

# Groton Daily Independent

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"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

-Maya Angelou



## 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

## UpComing Events

### Tuesday, March 8

Boys SoDak16 - Groton Area vs. Mt. Vernon/  
Plankinton, 7:30 pm in Redfield

### Thursday, March 10

End of Third Quarter  
Middle School Talent Show, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

### Saturday, March 12

Show Choir at Aberdeen Competition

### Sunday, March 13

Daylight Savings Time - turn clocks forward 1 hour

### Monday, March 14

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

## Vender Fair

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

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

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

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## **Tietz, Kurtz named to All-NEC Boys Basketball Team**

Two Groton Area boys basketball players have been named to the All-Northeast Conference Team. Sophomore Lane Tietz was named to the first team while Senior Kaden Kurtz was named to the second team.

Other members of the first team are Tyler O'Neill, Clark/Willow Lake; Jaydon Keller, Webster; Cooper Schiernbeck, Deuel; and Bennett Schwenn, Milbank.

Other members to the second team are Tyson Stevenson and Easton Neuendorf, Hamlin; Ty Langager, Sisseton; and Aidan Fredrickson, Britton-Hecla.

Members of the third team are Noah Boykin and Naplan Felberg, Clark/Willow Lake; Peyton Osborn Redfield; Brennan Kessler, Hamlin; and Trey Maaland, Deuel.

## **Middle School Music Department to host Annual Talent Show**

On Thursday March 10th, the Groton MS School Music Department will be hosting our Middle School Talent Show. Theme is "The Magic of Disney." The event will be held at the Groton High Old Gym at 7:00 pm. The talent show is a fundraiser for the MS Music Students to earn money for their future music trips. The show will consist of talent acts made up of middle school students and popcorn. For people that purchase tickets in advance there will be a drawing for special prizes at the end of the show. The general admission cost is \$5.00. Tickets will not be sold at the door, but a \$5.00 donation will be requested. The donations will be given to the Miller Music Department to help with supplies from their recent school explosion. The 6th Grade Band, JH Band, and JH Choir will also perform. You can get your tickets from any MS Music Student. Come enjoy a fun-filled night of talent and music. Thank you all for your support!

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## **GFP Commission Holds March Meeting**

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their March meeting at the Missouri Avenue Events Center in Pierre on March 3-4. The Commission carried over proposals from their January meeting and passed several other proposals, which will now be up for public comment.

### **PARKS PROPOSALS**

The Commission continued the discussion to allow for the cancellation of campsites and lodging facilities without fee for a period of time after a reservation is made. After that period has lapsed, a fee of one-half of the first night's camping or lodging fees would be assessed for both types of overnight use.

The Commission also continued to discuss two administrative rules to align business practices and requirements for license agents as part of launching a new online system. Go Outdoors South Dakota launched December 15, 2021. This system combines the purchases of hunting and fishing licenses with our state parks camping reservations and other purchases.

For more information on these proposals, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/).

Additionally, the Commission concurred with the department that an entrance license should be required to access the boat ramp at Lake Vermillion.

### **WILDLIFE PROPOSALS**

The Commission proposed the elk and bighorn sheep hunting seasons for 2022. For more information on these proposals, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/).

Black Hills Elk -The Commission proposed to adjust the total number of available licenses from 450 "any elk" and 490 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 940 licenses) to 535 "any elk" and 730 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 1,265 licenses).

The Commission also proposed to modify the boundaries of BHE-H9A and BHE-H9B to correct the unit boundary and to establish BHE-H4B.

Prairie Elk - The Commission proposed to adjust the number of licenses available from 78 "any elk" and 178 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 256 licenses) to 102 "any elk" and 175 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 277 licenses).

The Commission also proposed to modify Unit PRE-9A. This proposal would split the current unit and establish a new unit to include the portion of Meade County. Also proposed was to correct season dates for units PRE-11D, PRE-35A and PRE-35B. Finally, the Commission established units and season dates for PRE-35C, PRE-35D, PRE-35E, and PRE-35F for antlerless elk licenses.

Archery Elk - The Commission proposed to adjust the number of licenses available from 147 "any elk" and 70 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 217 licenses) to 182 "any elk" and 90 "antlerless" (total of 272 licenses).

Custer State Park Elk - The Commission proposed to adjust the total number of available licenses from 9 "any elk" licenses to no more than 12 "any elk" licenses.

Custer State Park Early Archery Elk - The Commission proposed to adjust the total number of available licenses from 3 "any elk" to 4 "any elk" licenses.

Bighorn Sheep Season - The Commission proposed to increase the number of "ram bighorn sheep" licenses from 8 to 11. They also proposed to change the mandatory orientation meeting from "preceding the opening day of the season" to "preceding the first day of hunting by the license holder" and to eliminate Unit BHS-ZZ1 for preference points.

### **Public Waters**

The Commission proposed to remove no boating zones and allow for non-motorized watercraft within the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge and the Waubay State Game Bird Refuge.

GFP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been working in collaboration to align state and federal regulations within the USFWS Refuge System, resulting in more recreational opportunities within the refuge boundaries.

Additionally, the Commission proposed to establish a no wake zone at a new boat ramp at Lake Poinsett State Recreation Area in Brookings County. The proposal would also modify the no wake zone at Belle Fourche Reservoir in Butte County to include all boat ramps.

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## **Lake Francis Case Walleye Regulations**

Current walleye regulations for the lower portion of Lake Francis Case, from the northern Gregory-Charles Mix County Line to Fort Randall Dam, require the first four walleyes caught to be kept and the 15-inch minimum length limit does not apply, while fishing through the ice. The Commission accepted a petition in January and proposed removing the regulation that requires the first four walleyes caught through the ice to be kept by anglers. The petition cited the reduced opportunity for anglers and local businesses from this current regulation. At their March meeting, the Commission modified the proposal to also include removing the exemption to the 15-inch minimum length limit while fishing through the ice. By removing both these special regulations, harvest regulations would be the same for all portions of Lake Francis Case.

## **Missouri River Pierre Waterfowl Refuge**

The Commission proposed to increase the size of the Pierre Waterfowl Refuge. The expansion of this refuge would add the area downriver from LaFramboise Island to the tip of Farm Island on Lake Sharpe. The refuge would also include from Corp Bay to the tip of Peoria Flats on Lake Oahe. The DeGrey Waterfowl Refuge would remain unchanged. This proposal was brought by the Commission in response to a petition submitted regarding this refuge.

## **Indian Springs/Antelope Lake**

The Commission proposed to change the date requirements where no shooting from a boat is allowed on Indian Springs/Antelope Lake in Clark County from Oct. 10 - Dec. 31 to Oct. 20 - Dec. 31.

## **License Allocation**

The Commission proposed to remove the requirement for unlimited access permits for archery, muzzle-loader, mentor, youth, and apprentice deer license holders to hunt certain deer hunting units and public lands.

They also proposed to limit the number of archery access permits for Unit WRD-27L to no more than 20 "any deer" access permits for residents and no more than 5 "any deer" access permits for nonresidents.

## **State Migratory Bird Certification**

The Commission proposed to remove the inclusion of the state migratory bird certification permit with the nonresident spring snow goose, nonresident early fall Canada goose licenses, nonresident 3-day licenses, nonresident youth waterfowl licenses and decrease applicable license fees by \$5 each.

## **Waterfowl Seasons**

The Commission proposed several waterfowl seasons. Some of the highlighted proposed changes to these seasons are:

To include mergansers in the daily duck limit bag. Previously, mergansers had separate bag limits.

Remove restriction for nonresident hunters in the counties of Beadle, Brookings, Hanson, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Miner, Moody, Sanborn, Turner, Union, and Minnehaha counties for the early Canada goose hunting season.

## **Public Comments Currently Being Accepted**

If you would like to comment on any of these proposals, visit [gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions](http://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions). Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave Pierre, SD.

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on April 3.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held April 7-8 in Watertown.

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**SoDak16 Boys  
Basketball on  
GDILIVE.COM**



NO TICKET REQUIRED! FREE TO WATCH



## **Good Luck Tigers from the GDILIVE.COM sponsors**

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Groton Ford  
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## Russia-Ukraine Conflict Continues to Drive Gas Prices Higher Record Breaking Pump Prices Anticipated

Average Gas Prices (per gallon, regular unleaded gasoline)		
South Dakota		National
\$3.70	Today	\$4.06
\$3.43	Week Ago	\$3.61
\$3.27	Month Ago	\$3.44
\$2.74	Year Ago	\$2.76

Source: AAA (<https://gasprices.aaa.com/>)

### National Overview:

As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues, the price of crude oil continues to soar, leading to higher pump prices in the U.S and, AAA expects the upward current trend to continue in step.

The national average for a gallon of gas is \$4.06, a staggering 45 cents more than a week ago, 62 cents more than a month ago and \$1.30 more than a year ago. The national average has not been this high since July 2008.

Today's national gas price average is only 5 cents below the highest national average ever recorded -- \$4.11 on July 17, 2008 -- making a record pump price imminently likely.

Last week, the International Energy Agency (IEA) announced a coordinated release of crude oil from its 31 member countries' strategic reserves, including the U.S., Germany, Canada, South Korea, and Mexico, to help counter the impact of rising crude prices. On Friday, IEA said member states committed to releasing a total of 61.7 million bbl from their strategic reserves to reassure markets roiled by the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This amount—half of which is expected to come from the U.S.—is the largest coordinated release since IEA was founded in 1974. Despite this announcement, the impact on pricing has been limited given that the amount of oil planned for release is small in comparison to the amount that flows daily from Russia to other countries around the globe. According to IEA, Russia exports approximately 5 million b/d of crude oil, representing about 12% of its global trade.

### Perspective:

South Dakota's average gas price is 36 cents below the national average, ranking the Mount Rushmore State as 5th lowest gas prices in the nation.

South Dakota's average gas price rose 27 cents in the past week and today's state average price is 43 cents higher than a month ago and 96 cents higher than one year ago.

As of today, 21 states plus Washington, DC, have an average price of \$4/gallon or higher.

Today's National Extremes:

High – California – \$5.34/gallon

Low – Missouri – \$3.62/gallon

Highest Recorded Average Price:

South Dakota \$4.09 (July 18, 2008)

National \$4.11 (July 17, 2008)

According to new data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), total domestic gasoline stocks decreased by 500,000 bbl to 246 million bbl last week. Meanwhile, gasoline demand rose slightly from 8.66 million b/d to 8.74 million b/d. The increase in gas demand and a reduction in total supply contribute to rising pump prices but, increasing oil prices play the leading role in pushing gas prices higher.

### What Can Drivers Do?

There are things drivers can do to increase gas mileage and help save a little money when they go to fill up their tanks:

Shop around for the best prices. Drivers can use tools such as the free AAA mobile app to find and

compare current gas prices closest to their location.

Take advantage of gas discounts, sometimes offered by fuel retailers and grocery store chains

Make sure your car is tuned up and air filters are clean

Properly inflate your tires

Stick to the speed limit and avoid fast, jackrabbit starts

Remove excess cargo weight or external luggage carriers or racks, all of which can lower gas mileage

Only use more expensive premium gasoline if your vehicle specifically requires it. Otherwise, less expensive regular 87 octane unleaded is fine for most cars. Be sure to check your owner's manual.

### **Oil Market Dynamics:**

At the close of Friday's formal trading session, WTI increased by \$8.01 to settle at \$115.68. Crude prices continue to surge in response to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. As the conflict continues, the oil markets will likely respond by increasing the price of crude oil to reflect more risk of disruption to tight global oil supplies this week. Additionally, EIA reported that total domestic crude stocks decreased by 2.6 million bbl last week to 413.4 million bbl. The current stock level is approximately 15% lower than at the end of February 2021, contributing to pressure on domestic crude prices.

### **Additional Details:**

Find today's average gas price for each county in South Dakota at <https://gasprices.aaa.com/?state=SD> (hover cursor over each county to see local price)

Find gas prices for select metro areas Rapid City, Sioux Falls and North Sioux City at <https://gasprices.aaa.com/?state=SD> (scroll down to "South Dakota Metro Average Prices" section and use arrows to expand)

Motorists can find current gas prices along their route with the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. The app can also be used to map a route, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance. Learn more at [AAA.com/mobile](https://AAA.com/mobile).

## **Elderly and disabled South Dakotans have until April 1 to apply for property tax relief**

PIERRE, S.D. – Elderly and disabled South Dakotans have until April 1, 2022, to apply for property tax relief under South Dakota's Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program.

Under the program, a qualifying homeowner's property assessment is prevented from increasing for tax purposes. If the actual value of the home increases, the homeowner still pays property taxes on the lower value.

To be eligible for the Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program, individuals must meet the following qualifications:

- Have income of less than \$30,423 for a single-member household (Only one individual in the household) or less than \$38,029 for a multiple-member household.
- Have owned or retained a life estate in a single-family dwelling for at least one year and have been a resident of South Dakota for at least one year.
  - Have resided in the single-family dwelling for at least 200 days of the previous calendar year
  - Be 65 years of age or older or disabled (as defined by the Social Security Act)
  - Un-remarried widows/widowers of those who previously qualified for the program may still qualify in some circumstances.

The valuation limit for the program is \$208,828 or more of full and true value, meaning that properties valued above the limit are not eligible unless the applicant has previously qualified.

Applications must be submitted to your local county treasurer's office by the April 1 deadline. Applications are available at your local county treasurer's offices or can be printed from the Department of Revenue's website at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/pt38>. For more information, please visit <https://dor.sd.gov/individuals/taxes/property-tax/relief-programs/#freeze> or call us at (800) 829-9188, option 2.

## Gov. Noem Signs Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed 24 bills into law: (You can click on the bill number to get the entire bill information)

[SB 1](#) codifies legislation enacted in 2021.

[SB 2](#) publishes voter-approved initiated constitutional amendments and initiated measures in the session laws.

[SB 6](#) revises provisions related to prohibited conduct by schools and landlords related to medical cannabis.

[SB 7](#) revises provisions related to custody and visitation rights by medical cannabis cardholders.

[SB 15](#) revises provisions providing that certain professions are not subject to discipline for certain conduct relating to medical cannabis.

[SB 17](#) revises provisions regarding cost reimbursement associated with medical cannabis.

[SB 68](#) revises holiday pay for state employees.

[SB 101](#) revises provisions regarding the sale or service of alcoholic beverages by persons under the age of twenty-one.

[SB 148](#) revises annuity sales standards.

[HB 1001](#) revises the freeze on assessments for dwellings of disabled and senior citizens.

[HB 1013](#) makes an appropriation for certain costs related to Capitol Lake.

[HB 1018](#) makes an appropriation for the construction of a storage garage in Rapid City.

[HB 1019](#) makes an appropriation for the payment of extraordinary litigation expenses.

[HB 1037](#) revises the penalty for certain willful violations by grain buyers and grain warehouse operators.

[HB 1060](#) consolidates certain domestication provisions in the Uniform Limited Liability Company Act.

[HB 1079](#) revises provisions regarding court transcript costs.

[HB 1082](#) revises the motor vehicle excise tax on vehicles leased for more than twenty-eight days to include certain off-road vehicles.

[HB 1087](#) revises certain provisions regarding records that are not open to inspection and copying and deliberations in an executive or closed meeting.

[HB 1118](#) clarifies when a delivery facilitation contractor may be considered an independent contractor.

[HB 1122](#) requires criminal background checks for medical technicians and advanced life support personnel.

[HB 1123](#) establishes licensure for rural emergency hospitals.

[HB 1128](#) protects the integrity of reemployment assistance.

[HB 1131](#) provides for a revocation of hunting, trapping, or fishing privileges.

[HB 1286](#) permits municipalities to contribute more to the cost of insurance provided to certain officers or retired employees.

Governor Noem has signed 86 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.



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## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

### NFL Combine

Over the past week, the best college football players from around the country took part in the annual NFL Combine. For many in NFL front offices, the Combine is simply a networking event that allows them to catch up with old friends and colleagues. For others, it is their first chance to look at many of these NFL draft prospects in person. For the Vikings' front office, there were a few prospects that they likely had their eye on more than others.

### Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner—CB (Cincinnati)

Coming into the Combine week, many NFL draft experts claimed that it was a three-person race on who would be the first cornerback taken in the 2022 NFL Draft—Derek Stingley, Trent McDuffie, and Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner. However, that claim was quickly curtailed when many rumors started to swirl that most, if not all of the NFL front offices, believed that Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner was the clear-cut number one cornerback in this year's draft.

For a Vikings team whose cornerback room has been decimated in talent over the past couple of years, getting a guy like Gardner would be a huge boost to the team. At the Combine, Gardner measured in at 6'2", which means he is a whole 3" taller than the average height of NFL cornerbacks. Not only is Gardner tall, but he is very athletic. Gardner's 40-yard dash time of 4.41 seconds set the record for the fastest 40-yard dash time in the history of the NFL Combine for a cornerback of his height.

Sadly, Gardner's impressive performance at the NFL Combine might have boosted his draft stock so high that he might be picked well before the Vikings' draft pick at 12.

### David Ojabo—DE (Michigan)

Under the Rick Spielman era, the Vikings never used a first-round pick on a defensive end. The reason for this was likely because the Vikings had such success finding such dynamic defensive ends later in the draft such as Everson Griffen (4th round pick) and Danielle Hunter (3rd round pick). However, with Rick Spielman being no longer with the Vikings, that philosophy might change.

Many NFL draft experts are claiming that the 2022 NFL Draft is rich with defensive end talent. Although the Vikings would like to get one of the top guys in Aidan Hutchinson or Kayvon Thibodeaux, the Vikings might have to settle on a guy from the second tier of the defensive end pool.

One name that sticks out that the Vikings might take is David Ojabo. Ojabo is an interesting prospect in that he did not start playing football until he was 17-years old. However, what Ojabo lacks in experience, he makes up for in insane athleticism. At the Combine this past week, Ojabo put on a show, posting ran a 40-yard dash time of 4.55. Ojabo's freakish athleticism might be enough to intrigue a team like the Vikings to draft a guy with so little experience but so much untapped potential.

### Looking Forward

With the NFL Combine over, the NFL free agency is set to begin here next week. On March 14, NFL teams will be allowed to start talking to the various free agents on the market. On March 16, teams will then be able to officially sign whatever free agents they made deals with. And on top of that, the NFL trading period begins.

Unlike most NFL offseasons, this year's offseason could perhaps have a ton of movement of franchise-level quarterbacks. Aaron Rodgers might leave Green Bay, Russell Wilson might ask to be traded from Seattle, the Deshaun Watson fiasco has yet to be settled, and it appears the Colts want to move on from Carson Wentz.

For the Vikings, they have made it clear that they will not trade Kirk Cousins. However, if we remember, they said the same things for Percy Harvin and Stefon Diggs. The moral of the story is, if the Vikings get a trade offer they like, Kirk Cousins might be on the move.

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That's Life by Tony Bender

## Getting back with the Beatles

I have this song stuck in my head:

Two of us riding nowhere  
Spending someone's hard-earned pay  
You and me Sunday driving  
Not arriving on our way back home  
—Two of Us, Lennon, McCartney

I was oblivious, just 10, when the Beatles were stumbling toward a finish line all their own, miles ahead of the pack. The album was "Let it Be," and I just (finally) watched Peter Jackson's reworking of documentary footage of the making of the album. It's called "Get Back."

"Let it Be," was officially the last album released (in 1970) after its bits and pieces had been assembled by Phil Spector. "Abbey Road," in 1969, was the last time they worked together. Then, the breakup. I remember that. It was as if the world had changed, and it had. The Beatles had changed it.

"Let it Be" has been described as a bit of a crash landing because it fell short of ambitions—to record 14 new songs without the studio tricks and fixes that had become de rigueur for the band that had years ago abandoned touring. But how can any effort that produced "Let it Be," "The Long and Winding Road," "Across the Universe," and "Get Back" be considered a failure?

They've got less than a month to become a band again in the truest sense because Ringo is set to star in a movie at the end of the month. Some of the songs in progress eventually land on "Abbey Road."

Although the eight hours of footage show the lads, all in their late 20's, exhausted and headed in different directions, the connection between them, especially between Lennon and McCartney, is often joyful.

By this time Lennon, Yoko at his side, has passively ceded leadership to McCartney who struggles to bring George along. He's dour. He's got a catalog of songs but remains limited to two cuts on this album. Ringo, is, well, Ringo. He's the quiet Beatle, it seems, but when George quits the band during the sessions, and they must contemplate the end, there are tears in his eyes.

Over a private lunch, John grabs the reins for a moment, admonishing Paul for his treatment of George, showing empathy that comes through in so much of his music. After a couple of tries, they woo George back and the beat goes on. George even laughs and smiles. They're still brothers, sure, but brothers growing up and apart.

It takes fate in the guise of Billy Preston to energize the sessions. An impromptu visit leads to his recruitment and magic, enough so that the Beatles contemplate making him a fifth Beatle. But Paul notes that there are enough problems with four.

They're adrift and ill-suited for the business their music has become. In charge of their own affairs for the first time because Brian Epstein, their manager, had committed suicide in 1967. "Mr. Epstein," they call him respectfully. It's especially poignant when you remember that these were tough young men from a tough port city. I interviewed Bobby Vee once and he reminisced about a bus tour across England with the Beatles who were just about to break out. "John and Paul had fistfights on the bus!"

Somehow, the fates conspired, "Mr. Epstein" heard and saw something special in them, and they became bigger than any musical group before or after. Transformational. But they're tired.

Still, there's a sweetness between them. Paul defends John's new direction and Yoko's presence. John exhibits extraordinary patience as Paul searches for a sound he just can't find. And when they sing together, they're kindred spirits. A partnership for the ages.

It culminates with the concert on the roof of Apple Studios. They rise to the occasion as a crowd mills beneath them and bobbies are dispatched to shut them down for disturbing the peace. God, it's glorious. Even elderly passersby approve. The last song they ever play together live is "Get Back," with police authorities hovering.

Get back to where you once belonged.

John turns back to his microphone. "I'd like to say thank you on behalf of the group and ourselves, and I hope we've passed the audition."

Oh, my, yes.

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## I survived the update

One of the biggest challenges that I face in the computer era are the updates to the computer. More importantly, the major ones. I always fear that when it gets done, either the computer will fail to work or some of the programs will cease to function.

Monday was one of those days. I had created a file at my home computer. The file went to the cloud. Which is nice because I was able to download it to my laptop to print it off at the office. I downloaded the file and then tried to open it. Apparently, the program I used at home was a newer version because it said it could not open up a newer file. I had a 2022 version of Indesign at home while the laptop had the 2021 version. I was left with two options - either convert the

file from a 2022 file to a 2021 file or update the program from 2021 to 2022. I opted to do the update.

I clicked on the update file. I got a message stating that my operating system was too old and that it needed to be updated before we could update the updated program. So checked my software update and sure enough, there was one that needed to be done. I proceeded to try and do the operating system update.

Then I got another message stating that I needed an additional 16 gigs of free space on the computer in order to do the update. Oh, good grief. So I started moving files to my external hard drive and deleting some files. After about 45 minutes of doing that, I finally got it freed up. It was good to go. It would now take an hour to download the file. So I went back to work figuring I would tackle the install process when I got off work.

Well, I got off work and came down to the office to finish the process. I was pretty excited that everything was going well. I clicked on the icon to do the update, agreed to its terms of agreement, and then I got another message. I needed to free up an ADDITIONAL 30 gig of hard drive space. WHAT?! I only have a 121 gig hard drive to begin with and you want me free up MORE space?! I was not impressed.

Well, I had to proceed - not sure how I was going get that done. The first thing I did was transfer the install file for the update to the external hard drive. That was 12 gigs in itself. Then it was time to move and delete files. After about another hour of frustrating decisions of which files to transfer and delete, I finally got the space freed up.

It would take about another hour to get the update done- this was a major operating system update.

At the end, I discovered that I only lost one program that will no longer work. It's my transfer program from transferring the files from the GDILIVE.COM camera to the hard drive. If a file is too big, it automatically puts it together into one file. I searched the Canon support website. Guess what? Support for that program ceased in 2019. Really!?! That means now I will have to stop recording at half time and start a new recording - making two files to upload instead of one.

