

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

### **Saturday, March 5**

State Debate in Harrisburg

### **Tuesday, March 8**

Boys SoDak16 - Groton Area vs. Mt. Vernon/  
Plankinton

### **Thursday, March 10**

End of Third Quarter

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

### **Saturday, March 12**

Show Choir at Aberdeen Competition

### **Monday, March 14**

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

### **Tuesday, March 15**

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

### **Thursday, March 17**

Spring Break - No School

### **Friday, March 18**

Spring Break - No School

### **Saturday, March 19**

Mitchell Show Choir Competition



“The life you have left is a gift. Cherish it. Enjoy it now, to the fullest. Do what matters, now.”

-Leo Babauta

## 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.



**Coach Brian Dolan is interviewed by Paul Kosel on GDILIVE.COM after the game.** (Photo

lifted by GDILIVE.COM video)

**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

## Groton Area boys advance to the SoDak16

Groton Area seniors were on the front lines of a Milbank defensive attack and fans at the Groton Area arena watched as the Tigers pulled out a 59-51 Region 1A semifinal game win.

The Bulldogs were firing on all cylinders to start the game and Tigers soon realized they had their hands full. Milbank made six of 11 shots in the first quarter for 55 percent while Groton Area made three of nine for 33 percent as Milbank took a 14-8 lead at the first break. Milbank had an eight-point lead in the first quarter, 14-6.

It was the seniors last opportunity to shine in front of the home crowd, and that they did. Seniors Jayden Zak and Wyatt Hearnen sparked the Tiger offense in the second quarter as Groton Area tied the game at 17 and took its first lead of the game at 18-17 with 4:23 left in the first half as Senior Kaden Kurtz made two free throws. Groton Area opened up a five-point lead, 22-17, midway in the second quarter, but the Bulldogs battled back and tied the game at half time at 25. In the second quarter, Groton Area made six of 12 field goals for 50 percent while Milbank



**Kaden Kurtz had to battle between two Milbank players to try and put up this shot under the basket.** (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

was four of 11 for 36 percent.

Milbank put the Tigers on the defensive in the third quarter as Milbank took a 32-25 lead. Groton Area Coach Brian Dolan called a full time-out with 5:20 left in the third quarter.

Right after the time-out, Kurtz sank a three-pointer. Milbank missed the next shot and Jacob Zak got the rebound as the Tigers quickly came-up court. Kurtz missed a three-pointer but Hearnen got the rebound and then Jayden Zak sank a three-pointer to make it 32-31, Milbank. After Milbank made a basket, Tietz would sink a three-pointer to tie the game at 34. Then Tietz intercepted a pass and went down for the layup and the Tigers had reclaimed the lead, 36-34. Now Milbank would call a time-out.

The remainder of the third quarter went back and forth and the game was tied at 41 going into the fourth quarter. In the third quarter, Groton Area made six of 13 field goals for 46 percent while Milbank was seven of 10 for 70 percent.

Through the game, the elementary students were up in the corner of the bleachers, but a couple of high school students went over and asked the elementary students to join them. Now joining forces for the Tigers school spirit, it was time for the momentum to permanently change to the Tiger side. Jayden Zak would hit a three-pointer and then would hit another three-



**Jayden Zak looks to hand the ball off to Wyatt Hearnen.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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pointer, but this time he was fouled and converted a rare four-point play as the Tigers took 48-42 lead. Milbank would cost to within two, 50-48, but the hoop closed up on the Bulldogs and Groton Area would pull away for the win. In the fourth quarter, Groton Area made six of 10 field goals for 60 percent while Milbank was two of 13 for 15 percent.

Jayden Zak was five of seven in three-pointers and had a season high 16 points to lead the Tigers. Lane Tietz also added 16 points while Kaden Kurtz had 11 and Jacob Zak and Wyatt Hearnen each had eight points.

Bennett Schwenn led Milbank with 19 points, scoring 16 of those in the first half. Wylie Mursu was held to two points in the first half but ended the game with 10 points. Kellen Hoeke also had 10 points while Garrett Mertens had eight and Justus Osborn four.

In three-point shots, Groton Area was nine of 21 for 43 percent and in two-point shots, Groton Area was 12 of 23 for 52 percent. The Bulldogs made 43 percent of its shots, making 19 of 44. Milbank had the edge in rebounds, 27-23, with Jacob Zak having seven for Groton and Schwenn having eight for Milbank.

Groton Area had seven turnovers with all seven being steals by Milbank. Milbank had 13 turnovers with six of them being steals with Tietz having three. Groton Area had 12 assists, 14 team fouls and two blocks - one each by Jacob Zak and Cole Simon. Milbank had eight assists and 17 team fouls with Hoeke fouling out with 18 seconds



**Lane Tietz launches one of this three-point shots.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

left in the game.

Coach Brian Dolan said, "The seniors did a great job." He said the Tigers still had some lapses that will need to be taken care to prepare for the SoDak16 with Mt. Vernon/Plankinton. Groton Area is now 18-3 on the season and will advance to the SoDak16. Milbank finishes its season with a 10-12 record.

#### INDIVIDUAL STATS

Jayden Zak - 16 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists.

Lane Tietz - 16 points, 3 assists, 3 steals, 2 fouls.

Kaden Kurtz - 11 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Jacob Zak - 8 points, 7 rebounds, 3 assists, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Wyatt Hearnen - 8 points, 5 rebounds, 1 steal, 4 fouls.

Cole Simon - 1 rebound, 1 steal, 1 block.

Tate Larson - 2 rebounds, 1 foul.

- Paul Kosel



**Cole Simon gets ready to pass the ball to a teammate as the Tigers run the offense.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Coach Brian Dolan gets ready to throw up the SoDak16 ball to the his team. The regional semifinal winners all receive a ball with the SoDak16 stamped on it.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**The Groton Area cheerleaders step in unison, leading the crown in a cheer to start the fourth quarter.** (Photo lifted by GDILIVE.COM video)

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## SoDak16 Pairings

#1 -

 1 Dakota Valley	22-0	3/8 TBD
 16 Madison	10-12	

#2 -

 2 St. Thomas More	19-2	3/8 TBD
 15 Stanley County	15-7	



#3 -

 3 Winner	21-1	3/8 TBD
 14 Red Cloud	15-6	

#4 -

 4 Flandreau	18-3	3/8 TBD
 13 Clark/Willow Lake	15-7	

#5 -

 5 Tea Area	16-6	3/8 TBD
 12 Sioux Falls Christian	13-9	

#6 -

 6 Groton Area	19-3	3/8 TBD
 11 Mount Vernon/Plankinton	16-6	

#7 -

 7 Sioux Valley	17-5	3/8 TBD
 10 Hanson	16-5	

#8 -

 8 Rapid City Christian	17-5	3/8 TBD
 9 Lakota Tech	15-5	

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## Groton Area Boys 2022 SoDak16 Qualifier

In front, left to right, are Coach Brian Dolan, Cole Simon, Jacob Zak, Wyatt Hearnen, Jayden Zak, Kaden Kurtz, Lane Tietz, Cade Larson, and Assistant Coach Kyle Gerlach; in the middle row are Logan Ringgenberg, Braxton Imrie, Tate Larson, Holden Sippel, Teylor Deigel, Colby Dunker and Dillon Abeln; in back are ball boys Major Dolan and Trey Tietz. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

MATCHUP	Groton Area	Mt. Vernon-Plankinton
Record	19-3	16-6
Points Per Game	61.6	60.0
Points Allowed	42.9	50.0
Points +/-	+18.7	+10.0
OPPONENTS	Groton Area	Mt. Vernon-Plankinton
Redfield 8-13	Won +12 70-58	Won +11 63-52
Lennox 16-6	Lost -10 52-62	Lost -14 46-60

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



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



**GHS FCA** brings an emotional & impactful presentation by:

## Tim Weidenbach

Director of Higher Power Sports

**Sunday, March 6th @ 3:30pm**

**United Methodist Church in Groton, SD**

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

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

Guest Speaker  
Nicole J Phillips  
The Kindness Podcast

*You're  
Invited!*

## RESET

womens conference

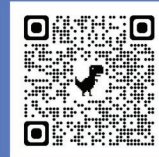
SATURDAY, MARCH 5  
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

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

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

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

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

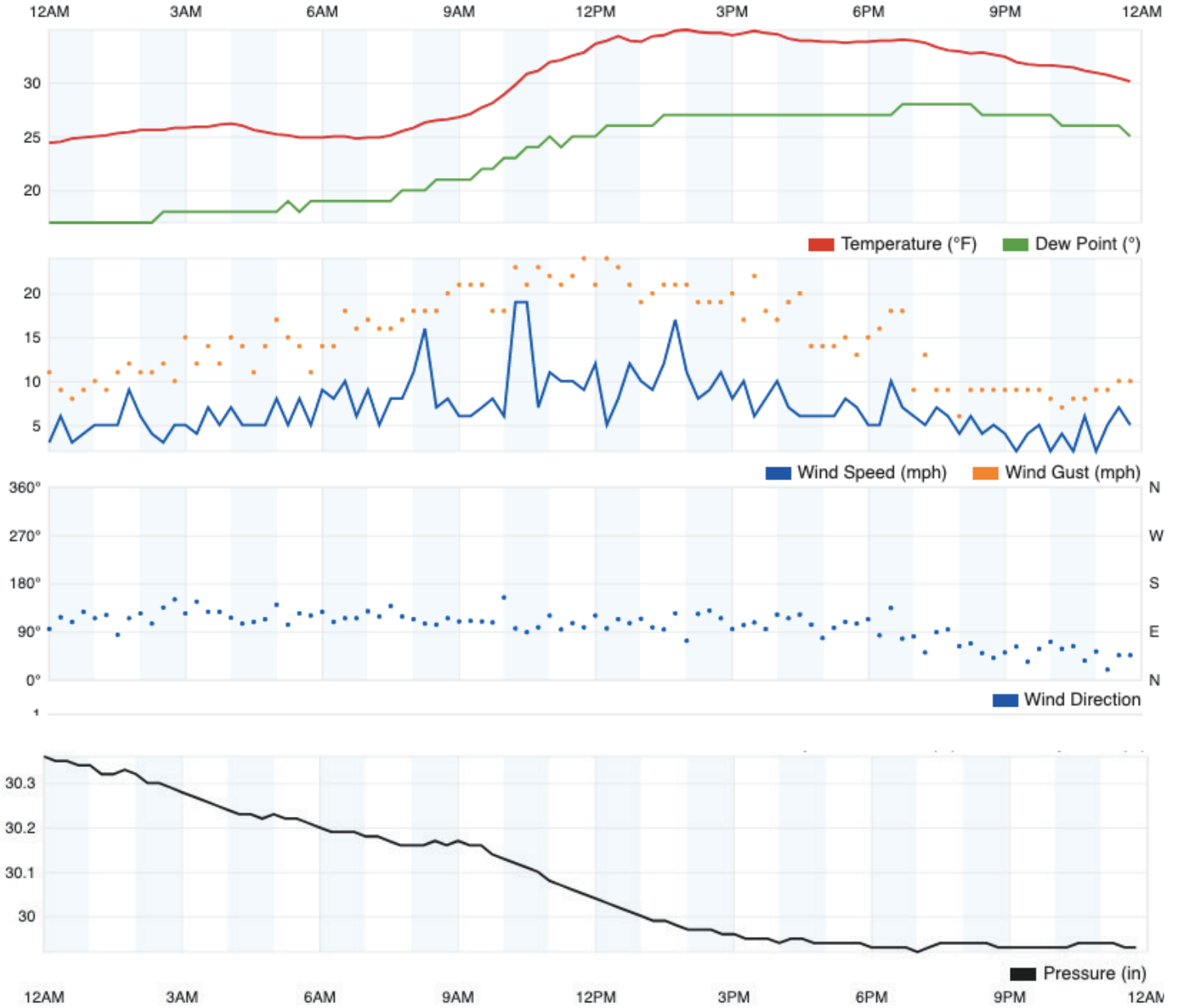




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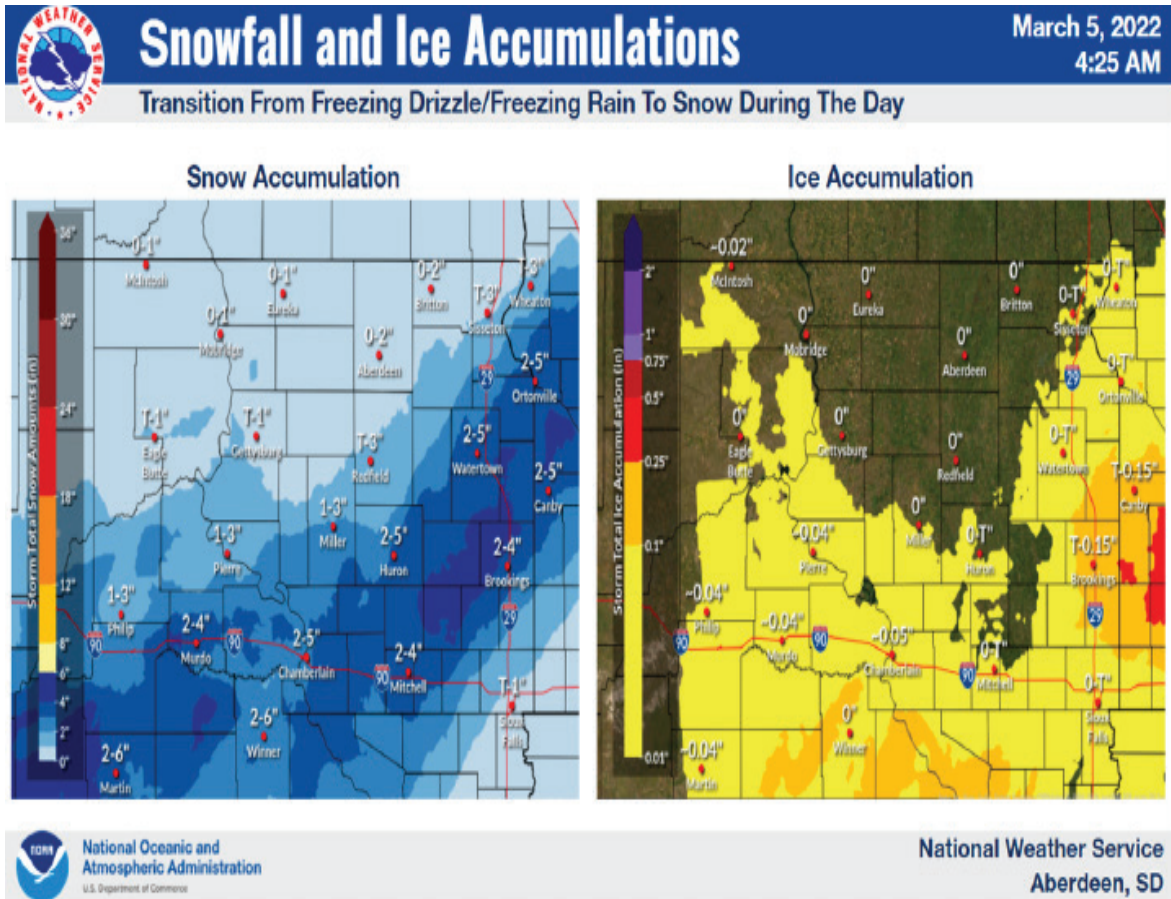
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
30%	30%			
Chance Snow and Blustery	Blustery. Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Decreasing Clouds	Sunny
High: 29 °F	Low: 17 °F	High: 27 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 32 °F



Here is the latest thinking on snow and ice accumulations. Onset timing of precipitation is a little slower, without the morning freezing drizzle that was expected, however there will still be some moisture moving in, starting as a mix before going to snow.

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## Today's Storm System Timeline

Updated: 3/5/2022 4:21 AM Central

	3/5 Sat																											
	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am
<b>Aberdeen</b>	9	9	9	7	4	5	6	7	8	14	19	20	21	21	24	28	26	25	20	15	13	8	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Britton</b>	10	10	10	7	4	4	5	6	6	8	10	15	20	27	33	40	36	32	26	21	24	16	8	9	9	7	4	2
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	20	20	20	25	30	32	34	37	40	43	47	54	62	60	49	39	24	10	5	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	3
<b>Eureka</b>	11	11	12	14	17	18	19	19	18	19	20	20	20	20	22	23	19	15	8	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
<b>Gettysburg</b>	18	18	19	20	20	20	20	22	23	25	27	26	25	27	29	32	27	22	15	8	5	3	1	1	1	1	2	3
<b>Kennebec</b>	9	13	16	19	23	32	41	49	58	69	80	84	88	88	77	65	47	30	20	10	4	2	1	1	1	2	5	7
<b>McIntosh</b>	20	20	20	24	29	29	29	29	29	32	34	37	39	35	29	22	14	6	3	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	2
<b>Milbank</b>				7	5	6	7	9	11	17	24	40	56	64	77	90	87	84	74	64	61	40	20	13	7	6	4	3
<b>Miller</b>	9	11	13	13	18	18	19	26	34	42	50	58	66	72	69	66	54	41	34	26	21	11	2	2	1	2	3	4
<b>Mobridge</b>	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	22	24	26	28	26	23	25	25	19	12	7	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
<b>Murdo</b>	20	20	20	25	30	41	52	64	75	80	84	84	83	69	56	37	18	10	3	0	1	2	1	1	2	6	8	
<b>Pierre</b>	14	16	18	21	23	27	30	38	45	51	57	65	72	74	63	52	36	19	12	5	2	1	1	1	0	2	4	5
<b>Redfield</b>	9	9	9	7	7	10	12	16	19	30	38	47	55	54	53	52	43	35	25	15	12	7	2	2	2	3	3	3
<b>Sisseton</b>	10	10	10	7	4	4	4	5	6	12	17	23	29	41	50	60	57	54	49	44	45	30	14	12	9	8	5	3
<b>Watertown</b>	9	9	9	7	5	8	10	14	18	24	30	45	59	70	81	92	85	78	67	56	48	27	5	5	4	4	4	4
<b>Wheaton</b>	9	9	9	6	4	4	4	5	6	12	18	22	26	40	51	63	62	61	57	52	54	37	20	16	13	10	5	2

\*Table values in %

\*\*Created: 3 am CST Sat 3/5/2022

\*\*\*Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Here is the hourly chance of precipitation. Dry air in the eastern Dakotas and western Minnesota has removed some of the freezing drizzle risk for this morning, and the timing of the system has slowed a little, however we still anticipate a mix of precipitation to lift up across south central, central and eastern South Dakota today into the early overnight hours.

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## Today in Weather History

March 5, 1966: The historic blizzard of 1966, which started on March 2, comes to an end in the Dakotas. North Dakota saw severe livestock losses with an estimated 18,500 cattle, 7,500 sheep, and 600 hogs killed. On a farm in eastern North Dakota, 7,000 turkeys perished. The total damage to livestock was estimated at near \$4 million. In South Dakota, an estimated 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1,800 hogs were killed. Most of the deaths occurred in the central and northern central part of the state.

1894: The low temperature of 36 degrees at San Diego, California, on this day was their lowest on record for March.

1959: Near blizzard conditions occurred over northern and central Oklahoma. Up to seven inches of snow fell and winds up to 50 mph created snow drifts 4 to 8 feet deep. In Edmond, a bus slid off the road into a ditch and overturned, injuring 16 people.

1966: A plane crashes near Mount Fuji in Japan after encountering severe turbulence. The pilot veered a few miles off course to give the passengers a better view of Mount Fuji when it tremendous wind gusts. All 124 people on board the aircraft were killed.

1972: Palm Springs, California recorded a high of 100 degrees, the earliest the city has ever hit the century mark.

1989: A F2 tornado killed one person and injured six others in Heard County, Georgia. A stronger, F3 tornado injured 23 persons and caused more than 5 million dollars damage around Grantville, Georgia.

2007: The morning temperature dropped to 51 degrees below zero at Key Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada.

1960 - Eastern Massachusetts greatest March snowstorm of record began to abate. The storm produced record 24 hour snowfall totals of 27.2 inches at Blue Hill Observatory, 17.7 inches at Worcester, and 16.6 inches at Boston. Winds gusted to 70 mph. (3rd-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1962 - A tremendous storm raged along the Atlantic coast. The great Atlantic storm caused more than 200 million dollars property damage from Florida to New England. Winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast reached 70 mph raising forty foot waves, and as much as 33 inches of snow blanketed the mountains of Virginia. The Virginia shoreline was rearranged by historic tidal flooding caused by the combination of the long stretch of strong onshore winds and the Spring Tides. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain and high winds in California. Up to six inches of rain soaked the San Francisco Bay area in 24 hours, and winds gusted to 100 mph at the Wheeler Ridge Pumping Plant near the Tehachapi Mountains. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - While snow blanketed eastern Kansas and northern Oklahoma, eight cities in North Dakota reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 61 degrees at Bismarck ND was 27 degrees warmer than that at Chanute KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S. A strong (F-2) tornado killed one person and injured six others in Heard County GA. A strong (F-3) tornado injured 23 persons and caused more than five million dollars damage around Grantville GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms over eastern Colorado, developing ahead of a major storm system, produced up to three inches of small hail around Colorado Springs in the late morning and early afternoon. Strong thunderstorms swept through southeastern sections of the Denver area during the evening hours. These strong thunderstorms also produced up to three inches of small hail, along with wind gusts to 50 mph, and as much as 2.4 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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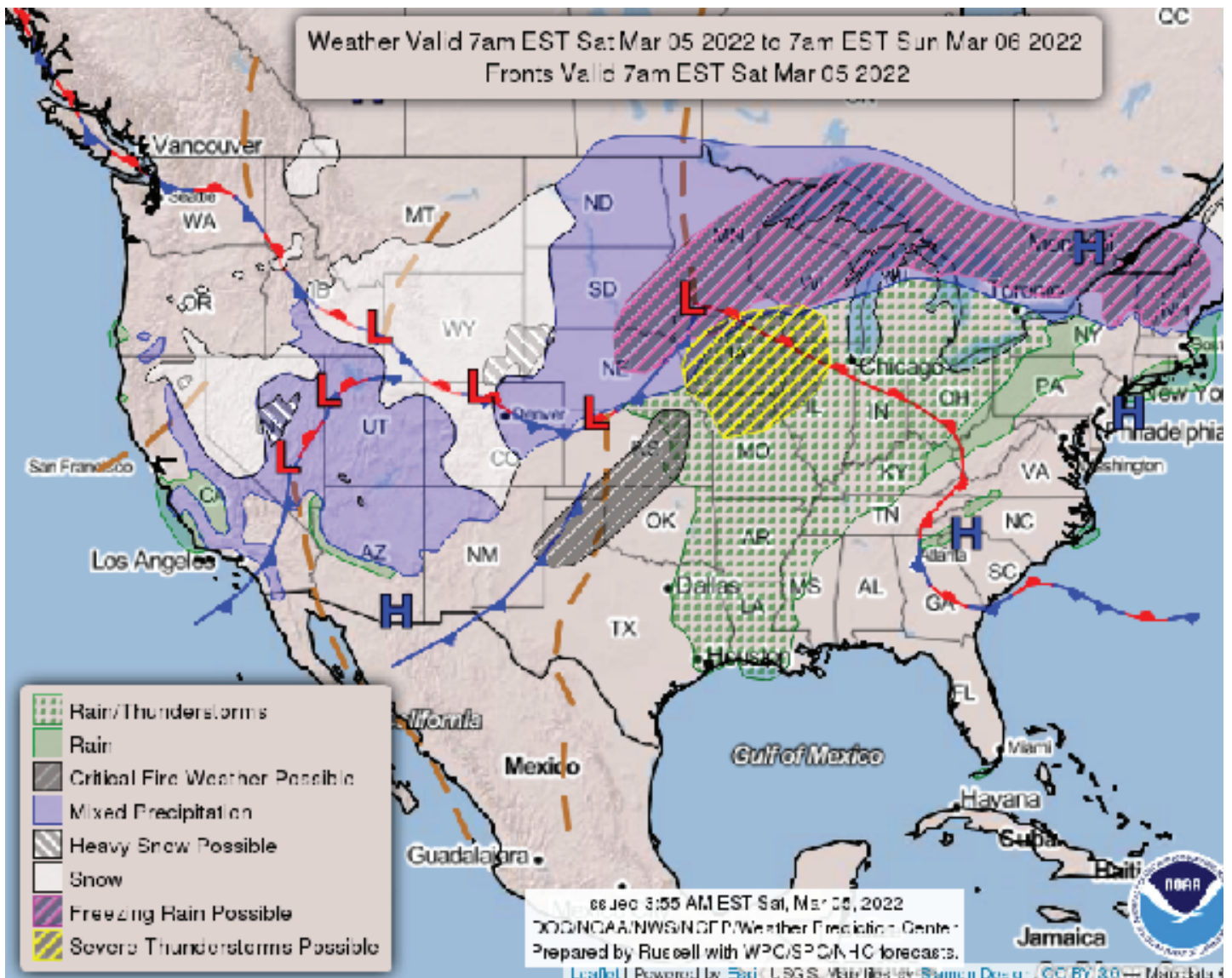
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 35 °F at 1:40 PM**  
**Low Temp: 24 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Wind: 24 mph at 11:40 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Day length: 11 hours, 24 minutes**

## Today's Info

Record High: 74 in 2000  
Record Low: -22 in 1919  
Average High: 36°F  
Average Low: 14°F  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.12  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.29  
Precip Year to Date: 0.97  
Sunset Tonight: 6:26:17 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59:30 AM



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## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships come in all sizes and shapes. Some last longer than others and some are more important than others. Some are temporary while others are permanent. Some are by chance and others by choice. So, whenever a person, place or thing "invades" our life and "consumes" our time, it becomes obvious that we have a "relationship" with that "thing." Well, so what?

When we say we "have" or are "in" a relationship with some object, it means that we are connected to "it." And perhaps the most significant fact about the "connection" is the amount of time we stay connected to "it." Time always tells the story about how much we value anything or anyone. If we spend much time with "it," we know that "it" has much value to us. If we spend little time with "it," we know that "it" has little value to us. Time tells the truth about the value of any of our relationships. The amount of time with "it" exposes our value of "it."

Our Psalmist makes a very revealing statement about his relationship with God's Word. He boldly states, "Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long!" In other words, he stays "connected" to God by "meditating" or being "connected" to His Word all day long.

Notice the results of his "connection" to God's Word: "Your commands are with me, and...make me wise... and give me more insight...and more understanding...for I obey them."

If we expect our relationship with God to have value, we must invest time with Him. Staying "connected" to Him by meditating on and reading His Word works!

Prayer: Lord, help us to stay "connected" to You. As we hide Your Word in our hearts and think on It, draw us closer to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long. Psalm 119:97

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## 2022 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

### Name:

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

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City

State, Zip Code

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Phone Number

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
- 3 Months ..... \$21.30
- 6 Months ..... \$26.63
- 9 Months ..... \$31.95
- 12 Months ..... \$42.60





## News from the Associated Press

### **Ex-police officer pleads not guilty to child porn charges**

ST. LOUIS, Mo. (AP) — A former St. Louis police officer has pleaded not guilty to federal charges of attempted production of child pornography and transfer of obscene materials to a minor.

Luke John Schauer, 28, appeared in a St. Louis federal court Friday.

Schauer is accused of attempting to employ an undercover FBI agent posing as a 12-year-old girl to engage in sexually explicit conduct. During the same time, he also allegedly sent obscene materials to the undercover agent with his cell phone.

Schauer was arrested Feb. 8 and admitted during questioning by the FBI that he was aware he was communicating with someone he believed to be a 12-year-old girl, according to court documents.

The Argus Leader reports he was fired from the police department.

Schauer faces up to 30 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. His trial has been set for April 19.

### **South Dakota aims to become top hemp producer in the country**

By ELISA SAND Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Hemp growers in South Dakota are expecting to more than double the number of acres used to grow industrial hemp and some are even adding fiber and seed processing capabilities in state.

Fiber processing facilities, or decortication plants, are expected to open in Wakonda and Winfred this fall. Ken Meyer, vice president of AH Meyer and Sons in Winfred and John Peterson, owner of Dakota Hemp in Wakonda, will be the first fiber processing facilities to open in South Dakota.

The two men were in Aberdeen recently to talk about the future of hemp along with Derrick Dohmann, sales and marketing manager for Horizon Hemp Seeds in Willow Lake, which also has plans to expand to a seed processing facility.

All see a growing interest in the state when it comes to industrial hemp and, with long hauls required to get industrial hemp fiber to a processing facility, both Meyer and Peterson saw the need for processing facilities in the state, the Aberdeen American News reported.

More than once there was reference to the latest National Hemp Report published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That study showed 8,000 acres planted to industrial hemp fiber, with 1,200 of those acres in South Dakota.

Peterson said right now, there's interest in planting at least 3,000 acres in South Dakota and that could easily grow to 4,000 to 5,000 acres.

"If we hit 5,000 we'll jump to the top in the nation," Dohmann said, adding that the Wakonda and Winfred fiber processing facilities will double the processing capabilities in the United States.

All three talked about the benefits and ease of growing industrial hemp. Dohmann said he also has a seed variety that can be grown for both seed and fiber.

Dohmann said the recommended seed depth is a half inch with plants spaced close enough so the canopy suppresses weed growth.

"There's no special process to get it in the ground, but row spacing is critical," Dohmann said, noting that chemical applications for weeks aren't yet available.

Crop insurance also isn't available the first year, Peterson said, noting that at a crop history is needed first, but once it's planted it's ready to harvest in 100 days, which means if timed right harvest of the industrial hemp can be completed before soybean harvest starts.

Anyone considering planting industrial hemp must follow licensing requirements, which include an initial application fee of \$50, background checks for the producer, the property owner and any other key members of the operation, and an annual licensing fee of \$500.

Meyer said the background check alone can take about three weeks, and includes fingerprints, but the

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DANR is working on exceptions for those who are unable to provide fingerprints because of age.

That application process is through the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Dohmann said he is able to take seed orders from producers who have started the licensing process, but cannot deliver to someone without a license.

Prior to growing, Dohmann said, a soil test is recommended to check for heavy metals. If they are detected, the crop can't be grown for seed, although there is a producer who found heavy metals and opted to remove the seed early and grow the crop just for the fiber.

Peterson said studies have shown industrial hemp can help with remediation, so he'll be interested to see if the heavy metals levels change on this property's soil.