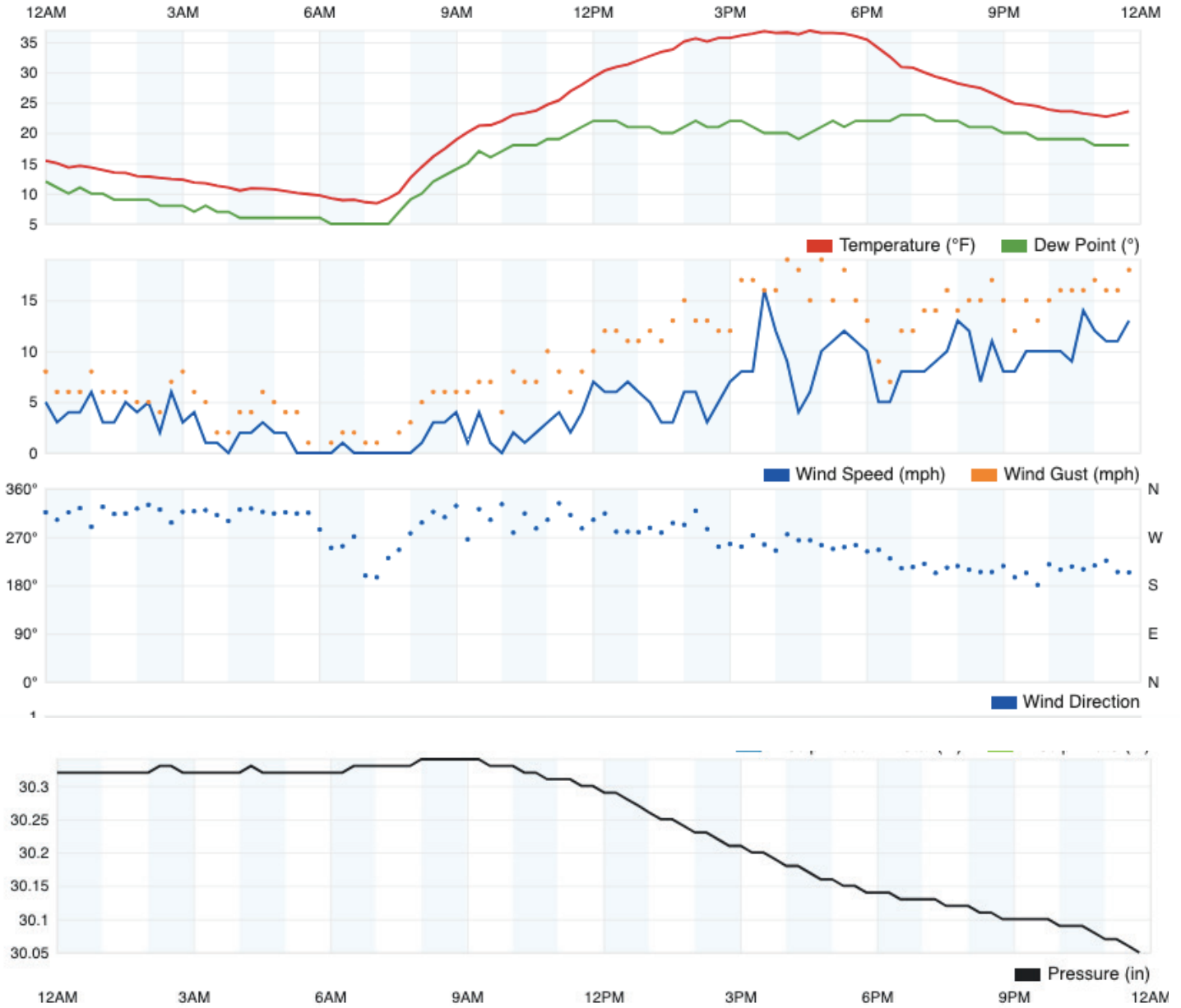
After all of that, I had to re-install the programs I had to delete to make room on the hard drive. So far, it appears all is going well now. I use the Indesign program to create the daily as well as the weekly and most of the production files.

So now, I am up to date with MacOS Monterey. I survived the update, for the most part! Now I have to get used to some minor changes. They revamped the email program so instead of a certain button being over here, it's over there. Good grief!

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Breezy. Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 32 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 19 °F	Low: 1 °F	High: 26 °F

## CHILLY for MARCH

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 3/8/2022 5:05 AM Central

**Today**  
Mar 8, 2022



26 to 34°  
2 to 10°

AM snow  
possible. Breezy  
to windy  
northwest winds

**Wednesday**  
Mar 9, 2022



12 to 24°  
-5 to 5°

Temperatures 15  
to 25 degrees  
below normal

**Thursday**  
Mar 10, 2022



20 to 30°  
0 to 6°

Breezy to windy  
through the  
overnight

**Friday**  
Mar 11, 2022



10 to 25°  
-10 to 5°

Breezy northwest  
winds. One more  
cold night

**Saturday**  
Mar 12, 2022



25 to 50°+  
20 to 25°

Cold air begins  
retreat. Mildest  
across central SD

While not much to talk about precipitation-wise (other than potential light snow showers this morning), temperatures will be about 15 to 25 degrees below normal Wednesday through Friday, following a couple cold frontal passages. And breezy to windy conditions at times will make it feel that much worse.



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## Today in Weather History

March 8, 2000: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, combined with 3 to 7 inches of snow, caused widespread blizzard conditions across north-central South Dakota. Many schools were closed early in the day. Travel was also significantly disrupted. Telephone service went down for several hours between Mobridge and Selby. Some heavy snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte, Selby, and Hoven, and 7 inches southwest of Keldron.

March 8, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought warm moist air overtop low-level cold air, which resulted in the widespread freezing rain across much of northeast South Dakota during the evening and into the early morning hours of the 8th and 9th. For much of the area, the precipitation changed over to all rain before ending as temperatures rose to above freezing. Ice accumulations ranged from a tenth of an inch to a half of an inch. Some ice accumulation reports include; 0.25 inches at Garden City, Hayti, Waubay, Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Summit, and 0.50 inches near Florence and Clark. Travel became hazardous, with no significant accidents reported. Also, no problems with power outages or tree damage were reported.

1717 - On Fishers Island in Long Island Sound, 1200 sheep were discovered to have been buried under a snow drift for four weeks. When finally uncovered, one hundred sheep were still alive. (The Weather Channel)

1909 - The town of Brinkley AR was struck by a tornado which killed 49 persons and caused 600,000 dollars damage. The tornado, which was two-thirds of a mile in width, destroyed 860 buildings. Entire families were killed as houses were completely swept away by the tornado. Tornadoes killed 64 persons and injured 671 others in Dallas and Monroe counties during the Arkansas tornado outbreak. (David Ludlum)

1972: A wind gust of 207 mph was recorded at the Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. Winds were sustained at over 146 mph for three hours during the storm.

1984 - A freak thunder snowstorm produced high winds, vivid lightning, and up to seven inches of snow in the northern suburbs of Washington D.C. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thirty-two cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Madison WI with a reading of 71 degrees. Afternoon highs of 68 degrees at Houghton Lake MI and 72 degrees at Flint MI smashed their previous records for the date by fourteen degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A cold front brought wintry weather to the north central U.S. Snowfall totals in northwestern Minnesota ranged up to eight inches at Roseau and Hallock. Winds in South Dakota gusted to 61 mph at Brookings. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - While arctic cold gripped the northeastern U.S., unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southwestern states. Albany NY reported a record low of 2 degrees below zero. Tucson AZ reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Late afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather in east central Iowa and west central Illinois. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado south of Augusta IL which traveled 42 miles to Marbleton. Golf ball size hail was reported at Peoria IL and near Vermont IL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - The California coast warms up. San Francisco broke a 112-year record by reaching 82 degrees. Los Angeles soared to 93 degrees.

2005 - A line of strong to severe thunderstorms affected the eastern portions of North and South Carolina, with wind damage and a few tornadoes reported. Winds gusted over 70 MPH with some of the stronger storms.

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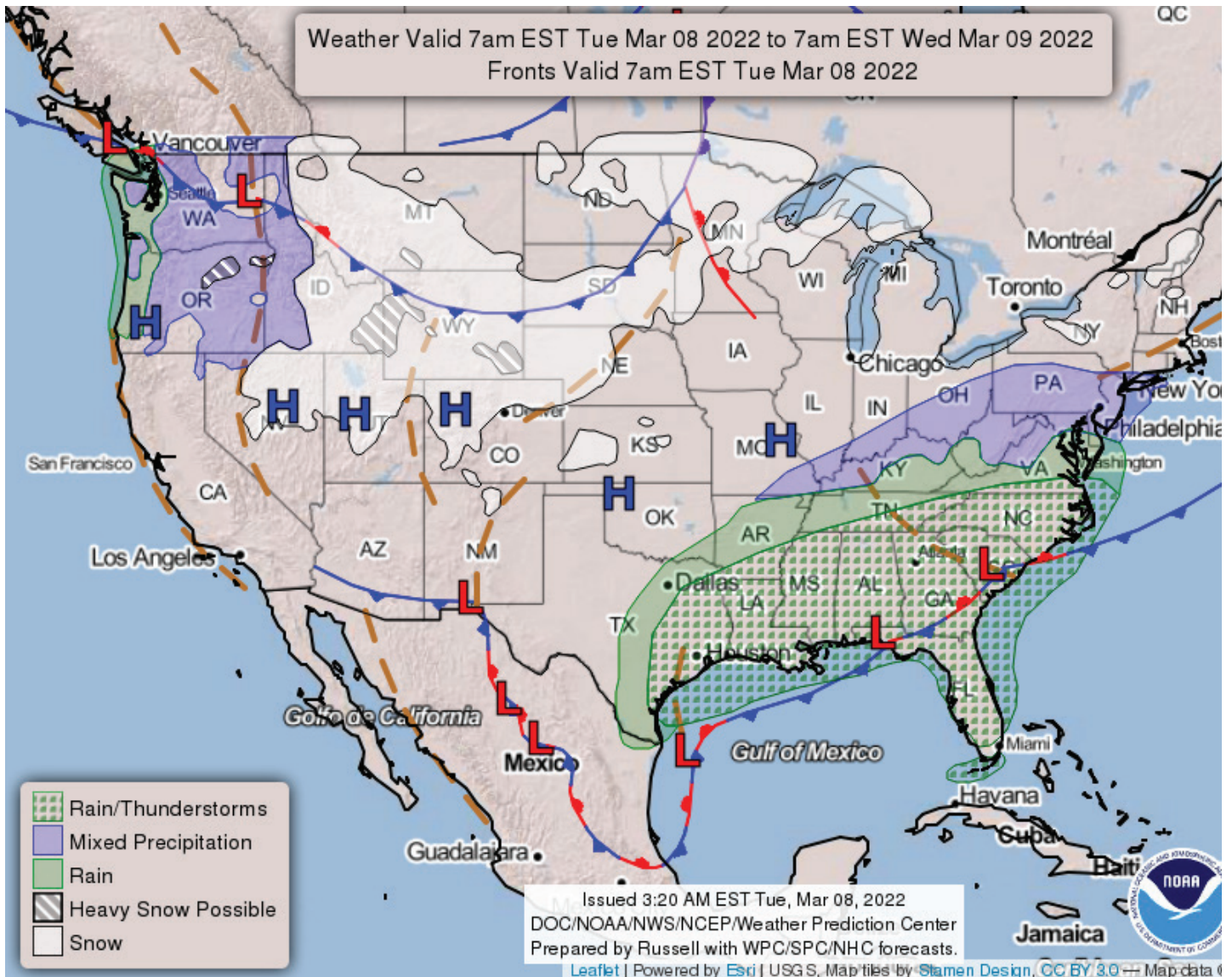
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 37 °F at 4:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 8 °F at 7:08 AM**  
**Wind: 21 mph at 4:03 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 11 hours, 34 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 2021  
Record Low: -32 in 1995  
Average High: 37°F  
Average Low: 16°F  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.19  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.36  
Precip Year to Date: 0.97  
Sunset Tonight: 6:30:20 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53:59 AM



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## A GODLY HERITAGE

Nearly everyone has been exposed to the damage an ungodly heritage can be in someone's life. Often, we hear horror stories of fathers who beat their children because their fathers were beaten by their fathers. Many times, women whose mothers were beaten by abusive men marry men who abuse them. Children who learn their values in families where alcohol and other drugs are a regular part of daily activities grow up to think that abusing drugs is a way of life for most people. Each of us has been given the "gift" called "heritage" by our parents. For most of us, it has dramatically influenced how we think and how we act.

Some of us have been given the blessings of growing up in a Christian home. Some have not had this privilege and have struggled to break the cycle of sin and suffering. Our past, however, does not control our future.

Our Psalmist wrote, "Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart."

We often focus on our past experiences and compare what has happened to us by what has happened to others. Sometimes we find things in our heritage that we are happy about and thankful for. Other times we become angry or jealous because others have received more than we have. Then, we feel deprived, jealous, and resentful.

But our Psalmist did neither. He focused on himself, and the heritage God wanted him to have: a heart filled with joy! And the wonderful fact about His heritage is that we can pass it on to our children, our friends, anyone and everyone we meet. God's heritage is unlimited.

Prayer: We are grateful, Father, that our past does not determine our future. In You, all things can become new. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. Psalm 119:111



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## 2022 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$126 million

Powerball

10-43-55-59-67, Powerball: 2, Power Play: 3

(ten, forty-three, fifty-five, fifty-nine, sixty-seven; Powerball: two; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$90 million

## S. Dakota St. routs South Dakota 83-60 in Summit semifinal

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Douglas Wilson had 21 points as South Dakota State romped past South Dakota 83-60 in the Summit League Conference Tourney semifinals on Monday night.

Baylor Scheierman had 18 points for South Dakota State (29-4). Zeke Mayo added 13 points. Luke Appel had eight rebounds.

South Dakota State scored 28 points in the second half, a season low for the team.

Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 19 points for the Coyotes (19-12). Mason Archambault added 10 points. Hunter Goodrick had eight rebounds.

## State House proposes cutting food tax amid budget talks

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bipartisan group of South Dakota House lawmakers on Monday passed a proposal to cut the state's sales tax on food, floating a proposal unlikely to survive budget negotiations that have produced clashes between the House, Gov. Kristi Noem and the Senate.

As the legislative session has entered its final days, lawmakers are focused on ironing out the state budget as well as deciding on over \$1 billion in one-time projects. House lawmakers have resisted many of Noem's proposals to fund projects for universities and other infrastructure, instead pushing tax breaks.

A House Republican proposal to scale back the state's sales tax was already dismissed by the Senate last month.

But the latest idea to eliminate sales tax on food and groceries gained support from Democrats. Despite holding just a handful of seats in the Legislature, Democrats have recently found themselves being courted for their potentially gridlock-breaking votes as the budget is shaped this week.

"Raw food — everybody needs it and you don't have a choice," House Democratic Leader Rep. Jamie Smith said, adding that it was a tax that weighs heavier on the budgets of low-income people.

Republican Rep. Jon Hansen brought the food tax proposal, arguing that the \$82 million loss in state revenues was worth allowing people to pay less at grocery stores.

"I just think we should allow the people to keep more of their tax dollars," he said.

The proposal faces an unlikely path through the Senate.

"That's dead," Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, one of the most powerful lawmakers in the chamber, said of the bill shortly after its House passage.

Senate Republicans have argued that the state is headed for a fiscal cliff once federal funding for pandemic recovering and infrastructure slows down. They have pushed a series of projects aimed at bolstering the state's universities and other assets.

The House on Monday approved sending \$30 million to expand Dakota State University's cybersecurity program, a project that Noem has personally lobbied lawmakers for. House lawmakers also approved \$5.3

million for a business incubator building at the South Dakota School of Mines.

But despite multiple attempts to ram it through the House, a \$5 million proposal from Noem for a shooting range near Rapid City was defeated in the House after it couldn't get the two-thirds vote necessary for one-time spending bills. House lawmakers also dismissed a \$38 million appropriation for a women's prison in Pennington County.

However, with lawmakers continuing to negotiate this week and seemingly plentiful funds on the table, proposals can easily be resurrected.

Republican Rep. Chris Karr said, "How many times this session does a bill have to die before we finally let it die?"

## South Dakota House rewrites Noem's vaccine exemption bill

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota House Republicans on Monday passed a completely rewritten version of a bill from Gov. Kristi Noem to allow employees to gain exemptions from their employer's COVID-19 vaccine mandates, setting up a statehouse clash over the proposal.

House lawmakers, in a snub to the governor's bill, rewrote it to allow employees to cite any objection of their conscience. Noem's initial bill, which had passed the Senate, would allow employees to avoid mandates by citing either a medical exemption, religious grounds for refusal or a test showing antibodies against COVID-19 in the last six months.

President Joe Biden's administration pushed vaccine mandates through employers last year to boost the nation's COVID-19 vaccination rate and slow the spread of the coronavirus.

South Dakota Republicans have exchanged barbs for months over competing proposals to allow employees to gain exemptions from vaccination requirements, with a group of House conservatives pushing broader exemptions.

The intra-party squabble comes as the state's vaccination rate of 60% of people fully vaccinated lags behind the nationwide rate of 65%.

"We trust the people of South Dakota to make the right decisions for themselves," said Republican Rep. Rhonda Milstead as she pushed for the broadened exemption.

After the House last month passed a separate bill to allow an exemption on any objection of an employee's conscience, Noem said her proposal would work best and that lawmakers needed "to remember what the role of government is and what it is not."

The Republican-controlled Senate later dismissed the House's initial bill.

The House and Senate have passed completely different versions of Noem's bill, and both chambers would have to find agreement on a proposal if a state exemption law is to be enacted.

South Dakota has seen a decrease in reported COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks. The Department of Health on Monday reported 122 people are currently hospitalized with COVID-19 infections, marking a decline from January when the number topped 400 — the highest rate in over a year.

## SD Senate passes ban on 'divisive' university race trainings

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Republicans in the South Dakota Senate on Monday passed a proposal from Gov. Kristi Noem to ban public universities from using training and orientation material that compels people to feel "discomfort" based on their race.

The bill's passage on a 27-8 vote was its final major hurdle in the Legislature, showing broad support from Republicans though some voiced opposition to how it could curtail free speech rights on college campuses. The House has already passed the bill, but because senators made minor changes, the two chambers will have to agree on its final language.

Noem has billed the proposal as a repudiation of so-called "critical race theory" and a way to ensure "students are not taught that they are responsible for (the) different actions of our ancestors."

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The governor has vilified critical race theory in the last year, following a political rallying cry on the right against the academic framework, which centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions.

The bill's actual text makes no mention of critical race theory. It lays out seven "divisive concepts" and bans universities from making students or faculty members adhere to them or promoting them in required trainings.

The "divisive concepts" listed in the bill include that individuals are "inherently responsible" for historical actions or "should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account" of their race.

The proposal drew sharp criticism that it would put a chill on academic freedom and sanitize the most painful facts of U.S. history. Leaders of South Dakota's minority communities, from Oglala Sioux Tribe President Kevin Killer to Julian Beaudion, the director of the South Dakota African American History Museum, spoke against the bill last week.

"Our country needs to acknowledge and reckon with its history of systemic racism — this includes being able to teach and talk about these concepts in our schools," Jett Jonelis, ACLU of South Dakota advocacy manager, said in a statement, adding that the bill encroaches on "a professor's right to make teaching choices without government interference."

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

The Board of Regents has supported the bill, and its lobbyist has testified that it would not change how universities are already operating.

But several lawmakers decried the bill as a step towards authoritarianism.

"What separates us from Russia, from China, from any of these places, our enemies," said Republican Sen. V.J. Smith. "We have the freedom of speech."

Republican Sen. Jessica Castleberry, an ally of the governor who presented the proposal on the Senate floor, insisted the bill would not infringe on free speech and argued it strengthened those rights because it prevented anyone from being compelled to adopt certain concepts.

"They can take Intro to Critical Race Theory. They can have spirited debates," she said. "This preserves institutional neutrality by preventing critical race theory and divisive concepts from being adopted at the institutional level."

A GOP-controlled Senate committee last week rejected a companion bill Noem brought that would have banned K-12 public schools from teaching the "divisive concepts." Allies of the governor were looking for ways to resurrect that proposal Monday.

But some Republicans have shown reservations about how far to push government policing of classrooms and campuses.

"I cannot support the idea that state government should create a list of ideas, write them into statute, and call them divisive," said Republican Sen. David Wheeler said during the Senate debate. "It's incredibly difficult to legislate effectively on broad concepts."

## Dozens gather in Sioux Falls to support Ukraine community

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Dozens gathered in the parking lot of a Sioux Falls church Sunday afternoon to show support for the Ukrainian community amid the ongoing violence from the Russian invasion in that country.

Alla Kureninova was among those outside the First Congregational Church. She told the crowd about the experiences of her mother in Ukraine since the invasion Feb. 24.

"When I told my mom that we're getting together here in Sioux Falls halfway across the world, my mom said, 'I'm crying from how much our pain hurts everyone else,'" Kureninova said during a vigil organized by South Dakota Voices for Peace, the Argus Leader reported.

"It's everyone's pain right now, and we're not gonna stop getting together and talking about it until it's

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over," she said.

Kureninova said her family members in Sumy, a town in northeastern Ukraine, sleep in shifts due to gunfire and the persistent threat of air raids.

"That's what they do to keep their families safe and to keep themselves safe," she said.

Russia announced yet another limited cease-fire and the establishment of safe corridors to allow civilians to flee some besieged Ukrainian cities Monday. But the evacuation routes led mostly to Russia and its ally Belarus, drawing criticism from Ukraine and others.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces continued to pummel some cities with rockets even after the announcement of the limited cease-fire.

## Live updates: China's Xi criticizes sanctions on Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

BEIJING — China says President Xi Jinping has criticized sanctions imposed on Russia over its war against Ukraine as "harmful to all sides," in a video summit with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

China has largely backed Russia in blaming the U.S. and its allies for provoking the conflict and has abstained in votes at the United Nations over whether to condemn Moscow for its actions.

In its readout of Tuesday's conversation, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said Xi expressed "anxiety and deep pain" over the fighting, and urged the sides to pursue peace talks in which he said China was willing to play a role.

Xi gave no indication on what sort of resolution China was looking for and the only details he gave concerned the impact of sanctions.

"We want to strive together to reduce the negative effects of the crisis," Xi was quoted as saying. "Regarding the impact of sanctions on global finance, energy resources, transport and supply chain stability, in terms of a world economy already burdened by the pandemic, it is harmful to all sides."

LONDON — Britain's defense minister says his staff will help process applications from Ukrainians fleeing war, after criticism of the sluggish U.K. effort to take in refugees.

Britain says it expects to take in as many as 200,000 displaced Ukrainians, and has set no upper limit on the number it will accept. But as of Monday night, the government said only 300 visas had been issued.

French officials have accused Britain of turning Ukrainians away at the English Channel port of Calais, telling them to apply for visas at British embassies in Paris or Brussels.

Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said Tuesday that "we can do more, we will do more" to speed up people's journeys to the U.K.

MOSCOW — Russia says it has summoned the Irish ambassador to Moscow a day after a truck was driven through the gates of the Russian embassy in Ireland during a demonstration against the war in Ukraine.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday it told Irish ambassador Brian McElduff that Russia demanded an apology from the Irish authorities and for Ireland to pay compensation.

Russia likened the incident to "a tactic widely used by terrorists" and said Irish law enforcement had not acted to stop it. The Irish Times newspaper reported Monday that the driver of the truck was arrested.

KYIV, UKRAINE — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called for the expansion of humanitarian corridors for Ukrainian civilians fleeing war, and more support from the Red Cross.

In a video address Tuesday from an undisclosed location, he said a child died of dehydration in the blockaded southern seaport of Mariupol, in a sign of how desperate the city's population has become.

He pleaded again with Western countries to provide air support.

He said evacuation buses have been sent to Mariupol, but said there was no firm agreement on the

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route, so "Russian troops can simply shoot on this transport on the way."

Zelenskiy accused the International Red Cross of "forbidding the use of its emblem on our cars," but did not give details. Videos of buses heading out of Sumy and toward Mariupol have had signs with a red cross on the side but it's not clear who pasted them there.

LONDON — Estee Lauder is the latest foreign company to halt its operations in Russia after the invasion of Ukraine.

The New York-based cosmetics giant said in a statement late Monday that it has decided to suspend all its commercial activity in Russia, "including every store we own and operate." It's not clear how many retail outlets it has in Russia.

Estee Lauder also said it's suspending shipments to its Russian retailers and will provide "compensation and support" to its Russian employees. The company owns more than two dozen brands including Clinique, Bobbi Brown and MAC Cosmetics.

LONDON — Energy giant Shell says it will stop buying Russian oil and natural gas as well as shut down its service stations and other operations in the country amid international pressure for companies to sever ties over the invasion of Ukraine.