Meyer said there is some oversight by the state as the crop is grown. Officials will come once to verify the crop in the ground and the producer will have to coordinate with the state to test for THC, the psychoactive substance in marijuana, when it's time for harvest. Once that testing is done, the farmer has 30 days to harvest.

Dohmann said so far farmers haven't had any issues with a positive THC test.

When it comes to harvest, Dohmann said, the top is first harvested for seed, but warns that it's harvested at about 20% to 26% moisture and should have air circulation immediately until the moisture level drops to 10%, which can happen within a couple weeks.

Peterson said heat should not be used to dry the seeds because that will affect the oil.

As for the harvest of the fiber, it should be cut 6 inches to 8 inches above the soil and then left to dry for one to three weeks until retting is complete, which is when the stalks snap in half and the fibers pull apart in long strands.

And, the final product is versatile.

"Anything you can make out of a tree you can make out of hemp but it takes 20 years to grow a tree and 4 months to grow hemp," Meyer said.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

11-19-28-46-47, Mega Ball: 5, Megaplier: 4

(eleven, nineteen, twenty-eight, forty-six, forty-seven; Mega Ball: five; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$113 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$85 million

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA SoDak 16=

Class AA=

State Qualifier Game 1=

Sioux Falls Jefferson 52, Pierre 38

Sioux Falls Washington 83, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 62

State Qualifier Game 2=

Rapid City Central 56, Watertown 20

Rapid City Stevens 56, Brookings 32

State Qualifier Game 3=

Sioux Falls Lincoln 43, Mitchell 38

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 50, Yankton 25

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State Qualifier Game 4=  
Brandon Valley 45, Spearfish 33  
Harrisburg 51, Huron 43

## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

SoDak 16 Qualifier=

Class A=

Region 1=

Clark/Willow Lake 47, Tiospa Zina Tribal 40

Groton Area 59, Milbank 51

Region 2=

Flandreau 55, Deubrook 37

Sioux Valley 71, Hamlin 52

Region 3=

Madison 75, West Central 69

Region 4=

Dakota Valley 73, Vermillion 35

Tea Area 66, Lennox 54

Region 5=

Hanson 56, Bon Homme 20

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 52, Parkston 38

Region 6=

Stanley County 42, Chamberlain 34

Winner 75, Mobridge-Pollock 52

Region 7=

Lakota Tech 79, Todd County 59

Red Cloud 64, Little Wound 61

Region 8=

Rapid City Christian 77, Hill City 60

St. Thomas More 66, Custer 27

Class B=

Region 1=

Aberdeen Christian 60, Langford 47

Waubay/Summit 66, Warner 51

Region 2=

Lower Brule 73, Ipswich 59

Potter County 77, Faulkton 56

Region 3=

Castlewood 45, Wolsey-Wessington 41

DeSmet 79, Estelline/Hendricks 50

Region 4=

Chester 45, Howard 44

Ethan 41, Bridgewater-Emery 38

Region 5=

Freeman Academy/Marion 66, Irene-Wakonda 32

Viborg-Hurley 48, Centerville 32

Region 6=

Burke 66, Gregory 62

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Platte-Geddes 52, Corsica/Stickney 38

Region 7=

Lyman 55, Philip 46

White River 67, Wall 38

Region 8=

Harding County 72, Faith 62

Timber Lake 65, Lemmon 55

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

## SD nursing homes still struggling with staffing shortages

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A new report from the American Health Care Association shows just how challenging the coronavirus pandemic has been for long-term care providers who have struggled with staffing and other issues.

During the course of the pandemic, South Dakota nursing homes have lost over 1,000 staff members, or about 14% of their workforce, according to the association's report.

All health care providers saw decreases in staff at the beginning of the pandemic, but some have either recovered or made significant progress toward pre-pandemic staffing levels.

South Dakota hospitals and home health agencies have rebounded or even exceeded the number of staff they had pre-pandemic, while South Dakota nursing homes and assisted living facilities continue to struggle with staffing levels.

"Nursing homes face unprecedented pressures. On top of years of Medicaid underfunding, they are also experiencing severe staffing shortages and have been on the front lines of the COVID battle for two years," said Mark Deak, executive director of the South Dakota Health Care Association. "We are seeing empty beds in nursing homes, not because there isn't a need for care, but because there aren't enough staff to accept new admissions."

South Dakota's Medicaid reimbursement rates are below those of its neighboring states. Nursing homes lose an average of \$65 each day for each resident paying through Medicaid.

Statewide, costs of unreimbursed care total more than \$56 million annually, KSFY-TV reported. About 55% of the total resident population in nursing homes relies on Medicaid to pay for their care.

## Ten-year sentence for failing to register as sex offender

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man accused in state court of killing an elderly Rapid City woman has been sentenced in federal court to 10 years in prison for failing to register as a sex offender.

Judge Jeffrey Viken gave James Jumping Eagle the maximum sentence for the felony in court Thursday. The 46-year-old Jumping Eagle will get 377 days credit for time served and will be on federal supervision for five years upon his release.

Jumping Eagle also faces state charges in the death of 82-year-old Reta McGovern. She was found dead in her home Feb. 10, 2021.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Heather Sazama listed Jumping Eagle's previous criminal history, including his first assault on a 15-year-old unconscious girl when he was 21.

Sazama said his criminal behavior toward women has escalated over the years, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"James Jumping Eagle is not a safe person to be out in the community," she said. "(He) has proven he won't keep his hands off of vulnerable people."

Sazama said he is a repeat sex offender and violated his terms of release three times. She said he knew how to register as a sex offender but didn't and when police found him he was hiding underneath the floorboards in his family's abandoned trailer.

"He is dangerous and he will not stop," she said.

## Cease-fire attempt in Ukraine fails amid Russian shelling

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Saturday that Ukrainian statehood is in jeopardy during a rambling speech from Moscow, while a promised cease-fire in the port city of Mariupol collapsed amid scenes of terror in the besieged town.

The struggle to enforce the temporary cease-fire in Mariupol and the eastern city of Volnovakha showed the fragility of efforts to stop the fighting across Ukraine as the number of people fleeing the country reached 1.4 million just 10 days after Russian forces invaded.

Ukrainian officials said Russian artillery fire and airstrikes had prevented residents from leaving before the agreed-to evacuations got underway. Putin accused Ukraine of sabotaging the effort and claimed the actions of Ukraine's leadership called into question the country's future as an independent state.

"If this happens, it will be entirely on their conscience," Putin said.

Earlier, the Russian defense ministry said it had agreed with Ukraine on evacuation routes out of the two cities. Before the announcement, Russia's days-long assault had caused growing misery in Mariupol, where AP journalists witnessed doctors make unsuccessful attempts to save the lives of wounded children, pharmacies ran bare and hundreds of thousands of people faced food and water shortages in freezing weather.

In comments carried on Ukrainian television, Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko said thousands of residents had gathered for safe passage out of the city when shelling began Saturday.

"We value the life of every inhabitant of Mariupol and we cannot risk it, so we stopped the evacuation," he said.

In recent days, Ukraine had urged Moscow to create humanitarian corridors to allow children, women and the older adults to flee the fighting, calling them "question No. 1."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held out the possibility that talks with Russia could result in a sustained, if limited ceasefire Saturday. Elsewhere in the country, Ukrainian forces were holding key cities in central and southeastern Ukraine, while the Russians were trying to keep Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Chernihiv and Sumy encircled, he said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Saturday said Russia was ready for a third round of talks on that and other issues, but he asserted that "the Ukrainian side, the most interested side here, it would seem, is constantly making up various pretexts to delay the beginning of another meeting."

Diplomatic efforts continued as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Poland to meet with the prime minister and foreign minister, a day after attending a NATO meeting in Brussels in which the alliance pledged to step up support for eastern flank members.

In Moscow, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was meeting with Putin at the Kremlin. Israel maintains good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, and Bennett has offered to act as an intermediary in the conflict. No details of Saturday's meeting have yet emerged.

In the wake of Western sanctions, Aeroflot, Russia's flagship state-owned airline, announced that it plans to halt all international flights, except to Belarus, starting Tuesday.

At least 351 civilians have been confirmed killed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, but the true number is probably much higher, the U.N. human rights office has said.

Zelenskyy said Saturday that that 10,000 Russian troops had died in the war, a claim that could not be independently verified. "We're inflicting losses on the occupants they could not see in their worst nightmare," the Ukrainian leader said.

The Russian military, which doesn't offer regular updates on casualties, said Wednesday that 498 of its troops had been killed.

Ukraine's military might is vastly outmatched by Russia's, but its military and volunteer forces have fought back with fierce tenacity since the invasion. Even in cities that have fallen to the Russians, there were signs of resistance.

Onlookers in Chernihiv cheered as they watched a Russian military plane fall from the sky and crash,

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according to video released Saturday by the Ukrainian government. In Kherson, hundreds of people protested the invasion, shouting, "Go home."

A vast Russian armored column threatening Ukraine's capital remained stalled outside Kyiv. Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich said the military situation was more quiet overall Saturday and Russian forces "have not taken active actions since the morning."

While the shelling in Mariupol showed Russia's determination to cut Ukraine off from access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, further damaging the country's economy, it was Putin who was most on the offensive with his comments warning that a no fly zone would be considered a hostile act.

NATO has said it has no plans to implement such a no fly zone, which would bar all unauthorized aircraft from flying over Ukraine. Western officials have said a main reason is a desire to not widen the war beyond Ukraine.

Zelenskyy has pleaded for a no-fly zone over his country and lashed out at NATO for refusing to impose one, warning that "all the people who die from this day forward will also die because of you."

But as the United States and other NATO members send weapons for Kyiv, the conflict is already drawing in countries far beyond Ukraine's borders.

As Russia cracks down on independent media reporting on the war, more major international news outlets said they were pausing their work there. Putin said nothing warrants imposing martial law at this point.

And in a warning of a hunger crisis yet to come, the U.N. World Food Program has said millions of people inside Ukraine, a major global wheat supplier, will need food aid "immediately."

Ukraine's president was set to brief U.S. senators Saturday by video conference as Congress considers a request for \$10 billion in emergency funding for humanitarian aid and security needs.

The U.N. Security Council scheduled an open meeting for Monday on the worsening humanitarian situation. The United Nations estimates that 12 million people in Ukraine and 4 million fleeing to neighboring countries in the coming months will need humanitarian aid.

Kyiv's central train station remained crowded with people desperate to flee. "People just want to live," one woman, Ksenia, said.

Elsewhere in the capital, in a sign of nerves near breaking point, two people on a sidewalk froze in their tracks at the sound of a sharp bang. It was a garbage truck upending a bin.

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

## Mariupol Diary: Scenes of despair, resolve in Ukraine city

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV and EVGENIY MALOLETKA Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine (AP) — A man dashes into a hospital with a desperately wounded toddler in his arms, the child's mother on his heels. Doctors use smartphone torches to examine patients' wounds.

New mothers nestle infants in makeshift basement bomb shelters.

A father collapses in grief over the death of his teen son when shelling ravages a soccer field near a school.

These scenes unfolded in and around the Azov Sea port of Mariupol in southern Ukraine over the past week, captured by Associated Press journalists documenting Russia's invasion.

With nighttime temperatures just above freezing, the battle plunged the city into darkness late in the week, knocked out most phone services and raised the prospect of food and water shortages. Without phone connections, medics did not know where to take the wounded.

A limited cease-fire that Russia declared to let civilians evacuate Mariupol and Volnovakha, a city to its north, quickly fell apart Saturday, with Ukrainian officials blaming Russian shelling for blocking the promised safe passage.

Russia has made significant gains on the ground in the south in an apparent bid to cut off Ukraine's access to the sea. Capturing Mariupol could allow Russia to build a land corridor to Crimea, which it seized in 2014.

### THE PAIN OF MOTHERS

A man dashes through the doors of a hospital carrying a desperately wounded toddler wrapped in a

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pale blue, bloodstained blanket. His girlfriend, the baby's mother, is on his heels.

Hospital workers surge round, trying to save the life of 18-month-old Kirill, but there is nothing to be done. As Marina Yatsko and her boyfriend Fedor weep in each other's arms, distraught staff sit on the floor and try to recover themselves before the next emergency arrives.

It's a scene repeated over and over again in Mariupol. Days earlier, hospital workers had pulled a wounded 6-year-old girl from an ambulance as her mother stood alone, helpless.

Multiple attempts at resuscitation failed until eventually the frenetic activity stopped and the mother was left with her grief. A doctor looked straight into the camera of an AP videojournalist allowed inside.

He had a message: "Show this to Putin."

## HOSPITAL HAS NO POWER

Smoke from shelling rises over a snow-covered residential part of Mariupol, as in the city's hospital the bangs send women dropping to the floor for shelter. One raises her arms in prayer.

Doctors use their smartphone torches to examine patients' wounds, as the hospital lacks electricity and heating.

"We work more than a week without a break, (some of us) even more," said doctor Evgeniy Dubrov. "(We) continue working, everyone on their positions."

Grappling with the pain of their wounds, Ukrainian soldiers are in shock at the loss of their comrades.

"I don't understand what had happened, blast, my eyes getting dark and vision blurring," said Svyatoslav Borodin. "I continued to crawl ... but I didn't understand if I had legs or not. Then I turned and saw my leg."

## DEATH COMES TO A SOCCER FIELD

Flashes from shelling light up the medics as they stand in a parking lot waiting for the next emergency call.

In the hospital nearby, a father buries his face into his dead 16-year-old son's head. The boy, draped under a bloodstained sheet, has succumbed to wounds from shelling on the soccer field where he was playing.

Hospital staff wipe blood off a gurney. Others treat a man whose face is obscured by blood-soaked bandages.

The medics prepare to go out, strapping on their helmets.

They find a wounded woman in an apartment and take her in an ambulance for treatment, her hand shaking rapidly from apparent shock. She yells out in pain as the medics wheel her into the hospital.

On the darkening horizon, orange light flashes at the edge of the sky and loud bangs reverberate in the air.

## CHILDREN WILL PLAY

The resting toddler, perhaps responding instinctively to the sight of a camera, raises an arm and waves. But the mother underneath has tears in her eyes.

They're lying together on the floor in a gym-turned-shelter, waiting out the fighting that rages outside. Many families have young children. And as children can do anywhere, some giggle and run around the floor covered with blankets.

"God forbid that any rockets hit. That's why we've gathered everyone here," says local volunteer Ervand Tovmasyan, accompanied by his young son.

He says locals have brought supplies. But as the Russian siege continues, the shelter lacks enough drinking water, food, and gasoline for generators.

Many there remember the shelling in 2014, when Russia-backed separatists briefly captured the city. "Now the same thing is happening — but now we're with children," says Anna Delina, who fled Donetsk in 2014.

## TANKS IN A ROW

In a field in Volnovakha on the outskirts of Mariupol, a row of four green tanks hold their cannons at roughly 45 degrees.

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Two of them fire, jolting the machines backward slightly, and sending clouds of white smoke skyward. The tanks are painted with the letter "Z" in white, a tactical sign intended to quickly identify military units and help troops distinguish friend from foe in combat.

The tanks with the "Z" move around inside Russian-held territory and are believed to be used by Russian forces.

## AMID DEATH, THE JOY OF BIRTH

A nurse fits a shirt on a newborn who fusses at first and then cries loudly. It is a joyful sound.

Babies born at a Mariupol hospital are taken down flights of stairs to a makeshift nursery that also serves as a bomb shelter during shelling.

Sitting in the dimly lit shelter, new mother Kateryna Suharokova struggles to control her emotions as she holds her son, Makar.

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

Above the basement, hospital staff labor to save people wounded in the shelling. A woman with blood streaming from her mouth cries out in pain, A young man's face is ashen as he is wheeled into the hospital. Another, who did not survive, is covered by a thin blue sheet.

"Do I need to say more?" says Oleksandr Balash, head of anesthesiology department.

"This is just a boy."

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

## Live updates: Israeli prime minister meets with Putin

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister was meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Saturday.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office confirmed the meeting at the Kremlin, which came just days after Bennett spoke over the phone with both Russia and Ukrainian leaders.

Bennett's office said he departed early Saturday morning for Moscow, accompanied by Russian-speaking Cabinet minister Zeev Elkin. Both men are observant Jews and wouldn't normally travel on the Sabbath.

Israel is one of the few countries that has good working relations with both sides. The country has delivered humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but also maintains ties with Moscow to make sure that Israeli and Russian warplanes do not come into conflict in neighboring Syria.

VIENNA — Technical safety systems are intact and radiation levels are normal at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant following a Russian attack that led to a fire at the site, according to the country's nuclear regulator.

Two out of the six reactors at the plant, Europe's biggest, are now operating after Russian forces took control of the site, the nuclear regulator told the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The regulator said it has been able to keep in touch with staff at the plant.

Ukrainian nuclear officials told the IAEA that one telephone communication line was lost but another was still working, as was cellphone communication. They said the facility's training center, located separately from the reactors, suffered "significant damage" early Friday and that there was also damage to the site's laboratory building and an administrative structure.

WASHINGTON — A Russian airliner has received an exception to the U.S. airspace ban in order to return



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Russian diplomats expelled from the U.S to Russia.

The Ilyushin Il-62 is flying from St. Petersburg to Washington Dulles International Airport outside the U.S. Capitol. A U.S. government official confirmed it had been granted a waiver from the airspace restriction put in place in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order to retrieve the Russian diplomats.

The U.S. expelled 12 Russians at its mission to the United Nations accusing them of being intelligence operatives.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller in Wilmington, Delaware, contributed to this report.

NEW YORK — Another Russian airline, low cost carrier Pobeda, said it would halt all international flights starting March 8, in accordance with recommendations from the Russia's state aviation agency.

Rosaviatsiya on Saturday recommended that all Russian airlines with foreign-leased planes halt both passenger and cargo flights abroad. It cited a high risk of foreign-leased planes being impounded as part of Western sanctions that ban leasing of planes to Russia.

Rosaviatsiya's recommendation doesn't apply to Russian airlines that use Russian planes or foreign planes that aren't at risk of being impounded. However, shortly after the recommendation was released, Russia's flagship carrier Aeroflot said it would suspend international flights starting March 8, including those carried out by its subsidiary airline Rossiya. Several hours later, Pobeda followed suit.

Earlier this week, Russia's biggest private airline S7 also announced halting international flights starting from March 5.

At the same time, foreign airlines from countries that have not imposed sanctions on Russia and have not shut down their airspace for Russian planes will still be allowed to fly in and out of Russia.

LONDON — Ukraine's foreign minister on Saturday criticized Shell for continuing to buy Russian oil, lashing out at the energy giant for continuing to do business with Vladimir Putin's regime after the company announced it was exiting investments in Russia.

Dmytro Kuleba said he had been told Shell "discreetly" bought the oil on Friday. He appealed to the public to pressure the company and other international firms to halt such purchases in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"One question to Shell: doesn't Russian oil smell (like) Ukrainian blood for you?" Kuleba said on Twitter. "I call on all conscious people around the globe to demand multinational companies to cut all business ties with Russia," he wrote.

Earlier this week, Shell said it was "shocked by the loss of life in Ukraine" and would end its joint ventures with Gazprom, the massive oil and gas company that is controlled by the Russian government.

Shell on Saturday said it has already stopped "most activities involving Russian oil," although it continues to buy some products from Russia to supply the needs of its refineries and chemical plants. These purchases are necessary to ensure fuel supplies for customers, Shell said.

WASHINGTON — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a "desperate plea" to U.S. senators on Saturday to send more planes to help the country fight the Russian invasion.

Zelenskyy made the request on a call joined by more than 300 people, including senators, some House lawmakers and aides.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, said in a statement that Zelenskyy made a "desperate plea for Eastern European countries to provide Russian-made planes to Ukraine."

"I will do all I can to help the administration to facilitate their transfer," Schumer said.

Schumer told Zelenskyy the U.S. lawmakers are inspired by him and by the strength and courage of the Ukrainian people, according to another person on the call who was granted anonymity to discuss it.

The U.S. Congress also is working on a \$10 billion package of military and humanitarian aide, and Schumer told Zelenskyy that lawmakers hope to send it quickly to Ukraine, the person said.

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Zelenskyy told senators he needs planes and drones more than other security tools, according to a senior Senate aide granted anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

Associated Press reporter Lisa Mascaro in Washington contributed to this report.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. State Department has updated an earlier travel advisory and is now recommending that U.S. citizens leave Russia immediately.

The notice offers this guidance: "If you wish to depart Russia, you should make arrangements on your own as soon as possible. If you plan to stay in Russia, understand the U.S. Embassy has severe limitations on its ability to assist U.S. citizens, and conditions, including transportation options, may change suddenly."

The department already has advised Americans not to travel to Russia. That warning cites "the unprovoked and unjustified attack by Russian military forces in Ukraine" and "the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens by Russian government security officials," among other things.

The American ambassador in Moscow, John Sullivan, has scheduled a virtual town hall on Wednesday for U.S. citizens in Russia "in light of the rapidly developing situation" from the Russian invasion.

CHISINAU, Moldova — Hundreds of families, many from Ukraine's Donetsk region, have taken refuge in a sports venue in the capital of Moldova. The refugees milled about or tried to relax on cots Saturday while lamenting what they were forced to leave behind.

Maria Cherepovskaia, 50, said she walked 15 kilometers (9 miles) to reach Chisinau, and received help from people who supplied rides and food.

"We will be here until the war is over," Cherepovskaia said. "We don't know where to go. We left behind our children and relatives, also our men."

She said there is bombing going on in Donetsk: "a lot, too much."

Refugees also fled to Siret, Romania, where some gathered together in a large tent. Iryna Bogavchuk, from Chernivtsi in Ukraine, warmed herself next to a portable heater as she caressed her 4-year-old daughter and looked at photos of her husband, who stayed behind.

"I miss him," Bogavchuk said as she wept. "I took a few Polaroid photos because I couldn't take a lot of stuff."

ROME — Thousands of pacifists marched through Rome on Saturday to protest the war in Ukraine.

But Italy's powerful labor federations are feuding over whether to support the decision of Italy and other Western countries to send weapons to Ukraine's government.

The leader of the more centrist-leading CISL union, Luigi Sbarra, said he was boycotting the pacifist rally on Saturday because "one can't be neutral, we're with the Italian government."

The Italian government last week asked Parliament to approve sending weapons to Ukraine.

Rome's protests comprised two marches, one of which set out behind a banner reading "Neither NATO nor Putin."

Left-leaning CGIL union leader Maurizio Landini, who turned out for the rally, dismissed suggestions that he wasn't supportive of efforts to help Ukraine.

"The theme is to block war" with negotiations, Landini told reporters. "It's (Russian President Vladimir) Putin who started the war."

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were holding key cities in the central and southeastern part of the country Saturday, while the Russians were trying to block and keep encircled Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Chernihiv and Sumy.

"We're inflicting losses on the occupants they could not see in their worst nightmare," Zelenskyy said. He alleged that 10,000 Russian troops were killed in the 10 days of the war, a claim that could not be independently verified. The Russian military doesn't offer regular updates on their casualties. Only once, on Wednesday, they revealed a death toll of nearly 500.

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"This is horrible," Zelenskyy said. "Guys 18, 20 years old ... soldiers who weren't even explained what they were going to fight for."

CHERNIHIV, Ukraine \_\_ Video released Saturday by the Ukrainian government shows a Russian military plane falling from the sky and crashing, as onlookers on the ground cheer.

Firefighters sprayed water on flames and smoke at a structure next to the debris of the plane, which bore a red star and the number 24.

WARSAW, Poland — The head of Ukraine's Supreme Court has appealed for Russia's top court to be excluded from a body of Central and Eastern Europe's chief justices because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine's top court president, Vsevolod Kniaziev, said the Supreme Court of Russia should be excluded from the Conference of Chief Justices of Central & Eastern Europe "as it represents a country that brought terror, death and crimes against humanity in Ukraine."

Kniaziev's letter of appeal was received Saturday by Malgorzata Manowska, the president of the Supreme Court in Poland, which borders Ukraine.

Manowska's office said she will urgently pass the appeal on to the chief justices' conference, a platform of cooperation that works to enhance judicial standards.

NEW YORK -- Russian President Vladimir Putin says there is nothing that warrants imposing martial law in Russia at this point.

Putin's comment on Saturday followed days of speculation that the introduction of martial law could be imminent.

Putin said that "martial law is imposed in a country ... in the event of external aggression, including in specific areas of hostilities. But we don't have such a situation, and I hope we won't."

ROME — Italian state broadcaster Rai is suspending reporting by its correspondents in Russia.

Rai's measure, effective Saturday, follows similar moves by some other foreign media. Rai said the measure is necessary to "safeguard the safety of its journalists in the place as well as the maximum freedom of information about the country."

Russia on Friday passed a law foreseeing prison sentences of up to 15 years for spreading what is deemed to be fake information about its armed forces.

NEW YORK — Russian President Vladimir Putin says Moscow would consider any third-party declaration of a no-fly zone over Ukraine as "participation in the armed conflict."

Speaking at a meeting with female pilots on Saturday, Putin said Russia would view "any move in this direction" as an intervention that "will pose a threat to our service members."

"That very second, we will view them as participants of the military conflict, and it would not matter what members they are," the Russian president said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pushed NATO to impose a no-fly zone over his country, warning that "all the people who die from this day forward will also die because of you."

NATO has said a no-fly zone, which would bar all unauthorized aircraft from flying over Ukraine, could provoke widespread war in Europe with nuclear-armed Russia.

HELSINKI, Finland — Finland and Sweden have pledged to further deepen defense cooperation, including with NATO. Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin says that "Russia's war against a European nation puts the European security order at risk."

Finland and neighboring Sweden for years have resisted joining NATO, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine is changing the dynamic. Recent polls in both countries show more than 50% of Finns and Swedes in support of NATO membership but their governments are more cautious.

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"It's very understandable that the mindset of our citizens is changing due to Russia's attack against Ukraine," said Marin, but refused to comment on whether Finland would ask for a major non-NATO allied status, a designation given to countries with close strategic relationship with the U.S. military.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said cooperation with NATO is "maybe closer than ever" and that a rapprochement with NATO would be discussed.

BERLIN -- The U.N. human rights office says it has confirmed the deaths of 351 civilians in Ukraine since the Russian invasion began.

The Geneva-based office said that another 707 civilians were injured between Feb. 24 and midnight Friday.

The rights office uses strict methodology and only reports casualties it has confirmed. It said Saturday it believes the real figures are considerably higher, "especially in government-controlled territory and especially in recent days," as the receipt of information from some places where there was intense fighting was delayed and many reports were still undergoing corroboration.

Ukrainian officials have presented far higher numbers.

LONDON — Hundreds have gathered in central London Saturday to protest Russia's assault on Ukraine, with the conflict in its 10th day.

Carrying placards reading "Protect Europe: Save Ukraine" and waving the country's blue and yellow flag, demonstrators chanted, "Stop Putin, stop the war."

The rally in London's Trafalgar Square began with a prayer from Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the papal nuncio to Great Britain. He said: "Today we are all Ukrainians."

NEW YORK — Aeroflot, Russia's flagship carrier, has announced that it will halt all international flights except to Belarus starting March 8.

The move by Russia's biggest state-owned airline comes after the country's aviation agency, Rosaviatsiya, recommended that all Russian airlines with foreign-leased planes halt both passenger and cargo flights abroad.

It cited a high risk of foreign-leased planes being impounded as part of Western sanctions that ban leasing of planes to Russia.

Rosaviatsiya's recommendation doesn't apply to Russian airlines that use Russian planes or foreign planes that aren't at risk of being impounded.

It also doesn't apply to foreign airlines from countries that have not imposed sanctions on Russia and have not shut down their airspace for Russian planes. Aeroflot's statement Saturday cited "circumstances that hinder operating flights" as a reason for its move.

Aeroflot said it would cancel return tickets for passengers who are scheduled to depart Russia after March 6 and travel back after March 8. Those with one-way tickets will be allowed to fly up until March 8. Earlier this week, S7, Russia's biggest private airline, announced that it was halting all international flights starting Saturday.

BERLIN -- German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF say they are suspending reporting from their Moscow studios after Russia passed a law foreseeing prison sentences of up to 15 years for spreading what is deemed to be fake information about its armed forces.

The measure was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on Friday and already prompted some foreign media including the BBC and Bloomberg to say they were suspending operations within Russia.

ARD and ZDF said in a statement that they are examining the consequences of the new legislation and suspending reporting from the Moscow studios for now.

The passing of the law comes amid a broader crackdown on media outlets and social media in Russia.

LVIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian president's office says civilian evacuations have halted in an area of the

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country where Russian defense officials had announced a cease-fire.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office, said the evacuation effort was stopped because the city of Mariupol remained under fire on Saturday.

"The Russian side is not holding to the ceasefire and has continued firing on Mariupol itself and on its surrounding area," he said. "Talks with the Russian Federation are ongoing regarding setting up a ceasefire and ensuring a safe humanitarian corridor."

The Russian Defense Ministry said earlier in a statement it had agreed on evacuation routes with Ukrainian forces for Mariupol, a strategic port in the southeast, and for the eastern city of Volnovakha.

But a city official reported that shelling continued in his area Saturday despite the deal, a sign of the fragility of efforts to stop fighting across the country.

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RZESZOW, Poland — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is visiting southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine as the war enters its 10th day. Blinken arrived in Rzeszow on Saturday for talks with top Polish officials and was to visit a frontier post to meet Ukrainian refugees later in the day.

Blinken was meeting Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau a day after attending a NATO foreign minister's meeting in Brussels at which the alliance pledged to step up support for eastern flank members like Poland to counter Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Although NATO has ruled out establishing a no-fly zone over non-member Ukraine, it has significantly boosted both military and humanitarian assistance. Rzeszow is about 80 km (50 miles) from the Ukrainian border and its airport has become a hub for flights carrying such aid.

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MADRID — Spanish clothing giant Inditex has decided to "temporarily suspend" all its activity in Russia, including over 500 stores and its online sales.

In a statement to Spanish stock market regulator CNMV, the parent company of Zara, Massimo Dutti and other fashion chains says that "under the current circumstances it cannot guarantee the continuity of its operations and the commercial conditions in the Russian Federation."

It added that the company will focus on developing "a special support plan" for the more than 9,000 people it employs in Russia.

Inditex said that Russia accounts for 8.5% of the group's business. It said the move doesn't significantly impact its investment there because all its Russian shops operate on rented premises.