Shell says in a statement Tuesday that it would withdraw from all Russian hydrocarbons, including crude oil, petroleum products, natural gas and liquefied natural gas, "in a phased manner."

The decision comes just days after Ukraine's foreign minister criticized Shell for continuing to buy Russian oil.

LONDON — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is set to address Britain's Parliament -- the first time a foreign leader has been allowed to speak in the House of Commons.

Screens and simultaneous translation headsets have been set up in the House of Commons so lawmakers can hear from Zelenskyy at 5 p.m. (1700GMT) on Tuesday.

World leaders have previously addressed British lawmakers elsewhere in Parliament, but not in the House of Commons itself.

Zelenskyy has previously thanked Britain for its support, which includes humanitarian aid and defensive weapons.

GENEVA -- The U.N.'s top human rights official is warning that a new Russian law allowing harsh punishment for spreading what is deemed to be fake information about the armed forces adds to concern about repressive legislation in Russia.

High Commission for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet told the U.N. Human Rights Council that "space for discussion or criticism of public policies – including (Russia's) military action against Ukraine – is increasingly and profoundly restricted."

Bachelet said some 12,700 people have been "arbitrarily arrested" for holding peaceful anti-war protests and noted that media are required to use only official information and terms.

She said she's concerned about repressive and vaguely defined legislation, and added that "further legislation criminalising circumstances of 'discrediting' the armed forces continues down this concerning path."

The new measure, signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on Friday, allows for prison sentences of up to 15 years. It has prompted some foreign media to suspend operations within Russia.

LONDON — Britain's defense secretary says the invasion of Ukraine will be Vladimir Putin's downfall as the Russian leader struggles to defeat and occupy a country that has put up unexpectedly staunch resistance to his armies.

Ben Wallace said Russian forces are already "exhausted" after facing logistical problems and suffering thousands of losses in the first 13 days of fighting. He added it's "an impossible task" to occupy a country



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of 44 million people that is bigger than France and Germany combined.

"This will be Putin's end ... and so it should be," Wallace told the BBC.

Putin is already "a spent force" in the wider world because the international community has decided the invasion of Ukraine and the humanitarian catastrophe it has unleashed are unacceptable, Wallace said. The international sanctions imposed on Russia "are reducing his economy to zero," and Putin is responsible for that, Wallace said.

**GENEVA** — The number of refugees fleeing Ukraine reached 2 million on Tuesday, according to the United Nations, the fastest exodus Europe has seen since World War II.

"Today the outflow of refugees from Ukraine reaches two million people. Two million," Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, wrote on Twitter.

The update came as a new effort to evacuate civilians along safe corridors finally got underway Tuesday. The route out of the eastern city of Sumy was one of five promised by the Russians to offer civilians a way to escape the Russian onslaught.

Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, is pressing for all civilians trapped by fighting in Ukraine to be allowed to leave safely. She said Tuesday she is "deeply concerned about civilians trapped in active hostilities in numerous areas."

Bachelet also told the U.N. Human Rights Council that her office has received reports of pro-Ukrainian activists being arbitrarily detained in areas of eastern Ukraine that have recently come "under the control of armed groups." She said there have been reports of beatings of people considered pro-Russian in government-controlled areas.

**TOKYO** — Japan says it has suspended the assets of 32 more Russian and Belarusian individuals as part of international sanctions against Russia.

The additional sanctions announced Tuesday target 20 Russians including head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, deputy chiefs of staff and a press secretary for President Vladimir Putin's government, and deputy chairmen of the state parliament. The list also includes business executives with close ties to Putin and his administration such as Volga Group, Transneft, the Private Military Company Wagner and USM Holdings, according to a statement jointly issued by the foreign, finance and trade ministries.

The sanction targets also included 12 Belarusian officials and business executives, including Belarus' National Olympic Committee President Viktor Lukashenko, as well as 12 organizations in Russia and Belarus.

Officials said Japan is also banning exports of oil refinery equipment to Russia and general purpose goods to Belarus that could be used to strengthen the country's military capability.

**WARSAW**, Poland -- Poland's prime minister is calling for even tougher sanctions against Russia in order to dismantle President Vladimir Putin's war machine.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki made his comments as he departed Warsaw for visits to NATO countries Britain and Norway.

He told reporters that strengthening NATO's eastern flank and pushing for more sanctions would be the main topics of discussion. In particular, Morawiecki wants to urge other European countries to replace Russian crude oil and gas with deliveries from other countries.

"In order to hit Russia effectively, our blow must be consistent and long-term if military action continues," Morawiecki said.

Poland has been building a gas pipeline, Baltic Pipe, meant to import gas from Norway.

He called Baltic Pipe "a symbol of Poland's sovereignty, of Poland's independence from Russia, from gas blackmail ... everything which has made it possible for Putin to build a war machine."

**TALLINN**, ESTONIA — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is wrapping up a short tour of the three Baltic states aimed at reassuring the former Soviet republics that NATO will guarantee their security as Russia's war with Ukraine rolls on unabated.

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Blinken was meeting with senior Estonian officials in Tallinn on Tuesday, a day after hearing appeals from both Lithuania and Latvia for more support and greater U.S. and NATO troop presence to deter a feared Russian intervention.

"We will defend every inch of NATO territory if it comes under attack," Blinken said Monday in Riga. "No one should doubt our readiness. No one should doubt our resolve."

Leaders in all three Baltic states have expressed grave concerns about Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions for former Soviet bloc countries that are now allied or otherwise linked to the West.

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said the Russian invasion of Ukraine had shown the Baltic countries in particular the need to bolster air and coastal defenses. He added Latvia would like its security cooperation with NATO to be "more efficient."

Lithuanian President Gitanes Nauseda told Blinken in Vilnius that a policy of deterrence was no longer enough and that "forward defense" was now needed. He predicted that "Putin will not stop in Ukraine if he will not be stopped."

KYIV, Ukraine — Safe corridors intended to let civilians escape the Russian onslaught in Ukraine could open Tuesday, officials from both sides said, though previous efforts to establish evacuation routes crumbled amid renewed attacks and it was not clear how large the operation would be if it happened.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Tuesday that both sides agreed to a cease-fire from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Ukraine time (0700-1900 GMT) for the evacuation of civilians from the eastern city of Sumy.

The first convoy with evacuated civilians in buses or private cars is to leave at 10 a.m. (0800 GMT), on a single route toward the Ukrainian city of Poltava. She said Russia's Defense Ministry agreed to this in a letter to the International Red Cross.

Those being evacuated from Sumy include foreign students from India and China, she said. The corridor will also be used to bring humanitarian aid into Sumy, she said.

She reiterated that Russian proposals to evacuate civilians to Russia and Belarus were unacceptable. She didn't elaborate on the possibility of evacuating Ukrainians toward western Ukraine.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — The head of the Norwegian Refugee Council said that refugees fleeing in Ukraine was "the fastest-growing displacement crisis I have witnessed in my 35 years as a humanitarian worker."

Jan Egeland, secretary general of the humanitarian group, said that "every second the war forces a person to flee across Ukraine's borders, and countless are displaced within the country."

The Oslo-based agency, which has been in Ukraine since 2014, said it was launching an aid plan to support 800,000 people inside Ukraine and neighboring countries.

NRC's humanitarian response plan calls for \$82 million and appealed to donors "to dig deep into their pockets to find new funding" and added do "not take resources from other crises."

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — The head of the World Health Organization's Europe office says it has confirmed 16 attacks that have affected the provision of health care in Ukraine in the fighting since Russia's invasion in the country began nearly two weeks ago.

Dr. Hans Kluge also told reporters Tuesday that Ukrainian health authorities have "remarkably" maintained COVID-19 surveillance and response since the invasion began on Feb. 24, though they reported 731 deaths related to the pandemic over the last week.

Kluge warned that "sadly, this number will increase as oxygen shortages continue" — with older people disproportionately affected. Treatment with oxygen is an important part of the response for people whose respiratory systems have been harmed by coronavirus infection.

The WHO Europe chief also said broken supply lines are harming the ability to treat conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and diabetes. Catherine Smallwood, senior emergency officer for WHO Europe, said

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the attacks on health care in Ukraine have led to at least 9 deaths and 16 injuries.

LONDON — Britain's defense secretary said Tuesday that there are reports Ukrainian special forces destroyed over 20 Russian helicopters on the ground overnight as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to face logistical problems and fierce resistance.

Russia's advance toward the capital, Kyiv, continues to face pressure from Ukrainian forces around the nearby towns of Hostomel, Bucha, Vorzel and Irpin, the U.K. Defense Ministry said in an intelligence update released late Monday. In addition, a lengthy Russian column remains stuck on the road north of Kyiv.

Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said Russian forces are becoming more and more desperate in the face of such military and supply holdups, leading to "indiscriminate shelling" of civilians.

WASHINGTON — The World Bank says it has approved more than \$700 million in emergency support for Ukraine.

Dubbed FREE Ukraine, it includes nearly \$500 million in loans and guarantees and \$134 million in grants, with Japan promising another \$100 million in financing. The aid is meant to help the Ukrainian government pay wages of hospital workers, pensions and other social programs.

"The World Bank Group stands with the people of Ukraine and the region," World Bank President David Malpass said. "This is the first of many steps we are taking to help address the far-reaching human and economic impacts of this crisis."

The World Bank also said it is preparing a \$3 billion package of support for Ukraine and the region to help it cope with the flood of displaced people fleeing the fighting.

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan sent an aircraft to Poland on Tuesday to evacuate more than 300 Pakistanis who escaped fighting in Ukraine.

Pakistan International Airlines says most of them are students.

Pakistan has refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even as it denounced war as a solution to differences and called for negotiations and a cease-fire. Prime Minister Imran Khan met with President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin just hours after the Russian leader sent tanks into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Pakistan abstained from last week's U.N. General Assembly vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

TOKYO — Japanese automaker Nissan is planning to halt production at its plant in Russia because of "logistical challenges."

Nissan Motor Co. did not provide a specific date but said Tuesday production will stop "soon." Its plant in St. Petersburg produced 45,000 vehicles last year, including the X-Trail sport utility vehicle.

The Yokohama-based manufacturer said the safety of its employees is its top priority.

Nissan earlier stopped exports to Russia.

LVIV, Ukraine — Russian aircraft bombed cities in eastern and central Ukraine overnight, Ukrainian officials said. Shelling pounded suburbs of the capital, Kyiv.

In Sumy and Okhtyrka, to the east of Kyiv near the Russian border, bombs fell on residential buildings and destroyed a power plant, regional leader Dmytro Zhivitsky said. He said there were dead and wounded but gave no figures.

Bombs also hit oil depots in Zhytomyr and the neighboring town of Cherniakhiv, located west of Kyiv.

In Bucha, a Kyiv suburb, the mayor reported heavy artillery fire.

"We can't even gather up the bodies because the shelling from heavy weapons doesn't stop day or night," Mayor Anatol Fedoruk said. "Dogs are pulling apart the bodies on the city streets. It's a nightmare."

The Ukrainian government is demanding the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow people to safely leave Sumy, Zhytomyr, Kharkiv, Mariupol and suburbs of Kyiv, including Bucha.

LVIV, Ukraine — The mayor of Lviv said the city in far western Ukraine is struggling to feed and house

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the tens of thousands of people who have fled here from war-torn regions of the country.

"We really need support," Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said.

More than 200,000 Ukrainians displaced from their homes are now in Lviv, filling up sport halls, schools, hospitals and church buildings. The historical city once popular with tourists had a population of 700,000 before the war.

The mayor said the city needs big tents equipped with kitchens so food can be prepared.

Hundreds of thousands more people could arrive if humanitarian corridors are opened up from cities now under siege from Russian troops.

The embassies of the U.S. and EU countries also moved to Lviv from Kyiv before the invasion.

Lviv is the main transit point for those fleeing just across the border to Poland. Many of the 1.7 million Ukrainians now abroad passed through the city.

**L**VIV, Ukraine — A Russian general was killed in the fighting around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, which Russian forces have been trying to seize since the invasion began, the Ukrainian military intelligence agency said.

It identified him as Maj. Gen. Vitaly Gerasimov, 45, and said he had fought with Russian forces in Syria and Chechnya and had taken part in the seizure of Crimea in 2014.

It was not possible to confirm the death independently. Russia has not commented.

Another Russian general was killed earlier in the fighting. A local officers' organization in Russia confirmed the death in Ukraine of Maj. Gen. Andrei Sukhovetsky, the commanding general of the Russian 7th Airborne Division.

Sukhovetsky also took part in Russia's military campaign in Syria.

## Russia-Ukraine War: What to know about the war in Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

Two million people have fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion, the United Nations refugee chief and the International Organization for Migration said on Tuesday.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, confirmed the figure as more headed for the borders. Poland has received more than 1.2 million Ukrainian refugees, the most of any nation, U.N. figures show.

Civilians in one eastern Ukrainian city were shown leaving on buses Tuesday amid a 12-hour-long cease-fire there after Russia and Ukraine agreed on establishing five safe corridors for people to escape the fighting.

Meanwhile, Russian aircraft continued to bomb cities in eastern and central Ukraine overnight, Ukrainian officials said. Shelling pounded suburbs of the capital, Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called Tuesday for the expansion of humanitarian corridors. In an earlier video, he urged his people to keep resisting the assault. Ukraine's foreign minister says more than 20,000 people from 52 countries have volunteered to fight in Ukraine.

As the war enters its 13th day, food, water, heat and medicine have grown increasingly scarce in multiple cities facing electricity outages.

Here's a look at key things to know about the war:

**HAS THERE BEEN PROGRESS ON SAFE EVACUATIONS?**

Videos Tuesday showed people boarding buses, and multiple buses marked with a red cross driving along a snowy road as the eastern city of Sumy was given a safe corridor for evacuation.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Tuesday both sides agreed to a cease-fire from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Ukraine time for the evacuation of civilians from Sumy. Those leaving include foreign students from India and China, she said.

The Russian Defense Ministry has said civilians will be allowed to also leave the cities of Mariupol and the capital, Kyiv, where people have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million people.



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Most of the corridors for fleeing civilians, however, will lead to Russia either directly or via Belarus, according to officials in Moscow. Russia's ambassador to the U.N. suggested that humanitarian paths leading from the capital and other cities could give people a choice in where they want to go.

The safe corridors were agreed on by Ukrainian and Russian officials during their third round of direct talks Monday since the start of invasion Feb. 24. The foreign ministers of both countries are scheduled to meet in Turkey on Thursday, according to that country's top diplomat.

## WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?

Russian aircraft bombed cities in eastern and central Ukraine overnight, Ukrainian officials said. Shelling pounded suburbs of the capital, Kyiv. Bombs also hit oil depots in two other towns.

Ukraine's Interior Ministry reported Tuesday that nine people, including two children, were killed in a Russian airstrike in Sumy on Monday.

The mayor of Lviv said the city in far western Ukraine is struggling to feed and house the tens of thousands of people who have fled there from other parts of the country. More than 200,000 Ukrainians displaced from their homes are now in Lviv, filling up sport halls, schools, hospitals and church buildings.

In the southern port city of Mariupol, an estimated 200,000 people — nearly half its population — are hoping to flee as hospitals there face severe shortages of antibiotics and painkillers.

Ukraine's president said Tuesday a child died of dehydration in Mariupol. An official with Ukraine's presidential office says humanitarian aid is being sent to the city.

A Russian general was killed in the fighting in Ukraine's second-largest city, according to the Ukrainian military intelligence agency. He is the second Russian general reportedly killed since the invasion began. The report said he had fought with Russian forces in Syria and Chechnya and had taken part in the seizure of Crimea in 2014. It was not possible to confirm the death independently. Russia has not commented.

Russian troops have overall made significant advances in southern Ukraine but stalled in some other regions.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED?

The death toll of the conflict has been difficult to measure. The U.N. human rights office said Monday that it had confirmed the deaths of 406 civilians and wounding of 801 others through the end of Sunday. However, it acknowledged the actual figures are likely considerably higher.

The World Health Organization said six health care workers have been killed and nearly a dozen wounded in attacks. It has confirmed 16 attacks on health care facilities in Ukraine since Russia's invasion began.

Ukrainian refugees continue to pour into neighboring countries, including Poland, Romania and Moldova. Among them are an unknown number of people with U.S. citizenship, though some haven't been able to flee Ukraine yet.

## WHAT IS THE GLOBAL IMPACT?

Surging prices for oil and other vital commodities, such as wheat used in subsidized bread and noodles, are rattling global markets.

Worries are growing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will upend already tight supplies of oil. Russia is one of the world's largest energy producers, with prices surging even further by the possibility the U.S. might bar crude imports from Russia.

A growing number of multinational businesses have cut Russia off from vital financial services, technology and a variety of consumer products in response to Western economic sanctions. Among those suspending services in Russia is Netflix, the popular streaming service, and Estee Lauder, the New York-based cosmetics giant.

In the Middle East, the war in Ukraine is magnifying divisions in the region following Moscow's role in recent years in the war in Syria. Russia has support among militant factions in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen where ally, Iran, has influence.

Despite countries sending weapons and military equipment to Ukrainian forces fighting the Russians, Western countries have rejected Ukrainian calls to impose a no-fly zone over the country. There are concerns such a move would risk dramatically escalating the conflict.



## Shell says it will stop buying Russian oil, natural gas

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Energy giant Shell said Tuesday that it will stop buying Russian oil and natural gas and shut down its service stations, aviation fuels and other operations in the country amid international pressure for companies to sever ties over the invasion of Ukraine.

The company said in a statement that it would withdraw from all Russian hydrocarbons, including crude oil, petroleum products, natural gas and liquefied natural gas, "in a phased manner."

The decision comes as surging oil prices have been rattling global markets and just days after Ukraine's foreign minister criticized Shell for continuing to buy Russian oil, lashing out at the company for continuing to do business with President Vladimir Putin's government.

"We are acutely aware that our decision last week to purchase a cargo of Russian crude oil to be refined into products like petrol and diesel — despite being made with security of supplies at the forefront of our thinking — was not the right one and we are sorry," CEO Ben van Beurden said. "As we have already said, we will commit profits from the limited, remaining amounts of Russian oil we will process to a dedicated fund."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he had been told Shell "discretely" bought the oil Friday and appealed to the public to pressure the company and other international firms to halt such purchases.

"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."

Last 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 controlled by the Russian government.

## People flee embattled Ukrainian cities along safe corridors

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Evacuations of people fleeing embattled Ukrainian cities along safe corridors began Tuesday, while U.N. officials said the exodus of refugees from Russia's invasion reached 2 million.

The Russian onslaught has trapped people inside cities that are running low on food, water and medicine amid the biggest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Previous attempts to lead civilians to safety have crumbled with renewed attacks. But on Tuesday, video posted by Ukrainian officials showed buses with people moving along a snowy road from the eastern city of Sumy and yellow buses with a red cross on them heading toward the southern port of Mariupol.

It was not clear how long the efforts would last.

"The Ukrainian city of Sumy was given a green corridor, the first stage of evacuation began," the Ukrainian state communications agency tweeted.

While some people fled to other cities in Ukraine, many have chosen to leave the country instead. Safa Msehli, a spokesperson for the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration, tweeted that 2 million have now left, including at least 100,000 people who are not Ukrainian.

With the invasion well into its second week, Russian troops have made significant advances in southern Ukraine but stalled in some other regions. Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers fortified the capital, Kyiv, with hundreds of checkpoints and barricades designed to thwart a takeover. A steady rain of shells and rockets fell on other population centers, including the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where the mayor reported heavy artillery fire.

"We can't even gather up the bodies because the shelling from heavy weapons doesn't stop day or night," Mayor Anatol Fedoruk said. "Dogs are pulling apart the bodies on the city streets. It's a nightmare."

In one of the most desperate cities, Mariupol, an estimated 200,000 people — nearly half the population of 430,000 — hoped to flee.

Russia's coordination center for humanitarian efforts in Ukraine and Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna

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Vereshchuk both said a cease-fire was agreed to start Tuesday morning to allow some civilians to evacuate, but it was not clear where all the corridors would lead to, amid disagreement between the two sides.

Russia's coordination center suggested there would be more than one corridor, but that most would lead to Russia, either directly or through Belarus. At the U.N., however, the Russian ambassador suggested corridors from several cities could be opened and people could choose for themselves which direction they would take.

Vereshchuk, meanwhile, only said that the two sides had agreed to an evacuation of civilians from the eastern city of Sumy, toward the Ukrainian city of Poltava. Those to be evacuated include foreign students from India and China, she said.

She reiterated that Russian proposals to evacuate civilians to Russia and its ally Belarus, which was a launch pad for the invasion, were unacceptable.

Later, Ukrainian presidential aide Kyrylo Tymoshenko posted a video of yellow buses with a red cross plastered on the side that he said were being used for evacuations from Mariupol.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said 30 buses were sent from Zaporizhzhia to Mariupol with humanitarian aid, including water, basic food staples, and medicines, and will be used to bring out civilians.

Demands for effective passageways have surged amid intensifying shelling by Russian forces. The steady bombardments, including in some of Ukraine's most populated regions, have yielded a humanitarian crisis of diminishing food, water and medical supplies.

Through it all, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were showing unprecedented courage.

"The problem is that for one soldier of Ukraine, we have 10 Russian soldiers, and for one Ukrainian tank, we have 50 Russian tanks," Zelenskyy told ABC News in an interview that aired Monday night. But he noted that the gap in strength was closing and that even if Russian forces "come into all our cities," they will be met with an insurgency.

A top U.S. official said multiple countries were discussing whether to provide the warplanes that Zelenskyy has been pleading for.

The besieged city of Mariupol was short on water, food and power, and cellphone networks are down. Stores have been looted as residents search for essential goods. Police moved through the city, advising people to remain in shelters until they heard official messages broadcast over loudspeakers to evacuate.

Hospitals in Mariupol are facing severe shortages of antibiotics and painkillers, and doctors performed some emergency procedures without them.

The lack of phone service left anxious citizens approaching strangers to ask if they knew relatives living in other parts of the city and whether they were safe.

The battle for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Several hundred kilometers (miles) west of Mariupol, Russian forces continued their offensive in Mykolaiv, opening fire on the Black Sea shipbuilding center of a half-million people, according to Ukraine's military. Rescuers said they were putting out fires caused by rocket attacks in residential areas.

Ukraine's general staff of the armed forces said in a statement Tuesday that Ukrainian forces are continuing defense operations in the suburbs of the city.

The general staff said "demoralized" Russian forces are engaging in looting in places they have occupied, commandeering civilian buildings like farm hangars for military equipment, and are setting up firing positions in populated areas. The claims could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian defense forces were also involved in operations in the northern city of Chernihiv and the outskirts of Kyiv, the general staff said.

In Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million, often using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables. Some barricades looked significant, with heavy concrete slabs and sandbags piled more than two stories high, while others appeared more haphazard, with hundreds of books used to weigh down stacks of tires.

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"Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary," said Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, with 1.4 million people, heavy shelling slammed into apartment buildings.

"I think it struck the fourth floor under us," Dmitry Sedorenko said from his Kharkiv hospital bed. "Immediately, everything started burning and falling apart." When the floor collapsed beneath him, he crawled out through the third story, past the bodies of some of his neighbors.

In the small town of Horenka, where shelling reduced one area to ashes and shards of glass, rescuers and residents picked through the ruins as chickens pecked around them.

"What are they doing?" rescue worker Vasyl Oksak asked of the Russian attackers. "There were two little kids and two elderly people living here. Come in and see what they have done."

At The Hague, Ukraine pleaded with the International Court of Justice to order a halt to Russia's invasion, saying Moscow is committing widespread war crimes.

Russia "is resorting to tactics reminiscent of medieval siege warfare, encircling cities, cutting off escape routes and pounding the civilian population with heavy ordnance," said Jonathan Gimblett, a member of Ukraine's legal team.

The fighting has sent energy prices surging worldwide and stocks plummeting, and threatens the food supply and livelihoods of people around the globe who rely on crops farmed in the fertile Black Sea region.

The U.N. human rights office reported 406 confirmed civilian deaths but said the real number is much higher.

On Monday, Moscow again announced a series of demands to stop the invasion, including that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia and recognize the eastern regions controlled by Moscow-supported separatist fighters as independent. It also insisted that Ukraine change its constitution to guarantee it won't join international bodies like NATO and the EU. Ukraine has already rejected those demands.

Zelenskyy has called for more punitive measures against Russia, including a global boycott of its oil exports, which are key to its economy.

"If (Russia) doesn't want to abide by civilized rules, then they shouldn't receive goods and services from civilization," he said in a video address.