Major western companies, including H&M, Apple, Mercedes-Benz and BP, have halted their sales or operations in Russia since the country started its invasion of Ukraine.

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NEW YORK — Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has defended Russia's adoption of a law setting out prison sentences of up to 15 years for spreading what is deemed to be fake information about its armed forces.

The measure was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on Friday and prompted some foreign media including the BBC and Bloomberg to say they were suspending operations within Russia.

Peskov told reporters the measure was justified on the grounds of an "information war which was unleashed against our country." Asked how Russians could express opinions which don't match the official government position, Peskov said "within the bounds of the law."

The passing of the law comes amid a broader crackdown on media outlets and social media in Russia. Facebook and Twitter were both blocked Friday in Russia.

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GENEVA -- The International Organization for Migration says the number of people who have left Ukraine since fighting began has now reached 1.45 million.

The U.N. migration agency, citing figures from government ministries in countries where they have arrived, said Saturday that 787,300 of them went to Poland. Some 228,700 fled to Moldova, 144,700 to Hungary, 132,600 to Romania and 100,500 to Slovakia.

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The IOM said that nationals of 138 countries have crossed Ukraine's borders into neighboring nations.

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman says the Turkish leader will speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday.

"This war must be stopped immediately and there must be a return to the negotiating table," Ibrahim Kalin told broadcaster NTV in Istanbul. He said Saturday that "our president will talk to Putin tomorrow."

NATO member Turkey has close ties to both Russia and Ukraine and has repeatedly offered to mediate between the two. It has invited the top diplomats of both countries to Turkey for talks next week.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Friday that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had confirmed his attendance at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, to be held in the Mediterranean coastal city between March 11-13.

BERLIN -- The German government says the country's state-owned development bank has signed an agreement with Dutch gas company Gasunie and German energy company RWE to build a liquid natural gas import terminal.

The Economy Ministry said Saturday that the memorandum of understanding to build the LNG terminal in Brunsbuettel, on Germany's North Sea coast, was signed Friday. It didn't give financial details or a timeframe.

The terminal will be run by Gasunie, which is owned by the Dutch state, and Germany's KfW development bank will have a 50% stake. The ministry said that, in the long term, the plan is to re-equip the terminal to import green hydrogen derivatives.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz said last weekend that Germany will quickly build two LNG terminals, one in Brunsbuettel and the other in Wilhelmshaven. Germany wants to reduce its dependency on Russian gas following the attack on Ukraine.

ROME — Italian financial police have seized two Russian-owned superyachts moored in a Ligurian port after Italy's foreign minister announced plans to sequester 140 million euros (\$154 million) from Russian billionaires in Italy.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told Italian state TV Friday evening that "this is the only way to convince" Putin "to reason."

Financial police in the port of Imperia immediately seized the 65-meter (215-foot) "Lady M," with an estimated value of 65 million euros, owned by Alexei Mordashov, as well as the "Lena," valued at 50 million euros and belonging to Gennady Timchenko. Other seizures were reportedly under way.

PARIS — The office of President Emmanuel Macron says France will soon propose concrete measures to ensure the safety and security of Ukraine's five main nuclear sites.

The safeguards will be drawn up on the basis of International Atomic Energy Agency criteria, a statement from the French presidency said Saturday.

A Russian attack on a nuclear plant sparked a fire on Friday and briefly raised worldwide fears of a catastrophe. The statement said Macron is "extremely concerned about the risks to nuclear safety, security and the implementation of international safeguards resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine."

Macron said Russia "must immediately cease its illegal and dangerous military actions" and allow Ukrainian authorities full control over all nuclear facilities within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders. He urged Russia to allow "free, regular and unhindered access for facility personnel to ensure their continued safe operation."

KYIV, Ukraine — The Russian military will observe a ceasefire in two areas of Ukraine starting Saturday to allow civilians to evacuate, Russian state media reported, but there was no immediate confirmation from Ukraine. It would be the first breakthrough in allowing civilians to escape.

The Russian Defense Ministry statement carried by the RIA Novosti and Tass agencies said it has agreed

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on evacuation routes with Ukrainian forces to allow civilians to leave the strategic port of Mariupol in the southeast and the eastern town of Volnovakha "from 10 a.m. Moscow time." It was not immediately clear from the vaguely worded statement how long the routes would remain open.

The head of Ukraine's security council, Oleksiy Danilov, had called on Russia to create humanitarian corridors to allow children, women and the elderly to escape the fighting, calling such corridors "question No. 1."

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

## Russian invasion reorders West's calculations on cost of war

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Not long after winding down 20 years of war, President Joe Biden now finds the United States entrenched in a conflict in Ukraine, even without sending in U.S. troops, that could have a more far-reaching effect on a larger cross section of Americans than Afghanistan or Iraq ever did.

Fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq cost the lives of more than 6,900 U.S. troops and more than 7,500 U.S. contractors, and American spending topped \$2.3 trillion. But those wars had little impact on how the vast majority of Americans lived their daily lives. It was a 20-year period where people experienced both the Great Recession and the longest U.S. economic expansion, touchstones that were little influenced by the two grinding conflicts.

Now, five months after the end of the war in Afghanistan, the longest in U.S. history, Americans are entering complicated terrain with the Russian invasion in Ukraine. While Biden promises there will be no American forces on the ground there, he acknowledged the war waged by Russian President Vladimir Putin could have real impact on Americans' pocketbooks.

"A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world," Biden told Americans in his State of the Union address on Tuesday night.

The financial tumult of the most significant military campaign in Europe since World War II is already being felt.

This past week saw U.S. crude oil prices surge about 13% to roughly \$113 per barrel and the cost of natural gas reached a record in Europe as the war stoked market fears about a supply shock.

Key stock market indices, volatile for weeks, saw further losses as French President Emmanuel Macron warned "the worst is yet to come" after a lengthy phone call on Thursday with Putin.

Yet, in Washington -- as well as in European capitals -- there are signs of growing resolve to confront Putin and of a willingness to take on some economic pain in the process.

It's a markedly different tone than in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that spurred the Afghanistan War. Then-President George W. Bush implored Americans then to "stand against terror by going back to work" and suggested Americans "get down to Disney World" as his administration tried to restore faith in the U.S. airline industry. Over the next 20 years, U.S. servicemembers, including more than 52,000 wounded in action, and their families would largely carry the burden.

In Washington, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif, got ahead of the White House in recent days in pushing for sanctions directly targeting Russia's energy sector, the lifeblood of Putin's economy. The administration has been hesitant to target Russian oil out of concern such a move would also imperil the economies of the U.S. and Western allies.

"Ban it," Pelosi said of Russian oil imports.

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, introduced a bipartisan bill to do just that. The legislation would halt Russian oil imports to the U.S. by declaring a national emergency, something Biden could also do on his own.

"If there was a poll being taken and they say, 'Joe, would you support 10 cents more a gallon for the people of Ukraine?' ... I would gladly," Manchin said.

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Whether that view is widely held in the United States could go a long way to determine if Biden's popularity will rebound after sinking to dismal levels.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, said the sanctions on Russia could raise interest rates, slow the economy and drive up inflation and gas prices. He suggested Americans were prepared to sacrifice.

"This comes at cost," Romney said. "Nowhere near the cost of blood that would be involved if we let (Putin) run amok but it is not without sacrifice."

Public polling suggests Americans increasingly believe that the U.S. may have to do more to help Ukraine. Forty-five percent of Americans said in the days after Russia invaded that the U.S. was doing too little to help Ukraine. Another 37% said the U.S. was doing the right amount; just 7% said efforts were too much, according to a Quinnipiac poll this past week.

American politicians have shown greater resolve about what lies ahead as Ukrainians have demonstrated, in Biden's words, "pure courage" in intense fighting against Russian forces. There's also been a substantial change in European attitudes as the Russian military has pummeled Ukraine's biggest cities.

In Germany, Chancellor Olaf Scholz was quick to put Nord Stream 2, a recently completed \$11 billion Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline, on indefinite hold once Russia invaded, a reversal of Germany's previous position.

The German government also reversed its long-held policy of not sending weaponry to a conflict zone and announced it would send anti-tank and stinger weapons to Ukraine. The German government — one of several European nations that have been laggard in meeting NATO countries' pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defense by 2024 — said it would about triple its defense budget in 2022.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck even called on his country to take on Putin in another way.

"If you want to hurt Putin a bit, then save energy," he said

Even Hungary, whose pro-Russian strongman President Viktor Orban resisted speaking out against Russia in the leadup to the war, has condemned Russian military action, expressed support for sanctions, and agreed to give temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees entering Hungary.

At the White House, officials say the stiffening of European allies' resolve came after many had showed some wariness about confronting the Russians. U.S. national security officials released a steady drip of intelligence for more than two months before the war that suggested Putin was intent on a full-scale invasion.

But even so, in talks with Biden's national security team, some European allies seemed convinced — until right before Putin acted — that he would do something less than a full invasion.

Talk of reacting with half measures quickly melted away — even among some of the most reluctant European allies — once it became clear Putin had put his sights went far beyond disputed territories in eastern Ukraine.

Now, as the costs to Western economies mount, Biden and allied leaders' pain threshold will be tested further. Asked about the administration's confidence in unity as the costs of the war rise, White House press secretary sought to turn the focus back on Putin.

"We are taking steps to stand up for democracy, stand up for democracy versus autocracy stand up to the actions of a brutal dictator," Psaki said. "It is because of his actions that we are in this circumstance." Edward Frantz, a historian at the University of Indianapolis, said Biden appeared to be headed toward a foreign policy "sweet spot" after the chaotic ending of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. In the final days of that war, 13 U.S. service members were killed in a suicide bomb attack as they assisted evacuation efforts at the Kabul airport.

As tangled and heart-wrenching as the withdrawal was, Biden had completed a campaign promise of ending the war, something his three predecessors failed to do. It also allowed him to more fully turn Washington's attention to what Biden sees as America's central foreign policy challenge: confronting the rise of economic and military adversary China.

"Now, instead, we're back to the Cold War," Frantz said. "If this is a long project — and it certainly seems it will be — the president now faces the challenge of selling to Americans why enduring some impact to our economy for Ukraine matters. That is not going to be easy."



Associated Press writers Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City, and Lisa Mascaro, Hannah Fingerhut and Colleen Long contributed to this report.

## **WNBA's Brittney Griner arrested in Russia on drug charges**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

WNBA All-Star Brittney Griner was arrested last month at a Moscow airport after Russian authorities said a search of her luggage revealed vape cartridges.

The Russian Customs Service said Saturday that the cartridges were identified as containing oil derived from cannabis, which could carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. The customs service identified the person arrested as a player for the U.S. women's team and did not specify the date of her arrest. Russian media reported the player was Griner, and her agent, Lindsay Kagawa Colas, did not dispute those reports.

"We are aware of the situation with Brittney Griner in Russia and are in close contact with her, her legal representation in Russia, her family, her teams, and the WNBA and NBA," Kagawa Colas said Saturday. "As this is an ongoing legal matter, we are not able to comment further on the specifics of her case but can confirm that as we work to get her home, her mental and physical health remain our primary concern."

On Saturday, the State Department issued a "do not travel" advisory for Russia because of its invasion of Ukraine and urged all U.S. citizens to depart immediately, citing factors including "the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens by Russian government security officials" and "the Embassy's limited ability to assist" Americans in Russia.

Griner, who plays for the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, has played in Russia for the last seven years in the winter, earning over \$1 million per season — more than quadruple her WNBA salary. She last played for her Russian team UMMC Ekaterinburg on Jan. 29 before the league took a two-week break in early February for the FIBA World Cup qualifying tournaments.

More than a dozen WNBA players were playing in Russia and Ukraine this winter, including league MVP Jonquel Jones and Courtney Vandersloot and Allie Quigley of the champion Chicago Sky. The WNBA confirmed Saturday that all players besides Griner had left both countries.

The 31-year-old Griner has won two Olympic gold medals with the U.S., a WNBA championship with the Mercury and a national championship at Baylor. She is a seven-time All-Star.

"Brittney Griner has the WNBA's full support and our main priority is her swift and safe return to the United States," the league said in a statement.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-basketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## **Refugees fleeing Ukraine grab documents, pets, some photos**

By ELDAR EMRIC Associated Press

SIRET, Romania (AP) — Life or death choices leave little time for sentiment. War refugees fleeing Russian ordnance in Ukraine grabbed only the essentials for their journeys to safety: key documents, a beloved pet, often not even a change of clothes.

Lena Nesterova remembers the hour her fate was sealed: Feb. 24, 5:34 a.m., the first explosions in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, that signaled the feared Russian invasion.

Driven by fear, she said, they took "only daughter, dog, all the documents, and left Kyiv with only the clothes on their backs.

"We left everything. We have no clothes, nothing," Nesterova said, adding. "And we don't know what will be after."

Her daughter, 18-year-old Margo, cradled the family toy Chihuahua, dressed lovingly in a purple puffer, in the safety of a refugee camp in the border city of Siret, Romania.

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Ten days into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 1.45 million people have fled the battered country, according to the U.N.-affiliated Organization for Migration in Geneva. The U.N. has predicted that the total number of refugees could swell to 4 million, to become the biggest such crisis this century.

Most have arrived in Poland and other neighboring European Union countries, with the bloc granting people fleeing Ukraine temporary protection and residency permits. Some are starting to make their way to countries further afield.

More than 100,000 have reached Slovakia, with many planning to continue to the neighboring Czech Republic that has a sizeable Ukrainian community. Czech authorities are creating classes for thousands of children to be taught in their native Ukrainian.

Hundreds arrive daily by train in the German capital, Berlin. Further away in Italy, 10,000 refugees have arrived, 40% of them children, with the education ministry indicating plans to get them into classrooms so they can integrate.

Iryna Bogavchuk wanted to be light for the journey to Romania from Chernivsti, across the Carpathian Mountains in southern Ukraine, just 40 kilometers (30 miles) — and what seems like a lifetime — away. In better times, her home city teemed with young people, drawn by the university whose 19th century architecture won it a spot on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

"I took my daughter," she said, stroking the child sleeping in her lap. "I hope we will be all right."

Instead of belongings, which would have weighed her down, Bogavchuk brought Polaroids, which she fumbles in her wallet to produce. Happier times: her daughter's 10th birthday; a photo with her husband, whom she left behind as Ukrainian men of military age are banned from exiting the country. "I miss him," she said, dissolving into tears.

Ludmilla Nadzemovska traveled to Hungary from the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. She planned ahead for the worst -- purchasing traveling cages for her four cats a month ago as U.S. intelligence indicated Russia's intention to invade. But the decision to actually leave was made in an instant: after hearing her neighbors had been killed by Russian forces.

"I want to go back" she said, sitting in a camp in Tiszabecs, Hungary, just over the border. "But my priority is my family and the pets."

In nearby Moldova, a non-EU nation tucked between Ukraine and Romania, hundreds of Roma families are being welcomed at a sports venue in the capital, Chisinau.

Maria Cherepovskaia, 50, walked the first 15 kilometers from her home in the eastern Russian-controlled enclave of Donetsk. She received help from people, including transport and food, to make the rest of the nearly 900-kilometer journey to Moldova.

"We will be here until the war is over. We don't know where to go," she said. "There they are bombing. A lot, too much, what can we do?"

Bela Szandelszky in Tiszabecs, Hungary, Helena Alves in Chisinau, Moldova, Karel Janicek in Prague and Frances D'Emilio in Rome contributed.

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

## Afghans resettling in US struggle to find affordable housing

By MATTHEW BARAKAT, AMY TAXIN, PHILIP MARCELO and JULIE WATSON Associated Press  
IRVINE, Calif. (AP) — After fleeing her home in now-Taliban controlled Afghanistan, Mozghan Entazari did everything she could to find a new one for her family in the sunny, palm tree-lined communities of Southern California.

The 34-year-old mother of two scoured options on Zillow with her husband, while the family lived at a hotel in Irvine, south of Los Angeles. She spent \$200 for an Uber ride to see an apartment 90 minutes away only to find it had been rented.

Entazari needed a place not just for her immediate family but for seven members of her extended family.

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In the end, it took four months. On Sunday, they will move into a five-bedroom house in Corona, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of LA, which is renting for \$4,000.

The family's struggles are emblematic of what tens of thousands of Afghans are finding since they moved off U.S. military bases and into American cities and towns following last summer's dramatic airlift operation. Many hope to settle in Southern California and the Washington, D.C., area, where Afghans previously established vibrant communities with Halal grocery stores and mosques.

But these communities also are among the country's priciest housing markets, and units, especially those suitable for often larger Afghan families, are in short supply. Resettlement agencies report it's taking longer to get refugees out of temporary housing like hotels, Airbnbs and churches.

Entazari will share a roof with her husband and kids, along with her mother, teen sister and her brother and his family.

Without a job, credit history or co-signer, she said it was incredibly difficult to find housing. And without an address, she said she and her husband couldn't get jobs and her kids couldn't enroll in school.

"All our life depends on housing," Entazari said in Farsi through a volunteer interpreter.

They had to pay two months of rent to move in, and are getting help from an organization that will fund a portion of the monthly rent until next year.

The search for housing for Afghans comes amid a tightening housing market as the U.S. crawls out of the pandemic. The nationwide vacancy rate for rental units dropped about one percentage point, to 5.6%, in the last quarter of 2020, according to recently released U.S. Census data. The typical U.S. rent was up nearly 16% to more than \$1,850 in January compared to last January, according to the online real estate marketplace Zillow, which launched an effort in November to help connect landlords with newly arrived Afghans.

In northern Virginia, Ahmad Saeed Totakhail was lucky to find permanent housing in Dale City, a suburb about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Washington.

His sister, who housed him until he got a place of his own, lives there. He was hired to work in nearby Arlington, by the same nonprofit that employed him in Kabul.

The area's stunning mosques and plentiful Afghan eateries have softened the blow of leaving his homeland. But he was shocked by the high price for his family's safe haven — \$2,000 a month for rent.

"It's quite expensive," he said. "I have friends here. I have my relatives here. But we never discussed the economics."

About half of all Afghan immigrants to the United States, many who came decades ago, live in five major metropolitan areas — Washington, Sacramento, California, San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles, according to the Migration Policy Institute. As a result, these areas are often attractive for Afghan newcomers, and many list the names of relatives or acquaintances already living there as contacts when resettlement agencies are considering where to send them.

But with some 76,000 Afghans arriving in the United States since the Taliban takeover of their country last year, many of these cities are reaching their saturation point, said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of the Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service.

The resettlement agency has teamed with Airbnb to provide temporary housing while talking to property management companies to find a more permanent solution. They've opened offices in more affordable markets to meet the housing demand. But the places also must have a robust job market and institutions and businesses that support Afghan families, such as mosques and Halal markets, she said.

The U.S. State Department says it doesn't track how many of the Afghans are in temporary accommodations. The top states for Afghans arriving following the Taliban takeover are Texas (nearly 10,500); California (over 8,200), Virginia (over 5,100) and Washington (over 2,800), according to State Department data.

Near the nation's capital, Lutheran Social Services has helped settle more than 4,000 Afghans since last summer. For many, the benefits of a community that is like "a second Kabul" outweigh the high housing costs, said Zabi, a housing coordinator for LSS and relatively recent refugee from Afghanistan who asked to be identified by his nickname because he still has family who could be targeted there because of his

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prior work with the U.S. military.

Zabi is working to convince area landlords and property owners that Afghan refugees are worth granting some leeway.

"They're gonna pay their rent, that's for sure," he said, adding many find employment quickly, with help from the agency and the existing Afghan community.

In Newburyport, Massachusetts, churches opened their doors to temporarily house four Afghan families. The Rev. Jarred Mercer said helping them set down permanent roots is daunting given the high cost of living in the largely white, affluent community near the New Hampshire state line.

He and another pastor are working with city officials and hope to bring local property owners and non-profits on board to help tackle the housing question. In the meantime, they've raised funds and formed volunteer committees to coordinate everything from teaching English classes to driving the families around town.

"They're getting more and more entrenched in town, especially the children, and it would just be more trauma to uproot them and start the whole process over again," Mercer said.

That already happened to several Afghan families who were asked to try a new location after searching for months for a home in Southern California, said Sonik Sadozai, a volunteer with Afghan Refugee Relief.

Sadozai, who came to the country as a refugee four decades ago from Afghanistan, said she's been doing this work for years and never faced so many hurdles.

She said she was able to help Entazari and her family move out of the Irvine hotel partly because of luck: An Afghan man she had helped find housing four years ago reached out to her about a Syrian friend who had a house for rent.

But she worries she won't be so lucky with the more than 100 other Afghan families she is helping in their search.

Many landlords walloped by the pandemic are asking for the first two months and last two months of rent up front — a tall order for arriving families, especially those needing larger units, she said.

"I have a family of 13," she said. "Where am I going to send them?"

Barakat reported from Dale City, Va., Marcelo reported from Boston, and Watson reported from San Diego.

## Blinken hears harrowing tales from refugees fleeing Ukraine

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

KORCZOWA, Poland (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Saturday visited a welcome center set up by Polish authorities in what once was a shopping mall in Korczowa, close to the border with Ukraine, where roughly 3,000 refugees are taking shelter after the Russian invasion of their homeland.

America's top diplomat heard harrowing tales from mothers and their children who described long and perilous journeys — and the shock of the sudden disruption and the fear for their lives — after fleeing the devastation of the war.

"Near our home we heard bombs," said Venera Ahmadi, 12, who said she came with her brother and sister, six dogs and seven cats from Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, more than 600 kilometers (372 miles) away. "We walked to the border, I don't know how many hours. We crossed the border on foot."

Her 16-year-old sister, Jasmine, said: "I was scared I would die."

Natalia Kadygrob, 48, reached the center with her four adopted children from Kropyvnytskyi, almost 800 kilometers (about 500 miles) by bus on their way to her brother's home in Germany. Her husband stayed behind.

"There they bombed planes at the airport," she said. "Of course we were afraid."

Tatyana, 58, who wouldn't give her last name, came with her daughter, Anna, 37, and her 6- and 1-year-old daughters, Katya and Kira, from Kharkiv, about 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) away. "They were shooting on the street," Tatyana said. Anna said her home had been destroyed by a shell or a rocket.

She was in the basement with her daughters when the explosion happened. "They should be in school,"

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Anna said. "They are children, they don't understand."

After his stop at the welcome center, Blinken visited the Korczowa border crossing where Polish authorities escorted small groups of refugees — about 20 at a time — across the frontier from the Ukrainian town of Krakovets as sporadic snow flakes fell from a gray sky.

Groups mainly of women, children and elderly men — grimly rolling their possessions in luggage and carrying infants and the occasional family pet — made their way into makeshift processing centers set up in tents on Polish territory.

Blinken earlier was in the city of Rzeszow for talks with top Polish officials before heading to the border and a frontier post. He met Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau a day after attending a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels. The military alliance pledged to step up support for eastern flank members such as Poland to counter the Russian invasion.

Although NATO has ruled out establishing a no-fly zone over non-member Ukraine, it has significantly boosted both military and humanitarian assistance. Rzeszow is about 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the Ukraine border and its airport has become a hub for flights carrying such aid.

Blinken said his visit to Poland was coming at "one of the most urgent moments in the long history between our two countries" and said recent deployments of U.S. soldiers to the country would continue.

Rau said Poland had already taken in more than 700,000 refugees from Ukraine and that he expected hundreds of thousands more in the coming weeks unless Russia backs down.

"Poland will never recognize territorial changes brought about by unprovoked, unlawful aggression," he said, adding that his country will demand that alleged Russian war crimes committed in Ukraine will be prosecuted.

Following his meeting with Blinken, Morawiecki said they had agreed on the need to further strengthen NATO's eastern flank and strengthen Europe's security architecture. Poland is seeking more U.S. forces on its territory, where there are currently more than 10,000 American troops.

The two men also discussed stepping up sanctions and freezes of assets on Russia, which Morawiecki said should be "crushing" for Russia's economy. No Russian banks should be exempted from the exclusions from the SWIFT system, he said. Currently, all but the largest Russian banks have been kicked off the financial messaging service.

## Whitmer plot underlines growing abuse of women officials

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

Angry over COVID-19 restrictions such as the closing of gyms, people from several states met in Ohio in June 2020 to plot ways to overthrow government "tyrants," prosecutors say. Within a week, they chose Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer as a target.

The plan, as outlined in a federal court indictment, was to kidnap Whitmer at her family's northern Michigan vacation home and take her to Wisconsin for a "trial." Over several months, they held training exercises and conducted surveillance on Whitmer's home in preparation for what a group leader called "a snatch and grab."

"Just grab the bitch," Adam Fox was recorded telling a confidential informant working with the FBI, prosecutors say. "Because at that point, we do that, dude — it's over."

Though it was interrupted by authorities, the alleged plot — for which four men will face trial in a Michigan courtroom beginning Tuesday — represented an increasing level of anger and violence in U.S. politics. That violence disproportionately targets female elected officials, and particularly women of color.

While criticism of public officials is healthy and expected in a democracy, researchers say women are dramatically more likely than their male counterparts to face threats and violence. As more women are elected, the hostility grows, ranging from death threats to armed people gathered outside homes, or attacks on social media that go beyond policy positions to include gendered or racial slurs and insults about intelligence or appearance.

That could have longer-term effects by pushing women to leave public office or deterring them from

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running, potentially reversing the progress women have made in diversifying who represents the country at City Hall, on school boards and in statehouses and other offices.

Whitmer appears to have been among the women lawmakers targeted in part due to gender. The men who prosecutors say participated in the plot came from different states, and she was not the only U.S. governor to impose pandemic-related restrictions.

In transcripts of recorded conversations, hours of which prosecutors are expected to present at trial, the use of gendered slurs and men discussing things like "taking" Whitmer indicate their rage goes beyond her policies, said Rutgers University Professor Mona Lena Krook, who authored a 2020 book on global violence against women in politics.

"It's like 'Who does she think she is trying to tell us what to do?'" Krook said. "There is a sense they're trying to delegitimize her because they don't feel like she has the right, that she's allowed to be there because she's a woman ... I think they take it very personally."

Several studies have shown the disparity between how men and women are treated. Researchers for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue measured online abuse of congressional candidates in the 2020 election, including direct or indirect threats and promoting violence or demeaning a person based on identity such as race or gender. They found female Democrats received 10 times more abusive comments on Facebook than their male peers, while Republican women received twice as many as their male counterparts.

Women lawmakers who are also ethnic minorities are particularly likely to face abuse, the study found. Among those targeted most often were Reps. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, who called out a culture of "accepting violence and violent language against women" during a 2020 House floor speech after a GOP lawmaker's verbal assault.

GOP women also are targets. The study found that during a two-week period, nearly one-third of the tweets directed at Sen. Susan Collins of Maine were abusive. With the exception of then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who received a higher-than-usual percentage of abusive tweets, between 5% and 10% of tweets directed toward men studied were abusive.

A State and Local Government Review survey of mayors in communities with over 30,000 residents found 79% of mayors reported being a victim of harassment, threats or other psychological abuse, and 13% reported instances of physical violence. Gender was the biggest predictor of whether mayors would be victims, with female mayors more than twice as likely as male mayors to face psychological abuse, and nearly three times as likely to experience physical violence.

Illinois state Sen. Deb Conroy has experienced such abuse firsthand. The Democrat from suburban Chicago received death threats after a conservative blog last month misrepresented a bill she is sponsoring, reporting inaccurately that it could lead to quarantining people who test positive for COVID-19.

Conroy started receiving voicemails with people calling her gendered slurs and saying things like "get back in the kitchen" and "you're going to get what you deserve." A commenter on Facebook said he hopes she sleeps with a gun under her pillow so she's ready for what's coming.

Conroy, who had to close her office, work with authorities to remove her address from the internet and cancel public events, said the vitriol in politics "exponentially changed" when Donald Trump became president.

"All of a sudden, it was OK to say the most hateful things that you normally would keep to yourself," she said.

The vitriol also intensified during the pandemic, and as some Trump supporters believed the lie that he won the 2020 election.

Amanda Hunter, executive director of the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, traces much of the change to the rise of social media. Years ago, if someone wanted to verbally attack a lawmaker, they had to track down their address and perhaps mail a letter. Today, it's relatively easy to reach someone via Twitter, Facebook, email or other methods — often in their homes or on their phones.

That's created another structural barrier to running for office, particularly in lower levels of government where the jobs don't come with a security detail or budget, said Hunter. The Barbara Lee Family Foundation works to increase women's representation in politics.

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"This is now another decision that women have to factor in when deciding whether or not to run for office, if they want to contend with weighing potential security threats against them or perhaps even their families," she said.

Lawmakers and advocacy groups have urged social media companies to do more to crack down on the online abuse. They also say there is power in drawing attention to the attacks — something some women once worried made them appear weak — and in calling out the attackers.

For Whitmer, the abuse continued even after federal charges were filed against the six men in the kidnapping plot in October 2020.

After one of the men pleaded guilty last year, she told a judge in a victim impact statement that she has seen herself hung in effigy during a protest and heavily armed people near her home. At one protest there was a sign calling for "burning the witch."

"Things will never be the same," she wrote.

Burnett reported from Chicago.

## **New offices for the hybrid era? Many companies are on board**

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — If you build a shiny new office building, will your employees show up to work in it?

Many U.S. companies are banking on it because they believe working in person is better for collaboration and training young employees. So even though most employees are still working from home offices and dining room tables today, some companies are willing to spend big on showplace headquarters.

Businesses recognize there is a place for offices despite the fact that they plan to give workers more flexibility to work from home and might see cost savings from limiting their real estate holdings.

In a sign of how committed companies are to keeping offices, some 57% of the more than 2,300 office projects that giant architecture firm Gensler is now working on were started last year, in the middle of the pandemic. But as they're building, companies are tweaking designs to reflect that offices may become spots that workers visit primarily to collaborate with others, instead of places where they toil all day, every day.

Jordan Goldstein, the co-firm managing principal at Gensler, said companies are placing a premium on having more meeting rooms with the technology to accommodate remote and in-person participants, as well as more flexible space for people to choose where they work within the office.

Mutual of Omaha plans to build a glassy new headquarters in its namesake Nebraska city that could wind up as Omaha's tallest building.

But the insurance company says the plans for its new building reflect its commitment to flexible work. The company has 4,000 employees in the Omaha metro area but is planning a building that can only accommodate between 2,200 and 2,500 people on any given day, Mutual spokesman Jim Nolan said.

"The only way that works is by embracing remote and hybrid work," he said.

The number of people working remotely is clearly growing because so many companies learned they could do it during the pandemic. The Society for Human Resource Management estimates the number of totally remote U.S. workers will double to roughly 36 million people by 2025. But the CEO of that trade group, Johnny C. Taylor Jr., said that will still only account for a little over 20% of the workforce. The other nearly 80% will work in an office at least part of the time.

Another survey done last year by CBRE Group, the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm, showed that 87% of large companies planned to use a hybrid schedule after the pandemic, with workers in the office part of the time.

And separate worker surveys that SHRM and Gensler conducted last fall both showed that more than half of workers wanted to be back in the office at least one day a week.

But so far businesses have been slow to bring employees back. An average of 36.8% of the workforce was back in offices during the fourth week of February in 10 major U.S. cities monitored by Kastle Systems, which tracks building access-card swipes. That number has been creeping up since early January when it

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fell as low as 23% during the omicron surge.

Mutual of Omaha CEO James Blackledge said bringing people together in an office at least periodically will boost productivity and creativity, and having a gleaming new \$433 million office should help the company attract new talent. Plus, the new headquarters will likely be smaller overall than Mutual's current headquarters complex, but the exact size will be determined later in the design process.

Elsewhere, two high profile projects already underway are Walmart's new headquarters being built in Bentonville, Arkansas, and the new New York City home for bank JP Morgan Chase.

Walmart said it was overdue for a new headquarters regardless of the pandemic because it is currently spending tens of millions of dollars every year to maintain an outdated patchwork of more than 20 offices in northwest Arkansas for its administrative and support staff.

JP Morgan CEO Jamie Dimon has said that the rise of work-from-home might mean the company only needs 60 desks for every 100 employees because they will be shared. But he remains committed to a new headquarters for 12,000 to 14,000 of the bank's employees because many tasks will still need to be done in person.

Deluxe, the company once known primarily for printing checks that now processes nearly \$3 trillion in payments a year, invested \$12.2 million during the pandemic in a new 94,000-square-foot Minneapolis headquarters that opened last fall. When they return on a more regular basis later this month, employees will be expected to be there more often than they work from home.

But the new headquarters is less than one-third the size of Deluxe's old one. The company cut its overall real estate footprint in half nationwide to better reflect its current needs with more people working remotely.

Deluxe CEO Barry McCarthy acknowledges that parts of each of his employee's jobs can be done remotely, but coming together and being able to work as a team is a bigger element.

"There are very, very few jobs that are just individual contributor jobs with little or no interaction required from others," he said.

McCarthy, like many CEOs, says he believes office work is better for training and mentoring younger employees because they can watch and interact with their coworkers better and get more immediate feedback on their work.

The roughly 100 headquarter workers at shoe and apparel company Merrell moved into a new office in Rockford, Michigan, in January. The project was in the works before the pandemic began, but CEO Chris Hufnagel said the company reworked the plan after it became clear that many employees would still work from home, at least part of the time. Hufnagel said he believes the office will be the "epicenter" for the company's work.

"I think everyone realizes that there are parts of our jobs that we do better when we are together," Hufnagel said.

And then there are companies that plan to largely do away with their offices in favor of remote work. But even those firms may keep a small office presence.

Intradiem CEO Matt McConnell said the software company had its most profitable year ever in 2021 and didn't miss a beat while its 150 employees and 75 contractors were all working remotely. After checking with employees, the company shifted to a remote-first plan and will let its current headquarters lease expire at the end of 2022.

"It's just this big, empty space that no one is using. It doesn't make any sense to maintain that," McConnell said.

But Intradiem, which is based in Alpharetta, Georgia, will likely still maintain a smaller headquarters with space for its IT workers to put together equipment to send out to home-based workers, and the company will encourage teams to occasionally get together in person. They may also rent some space at shared offices run by WeWork for employees across the country to use.

Modular flooring manufacturer Interface just opened a new headquarters in 2018, but the pandemic prompted the company to spend \$400,000 remodeling the building and investing in new technology and furniture to adjust to workers only being in the office part of the time.

Darby Gracey, Interface's director of worklife and workplace strategy, said she knows the roughly 175



headquarters workers didn't miss commuting in Atlanta traffic while they worked from home, but the company has asked them to return at least some of the time.

"We believe a major part of culture comes from the ability to sit down and have a cup of coffee with an colleague or have a white-boarding session with a teammate — just actually getting together in person and being able to read body language — we believe that there's a lot of value in that and it's something we're standing firm on," Gracey said.

## Charities struggle to deliver humanitarian aid into Ukraine

By GLENN GAMBOA and HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writers

In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the fog of war is extending to those who are trying to help the beleaguered Ukrainians.

With ports blocked and roads made treacherous by bombings, charities currently can't send humanitarian aid into Ukraine through normal channels, though both countries agreed Thursday to create corridors to allow those donations to be delivered. The International Committee of the Red Cross has expressed worry that Russian attacks being carried out in densely populated areas are imperiling children, the sick and the elderly.

Yet the complexities of the conflict haven't stopped aid from reaching Ukrainians. The United Nations says much of the humanitarian effort are now based in neighboring countries to support roughly 1.2 million Ukrainians who have fled the country, mostly to Poland, Hungary and Romania. But charities are also working to send aid to Ukraine itself.

The scale of need is enormous. On Tuesday, the United Nations issued an appeal for \$1.7 billion to help with aid efforts, estimating that 12 million people in Ukraine and 4 million refugees could be in need of relief and protection in the coming months.

Filippo Grandi, chief of the U.N. refugee agency, said his agency had already received more than \$40 million in private donations from individuals and companies.

Many corporations have committed to help. Amazon pledged \$5 million to the U.N.'s refugee agency and other humanitarian organizations and plans to match up to \$5 million more in donations made by its employees. Snapchat announced \$15 million for humanitarian support. Airbnb offered free housing" to up to 100,000 refugees and is waiving its fees on the grassroots movement of people booking stays in Ukrainian homes, with no plans of using them, to get money quickly into the accounts of hosts. And Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, has pledged \$10 million toward aid.

Cryptocurrencies donations themselves have emerged as a leading form of aid. Samuel Bankman-Fried, CEO of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX, said his company gave \$25 to "each Ukrainian" on FTX.

"Do what you gotta do," he wrote.

Elliptic, a company that tracks cryptocurrency transactions, said that as of Friday, \$56.2 million in digital currencies had been donated to Ukraine's government and to Come Back Alive, a Ukrainian organization that says it trains and supplies ammunition to Ukraine's military.

Come Back Alive is set to receive support from a crypto fundraising campaign, Ukraine DAO, that was organized in part by the punk protest group Pussy Riot. The organizer tweeted Wednesday they had raised just over 2,258 ether, equivalent to about \$6.7 million.

"This is the first time that we're seeing sort of a public concerted effort to raise funds to finance an ongoing conflict through cryptocurrency," said Chris DePow, a regulation and compliance expert at Elliptic.

Inevitably, scammers appear to be trying to profit off the crisis. Elliptic said in a blog post that it had identified crypto fundraising scams that solicited aid for Ukraine.

"If the funds are being raised directly by the government through a publicly announced appeal, or if the funds are being raised through a third-party reputable organization that's known to be active in this space, that's probably a safer bet," DePow said.

As of Wednesday, Meta said, more than \$20 million had been raised on its Facebook and Instagram platforms for nonprofits that support humanitarian aid.

Maria Genkin, a board member with the American nonprofit Razom, which was established to help

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Ukrainians after Russia's 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea, said her group has generated donations through their Facebook and Instagram fundraisers to send supplies to Poland.

The usual delivery trucks and other shipping methods, Genkin said, have either been halted or made more dangerous by the war. So supporters are building their own system.

"It's a system of volunteers essentially crowdsourcing delivery," she said. "There will be a lot of private cars bringing supplies from Warsaw to Lviv."

Razom says it would prefer that people donate directly to the Ukrainian Armed Forces through an account opened by the National Bank of Ukraine. But Genkin said she recognizes that many nonprofits cannot give directly to the military because of tax restrictions and that many donors may object to funding another country's armed forces.

For that reason, Razom will continue to collect donations for humanitarian aid for Ukraine. It also plans to raise awareness for campaigns to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine and upcoming protests, including one Saturday in New York's Times Square.

"We're finding a lot of little things that we can do that add up to big things," Genkin said.

That's Nova Ukraine's plan as well. The American nonprofit, which provides humanitarian aid and raises awareness of Ukrainian issues in the United States, initially planned to collect clothing and other aid and ship it to the country. However, with Ukraine's ports cut off by Russian forces, that is no longer an option. Igor Markov, one of Nova Ukraine's directors, said the group will work to send what they have collected to Ukrainian refugee camps in neighboring countries, as well as prepare for ongoing refugee support.

Elsewhere in the U.S., the Jewish organization UJA-Federation of New York spent the past month preparing for different scenarios with its Ukrainian partners, some of whom had been storing two to three months' worth of food as a precaution. Once the invasion occurred, said Deborah Joselow, the group's chief planning officer, the federation managed to quickly deploy \$3 million in emergency grants to provide humanitarian support and other aid to roughly 200,000 Jews living in Ukraine.

The initial grants are slated to help their partners — at least 15, with many more affiliates — provide food and medicine for the elderly, Holocaust survivors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations. The organization said it's been receiving inquiries from community activists and others who have taken shelter in bunkers in Odessa and in metro stations across Ukraine.

"They're scared," Joselow said. "They're really, really scared."

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Associated Press coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content. For all of AP's philanthropy coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/philanthropy>.

## Iran may answer UN nuclear questions as deal talks near end

By AMIR VAHDAT and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran on Saturday suggested it could supply answers long sought by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog toward the end of May as talks in Vienna over its tattered atomic deal with world powers appear to be reaching their end.

The comment by Mohammad Eslami, the head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, came as Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency visited Tehran in an effort that could push the deal to a conclusion.

But meanwhile, Russia's foreign minister for the first time linked American sanctions on Moscow over its war on Ukraine to the ongoing Iran nuclear deal talks — adding a new wrinkle to the delicate diplomacy.

While Grossi did not directly confirm Eslami's timeline, he described his visit as meant "to address outstanding questions" as negotiators back in Europe appear to be reaching a deadline to see if the 2015 accord can be revived. He planned to address journalists in Vienna late Saturday about his trip.

"It would be difficult to believe or to imagine that such an important return to such a comprehensive agreement like the (nuclear deal) would be possible if the agency and Iran would not be seeing eye to

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eye on how to resolve these important safeguards issues," Grossi said in Tehran. Safeguards in the IAEA's parlance refer to the agency's inspections and monitoring of a country's nuclear program.

Grossi for years has sought for Iran to answer questions about man-made uranium particles found at former undeclared nuclear sites in the country. U.S. intelligence agencies, Western nations and the IAEA have said Iran ran an organized nuclear weapons program until 2003. Iran long has denied ever seeking nuclear weapons.

For his part, Eslami said the men had reached an "agreement" that would see Iran "presenting documents that would remove the ambiguities about our country."

"God willing, we will do this by Khordad, which is a phase of the agreement in Vienna," Eslami said. Khordad is a month in the Persian calendar which starts on May 22 this year. However, converting Persian calendar dates to Gregorian has caused prior confusion amid recent tensions over Iran's program.

Eslami did not elaborate on what the documents would discuss. However, Iran has made previous conciliatory gestures before meetings of the IAEA's membership. Its next Board of Governors meeting begins Monday.

Grossi met later with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian.

The nuclear deal saw Iran agree to drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of crushing economic sanctions. But a 2018 decision by then-President Donald Trump to unilaterally withdraw America from the agreement sparked years of tensions and attacks across the wider Mideast.

Today, Tehran enriches uranium up to 60% purity — its highest level ever and a short technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% and far greater than the nuclear deal's 3.67% cap. Its stockpile of enriched uranium also continues to grow, worrying nuclear nonproliferation experts that Iran could be closer to the threshold of having enough material for an atomic weapon if it chose to pursue one.

Undeclared sites played into the initial 2015 deal as well. That year IAEA's then-director-general also came to Tehran and visit one suspected weapons-program site at Parchin. Inspectors also took samples there for analysis.

Grossi's inspectors also face challenges in monitoring Iran's current advances in its civilian program. Iran has held IAEA surveillance camera recordings since February 2021, not letting inspectors view them amid the nuclear negotiations.

In Vienna, negotiators appear to be signaling a deal is near — even as Russia's war on Ukraine rages on. Russia's ambassador there, Mikhail Ulyanov, has been a key mediator in the talks and tweeted Thursday that negotiations were "almost over." That was something also acknowledged by French negotiator Philippe Errera.

"We hope to come back quickly to conclude because we are very, very close to an agreement," Errera wrote Friday on Twitter. "But nothing is agreed until EVERYTHING is agreed!"

British negotiator Stephanie Al-Qaq simply wrote: "We are close."

But comments Saturday by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for the first time offered the suggestion that the Ukraine war — and the stinging sanctions that Americans and others have put on Moscow — could interfere.

"We need guarantees these sanctions will in no way affect the trading, economic and investment relations contained in the (deal) for the Iranian nuclear program," Lavrov said, according to the Tass news agency.

Lavrov said he wanted "guarantees at least at the level of the secretary of state" that the U.S. sanctions would not affect Moscow's relationship with Tehran. There was no immediate American response to Lavrov's comments.

Meanwhile on Saturday, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard unveiled what it described as two new underground missile and drone bases in the country. State TV said the bases contained surface-to-surface missiles and armed drones capable of "hiding themselves from enemy radar."

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Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

## Walker taking no sides in Georgia's GOP contest for governor

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Herschel Walker has a message for the Republicans going after each other for their party's nomination for governor in Georgia: Don't count on help from me.

A football legend in a sports-crazed state whose Senate campaign is backed by former President Donald Trump, Walker is running far ahead in Georgia's May primary. That makes his support attractive for incumbent Gov. Brian Kemp and challenger David Perdue, who are in a bruising primary campaign.

For now, Walker is refusing to get involved and is increasingly expressing exasperation with the negative tone of the governor's race. He is voicing the concerns of many Republicans that a nasty campaign between Kemp and Perdue could leave the GOP divided heading into the November election and potentially cost the party the governorship in a state they have dominated for two decades.

"I don't support either one of them. I'm mad at both of them," Walker told a University of North Georgia audience last month, according to audio obtained by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. He later told nationally syndicated conservative radio hosts Clay Travis and Buck Sexton that "intersquad fighting" was distracting from efforts to unify the party.

"I told people I'm upset because we got some strong candidates running," he said. "We cannot continue to go out there and fight among each other when we got this country that is hurting."

That anxiety is especially pronounced in Georgia, where Republicans have attributed the loss of two Senate seats in 2021 to party infighting after the 2020 presidential election. Those defeats handed Democrats the Senate majority.

Trump, who narrowly lost Georgia in 2020 and has made the state a centerpiece of his lie that the election was stolen, isn't doing anything to soothe tensions. He appears to be micromanaging efforts to defeat Kemp, whom he blames for not trying to overturn Biden's victory in Georgia — something the governor had no power to do.

The former president retaliated by publicly recruiting Perdue, one of the senators defeated in 2021, to run for governor. Trying to clear the way for Perdue, Trump persuaded another loyalist running for governor, Vernon Jones, to exit the field and instead run for a congressional seat with his explicit backing.

The GOP dynamic contrasts with the straightforward alignment on the Democratic side between incumbent Sen. Raphael Warnock and Stacey Abrams, the all-but-certain nominee for governor. The two are longtime political allies. Abrams' strong backing was a major factor in propelling Warnock to the Senate in 2021, and they are likely to run closely-linked campaigns emphasizing many of the same issues, including Medicaid expansion and protecting voting rights.

A Trump spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment for this story. But his political team has not talked to Walker about endorsing in the governor's race, according to a person familiar with conversations between the two camps who requested anonymity to discuss internal operations.

Kemp never asked for Walker's blessing, said spokesperson Cody Hall. Perdue's campaign didn't respond to questions about whether Perdue has sought Walker's support.

Walker has his own problems, including scrutiny on his past threats of violence, his business dealings and his policy positions in the Senate race. But he's seen as a strong front-runner in the primary in part because of the celebrity he earned after leading the University of Georgia to a national championship following the 1980 season and winning the Heisman Trophy in 1982.

With Walker currently supported by many Perdue and Kemp voters, there is little incentive for him to make either side mad, said Randy Evans, an Atlanta lawyer and Trump's former ambassador to Luxembourg who is backing Walker.

Evans said Walker has emerged as the "900-pound gorilla" of the primary. "The truth of the matter is Herschel is bigger than either of them put together," Evans said.

Other Trump loyalists still believe Walker will come around to supporting Perdue, though.

"I think you're going to have a unified Trump ticket," said Debbie Dooley, a national tea party leader and early backer of Trump's 2016 candidacy who lives in suburban Atlanta.

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Walker has pledged to back the primary winner. Spokesperson Mallory Blount said Walker is "laser-focused on unifying the party so we can defeat Sen. Warnock."

One likely outcome, suggests Georgia Republican political consultant Chip Lake, is that Walker could "finesse" the situation by appearing with Trump and Perdue at a rally without offering an explicit endorsement.

"I think Herschel can share the stage with he and David Perdue and say, 'Look, I'm not taking a formal position in the primary for governor, but what I am doing is I'm here with my friend Donald Trump, the former president, and I'm proud he's supporting me,'" Lake said. "They can thread that needle."

Helping Walker dodge any Trump demands is a relationship that predates their entries into politics. Walker played for the Trump-owned New Jersey Generals of the United States Football League and vacationed with Trump and his children.

"President Trump has been a great friend of mine for years. He's a great man, got a great family, I'm going to stand behind him, but he don't run Georgia, I run Georgia," Walker told Newsmax on Feb. 7.

Walker has ties to Kemp, too, dating to Walker's days at the University of Georgia.

Kemp was best friends with Daniel Dooley, the son of legendary Bulldog football coach Vince Dooley. (The Dooleys are not related to Debbie Dooley.) In a July interview with The Associated Press, Kemp remembered how he and his friend stormed the field after the game when Walker scored his first collegiate touchdown by bowling over the Tennessee's Bill Bates in 1980.

"Daniel and I just rushed the field after the game and somehow squeezed in with the team and got in the locker room," Kemp recalled. "So I've been around Herschel a lot, and I know a lot of people that know Herschel very well, and you know he's just a great guy and he's a damn good dawg."

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Associated Press writer Jill Colvin in New York contributed to this report.

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Follow Jeff Amy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jeffamy>

## North Korea fires ballistic missile in extension of testing

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Saturday fired a ballistic missile into the sea, according to its neighbors' militaries, extending Pyongyang's streak of weapons tests this year amid a prolonged freeze in nuclear negotiations with the United States.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile fired from an area near the North Korean capital flew about 270 kilometers (168 miles) eastward at a maximum altitude of 560 kilometers (348 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said U.S. and South Korean intelligence officials were closely analyzing the launch.

The launch was North Korea's ninth round of weapons tests in 2022 as it continues to use a pause in diplomacy to expand its military capabilities while attempting to pressure the Biden administration for concessions.

The flight details roughly matched an earlier assessment by the Japanese military and were similar to North Korea's previous launch last Sunday that was also conducted from the Sunan area near Pyongyang.

North Korean state media said last week's launch was designed to test a camera system it plans to install on a spy satellite that is under development.

"The missile was fired just as the international community is responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while also in the middle of the Beijing Paralympics," said Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi. He canceled an appearance at a military academy graduation to respond to the launch, calling it "absolutely unacceptable."

The U.S. Indo Pacific Command said the launch did not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or that of its allies. It called on North Korea to refrain from further destabilizing acts and said it was closely consulting with South Korea and Japan as well as other regional allies and partners over the launch.

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Officials in Seoul convened an emergency National Security Council meeting and called on the North to refrain from actions that further raise tensions in the face of an international crisis created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and at a time when South Korea is holding a presidential election.

They also vowed stronger cooperation with the United States to deal with the North Korean threat and more closely monitor its nuclear and missile facilities as well as a nuclear testing ground that had been active until 2017, Seoul's presidential office said.

The launch came as South Koreans waited in long lines Saturday morning for early voting ahead of a presidential election on Wednesday. Two major candidates have clashed over whether South Korea should continue to pursue engagement with the belligerent North or take a harder line to check its nuclear threat.

Lee Jae-myung, the candidate for the ruling center-left party who has called for a conciliatory approach toward Pyongyang, criticized the launch but reiterated his commitment to dialogue. In a statement on Facebook, he promised he wouldn't "tolerate actions that raise tensions," without specifying how he would respond.

The North's other tests this year included a purported hypersonic missile and its first launch since 2017 of an intermediate range missile with a potential of reaching Guam, a major U.S. military hub in the Pacific.

Analysts say North Korea could up the ante in coming months and possibly resume its testing of major weapons like intercontinental ballistic missiles as it tries to move the needle with Washington, which is now preoccupied with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and regional competition with China.

"The (Kim Jong Un) regime may be unhappy with Washington coordinating global efforts against Russian aggression in Ukraine and disappointed with Seoul's inward focus ahead of the South Korean presidential election," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

"But North Korea does not simply test missiles for international attention. Pyongyang's current priorities are military modernization and domestic politics," Easley added.

During a ruling Workers Party conference called by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last month, Politburo members issued a veiled threat to resume the tests of nuclear devices and ICBMs, which Kim had unilaterally suspended in 2018 to make room for diplomacy with then-President Donald Trump.

But negotiations have stalled since 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for dismantling an aging nuclear facility, which would have amounted to a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

The Biden administration has offered open-ended talks with Pyongyang but shown no willingness to offer badly needed economic benefits unless the North takes real steps to cut down its nuclear weapons and missile program.

The North's claim that it is testing camera systems for spy satellites suggests it could possibly conduct a banned long-range rocket test disguised as a space launch to advance its weaponry and apply more pressure on Washington.

Some analysts predict that North Korea will launch a rocket carrying a satellite ahead of a major political anniversary in April, the birthday of state founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of Kim Jong Un.

\_\_\_ Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo.

## Local churches shun Vatican's moderate stance on Russia

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The head of the Polish bishops' conference has done what Pope Francis has so far avoided doing: He publicly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and urged the head of the Russian Orthodox Church to use his influence with Vladimir Putin to demand an end to the war and for Russian soldiers to stand down.

"The time will come to settle these crimes, including before the international courts," Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki warned in his March 2 letter to Patriarch Kirill. "However, even if someone manages to avoid this human justice, there is a tribunal that cannot be avoided."

Gadecki's tone was significant because it contrasted sharply with the comparative neutrality of the Vatican

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and Francis to date. The Holy See has called for peace, humanitarian corridors, a cease-fire and a return to negotiations, and even offered itself as a mediator. But Francis has yet to publicly condemn Russia by name for its invasion or publicly appeal to Kirill, and the Vatican offered no comment on the Russian strike on Europe's largest nuclear plant that sparked a fire Friday.

For a pope who has declared the mere possession of nuclear weapons immoral and cautioned against using atomic energy because of the environmental threat posed by radiation leaks, the silence was even more notable.

The Vatican has a tradition of quiet diplomacy, believing that it can facilitate dialogue better if it doesn't take sides or publicly call out aggressors. It has long used that argument to defend Pope Pius XII, the World War II-era pope criticized by some Jewish groups for not speaking out enough against the Holocaust. The Vatican says quiet diplomacy helped save lives then, and it continued that tradition in its Cold War Ostpolitik policy of behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

Francis took an unprecedented step last week when he went to the Russian Embassy to the Holy See to meet with the ambassador. But the only thing the Vatican said about the meeting was that Francis went to "express his concern about the war." He also spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, took a similarly unusual step this week when, in an interview with four Italian newspapers, he actually named Russia in saying the war had been "unleashed by Russia against Ukraine."

In the case of Ukraine, which counts a few million Catholics among its majority Orthodox population, Francis is not shy about his hopes to improve relations with the Russian Orthodox Church and its influential leader, Kirill. As recently as December, when fears of a Russian invasion were already tangible, Francis expressed hope for a second meeting with Kirill following their historic encounter in 2016, the first between a pope and Russian patriarch in a millennium.

"A meeting with Patriarch Kirill is not far from the horizon," Francis told reporters in route home from Greece. "I am always available, I am also willing to go to Moscow: to talk to a brother, there is no need for protocols. A brother is a brother before all protocols."

Francis' ambassador to Russia, Archbishop Giovanni D'Agnello, met Thursday with Kirill at the patriarch's residence in the Danilov Monastery in Moscow. Kirill's office said the patriarch recalled the "new page in history" opened by the 2016 meeting, expressed appreciation for the "moderate and wise position" of the Holy See in resisting being drawn into the conflict and insisted churches can only be peacemakers.

The Vatican didn't report the meeting and its spokesman didn't respond when asked for comment.

One of Francis' top communications advisers, the Rev. Antonio Spadaro, however, noted Kirill is "facing a great challenge" to weigh the now-growing list of Orthodox priests, metropolitans and ordinary Ukrainian faithful who are begging him to raise his voice against Putin and change position. In an essay published by the Italian news agency Adnkronos, Spadaro didn't count Francis among them, though he quoted the pope as saying recently that it was "very sad" that Christians were making war.

That moderate tone was echoed this week when the Holy See's ambassador to the United Nations stressed the need for humanitarian corridors in Ukraine to allow refugees out and humanitarian aid in. He didn't identify Russia as the reason they were needed, according to the Vatican summary of his remarks.

The Holy See's foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, met Wednesday with his Italian counterpart, Luigi Di Maio. The Italian foreign ministry said Di Maio "repeated Italy's firm condemnation of the Russian aggression to the detriment of Ukraine and the commitment to continue on the path of effective and incisive sanctions against the government of the Russian Federation," while helping Ukraine in the "humanitarian, economic and defense areas."

The Vatican, which is sending medical supplies to Ukraine, said nothing after the meeting.

Such silence has not been shared by the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, who has been emphatic in his daily denunciations of the Russian invasion. Nor has it been shared by Polish bishops, who are now helping to mobilize the reception of tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees who have crossed

the border.

"I ask you, Brother, to appeal to Vladimir Putin to stop the senseless warfare against the Ukrainian people," Polish Bishop Gadecki said in his letter to Kirill. "I ask you in the most humble way to call for the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the sovereign state that is Ukraine."

"I also ask you to appeal to Russian soldiers not to take part in this unjust war, to refuse to carry out orders which, as we have already seen, lead to many war crimes," he added. "Refusing to follow orders in such a situation is a moral obligation."

## Utah governor says he'll veto transgender youth sports ban

By SAM METZ and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah Gov. Spencer Cox said that he plans to veto legislation passed Friday that would ban transgender student-athletes from competing in girls sports.

Without his support, Utah is unlikely to join the 11 states, all Republican-led, that have recently enacted bans on transgender girls wanting to compete in school sports leagues that correspond with their gender identity.

In vowing to veto the bill, Cox directly addressed transgender student-athletes, who he said found themselves the subject of political debate through no fault of their own.

"I just want them to know that it's gonna be okay. We're gonna work through this," Cox said.

The governor had for months engaged in behind-the-scenes negotiations to broker a compromise between LGBTQ advocates and social conservatives.

After throwing his support behind a proposal to create a first-of-its-kind commission of experts in Utah to make decisions on individual transgender student-athletes aiming to participate, Cox said he was stunned on Friday night as lawmakers advanced and ultimately passed an amended proposal that included an outright ban on transgender student-athletes competing in girls leagues.

Legislation sent to Cox after passing through the state Senate and House on Friday bans "biological males" — which it defines as "an individual's genetics and anatomy at birth" — from girls leagues. Supporters said it would ensure fairness and safety for girls and pre-empt cultural shifts they said could lead to a growing number of transgender kids wanting to compete in girls sports in the future.

"Boys can run faster, they can jump higher and they can throw farther than girls in the same age bracket," Republican state Sen. Curt Bramble said.

"To have individuals that are born male compete against naturally born females, it's an unfair playing field," he added.

The originally proposed "School Activity Eligibility Commission" would have been comprised of a mix of experts in sports and transgender healthcare. It ultimately failed to gain buy-in from those opposed to and supportive of a ban.

Though they preferred it to an outright ban, LGBTQ advocates worried transgender kids required to appear before the panel would feel targeted. Social conservatives, backed by a much larger contingent of Republican lawmakers, said it didn't go far enough to protect girls sports.

There are no public accusations of a transgender players having competitive advantages in Utah. The Associated Press last year reached out to two dozen lawmakers in the more than 20 states considering similar youth sports measures and found that only a few times has it been an issue among the hundreds of thousands of teenagers who play high school sports.

The legislation sent to the governor aims to rebut what commission advocates, including the bill's sponsor Rep. Kera Birkeland, believed was among their strongest arguments: that courts would likely prevent Utah from enforcing a ban, much like they have in states such as Idaho.

The ban that ultimately passed retained sections of the original proposal and designated the commission as a back-up, for a scenario in which courts prohibited Utah from enforcing a ban.

Birkeland, who coaches high school basketball when not in the Legislature, said her intention in introducing a transgender youth sports bill for the second year in a row had to do with conversations she had



with transgender and cisgender students.

Though Utah lawmakers ultimately ended in a similar place, Birkeland's comments were marked different than those made by lawmakers in states such as Iowa, where one senator framed a ban as a stand against "wokeness" and part of "an ongoing culture war."

Birkeland said she was frustrated by the many conversations she had about the politics of her proposed commission, rather than the kids affected.

She expects it to face legal challenges but ultimately supported the amended legislation because she said, if the ban gets enjoined by courts, the commission will end up working as intended.

Equality Utah, an LGBTQ rights group opposed to state intervention in youth sports, said they were blindsided by the passage of the legislation.

"We have failed our state's transgender children, who just want to be treated with kindness and respect," the group said in a statement.

In most places, eligibility decisions for transgender kids are made by sports organizations like the Utah High School Athletic Association. Out of the roughly 85,000 student-athletes that play high school sports in the state, four transgender players have gone through the association's eligibility determination process.

Despite those established processes, youth sports have increasingly become a central policy issue in Republican-majority statehouses. Before 2020, no state had enacted a law pertaining to transgender kids participating in youth sports. Since, 11 states have since passed laws banning transgender girls from playing in leagues corresponding with their gender identity — Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia.

In Indiana, lawmakers passed a ban this week, sending it to Gov. Eric Holcomb for final approval.