## 'Some kind of terrible dream' for Ukrainian women refugees

By JUSTIN SPIKE and BELA SZANDELSZKY Associated Press

ZAHONY, Hungary (AP) — It's a global day to celebrate women, but many fleeing Ukraine feel only the stress of finding a new life for their children as husbands, brothers and fathers stay behind to defend their country from Russia's invasion.

The number of refugees fleeing Ukraine reached 2 million on Tuesday, according to the United Nations, the fastest exodus Europe has seen since World War II.

Polina Shulga tried to ease the journey for her 3-year-old daughter by hiding the truth.

"Of course it's hard to travel with a child, but I explained to her that we're going on vacation and that we'll definitely come home one day when the war is over," Shulga said.

She didn't know what would come next after arriving in Hungary from Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, but believed the experience was making her stronger. "I feel like I'm responsible for my child, so it was easier for me to take this step and leave, because if I had not had a child, I probably would not have dared to go into the unknown," she said, as her little girl tugged at the hem of her coat.

Nataliya Grigoriyovna Levchinka, a refugee from Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, felt much the same.

"I'm generally in some kind of a terrible dream which keeps going on," the retired teacher said. "I would be in some kind of abstraction if it wasn't for my daughter. I wouldn't be able to come to my senses."

A decree by Ukraine's government that prohibits men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country means that most of those fleeing Ukraine are women and children. The policy is meant to encourage men to sign up to fight against Russia's invasion or to keep them available for conscription into the armed forces.

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That has led to heartbreaking scenes of separation, and growing worry as some encircled, battered parts of Ukraine slip out of reach.

In a refugee camp in Moldova, Elena Shapoval apologized for her tears. She doesn't hide them from her two children, one 4 and one 8, while recalling their journey from Odesa. The younger one doesn't understand what's happening, Shapoval said. The older one tries to calm her, saying, "Mom, everything will be all right."

She cannot collapse as she thinks about the life they left behind. "I realize that we'll have to work a lot now," she said. "I need to get myself together because I have two children and I need to ball up my will like a fist."

In Romania, Alina Rudakova began to cry as she realized she had forgotten about International Women's Day. Last year, the 19-year-old from Melitopol received a bouquet of flowers from her father and gifts from other relatives.

"This year, I didn't even think about this day," she said. "This day was really awful."

In a theater at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in the Polish city of Przemysl near the border, women and children filled makeshift beds. Some checked their phones yet again for news.

"It was difficult to prepare myself for traveling," said one refugee from near Kyiv who gave only her first name, Natalia. "My sister said that I am very brave, but in my opinion I am a coward. I want to go home."

And at the Medyka border crossing in Poland, Yelena Makarova said her hurried flight from Kremenchuk with her mother and teenage daughter marked the end of her life as she knew it. Her father, husband and brother all stayed behind.

"I wish that (the war) it would finish as soon as possible, because do you know, for every mother, what can be worse?" she said. "I can't understand why our children are dying. I don't know."

## On Texas trip, Biden to call for more health care for vets

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's trip Tuesday to Fort Worth, Texas, is personal — a chance to talk with veterans and their caregivers and push for more help for members of the military who face health problems after exposure to burn pits.

In last week's State of the Union address, Biden raised the prospect of whether being near the chemicals from burn pits in Iraq led to the death of his son Beau.

"We don't know for sure if a burn pit was the cause of his brain cancer, or the diseases of so many of our troops," Biden said in the speech. "But I'm committed to finding out everything we can."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that Biden will be traveling with Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough to Texas. They'll visit the VA clinic in Fort Worth, with remarks to follow at the Tarrant County Resource Connection on "expanding access to health care and benefits for veterans affected by exposure to harmful substances, toxins and other environmental hazards, including those from burn pits."

Biden, a Democrat, will also call on Congress to send him a bill that protects veterans who face health consequences after burn pit exposure. The House last week passed a bill that would provide VA health care to millions of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who meet that criteria.

Biden's son Beau was a major in an Army National Guard unit that deployed to Iraq in 2008. The two-term Delaware attorney general was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2013 and died two years later at age 46.

It is difficult to link toxic exposure to an individual's medical condition. The concentration of toxic material is often well below the levels needed for immediate poisoning. Still, the VA's own hazardous materials exposure website along with scientists and doctors say military personnel do face risks and dangers after being exposed to contaminants.

## Blinken wraps up Baltic assurance tour as Ukraine war rages

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer



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TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was on the last leg Tuesday of a short tour of the three Baltic states aimed at reassuring the former Soviet republics that NATO will guarantee their security as Russia's war with Ukraine rolls on unabated.

Blinken was meeting with senior Estonian officials in Tallinn, a day after hearing appeals from both Lithuania and Latvia for more support and greater U.S. and NATO troop presence to deter a feared Russian intervention.

"We will defend every square inch of NATO territory if it comes under attack, if it's on the receiving end of aggression," Blinken told Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets.

Liimets, echoing her Baltic counterparts, denounced the Russian invasion, calling it a direct threat to Europe and particularly to the Baltics.

"As the security situation has changed in Europe we must continue to strengthen the defense and deterrent posture here in NATO, especially here on the eastern flank," she said.

As the war in Ukraine rages, leaders in all three Baltic states have expressed grave concerns about Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions for former Soviet bloc countries that are now allied or otherwise linked to the West.

"We have no illusions about Putin's Russia anymore," Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said Monday in Riga. "We don't really see any good reason to assume that Russia might change its policy."

Rinkevics said that the Russian invasion of Ukraine had shown the Baltic countries in particular the need to bolster air and coastal defenses and that Latvia would like its security cooperation with NATO to be "more efficient."

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda told Blinken in Vilnius that a policy of deterrence was no longer enough and that "forward defense" was now needed. He predicted that "Putin will not stop in Ukraine if he will not be stopped."

Memories of Soviet rule are still fresh in the Baltics and since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last month, NATO has moved quickly to boost its troop presence in its eastern flank allies while the U.S. has pledged additional support.

Support for Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion was palpable in all three Baltics as Ukrainian flags and other signs of solidarity were evident in many businesses and on houses, public buildings and buses.

From Tallinn, Blinken will travel to Paris later Tuesday for a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss his recent conversations with Putin about Ukraine and efforts to convince the Russian leader to end the conflict.

## World markets mixed after rout on Wall St; oil prices climb

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — World markets were mixed Tuesday, with European benchmarks and U.S. futures turning higher after Asian shares extended losses.

Surging prices for oil and other vital commodities have been rattling global markets and the situation remains uncertain as investors search for safe havens from expanding sanctions against Russia.

Oil prices were relatively steady after surging past \$130 a barrel the day before. U.S. benchmark crude gained \$2.16 to \$121.56 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international standard, added \$2.43 to \$125.64 a barrel.

Russian troops were making significant advances in southern Ukraine early Tuesday but were stalled in some other regions. Ukrainian officials were skeptical over a Russian plan for safe corridors to let civilians escape fighting after earlier efforts to establish evacuation routes crumbled amid renewed attacks.

France's CAC 40 added 2.2% to 6,112.21 while Germany's DAX climbed 1.4% to 13,010.32. Britain's FTSE 100 gained 0.2% to 6,971.04. U.S. futures also advanced, with the contract for the Dow industrials up 0.3% while the contract for the S&P 500 gained 0.5%.

Analysts expect the war in Ukraine to top the agenda for some time to come and say the full impact of the conflict is yet to be fully taken into account.

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Worries are growing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will squeeze already tight supplies of oil. Russia is one of the world's largest energy producers, and oil prices already were high before the attack because the global economy is demanding more fuel after disruptions to travel and manufacturing from the pandemic.

But reports Tuesday highlighted plans by European leaders to find ways to reduce the region's current heavy reliance on Russian natural gas.

"Disruptions to energy markets and the possibility of a geopolitical paradigm shift make for a highly unpredictable environment," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary. However, he added, "we should reach a point at which equities start to price in a light at the end of the tunnel."

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 shed 1.7% to finish at 24,790.95. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 sank 0.8% to 6,980.30. South Korea's Kospi slipped 1.1% to 2,622.40. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1.4% to 20,765.87, while the Shanghai Composite tumbled 2.4% to 3,293.53.

India's Sensex was the rare gainer, adding 1% to 53,345.24.

The price of gold — a measure of nervousness on Wall Street — jumped more than \$22 an ounce to \$2,018.00.

Nickel, crucial for batteries and steel making among other vital manufacturing, jumped 44.3% to \$42,995.00 per metric ton on the London Metal Exchange. The exchange suspended trading after the price of the metal's three-month contract more than doubled to over \$100,000 a ton.

The exchange said the evolving situation in Russia and Ukraine had led it to suspend trading at least for Tuesday and possibly longer "on orderly market grounds."

Russia is a key supplier of nickel. It and Ukraine together also supply 13% of the world's titanium, which is used to make passenger jets and 30% of the palladium, which goes into cars, cellphones and dental fillings.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar rose to 115.50 Japanese yen from 115.32 yen. The euro cost \$1.0915, up from \$1.0853.

## Berliners open their hearts, homes to those fleeing Ukraine

By KERSTIN SOPKE and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Emmanuel Oyedele's dream of getting a business degree in Ukraine lies shattered in the rubble of Russia's sudden fierce military assault, but right now the 28-year-old Nigerian says he feels blessed.

After hastily escaping Kyiv as Russian forces advanced, Oyedele, his brother and two young female friends spent days trying to flee Ukraine by train and on foot before eventually making it to Berlin, where they were welcomed into a stranger's home.

"The stress, it's all gone," Oyedele said Monday from the lake-side house an hour outside the German capital where the Vollmann family says he and his group can stay until the end of April.

"The only stress I have right now is the sympathy, the sadness in me to see my brothers who are stuck in Kyiv or other regions of Ukraine," Oyedele told The Associated Press. Aside from the threat of being caught in the fighting, lack of electricity means those left behind are now sleeping in cold apartments, without warm water or any way to cook, he said.

According to the U.N. refugee agency, more than 1.7 million people have fled Ukraine since the start of the conflict, and many more are still trying to get out. Among them are tens of thousands of foreigners, including many students from Asia and Africa who, like Oyedele, had hoped to get a foothold in Europe with a degree in Ukraine.

Reports of non-white people being turned back at the border as they tried to enter Poland prompted Oyedele and his friends to make a lengthy detour via Hungary, from where they were eventually able to get to Berlin.

Christian Vollmann, a tech entrepreneur in his mid-40s, was among hundreds of Germans waiting at the train station Friday night with a sign saying how many people he could take in and for how long.

"I felt helpless and wanted to do something," Vollmann told AP after he and Oyedele had been paired

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up by volunteers trying to find homes for trainloads of weary refugees, many of whom were carrying little more than a bag each containing their most precious belongings and documents.

"We are so privileged here," he said.

Germany took in almost 900,000 refugees in 2015, many of them fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The influx was accompanied by a deliberate effort on the part of many Germans to help the new arrivals integrate, but also led to social tensions and the rise of a new far-right party in the country.

So far, Berlin's welcome to those fleeing the war in Ukraine has been big-hearted, but the sudden strain is beginning to show.

"It's very important that people don't just arrive in Berlin, but also are accommodated in other states so that we can manage it," Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey said Monday.

Of the more than 10,000 people arriving in the German capital each day since Friday, the overwhelming majority have found shelter in private accommodation — with friends or volunteer hosts.

Giffey praised the goodwill of Berliners but warned that it likely won't be a long-term solution.

"If someone clears out their children's room, they can do that for a while, for one or two or perhaps a few weeks," she said, but warned that eventually people might need long-term accommodation elsewhere.

Vollmann is convinced he made the right choice taking in Oyedele and his friends. The Nigerians and their German hosts have already spent a night around a campfire drinking beer and getting to know each other.

"It was great to see how grateful they were, how much joy they had and how many plans they're already making," Vollmann said.

He hopes the wave of support many Europeans are showing toward those fleeing Ukraine will continue.

"In my view this sends a very strong signal," Vollmann said. "The more aggression there is, the more solidarity has to come from our side."

Oyedele, too, has his hopes pinned on Europe.

"I think Germany has a space for me," he said.

## Ukraine war highlights internal divides in Mideast nations

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — In a neighborhood of Iraq's capital, a gigantic poster of Vladimir Putin with the words, "We support Russia," was up for few hours before a security force arrived and hurriedly took it down. Then came the security directive: All public displays of Putin's pictures shall be banned.

In Lebanon, the powerful Hezbollah militia railed against the government's condemnation of Russia's attack on Ukraine, calling for neutrality.

Such wrangling shows the deep divisions over the Ukraine war in the Middle East, where Moscow has embedded itself as a key player in recent years, making powerful friends among state and non-state actors while America's influence waned.

Political elites closely allied with the West are wary of alienating Russia or the U.S. and Europe. But other forces — from Shiite militia factions in Iraq, to Lebanon's Hezbollah group and Houthi rebels in Yemen — vocally support Russia against Ukraine.

These groups are considered to be Iran's boots on the ground in the so-called anti-U.S. "axis of resistance." Putin won their backing largely because of his close ties with Tehran and his military intervention in Syria's civil war in support of President Bashar Assad.

They see Putin as a steady, reliable partner who, unlike the Americans, does not drop his allies. In their circles, they even have an affectionate nickname for Putin — "Abu Ali" — which is a common name among Shiite Muslims and meant to portray a certain camaraderie.

Meanwhile, governments are walking a tightrope.

"Iraq is against the war but has not condemned it nor taken a side," said political analyst Ihsan Alshamary, who heads the Political Thought Think Tank in Baghdad. Iraq needs to remain neutral because it has shared interests with both Russia and the West, he said.

He said Iran's allies in the region are outspokenly with Russia "because they are anti-American and anti-

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West and believe that Russia is their ally.”

Russia has invested up to \$14 billion in Iraq and the northern Kurdish-run region, mainly focusing on the energy sector, Moscow’s ambassador Elbrus Kutrashev told the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw in a recent interview.

Among the major oil companies operating in the country are Russia’s Lukoil, Gazprom Neft and Rosneft. Iraq also maintains close ties with the U.S., but Western companies have steadily been plotting to exit from Iraq’s oil sector.

Iraq’s strongest move so far came after its central bank advised the prime minister against signing new contracts with Russian companies or payments in light of U.S. sanctions. The decision will impact new Russian investment in the country, but little else, Russian industry officials said.

Last week, Iraq was among the 35 countries that abstained from a U.N. General Assembly vote to demand that Russia stop its offensive and withdraw troops from Ukraine. Lebanon voted in favor, while Syria, where Russian ties run deep, voted against. Iran also abstained.

In Lebanon, an unusually blunt Foreign Ministry statement denouncing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine caused an uproar and upset the Russians, forcing the minister to clarify that Lebanon did not intend to take sides and would remain neutral.

“They distance themselves and claim neutrality where they want, and they interfere and condemn where they want,” Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim Moussawi wrote on Twitter, taking aim at the Foreign Ministry. “What foreign policy does Lebanon follow, and what is Lebanon’s interest in that? Please clarify for us, foreign minister.”

Hezbollah, which also sent thousands of fighters to neighboring Syria to shore up Assad’s forces, has seized on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to portray it as an inevitable result of U.S. provocations and yet another betrayal by the United States of its allies – in this case, Ukraine.

In Syria, where Russia maintains thousands of troops, billboards proclaiming, “Victory for Russia” popped up in areas of Damascus this week. In opposition-held areas, which still get hit by Russian airstrikes, residents hope pressure will ease on them if Russia gets bogged down in fighting in Ukraine.

In Iraq, the Ukraine war is highlighting divisions in an already fractured landscape during stalled efforts to form a new government, five months after parliament elections were held.

The huge billboard in support of Putin was briefly put up in a Baghdad neighborhood considered a stronghold of powerful Iranian-backed militias. After it was removed, the Russian Embassy in Baghdad tweeted an image of it.

“The poster was provocative, I am against it,” said Athir Ghorayeb, who works at a nearby coffee shop. Iraq is only just emerging from decades of war and conflict, he said. “Why do they insist on involving us in new problems?”

Many Iraqis see in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine echoes of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of neighboring Kuwait and subsequent years-long economic sanctions placed on Iraq. It was only a few days ago that Iraq finished paying reparations to Kuwait which totaled more than \$52 billion.

On social media, Iraqi pages on Facebook with millions of followers have posted news of what is happening in Ukraine, sharing their views. “Our hearts are with the civilians, as those who have tasted war know its catastrophes,” posted one user, Zahra Obaidi.

“We have tents for refugees and internally displaced people, so you’re welcome to come use them,” Hafidh Salih posted.

Toby Dodge, a professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, said Iraq’s moves — abstaining from the U.N. vote while limiting economic activity — were prudent, managing the short-term risks without taking an ideological stance.

But the longer the war drags on, the harder it will be to maintain this strategy.

“Iraq is deeply divided politically amongst players between pro-Iran and those that are anti-Iran trying to assert autonomy. The Ukraine becomes another performance, another example of where either side can burnish their credentials,” he said.



## Resilience Story: Forget about the leg, just watch him dance

By MARTHA IRVINE Associated Press

CADILLAC, Mich. (AP) — The high school choir room buzzed with spontaneous song and silliness before the show. Their recent rendition of Disney's "High School Musical" was the students' first chance to perform live since the pandemic shut down the world two years ago.

Everyone was thrilled to be together again, but nervous, too.

At this point, someone usually shouts, "Break a leg!" MacKale McGuire, one of the show's stars, responds with a cheeky grin: "I beat you to it."

It is dark humor from a young man whose left leg was amputated above the knee four years ago after a battle with osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer. "I've said it too many times, and now people just roll their eyes whenever they hear it," he said, chuckling. "But I love doing it. It's funny."

MacKale learned to walk again with a prosthetic leg. He returned to golfing almost immediately and eventually played soccer. Inspired by athletes in the winter Paralympics, which were on right about the time of his amputation, he learned to ski on one leg.

Now, on this snowy night in his northern Michigan hometown, he was about to dance across the stage, playing the lead role of Troy Bolton, a jock (like him) who likes to sing. A show that's heavy on dancing was a particular challenge.

"I like to surprise people," said the curly-headed 18-year-old, whose story has long inspired his small community. Shortly after his diagnosis in 2015, the Cadillac High School boys' basketball team donned "Team MacKale" shirts in his favorite colors – fluorescent orange and black. Soon, people all over town were wearing them.

MacKale, also called "Mac," has been cancer-free for more than five years. He credits the support, especially from his family, with helping him get through challenging times.

But his parents say MacKale has always been pretty resilient, perhaps because he's dealt with hard things his entire life. He was born with hemophilia, a blood-clotting disorder. So when the cancer diagnosis came, he was accustomed to visiting doctors and hospitals.

His mom, Marsha McGuire, says he also seems to have forgotten or compartmentalized the worst moments in his cancer journey – the nausea from chemotherapy that made it hard to eat or the pain from the unsuccessful attempt to use a cadaver bone to save his leg.

After a surgeon in Florida presented amputation as an option in 2018, MacKale quickly agreed.

"When he had his full leg, he was more handicapped than he is now without his leg. It was like a dead weight," his mom recalls. "When he had his amputation, it's like the whole world opened up to him and he seemed more confident to all of us."

MacKale started out as a manager for his school soccer team. His coach eventually encouraged him to play.

"I just remember that first time and feeling the wind blow through my hair again," he said. "... I was hooked from then on."

As a sophomore, MacKale scored a winning goal in a shootout during a tournament game. With the help of a "blade" prosthetic that gave him more speed and agility, he played varsity this season, his last at Cadillac High.

"I try to like look for things that I can do, rather than things that I can't do," he said.

Even when the coronavirus pandemic shut down much of life, MacKale said he felt more prepared for the isolation than most.

"While I was in treatment, I was basically in a similar situation -- like people rarely came to see me because I was sick quite often," he said. "So it just it seemed kind of familiar in a weird way."

In the fall, MacKale plans to go to college. He's thinking about becoming a pediatric oncologist to help kids in the same predicament he was – though sports management and theater also are appealing.

For now, he's just happy to enjoy the end of his senior year and to savor those moments back on stage.

"This could be the start of something new. It feels so right to be here with you," MacKale sang in one

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song, as Troy Bolton.

Wearing a basketball uniform for most of the show, his prosthetic leg was there for all to see. But he hoped most people eventually forgot about it and just enjoyed the show.

## Morgan Wallen wins at ACM Awards; Lambert wins top prize

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

Morgan Wallen won album of the year at the Academy of Country Music Awards on Monday night for "Dangerous: The Double Album," a year after he was removed from the ACMs ballot after he was caught on camera using a racial slur.

Wallen made no direct reference to the incident or his absence from recent awards shows while accepting the trophy at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, but may have dropped a hint about it.

"To my son, this award will signify that his daddy was a fighter," Wallen said, finishing his speech by enthusiastically thanking the fans in attendance.

Miranda Lambert took home the night's top prize, entertainer of the year, for the first time after losing out in five previous years, but was not in Las Vegas to accept it.

"I cannot believe I'm not there to celebrate," Lambert said in a video message from London, "it's the first time I've missed the ACMs in 17 years. I've been waiting a long time for this"

Carly Pearce won best female artists and Chris Stapleton won best male artist over Wallen, who took no other awards Monday night after being nominated for three.

Wallen was among the few winners who did not perform on the show.

Jason Aldean and Carrie Underwood won single of the year for their duet "If I Didn't Love You," while Lainey Wilson won song of the year for "Things a Man Oughta Know." The artists later performed the songs live in a show that was heavy on performances.

The show, streamed live on Amazon Prime Video, tried to evoke a party atmosphere while paying tribute to tragedies both global and local.

As Old Dominion took the stage to claim its fifth straight ACM Award for best group, lead singer Matthew Ramsey said he was glad host Dolly Parton had opened the show by dedicating the night to Ukraine amid the Russian invasion.

"I was feeling a little bit strange because we're in this beautiful bubble," Ramsey said. "Every person here have fought for their dreams, but there are people out there fighting for their lives."

Aldean, who was performing at a nearby music festival on the Las Vegas Strip in 2017 when a 64-year man opened fire and killed 60 people, said he still couldn't believe the moment happened as he introduced Stapleton.

Stapleton performed his angry song about the shooting, "Watch You Burn."

"Only a coward would pick up a gun, and shoot up a crowd trying to have fun," Stapleton sang.

Otherwise, the show did its best to be lighthearted fun.

Parton opened the show by taking the stage at the indoor stadium in a jumpsuit that appeared to be covered in sparkling shards of glass.

"A disco ball just fell right on me," Parton said. "I'm just hoping that nothing punctures me."

Then came the first of several long blocks of performances — including one 35 minutes long — in a ceremony that seeks to emphasize the music and a concert-like atmosphere.

Parton's co-hosts Jimmie Allen and Gabby Barrett celebrated the show's return to its usual home city after two years in Nashville. They sang Elvis Presley's classic "Viva Las Vegas" and Faith Hill's "Let's Go to Vegas."

They were followed by medleys from Eric Church and Walker Hayes, who started his performance deep in the stadium stands, dressed as casually as the folks in the cheap seats as he sang his viral hit about a date at Applebee's, "Fancy Like."

Brothers Osborne broke a three-year winning streak by Dan + Shay to take best duo, the first trophy handed out during the show.

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Luke Bryan sang his ballad "Up," then performed his hit duet "Buy Dirt" with Jordan Davis and performance of his ballad "Up." Other performers included Kane Brown, Maren Morris, Thomas Rhett, Blanco Brown, Brooke Eden, Ashley McBryde and BRELAND.

As the show drew to a close, Kelly Clarkson performed "I Will Always Love You," first written and recorded by Parton, in tribute to the host.

"I love you Dolly Parton!" Clarkson screamed as Parton stepped out to present the entertainer of the year award.

After reading Lambert's name, Parton said, "I have always loved her." She also said she thought the late Whitney Houston, who brought the song renewed fame in the 1990s, would approve of Clarkson's soaring rendition.

Brothers Osborne and Brittney Spencer closed the show with a performance of Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walking."

Drawn by the ACM's reputation for having a fun, inviting and inclusive atmosphere, Amazon sought to go beyond the live sporting events it has previously aired to connect that with a large audience of country fans who listen to Amazon Music.

The show attempted to have a sporting look, with three stages, overhead spider cameras, non-stop action and heavy on graphics.

It was touted as commercial-free, but there were breaks to promote Amazon's original movies and television series.

In one moment of promotional synergy, author James Patterson introduced a performance by Parton and Kelsea Ballerini.

Patterson and Parton co-authored a novel, "Run, Rose, Run," that debuted for sale on Amazon on Monday. Parton and Ballerini performed a duet from the companion album, available on Amazon Music, while Ballerini performs the role of the title character in the audiobook on Amazon's Audible.com.

## Court rejects GOP redistricting plans in NC, Pennsylvania

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a victory for Democrats, the Supreme Court has turned away efforts from Republicans in North Carolina and Pennsylvania to block state court-ordered congressional districting plans.

In separate orders late Monday, the justices are allowing maps selected by each state's Supreme Court to be in effect for the 2022 elections. Those maps are more favorable to Democrats than the ones drawn by the states' legislatures.

In North Carolina, the map most likely will give Democrats an additional House seat in 2023.

The Pennsylvania map also probably will lead to the election of more Democrats, the Republicans say, as the two parties battle for control of the U.S. House of Representatives in the midterm elections in November.

The justices provided no explanation for their actions, as is common in emergency applications on what is known as the "shadow docket."

While the high court did not stop the state court-ordered plans from being used in this year's elections, four conservative justices indicated they want it to confront the issue that could dramatically limit the power of state courts over federal elections in the future. The Republicans argued that state courts lack the authority to second-guess legislatures' decisions about the conduct of elections for Congress and the presidency.

"We will have to resolve this question sooner or later, and the sooner we do so, the better. This case presented a good opportunity to consider the issue, but unfortunately the court has again found the occasion inopportune," Justice Samuel Alito wrote in a dissent from the Supreme Court's order, joined by Justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh made a similar point, but said he didn't want to interfere in this year's electoral process, which already is underway. The filing deadline in North Carolina was Friday.

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The state courts were involved because of partisan wrangling and lawsuits over congressional redistricting in both states, where the legislatures are controlled by Republicans, the governors are Democrats and the state Supreme Courts have Democratic majorities.

In Pennsylvania, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf vetoed the plan the Republican-controlled Legislature approved, saying it was the result of a "partisan political process."

The state, with a delegation of nine Democrats and nine Republicans, is losing a seat in the House following the 2020 Census.

Republicans said the map they came up with would elect nine Democrats and eight Republicans. State courts eventually stepped in and approved a map that probably will elect 10 Democrats, the GOP argued.

North Carolina is picking up a seat in the House because of population gains. Republican majorities in the Legislature produced an initial plan most likely to result in 10 seats for Republicans and four for Democrats. The governor does not have veto power over redistricting plans in North Carolina.

After Democrats sued, the state's high court selected a map that likely will elect at least six Democrats.

Lawsuits are continuing in both states, but the Supreme Court signaled in Monday's orders that this year's elections for Congress in North Carolina and Pennsylvania would take place under the maps approved by the states' top courts.

## **AP sources: Biden to issue executive order on cryptocurrency**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is expected to sign an executive order on cryptocurrency this week that will mark the first step toward regulating how digital currency is traded.

The move comes as administration officials have raised concerns in recent weeks about Russia's use of cryptocurrency to evade the impact of crushing sanctions in response to its invasion of Ukraine. The sanctions have sent the ruble to historic lows and have closed the country's stock market.

Two people familiar with the process said the executive order on cryptocurrency was expected to be issued this week and it had been in the works long before the war. Both people spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the order.

The order is expected to describe what government agencies, including the Treasury Department, need to do to develop policies and regulations on digital currencies. It is expected to include a request for the State Department to ensure that American cryptocurrency laws are aligned with those of U.S. allies and will ask the Financial Stability Oversight Council — which monitors the stability of the U.S. financial system — to study illicit finance concerns.

Additionally, the order will explore the possibility of a new central bank digital currency. The Federal Reserve issued a paper on the topic in January that explores the risks and benefits of U.S.-backed digital currency.

Implicit in the order will be that cryptocurrency will remain a part of the U.S. economy for years to come. The White House's plans to move forward with the executive order were first reported by Bloomberg News.

While U.S. officials have played down the significance of cryptocurrency to Russia's ability to evade sanctions, it remains a concern.

"We will continue to look at how the sanctions work and evaluate whether or not there are liquid leakages and we have the possibility to address them. I often hear cryptocurrency mentioned and that is a channel to be watched," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said last week.

A senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity said the president's national security team has already been on the lookout for the use and creation of front companies and alternative financial institutions that Moscow might try to employ to get around sanctions.

Crypto is one of several spaces that the Biden administration is looking to shore up as it tries to make certain that sanctions on Russia have maximum impact. The official said past experiences in Iran and Venezuela with sanctions evasion are informing the administration's efforts. Additional export controls and new sanction targets are also expected to be unveiled in the days and weeks ahead to counter Russian



sanction evasion efforts, the official said.

On Monday, Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network issued an alert advising financial institutions to be "vigilant" against any efforts to evade sanctions in connection with Russia's war in Ukraine.

"Although we have not seen widespread evasion of our sanctions using methods such as cryptocurrency, prompt reporting of suspicious activity contributes to our national security and our efforts to support Ukraine and its people," acting Director Him Das said in a statement.

## 1 teen dead, 2 wounded in shooting outside Iowa high school

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — One teenager was killed and two others were critically wounded after gunfire that appeared to come from a passing vehicle struck them outside an Iowa school, authorities said.

Des Moines police said in a news release Monday that potential suspects have been detained in the shooting on the grounds of East High School, near Des Moines' downtown, about a half mile, from the Capitol. No charges were immediately filed.

Sgt. Paul Parizek told KCCI-TV that calls started pouring in around 2:50 p.m. Monday, shortly before classes were scheduled to dismiss for the day.

Police didn't identify those shot but said a 15-year-old male had died. He was not a student at East.

The other two shot were females aged 16 and 18, who both attend East. They were hospitalized in critical condition.

The district said in a news release that the school was immediately put into lockdown and students were kept inside while police investigated. They were dismissed around 3:30 p.m. after law enforcement gave an all clear.

Principal Jill Versteeg described what happened as "everyone's worst nightmare" and urged parents to "hug your students and love them."

The district said there would be no classes Tuesday and that it was postponing the ACT and parent-teacher conferences. The district also was making grief counselors available.

Superintendent Thomas Ahart said school shootings have "become too common" and said that "real change to gun laws and access would go a long way to help us."

"Our staff and students," he said, "are forced to train for these incidents and the trauma associated with the repeated drills and incidents will remain with them for years to come. It's unfortunate that our state and our country have become a place where firearms are far too easily accessible."

Police said they do not believe there is a continued threat to the public.

A motive was not immediately known, and Parizek provided no details on the potential suspects. He said witnesses were being interviewed and investigators were executing search warrants.

Authorities have recovered shell casings from the scene as they investigate what happened.

"Obviously, we threw every resource we had at this. We know that the kids in that school are our community's most precious cargo."

Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert went to the school after the shooting and expressed frustration at the violence.

"Unfortunately what happened here today was just another pointless tragedy in our community," Wingert told TV station WOI-TV. "People using firearms to settle their differences."

Police said it was the fourth homicide in Des Moines this year.

## Crisis deepens, Ukraine accuses Moscow of 'medieval' tactics

By YURAS KARMAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine deepened Monday as Russian forces intensified their shelling and food, water, heat and medicine grew increasingly scarce, in what the country condemned as a medieval-style siege by Moscow to batter it into submission.

A third round of talks between the two sides ended with a top Ukrainian official saying there had been

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minor, unspecified progress toward establishing safe corridors that would allow civilians to escape the fighting. Russia's chief negotiator said he expects those corridors to start operating Tuesday.

But that remained to be seen, given the failure of previous attempts to lead civilians to safety amid the biggest ground war in Europe since World War II.

Well into the second week of the invasion, with Russian troops making significant advances in southern Ukraine but stalled in some other regions, a top U.S. official said multiple countries were discussing whether to provide the warplanes that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been pleading for.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces continued to pummel cities with rockets, and fierce fighting raged in places. In the face of the bombardments, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were showing unprecedented courage.

"The problem is that for one soldier of Ukraine, we have 10 Russian soldiers, and for one Ukrainian tank, we have 50 Russian tanks," Zelenskyy told ABC News in an interview that aired Monday night. He noted that the gap in forces was diminishing and that even if Russian forces "come into all our cities," they will be met with an insurgency.

In one of the most desperate cities, the encircled southern port of Mariupol, an estimated 200,000 people — nearly half the population of 430,000 — were hoping to flee, and Red Cross officials waited to hear when a corridor would be established.

The city is short on water, food and power, and cellphone networks are down. Stores have been looted as residents search for essential goods.

Police moved through the city, advising people to remain in shelters until they heard official messages broadcast over loudspeakers to evacuate.

Hospitals in Mariupol are facing severe shortages of antibiotics and painkillers, and doctors performed some emergency procedures without them.

The lack of phone service left anxious citizens approaching strangers to ask if they knew relatives living in other parts of the city and whether they were safe.

In the capital, Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million, often using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables. Some barricades looked significant, with heavy concrete slabs and sandbags piled more than two stories high, while others appeared more haphazard, with hundreds of books used to weigh down stacks of tires.

"Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary," said Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, with 1.4 million people, heavy shelling slammed into apartment buildings.

"I think it struck the fourth floor under us," Dmitry Sedorenko said from his Kharkiv hospital bed. "Immediately, everything started burning and falling apart." When the floor collapsed beneath him, he crawled out through the third story, past the bodies of some of his neighbors.

Klitschko reported that fierce battles continued in the Kyiv region, notably around Bucha, Hostomel, Vorzel and Irpin.

In the Irpin area, which has been cut off from electricity, water and heat for three days, witnesses saw at least three tanks and said Russian soldiers were seizing houses and cars.

A few miles away, in the small town of Horenka, where shelling reduced one area to ashes and shards of glass, rescuers and residents picked through the ruins as chickens pecked around them.

"What are they doing?" rescue worker Vasyl Oksak asked of the Russian attackers. "There were two little kids and two elderly people living here. Come in and see what they have done."

In the south, Russian forces also continued their offensive in Mykolaiv, opening fire on the Black Sea shipbuilding center of a half-million people, according to Ukraine's military. Rescuers said they were putting out fires caused by rocket attacks in residential areas.

At The Hague, Netherlands, Ukraine pleaded with the International Court of Justice to order a halt to Russia's invasion, saying Moscow is committing widespread war crimes.

Russia "is resorting to tactics reminiscent of medieval siege warfare, encircling cities, cutting off escape

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routes and pounding the civilian population with heavy ordnance," said Jonathan Gimblett, a member of Ukraine's legal team.

Russia snubbed the court proceedings, leaving its seats in the Great Hall of Justice empty.

Efforts to set up safe passage for civilians over the weekend fell apart amid continued Russian shelling. Before Monday's talks began, Russia announced a new plan, saying civilians would be allowed to leave Kyiv, Mariupol, Kharkiv and Sumy.

But many of the evacuation routes headed toward Russia or its ally Belarus, which has served as a launch pad for the invasion. Ukraine instead proposed eight routes allowing civilians to travel to western regions of the country where there is no shelling.

Later, Russia's U.N. Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, told the U.N. Security Council that Russia would carry out a cease-fire Tuesday morning and appeared to suggest that humanitarian corridors leading away from Kyiv, Mariupol, Sumy and Chernigov could give people choice in where they want to go.

The U.N. humanitarian chief, Undersecretary-General Martin Griffiths, addressed the Security Council and urged safe passage for people to go "in the direction they choose."

Zelenskyy's office would not comment on the Russian proposal, saying only that Moscow's plans can be believed only if a safe evacuation begins. The office said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk planned to make a statement on the issue Tuesday morning.

The battle for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The fighting has sent energy prices surging worldwide and stocks plummeting, and threatens the food supply and livelihoods of people around the globe who rely on crops farmed in the fertile Black Sea region.

The U.N. human rights office reported 406 confirmed civilian deaths but said the real number is much higher. The invasion has also sent 1.7 million people fleeing Ukraine.

On Monday, Moscow again announced a series of demands to stop the invasion, including that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia and recognize the eastern regions controlled by Moscow-supported separatist fighters as independent. It also insisted that Ukraine change its constitution to guarantee it won't join international bodies like NATO and the EU. Ukraine has already rejected those demands.

Zelenskyy has called for more punitive measures against Russia, including a global boycott of its oil exports, which are key to its economy.

"If (Russia) doesn't want to abide by civilized rules, then they shouldn't receive goods and services from civilization," he said in a video address.

He has also asked for more warplanes. Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said officials are "trying to see whether this is possible and doable."

While the West has been rushing weapons to Ukraine such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, some officials fear that sending warplanes could be seen by Moscow as direct involvement in the war.

One possible scenario under discussion: Former Soviet bloc nations that are now NATO members could send Ukraine their own Soviet-era MiGs, which Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly, and the U.S. would then replace those countries' aircraft with American-made F-16s.

Russia's invasion has nearby countries terrified the war could spread to them.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken began a lightning visit to the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, former Soviet republics that are NATO members. Blinken hoped to reassure them of the alliance's protection.

NATO has shown no interest in sending troops into the country and has rejected Zelenskyy's pleas to establish a no-fly zone for fear of triggering a wider war.

## What to know about South Korea's presidential election

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Whoever wins South Korea's presidential election Wednesday will face a host of major issues, including skyrocketing housing prices, threats from nuclear-armed North Korea and a debate about how to heal a nation sharply split along ideological, generational and gender lines.

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Here's what to know about the election for leader of the world's 10th-largest economy.

## WHAT'S AT STAKE

The winner will take office on May 10 for a single five-year term. Current liberal President Moon Jae-in is barred by law from seeking reelection. The candidate who receives the most votes is declared the winner, even if that person fails to achieve majority support.

The present election system was adopted in 1987 when South Korea's then military-backed government caved to massive pro-democracy protests and accepted sweeping liberalizing measures.

## THE CANDIDATES

The election has boiled down to a showdown between ruling liberal Democratic Party candidate, Lee Jae-myung, and his conservative opposition rival, Yoon Suk Yeol, from the People Power Party. Both have been criticized for negative campaigning and for not presenting long-term visions on how to lead South Korea.

Lee is a former governor of the populous Gyeonggi province that surrounds Seoul, while Yoon is a former prosecutor general who entered party politics last year.

## WHO CAN VOTE

About 44 million South Korean nationals aged 18 or older are eligible to vote, out of the country's population of about 52 million people. About 16 million of them already cast ballots during early voting last week.

Separately, about 161,820 voters who are living abroad also already cast ballots at polling booths established at South Korean diplomatic facilities. Tens of thousands of others on remote islands, at nursing homes or on ships have been voting by mail or fax.

On Wednesday, polling stations are open from 6 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

## MAIN ISSUES

Lee and Yoon have been bickering over North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal and an intensifying U.S.-China rivalry.

Lee, who has often expressed nationalistic views, hopes to win exemptions from U.N. sanctions against North Korea to revive stalled inter-Korean economic cooperation projects. He also believes Seoul could act as a mediator between Washington and Pyongyang to revive dormant nuclear diplomacy.

Yoon says he would seek a stronger U.S. security commitment to deter North Korean aggression. He wants to launch preemptive strikes on the North if it displays signs of attack.

While Lee favors a balancing act between Washington and Beijing — Seoul's chief security ally and its biggest trading partner, respectively — Yoon has made it clear that a boosted alliance with the United States would be the center of his foreign policy.

Both have promised to offer economic relief to small business owners hit by pandemic-related restrictions, provide millions of public housing units throughout the country and to create more jobs.

## SCANDALS

The mudslinging between Lee and Yoon involves plenty of bizarre accusations targeting the candidates and their families.

Yoon's wife was forced to apologize over suspicions that she falsified her work experience when applying for teaching jobs at colleges. Lee's wife also apologized over allegations that she privately used official funds and made public servants do her personal errands while her husband served as a Gyeonggi governor.

Yoon has attacked Lee over allegations that Lee is a central figure in a corrupt property development project launched in the city of Seongnam when he was mayor there. Lee and his allies have tried to link Yoon to that scandal and also accused the opposition candidate and his wife of having depended on shamanism, an ancient religious belief, too much.



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## VIRUS FEARS

Wednesday's vote will take place as coronavirus infections surge. Virus patients and others placed in quarantine are allowed to cast ballots when regular voting closes at 6 p.m. They are asked to vote at designated polling booths, while election workers will be equipped with gloves, masks, face screens and protective suits.

Arranging a voting process for virus carriers was crucial, with health authorities rapidly expanding at-home treatments to save hospital resources. As of Monday, more than 1.15 million people with mild or moderate symptoms were being asked to isolate at home.

## 1 teen dead, 2 wounded in shooting outside Iowa high school

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — One teenager was killed and two others were critically wounded Monday after gunfire that appeared to come from a passing vehicle struck them outside an Iowa school, authorities said.

Des Moines police said in a news release that potential suspects have been detained in the shooting on the grounds of East High School, near Des Moines' downtown, about a half mile, from the Capitol. No charges were immediately filed.

Sgt. Paul Parizek told KCCI-TV that calls started pouring in around 2:50 p.m., shortly before classes were scheduled to dismiss for the day.

Police didn't identify those shot but said a 15-year-old male had died. He was not a student at East.

The other two shot were females aged 16 and 18, who both attend East. They were hospitalized in critical condition.

The district said in a news release that the school was immediately put into lockdown and students were kept inside while police investigated. They were dismissed around 3:30 p.m. after law enforcement gave an all clear.

Principal Jill Versteeg described what happened as "everyone's worst nightmare" and urged parents to "hug your students and love them."

The district said there would be no classes Tuesday and that it was postponing the ACT and parent-teacher conferences. The district also was making grief counselors available.

Superintendent Thomas Ahart said school shootings have "become too common" and said that "real change to gun laws and access would go a long way to help us."

"Our staff and students," he said, "are forced to train for these incidents and the trauma associated with the repeated drills and incidents will remain with them for years to come. It's unfortunate that our state and our country have become a place where firearms are far too easily accessible."

Police said they do not believe there is a continued threat to the public.

A motive was not immediately known, and Parizek provided no details on the potential suspects. He said witnesses were being interviewed and investigators were executing search warrants.

Authorities have recovered shell casings from the scene as they investigate what happened.

"Obviously, we threw every resource we had at this. We know that the kids in that school are our community's most precious cargo."

Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert went to the school after the shooting and expressed frustration at the violence.

"Unfortunately what happened here today was just another pointless tragedy in our community," Wingert told TV station WOI-TV. "People using firearms to settle their differences."

Police said it was the fourth homicide in Des Moines this year.

## Scientists: Asian spider could spread to much of East Coast

ATLANTA (AP) — Researchers say a large spider native to East Asia that proliferated in Georgia last year could spread to much of the East Coast.

The Joro spider's golden web took over yards all over north Georgia in 2021, unnerving some residents.

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The spider was also spotted in South Carolina, and entomologists expected it to spread throughout the Southeast.

A new study suggests it could spread even farther than that. The Joro appears better suited to colder temperatures than a related species, researchers at the University of Georgia said in a paper published last month.

It has about double the metabolism, a 77% higher heart rate and can survive a brief freeze that kills off its relatives, the study found.

The researchers also noted that Joros are found in much of Japan, which has a similar climate to the U.S.

"Just by looking at that, it looks like the Joros could probably survive throughout most of the Eastern seaboard here, which is pretty sobering," study co-author Andy Davis said in a statement.

The Joro — *Trichonephila clavata* — is part of a group of spiders known as orb weavers for their highly organized, wheel-shaped webs. Joro females have colorful yellow, blue and red markings on their bodies and can measure three inches (8 cm) across when their legs are fully extended.

It's not clear exactly how and when the first Joro spider arrived in the U.S. or why they were so abundant in Georgia last year.

Their impact on native species and the environment is also not clear, though some researchers believe they are benign.

## US gasoline prices rise again on talk of banning Russian oil

By DAVID KOENIG AP Business Writer

Gasoline prices are pushing even farther above \$4 a gallon, the highest price that American motorists have faced since July 2008, as calls grow to ban imports of Russian oil.

Prices at the pump were rising long before Russia invaded Ukraine and have spiraled faster since the start of the war. The U.S. national average for a gallon of gasoline has soared 45 cents a gallon in the past week and topped \$4.06 on Monday, according to auto club AAA.

"I am looking at the possibility of walking to work," said Asiya Joseph, who had just paid \$4.29 a gallon at a BP station in Brooklyn, New York. "This is the first time that I am filling up my tank in like, 10 days."

In Huntington Beach, California, Julian Mesa earns \$15 an hour cleaning offices. On Monday, he paid \$92 to fill his pickup at \$5.79 a gallon.

"It's very expensive, high for people who are earning the minimum," Mesa said. His family had already scaled back on eating out to cut their spending during the pandemic.

The price of regular broke \$4 a gallon on Sunday for the first time in nearly 14 years and is now up nearly 50% from a year ago.

The price is even higher in Europe, averaging 1.75 euros per liter last week, according to the European Commission, the equivalent of \$7.21 per gallon.

GasBuddy, which tracks prices down to the service-station level, said Monday that the U.S. was likely to break its record price of \$4.10 a gallon, but that does not account for inflation. In today's terms, the record price would be equal to about \$5.24 after accounting for inflation.

"Forget the \$4 per gallon mark, the nation will soon set new all-time record highs and we could push closer to a national average of \$4.50," said GasBuddy analyst Patrick De Haan. "We've never been in this situation before, with this level of uncertainty. ... Americans will be feeling the pain of the rise in prices for quite some time."

Energy prices are contributing to the worst inflation that Americans have seen in 40 years, far outpacing higher wages. Consumer prices jumped 7.5% in January, compared with a year earlier, and analysts predict a 7.9% increase when the government reports February figures later this week.

Oil prices soared early Monday before retreating. Benchmark U.S. crude surged to \$130 a barrel overnight, then moderated to around \$119, a 3% gain, in afternoon trading. The international price skyrocketed to \$139 before falling back to about \$123 a barrel. U.S. stocks tumbled, with the S&P 500 falling 3%, its biggest drop in 16 months.

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Crude prices plummeted in early 2020 as economies around the world shut down because of COVID-19 — the price of futures even turned negative, meaning some sellers were paying buyers to take oil. Prices rebounded, however, as demand recovered faster than producers pulled oil out of the ground and inventories dried up.

Still, few forecasters saw this week's surge coming. Just a month ago, the Energy Department predicted oil would average around \$80 a barrel this year. That was before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

The United States is the world's largest oil producer — ahead of Saudi Arabia and Russia — but it is also the biggest oil consumer, and it can't meet that staggering demand with domestic crude alone.

The U.S. imported 245 million barrels of oil from Russia last year — about 8% of all U.S. oil imports — up from 198 million barrels in 2020. That's less than the U.S. gets from Canada or Mexico but more than it imported last year from Saudi Arabia.

The increasingly violent Russian attack on Ukraine has raised calls to cut off Russia from the money it gets from oil and natural gas exports. Europe is heavily dependent on Russian gas.

President Joe Biden has been reluctant to ban Russian oil, fearing it could further fuel inflation heading into the midterm elections this November.

Many Republicans and a growing number of Democrats in the House and Senate, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., have endorsed banning Russian crude as a way to put more pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the shelling of Ukraine. On Monday, a bipartisan group of committee chairmen reached agreement on legislation to ban Russian oil imports and suspend normal trade relations status with Russia and its ally, Belarus — the latter move could lead to steep tariffs on other goods from the two countries.

The White House hasn't ruled out a ban, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday that the United States and its allies were discussing a ban "while making sure that there is still an appropriate supply of oil" on the world market.

Talk of a ban on Russian oil has led U.S. officials to consider other sources that are currently limited. In what was supposed to be a secret trip, senior U.S. officials traveled to Venezuela over the weekend to discuss the chance of easing oil sanctions on the major crude-exporting country.

Ronnie James, an Uber driver in Brooklyn, wants the government to do something to bring prices down — get oil from Venezuela or tap more from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

"The folks who are every day building the wealth of this nation could use a break," he said.

## Falcons WR Ridley suspended for '22 for bets on NFL games

By CHARLES ODUM AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — For endangering the integrity of the sport by betting on games, Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Calvin Ridley has been suspended by the NFL for at least the next season.

Ridley won't play in 2022 and there is no guarantee for the NFL future of the player who had been expected to be the Falcons' top target for quarterback Matt Ryan.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Monday suspended Ridley after a league investigation determined Ridley bet on NFL games in 2021 while away from the team addressing mental health concerns. The league says the suspension will carry "through at least the conclusion of the 2022 season."

The NFL says the betting took place during a five-day period in late November 2021. Ridley was placed on the non-football illness list following Week 8 last season, which ended Nov. 1.

Ridley wrote on his Twitter account on Monday "I bet 1500 total I don't have a gambling problem."