The nature of the bans vary. Some explicitly target transgender girls, who have been the primary subject of debate in most statehouses. Others are broad enough to include college athletics.

With two-thirds majorities in both chambers, lawmakers could override a governor's veto, however with some Republicans opposing the ban, such a scenario is unlikely.

## **Putin critic who left Russia flees Kyiv as "double refugee"**

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — To Olena, it feels like Vladimir Putin has been chasing her for years.

Fed up with Putin's government, the Russian citizen left her native country six years ago and moved to Ukraine, where she helped raise funds for women and children whose homes had been destroyed in years of fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region.

Then, this week, she was on the move again — fleeing her adopted home of Kyiv ahead of Putin's invaders.

"It looks like I'm a double refugee now because first I fled from Russia because I was against Putin," said Olena, who spoke on condition that she be identified only by her first name for fear of reprisals against her or her family. "I fled from Russia, and then Russia came to Ukraine."

Olena and five colleagues left Kyiv after three nights in a bomb shelter, the thuds of explosions reverberating. They arrived in Hungary on Thursday after a harrowing, three-day flight.

Seated on a train in the Hungarian border town of Zahony before departing for the capital of Budapest, Olena said she had participated in anti-Putin protests in Russia, but came to realize that "Putin will just rule for as long as he lives. So I chose to vote with my legs and leave."

She moved to Ukraine, she said, because she was inspired by the Maidan revolution of 2014, when sustained protests forced the ouster of Ukraine's Moscow-backed president, Viktor Yanukovich.

"As long as Putin is in power, I will never go back," she said.

But now, Ukraine was no longer an option, either — for her or for the hundreds of other refugees who boarded the train for the five-hour journey from the border to Budapest. Dozens of volunteers greeted them, offering food, transportation and accommodation.

Olena was grateful to be in friendly territory, but the future looked uncertain. "I have no home, I don't know what I'm gonna do. I just have to hope," she said.

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She lost access to her money after Ukraine blocked the bank accounts of Russian citizens, fearing they would be used to finance Russia's assault on the country.

"I understand their reasons, because they are afraid that Russians will use this money to fight. But I'm just a civilian. I just lost all my income, I lost all my source of money, and I lost my bank account, just because of this Russian passport," she said.

That passport, she said, caused her problems on the journey from Kyiv. Some Ukrainians expressed hostility, associating her with the enemy.

But she stressed that many Russians, at home and abroad, oppose the war, and she hopes "people would separate the government from common people that don't want to fight."

"Ukrainians are like a brother people," she said. "We can't fight amongst each other. Putin is the real enemy. When Putin came to power, I didn't like him but I didn't realize the whole scale of his insanity."

On Thursday, Olena and her colleagues were given a place to stay in a leafy suburb of Budapest. It is a welcome respite.

"We don't hear explosions anymore. We don't hear sirens every two hours, when we have to pack our things and rush to the bomb shelter," she said. "When we crossed the border it was such a relief that we are alive and we are safe."

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Balazs Kaufmann in Zahony, Hungary, contributed to this report.

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

## **EXPLAINER: Putin's Balkan narrative argument for Ukraine war**

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Well before Russian tanks and troops rolled into Ukraine, Vladimir Putin was using the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s to ostensibly offer justification for the invasion of a sovereign European country.

The Russian president has been particularly focused on NATO's bombardment of Serbia in 1999 and the West's acceptance of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. He claims both created an illegal precedent that shattered international law and order, apparently giving him an excuse to invade Ukraine.

Putin's arguments, repeated several times since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, appear to follow this line: If different ex-Yugoslav republics and the former Serbian province of Kosovo could become independent with Western backing and wars, why can't Ukraine's strategic Black Sea peninsula and the rebel-controlled, majority Russian areas in the east of the country split from their mother nations — with Russian help?

With strong U.S. support, ethnic Albanian-dominated Kosovo seceded over Serbia's strong objections. Russia, a historic ally of the Serbs, argued then that this set a precedent that could trigger a series of statehood claims elsewhere in the world.

In July 2010, U.N.'s highest court ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence was legal but did not outright endorse Kosovo's claim to statehood.

There are many differences between the Russian attack on Ukraine, seen in the West as one of the darkest moments for Europe since World War II, and the wars in the Balkans that left more than 120,000 people dead and millions homeless. There are also some similarities.

**WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIFFERENCES?**

NATO didn't occupy Kosovo after driving Serbian forces out of the former Serbian province, but sent in peacekeepers. Russian troops, meanwhile, took control of Crimea even before its referendum to join Russia was held.

NATO intervened in Kosovo only after significant evidence of Serbian abuses against ethnic Albanians, including mass killings and deportations. Russian forces intervened in Ukraine with no major abuses or violence reported against ethnic Russians.

Kosovars declared independence but did not join their ethnic brethren in neighboring Albania in a single

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state. Crimea, which has a majority Russian population, signed a deal to join Russia two days after the referendum which was deemed flawed and undemocratic by the West.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN SIMILARITIES?

Both interventions started with false claims that ethnic minorities are being persecuted in neighboring countries. The Serb-led military unleashed a heavy barrage of artillery against towns and villages in Croatia in 1991, something similar to the initial attacks by Russian forces against Ukraine.

Just as Croats, Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians feared Serbian repression during the autocratic rule of late Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, ethnic Russians feared Ukrainian nationalists.

## WHAT DID PUTIN SAY?

"(German Chancellor Olaf Scholz) has just said that the people of his generation — and I certainly belong to that generation myself — find it difficult to imagine some war in Europe," Putin said following talks with Scholz in Moscow on Nov. 15.

"But all of us were witnesses to the war in Europe that NATO unleashed against Yugoslavia," Putin said. He recalled that it was a major military operation involving bombing strikes against a European capital, Belgrade.

"It did happen. Without any sanctions by the U.N. Security Council. It is a very sad example, but it is a hard fact," Putin said.

He has argued that by intervening in Kosovo, the West created a precedent with longstanding consequences.

## WHAT IS THE WEST'S TAKE ON THAT?

At the press conference with Putin, Scholz hit back at the Russian president's arguments over NATO's actions in Kosovo, saying this was done to prevent genocide, referring to the persecution of Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanians by Serbian forces.

Western leaders have repeatedly rejected Putin's arguments, saying Kosovo was a unique case due to the large number of victims during the Balkan wars amid the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel had insisted that Putin's analogies between the West's actions in Kosovo and Russia's intervention in Crimea are "shameful."

## WHAT COULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES?

There are fears that the pro-Russian Serbian leadership could try to use the international attention focused on Ukraine to further destabilize its neighbors, particularly Bosnia where minority Serbs have been threatening to join Serbia.

European Union peacekeepers in Bosnia have announced the deployment of some 500 additional troops, citing "the deterioration of the security internationally (which) has the potential to spread instability" to the region.

Kosovo's leadership fears Serbia could be encouraged by Russia to try to intervene in its former province to stop the alleged harassment of minority Serbs. Kosovo has asked NATO for a fast track to membership in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, something neither Serbia nor Russia would likely accept peacefully.

Kosovo officials have rejected Putin's parallels between the NATO intervention in Kosovo and his invasion of Ukraine as "totally baseless and ridiculous."

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AP Balkan correspondent Dusan Stojanovic covered the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and events in Ukraine in 2014.

## China cuts economic growth goal as it tries to reverse slump

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Saturday cut its annual economic growth target to its lowest level in decades as Beijing struggles to reverse a slump at a time when Russia's war on Ukraine is pushing up oil prices and roiling the global economy.

The ruling Communist Party will aim for "around 5.5%" growth this year, down from last year's 8.1%

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expansion, the country's No. 2 leader, Premier Li Keqiang, said in a report to an annual meeting of its ceremonial legislature. It noted commodity prices are surging but made no mention of the reason: the attack by Beijing's friend, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Achieving this goal will require arduous efforts," Li said during a 55-minute speech at the opening of the National People's Congress in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Surging energy costs due to the war add to pressure from anti-coronavirus controls and a crackdown on debt in China's vast real estate industry that caused economic growth to fall to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021. This year's growth forecasts by the International Monetary Fund and private sector analysts are as low as 4.3%.

Manufacturing has been disrupted by a "zero tolerance" COVID-19 strategy that has at times suspended access to some major cities, as well as weak demand for Chinese exports and shortages of power and processor chips. The premier gave no indication Beijing might relax its anti-virus strategy that has helped to keep infection numbers low but at a rising cost.

President Xi Jinping's government has tried to distance itself from Putin's war by calling for dialogue but refused to criticize the attack. Beijing has denounced trade and financial sanctions on Moscow and says Washington is to blame for the conflict.

Li indirectly acknowledged the war's impact on prices of oil, wheat and other commodities, saying they "remain high and prone to fluctuation," but gave no indication why.

"All of this is making our external environment increasingly volatile, grave and uncertain," Li said.

His report focused on the economy, social welfare and other domestic issues, in contrast to Tuesday's State of the Union speech by President Joe Biden, which emphasized Russia's attack on Ukraine and international efforts to pressure Putin to stop.

The ruling party is trying to steer the world's second-largest economy toward slower, self-sustaining growth based on consumer spending instead of trade and investment but was alarmed by last year's abrupt slowdown.

The slide was triggered by tighter controls on borrowing by real estate developers that caused construction and housing sales to plunge.

Ruling party leaders responded by announcing a "policy pivot" in December toward shoring up growth and away from longer-term initiatives aimed at cutting debt and carbon emissions.

"We must make economic stability our top priority," Li said. He said that should "occupy an even more prominent position."

The premier promised to "ensure food and energy security" with adequate supplies of grain and electric power. He said Beijing will step up exploration for oil, gas and minerals and improve its system of stockpiles of essential raw materials.

Li also promised to crack down on trafficking of women and children and protect their "lawful rights." The status of women who are mistreated and possible additional protections is expected to be discussed by the legislature following the widely publicized case of a woman who was found chained in a shed in eastern China.

No growth target was announced in 2020 after much of the economy was shut down to fight the virus. Last year's target was "over 6%." This year is the first time since the 1990s the official target is below 6%.

The ruling party has promised tax cuts for entrepreneurs who generate jobs and wealth. Banks have been told to lend more. The government is injecting money into the economy through higher spending on building public works.

The ruling party is promising to build more solar, wind and other renewable power resources. But it also has eased pressure on utilities to restrain growth of climate-changing carbon emissions by burning less coal. Energy efficiency will be "assessed with appropriate flexibility," Li said.

Turning to COVID-19, Li said China needs to "constantly refine epidemic containment" but gave no indication Beijing might ease its "zero tolerance" strategy. He called for accelerating vaccine development and "strengthening epidemic controls" in cities where travelers and goods from abroad arrive.

All the delegates attending the opening session of the legislature wore face masks. The meeting, which

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normally lasts two weeks, has been curtailed to one week again this year because of the pandemic.

Also Saturday, the government announced a 7.1% increase in its military budget, up from last year's 6.8% rise. China has the world's second-highest military budget after the United States and is investing in long-range, nuclear-capable missiles and other weapons to extend its power beyond its shores.

Li affirmed the ruling party's insistence that Hong Kong "should be governed by patriots," a key element in a campaign to crush pro-democracy activism in the former British colony.

The premier indicated no change in stance toward Taiwan, the island democracy that Beijing claims as part of its territory and has threatened to invade. The two sides have been ruled separately since splitting in 1949 after a civil war but have multibillion-dollar trade and investment ties.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted suggestions Beijing might be more likely to use force against Taiwan if it sensed a lack of resolve on the part of the United States and its allies. The ruling party has offered no signs of changing its avowed approach of gaining control of Taiwan by peaceful means, without giving up the military option.

Beijing will "advance peaceful growth of relations across the Taiwan Strait and the reunification of China," Li said. "We firmly oppose any separatist activities seeking 'Taiwan independence' and firmly oppose foreign interference."

AP researcher Henry Hou contributed.

## Pulitzer winner Walter Mears dies, AP's 'Boy on the Bus'

By MIKE FEINSILBER and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Walter R. Mears, who for 45 years fluidly and speedily wrote the news about presidential campaigns for The Associated Press and won a Pulitzer Prize doing it, has died. He was 87.

"I could produce a story as fast as I could type," Mears once acknowledged — and he was a fast typist. He became the AP's Washington bureau chief and the wire service's executive editor and vice president, but he always returned to the keyboard, and to covering politics.

Mears died Thursday at his apartment in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, eight days after being diagnosed with multiple forms of cancer, said his daughters Susan Mears of Boulder, Colorado, and Stephanie Mears of Austin, Texas, who were with him.

They said he was visited on his last night by a minister, with whom he discussed Alf Landon, the losing Republican presidential candidate in 1936, a year after his birth.

Mears' ability to find the essence of a story while it was still going on and to get it to the wire — and to newspapers and broadcasters around the world — became legend among peers. In 1972, Timothy Crouse featured Mears in "The Boys on the Bus," a book chronicling the efforts and antics of reporters covering that year's presidential campaign.

Crouse recounted how, immediately after a political debate, a reporter from The Boston Globe called out to the man from AP: "Walter, what's our lead? What's the lead, Walter?" The question became a catchphrase among political reporters to describe the search for the most newsworthy aspect of an event — the lead. "Made me moderately famous," Mears cracked in 2005.

It was a natural question. Mears had to bang out stories about campaign debates while they were still underway. Newspaper editors would see his lead on the wire before their own reporters filed their stories. So it was defensive for others on the press bus to wonder what Mears was leading with, and to ask him.

Early in his Washington career, he was assigned to write updates on the 1962 congressional elections. His bureau chief asked a senior colleague to size up how Mears worked under pressure and report back. "Mears writes faster than most people think," the evaluator wrote, then, tongue in cheek, "and sometimes faster than he thinks."

"Walter's impact at the AP, and in the journalism industry as a whole, is hard to overstate," said Julie Pace, AP executive editor and senior vice president. "He was a champion for a free and fair press, a dogged reporter, an elegant chronicler of history and an inspiration to countless journalists, including myself."

Kathleen Carroll, a former AP executive editor, said he taught generations of journalists "how to watch

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and listen and ask and explain.”

“Walter was also a wonderful human being,” she said. “He loved his family — being a grandfather was one of the great joys of his life. He loved golf and the Red Sox, in that order. He loved politics and he loved the AP.”

Mears didn’t seem to mind being known as a pacesetter. “I came away with a slogan not of my making, but one that stuck for the rest of my career,” he recalled in his 2003 memoir, “Deadlines Past.” Over four decades, Mears covered 11 presidential campaigns, from Kennedy-Nixon in 1960 to Bush-Gore in 2000, as well as the political conventions, the campaigns, debates, the elections and, finally, the pomp and promise of the inaugurations.

In tribute, Jules Witcover, who covered politics for The Sun in Baltimore, said Mears combined speed and accuracy with an eye for the telling detail.

“His uncanny ability to cut to the heart of any story and relate it in spare, lively prose showed the way for a generation of wire service disciples, and he did so with a zest for the nomad’s life on the campaign trail,” Witcover said.

At other times in his career, Mears served AP as Washington bureau chief and as the wire service’s primary news executive, the executive editor in the New York headquarters. But he missed writing and went back to it.

He left once, to be Washington bureau chief for The Detroit News, but returned to AP nine months later. “I couldn’t take the pace,” he said. “It was too slow.”

In 1977 he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his work covering the election in which Democrat Jimmy Carter defeated a sitting president, Gerald R. Ford, who had inherited his office through the resignation in disgrace of Richard M. Nixon.

It was the Pulitzer, not the Crouse catchphrase, for which Mears thought he would be remembered. Asked to address a later crop of Pulitzer winners, he told them they would never have to wonder what would be the first words of their obituaries: They would be, he said, “Pulitzer-prize winning.”

Winning his Pulitzer, Mears said, was “the sweetest moment in a career that is like no other line of work.”

In his lead paragraphs, Mears captured the essence of events, not just the words but the music.

—When the 1968 Democrats, in a convention held in the midst of antiwar rioting on the streets of Chicago, finally chose their nominee, he wrote: “Hubert H. Humphrey, apostle of the politics of joy, won the Democratic presidential nomination tonight under armed guard.”

—When, earlier that year, a gunman slew John Kennedy’s brother: “Robert F. Kennedy died of gunshot wounds early today, prey like his president brother to the savagery of an assassin.”

—And, in 1976, when former peanut farmer Carter took the presidency from its accidental occupant: “In the end, the improbable Democrat beat the unelected Republican.”

Said Terry Hunt, former AP White House correspondent and deputy bureau chief in Washington: “You can’t talk about Walter without using the word legendary. He was a brilliant writer, astonishingly fast, colorful and compelling.”

David Espo, former special correspondent and assistant Washington bureau chief agreed. “No one ever wrote faster or with more clarity, nor worked harder and made it look easier than Walter did,” he said. “He took care to mentor those less talented than he, in other words, all of us.”

Mears was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, and grew up in Lexington, the son of an executive of a chemical company. He graduated, Phi Beta Kappa, from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1956 and within a week joined the AP in Boston.

In those days, news was written on typewriters and transmitted on teletypes. “They were slow and they clattered,” Mears once wrote, “but the din was music to me.”

His first assignment was far from the din. He single-handedly covered the Vermont Legislature. “It was fun covering a citizen legislature with a representative from every hamlet in the state” — 276 of them, he recalled years later, including one elected by his townspeople to keep the fellow from being eligible for welfare.

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Mears covered John F. Kennedy in 1960 whenever Kennedy campaigned in New England and covered Barry Goldwater's hapless race against Lyndon Johnson four years later. He was back at it every presidential year, even after he retired in 2001.

On election night, 2008, he wrote an analysis of Barack Obama's victory, and the challenge before him. "Obama is the future," he wrote, "and it begins now, in troubled times, for a president-elect with a costly agenda of promises that would be difficult to deliver in far better economic circumstances."

No cheerleading from Mears there. He didn't believe in reporters expressing political opinions and he kept his own to himself. Although he got to know the candidates he covered, sometimes shared after-hour drinks and played golf with them, he always addressed them by their titles.

He considered a distance between newsperson and newsmaker to be appropriate. He once explained: "I can't really say I ever felt close to any of them, maybe because I always felt that there's a line there, there's sort of a reserve that I think needs to be maintained because you're not covering a friend. You're covering somebody who's trying to convince the American people to give him the most important job they've got at their command."

After retiring, Mears taught journalism for a time at the University of North Carolina and made his home there, in Chapel Hill.

His wife, Frances, died in January 2019. His first wife and their two children were killed in a house fire in 1962. Mears directed that a portion of his ashes be distributed with Frances' remains and the rest in Massachusetts with those of his first wife and two children lost in the fire.

Mike Feinsilber is a longtime UPI and AP writer and editor who served as assistant chief of the Washington AP bureau for news before his retirement as writing coach in 2011. Paul Stevens, a retired AP bureau chief and regional vice president who publishes a daily AP retiree newsletter contributed to this story.

## Ukraine digital army brews cyberattacks, intel and infowar

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Formed in a fury to counter Russia's blitzkrieg attack, Ukraine's hundreds-strong volunteer "hacker" corps is much more than a paramilitary cyberattack force in Europe's first major war of the internet age. It is crucial to information combat and to crowdsourcing intelligence .

"We are really a swarm. A self-organizing swarm," said Roman Zakharov, a 37-year-old IT executive at the center of Ukraine's bootstrap digital army.

Inventions of the volunteer hackers range from software tools that let smartphone and computer owners anywhere participate in distributed denial-of-service attacks on official Russian websites to bots on the Telegram messaging platform that block disinformation, let people report Russian troop locations and offer instructions on assembling Molotov cocktails and basic first aid.

Zakharov ran research at an automation startup before joining Ukraine's digital self-defense corps. His group is StandForUkraine. Its ranks include software engineers, marketing managers, graphic designers and online ad buyers, he said.

The movement is global, drawing on IT professionals in the Ukrainian diaspora whose handiwork includes web defacements with antiwar messaging and graphic images of death and destruction in the hopes of mobilizing Russians against the invasion.

"Both our nations are scared of a single man — (Russian President Vladimir) Putin," said Zakharov. "He's just out of his mind." Volunteers reach out person-to-person to Russians with phone calls, emails and text messages, he said, and send videos and pictures of dead soldiers from the invading force from virtual call centers.

Some build websites, such as a "site where Russian mothers can look through (photos of) captured Russian guys to find their sons," Zakharov said by phone from Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.

The cyber volunteers' effectiveness is difficult to gauge. Russian government websites have been repeatedly knocked offline, if briefly, by the DDoS attacks, but generally weather them with countermeasures.

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It's impossible to say how much of the disruption — including more damaging hacks — is caused by freelancers working independently of but in solidarity with Ukrainian hackers.

A tool called "Liberator" lets anyone in the world with a digital device become part of a DDoS attack network, or botnet. The tool's programmers code in new targets as priorities change.

But is it legal? Some analysts say it violates international cyber norms. Its Estonian developers say they acted "in coordination with the Ministry of Digital Transformation" of Ukraine.

A top Ukrainian cybersecurity official, Victor Zhora, insisted at his first online news conference of the war Friday that homegrown volunteers were attacking only what they deem military targets, in which he included the financial sector, Kremlin-controlled media and railways. He did not discuss specific targets.

Zakharov did. He said Russia's banking sector was well fortified against attack but that some telecommunications networks and rail services were not. He said Ukrainian-organized cyberattacks had briefly interrupted rail ticket sales in western Russia around Rostov and Voronezh and knocked out telephone service for a time in the region of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists since 2014. The claims could not be independently confirmed.

A group of Belarusian hacktivists calling themselves the Cyber Partisans also apparently disrupted rail service in neighboring Belarus this week seeking to frustrate transiting Russian troops. A spokeswoman said Friday that electronic ticket sales were still down after their malware attack froze up railway IT servers.

Over the weekend, Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, announced the creation of an volunteer cyber army. The IT Army of Ukraine now counts 290,000 followers on Telegram.

Zhora, deputy chair of the state special communications service, said one job of Ukrainian volunteers is to obtain intelligence that can be used to attack Russian military systems.

Some cybersecurity experts have expressed concern that soliciting help from freelancers who violate cyber norms could have dangerous escalatory consequences. One shadowy group claimed to have hacked Russian satellites; Dmitry Rogozin, the director general of Russia's space agency Roscosmos, called the claim false but was also quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying such a cyberattack would be considered an act of war.

Asked if he endorsed the kind of hostile hacking being done under the umbrella of the Anonymous hacktivist brand — which anyone can claim — Zhora said, "We do not welcome any illegal activity in cyberspace."

"But the world order changed on the 24th of February," he added, when Russia invaded.

The overall effort was spurred by the creation of a group called the Ukrainian Cyber Volunteers by a civilian cybersecurity executive, Yegor Aushev, in coordination with Ukraine's Defense Ministry. Aushev said it numbers more than 1,000 volunteers.

On Friday, most of Ukraine's telecommunications and internet were fully operational despite outages in areas captured by invading Russian forces, said Zhora. He reported about 10 hostile hijackings of local government websites in Ukraine to spread false propaganda saying Ukraine's government had capitulated.

Zhora said presumed Russian hackers continued trying to spread destructive malware in targeted email attacks on Ukrainian officials and — in what he considers a new tactic — to infect the devices of individual citizens. Three instances of such malware were discovered in the runup to the invasion.

U.S. Cyber Command has been assisting Ukraine since well before the invasion. Ukraine does not have a dedicated military cyber unit. It was standing one up when Russia attacked.

Zhora anticipates an escalation in Russia's cyber aggression — many experts believe far worse is yet to come.

Meantime, donations from the global IT community continue to pour in. A few examples: NameCheap has donated internet domains while Amazon has been generous with cloud services, said Zakharov.

## Trump's praise of Putin, 'America First' view tested by war

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From the earliest days of his first presidential campaign, Donald Trump aggressively challenged the pillars of Republican foreign policy that defined the party since World War II.



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He mocked John McCain's capture during the Vietnam War, validated autocrats with his platitudes, questioned longtime military and security alliances and embraced an isolationist worldview. And to the horror of many GOP leaders at the time, it worked, resonating with voters who believed, in part, that a bipartisan establishment in Washington had brokered trade deals that hurt American workers and recklessly stumbled into so-called "forever wars."

But Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is posing a serious test for Trump and his "America First" doctrine at a moment when he is eyeing another presidential run and using this year's midterm elections to keep bending the GOP to his will. He's largely alone in his sustained praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin as "smart," an assessment he reiterated last week during speeches to donors and conservative activists. His often deferential vice president, Mike Pence, split with him on the issue late Friday.

The multinational partnerships that Trump repeatedly undermined, meanwhile, have allowed the West to quickly band together to hobble Russia's economy with coordinated sanctions. The NATO alliance, which Trump once dismissed as "obsolete," is flexing its strength as a foil to Russia's aggression.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the war is a fresh reminder, observers say, that the U.S. can't simply ignore the world's problems, even if that's sometimes a politically appealing way to connect with voters facing their own daily struggles.

"This is a brutal wake-up call to both parties that not only are we not going to be able to do less in the world," said Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former diplomat. "We are going to have to do more."

While he argued that large elements of both parties have demonstrated a desire to turn inward, the current situation poses a "special problem" for Republicans and the "America firsters" who have previously tried to paint Russia as a benign actor.

"The entire thrust of America First, I would argue, was misguided in a world where what happens anywhere can and will affect us," he said.

It's unclear whether the Western unity that has taken hold against Russia can be sustained if the war escalates, expands beyond Ukraine or drags on indefinitely. And after two decades of U.S. foreign policy failures, including the Iraq War and the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, many Americans are approaching the moment with caution.

On the eve of Russia's invasion, just 26% of Americans said they supported the U.S. playing a major role in the conflict, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

But the challenges to Trump's approach to the world are clear.

Sweden and Finland have abandoned their long-held neutrality and warmed to the idea of joining NATO, expanding an alliance Trump continued to criticize this week. Germany, a country Trump spent years trying to browbeat into spending more on its defense, broke its longstanding post-World War II policy by sending anti-tank weapons and surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine and pledging to dramatically increase its defense budget.

Trump and his allies insist that Russia would never have invaded Ukraine were he still president. And Russia did not make aggressive moves on his watch, something former aides and others credit to his erratic behavior and direct threats that left world leaders uncertain of how Trump would respond to a provocation.

Roger Zakheim, the Washington director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, credited Trump for deterring Putin, who he said had "validated the need for allies to invest more in their security and defense."

"I think President Trump, at least at it related to Ukraine, was able to deter Vladimir Putin. And that was a function of unpredictability, which is valuable to deterring an autocrat like Vladimir Putin," he said. Still, he argued Putin's actions had been "so aggressive and so brazen and so immoral" that it had "de-emphasized the difference" between various foreign policy approaches.

Still, the war renews focus on the controversial role Ukraine played during Trump's tenure, particularly the way the then-president used defense of the struggling country as a bargaining tool to improve his domestic political standing.

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Trump was impeached for the first time for trying to pressure Ukraine to investigate his 2020 Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, and his son, Hunter Biden. The effort included holding up nearly \$400 million in U.S. security aid to Ukraine and leveraging an Oval Office visit that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had been requesting.

Trump also pushed discredited claims that Ukraine, not Russia, had meddled in the 2016 election, repeatedly siding with Putin over his own national intelligence agencies.

"Putin is the critical agent, but certainly Trump contributed to it with his scheme back then and continued to contribute it by undermining national security," said retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel Alexander Vindman, the former national security council whistleblower who raised alarms about Trump's pressure tactics. "Ultimately the president undermined U.S. foreign policy because he weakened Ukraine."

As he aims to play a significant role in this year's midterms and potentially run for president again in 2024, Trump has shown little interest in calibrating his approach to Putin.

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has been laying the groundwork for his own potential presidential run, has largely abandoned the language he was criticized for using before the invasion, when had called Putin "very capable" and said he had "enormous respect for him." Even Tucker Carlson, the popular Fox News host who had openly questioned why he shouldn't side with Russia over Ukraine, has tried to walk back his pro-Russia rhetoric, saying, "We've been taken by surprise by the whole thing."

That's left Trump relatively isolated, defending his decision to label Putin as "smart" and criticizing the response from Biden and other Western leaders, even as he has denounced the invasion as "horrific" and a "very sad thing for the world."

"NATO has the money now, but they're not doing the job they should be doing," he said this week on Fox Business. "It's almost like they're staying away."

That has earned rebuke from some in his party.

In a speech to GOP donors Friday night, Pence forcefully defended NATO and admonished those who have defended Putin as he, too, weighs a presidential run.

"There is no room in this party for apologists for Putin," he said, according to his prepared remarks. "There is only room for champions of freedom."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell told Fox News there "should be no confusion about Vladimir Putin.

"He's a thug. He's a killer," McConnell said. "He's been on the rampage and this will not end well for him."

Chris Stirewalt, a senior fellow at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute think tank and a contributing editor of The Dispatch, said Russia's invasion of Ukraine is fundamentally different from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that turned large swaths of the American public against foreign intervention and which Trump was able to use to his political advantage.

"Putin," he said, "has undone so much of what Trump and nationalists in the United States had done to change the global order."

## Russia cracks down on dissenting media, blocks Facebook

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH Associated Press

DUSSELDORF, Germany (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday intensified a crackdown on media outlets and individuals who fail to hew to the Kremlin line on Russia's war in Ukraine, blocking Facebook and Twitter and signing into law a bill that criminalizes the intentional spreading of what Moscow deems to be "fake" reports.

The moves against the social media giants follow blocks imposed on the BBC, the U.S. government-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, German broadcaster Deutsche Welle and Latvia-based website Meduza. The government's sweeping action against the foreign outlets that publish news in Russian seeks to establish even tighter controls over what information the domestic audience sees about the invasion of Ukraine.

The state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said it cut access to Twitter and Facebook in line

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with a decision by the prosecutor general's office. The watchdog has previously accused Twitter of failing to delete the content banned by Russian authorities and slowed down access to it.

Twitter said in a statement Friday afternoon that while the company is "aware of reports" that its platform is blocked in Russia, it has not been able to confirm whether this is the case.

The bill, quickly rubber-stamped by both houses of the Kremlin-controlled parliament and signed by Putin, imposes prison sentences of up to 15 years for those spreading information that goes against the Russian government's narrative on the war.

The question regarding Russia is no longer "what we do to stop disinformation," former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul said on Friday. "The question has to be how do we promote information inside Russia -- and I don't have the answer."