He also seemed to take a light-hearted approach to his suspension when he added in another post "I know I was wrong But I'm getting 1 year lol." He also said "Just gone be more healthy when I come back."

Ridley defended himself in another tweet when he said "If you know me you know my character."

A league investigation uncovered no evidence inside information was used or that any game was compromised by Ridley's betting, Goodell's announcement said. Nor was there evidence suggesting Falcons coaches, players or staff were aware of Ridley's betting activity.

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Ridley may petition for reinstatement after Feb. 23, 2023.

During the offseason, the Falcons have had no update on Ridley's status. The team released a statement Monday in which it said it cooperated with the league's investigation in the last month.

"We were first made aware of the league's investigation on Feb. 9," the Falcons said in the statement. "We have cooperated fully with the investigation since receiving notice, and support the league's findings and actions. We are moving forward in the 2022 season with the decision that was made. With the decision that was made by the NFL, any further questions on the investigation should be directed to the league office."

In a letter from Goodell to Ridley, the commissioner said:

"There is nothing more fundamental to the NFL's success — and to the reputation of everyone associated with our league — than upholding the integrity of the game.

"This is the responsibility of every player, coach, owner, game official, and anyone else employed in the league. Your actions put the integrity of the game at risk, threatened to damage public confidence in professional football, and potentially undermined the reputations of your fellow players throughout the NFL.

"For decades, gambling on NFL games has been considered among the most significant violations of league policy warranting the most substantial sanction. In your case, I acknowledge and commend you for your promptly reporting for an interview, and for admitting your actions."

Even before the suspension, Ridley's future with the Falcons was in doubt. He sat out the final two months of the season after he was a last-minute scratch before the team's 19-13 loss to Carolina on Oct. 31.

On that day, Ridley explained his absence when he wrote on his Twitter account "I need to step away from football at this time and focus on my mental well being."

Ridley had posted no update on his Twitter account until Friday, when he posted an icon of a football and added "is life." On Sunday, he added another update "I learn from my Ls."

The Falcons' 2018 first-round draft pick had 90 catches for 1,374 yards and nine touchdowns in 2020. Ridley was expected to be Ryan's top playmaker after Julio Jones was traded to Tennessee before the 2021 season. But Ridley had only 31 receptions for 281 yards and two touchdowns in his shortened season.

The Falcons had been approximately \$7.3 million over the salary cap for 2022. They will be able to remove Ridley's \$11.1 million salary from their payroll for the season, moving them under the cap. That contract shifts to 2023, when Ridley would have been a free agent.

The suspension of Ridley could impact Atlanta's plans for free agency and the NFL draft. Wide receiver now becomes a position of need, and the team could place a greater emphasis on re-signing free agent Russell Gage. Rookie tight end Kyle Pitts and Gage were Atlanta's leading receivers last season.

This is not the first gambling suspension meted out by Goodell. He suspended Arizona Cardinals cornerback Josh Shaw in November 2019 for gambling on an NFL game. Shaw has not played in the league since his suspension; he missed 21 games of the 2019 and 2020 schedules.

The most famous disciplining of NFL players for gambling came in 1963 when then-commissioner Pete Rozelle suspended star running back Paul Hornung of Green Bay and defensive tackle of Alex Karras of Detroit — both now Hall of Famers. Each was sidelined for that season, with Rozelle citing bets on league games and associating with gamblers or "known hoodlums."

Twenty years later, Rozelle suspended Colts quarterback Art Schlichter, who was in just his second pro season.

"Schlichter will not be reinstated," Rozelle said, "until the league can be solidly assured that the serious violations of cardinal NFL rules he has committed will not be repeated."

Schlichter was reinstated and played for 1984 and '85. But he couldn't kick the gambling habit and eventually wound up in prison for a multimillion dollar ticketing scam.

Frank Filchock and Merle Hapes of the New York Giants were suspended by then-commissioner Bert Bell for not reporting attempted bribes, particularly for the 1946 championship game. Filchock actually played in that game, which the Giants lost 24-14 to the Bears, but Hapes was not allowed to take the field.

Subsequently, both were suspended. Filchock didn't return to the NFL until 1950 with Baltimore, though



he played parts of four seasons in Canada. Hapes never played another NFL game.

## Mask mandates go away in schools, but parent worries persist

By PHILIP MARCELO and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Major school districts around the country are allowing students into classrooms without masks for the first time in nearly two years, eliminating rules that stirred up intense fights among educators, school boards and parents throughout the pandemic.

New York City became the latest school district to do away with its mask requirement Monday and Philadelphia is poised to lift its mandate Wednesday, joining big cities such as Houston and Dallas and a number of a states that made similar moves in the last week. Chicago schools will end their mask mandate next Monday.

Parents, teachers and principals face a complicated balancing act in navigating the new rules. Some families are thrilled that their children no longer have to wear masks, while others say they're still tentative and urging their kids to keep wearing face coverings for now. Teachers and principals are caught in the middle.

In Anchorage, Alaska, School Superintendent Deena Bishop says lifting the mandate in the city's nearly 100 public schools last week was a relief after months of acrimony even though there were some bumpy patches.

Bishop says she has been made aware of a handful of comments teachers inadvertently made that "didn't sit well" with students and their parents, such as a teacher singling out a young child whose parents decided to keep them wearing a mask and another who had made a student feel guilty about their decision not to wear one.

She said the instances served as "teachable moments" to remind staff that "a choice is a choice and that we need to honor that home's choice."

"There was a lot of angst, a lot of battles in the city over wearing masks, not wearing masks," Bishop said. "So I'm glad that we've taken that fight away. All that has just subsided, and now we can go back to focus on learning."

Falling infection rates and new federal health guidance are leading most of the remaining states with statewide school mask requirements to drop the mandates. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued new guidelines saying most Americans live in places where healthy people, including students, can safely take a break from wearing masks.

But those hesitant about ending school mask mandates often point to low childhood vaccination rates among American children. Only about a quarter of children ages 5 to 11 have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, and about 58% of children ages 12 to 17 are inoculated, the CDC says.

New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois and Delaware rescinded their statewide school mask requirements recently. New Jersey and Rhode Island dropped theirs officially Monday while California, Oregon and Washington have jointly announced they'll drop their statewide mandates effective March 12.

In many instances, the ultimate decisions are being made at the local school district level.

Officials many large cities, such as Boston, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., have said they'll keep mask rules for now, either until vaccination rates improve among their students, or they can work out agreements with teachers unions, which have been among those most vocal about keeping the mandates in place.

After Chicago schools announced Monday that masks will no longer be required as of March 14, the city's teachers union vowed to take officials to court, saying the move will violate an agreement with the district to keep the mask rule through the end of the school year.

In New York City, elementary student Jack Jalaly ditched his mask Monday as they became optional in the nation's largest school district.

"I think it's nice because kids can finally see their teachers talk, and I also have a younger daughter who has spent all her time with no face, right?" said Jack's mother, Andrea. "So for little kids, it's really great because you can see the way words are pronounced and you can see spellings.

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But third-grader Derrick Carter-Jacob kept his mask on as New York eliminated the requirement. "I don't want to get COVID," he said.

"Leave it on. There's no reason for him to take it off until basically everybody is safe," said his parent, Michael Jacob. "I want my son to be safe. I'm sorry. That's the way I see it."

John Bracey, a Latin teacher at Belmont High School in suburban Boston, says he intends to keep wearing his hospital-grade N-95 respirator through the end of the academic year even as district officials are expected to decide on their school mandate later this week.

The 41-year-old Bellingham resident said he and his wife have also decided to keep his two young school-age children wearing masks this week even though their district lifted the requirement Monday.

"I have major concerns on so many levels," Bracey said. "It appears to be a decision made to benefit the most privileged and leaves everyone else to their own devices. We're sacrificing the health of immunocompromised students, elderly staff and those of us with young children. I just can't find a public health or moral justification for removing them."

In Needham, another Boston suburb, school administrators waited until Monday — a full week after the state eased its mask requirement — in part to prepare students for the transition this week to what they call a "mask-friendly environment," says School Superintendent Daniel Gutekanst.

He said the work, which included posters and informational videos created by district officials, appears to have paid off, with no reports of major disputes or other issues around mask wearing after classes ended Monday.

Melissa Bello says her two school-age children were among those that gladly removed their masks Monday.

She says her 8-year-old son has hearing loss in both ears and has been complaining of having trouble understanding people in school with everyone wearing masks the last two years.

"He's working harder everyday in school and coming home more tired," Bello said. "There's not enough consideration for those kinds of tradeoffs in these mask mandates."

But Jason Chan, another parent in Needham, said his two school-age children went in Monday still wearing masks — and likely still will through the week before the family reassesses.

He believes his children, which include a 5-year-old son who has never known schooling without a mask, would be fine wearing them until the end of the school year, if it came down to it.

"Honestly, the kids have been doing better than the parents with the masks," Chan said. "I hear a lot of parents upset but kids just don't look at it the same way in terms of this civil rights issue. It's like wearing a hat or a sweater for them."

## Baby gets heart transplant with a twist to fight rejection

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Duke University doctors say a baby is thriving after a first-of-its-kind heart transplant -- one that came with a bonus technique to try to help prevent rejection of the new organ.

The thymus plays a critical role in building the immune system. Doctors have wondered if implanting some thymus tissue that matched a donated organ might help it survive without the recipient needing toxic anti-rejection medicines.

Easton Sinnamon of Asheboro, North Carolina, received his unique transplant last summer when he was 6 months old. But Duke waited to announce it until Monday after doctors learned the specially processed thymus implants appear to be functioning like they'd hoped -- producing immune cells that don't treat the tot's new heart like foreign tissue.

Doctors eventually will try weaning Easton off the immune-suppressing drugs required after a transplant, said Dr. Joseph Turek, Duke's chief of pediatric cardiac surgery.

The research is in very early stages and just one possible method scientists are testing in hopes of inducing what's called immune tolerance to a transplant.

But Turek says if it works, it could be attempted with other organ transplants, not just the heart.

Easton was a candidate for the experimental transplant because he had two separate health problems.

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He was born with some heart defects that surgeries right after birth failed to solve. And he suffered recurrent infections that doctors eventually realized meant his own thymus wasn't working properly.

Some babies are born without a thymus, which stimulates development of part of the immune system known as T cells. Separately, Duke researchers had been working with Enzyvant Therapeutics to develop lab-grown implants of donated thymus tissue to treat that rare disorder.

Easton got a combination of the two procedures. First surgeons implanted his new heart while the donated thymus was sent to a lab. About two weeks later, he had a second operation to implant the processed thymus tissue. His own partially working thymus was removed, to clear the way for new immune cells to take hold.

About six months later, testing shows the thymus tissue is building Easton well-functioning new T cells, said Turek.

## Half of US adults exposed to harmful lead levels as kids

BY DREW COSTLEY AP Science Writer

Over 170 million U.S.-born people who were adults in 2015 were exposed to harmful levels of lead as children, a new study estimates.

Researchers used blood-lead level, census and leaded gasoline consumption data to examine how widespread early childhood lead exposure was in the country between 1940 and 2015.

In a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on Monday, they estimated that half the U.S. adult population in 2015 had been exposed to lead levels surpassing five micrograms per deciliter — the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention threshold for harmful lead exposure at the time.

The scientists from Florida State University and Duke University also found that 90% of children born in the U.S. between 1950 and 1981 had blood-lead levels higher than the CDC threshold. And the researchers found significant impact on cognitive development: on average, early childhood exposure to lead resulted in a 2.6-point drop in IQ.

The researchers only examined lead exposure caused by leaded gasoline, the dominant form of exposure from the 1940s to the late 1980s, according to data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Leaded gasoline for on-road vehicles was phased out starting in the 1970s, then finally banned in 1996.

Study lead author Michael McFarland, an associate professor of sociology at Florida State University, said the findings were "infuriating" because it was long known that lead exposure was harmful, based on anecdotal evidence of lead's health impacts throughout history.

Though the U.S. has implemented tougher regulations to protect Americans from lead poisoning in recent decades, the public health impacts of exposure could last for several decades, experts told the Associated Press.

"Childhood lead exposure is not just here and now. It's going to impact your lifelong health," said Abheet Solomon, a senior program manager at the United Nations Children's Fund.

Early childhood lead exposure is known to have many impacts on cognitive development, but it also increases risk for developing hypertension and heart disease, experts said.

"I think the connection to IQ is larger than we thought and it's startlingly large," said Ted Schwaba, a researcher at University of Texas-Austin who studies personality psychology and was not part of the new study.

Schwaba said the study's use of an average to represent the cognitive impacts of lead exposure could result in an overestimation of impacts on some people and underestimation in others.

Previous research on the relationship between lead exposure and IQ found a similar impact, though over a shorter study period.

Bruce Lanphear, a health sciences professor at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver who has researched lead exposure and IQ, said his 2005 study found the initial exposure to lead was the most harmful when it comes to loss of cognitive ability as measured by IQ.

"The more tragic part is that we keep making the same ... mistakes again," Lanphear said. "First it was

lead, then it was air pollution. ... Now it's PFAS chemicals and phthalates (chemicals used to make plastics more durable). And it keeps going on and on.

"And we can't stop long enough to ask ourselves should we be regulating chemicals differently," he said.

## Death toll surpasses 6 million for pandemic now in 3rd year

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The official global death toll from COVID-19 eclipsed 6 million on Monday — underscoring that the pandemic, now entering its third year, is far from over.

The milestone, recorded by Johns Hopkins University, is the latest tragic reminder of the unrelenting nature of the pandemic even as people are shedding masks, travel is resuming and businesses are re-opening around the globe.

Remote Pacific islands, whose isolation had protected them for more than two years, are just now grappling with their first outbreaks and deaths, fueled by the highly contagious omicron variant.

Hong Kong, which is seeing deaths soar, is testing its entire population of 7.5 million three times this month as it clings to mainland China's "zero-COVID" strategy.

As death rates remain high in Poland, Hungary, Romania and other Eastern European countries, the region has seen more than 1.5 million refugees arrive from war-torn Ukraine, a country with poor vaccination coverage and high rates of cases and deaths.

And despite its wealth and vaccine availability, the United States is nearing 1 million reported deaths on its own.

Death rates worldwide are still highest among people unvaccinated against the virus, said Tikki Pang, a visiting professor at the National University of Singapore's medical school and co-chair of the Asia Pacific Immunization Coalition.

"This is a disease of the unvaccinated — look what is happening in Hong Kong right now, the health system is being overwhelmed," said Pang, the former director of research policy and cooperation with the World Health Organization. "The large majority of the deaths and the severe cases are in the unvaccinated, vulnerable segment of the population."

It took the world seven months to record its first million deaths from the virus after the pandemic began in early 2020. Four months later another million people had died, and 1 million have died every three months since, until the death toll hit 5 million at the end of October. Now it has reached 6 million — more than the populations of Berlin and Brussels combined, or the entire state of Maryland.

But despite the enormity of the figure, the world undoubtedly hit its 6 millionth death some time ago. Poor record-keeping and testing in many parts of the world has led to an undercount in coronavirus deaths, in addition to excess deaths related to the pandemic but not from actual COVID-19 infections, like people who died from preventable causes but could not receive treatment because hospitals were full.

Edouard Mathieu, head of data for the Our World in Data portal, said that — when countries' excess mortality figures are studied — as many as nearly four times the reported death toll have likely died because of the pandemic.

An analysis of excess deaths by a team at The Economist estimates that the number of COVID-19 deaths is between 14.1 million and 23.8 million.

"Confirmed deaths represent a fraction of the true number of deaths due to COVID, mostly because of limited testing, and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death," Mathieu told The Associated Press. "In some, mostly rich, countries that fraction is high and the official tally can be considered to be fairly accurate, but in others it is highly underestimated."

The United States has the biggest official death toll in the world, but the numbers have been trending downward over the last month.

Lonnie Bailey lost his 18-year-old brother-in-law, Carlos Nunez Jr., in September. He was 17 when he got sick in April — the same month Kentucky opened his age group to vaccinations. The Louisville resident said the family is still suffering, including Carlos' younger sibling, who had to be hospitalized himself and still



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has lingering symptoms. The aggressive reopening of the country has been jarring for them to witness.

"For us it is hard to let our guard down; it's going to take a while for us to adjust," Bailey said.

The world has seen more than 445 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, and new weekly cases have been declining recently in all regions except for the Western Pacific, which includes China, Japan and South Korea, among others, the World Health Organization reported this week.

Although the overall figures in the Pacific islands seeing their first outbreaks are small compared to larger countries, they are significant among their tiny populations and threaten to overwhelm fragile health care systems.

"Given what we know about COVID ... it's likely to hit them for the next year or so at least," said Katie Greenwood, head of the Red Cross Pacific delegation.

Tonga reported its first outbreak after the virus arrived with international aid vessels following the Jan. 15 eruption of a massive volcano, followed by a tsunami. It now has several hundred cases, but — with 66% of its population fully vaccinated — it has so far reported people suffering mostly mild symptoms and no deaths.

The Solomon Islands saw the first outbreak in January and now has thousands of cases and more than 100 deaths. The actual death toll is likely much higher, with the capital's hospital overwhelmed and many dying at home, Greenwood said.

Only 12% of Solomon Islanders are fully vaccinated, though the outbreak has provided new impetus to the country's vaccination campaign and 29% now have at least one shot.

Global vaccine disparity continues, with only 6.95% of people in low-income countries fully vaccinated, compared to more than 73% in high-income nations, according to Our World in Data.

In a good sign, at the end of last month Africa surpassed Europe in the number of doses administered daily, but only about 12.5% of its population has received two shots.

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is still pressing for more vaccines, though it has been a challenge. Some shipments arrive with little warning for countries' health systems and others near the expiration date — forcing doses to be destroyed.

Eastern Europe has been particularly hard hit by the omicron variant, and with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a new risk has emerged as hundreds of thousands of people flee to places like Poland on crowded trains. Health officials there have been offering free vaccinations to all refugees, but have not been making them test upon arrival or quarantine.

"This is really tragic because great stress has a very negative effect on natural immunity and increases the risk of infections," said Anna Boron-Kaczmarek, a Polish infectious disease specialist. "They are in very high stress, being afraid for their lives, the lives of their children, their family members."

Mexico has reported 300,000 deaths, but with little testing, a government analysis of death certificates puts the real number closer to 500,000. Still, four weeks of falling infection rates have left health officials optimistic.

In India, where the world was shocked by images of open-air pyres of bodies burned as crematoria were overwhelmed, the scars are fading as the number of new cases and deaths has slowed.

India has recorded more than 500,000 deaths, but experts believe its true toll is in the millions, primarily from the delta variant. Migrants from India's vast hinterland are now returning to its megacities in search of jobs, and the streets are packed with traffic. Shopping malls have customers, albeit still masked, while schools and universities are welcoming students after a months-long gap.

In Britain, infections have fallen since an omicron-driven surge in December, but remain high. England has now lifted all restrictions, including mask mandates and the requirement that all who test positive isolate at home.

With about 250,000 reported deaths, the African continent's smaller death toll is thought to stem from underreporting, as well as a generally younger and less mobile population.

"Africa is a big question mark for me, because it has been relatively spared from the worst so far, but it could just be a time bomb," Pang said, noting its low vaccination rates.

In South Africa, Soweto resident Thoko Dube said she received news of the deaths of two family members on the same day in January 2021 — a month before the country received its first vaccines.

It has been difficult, but “the family is coping,” she said. “We have accepted it because it has been happening to other families.”

## Supreme Court won't review decision that freed Bill Cosby

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The U.S. Supreme Court quietly announced Monday that it would not review Bill Cosby's sexual assault case, leaving him a free man and ending a two-decade legal drama that shifted the cultural landscape, destroyed the groundbreaking Black actor's reputation, and sent him to prison for several years late in life.

The high court, without comment, declined to review a stunning decision out of Pennsylvania that released Cosby from prison in June over the word of a former prosecutor who said he had made a secret promise to Cosby's lawyers that he would never be charged.

A Cosby spokesperson expressed “sincere gratitude to the justices” on behalf of Cosby and his family for the announcement and said he was the victim of “a reprehensible bait and switch” by the district attorney and judge in the case.

“This is truly a victory for Mr. Cosby, but it shows that cheating will never get you far in life,” spokesperson Andrew Wyatt said in a statement, once again taking aim at the court officials in suburban Philadelphia, as he had throughout both criminal trials.

The 84-year-old Cosby, according to Wyatt, remains in good health despite being legally blind. “Many people are calling for projects for him,” and he is considering a final standup tour, Wyatt said.

District Attorney Kevin Steele in Pennsylvania's Montgomery County said that asking the high court to revive the case “was the right thing to do,” even if it was a long shot. He thanked accuser Andrea Constand for her courage and wished her well.

Constand and her lawyers, in a statement, called the decision an “unfortunate outcome for everyone, especially sexual assault survivors.” They noted that the existence of the agreement or promise was “vigorously disputed in the (court) habeas proceedings, and determined by the trial judge not to exist.”

Cosby never signed an immunity agreement in the case. And Steele's predecessor, Bruce L. Castor Jr., never put anything in writing or told anyone in his office about it. He never mentioned it in public until new evidence emerged and the case was reopened a decade later.

He said he had made the deal with a Cosby lawyer who was by then deceased.

“A secret agreement that permits a wealthy defendant to buy his way out of a criminal case isn't right,” Steele argued in court in 2016 as he pressed to send the case to trial.

Montgomery County Judge Steven O'Neill found Castor's testimony on the point not credible and sent the case to trial. However, the state Supreme Court later ruled that whether or not the supposed deal was ironclad, Cosby thought it was when he gave eye-popping — and potentially incriminating — testimony in a lawsuit later filed by Constand.

“The principle of fundamental fairness that undergirds due process of law in our criminal justice system demands that the promise be enforced,” Justice David N. Wecht wrote last year, ordering Cosby's immediate release after nearly three years in prison.

During the 2006 deposition, a seemingly free-wheeling Cosby gave long, stream-of-consciousness answers to questions from Constand's lawyers. He detailed his sexual involvement with a string of young women, a few still in their teens, over the years. And he recalled giving several of them, including Constand, alcohol or pills while he remained sober.

“I don't hear her say anything. And I don't feel her say anything. And so I continue and I go into the area that is somewhere between permission and rejection. I am not stopped,” Cosby said in the deposition, describing a sexual encounter that came after he gave her three pills for stress, which she said knocked her out.

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He was arrested in the Constand case on Dec. 30, 2015, just days before the 12-year statute of limitations expired. Steele had reopened the case after The Associated Press went to federal court to unseal Cosby's long-buried testimony in Constand's lawsuit.

Cosby, after giving four days of damaging testimony, had paid her \$3.4 million to settle the case.

He went on trial in the criminal case in June 2017. The jury could not reach a verdict. Less than a year later — after media reports about media mogul Harvey Weinstein's sexual abuse of women galvanized the #MeToo movement — a second jury convicted Cosby of drugging and molesting Constand.

The AP does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission. Constand, now an advocate for sexual assault survivors, has done so.

Scores of women have come forward to say Cosby also sexually assaulted them, but Constand's is the only one that led to an arrest. His insurer, against Cosby's wishes, settled a Massachusetts lawsuit involving seven accusers for an undisclosed amount after the 2018 conviction. At least two other lawsuits remain pending against the actor.

Castor, who said he made the deal with Cosby's lawyer, later represented former President Donald Trump at his second impeachment trial, at which Trump was acquitted of inciting the violent mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

Castor said he declined to arrest Cosby in 2005 based in part on his belief that both parties "could be held in less than a flattering light." Constand later sued Castor for defamation and won a settlement from him. Castor countersued Constand, but the judge threw it out.

## **A modern Churchill? Zelenskyy praised as war communicator**

By DAVID BAUDER and JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

To a watching world, his message is this, in both his words and his resolute, sometimes haggard appearance: He stands as a mirror to the suffering and spirit of his people.

It appears to be getting through. Just days into the war engulfing his nation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is drawing historical comparisons as an effective and stirring wartime communicator — yet with a distinctly modern touch inflected by the sensibilities of live television and the personal feel of social media.

His baby-faced complexion is now usually puffy and pasty, with a faint growth of beard. Suits and dress shirts have been replaced by olive military-style garb. His raspy voice betrays exhaustion. Together, these help form a narrative of personal courage, of David fighting mighty Goliath and refusing safe passage out of his homeland — embodied by his line that he needed "ammunition, not a ride."

It's all quite a development for a former TV actor and comedian who weeks ago was disdained in some corners as a political novice too eager to seek compromise with Moscow.