Multiple outlets said they would pause their work inside Russia to evaluate the situation. Among them, CNN and CBS News said they would stop broadcasting in Russia while Bloomberg and the BBC said they would temporarily suspend the work of their journalists there.

Russian authorities have repeatedly and falsely decried reports of Russian military setbacks or civilian deaths in Ukraine as "fake" news. State media outlets refer to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation" rather than a war or an invasion.

Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of the lower house of parliament, said the measure "will force those who lied and made statements discrediting our armed forces to bear very grave punishment."

"I want everyone to understand, and for society to understand, that we are doing this to protect our soldiers and officers, and to protect the truth," he added.

The law envisages sentences of up to three years or fines for spreading what authorities deem to be false news about the military, but the maximum punishment rises to 15 years for cases deemed to have led to "severe consequences."

In blocking Facebook, Roskomnadzor cited its alleged "discrimination" of the Russian media and state information resources. The agency said in a statement that the restrictions introduced by Facebook owner Meta on the Russian news channel RT and other state-controlled media violate Russian law.

"Obviously Putin is shutting these people down because he is afraid. He wouldn't be shutting them down if everything was going peachy keen," McFaul said during a call with reporters and experts hosted by Stanford's Cyber Policy Center. "This is an indicator of his state of mind."

Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs, said tweeted in response to Russia's action that "millions of ordinary Russians will find themselves cut off from reliable information, deprived of their everyday ways of connecting with family and friends and silenced from speaking out."

"We will continue to do everything we can to restore our services so they remain available to people to safely and securely express themselves and organize for action," Clegg added.

The Russian media blocks on the five foreign media organizations are among the most influential and often critical foreign media publishing in Russian.

Roskomnadzor said those media had published "false information" on subjects including "the methods of carrying out combat activities (attacks on civilians, strikes on civil infrastructure), the numbers of losses of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. and victims among the civilian population."

BBC Director-General Tim Davie said the legislation "appears to criminalize the process of independent journalism."

"The safety of our staff is paramount and we are not prepared to expose them to the risk of criminal prosecution simply for doing their jobs," he said.

Davie said the BBC's Russian-language news service would continue to operate from outside Russia.

Earlier in the day, the BBC posted instructions on Twitter about how Russian readers could work around the block by using apps or the "dark web."

"Access to accurate, independent information is a fundamental human right which should not be denied to the people of Russia, millions of whom rely on BBC News every week. We will continue our efforts to make BBC News available in Russia, and across the rest of the world," the BBC said.

Earlier this week the BBC said it was bringing back shortwave radio transmission to Ukraine and parts

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of Russia so people can listen to its programs with basic equipment.

Some well-known media outlets within Russia have chosen to close rather than face heavy restrictions on what they can report. News website Znak said it was closing Friday morning, shortly after the parliament approved the draft bill. On Thursday, Russia's top independent radio station Ekho Moskvy was closed and independent TV station Dozhdh suspended operations after receiving a threat of closure from the authorities.

The authorities also pressed ahead with a sweeping effort to target human rights organizations.

Authorities raided the offices of Memorial, one of Russia's oldest and most prominent human rights organizations. According to Memorial members, police didn't provide any explanation and there were no warnings.

"The police refused to let me and the lawyer in without explanation, and when I tried not to let in the reinforcement officers who arrived in bulletproof vests and masks, they threatened to use force if I did not let them in," the chairman of International Memorial Yan Rachinsky said. "This is the level of justice today in the capital of Russia."

Another leading human rights group, the Civic Assistance, also saw its Moscow office raided.

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Associated Press writers Jill Lawless in London and Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, contributed.

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Follow all AP stories on the Russian invasion of Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>.

## Attack on Ukrainian nuclear plant triggers worldwide alarm

By ANDREW DRAKE, FRANCESCA EBEL, YURAS KARMANAU and MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops Friday seized the biggest nuclear power plant in Europe after a middle-of-the-night attack that set it on fire and briefly raised worldwide fears of a catastrophe in the most chilling turn yet in Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Firefighters put out the blaze, and no radiation was released, U.N. and Ukrainian officials said. Russian forces pressed on with their week-old offensive on multiple fronts, though they did not appear to gain significant ground in fighting Friday. The number of refugees fleeing the country eclipsed 1.2 million.

With world condemnation mounting, the Kremlin cracked down on the flow of information at home, blocking Facebook, Twitter, the BBC and the U.S. government-funded Voice of America. And President Vladimir Putin signed a law making it a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison to spread so-called fake news, including anything that goes against the official government line on the war.

Multiple outlets said they would pause their work inside Russia while they evaluate the situation. CNN and CBS News announced they would stop broadcasting in Russia and Bloomberg temporarily suspended the work of its journalists there.

While the vast Russian armored column threatening Kyiv remained stalled outside the capital, Putin's military has launched hundreds of missiles and artillery attacks on cities and other sites across the country, and made significant gains on the ground in the south in an apparent bid to cut off Ukraine's access to the sea.

In the attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in the southeastern city of Enerhodar, the chief of the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi, said a Russian "projectile" hit a training center, not any of the six reactors.

The attack triggered global alarm and fear of a catastrophe that could dwarf the world's worst nuclear disaster, at Ukraine's Chernobyl in 1986. In an emotional nighttime speech, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he feared an explosion that would be "the end for everyone. The end for Europe. The evacuation of Europe."

But nuclear officials from Sweden to China said no radiation spikes had been reported, as did Grossi.

Authorities said Russian troops had taken control of the overall site but plant staff continued to run it. Only one reactor was operating, at 60% of capacity, Grossi said in the aftermath of the attack.

Two people were injured in the fire, Grossi said. Ukraine's state nuclear plant operator Enerhoatom said

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three Ukrainian soldiers were killed and two wounded.

In the U.S., Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the episode "underscores the recklessness with which the Russians have been perpetrating this unprovoked invasion." At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council, Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, said the fire broke out as a result of Russian shelling of the plant and accused Moscow of committing "an act of nuclear terrorism."

Without producing evidence, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed that a Ukrainian "sabotage group" had set the fire at Zaporizhzhia.

The crisis unfolded after Grossi earlier in the week expressed grave concern that the fighting could cause accidental damage to Ukraine's 15 nuclear reactors at four plants around the country.

Atomic safety experts said a war fought amid nuclear reactors represents an unprecedented and highly dangerous situation.

"These plants are now in a situation that few people ever seriously contemplated when they were originally built," said Edwin Lyman of the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington. "No nuclear plant has been designed to withstand a potential threat of a full-scale military attack."

Dr. Alex Rosen of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War said the incident was probably the result of military units overestimating the precision of their weapons, given that the prevailing winds would have carried any radioactive fallout straight toward Russia.

"Russia cannot have any interest in contaminating its own territory," he said. He said the danger comes not just from the reactors but from the risk of enemy fire hitting storage facilities that hold spent fuel rods.

In the wake of the attack, Zelenskyy appealed again to the West to enforce a no-fly zone over his country. But NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg ruled out that possibility, citing the risk of a much wider war in Europe. He said that to enforce a no-fly zone, NATO planes would have to shoot down Russian aircraft.

In a bitter and emotional speech, Zelenskyy criticized NATO's reluctance, saying it will fully untie Russia's hands as it escalates its air attack.

"All the people who die from this day forward will also die because of you, because of your weakness, because of your lack of unity," he said in a nighttime address. "The alliance has given the green light to the bombing of Ukrainian cities and villages by refusing to create a no-fly zone."

Russian forces, meanwhile, did not make significant progress Friday in their offensive to sever Ukraine's access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which would deal a severe blow to its economy and could worsen an already dire humanitarian situation. There were also no changes in the north and the east, where the Russian offensive has stalled, meeting fierce Ukrainian resistance.

A round of talks between Russia and Ukraine yielded a tentative agreement Thursday to set up safe corridors to evacuate citizens and deliver food and medicine. But the necessary details still had to be worked out.

More than 840 children have been wounded in the war, and 28 have been killed, according to Ukraine's government. A total of 331 civilians had been confirmed killed in the invasion, but the true number is probably much higher, the U.N. human rights office said.

In Romania, one newly arrived refugee, Anton Kostyuchyk, struggled to hold back tears as he recounted leaving everything behind in Kyiv and sleeping in churches with his wife and three children during their journey out.

"I'm leaving my home, my country. I was born there, and I lived there," he said. "And what now?"

Appearing on video in a message to antiwar protesters in several European cities, Zelenskyy continued to appeal for help.

"If we fall, you will fall," he said. "And if we win, and I'm sure we'll win, this will be the victory of the whole democratic world. This will be the victory of our freedom. This will be the victory of light over darkness, of freedom over slavery."

Inside Ukraine, frequent shelling could be heard in the center of Kyiv, though more distant than in recent days, with loud thudding every 10 minutes resonating over the rooftops.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich said battles involving airstrikes and artillery continued northwest of Kyiv, and the northeastern cities of Kharkiv and Okhtyrka came under heavy fire.

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He said Ukrainian forces were still holding the northern city of Chernihiv and the southern city of Mykolaiv. Ukrainian artillery also defended Ukraine's biggest port city, Odesa, from repeated attempts by Russian ships, Arestovich said.

Another strategic port, Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, was "partially under siege," and Ukrainian forces were pushing back efforts to surround the city, Arestovich said.

Amid the warfare, there were occasional signs of hope.

As explosions sounded on the fringes of Kyiv, Dmytro Shybalov and Anna Panasyk smiled and blushed at the civil registry office where they married Friday. They fell in love in 2015 in Donetsk amid the fighting between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces that was a precursor to the countrywide war.

"It's 2022 and the situation hasn't changed," Shybalov said. "It's scary to think what will happen when our children will be born."

Karmanau reported from Lviv, Ukraine. Chernov reported from Mariupol, Ukraine. Sergei Grits in Odesa, Ukraine; Jamey Keaten in Geneva; Vanessa Gera in Warsaw, Poland; Frank Jordans in Berlin; Matt Sedensky in New York; Robert Burns in Washington; and other AP journalists from around the world contributed to this report.

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

## **Pence hits Trump: No room in GOP for 'apologists for Putin'**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence urged Republicans to move on from the 2020 election and declared that "there is no room in this party for apologists for Putin" as he further cemented his break from former President Donald Trump.

Pence, in a speech Friday evening to the party's top donors in New Orleans, took on those in his party who have failed to forcefully condemn Russian President Vladimir Putin for his unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

"Where would Russian tanks be today if NATO had not expanded the borders of freedom? There is no room in this party for apologists for Putin," Pence said, according to excerpts from the speech, which was closed to reporters. "There is only room for champions of freedom."

Pence did not directly reference the former president. But Trump has repeatedly used language that has been criticized as deferential to Putin, including calling the Russian leader "smart" while insisting the attack never would have happened on his watch.

Pence also continued to push back on Trump's lies about the 2020 election as he lays the groundwork for a possible 2024 presidential run. Trump, who has been teasing his own comeback bid that could potentially put the two in direct competition, has continued to falsely insist that Pence had the power to overturn the 2020 election, which he did not.

"Elections are about the future," Pence said. "My fellow Republicans, we can only win if we are united around an optimistic vision for the future based on our highest values. We cannot win by fighting yesterday's battles, or by relitigating the past."

Pence has been increasingly willing to challenge Trump — a dramatic departure from his deferential posture as vice president.

Pence has said the two men will likely never see "eye to eye" on the Capitol insurrection of Jan. 6, 2021, when Trump supporters stormed the building in an effort to stop certification of Joe Biden's election victory. Last month, he directly rebutted Trump's false claims that he, as vice president, could have overturned the results, telling a gathering of lawyers in Florida that Trump was "wrong."

Still, he joined the oft-stated view of Trump and others in the Republican Party Friday evening in blaming President Joe Biden for Putin's actions, accusing the current president of having "squandered the deterrence that our administration put in place to keep Putin and Russia from even trying to redraw international

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boundaries by force.”

“It’s no coincidence that Russia waited until 2022 to invade Ukraine,” Pence said, according to excerpts. “Weakness arouses evil, and the magnitude of evil sweeping across Ukraine speaks volumes about this president.”

While Pence allies believe that he can forge a coalition that brings together movement conservatives, white Evangelical Christians and more establishment-minded Republicans, Trump’s attacks on Pence have made him deeply unpopular with large swaths of Trump’s loyal base, potentially complicating his bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

Pence on Jan. 6 had to be whisked to safety with his family as a mob of Trump supporters breached the Capitol building, some chanting “Hang Mike Pence!”

## As planet warms, less ice covering North American lakes

By BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

GRAND LAKE, Colorado (AP) — With a backdrop of mountain vistas and a rink of natural ice, the annual ice hockey tournament at Grand Lake offers a picturesque snapshot of Colorado’s beauty. What’s not apparent is the problem brewing under players’ skates.

This year’s tournament was held a month later than normal, with thin ice forcing organizers to postpone the event originally scheduled for the third weekend of January.

“We had slushy conditions and less than six inches of ice. There just was no way it could safely be held,” said Steve Kudron, mayor of Grand Lake.

That is a reality that many communities that live near lakes, which freeze and provide myriad activities during winter months, are increasingly confronting. According to a major UN report on climate released on Monday, as the planet warms, the amount of ice, and amount of time it keeps a body of water solid, are diminishing. Those changes are forcing communities to adapt and curtail some winter activities while also raising the spectre of long-term environmental and health issues.

Sapna Sharma, an aquatic ecologist at Toronto’s York University, analyzed 100 to 200 years of data for 60 North American lakes, finding that in the last 25 years, “we’re losing ice six times faster than the historical average.” Air temperature, particularly in winter, is the most significant driver of lake ice, she said.

In addition to shorter ice seasons, so-called “winter weirding events” are becoming more widespread, Sharma said.

“You’ll have really cold days and some warm days with rainfall and cold days again and some more rain and the melting of snow,” she said. “That’s exactly the type of winter we’re having in Toronto right now.”

Some impacts of climate change can be addressed through efforts like building fire-resistant homes, reducing overfishing and building infrastructure that can withstand intense storms. But there are no simple solutions for preserving lake ice cover; only sharply reducing greenhouse gas emissions can slow warming, and subsequent ice loss, in the decades to come.

According to handwritten records maintained by Northern Water, a major water provider for northeastern Colorado, the last 20 years at Grand Lake saw a shorter ice season by about 14 days than the prior 20-year period. There, November’s air temperature has warmed on average about five degrees Fahrenheit, according to data by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This past November was the second hottest on record.

David Gochis, a hydrometeorologist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, says Colorado’s trend of very hot summers and last year’s unseasonably warm fall combined to raise the lake’s water temperature, contributing to a delayed and gradual freeze.

That meant the hockey tournament in Grand Lake had to be pushed back, already a sign of community adaptation.

“Moving forward, I would schedule it the last weekend in January at the earliest, just to make sure in case we have another year like this,” said organizer Brian Blumenfeld.

Beyond the hit to recreation activities and economic impacts, longer open water periods will affect “quality and quantity of downstream water resources,” according to a 2021 study from the University of

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Colorado, Boulder.

"When a lake is frozen, it's not evaporating water," said Adam Jokerst, a water manager for Greeley, a rapidly growing Colorado city that just acquired an aquifer to support future growth. Water that's open for longer periods increases your evaporative loss for the year, he said.

Additionally, warm, stagnant water can provide prime conditions for algal blooms, which can be toxic to humans and animals, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We can treat any water, but just get out your check book," Jokerst said, reciting a common phrase in the water utility world.

The warming temperatures are having an impact on lake communities around North America.

For example, much of Alaska is currently experiencing an unusual season - a warm start to the year followed below-average temperatures in late fall.

Lynnette Warren has led fishing groups around Alaska for 46 years. At popular ice fishing lakes across the Matanuska-Susitna Borough north of Anchorage, this year's warmer temperatures melted the snow, resulting in a chain reaction. The water weighed down the ice. The ice weakened. More water seeped up through cracks. Fishers avoided those lakes, and congregated on the handful of viable ones.

"When those lakes are the ones people are fishing all the time, then the catching opportunities are highly reduced because those lakes are overfished," Warren said.

A longer open-water season means more time for tourists who pay premiums to fish from a boat. But it also means more time for the sun to heat it - a threat to cold water fish that have faced die-offs in recent years coinciding with record-setting summer temperatures.

In parts of Alaska and Northern Canada, frozen lakes and rivers also serve a critical role connecting remote, often indigenous communities that are inaccessible by road. Without the ice, residents cannot access outside goods and services except by plane or boat. For both transportation and recreation, changes in ice trends can be deadly.

Back at Grand Lake, a Johnny Cash song blasts from a speaker as five simultaneous hockey games are played, the humidity in players' breath crystalizing in the frigid air as they cheer on their teammates.

Hockey player Rachel Kindsvatter, a caseworker who assisted people who lost their homes in a wildfire that ravaged the area in the fall of 2020, says she recognizes that delaying a tournament pales in comparison to many problems facing the world. Still, having to push it back an entire month so that people don't fall in is "scary."

"Give it 10 to 20 plus years and who knows if (the tournament) could even happen," she said.

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Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Shane Warne, one of cricket's iconic players, dies at 52

By DENNIS PASSA AP Sports Writer

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Shane Warne, widely regarded as one of the greatest players, most astute tacticians and ultimate competitors in the long history of cricket, has died. He was 52.

Known around the cricket globe as "Warnie," he revived and elevated the art of leg spin bowling when he emerged on the international scene in the 1990s and was a central character in one of Australia's most successful eras in the sport. He also was one of cricket's larger-than-life showmen.

Fox Sports television, which employed Warne as a commentator, quoted a family statement early Saturday as saying he died of a suspected heart attack in Koh Samui, Thailand.

"Shane was found unresponsive in his villa and despite the best efforts of medical staff, he could not be revived," the statement said.

Cricket Australia described Warne as "a true cricketing genius."

"Shane's strength of character and enormous resilience saw him bounce back from career-threatening finger and shoulder injuries, and his stamina and his sheer will to win, and his self-belief were key factors



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in Australia's great side of the late 1990s and early 2000s."

Police in Thailand said a friend staying at the same complex went to check on Warne when the cricket star failed to arrive for dinner and found him unconscious at the villa. Warne was taken by ambulance to Thai International Hospital but could not be revived. His body was transferred to Ko Samui Hospital for an autopsy.

The Australian men's national team was told of Warne's death following play on the first day of the series-opening test match against Pakistan in Rawalpindi.

"We all grew up watching Warnie, idolizing him," Australia captain Pat Cummins said. "What we loved so much about Warnie was his showmanship, his charisma, his tactics, the way he willed himself and the team around him to win games for Australia.

"The game was never the same after Warnie emerged and the game will never be the same after his passing. Rest in peace, King."

Warne held the record for most test wickets (708) when he retired in 2007 after his 145th match. Only Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan has passed him, with 800.

"Spinning was a dying art, really, till Shane Warne came along," renowned cricket commentator Jonathan Agnew told the BBC.

Among his career highlights were back-to-back player-of-the-match awards in the semifinals and final of the 1999 Cricket World Cup, being included among the Five Cricketers of the 20th Century by Wisden, colloquially known as the sport's bible, and being part of five Ashes-winning teams against England. He also played in 194 one-day internationals.

Warne made an underwhelming test debut against India in Sydney in 1992 but quickly rose to become a key figure across all formats during one of the greatest sustained periods of dominance by any team in world cricket.

He had accumulated career figures of 1-335 by the time he was asked to bowl during the second innings of his third test, against Sri Lanka in '92, and he finished the match by taking three wickets without conceding a run in 13 deliveries to secure an unlikely, narrow victory.

Warne was often given the ball when Australia was in trouble or desperate for a wicket, and so often he was able to turn matches around with a mesmerizing spell of bowling.

He wrote himself into folklore when he delivered the "Ball of the Century" with his first toss of the 1993 Ashes tour, bowling Mike Gatting with a delivery that turned from well outside leg stump to clip the off bail.

"It's one of those wonderful highlights of the game," Gatting said in 2018. "One of those bits of history that belongs not only to me but to probably the best legspinner of all time."

Warne was noted as much for his life off the field as on it.

Just before the 2003 World Cup in South Africa, he was banned for 12 months for taking a prohibited substance, which he said was in a diuretic his mother had given him to "improve his appearance." But he returned in 2004 and in the third Ashes test of 2005 he became the first bowler in history to take 600 test wickets.

In 1998, the Australian Cricket Board confirmed that Warne and Mark Waugh had been fined four years earlier for providing pitch and weather information to an Indian bookmaker during Australia's tour of Sri Lanka in 1994.

Warne's exploits off the field took their toll on his marriage and he split from wife Simone, the mother of his three children. He later had a relationship and became engaged to English actress Liz Hurley in 2010. The pair eventually split in 2013.

Warne's death came only a few hours after he expressed his sadness and condolences following the death of another Australian great, wicketkeeper Rodney Marsh, at age 74.

"He was a legend of our great game & an inspiration to so many young boys and girls," Warne posted on Twitter. "Rod cared deeply about cricket & gave so much - especially to Australia & England players. Sending lots & lots of love to Ros & the family. RIP mate."

After the shock news of Warne's death, tributes flowed in cricket's iconic stars and high-profile fans including Mick Jagger and actor Russell Crowe.

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"Will miss you Warnie," India great Sachin Tendulkar posted on Twitter. "There was never a dull moment with you around, on or off the field. Will always treasure our on field duels & off field banter. You always had a special place for India & Indians had a special place for you. Gone too young!"

West Indies great Brian Lara echoed Tendulkar.

"My friend is gone!!" Lara said. "We have lost one of the Greatest Sportsmen of all time!! RIP Warnie!! You will be missed."

Born in Upper Ferntree Gully near Melbourne, Warne showed prodigious talent from a young age and won a sports scholarship to a prestigious high school. After a brief attempt at becoming a professional Australian rules football player in 1988, he went to train at the Australian Cricket Academy in Adelaide and made his first-class debut in 1991.

Warne is survived by his children Jackson, Brooke and Summer, his parents Bridgette and Keith, and brother Jason.

Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews, supported by Australia's federal government, has offered a state funeral.

"Nobody who saw Shane Warne play will ever forget him," Andrews said. "To us, he was the greatest — but to his family, he was so much more. Our hearts are breaking for Shane's family and friends."

Associated Press reporter Chalida Ekvittayavechnukul in Bangkok and AP Sports Writers John Pye in Brisbane, Australia, Foster Niumata in London and Steve Douglas in Sundsvall, Sweden contributed to this report.

More AP cricket: <https://apnews.com/hub/cricket> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## **EXPLAINER: Why a no-fly zone is unlikely in Ukraine**

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Russia's attack on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has renewed calls for NATO to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, despite the repeated rejection of the idea by western leaders concerned about triggering a wider war in Europe.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday asked the people of Western Europe to demand that their leaders change course because the shelling of a nuclear power plant in Ukraine threatens the security of the entire continent.

"Immediate closure of the skies over Ukraine is needed," he said. "Take to the streets and say that you want to live, to live on earth without radioactive contamination. Radiation does not know where the Russian border is."

The attack did not, as initially feared, result in radiation release.

But military analysts say there is no chance that the U.S., Britain and their European allies will impose a no-fly zone because it could easily escalate the war in Ukraine into a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia. Here's a more detailed explanation about the situation:

### WHAT IS A NO-FLY ZONE?

A no-fly zone would bar all unauthorized aircraft from flying over Ukraine. Western nations imposed such restrictions over parts of Iraq for more than a decade following the 1991 Gulf War, during the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1993-95, and during the Libyan civil war in 2011.

### WHY WON'T NATO TAKE THIS STEP IN UKRAINE?

In simple terms, because it would risk a direct military conflict with Russia that could escalate into a wider European war with a nuclear-armed superpower.

While the idea may have captured the public imagination, declaring a no-fly zone could force NATO pilots to shoot down Russian aircraft.

But it goes beyond that. In addition to fighter planes, NATO would have to deploy refueling tankers and electronic-surveillance aircraft to support the mission. To protect these relatively slow, high-flying planes,

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NATO would have to destroy surface-to-air missile batteries in Russia and Belarus, again risking a broader conflict.

"The only way to implement a no-fly zone is to send NATO fighter planes into Ukrainian airspace, and then impose that no-fly zone by shooting down Russian planes," NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg said Friday. "We understand the desperation, but we also believe that if we did that, we would end up with something that could end in a full-fledged war in Europe."

"We have a responsibility as NATO allies to prevent this war from escalating beyond Ukraine," he said.

**WHAT WOULD A NO-FLY ZONE ACHIEVE?**

Ukrainian authorities and people cowering night after night in bomb shelters say a no-fly zone would protect civilians — and now nuclear power stations — from Russian air strikes.

But analysts say it's Russia's ground forces, not aircraft, that are causing most of the damage in Ukraine.

What Ukrainians actually want is a broader intervention like the one that occurred in Libya in 2011, when NATO forces launched attacks on government positions, said Justin Bronk, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London. That's not likely to happen when the opponent is Russia.

"They want to see the West kind of sweeping in and taking out the rocket artillery that's pummeling Ukrainian cities," Bronk said. "We're not going to go to war against the Russian army. They are a massive nuclear-armed power. ... There is no way that we could possibly model, let alone control, the escalation chain that would come from such an action."

**WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE SKIES OVER UKRAINE?**

Predictions that Russia would quickly control the skies over Ukraine have not come to fruition.

Military experts are wondering why Russia has chosen to leave most of its fixed-wing combat aircraft on the ground during this massive land offensive. One explanation may be that Russian pilots aren't well trained in supporting large-scale land operations, engagements that require coordination with artillery, helicopters and other assets in a fast-moving environment.

"I think that maybe they're a little bit worried that that is a very constrained area. It's not like the Middle East, where there's all kinds of space to roam around in the air," said Robert Latif, a retired U.S. Air Force major general who now teaches at the University of Notre Dame.

"They could very easily stray over borders," he explained. "With both Ukrainian and Russian air defense systems and Ukrainian, what little they have, and Russian airplanes all flying around — that could be a very confusing. I think maybe they're a little bit worried about actually being able to pull it off."

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Associated Press Writer Lorne Cook in Brussels contributed.

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Follow all AP stories on the Russian invasion of Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>.

## Russia's nuke plant attack revives Chernobyl disaster fears

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Russia's attack on a nuclear power plant in Ukraine has revived the fears of people across Europe who remember the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which killed at least 30 people and spewed radioactive fallout over much of the Northern Hemisphere.

The U.N nuclear energy watchdog said no radiation was released after Russian forces shelled the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in the early hours of Friday.

But that did little to ease growing concerns in Western Europe. Even before the attack, Russia's invasion of Ukraine had heightened concerns about the vulnerability of the nuclear reactors that provide about 50% of the country's electricity. In addition to the danger of explosives damaging the reactors, plant managers and technicians must have unfettered access to the plants to ensure they operate safely, nuclear experts warned.

Pharmacies in some Eastern European and Scandinavian countries reported a surge in demand for iodine tablets, which can be used to protect children from radiation exposure. Politicians rushed to criticize Rus-

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sia's "reckless" actions, and Ukrainian authorities renewed calls for a no-fly zone to ensure Europe doesn't face another nuclear disaster.

"I didn't really sleep last night," said Paul Dorfman, who led the European Environment Agency's response to Chernobyl and was glued to the news from Ukraine on his phone. "The fact is that when things go really wrong with nuclear, you can begin to write off a lot of people's lives."

That's what happened on April 26, 1986, when a sudden surge of power during a reactor systems test destroyed Unit 4 at the Chernobyl power plant in northern Ukraine, which was then part of the Soviet Union.

The accident and fire that followed released massive amounts of radioactive material, forcing the evacuation of nearby communities and contaminating 150,000 square kilometers (60,000 square miles) of land in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

The initial explosion killed two plant workers, and 28 others died within the next three months. By 2005, more than 6,000 thyroid cancers were reported among children and adolescents in the affected area, many of which were most likely caused by radiation, according to a report from the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Radiation.

"Radioactive fallout scattered over much of the Northern Hemisphere via wind and storm patterns, but the amounts dispersed were in many instances insignificant," the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

Twenty-five years later, an earthquake and tsunami triggered a meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan, forcing the evacuation of more than 100,000 people. The accident raised safety concerns that led Japan and many other countries to curtail the use of nuclear power stations.

Nuclear experts on Friday stressed that the Zaporizhzhia plant is much safer than Chernobyl because the reactor is housed inside a reinforced concrete containment building designed to prevent radioactive material from escaping in the event of an accident. Chernobyl didn't have this kind of structure.

While a Chernobyl-type event is unlikely, the containment vessel isn't designed to withstand explosive ordinance such as artillery shells, said Robin Grimes, a professor of materials science at Imperial College London.

"It is therefore staggering and reckless to the extreme that shells have been fired close to a nuclear plant, let alone targeting buildings within the plant," Grimes said. "Even if they were not aiming for the nuclear plant, artillery is notoriously inaccurate in a time of war."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council to discuss the attack. A host of other world leaders contacted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to express shock.

Among them was Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida who called the attack on Zaporizhzhia an "unforgivable reckless act."

"As a country that has experienced the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, I said Japan condemns the attack in the strongest terms," Kishida told reporters.

Ukraine's nuclear power industry began in the 1970s, when it was still part of the Soviet Union. It now has 15 reactors at four power plants around the country. Two more reactors are under construction and the four at Chernobyl have been shut down.

Together the reactors generate about half of the country's electricity. That share is expected to grow until at least 2035, because Ukraine sees nuclear power as the most cost-effective source of low-carbon energy, according to the IAEA.

That bucks the trend in the European Union, where nuclear power generation dropped by 25% from 2006 to 2020.

With the war in Ukraine triggering memories of Chernobyl, some people are taking precautions.

In Denmark, Sweden and Finland sales of iodine tablets have increased sharply. Meanwhile, authorities in countries like Poland and Romania sought to head off a similar surge in demand by warning consumers that taking iodine pills without a doctor's supervision may do more harm than good.

The tablets can be used to protect children from the effects of radiation exposure by minimizing the uptake of radioactive iodine that can damage the thyroid gland.

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Rosie Fisher, 42, a climate scientist who lives in Oslo, Norway, said she was startled when her 5-year-old brought a consent form home from kindergarten asking whether the school could give him iodine tablets in the event of a nuclear accident.

"Normally communications from his teacher's are on the subject of the number gloves that they have or the very thick winter dress or what kind of hats they'll need and where they should put their shoes in the morning," Fisher said.

While she acknowledged that the form was probably just an example of Norwegian authorities planning for every eventuality, it nevertheless caused some anxiety.

"I'm trying not to Google how far away you have to be from a nuclear blast to survive it," she said. "I'm trying not to Google that."

Associated Press writers Frank Jordans in Berlin; Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark; Stephen McGrath in Siret, Romania, and Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed.

## Stocks tumble as war overshadows 'fantastic' US jobs data

By STAN CHOE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks around the world racked up more losses Friday, as even a gangbusters report on the U.S. jobs market can't pull Wall Street's focus off its worries about the war in Ukraine.

The S&P 500 fell 0.8% and posted its third weekly loss in the last four. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite ended 1.7% lower.

The declines for U.S. stock indexes followed sharper losses in Europe after a fire at the continent's largest nuclear plant caused by shelling raised worries about what's next. Markets worldwide have swung wildly over the last week on worries about how high prices for oil, wheat and other commodities produced in the region will go because of Russia's invasion, inflaming the world's already high inflation.

Treasury yields sank again as investors moved money into U.S. government bonds in search of safety, and a measure of nervousness on Wall Street climbed.

All the movements came despite a much stronger report on U.S. jobs than economists expected, one described as encouraging and even "fantastic." Hiring by employers last month topped expectations by hundreds of thousands of workers, more people came back into the workforce after sitting on the sidelines and jobs numbers for prior months were revised higher.

On the inflation front, growth in wages for workers was slower last month than economists expected. While that's discouraging for workers hoping to keep up with rising prices at the grocery store, for economists and investors, it means less risk the economy may be headed for what's called a "wage-price spiral." In such a reinforcing cycle, higher wages for workers would cause companies to raise their own prices even higher.

"The COVID recovery was in full bloom in the jobs report," said Brian Jacobsen, senior investment strategist at Allspring Global Investments.

"The tricky part is the future, not the past," he said, as U.S. crude oil prices climbed above \$115 per barrel amid worries about pressure on supplies because of the Ukrainian war. "Higher fuel and food costs can eat into consumers' budgets. Those high costs can be a boon for oil producers and farmers, but not for everyone else."

Such concerns helped drag stocks sharply lower in the early going, though the indexes pared their losses by the end of the day. The S&P 500 fell 34.62 points to 4,328.87, and is now down just under 10% from its record set early this year.

The Dow, which slid initially more than 500 points, ended down 179.86 points to 33,614.80. The Nasdaq fell 224.50 points to 13,313.44.

Smaller company stocks also fell. The Russell 2000 index dropped 31.51 points, or 1.6%, to 2,000.90.

In the benchmark S&P 500, more than 60% of stocks fell, with technology and financial companies weighing down the index the most. Apple fell 1.8% and JPMorgan Chase slid 2.8%. Among the gainers

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were utilities, health care stocks and companies that can benefit from higher oil prices. Occidental Petroleum vaulted 17.6% for the biggest gain in the index.

In Europe, whose economy is much more closely tied to the conflict because of its dependence on oil and natural gas from the region, the losses were sharper. France's CAC 40 fell 5%, Germany's DAX lost 4.4% and the FTSE 100 in London fell 3.5%.

Russian forces gained ground, shelling Europe's largest nuclear power plant and causing a fire early Friday as they pressed their attack on a crucial energy-producing Ukrainian city. Authorities said the blaze was safely extinguished. U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm tweeted that the Zaporizhzhia plant's reactors were protected by robust containment structures and were being safely shut down.

Trading on the Moscow exchange, after briefly opening Monday, has remained closed throughout the week. The value of Russia's ruble continues to hover below a penny after plunging roughly 30% since the middle of last week. It now takes roughly 104 rubles to get a dollar, up from fewer than 75 at the start of the year. The ruble has dropped as Western governments imposed sanctions that cut off much of Russia's access to the global financial system.

The price of U.S. oil jumped 7.4% to \$115.68 per barrel, the highest since August 2008. In July of that year, the price per barrel of U.S. crude climbed to an all-time high \$145.29, pushing up the average price for gasoline above \$4 a gallon.

Brent crude, the international standard, climbed 6.9% to \$118.11 per barrel Friday.

"I don't think the elevated commodity prices are behind us by any means," said Megan Horneman, chief investment officer at Verdence Capital Advisors. "As energy prices continue to rise, eventually there could be some demand destruction that will result in some peaking in the price and possibly some decline in the price of oil."

Amid the rush to safety, the yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 1.74% from 1.84% late Thursday, a big move. It's well below the 2% level it had reached last month, as expectations built for upcoming hikes in interest rates by the Federal Reserve to rein in inflation.

Stocks had rallied in the middle of the week after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said he favored a more modest increase to interest rates later this month than some investors had feared. The Fed is set to raise rates for the first time since 2018, though it has a tightrope walk ahead because too-high rates can choke the economy and cause a recession.

Powell warned Thursday that the fighting in Ukraine is likely to further magnify the high inflation troubling world economies. Russia is a key oil producer and prices have been rising as global supplies are threatened by the conflict.

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AP Business Writer Elaine Kurtenbach contributed. Veiga reported from Los Angeles.

## **Witness: Jan. 6 rioter wanted to remove 'corrupt' lawmakers**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first person to be tried in the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol was a Texas militia member who advocated for physically removing and replacing "corrupt" members of Congress as he drove to Washington, D.C., a former group member testified Friday.

Rocky Hardie, a key government witness at the trial of Guy Wesley Reffitt, said he didn't believe Reffitt would act on his talk of dragging lawmakers out of the Capitol and replacing them with people who would "follow the Constitution."

"I considered it hyperbole," Hardie testified during the third day of Reffitt's trial — the first among hundreds of cases stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

Reffitt, 49, of Wylie, Texas, is charged with bringing a gun onto Capitol grounds and interfering with police officers guarding the building. He also is charged with obstructing justice for allegedly threatening his children if they reported him to law enforcement after the riot.

Hardie, who was Reffitt's passenger on their car ride to Washington, said he was "pretty impressed"

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when Reffitt recounted what he did after they became separated on their way to the Capitol.

"I felt like he had more courage than I did," Hardie said.

Hardie said he met Reffitt through their membership in the "Texas Three Percenters." The Three Percenters militia movement refers to the myth that only 3% of American colonists fought against the British in the Revolutionary War.

During the trial's opening statements on Wednesday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Nestler told jurors that Reffitt drove to Washington because he intended to storm the Capitol and try to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory. Reffitt "lit the match that started the fire" when a mob charged at police officers guarding the building and was "the tip of this mob's spear," Nestler said.

Defense attorney William Welch disputed that Reffitt had a gun at the Capitol and said there is no evidence that Reffitt damaged property, used force or physically harmed anybody.

During Friday's testimony, prosecutors zoomed in on a video image of Reffitt at the Capitol. FBI Special Agent Laird Hightower said the image shows "a silvery metallic linear object" in a holster protruding from under Reffitt's jacket as he leaned forward.

Hardie testified that he and Reffitt both had holstered pistols strapped to their bodies when they attended then-President Donald Trump's "Stop the Steal" rally and then headed to the Capitol. They both left rifles locked up in a car parked at a hotel, Hardie said.

Hardie said Reffitt also gave him two pairs of zip-tie cuffs before they left their hotel room that day.

"What are those for?" Hardie recalled asking.

"In case we need to detain anybody," Reffitt replied, according to Hardie.

Prosecutors say Reffitt played a leadership role when he and other rioters charged at police officers on the west side of the Capitol, but he isn't accused of entering the building. He retreated after an officer pepper-sprayed him in the face, according to prosecutors.

Hardie said he didn't join the hundreds of rioters who entered the building, but he conceded that he brought a gun into a restricted area. He has an immunity agreement that prevents prosecutors from using his testimony against him, but the deal doesn't insulate him from being charged with a crime for his actions on Jan. 6.

During Welch's cross-examination, Hardie agreed that Reffitt is prone to bragging, using hyperbole and embellishment.

Hardie, who lives near Austin, Texas, said he met Reffitt in person for the first time before the 2020 presidential election, discussing politics at a park.

"We talked about how the country is pretty much going down the tubes," Hardie said. They both viewed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as "evil incarnate" and believed the election had been stolen from Trump, Hardie testified.

"We did ask ourselves how far do you let things go before you take action to protect your country," Hardie said.

Hardie said he went to Washington to "stand and be counted" and hoped the crowd's presence would deter Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote count. He said he brought a handgun with him to the rally because he wanted to protect himself or others if "antifa" counter-protesters attacked them.

"I didn't think we or anybody was going to get close to the Capitol," he said. "I thought that was impossible."

Earlier Friday, jurors saw surveillance video of Secret Service agents escorting Vice President Mike Pence out of an office at the Capitol after rioters stormed the building. Pence was presiding over the Senate when the riot erupted.

On Thursday, Reffitt's son, Jackson, testified that he secretly recorded his father proudly describing his role in the riot and gave the audio file to an FBI agent after his father threatened him and his sister.

Prosecutors expect to rest their case Monday after calling four more witnesses, including two Capitol police officers and Reffitt's daughter, Peyton.

It appears Reffitt won't be testifying. Welch told U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich on Friday that he

doesn't plan to call any defense witnesses.

Reffitt's trial could have a significant impact on other Capitol riot cases. A conviction would give prosecutors more leverage to cut plea deals with others facing the most serious charges. An acquittal could embolden other riot defendants to seek more favorable plea terms or gamble on trials of their own.

More than 750 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. Over 220 riot defendants have pleaded guilty, more than 100 have been sentenced and at least 90 others have trial dates.

## Big cities drop more COVID-19 measures in push for normalcy

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City and Los Angeles are lifting some of their strictest COVID-19 prevention measures as officials in big cities around the U.S. push for a return to normalcy after two grueling years of the pandemic.

New York City, which has long prided itself as having the nation's toughest COVID-19 safety protocols, will do away with several of its mandates next week, including required masking in public schools and vaccination requirements at restaurants, entertainment and cultural venues, the mayor announced Friday.

On the other side of the country, residents in Los Angeles County were no longer required as of Friday to wear masks at restaurants, bars, gyms, shops and other businesses, though the city of Los Angeles is still requiring many indoor businesses to verify that their patrons are fully vaccinated.

The moves to ease the mandates comes as government officials around the U.S. have been easing COVID-19 guidelines and signaling that the risk of virus spread is retreating — at least for now.

Illinois lifted face mask requirements for many indoor spaces on Monday, and Boston will lift similar rules on Saturday. Chicago stopped requiring proof of vaccination to dine in restaurants. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said last week that most Americans can now safely take a break from wearing masks, including students.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, declaring it was time to "celebrate" as he stood in Times Square on Friday, said the city needed to recover and that "we are not going to allow COVID to define us."

"We're far from out of the woods. COVID is still here. But we are beating it back," Adams said.

He invited "people from Canada, from Arkansas, from New Zealand, from anywhere else," to visit and spend money and implored New Yorkers to "go out this weekend and go dine."

The Democratic mayor said he was confident that it would be safe, starting Monday, to send children and teachers to school unmasked and no longer require some businesses to check guests' vaccine cards.

The decision to ease rules in Los Angeles County aligns with new California guidelines unveiled allowing vaccinated or unvaccinated people to choose to go without face coverings in most places.

Masks are still required in all K-12 school districts until March 12. After that, districts may maintain their own mask requirements. Business owners also can choose to require masks for customers and employees.

At Coffee Fix in the Studio City neighborhood of Los Angeles, owner Tae Kim said the change in masking rules has been a bit confusing for customers.

One customer Taylor Lewis, who was wearing her mask, said it was "so nice seeing people's faces" but she would continue to wear her mask out of habit in indoor places.

"With the ever-changing facts that are given to us I see the good in wearing it," she said.

In New York City, the elimination of the school mask requirement is a striking turnaround from just a few months ago, when some parents and teachers were agitating for a return to remote learning as the omicron wave swept through schools and attendance plummeted. The teachers union said Friday it supports the move to lift the rule.

Children under age 5 would still have to wear masks because they are not eligible for the vaccine.

The city's vaccine mandate, imposed last year in a program called Key2NYC, required New Yorkers and tourists to show proof of vaccination to enter restaurants and bars, work out in gyms, catch a movie, attend a Broadway show, go to a convention or visit a museum.

Not all of those places are ready to drop the restrictions. The Broadway League has said it will maintain



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mask and vaccination requirements in all its theaters at least through April 30.

Andrew Rigie, the executive director of the New York City Hospitality Alliance representing restaurants, bars and nightclubs, said Friday that he thinks few venues will continue to impose vaccine rules on their own because their staff had to enforce the rules with customers and, at times, weather their frustrations.

"Regardless of what someone's opinion is of the vaccination requirement, it's put restaurant workers in an extraordinarily difficult position," he said. "We hoped that people would respect workers but it's been really tough."

The rules also barred star Brooklyn Nets guard Kyrie Irving from playing home games with the team. But Adams said that he plans to preserve a rule requiring private employers to ensure their workers are vaccinated, which would apply to Irving.

By lifting the Key2NYC rule, Irving would be allowed to attend the Nets' home games as a spectator but not play.

Recently, New York City has been averaging just under 680 new coronavirus cases and 25 deaths each day, down from nearly 41,000 new cases and nearly 130 deaths per day at the height of the omicron wave in January.

The virus continues to hospitalize and kill New Yorkers with greater frequency now than it did last summer and through much of the fall, when many of the vaccination and school masking rules were imposed.

Around 4,000 city residents have died of the virus since Jan. 1, more than in the previous nine months combined.

Not everyone agreed with the move.

The city's public advocate Jumaane Williams, who served as an elected ombudsman, called it "unnecessary and unwise" to remove the vaccine requirement while lifting other rules and people needed to feel safe.

Adams, responding to critics on Friday, said "there's no decision you can make in New York that you're going to get 100% of New Yorkers" to agree with.

He said some people may be reluctant to dine out without vaccine rules but said he thinks most New Yorkers are ready.

"We are all right, folks," Adams said. "We're doing the right things."

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Associated Press writers John Antczak and Michael R. Blood in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

## Voter turnout sagging in troubled voting rights hub of Selma

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Fewer and fewer people are voting in Selma, Alabama. And to many, that is particularly heartbreaking.

They lament that almost six decades after Black demonstrators on the city's Edmond Pettus Bridge risked their lives for the right to cast ballots, voting in predominantly Black Selma and surrounding Dallas County has steadily declined. Turnout in 2020 was under 57%, among the worst in the state.

Rep. Terri Sewell, a Black Democrat whose district includes her hometown of Selma, said Friday she was shocked to learn of the decline, reported by The Associated Press.

"You would think that Selma and Dallas County, we, of all places, should know the importance of voting in every election," Sewell said in an interview. Voter apathy is a problem, she said.

Thousands will gather March 6 for this year's reenactment of the bridge crossing to honor the foot soldiers of that "Bloody Sunday" in 1965. Downtown will resemble a huge street festival during the event, known as the Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee, with thousands of visitors, blaring music and vendors selling food and T-shirts.

Another Selma event, less celebratory and more activist, was held last year by Black Voters Matter. The aim was to boost Black power at the ballot box.

But the issues in Selma — a onetime Confederate arsenal, located about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Montgomery in Alabama's old plantation region — defy simple solutions.

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Some cite a hangover from decades of white supremacist voter suppression, others a 2013 Supreme Court ruling that gutted key provisions of federal voting law to allow current GOP efforts to tighten voting rules. Some Black voters, who tend to vote Democratic, simply don't see the point in voting in a state where every statewide office is held by white Republicans who also control the Legislature.

Then there is what some describe as infighting between local leaders, and low morale in a crime-ridden town with too many pothole-covered streets, too many abandoned homes and too many vacant businesses. All are considered factors that helped lead to a 13% decline in population over the last decade in a town where more than one-third live in poverty.

Despite visits from presidents, congressional leaders and celebrity luminaries like Oprah Winfrey — and even the success of the 2014 historical film drama "Selma" by Ava DuVernay — Selma never seems to get any better.

Resident Tyrone Clarke said he votes when work and travel allow, but not always. Many others don't because of disqualifying felony convictions or disillusionment with the shrinking town of roughly 18,000 people, he said.

"You have a whole lot of people who look at the conditions and don't see what good it's going to do for them," Clarke said. "You know, 'How is this guy or that guy being in office going to affect me in this little, rotten town here?'"

But something else seems to be going on in Selma and Dallas County. Other poor, mostly Black areas have not seen the same drastic decline in turnout. Only one of Alabama's majority Black counties, Macon, the home of historically Black Tuskegee University, had lower voter turnout than Dallas in 2020.

Selma is hardly the only place where big Black majorities don't always translate to big voter turnout. The U.S. Census Bureau found that a racial gap persisted nationwide in voting in 2020, with about 71% of white voters casting ballots compared to 63% of eligible Black people.

A majority of Dallas County's voters are Black, and Black people made up the largest share of the county's vote in 2020, about 68%, state statistics show. But white voters had a disproportionately larger share of the county electorate compared to Black voters, records showed.

Jimmy L. Nunn, a former Selma city attorney who became Dallas County's first Black probate judge in 2019, said the community is weighted down by its own history.

"We have been programmed that our votes do not count, that we have no vote," said Nunn, who works in the same county courthouse where white, Jim Crow officeholders refused to register Black voters, helping inspire the protests of 1965. "It is that mindset we have to change."

Selma entered voting rights legend because of what happened at the foot of the Edmond Pettus Bridge, which is named for a onetime Confederate general and reputed Ku Klux Klan leader, on March 7, 1965.

After months of demonstrations and failed attempts to register Black people to vote in the white-controlled city, a long line of marchers led by John Lewis, then a young activist, crossed the span over the Alabama River headed toward the state capital of Montgomery to present demands to Gov. George C. Wallace, a segregationist. State troopers and sheriff's posse members on horseback stopped them.

A trooper bashed Lewis' head during the ensuing melee and dozens more were hurt. Images of the violence reinforced the evil and depth of Southern white supremacy, helping build support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In the following decades, Selma became a worldwide touchstone for voting rights, with then-President Barack Obama speaking at the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in 2015.

"If Selma taught us anything, it's that our work is never done," he said. "The American experiment in self-government gives work and purpose to each generation."

But in Selma, voting already was on the decline. After more than 66% of Dallas County's voters went to the polls in 2008, when Obama became the nation's first Black president, turnout fell in each presidential election afterward.

Shamika Mendenhall, a mother of two young children with a third on the way, was among registered voters who did not cast a ballot in 2020. She often goes to the annual jubilee that marks the anniversary of Bloody Sunday and has relatives who participated in voting rights protests of the 1960s, and she's still

a little sheepish about missing the election.

"To choose our president we ought to vote," said Mendenhall, 25.

A Black member of the county's Democratic Party executive committee, Collins Pettaway III spends a lot of time pondering how to get young voters like Mendenhall more engaged. Older residents who remember Bloody Sunday and the subsequent Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march vote, he said, but turnout is falling away among millennials and other, younger generations.

"We just have to try to really make it relevant for them and really get them to see the importance through their lens," said Pettaway, 32, the son of a county judge.

This year, the commemoration of Bloody Sunday will include a "hip-hop political summit" aimed at helping make voting more relevant and giving voice to the reality that many people have given up on the system because they seldom see their votes making a difference in their daily lives, he said.

"There are so many people who feel they have been disenfranchised and they believe that the system is working against them. We cannot dispute it and we cannot make them feel that is wrong, because it is true," Pettaway said. "We have to let them know and find a way for them understand that the only way that is going to change is if they participate in the process."

## High court reimposes Boston Marathon bomber's death sentence

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has reinstated the death sentence for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

The justices, by a 6-3 vote Friday, agreed with the Biden administration's arguments that a federal appeals court was wrong to throw out the sentence of death a jury imposed on Tsarnaev for his role in the bombing that killed three people near the finish line of the marathon in 2013.

"Dzhokhar Tsarnaev committed heinous crimes. The Sixth Amendment nonetheless guaranteed him a fair trial before an impartial jury. He received one," Justice Clarence Thomas wrote for the majority, made up of the court's six conservative justices.

The court reversed the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston, which ruled in 2020 that the trial judge improperly excluded evidence that could have shown Tsarnaev was deeply influenced by his older brother, Tamerlan, and was somehow less responsible for the carnage. The appeals court also faulted the judge for not sufficiently questioning jurors about their exposure to extensive news coverage of the bombing.

In dissent for the court's three liberal justices, Justice Stephen Breyer wrote, "In my view, the Court of Appeals acted lawfully in holding that the District Court should have allowed Dzhokhar to introduce this evidence."

Breyer has called on the court to reconsider capital punishment. "I have written elsewhere about the problems inherent in a system that allows for the imposition of the death penalty ... This case provides just one more example of some of those problems," he wrote in a section of his dissent his liberal colleagues, Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, did not join.

The prospect that Tsarnaev, now 28, will be executed anytime soon is remote. The Justice Department halted federal executions last summer after the Trump administration carried out 13 executions in its final six months.

President Joe Biden has said he opposes the death penalty, but his administration was put in the position of defending Tsarnaev's sentence at the Supreme Court. The appeal was initially filed during the Trump administration, but Biden's team did not signal a change of position before the court agreed nearly a year ago to hear the case.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that Biden has made clear "his grave concerns about capital punishment as implemented, but he respects the process and the ongoing review that is being led by the Department of Justice and the Attorney General."

Had Tsarnaev prevailed at the high court, the administration would have had to decide whether to pursue a new death sentence or allow Tsarnaev to serve out the rest of his life in prison.

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Tsarnaev's guilt in the deaths of Lingzi Lu, a 23-year-old Boston University graduate student from China; Krystle Campbell, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Medford, Massachusetts; and 8-year-old Martin Richard, of Boston, was not at issue, only whether he should be put to death or imprisoned for life.

Tsarnaev was convicted of all 30 charges against him, including conspiracy and use of a weapon of mass destruction and the killing of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Officer Sean Collier during the Tsarnaev brothers' getaway attempt. The appeals court upheld all but a few of his convictions.

Two people who were seriously injured in the bombing and its aftermath praised Friday's outcome on Twitter.

"Congratulations to all who worked tirelessly for justice," wrote Adrienne Haslet, a professional ballroom dancer who lost a leg in the attacks.

Dic Donohue, a Massachusetts transit police officer who was critically wounded in a firefight with the two marathon bombers, tweeted: "Bottom line: He can't kill anyone else."

The main focus at high court arguments in October was on evidence that implicated Tamerlan Tsarnaev in a triple killing in the Boston suburb of Waltham on the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The evidence bolstered the defense team theory that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was indoctrinated and radicalized by his older brother.

The trial judge had rejected that argument, ruling that the evidence linking Tamerlan to the Waltham killings was unreliable and irrelevant to Dzhokhar's participation in the marathon attack. The judge also said the defense team's argument would only confuse jurors.

One problem with the evidence about the Waltham killings was that both Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Ibragim Todashev, who implicated him, were dead by the time of the trial.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, had been in a gunfight with police and was run over by his brother as he fled, hours before police captured a bloodied and wounded Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the Boston suburb of Watertown.

Todashev was interviewed by investigators after the marathon attack. He told authorities that Tamerlan recruited him to rob the three men, and they bound the men with duct tape before Tamerlan slashed their throats to avoid leaving any witnesses.

In a bizarre twist, while Todashev was being questioned in Florida, he was shot dead after authorities say he attacked the agents. The agent who killed Todashev was cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.

Given the circumstances, Thomas wrote, U.S. District Judge George O'Toole Jr. can't be faulted for excluding Todashev's account because "no matter how Dzhokhar presented the evidence, its bare inclusion risked producing a confusing mini-trial where the only witnesses who knew the truth were dead."

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Samuel Alito, Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh also voted to reimpose Tsarnaev's death sentence.

## Strong job growth points to COVID's fading grip on economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a buoyant sign for the U.S. economy, businesses stepped up their hiring last month as omicron faded and more Americans ventured out to spend at restaurants, shops and hotels despite surging inflation.

Employers added a robust 678,000 jobs in February, the largest monthly total since July, the Labor Department reported Friday. The unemployment rate dropped to 3.8%, from 4% in January, extending a sharp decline in joblessness to its lowest level since before the pandemic erupted two years ago.

Friday's hiring figures were collected before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has sent oil prices jumping and has heightened risks and uncertainties for economies in Europe and the rest of the world.

Yet the February hiring data suggest that two years after COVID-19 sparked a nationwide shutdown and 22 million job losses, the disease is losing its grip on America's economy. More people are taking jobs or searching for work — a trend that, if it endures, will help ease the labor shortages that have bedeviled employers for the past year.

In addition, fewer people are now working remotely because of the disease. A continuing flow of people

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back to offices could boost employment in urban downtowns. And the number of Americans who are delaying job hunts for fear of the disease fell sharply from January, when omicron was raging, to February.

"All signs are that the pandemic is easing its hold on jobs and the economy," said Jane Oates, president of WorkingNation and a former Labor Department official. "Very strong numbers in very uncertain times."

Other recent economic data also show the economy maintaining strength as new COVID infections have plummeted. Consumer spending has risen, spurred by higher wages and savings. Restaurant traffic has regained pre-pandemic levels, hotel reservations are up and far more Americans are flying than at the height of omicron.

Still, escalating costs for gasoline, wheat and metals such as aluminum, which are exported by both Ukraine and Russia, will likely accelerate inflation in the coming months. Higher prices and anxieties surrounding the war could slow hiring and growth later this year, though economists expect the consequences to be more severe in Europe than in the United States.

Inflation has already reached its highest level since 1982, with price spikes especially high for such necessities as food, gasoline and rent. In response, the Federal Reserve is set to raise interest rates several times this year beginning later this month. Those increases will eventually mean higher borrowing rates for consumers and businesses, including for homes, autos and credit cards.

Chair Jerome Powell said this week he plans to propose that the Fed raise its benchmark short-term rate by a quarter-point when it meets in about two weeks. Powell has acknowledged that high inflation has proved more persistent and has spread more broadly than he and many economists had expected.

One figure in Friday's report could provide reassurance for the Fed's policymakers as they assess inflation pressures: Average hourly pay barely grew in February. Higher wages, while good for workers, often lead companies to raise prices to cover their higher labor costs and thereby further heighten inflation.

But that slowdown might not last if inflation worsens. Some staffing agencies are seeing a shift in what is driving higher pay. Previously, it was companies' need to fill jobs. Now, some workers are saying they need raises to cover rising costs.

Michelle Reisdorf, a district director at recruiter Robert Half in Chicago, who fills permanent and temporary jobs in accounting, human resources and other professional jobs, said workers are starting to cite higher gas costs when seeking a raise, particularly if they drive to offices.

"If they know they are going to have to go onsite five days a week, they are definitely asking for more money," she said.

The strong hiring in February occurred across most of the economy, with restaurants, bars and hotels adding 79,000 jobs, construction 60,000 and transportation and warehousing 48,000. Though the economy still has 2.1 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic struck, the gap is closing fast.

A survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that Americans are now much less worried about COVID than they were in December and January. Mask mandates and other restrictions are ending.

Data from the restaurant reservation software provider OpenTable showed that seated diners surpassed pre-pandemic levels late last month. And figures from the Transportation Security Administration reflected a sharp increase in the number of people willing to take airplane flights.

As mask mandates have ended and omicron cases have declined, customer visits have more than doubled at p.volve, an online fitness company that provides at-home workouts and has three gyms in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, said Julie Cartwright, the company's president.

The company, which employs about 75, has four job openings in data analysis, engineering and marketing. The vast majority of its customers do the company's proprietary workouts at home. Over the past four months, Cartwright has hired 15 people, 10 of whom replaced workers who had quit. Quitting has reached record levels nationally as employers in need of hires have poached workers from other companies.

In response, Cartwright said, p.volve has provided pay raises and more leadership opportunities to try to retain its employees. The company is based in New York City but has also hired remotely since the pandemic hit, significantly expanding its talent pool.

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"That's a massive advantage, now that we can hire really anyone, anywhere," she said.

After months of concerns about labor shortages holding back businesses, more Americans started job searches in February for the second straight month. The proportion of Americans either working or looking for a job rose to 62.3%, up from 61.5% a year ago, though it remains below the pre-pandemic level of 63.4%.

The number of people who said they avoided job hunting because they were concerned about COVID fell to 1.2 million in February, down 600,000 from January, when omicron was raging.

Gregory Daco, chief economist at tax advisory firm EY-Parthenon, suggested that the increase in the number of Americans looking for a job last month was "the most important number" in the report.

"That will reduce wage growth pressures and put us on a more sustainable trajectory for the economy," Daco said.

Among the recent new job seekers was Ryan Gerard, who had quit a sales job last July because he felt burned out by the emails and texts he received at all hours and because his employer wasn't fully comfortable with remote work during COVID.

Gerard, 30, who lives near Cleveland, took a break for several months, then began looking for work again in November. In January, he landed a sales and account management job at Sixth City Marketing. Gerard said he never worried that he wouldn't be able to find work. And his current position, he said, provides a much better work-life balance.

"I wanted to reassess where I was," he said. "There was no shortage of jobs. I got interviews at a variety of places."

This story has been corrected to show that Ryan Gerard works at Sixth City Marketing, not Sixth City Communications.

Contact Christopher Rugaber at <http://Twitter.com/ChrisRugaber>

## Russian propaganda 'outgunned' by social media rebuttals

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Russian state media is spreading misinformation about the location of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in what analysts said is an attempt to discourage resistance fighters and erode support for Ukraine around the globe.

A story published by the Russian News Agency Tass this week quoted a Russian lawmaker saying Zelenskyy "hastily fled" Kyiv for Lviv in far western Ukraine, despite photos and video clips showing him leading Ukraine's defense from its capital.

It's one of many distorted claims to emerge from a Russian propaganda and disinformation campaign that aims to strengthen domestic support for the invasion and undermine the resolve of Ukrainians. But the same tactics that have sustained such propaganda for years are running into a far more complex reality where the claims can be instantly and credibly rebutted on social media.

Videos and photos of Zelenskyy in Kyiv have quickly become some of the defining images of the invasion, rallying support for Ukraine at home and abroad and challenging Russia's attempt to control public perception.

By claiming he's fled Kyiv, Russia hopes to undermine Zelenskyy's status as a Ukrainian hero while also suggesting legitimate sources of news and information can't be trusted, according to Sarah Oates, a professor at the University of Maryland who studies Russian propaganda.

To Oates, it's a move that smacks of desperation by a Russian propaganda machine that can't compete with viral images of Ukrainian defiance.