"Here's a guy who was basically considered to be a lightweight, out of his element, about to be crushed by a major superpower next door. And it didn't happen," says Andrew J. Polsky, a professor of political science at Hunter College in New York and author of a book on wartime U.S. presidents. "I think people really expected that he would flee ... and I think he surprised people by sharing the danger that they were sharing."

That, Polsky says, has created "a reciprocal relationship between Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people. I think they have gotten energy from each other and confidence from each other. That's an impressive communications accomplishment for a leader, to be that much in touch with his people in the middle of a crisis."

Winston Churchill, who rallied Britons during World War II's darkest days, is a name frequently invoked — even by Churchill's biographer. One analyst compared Zelenskyy to Benjamin Franklin and his success in soliciting French support for the American Revolution.

Through interviews and appearances via video link from hidden locations, Zelenskyy has sought to rally the world to Ukraine's side. When he told the European Parliament "we're fighting just for our land and for our freedom," the translator struggled not to cry.

Speaking the other day at a San Francisco fundraiser, U.S. first lady Jill Biden said that "I just have to

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turn on the TV every morning and pray that Zelenskyy is still alive.”

Some of Zelenskyy’s appearances seem designed to deliver that simple assurance. Shortly after Russia invaded, he was seen in what appeared to be mobile phone video from a darkened street in Kyiv, four grim-faced colleagues standing behind him.

“We are all here,” he said. “Our soldiers are here, the citizens of our country are all here protecting our independence, and we are going to continue to do so. Glory to the defenders of Ukraine.”

Zelenskyy’s insistence on staying, along with his wife and children, was a turning point, says Orysia Lutsevych, a research fellow and manager of the Ukraine Forum in the Russia and Eurasia Program at Chatham House, a London-based think tank. “People saw he had courage,” she says.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin has appeared detached and distant, speaking to aides via videoconference or the end of an almost absurdly elongated table, with speeches that Polsky says display a self-created sense of history.

The Ukraine president’s words have projected a mixture of defiance and an escalating desperation, and he seems unafraid of alienating those whose help he might need. For example, he told NATO officials they would bear responsibility for civilian deaths if they didn’t enforce a no-fly Zone over Ukraine.

Through those messages, he’s not just speaking to NATO leaders, but directly to the citizens who may put pressure on them to do more, says Kenneth Osgood, professor of history at the Colorado School of Mines and an expert on propaganda and intelligence.

Zelenskyy’s pleas remind one analyst of Benjamin Franklin’s trip to France in 1776 to elicit French support for the American Revolution — a trip that ultimately proved pivotal to history.

“The British had military superiority,” says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a specialist in political communication and director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. “Had France not joined the war in 1778, the outcome may have been different.”

The Ukrainian leader’s persona, message and delivery are mutually reinforcing, Jamieson says. “His delivery straight to camera in closeup is effective social media — unscripted, clear, straightforward and brimming with resolve.”

His messages don’t necessarily all have the same impact, she notes. Saying “Don’t let them exterminate us” is a more effective frame, she says, than “calling a NATO summit weak and confused.”

Jamieson says TV networks have magnified the power of Zelenskyy’s appeals with potent visuals, “over-laying evocative images of damaged buildings, fleeing mothers and children, menacing Russian tanks, empty store shelves and the like.” What’s more, she says, the specter of his demise always looms: “His increasingly unshaven look, the flak jacket when in public and the repeated reminders to world leaders that this may be the last time they see him alive add immediacy to his appeals.”

That same message — it might be the last time they see him alive — was delivered to members of the U.S. Congress via Zoom over the weekend.

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois told ABC News that he took notes when Zelenskyy talked. “Calm,” heroic” and “unprecedented” were among the words he wrote. “I don’t think you can sit there with human emotions and not be moved, not be motivated,” Quigley said.

He cited the Churchill comparison. So did Andrew Roberts, author of the 2018 biography “Churchill: Walking with Destiny”: Speaking on a Commentary magazine podcast, he noted both Zelenskyy’s personal bravery and his refusal to sugarcoat things.

Zelenskyy doesn’t possess the same rhetorical prowess as Churchill did in radio messages as German bombs rained down upon London, says Osgood, the propaganda expert. “Zelenskyy is much blunter — sort of, ‘Here’s the story. I’m just going to give it to you straight.’ So there’s not the same poetry to it. But there’s the same desperation.”

Indeed, in style, the more formal Churchill and Zelenskyy could not be more different. But each man, Polsky says, mastered the media of his era.

“Churchill made good use of radio, the written word as well,” he says. “And Zelenskyy makes excellent use of casual social media. He walks through the streets and holds his cell phone up, and he talks to



people." His off-the-cuff remarks, with no time to prepare a long speech, add to the genuine nature of his presentations, he and others say, and resonate with a younger generation.

Not many people in Ukraine saw Zelenskyy as a great leader before the war, says Lutsevych, at the Ukraine Forum in London. Now, though, he has become the voice of the nation.

"He has a personal quality, especially being sensitive to your environment, to be able to play different roles, to be sensitive to your audience," she says. "He's quite empathetic as a leader."

## **In Selma, foot soldier's kin boosts youth voting rights role**

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

For longer than Elliott Smith can recall, annual commemorations of the historic voting rights marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, doubled as family reunions.

He first attended as a newborn. At Selma's iconic Edmund Pettus Bridge where demonstrators were stopped, tear gassed and brutally beaten by state troopers on the fateful "Bloody Sunday" in 1965, Smith's great-aunt, the late Amelia Boynton Robinson, pushed him across in a stroller during the 30th commemoration.

"I consider myself a movement baby," he told The Associated Press.

Twenty years later, Smith would switch roles with Boynton Robinson, the Selma voting rights strategist and civil rights movement matriarch: Mere months before she died, Smith guided his great-aunt's wheelchair across the bridge during the 50-year commemoration of the march she helped lead.

Now, at 27, Smith himself is in Selma leading a multiracial delegation of millennial and Gen Z activists who intend to reshape the ongoing voting rights debate around their generations' access to political power and socioeconomic justice.

"If our national narrative is just focused solely on voting rights and an attack on Black people, then our message is too narrow. We are missing it," he said, previewing a message he intended to share in Selma.

Tens of millions of young Americans will have become eligible to vote between the 2016 general election and the upcoming midterm election, which Smith sees as an opportunity to reenergize civic engagement among young adults and pay homage to his great-aunt.

"We have to expand our framing and always tie the struggle for the right to vote to the struggle of a low wage worker not getting a living wage," added Smith, co-director of student and youth engagement for the Poor People's Campaign, a revival of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s economic justice campaign.

Along with the Rev. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow PUSH Coalition and the Transformative Justice Network, Smith planned another reenactment of the 1965 marches on Monday. The group will take on an 11-mile (18-kilometer) stretch of the original route toward Montgomery.

Marchers from other groups are expected to take their own stretches of the route throughout the week and reach the capital city for a rally on Friday.

For decades, march commemorations were faithfully attended by the stalwart foot soldiers of the movement. They nudged their nieces, nephews, children and grandchildren to carry the cause beyond the bridge. But as the commemorations became a standard photo op for elected officials and candidates to shore up their civil rights bona fides, young people's historic place and presence in the movement was obscured.

"The most popular memory today of the movement is one that's largely led by older Black intellectuals and activists, and that's a convenient memory, but it's not fully accurate," said John Giggie, an associate professor of history at the University of Alabama and director of the Summersell Center for the Study of the South.

Whether it's civil rights history in Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham or tiny Greensboro, nearly every part of the Alabama racial justice movement depended on the willingness of people as young as high schoolers to take risks and make sacrifices, Giggie said.

"How have we not served the younger generation well? By not insisting that, when you look back, you need to see yourself in this movement," he added.

In January, lawmakers in Washington failed to meet a deadline civil rights leaders had set for passing

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federal voting rights legislation following a wave of proposals in conservative-leaning states to curb access to early voting, eliminate same-day voter registration, limit mail-in vote casting and decrease the number of ballot drop boxes used in pandemic-era elections, among other effects.

That wave was driven, in part, by false claims from former President Donald Trump and other Republican leaders of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, between the start of 2021 and mid-January of this year, lawmakers in 27 states introduced, pre-filed or carried over 250 pieces of legislation that the center described as voter suppression measures.

With midterm elections approaching this fall and narrow Democratic control of the House and Senate on the line, some fear the window of opportunity has nearly closed to beat back state-level voter suppression. And with stakes so high, advocates see this year's Selma commemoration as a crucial rallying point.

Smith, who organized campus voter registration drives while a student at Virginia's Radford University, said he sees the inaction in Washington as an insult to the memory of all who bled on the bridge in Selma 57 years ago.

Boynton Robinson, one of the first Black women to successfully register to vote in the 1930s Jim Crow South, spent decades organizing and attempting to register Black people to vote in towns controlled by segregationist white leaders. Her efforts culminated in the 1965 marches, to which she invited King, hoping he would help nationalize the voting rights struggle.

On March 7, 1965, before King could arrive in Selma, state troopers and members of the Dallas County sheriff's posse stopped demonstrators at the foot of the Pettus bridge. A trooper bashed the head of John Lewis, the late congressman who was then a student activist, during the fracas that left dozens injured.

Boynton Robinson recounted to her great-nephew how she'd been struck, once in the arm and once in the head, leaving her on the ground gasping for air as the local sheriff stood by refusing to offer aid.

Gruesome images of the violence spurred passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Until nearly a decade ago, the federal legislation required U.S. Department of Justice lawyers to review voting law changes in states with histories of racial discrimination. The Supreme Court's 2013 decision in *Holder v. Shelby County* — an Alabama jurisdiction — removed that requirement, which critics say cleared the way for a nationwide spate of regressive voting laws.

"With all the voter suppression tactics happening, it's so clear that what our ancestors were talking about in the '60s is still relevant today," Smith told the AP.

The Rev. William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, said he had initially turned down an invitation to speak at Sunday's event, insisting Smith speak in his place. Ultimately, Barber delivered portions of Smith's prepared remarks with the 27-year-old's blessing.

"At Elliott's age, King was leading the Montgomery bus boycott," Barber told the AP. "We shouldn't have people waiting until they're 40 and 50 to take up leadership in the movement. His generation needs to speak. They are the people not of tomorrow, but of right now."

## Realtors to conservatives living in liberal areas: Try Idaho

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS Associated Press

SANDPOINT, Idaho (AP) — Linda Navarre moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, from Cleveland in 1978, when the town consisted of people in the timber industry and hippies "and they all got along."

Now she barely recognizes the small resort community near the Canadian border that is quickly growing as people disenchanted with big city life move there. Many are conservatives fed up with liberal politics in blue states.

"The division gets wider and wider," Navarre said, adding many of the new arrivals are changing the civility of the community. "My concern is there are so many people who are not nice."

Sandpoint is a four-season resort town built along the shores of scenic Lake Pend Oreille. It had 7,300 residents in the 2010 Census, but grew 21% in the decade to about 8,900 in the 2020 Census. In addition to the natural beauty, "people come here because it's a red state," said longtime resident Gail Cameron, 67.

To capitalize on that trend, a growing number of real estate companies are advertising themselves to

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people on the right, saying they can take them out of liberal bastions like Seattle and San Francisco and find them homes in places like rural Idaho.

Sandpoint-based Flee The City is a consortium of four businesses which specialize in selling property to conservatives in northern Idaho and western Montana. The company calls itself "a real estate firm for the vigilant."

Flee the City has partnered with a company that provides "sustainable homes design with integrated ballistic and defensive capabilities."

Todd Savage, whose Black Rifle Real Estate firm is part of Flee The City, said in a brief email exchange that his business is booming, thanks to "insane" left wing politics.

One of the bigger players among right-leaning real estate companies is Conservative Move, based in a suburb of Dallas. Founder and chief executive Paul Chabot said blue states have only themselves to blame for driving out conservatives.

"People are tired of out-of-control crime and forced masking," Chabot said.

Idaho has been the fastest growing state in the nation for five years running, growing 2.9% in 2021, mostly from in-migration.

But the influx of people to places like Idaho has made it harder for some long-time residents. People struggle to find housing in Sandpoint, with many houses sold the same day they are listed, after bidding wars, Cameron said.

Many of those homes are converted into vacation rentals, which tightens the market for people who live in the area, Cameron said.

Carolyn Knaack, associate director of the Lake Pend Oreille Waterkeeper conservation group, has lived in town for a year.

She said the confluence of the coronavirus pandemic and politics "has created a divisiveness among folks."

"I've been applauded and belittled for wearing a mask," she said. "I have friends who refused to get vaxxed."

Savage was asked if it was desirable for people to segregate themselves by political ideology.

"I don't agree with the term 'segregate,'" he wrote. "Folks simply 'vote with their feet' relating to issues such as crime, taxes, homeschooling, gun laws, mask and vaccine mandates, Orwellian laws and out of control tyranny in the sanctuary states."

Not everyone is a fan of what Savage and conservative realtors are doing in Sandpoint and elsewhere.

Mayor Shelby Rognstad, a Democrat, worries real estate firms that serve only conservatives "pushes Idaho more and more into a playground for extremism."

"It doesn't bode well for our sense of community here," said Rognstad, who is mounting a campaign for governor. "It's a challenge to civility."

Barbara Russell, who lives in nearby Bonners Ferry, Idaho, expressed similar concerns.

Bonners Ferry feels like it's been overrun with white nationalists, said Russell, who owns a dance studio in the town of 2,600 residents.

"What they are doing is preparing for war," Russell said of new arrivals, who often carry guns when in town.

"New people are moving in and they go to City Council meetings and tell people who grew up here to go back to California," Russell said. "They are selling fear is what they are doing."

The National Association of Realtors does not keep records of if any of its members market themselves by political ideology, spokesman Quintin Simmons said. And not all real estate agents are members of the Realtors. So it's tough to determine if the trend of targeting conservative customers is widespread.

The Western States Center, a human rights group based in Portland, Oregon, is keeping an eye on right-leaning real estate firms, said member Kate Bitz.

"It's just the latest of several waves of politically motivated relocation to the inland Northwest," Bitz said.

Indeed, in past decades a variety of extremist groups, most prominently the Aryan Nations, sought to create a white homeland in northern Idaho because of the region's small number of minorities.

"People in the United States relocate all the time," Bitz said. "What concerns us is when white nationalists and anti-democracy actors relocate to the region with the aim of organizing, recruiting and seizing control of local institutions."

## Food or power: Energy bill late fees force tough choices

By JASEN LO Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Chris Kinney, a resident of Rapides Parish in central Louisiana, has seen his electricity disconnected eight times in the past two years for falling behind on his energy bills to Cleco Power.

His family did everything they could think of to catch up: pawning possessions, accumulating vast bank overdraft fees, borrowing money and applying for energy assistance.

Somehow, Kinney's outstanding balance kept growing.

While his electrical charges added up to about \$6,400 for the past two years, Cleco Power also billed him over \$1,250 for being late on paying his bills, including late fees, reconnection charges and deposits.

"These charges keep piling up and there is no way to catch up. The financial strain was just insane," Kinney said.

Americans paid a combined \$561 million in late payment fees to electrical utilities in 2019.

But how much you pay depends on where you live.

An AP analysis of federal regulatory data found that several major utility companies in states like Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, Florida and Maryland are charging customers late fees that are much higher than the national average.

Five power companies — Cleco Power, Kentucky Power Co. and three subsidiaries of Entergy Corp. — averaged more than \$17.50 per customer in annual late fee revenues between 2011 and 2020. That's three times the national average of \$5.83 per customer in the same time period.

The fees account for a small part of major energy companies' overall revenue — less than one-quarter of a percent on average — but for the people who must pay them, they can be crushing.

Late fees typically punish customers who are least able to afford their utility bill to begin with. Poorly insulated homes and damage from natural disasters all contribute to poor residents spending larger portions of their paychecks on their energy bills. And Black and Hispanic households are more likely to experience energy insecurity and face utility disconnections.

For those who fall behind, it often means choosing between paying for power and affording other necessities.

Mary Boyd, who is 83 and lives in New Orleans, said her expensive energy utility bills from Entergy — a major utility provider in Louisiana and three other Southern states — were causing her to choose between medication, and other expenses such as repairing the damage to her fence caused by Hurricane Ida.

"I am sick. I have high blood pressure, asthma and arthritis," Boyd said. "Now just imagine this, this three hundred and some dollars energy bill takes away from food and other things."

Power companies, including Entergy and Cleco Power, say late fees are an important tool to encourage customers to pay their bills.

"Ultimately, late payment policies are put in place to help protect all customers from potential rate increases caused by uncollected payments," Entergy spokesperson Jerry Nappi said in an email. The company doesn't profit from late fees, he said.

But for some major utility providers, including Entergy, late payment fees make up far more of the companies' revenues than average.

Nine companies, including Baltimore Gas and Electric, Central Hudson Gas and Electric, and Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co., derive more than 0.5% of their total revenue from late payment fee collection from 2011 to 2020 — double and even triple the national average of about 0.24%.

Late fees are meant to cover the cost of collecting a bill, or the cost of disconnecting or reconnecting power to a residence.



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They're not meant to be punitive, said Odogwu Obi Linton, who sits on the board of directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

If a customer pays the bill quickly, the utility doesn't have to carry or pursue collection of the debt, Linton said. This saves the utility company money on things like turnoff notices and making phone calls to collect late payments.

But advocates say the amount being charged doesn't reflect expenses to power companies.

"Historically few, if any, of the late fees our utilities charge are cost-based," said Kent Chandler, chairman of the Kentucky Public Service Commission.

Dan Kermode, a former policy advisor at the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, said that rules on late fee penalties in many states were decided long before the advent of new technologies and computer systems. Billing software and automated meters have made the cost of collecting late payments virtually zero for utilities.

In Louisiana, state regulations allow for up to a 5% penalty on late payments for all electric utilities. When asked for the rationale for why the late fees penalty was set at 5%, Public Service Commission press secretary Colby Cook said he could not comment because the rules on late fees, which were adopted in 1976, did not articulate the reasoning behind its adoption.

"This is what's unique about late fees — these are charges which are not to collect costs, but to act as a disincentive for late payment," Kermode said.

Some regulators and consumer advocates question whether late fees even work.

In Kentucky, the pandemic led to a moratorium on late fees for residential customers until the end of 2020. When looking back at the effects of that moratorium, the commission said, "late fees have little discernible effect on the timeliness of residential customer payments for utility service."

Energy insecurity has affected Black and Hispanic households disproportionately, and the ongoing pandemic has made things even worse, according to Indiana University researchers in a paper they published in the science journal *Nature Energy*.

In New Orleans, an organization called Total Community Action helps disburse federal energy assistance, based on need. Nearly all of the group's 7,000 clients who receive energy assistance are Black, even though only approximately 60% of New Orleans residents are Black.

In 2017, Black households spent 43% more of their incomes on energy costs than white households did, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. The council's analysis, published in 2020, also found Native American households' and Hispanic households' energy costs accounted for much larger portions of their incomes than those of white households.

Older homes, including in low-income communities, generally are less energy-efficient in the first place — and floods or other disasters can damage those buildings to the point that they no longer qualify for government weatherization assistance.

"Homes in Louisiana have been impacted by hurricanes and by floods. It makes it so that we can't come in and weatherize them because it needs a whole new roof," said Lauren Holmes, who oversees energy assistance programs for the Louisiana Housing Corp. "That's outside the scope of weatherization. We can't go in and insulate an attic if you've got a four foot gaping hole in the attic."

In neighboring Kentucky, most homes that apply for such assistance aren't able to get it, either.

Kent Chandler, a member of the state's Public Service Commission, said for every home the Kentucky Housing Corp. is able to weatherize using federal funds, roughly two homes cannot be retrofitted due to underlying health and safety problems that disqualify them from receiving that aid.

And weatherization isn't the only thing affecting energy efficiency; how people heat their homes also plays a major role. In rural areas of Kentucky, many homes are heated with inefficient electric heating, which causes extraordinarily expensive bills in winter months, Chandler said.

Getting financial assistance to pay those bills, though, can be easier said than done for people who are unemployed or self-employed.

"When residents receive a disconnection notice, they only have a few days to get help and all the sup-

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porting documentation that is required before they are disconnected," said Selton Jones, Total Community Action's community service specialist for energy services. "If I play at a jazz bar and I'm just on the saxophone, I ain't got no tax stubs."

Those who get pensions, Social Security or other retirement income do have that documentation and are more able to get help paying their bills, but that still doesn't always mean they won't fall behind.

Carolyn Peters lives in New Orleans on a fixed retirement income and has received aid from the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Her bill in February from Entergy New Orleans was almost \$500, including late fees that had been charged in previous months.

When asked about how she was planning to pay her outstanding bill, Peters said she would have to give up another necessity like medication. "It's a strain," she said.

## Republican 'unforced errors' threaten path to Senate control

By STEVE PEOPLES and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the prospect of a red wave grows, a series of Republican missteps including recruiting stumbles, weak fundraising and intense infighting is threatening the GOP's path to the Senate majority.

Arizona's Republican Gov. Doug Ducey dealt his party its latest setback late last week by announcing he would not challenge Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly this fall. His decision, which leaves no obvious front-runner in a crowded Republican primary, disappointed Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and his allies who had spent months privately encouraging Ducey to run.

But the GOP's shortcomings extend well beyond Arizona.

Republican candidates in Arizona, Georgia and Nevada are struggling to keep pace with Democratic fundraising. Recruiting failures have dashed GOP hopes in reach states like Maryland and threaten a prime pickup opportunity in New Hampshire. And a recent plan that would raise taxes on low-income Americans and seniors, released by the Republican Senate midterm chief, Florida Sen. Rick Scott, is putting GOP candidates in a difficult position across states like Wisconsin, Ohio and Florida.

The challenges amount to an early warning sign for Republicans less than two months before the opening Senate primaries of the 2022 election season. With Democrats confronting historic headwinds and the weight of an unpopular president, a Republican Senate majority is easily within reach. But, sensing discord within the GOP, Democrats are suddenly optimistic they may have a path to hold — or even expand — their majority.

Rep. Val Demings, the leading Democrat in the race to unseat Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, acknowledged that her party has struggled to highlight its accomplishments — including sweeping coronavirus pandemic relief and a massive infrastructure package — in the face of President Joe Biden's political woes. But she seized on Scott's plan as a clear contrast for how Democrats and Republicans would govern differently.

"This plan is toxic. It would hurt working families. It would hurt seniors. And Rubio's going to own it," Demings said in an interview.

Rubio's campaign declined to say specifically whether he supported Scott's plan when asked, issuing a statement instead that called Demings "a do-nothing member of Congress who has never even passed a real law, much less a tax cut."

With eight months until Election Day, the political landscape remains in flux. The health of the economy, a Supreme Court decision on abortion and the war in Eastern Europe remain major variables. But history suggests Democrats would be lucky to preserve their fragile Senate majority in November.

In a 50-50 Senate, Democrats would lose control of Congress' upper chamber if they lose a seat. And without the majority, they lose any hope of enacting Biden's plans to bolster child care, education, family leave and environmental protection while protecting voting rights.

The GOP's best pickup opportunities rest in Arizona, Georgia and Nevada, according to Steven Law, a McConnell ally who leads the most powerful Republican-aligned Senate super PAC. He said he's increasingly optimistic about the state viewed as the Democrats' best pickup opportunity, Pennsylvania, and sees

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competitive races in Republican-held states like North Carolina, Florida and Missouri trending in the right direction.

Given historic trends against the party that occupies the White House, Law predicted that a state like Colorado or Washington state could become more competitive than expected this fall as well.

"The fundamentals of this election cycle are still very, very good," Law said. "I don't think recent challenges or setbacks or issues are going to define it at all. There are going to be bumps in the road. But at the end of the day, this election is going to be about the historic unpopularity of Joe Biden and his agenda, which virtually all Democrats have blindly supported."

A February AP-NORC poll found that more people disapproved than approved of how Biden is handling his job, 55% to 44%, while just 29% of Americans thought the nation was on the right track.

Democratic strategists acknowledge their party's uphill odds in the months ahead. But on paper, at least, the current Senate landscape gives them an inherent advantage.

"Frankly, Democrats just need to hold seats in states Biden won," said Jessica Floyd, the president of the pro-Democratic super PAC American Bridge, which launched a \$5 million paid advertising campaign late last week across four states: Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania. "The map matters."

While Biden did win all four of American Bridge's target states, the Democratic president won three of them by 1 percentage point or less and the other by just 2 percentage points. Those margins should give Democrats little comfort.