"They're flailing. They've been doing this for decades and they have a very well oiled delivery system but right now their content just isn't working," Oates said. "The Ukrainians may be completely outgunned by traditional military, but they are winning the propaganda war."

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Some of the most popular posts falsely claiming Zelenskyy has fled are clearly aimed at an international audience. The news outlet Sputnik ran translated versions of the story not only in English and Spanish but also Portuguese and Vietnamese. A Spanish-language TikTok video created by Sputnik — set to the grooves of the American band Twenty One Pilots — has racked up more than 2.3 million views.

Zelenskyy has declined American offers to help him evacuate the city.

“The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride,” Zelenskyy said last week, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation.

Despite the evidence that Zelenskyy remains in Kyiv, Sputnik and Tass have not removed their claims or added corrections. The story has also been republished in Italy, India and China.

The false story began spreading on Twitter on Friday when George Papadopoulos, a former aide to ex-President Donald Trump, posted a link to the claim in an Italian publication. Papadopoulos served prison time for lying to the FBI during its investigation into Russia’s meddling on behalf of Trump in the 2016 election.

“Breaking: Zelensky, after saying he would not abandon Ukraine, has fled the country,” Papadopoulos tweeted. He did not immediately return a message seeking comment on Friday.

Claims that Zelenskyy has abandoned the capital aren’t the only narratives Russia is trying to use to lower Ukrainian morale, according to Roman Osadchuk, a Ukraine-based analyst with the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab. He said Russian forces have also tried to spread claims that Ukraine has surrendered.

Early in the invasion, a fake account said to be controlled by Zelenskyy appeared on the platform Telegram telling Ukrainians to surrender to the invaders.

“Attacking morale seems to be really important for the Russian forces,” Osadchuk said Friday during an online discussion about the conflict.

After the European Union’s president called for a ban on Russian state media, a wave of tech companies blocked the channels from their platforms within the EU. They include Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, as well as TikTok and Google, the owner of YouTube.

TikTok, which boasts more than one billion users worldwide, has emerged as perhaps the leading front in the information war that’s running parallel to the military invasion, according to Ciaran O’Connor, an analyst who researches online disinformation at the London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue. TikTok’s loose content moderation policies when compared to Facebook or YouTube make it a more effective means of spreading misinformation and propaganda.

One favored tactic used by Russian state media is to highlight pro-Russian comments from Western leaders to divide its opponents, O’Connor said. For example, the Russian news agency RIA Novosti uploaded a TikTok video clip this week featuring Trump’s recent praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin. It has been viewed more than 4 million times.

“This is one of the first major wars in which TikTok has been at the forefront of events on the ground,” O’Connor said, “both for people watching from afar but also those trying to document events, disseminate narratives and shape perceptions.”

Klepper reported from Providence, R.I.

## Judge approves fix to stem race bias in NFL concussion deal

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Black retired football players who were denied payments for dementia in the NFL’s \$1 billion concussion settlement can seek to be retested or have their claims rescored to eliminate racial bias in the testing and payout formula, under a revised plan finalized Friday.

Outrage over the use of “race-norming” in the dementia testing — which assumed that Black people have a lower cognitive baseline score, making it harder for them to show mental declines linked to football — forced the NFL and players’ lawyers back to the negotiating table last year.

The revisions could allow many retired players to resubmit their claims and add \$100 million or more to

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the NFL's legal tab. The NFL, through the fund, has paid out more than \$800 million to date, nearly half for dementia claims. The dementia awards average about \$600,000.

"Thousands of Black players stand to benefit from these changes to the settlement," said lawyer Cyril V. Smith, who represents former players Najeh Davenport and Kevin Henry, whose 2020 race discrimination lawsuit brought the issue to light.

Senior U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody in Philadelphia, who has overseen the NFL concussion case for a decade, dismissed their lawsuit but ordered the parties to address the problem. She approved the negotiated changes in an order filed Friday.

More than 3,300 former players or their families have sought awards for brain injuries linked to their playing days, more than 2,000 of them for moderate to advanced dementia.

The dementia cases have proven the most contentious, and only 3 in 10 claims have been paid to date. Another one-third have been denied, and the rest remain in limbo, often as the claim goes through several layers of review by the claims administrator, medical and legal consultants, audit investigators and judges.

In one recent ruling that shows the difficulty families have faced navigating the claims process, the reviewer bemoaned the long delays experienced by the widow of a former player found after his 2019 death to have advanced CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

His medical records show "progressive cognitive decline and un rebutted evidence that he suffered from CTE at the time of his death," reviewer David Hoffman wrote.

"But those diagnoses, and the supporting medical records, do not fit into the settlement's prescribed boxes for the claimed qualifying diagnosis (of dementia)," said Hoffman, an expert in contract law at the University of Pennsylvania law school.

The player, a Black man who was 57 when he died, also had his scores normed to account for his race, age, education and other factors, in keeping with the protocols used at the time. According to Hoffman, his claim would not qualify for an award even if his tests were rescored under the new race-blind formula.

The vast majority of the league's players — 70% of active players and more than 60% of living retirees — are Black. So the changes are expected to be significant, and potentially costly for the NFL.

The agreement to end race-norming follows months of closed-door negotiations between lawyers for the NFL, the class counsel for the nearly 20,000 retired players, and Smith and others representing Davenport and Henry.

Ken Jenkins and his wife, Amy Lewis, have also fought for the changes, gathering thousands of petitions and pressing the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department to investigate the alleged discrimination.

The binary scoring system used in dementia testing — one for Black people, one for everyone else — was developed by neurologists in the 1990s as a crude way to factor in a patient's socioeconomic background. Experts say it was never meant to be used to determine payouts in a court settlement.

However, it was adopted by both sides in the 2015 settlement that resolved lawsuits accusing the NFL of hiding what it knew about the risk of repeated concussions.

The 65-year settlement also grants financial awards to ex-players with Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. It does not cover CTE — which some call the signature disease of football — except for men diagnosed with it posthumously before April 2015, a deadline set to avoid incentivizing suicides.

Follow Maryclaire Dale on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/Maryclairedale>

## 'I love Berlin': Jewish refugee kids reach safety in Germany

KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Maxim and Shaul had spent the last 52 hours on a bus full of dozens of Jewish refugee children that took them from war-torn Ukraine in the dark of night and across six European borders to safety in Berlin.

Pale, tired and overwhelmed, the two teenagers looked around when they finally arrived in the German



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capital Friday morning. There were lots of police officers in front of their hotel who had cordoned off the street so the 105 children could exit their buses as Jewish women from Berlin's Chabad community spontaneously started singing at the top of their voices to give them a joyous and relieved welcome.

"I love Berlin, it's beautiful," 14-year-old Maxim said a little while later as he sat down to a kosher breakfast of tuna salad, cucumbers, cereal, eggs and pita bread. "Last week we were still sitting in the bunker and the sirens were wailing nonstop."

His friend Shaul, 13, nodded, too tired to say much, straightened his red-checkered kippa and went over to one of the 15 foster home staffers to make sure he and Maxim would be sharing a room in Berlin. The children's last names were withheld because they are minors.

Only three days earlier, Rabbi Yehuda Teichtal, a Berlin rabbi and the head of the local Chabad community, had received a phone call from a rabbi in the Ukrainian port city of Odesa begging him to help get the children and teens from the foster care home Mishpacha — Hebrew for family — to a peaceful and secure place.

"It's been a huge challenge but with the grace of God we worked it out together to bring these precious souls into safety," Teichtal, 49, told The Associated Press. The rabbi and a team of around 100 volunteers from the Chabad community had barely slept since they got the call for help from Odesa.

They soon figured out that traveling by plane would not be an option since about 40 of the children had no passports, only birth certificates. So they talked to diplomats and security officials from Israel, Germany and other European countries the children would have to travel through for help making the 1,000-mile (1,700-kilometer) overland trek come true.

They raised money from Jewish aid groups and told the children to quickly pack warm winter clothes. The teenagers also took along their cell phones, while the little ones clutched their favorite stuffed animals tightly.

"When we got on the road, we told the children that we are going on a winter trip," said Rabbi Mendy Wolff, 25, from Odesa, who accompanied the children on the journey. "They should not feel like refugees for a single moment."

Thanks to the joint international diplomatic efforts the buses — one for the girls and another for the boys — crossed the borders of Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, before finally entering Germany without any problems.

"They made a 'green corridor' for us," Wolff said. When they crossed from Moldova to Romania, the buses were even allowed to use the diplomatic lane, passing a long line of around 100 buses full of other Ukrainian refugees waiting to get into the European Union.

More than 1 million people have fled since Russia invaded Ukraine last week. Several thousand have reached Germany. Many are coming to Berlin, with hundreds arriving daily on trains via Poland. The Berlin mayor, Frankziska Giffey, said earlier this week that around 20,000 refugees from Ukraine are expected to reach the city in the near future.

Most of the children from the Odesa home are foster kids, some are orphans and a few are members of the city's Chabad community who were sent out of the country by parents who couldn't flee their homes. Not all teenagers from the foster care home could come along. Boys aged 18 and older had to stay behind as men of military age are not allowed to leave the country.

After their first breakfast in Berlin, the children grabbed their backpacks and started arguing over who got to share rooms — almost like a regular group of kids on a school trip. Only the sound track was much more international — it was a Babylonian tangle of Ukrainian, Russian, Hebrew, English, German and even some Yiddish.

Baby Tuvia — only 5 weeks old — cried a little as the kids left the breakfast hall for their rooms. Sada, who had just turned 5, proudly held onto a big birthday balloon as she walked through the hallways with one of the caretakers, and Shoshana Khusid, 18, and one of the oldest, stared out of the window worrying about her parents back home.

"I'm still afraid because my mother and father stayed in Ukraine, in Odesa, and all the time something happens there, and I read the news, and all the time I call them and ask, 'What happened?'" the teenager

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said with a worried face. "They tell me it's all OK because they're my parents. That's something not good."

Asked about the future, she got monosyllabic.

"I hope to be back home in two weeks," she said with an insecure smile.

Nobody really knows how long the children will stay in Berlin — it depends on when the war ends in Ukraine — but the community is determined to do everything to make them feel at home as long as needed.

"We assume that they will stay here a little longer," said Roy Frydling, one of Chabad's volunteers. "The idea is that there will be an everyday life here for them soon, that they can go to school and kindergarten."

"They will definitely stay together as one group," Frydling added. He said the plan was to put the children up at the hotel for the first two to four weeks, and that the Chabad community had already started looking for a building where the children can live afterward.

"We've received an outpouring of support from the community and beyond, lots of clothes and other supplies, but what we really need now are financial donations — only the food for all the children costs about 5,000 euros every day," he added.

Alina Chubattaya, 59, the director of the children's home, looked concerned when asked about a possible return date to Odesa.

"My husband, my daughter, my son and my dog, are all still in Odesa," she said with a sad smile. "My heart is there, too," she added. "But I also wanted to take these kids here to safety."

"I hope we will be back in time for Purim," Chubattaya said, referring to the Jewish holiday which begins on the eve of March 16 this year and commemorates the Jews' rescue from persecution in the ancient Persian empire.

"You know, we Jews, we always dream of a better future."

AP writer Ilan Ben Zion contributed from Jerusalem.

## For families, \$6B deal with OxyContin maker is just a start

By JOHN SEEWER and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

For those who lost loved ones in the opioid crisis, making sure the family behind OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma paid a price was never just about money. What many wanted was a chance to confront the Sackler family face to face, to make them feel their pain.

While some may get that chance — at least by video — under a tentative settlement reached Thursday that also would force the Sacklers to pay out billions, the families still are coming away feeling empty, conflicted and angry yet again. There's a bit of hope mixed in, too.

Nothing, though, will bring back any of the lives lost or hold the Sacklers fully accountable, in their eyes.

"I'd like to see the Sacklers bleed all they can, but the bigger picture for me is what they're doing to clean up the mess," said Vicki Meyer Bishop of Clarksburg, Maryland, who lost her 45-year-old son, Brian Meyer, in 2017. "We're all so very worried about the next generation and the next child who will be lost."

The Sacklers, whose wealth has been estimated in court filings at over \$10 billion, will get to hang on to a chunk of their vast fortune and be protected from current and future civil lawsuits over opioids.

The deal, which must be approved by a federal bankruptcy judge, requires the Sacklers to pay as much as \$6 billion, with \$750 million for victims and their survivors. Most of the rest will go to state and local governments to fight the crisis. They also must give up ownership of their company, with the new entity's profits going toward fighting opioid addiction through treatment and education programs.

Some of the survivors of the opioid crisis and relatives of those who died will receive payments. But most will get just a few thousand dollars — not even enough to reimburse the cost of a funeral — and many more who have not filed claims already will be shut out altogether.

"These families do need to get something," said Beth Schmidt, who started a support group in Sykesville, Maryland, after her son Sean died in 2013, one of 13 lost in their town in little over a year. "We have families that can't afford to bury their children. They're choosing cremation because it's less expensive. They shouldn't have to do that."

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The agreement also recommends that the victims be allowed to directly share their heartache with Sackler family members by videoconference at a hearing scheduled for Wednesday.

Meyer Bishop would love to face the Sacklers and show them a picture of her son that's "so big they couldn't look away."

"It's what I see before I fall asleep every night," she said. "I don't even know if that would touch them. I don't think it would."

The Sacklers have been cast as the leading villains in the country's opioid crisis by activists who point to their lack of remorse and long-running efforts to shield their wealth while maintaining a lavish lifestyle. Their role in the epidemic was spotlighted in Hulu's miniseries "Dopesick."

A half-million Americans have died from opioids over the past two decades, a toll that includes victims of prescription painkillers like OxyContin and Vicodin and illicit drugs such as heroin and fentanyl.

"Everyday this goes on, we lose all of these people," said Lynn Wencus, of Wrentham, Massachusetts, whose son Jeff died of an overdose in 2017. "If states use the money the way it's supposed to be, then we will be saving lives."

It bothers her that more money won't end up in the hands of the families, but she also knows nothing would make up for what she and so many others have lost.

"Even if I got a billion dollars, it's not going to bring back my son," she said.

In one of the hardest-fought provisions in the settlement, the Sacklers will be protected from future opioid lawsuits. While they weren't given immunity from criminal charges, there have been no indications they will face any.

Allowing the Sacklers to avoid any more lawsuits or jail time is a dangerous message to send to the pharmaceutical industry or any other business, said activists who have fought for Purdue owners and company officials to be charged with crimes.

"What makes me most angry is they're getting away with it," said Tim Kramer, of Waterford Township, Michigan. "They've got more money than God, so it's not going to hurt them. I'd like to see them go to prison, and a regular prison, not one of those resort prisons."

His common law wife, LeeRae Conn, was 46 when she overdosed in 2018. He found out she was addicted soon after they met a decade earlier.

"No matter what she did, no matter what I did, she couldn't get off it," he said. "She tried."

Sackler family members have never unequivocally offered an apology, but on Thursday issued a statement of regret about the toll of OxyContin.

The settlement comes more than two years after the Stamford, Connecticut-based company filed for bankruptcy while facing some 3,000 lawsuits that accused it of fueling the crisis by aggressively pushing sales of its signature painkiller.

An earlier settlement fell apart last year, but this time the Sacklers agreed to add another \$1 billion and accepted other terms.

"It's money, but there's still no accountability," said Liz Fitzgerald, of Southington, Connecticut, who said she wanted to hear a public apology.

She lost two adult sons, who first used OxyContin in high school, to overdoses in 2013 and 2017.

"My three children have lost two brothers, and I think that a lot more needs to be done to support families because of the traumatic PTSD. They just destroyed our lives," she said.

"I have a granddaughter who lost her dad. No money in the world is going to bring back her dad," Fitzgerald said. "How do you tell a 10-year child that your dad's gone and not even understanding addiction? It's just horrific."

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Associated Press writers Geoff Mulvihill and Susan Haigh contributed to this report.

## As Ukrainians flee, 'we even feel a bit guilty we are OK'

By FLORENT BAJRAMI and ALEXANDER TURNBULL Associated Press

MEDYKA, Poland (AP) — Walking the final 14 miles to Ukraine's border and to safety, Ludmila Sokol was moved by the mounds of clothes and other personal effects that many people discarded as they fled the fighting before her.

"You should have seen things scattered along the road," said the gym teacher from Zaporizhzhia. "Because the farther you carry things, the harder it is."

Like more than 1 million others, she's grappling with the pain of leaving everything behind.

Sokol has found a home in Paris with her former gymnastics coach, a "second mother" whom she first met as a child. "I don't know what will happen tomorrow, but the only thing I know is that everything will be fine because Victoria Andreevna is nearby."

Her host tied a homemade Ukrainian flag to a fishing rod to wave in a small gesture of defiance over Russia's invasion.

The number of refugees who have fled Ukraine has now reached 1.2 million, the International Organization for Migration said Friday. This could become the "biggest refugee crisis this century," the U.N. has said, predicting that as many as 4 million people could leave. The European Union decided Thursday to grant people fleeing Ukraine temporary protection and residency permits.

The influx is "enormous, enormous," U.N. refugee chief Filippo Grandi told The Associated Press during a visit to a border crossing in Moldova.

He urged more international support for host countries. "You see behind me, there's 20 kilometers (12 miles) of cars in line waiting to come."

One newly arrived refugee in Romania, Anton Kostyuchyk, struggled to hold back tears as he described leaving everything, even his parents, behind in Kyiv and sleeping in churches with his wife and three children during their journey out.

"I'm leaving my home, my country. I was born there, and I lived there, and what now?" he said.

Amid loss, gestures of generosity abound. At a refugee camp in Siret, Romania, volunteers and emergency workers paused to hold a birthday party for a 7-year-old girl from Ukraine, complete with cake, balloons and song.

The U.N. children's agency said a half-million children in Ukraine had to flee their homes in the first week of Russia's invasion, though it didn't say how many left the country.

In the small village of Uszka in Hungary, pastor Edgar Kovacs opened the only room of his church to refugees. It was quickly filled with 29 members of a Roma family from Didova, Ukraine. "I have a big family, so when we heard on the news what happened next door, our hearts began beating faster. And my whole family and I tried to help," the pastor said.

Some Ukrainians had little but grief.

"My colleague was shot by Russian soldiers when she tried to go out of Kyiv to Zhytomyr. And she was shot, she is dead now, unfortunately," said Vladislav Stoyka, a doctor from Kyiv who had been in Slovakia on vacation when he woke up the day of Russia's invasion to find himself a refugee. He said the slain woman was a pediatric doctor. Now he seeks to move on to Germany or the Czech Republic, part of a growing wave westward.

"Many people are also going to Bratislava, to Prague, to Germany," said Mihail Aleksa, a Slovak volunteer with the Red Cross. "Very important thing is that if they have passports, you know, they can get nearly everywhere in Europe now for free."

In the Netherlands, 50 refugees arrived Friday in Waddinxveen where Mayor Evert Jan Nieuwenhuis told local broadcaster Omroep West he was glad the town could help "even if it is just a drop in the ocean."

But many are finding new homes far from Europe. After a 23-hour flight, more than 80 people, including Ukrainian family members, arrived in Mexico City early Friday.

"It's a sense of security, of relief, but at the same time, we have mixed feelings. And we even feel a bit guilty that we are OK when we know that our relatives are in a bunker right now," said one evacuee, Alba

Becerra. "My son's father is in a cellar, my daughter-in-law's parents are also in a bunker, all in Ukraine."

Some who left are choosing to return. At the Medyka border post with Poland, 65-year-old Katarzyna Gordyczuk boarded a bus preparing to cross back again. She had come with her grandchildren but was going back to join the rest of her family.

"I left my farm, my husband, my children who are still in Ukraine," she said. "I am worried. I am worried." Her bus home was nearly empty.

Turnbull reported from Paris.

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

## Russia's invasion of Ukraine leaves global trade in tatters

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Sanctions on Russia are starting to wreak havoc on global trade, with potentially devastating consequences for energy and grain importers while also generating ripple effects across a world still struggling with pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, hundreds of tankers and bulk carriers have been diverted away from the Black Sea, while dozens more have been stranded at ports and at sea unable to unload their valuable cargoes. Russia is a leading exporter of grains and a major supplier of crude oil, metals, wood and plastics — all used worldwide in a range of products and by a multitude of industries from steelmakers to car manufacturers.

Only a small handful of Russia's 2,000 cargo and tanker ships have been sanctioned by Western powers, but freezing the assets of the country's biggest banks means the business of importing and exporting from Russia will take a major hit. Intensifying the squeeze are companies from Apple and Nike to major shippers like Maersk abandoning the country, whose extensive trade ties with the West have been all but severed.

"This is an earthquake like we've never seen before," said Ami Daniel, a co-founder of Windward, a maritime intelligence firm that advises governments. He added, "Companies are going well beyond what's legally required and taking actions based on their own values before their customers even demand it."

One potential escape valve for Russian exports is China, whose fast-growing economy is thirsty for natural resources. But China, perhaps the biggest beneficiary of globalization, so far has shown little appetite to fully back President Vladimir Putin despite abstaining from a U.N. vote condemning the land grab.

The strains are already being felt at Interunity Group, a family-run Greek shipping company whose 60 oil tankers and bulk carriers are operated by dozens of Russian and Ukrainian sea captains and officers.

After the invasion, the Russian part of Interunity's workforce wondered how they'd get home after the European Union imposed a flight ban on their country. The Ukrainian half didn't know if they'd have a home to return to.

One Ukrainian senior officer stranded on a tanker in the Gulf of Mexico was so distraught that he demanded to be allowed to disembark months before his contract ended, said George Mangos, one of Interunity's directors.

"He told me he wanted to get off at the next port so he could fight for his homeland," said Mangos, who expressed admiration for his patriotism. "Operating a highly sophisticated tanker with a dangerous cargo is stressful even under normal situations, so all you can do is ask people to focus on the job and leave the politics aside. It's hard, but these are very stoic people, and I've been impressed by their dedication."

So far, the war's impact on global trade has been most severe in the Black Sea, where Russian and Ukrainian ports are major hubs for wheat and corn. Traffic has ground to a halt, effectively shutting down the world's second-largest grain exporting region.

Unlike oil production, which can be ramped up quickly elsewhere, boosting grain supplies takes time and the sheer volume that could be diverted as a result of war and sanctions — Ukraine accounts for 16% of global corn exports and together with Russia 30% of wheat exports — means poorer countries that

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depend on imports could face major supply shocks.

"The question is not whether there will be serious economic effects and critical food shortages in already fragile countries, the question is what Russia will do with that and how the West will react," said Rohini Ralby, a director at I.R. Consilium, a U.S.-based maritime consulting firm.

Among the countries most at risk are Egypt, India and Turkey, all of which rely heavily on Russia for everything from staples used to make flatbread to natural gas and tourism.

Around 78% of Turkey's wheat imports come from Russia and another 9% from Ukraine. Much of those supplies are used in Turkey's food industry, a major exporter itself. India imports about 80% of its oil, much of it from Russia, and metals from Russia to supply the world's fifth-largest automobile industry.

In the U.S., the biggest impact will be felt at the gas pump, where higher prices are expected to add to inflation already running at the fastest rate in four decades. Russia was the third-largest source of oil products sold in the U.S. last year — behind only Mexico and Canada — and responsible for 8% of all imports. Russia is also the United States' second-largest supplier of platinum, a metal used to build exhausts for automobiles.

But overall, Russia was only the 20th-largest supplier of goods for the United States, according to the U.S. trade data.

While the Biden administration has held back from a blanket Russian trade embargo or targeting Russia's energy sector, to limit the pain on the West, that's done little to calm markets.

Wheat prices have jumped more than 55% since the week before the invasion. Oil prices, which had been steadily rising since the start of the year due to demand from a recovering global economy, soared past \$110 a barrel for the first time since 2013.

And the rates charged to charter giant oil tankers worldwide have jumped as much as 400% as oil traders scramble to secure capacity that become suddenly scarce. Windward estimates there are 87 million barrels of Russian oil worth \$10 billion that are floating in the ocean, struggling to find buyers.

It's not yet clear how economic warfare on Russia will shake out and what other unintended consequences may be in store. While overcompliance with sanctions is a frequent problem, never in the past have restrictions been imposed so swiftly and coordinated so closely among U.S. allies to target a global power.

The situation alarms Tinglong Dai, a business professor who studies supply chains at Johns Hopkins University. Since the end of the Cold War, the bedrock of global trade has been a separation of geopolitics and business and an assumption that rational decision-making will always prevail, Dai said.

"Both of those have been destroyed by Russia," says Dai, adding that a new sort of "Iron Curtain" could soon emerge, with Russia and its allies on one side and the West on the other.

"It's no longer possible to avoid picking sides, and the consequences of this reconfiguration of global supply chains in terms of more poverty, loss of innovation and job opportunities is something we will all have to pay for," he said.

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Associated Press writers Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, and Ashok Sharma in New Delhi contributed to this report.

## **Tearful goodbyes at Kyiv train station during war in Ukraine**

By VADIM GHIRDA and EMILIO MORENATTI Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A woman crouches down in the doorway of a blue and yellow train at a station in Kyiv, Ukraine's embattled capital city. Her husband stands on the platform below and cranes his neck up for a kiss that both hope will not be their last.

As the train door closes, the woman holds up their 2-year-old son and he smiles and presses his tiny hand against the smudged window to wave goodbye to his father, who is staying behind to fight the Russian invaders.

Nearby, a grandmother reaches out to bid farewell to her daughter and grandson, who are on the train

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headed toward the border with Poland. She backs toward a wall of the train station and is soon overcome with emotion. She places her hands over her mouth, squeezes her eyes shut tight and lets the tears fall.

These are the goodbyes that have been repeated across Ukraine in the week since Russia invaded and began pounding the country's cities with bombs. The UN says the fighting has sent more than 1 million people fleeing the country, a number that is already the swiftest exodus of refugees this century and one that could soon skyrocket even further.

Those leaving are overwhelmingly women and children. Ukrainian men have been ordered to stay and fight in the war.

At the train station in Kyiv crowds of people carrying luggage stand in the cold as they wait for their chance to board a train. Mothers hold children bundled in winter jackets and stocking caps, some clutching onto stuffed animals. Men help the elderly get to the train, even using a luggage cart to carry one woman with crutches.

Up and down the platform there are tearful embraces.

Once on the train, many of those leaving press their faces against the windows for a last glimpse at those staying behind. One woman reaches her hand out the door for a fleeting brush of a loved one's cheek.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 5, the 64th day of 2022. There are 301 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 5, 1770, the Boston Massacre took place as British soldiers who'd been taunted by a crowd of colonists opened fire, killing five people.

On this date:

In 1849, Zachary Taylor was inaugurated as the 12th president of the United States. (The swearing-in was delayed by a day because March 4 fell on a Sunday.)

In 1868, the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson began in the U.S. Senate, with Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase presiding. Johnson, the first U.S. president to be impeached, was accused of "high crimes and misdemeanors" stemming from his attempt to fire Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; the trial ended on May 26 with Johnson's acquittal.

In 1933, in German parliamentary elections, the Nazi Party won 44 percent of the vote; the Nazis joined with a conservative nationalist party to gain a slender majority in the Reichstag.

In 1946, Winston Churchill delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in which he said: "From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an 'iron curtain' has descended across the continent, allowing police governments to rule Eastern Europe."

In 1953, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin died after three decades in power.

In 1963, country music performers Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins died in the crash of their plane, a Piper Comanche, near Camden, Tennessee, along with pilot Randy Hughes (Cline's manager).

In 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons went into effect after 43 nations ratified it.

In 1979, NASA's Voyager 1 space probe flew past Jupiter, sending back photographs of the planet and its moons.

In 1982, comedian John Belushi was found dead of a drug overdose in a rented bungalow in Hollywood; he was 33.

In 1998, NASA scientists said enough water was frozen in the loose soil of the moon to support a lunar base and perhaps, one day, a human colony.

In 2004, Martha Stewart was convicted in New York of obstructing justice and lying to the government about why she'd unloaded her Imclone stock just before the price plummeted; her ex-stockbroker, Peter Bacanovic, also was found guilty in the stock scandal. (Each later received a five-month prison sentence.)

In 2020, Palestinian officials closed the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem over fears of the coronavirus.

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Officials ordered a cruise ship with 3,500 people aboard to stay back from the California coast until passengers and crew could be tested; a traveler from its previous voyage died of the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (neh-ten-YAH'-hoo) met at the White House, where Obama urged pressure and diplomacy to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb while Netanyahu emphasized his nation's right to a pre-emptive attack.

Five years ago: Throngs of people converged in the city of Selma, Alabama, for the annual re-enactment of a key event in the civil rights movement: the 1965 march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge by demonstrators seeking voting rights.

One year ago: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's health department confirmed that members of his COVID-19 task force altered a state Health Department report to omit the full number of nursing home patients killed by the coronavirus, but insisted the changes were made because of concerns about the data's accuracy. California relaxed guidelines for reopening outdoor venues, clearing the way for fans to attend opening-day baseball games and return to Disneyland nearly a year after coronavirus restrictions shut down major entertainment spots. Movie theaters in New York City reopened, operating at only 25% capacity. Pope Francis began the first-ever papal visit to Iraq with an appeal for Iraqis to protect the country's diversity, and for the country's embattled and dwindling Christian community to persevere.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Paul Sand is 90. Actor James B. Sikking is 88. Actor Fred Williamson is 84. Actor Samantha Eggar is 83. Actor Michael Warren is 76. Actor Eddie Hodges is 75. Singer Eddy Grant is 74. Rock musician Alan Clark (Dire Straits) is 70. Actor-comedian Marsha Warfield is 68. Magician Penn Jillette is 67. Actor Adriana Barraza is 66. Actor Talia Balsam is 63. Rock singers Charlie and Craig Reid (The Proclaimers) are 60. Pro Football Hall of Famer Michael Irvin is 56. Actor Paul Blackthorne is 53. Rock musician John Frusciante (froo-SHAN'-tee) is 52. Singer Rome is 52. Actor Kevin Connolly is 48. Actor Eva Mendes is 48. Actor Jill Ritchie is 48. Actor Jolene Blalock is 47. Model Niki Taylor is 47. Actor Kimberly McCullough is 44. Actor Karolina Wydra is 41. Singer-songwriter Amanda Shires is 40. Actor Dominique McElligott is 36. Actor Sterling Knight is 33. Actor Jake Lloyd is 33. Actor Micah Fowler is 24.