Republican Glenn Youngkin narrowly defeated former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe in Virginia's high-profile governor's race last fall, even though Biden had carried the state by 10 percentage points a year earlier. Longer-term historical trends are no less daunting for Democrats: Over the last 40 years, the party that holds the White House has won Senate seats in only two midterm elections.

Meanwhile, escalating tensions among Republican leaders at the highest levels threatens to undercut the party's ambitions. McConnell and former President Donald Trump have long sparred over Republican messaging and candidate endorsements. In some states, Trump favors far-right nominees who struggle in statewide general elections.

But for now, a simmering feud between McConnell and Scott has taken center stage.

Scott, the leader of the GOP's Senate midterm efforts, released an 11-point plan late last month that would impose a modest tax increase for many of the lowest paid Americans, while opening the door for cutting Social Security and Medicare. The Senate Democrats' political arm released a radio ad within 24 hours declaring, "If Senate Republicans win, we pay the price."

Staffers from Scott's Senate committee moved into triage mode almost immediately, reaching out to Republican campaigns across the country to gauge their frustration while offering messaging help, according to senior Republican strategists with direct knowledge of the situation.

The strategists, who requested anonymity to discuss private deliberations, said many Senate Republicans had been willing to ignore what they viewed as Scott's presidential ambitions over the last year. But that changed when the Florida senator released his latest proposal, which they considered an "unforced error" that triggered a wave of anger across the party.

McConnell could not stay silent as he faced reporters last week on Capitol Hill.

The Senate Republican leader forcefully rebuked Scott's plan during the Republican leadership's weekly news conference, which Scott was part of.

"Let me tell you what would not be a part of our agenda," McConnell said moments after Scott stepped away from the event. "We will not have as part of our agenda a bill that raises taxes on half of the American people and sunsets Social Security and Medicare within five years."

Scott refused to respond on Sunday when asked about McConnell's comments during an appearance on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures," offering instead a defiant defense of his broader plan.

"It's my ideas," Scott said. "There's going to be other ideas."

Amid such Republican infighting, Democrats are pressing their cash advantage on the ground in key states, even as GOP campaign committees in Washington report record fundraising hauls.

In Nevada, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, one of the nation's most endangered Democrats, reported

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\$10.5 million cash on hand at the end of last year, compared to Republican former state Attorney General Adam Laxalt's \$1.7 million.

Georgia Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock finished the year with \$22.9 million in the bank, while likely Republican challenger Herschel Walker, the former football star who has been endorsed by Trump, reported \$5.4 million.

And Arizona Democrat Kelly, a former astronaut who won a 2020 special election to serve out the final two years of the late Sen. John McCain's term, reported \$18.6 million in the bank. Arizona's Republican state Attorney General Mark Brnovich, the best-known Republican in a crowded primary field, reported less than \$800,000 in the bank.

Warnock and Kelly pressed their financial advantages by launching an initial round of television ads in recent weeks as Republican candidates in both states focus on fighting each other. It's much the same in New Hampshire, where Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan placed \$13 million in initial TV and radio advertising reservations for the fall, much of it in the expensive Boston media market, while three Republicans will be locked in a primary through mid-September.

Back in Washington, Scott seemed to be in good spirits as he described Biden and his agenda as "wildly unpopular."

"The Democrats are simply failing American families and the voters are ready to give them a butt kicking this November," Scott told AP.

Meanwhile, in Florida, Demings offered a window into the Democrats' challenge by refusing to say whether she wanted Biden to campaign in the state on her behalf when asked.

"I grew up poor, Black and female in the South," Demings told The Associated Press. "I've never depended on someone else to do the work for me or someone to give me a pass or come to rescue me."

"I'm excited about where we are in this race," she said.

## War silenced violin for refugee as 1.7M have fled Ukraine

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

ZAHONY, Hungary (AP) — The violin was so beloved by Myroslava Sherbina it was the one item she took as she fled Ukraine, along with the clothes she wore. But the instrument has remained silent since the start of Russia's invasion of her country.

"I didn't want to play so I could hear the sirens and we could go to the bomb shelter," the 20-year-old Sherbina said.

She is among the more than 1.7 million people who have fled Ukraine in what the United Nations calls Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. The number is up from 1.5 million on Sunday, the U.N. refugee agency said.

Sherbina spoke at a train station in Hungary, one of dozens of musicians with the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine who are now refugees. They were on their way to Slovenia as part of a joint evacuation mission with a Slovenian orchestra.

Cellos, violins, violas and other instruments lay on the train platform next to their young and disoriented owners. Hours-long train delays caused by the surge of Ukrainians toward borders meant that about 30 musicians were still unaccounted for.

"There's a group of about 90 people coming to this particular train station," said Uros Dokl, a volunteer from Slovenia who came the 665 kilometers (413 miles) to greet the orchestra members. "Not all of them are members of the orchestra, but they are young people playing music, and young people of course need guidance."

Sherbina, the violin player, said she's confident the war in Ukraine will end soon and she'll return home. Until then, she'll refine her skills in Slovenia, a country she's never visited.

"I want to feel safe so I can practice, and not think that a bomb can fall and ruin my house," she said.

Some 4 million people may flee Ukraine if Russia's offensive continues, the U.N. has said. On Monday, European Union foreign affairs policy chief Josep Borrell urged the mobilization of "all the resources" of



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the 27-nation bloc to help countries welcoming them.

Two Czech army convoys were on the way to neighboring Slovakia to help. "We didn't have to think twice and immediately met the Slovak request," Czech Defense Minister Jana Cernochova said. The temporary base will be able to accommodate up to 400 people.

A cardinal dispatched by Pope Francis on a mission to promote peace traveled to the Polish-Ukrainian border to meet with refugees. He will highlight "the sad similarity between the Ukrainians' sufferings and the protracted conflicts that no longer attract the world's attention," the Vatican said, citing the pope's frequent denunciation of suffering in wars in Ethiopia, Yemen and Syria.

Uncertainty and relief continued along the border among the thousands of arriving Ukrainians. Many were wrapped in blankets. Some held small children. They sought the basic necessities: food, shelter, sleep, support.

Under a canopy next to the train station in the Hungarian border town of Zahony, Tamas Marghescu stirred a cauldron of traditional meat stew. As an outdoorsman and the Hungary director for the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, he called the meal well-suited for those who shivered in line for hours at the border.

"When you're at home watching the news, you feel so helpless," his wife, Ilona, said. "It's ... important for people when they come off those trains to have somebody smiling at them and to know that there are people here that care."

The couple said they felt a responsibility to help those who fled. Ilona's parents left Hungary for Australia during World War II. Marghescu's family twice fled Soviet domination, after the war in 1948 and again after the brutal Soviet repression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

"My parents are still telling me stories about when they were refugees and they were looked after," Marghescu said, His wildlife organization has set up similar outdoor kitchens at the Polish, Slovakian and Romanian borders with Ukraine.

"It's a traditional meal and it's cooked with love," his wife said.

In Moldova, some families opened homes to refugees. "It was a natural and beautiful process," said Sabina Nadejdin, who hosts pregnant Anastacia Luybimova and her three small children. Like most other men, Luybimova's husband stayed behind in Ukraine. Lifting her hand from her belly, she showed a heart tattoo she and her husband got on their ring fingers when they married.

Poland, where more than 1 million refugees have arrived, on Monday approved legislation offering them financial help and allowing them to stay legally in the country for 18 months. Helping the Ukrainians is the most important challenge Poland has faced in decades, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said, and efforts "cannot be only spontaneous."

At the Przemysl train station near the Medyka border crossing, the main point of arrival in Poland, the hall was packed and a banner in Ukrainian read, "Here, you are safe."

A 17-year-old Polish volunteer, Zuzana Koseva, described the refugees as "just very, very tired, terrified and confused because they don't know what to expect."

The volunteers were trying to organize food and a warm tent, she said. She was moved by the exhausted mothers and the small, sometimes bewildered, children.

"They are happy with one sweet, so that's just amazing," Koseva said.

One mother held a child to her chest and, closing her eyes in what might be prayer, touched their foreheads together.

## Trial next for 4 accused in Michigan governor kidnap plot

By MICHAEL TARM and ED WHITE Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Were they gullible foul-mouthed men under the spell of undercover agents? Or a rogue cast seething with enough anger to actually want to kidnap Michigan's governor?

Jury selection begins Tuesday in the trial of four men who are accused of conspiring to snatch Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in a stunning scheme to retaliate against her stay-home policies and other COVID-19 restrictions during the early months of the pandemic.

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In 2020, Whitmer, a Democrat, was trading taunts with then-President Donald Trump over his administration's response to COVID-19. Her critics, meanwhile, were regularly protesting at the Michigan Capitol, clogging streets around the statehouse and legally carrying semi-automatic rifles into the building.

During that turbulent time, Adam Fox, Brandon Caserta, Barry Croft Jr. and Daniel Harris were plotting to snatch Whitmer, prosecutors say. They're accused of taking critical steps over several months, including secret messaging, gun drills in the woods and a night drive to northern Michigan to scout her second home and figure out how to blow up a bridge.

The FBI, which had infiltrated the group, said it thwarted the plan with the arrests of six men in October 2020. Two of them, Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks, have pleaded guilty and will appear as crucial witnesses for the government, giving jurors an inside view of what was planned.

Garbin, for example, said Fox, the alleged ringleader, wanted the men to chip in for a \$4,000 explosive large enough to destroy a bridge near Whitmer's home and distract police during a kidnapping.

"The blood of tyrants needs to be shed," Garbin quoted Caserta as saying during a meeting.

Garbin and Franks insist no one in the group acted because of excessive influence by agents or undercover informants.

"It is not the end of the case for the defense, but it's a big obstacle to overcome," John Smietanka, a former federal prosecutor, said of the pair's cooperation. "It's going to come down to the credibility of witnesses plus the effect of any extrinsic evidence, like tapes."

Indeed, prosecutors said much of the evidence will be the defendants' own words gathered during secret recordings. The government will also offer screenshots of text messages as well as photos and videos posted on social media.

Ahead of the trial, defense lawyers panned the case, especially the "staggering use" of informants. They deny any conspiracy to kidnap Whitmer and have signaled an entrapment defense.

"The agents and snitches recruited the defendants, arranged meetings, paid for travel, paid for hotels, rented cars, produced promotional videos demonstrating explosives, purchased equipment, vetted new members, hatched the ideas and directed the operations," said Joshua Blanchard, who is Croft's attorney.

Defense lawyer Christopher Gibbons said Fox did not want to kidnap Whitmer, though he made "many inflammatory remarks" about the governor and what he considered to be unconstitutional acts.

Agents and informants were the "binding force and catalyst for every event, impassioned speech and nearly every suggestion of criminality," Gibbons said in a court filing.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler said informants were paid to collect information, not to induce crimes.

"The things they recorded were the defendants' own words. That's what makes the defendants look guilty," Kessler told a judge Friday.

A successful entrapment defense requires evidence that the government induced someone to commit a crime that they otherwise wouldn't be inclined to carry out, Smietanka said.

Whitmer, who is seeking reelection this year, rarely talks publicly about the case and isn't expected to attend the trial, which could last more than a month in federal court in Grand Rapids. After charges were filed in 2020, just weeks before the fall election, she accused Trump of "giving comfort" to antigovernment extremists with his rhetoric.

"The plots and threats against me, no matter how disturbing, could not deter me from doing everything I could to save as many lives as possible by listening to medical and health experts," Whitmer said last summer, referring to COVID-19.

Separately, authorities in state court are prosecuting eight men who are accused of aiding the group.

## 'Squid Game Election': South Korean campaign gets ugly

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The race between South Korea's two leading presidential candidates has seen unprecedented levels of toxic rhetoric, mudslinging and lawsuits.

How bad is it?

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"Hitler," "beast," and "parasite" are some of the choicer insults leveled by both camps. Some are even calling it "The Squid Game Election," in reference to Netflix's megahit survival drama where people are killed if they lose children's games.

And the stakes? There's widespread speculation that the loser will be arrested.

"It's a dreadful presidential election when the losing contender faces prison. Please survive this dogfight in the mire!" senior opposition politician Hong Joon-pyo wrote on Facebook.

Just days before Wednesday's election, Lee Jae-myung from the liberal governing Democratic Party and Yoon Suk Yeol from the main conservative opposition People Power Party are locked in an extremely tight race.

Their negative campaigns are aggravating South Korea's already severe political divide at a time when it faces a battered, pandemic-hit economy, a balancing act over competition between its main ally, Washington, and its top trading partner, China, and a raft of threats and weapons tests from rival North Korea.

Opinion surveys show that both candidates have more critics than supporters.

"Isn't our national future too bleak with an unpleasant and bitter presidential election that calls for choosing the lesser of two evils?" the mass-circulation Dong-A Ilbo newspaper said in an editorial.

Yoon has slammed Lee over his possible ties to an allegedly corrupt land development scandal. Lee has denied any connection, and in turn has tried to link Yoon to the same scandal, while separately criticizing him for his reported ties to shamanism — an ancient, indigenous religious belief.

There have also been attacks on the candidates' wives, both of whom have been forced to apologize over separate scandals.

Yoon described Lee's party as "Hitler" and "Mussolini" while an associate called Lee's purported aides "parasites." Lee's allies called Yoon "a beast," "dictator" and "an empty can" and derided his wife's alleged plastic surgery.

Their campaign teams and supporters have filed dozens of lawsuits charging libel and the spread of false information, among other issues.

"This year's presidential election has been more overwhelmed by negative campaigning than any other previous election, and the mutual hatred won't easily die down after the election," said Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership.

Among the fault lines in the electorate are South Korean regional rivalries, views on North Korea, a conflict between generations, economic inequality and women's rights issues.

Yoon is more popular with older voters and those in the southeastern region of Gyeongsang, where past conservative and authoritarian leaders came from. His supporters typically advocate a stronger military alliance with the United States and a tougher line on North Korea, and they credit past authoritarian rulers for quickly developing the economy after the Korean War.

Lee enjoys greater support from younger people and those from Jeolla province, Gyeongsang's rival region in the southwest. His supporters generally want an equal footing in relations with the United States and rapprochement with North Korea while being extremely critical of past authoritarian rulers' human rights records.

In a notable development, many surveys showed Yoon has received greater approval ratings than Lee from voters aged 18 to 29, most of whom were born after South Korea became a developed country.

"They didn't experience poverty and dictatorships. ... They are very critical of China and North Korea, and they have rather friendly feelings toward the U.S. and Japan," said Park Sung-min, head of Seoul-based MIN Consulting, a political consulting firm.

South Korea's deep divisions are reflected in the troubles of the last three leaders. Their supporters say intense corruption investigations after they left office were politically motivated by their rivals.

During a corruption probe of his family, former liberal President Roh Moo-hyun jumped to his death in 2009, a year after he left office. His successor, the conservative Lee Myung-bak, and Lee's conservative successor, Park Geun-hye, were separately convicted of a range of crimes, including corruption, and given lengthy prison terms after Roh's friend and current President Moon Jae-in took office in 2017.

Park was pardoned in December, but Lee is still serving a 17-year prison term.

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Moon's government took a big hit with a scandal involving Moon's former justice minister and close associate, Cho Kuk. Cho and his family members are alleged to have participated in financial crimes and the faking of credentials to help Cho's daughter enter medical school.

Cho was seen as a reformist and potential liberal presidential hopeful. Moon's early attempts to keep Cho in office split the public, with his critics calling for Cho's resignation and supporters rallying to his side during large street protests.

Yoon originally served as Moon's prosecutor general and spearheaded investigations of previous conservative governments. But he eventually left Moon's government and joined the opposition last year after a conflict with Moon's allies over the Cho case helped him emerge as a potential presidential contender.

"Cho's case was a watershed in South Korean politics. It made Yoon a presidential candidate, and many in their 20s and 30s switched their support from Moon," said Choi, the institute director.

During a recent TV debate, Yoon and Lee agreed not to launch politically motivated investigations against the other side if they win. But some question their sincerity.

In a newspaper interview last month, Yoon said that if elected, his government would investigate possible wrongdoing by the Moon government and also the land development scandal that Lee has been allegedly linked to.

When Moon's government was conducting widespread investigations of past conservative governments, Lee said they were necessary to eradicate "deep-rooted evils and injustice."

Cho Jinman, a professor at Seoul's Duksung Women's University, said a new president must exercise restraint and calm calls for political revenge by hard-line supporters.

"We now have an election race like 'Squid Game,' but it will be a new president's responsibility to pull us out of it," he said.

## Russia snubs UN court hearings in case brought by Ukraine

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Ukraine pleaded with the United Nations' top court Monday to order Russia to halt its devastating invasion, saying Moscow is already committing widespread war crimes and "resorting to tactics reminiscent of medieval siege warfare" in its 12-day-old military onslaught.

Russia snubbed the International Court of Justice hearings and its seats in the Great Hall of Justice remained empty.

On a lawn outside the court's headquarters, the Peace Palace in The Hague, a protester placed colored candles spelling out the words: "Putin Come out." A small group of protesters holding Ukrainian flags chanted antiwar slogans outside the building's gates.

Ukrainian representative Anton Korynevych told judges at the International Court of Justice: "Russia must be stopped and the court has a role to play in stopping it."

Ukraine has asked the court to order Russia to "immediately suspend the military operations" launched Feb. 24 "that have as their stated purpose and objective the prevention and punishment of a claimed genocide" in the separatist eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Lawyers for Kyiv dismissed the Russian claim.

"Ukraine comes to this court because of a grotesque lie and to seek protection from the devastating consequences of that lie," David Zions told the court. "The lie is the Russian Federation's claim of genocide in Ukraine. The consequences are unprovoked aggression, cities under siege, civilians under fire, humanitarian catastrophe and refugees fleeing for their lives."

A decision on Ukraine's request is expected within days. The court's president, American judge Joan E. Donoghue, said the judges would issue a decision "as soon as possible."

If the court were to order a halt to fighting as Ukraine requested, "I think the chance of that happening is zero," said Terry Gill, a professor of military law at the University of Amsterdam. He noted that if a nation does not abide by the court's order, judges could seek action from the United Nations Security Council, where Russia holds a veto.



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Donoghue said Russia's ambassador to the Netherlands, Alexander Shulgin, informed judges that "his government did not intend to participate in the oral proceedings."

Because of Russia's refusal to participate in the hearings, Moscow's turn to present legal arguments on Tuesday was canceled.

Korynevych condemned Moscow's snub.

"The fact that Russian seats are empty speaks loudly," he said. "They are not here in this court of law. They are on a battlefield waging aggressive war against my country."

The request for so-called provisional measures is linked to a case Ukraine has filed based on the Genocide Convention. Both countries have ratified the 1948 treaty, which has a clause allowing nations to take disputes based on its provisions to the Hague-based court.

"Ukraine emphatically denies that any such genocide has occurred, and that the Russian Federation has any lawful basis to take action in and against Ukraine for the purpose of preventing and punishing genocide," the country said in its claim to the court.

Even before the hearing, Donoghue sent a message to Russia's foreign minister on March 1 pressing home the necessity to act "in such a way as will enable any order the Court may make on the request for provisional measures to have its appropriate effects."

Jonathan Gimblett, a member of Ukraine's legal team, highlighted the urgency of Ukraine's case, saying Moscow's "military aggression could have resulted in a new nuclear catastrophe affecting not only Ukraine or Russia, but potentially a vast surrounding area."

He added that Russia, "today is resorting to tactics reminiscent of medieval siege warfare, encircling cities, cutting off escape routes and pounding the civilian population with heavy ordnance."

The success of Ukraine's request will depend on whether the court accepts it has "prima facie jurisdiction" in the case, which is not a guarantee that the court ultimately would proceed with the suit. Cases at the International Court of Justice typically take years to complete.

Regardless of the outcome of the hearings, they give Ukraine another platform to air grievances about Moscow's invasion.

"It's part of, I think, an overall diplomatic strategy to try to put maximum pressure on Russia," said Gill.

Ukrainian representative Oksana Zolotaryova emotionally underscored the high stakes as the hearing closed.

"As I am speaking, the Russian Federation continues its relentless assaults on our cities, on our towns, on our villages, on our people," she told judges.

She added: "We don't know yet the true number of Ukrainians that Russia has murdered in the past eleven days. We can only guess how many more will be murdered in the next eleven days if this senseless aggression does not stop."

## At Romania hotel, ballroom welcomes refugees fleeing Ukraine

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

SUCEAVA, Romania (AP) — As Olga Okhrimenko walked into a bustling ballroom-turned-refugee shelter at a four-star Romanian hotel, her corgi, Knolly, strained at the leash anxiously seeking the warmth inside. It had taken them three days to flee Ukraine by car, bus and taxi in the bitter cold.

The 34-year-old Ukrainian marketing manager could hardly contain her emotions, and a simple "are you OK?" filled her eyes with tears she thought she no longer had.

The first refugees began arriving more than a week ago at the Mandachi Hotel and Spa in Suceava in Romania, where the owner decided to make the lavish, 850-square-meter ballroom available to them. Since then, more than 2,000 people and 100 pets have taken shelter here, with row upon row of numbered mattresses under an incongruous glittering disco ball.

They are part of the swiftest refugee exodus so far this century, in which more than 1.7 million people have fled Ukraine in just 10 days, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency. Since the war started on Feb. 24, more than 227,000 Ukrainians have crossed into neighboring Romania, according to local au-

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thorities.

Like Okhrimenko, some of the refugees at the Mandachi have fled cities on the front lines of the war.

"Whenever somebody asks me where I am from, and I say Kharkiv, their expression, it's like I arrived from Hiroshima," Okhrimenko told The Associated Press from mattress number 60. "Then, I remember everything going on there and I break down."

After five days of shelling, she decided to flee Kharkiv on March 1 with Knolly, a couple of friends and their two cats. Their car passed by the city's central Freedom Square just 20 minutes before it was engulfed by a giant ball of fire in a Russian military strike.

"It was difficult for me before to say I'm a great patriot of my land," she said. "But on Feb. 24, I became one 100%."

As she spoke, volunteers on megaphones interrupted several times to announce buses leaving for Italy, Germany, Bulgaria and other European nations. The room was chaotic, filled mostly with women and children, as men stayed in Ukraine to fight. Some spoke Russian, underlining the sense of a war on family.

The majority of the refugees were Ukrainian, but there were also Nigerians, Moroccans, Italians, Chinese and Iranians. Toddlers cried in the arms of exhausted mothers, who took deep breaths to calm their children and themselves. Cats and dogs of all sizes shared beds with their owners, and one stressed Chihuahua with bulging eyes bit anyone who attempted to pet it.

Some 300 volunteers, translators and social workers take turns to help here. In the mornings, they change the mismatched sheets on vacated mattresses, placing a "reserved" or "free" handwritten sign over them. In the reception area, the two bars display not alcohol but an array of diapers, toothbrushes, snacks and even surgical masks and disinfectant gel.

At the opposite end of the King Salon, at mattress number 82 near stacks of red velvet chairs, 85-year-old Nellya Nahorna sat in silence combing her gray hair with her fingers.

It was the second time this Ukrainian grandmother had fled war. In 1941, when she was just 4 years old, Nahorna was injured by shrapnel in Nazi Germany's invasion of Ukraine, she said.

"The first night of the war, my mother grabbed me from my cradle and ran to take the last car that carried the wounded to the border," Nahorna recalled in a soft, low voice.

Now, more than 80 years later, it was her daughter, 57-year-old Olena Yefanova, who grabbed her on the first day of the war and crossed the border. They came from the town of Zaporizhzhia, where Europe's largest nuclear power plant was hit by Russian shelling last week.

"This war is different," Nahorna said in Russian. In World War II, the enemies were German "fascists," she said. But now, she was fleeing from her "brothers." They had to make stops along the way to get her a Ukrainian passport.

"I would like to tell the Russian mothers .... help by keeping your sons right next to yourselves and don't let them fight and attack other countries," Nahorna said.

In an astonishing accomplishment, the same grandmother who leaned on a cane to make it from her mattress to a table a few steps away had walked the last 5 km (3 miles) to Romania by foot. At one point, Nahorna's heart seemed like it was giving up, and a doctor gave her some pills so she could continue, her daughter said.

"My mother clenched her will into a fist and left," Yefanova said proudly. "She understood that this is going to be hard but she took it steadfastly."

Yefanova had left her husband and one son behind, enlisted to fight the Russians. She wept as she showed a photo of them on her phone screensaver.

"Our kids play a game called little tanks - (Russian President Vladimir Putin) is playing his own version of this game," she said. "And he is (using) his people in this game."

A row behind Yefanova on mattress 34, Anna Karpenko thought of her partner as their 6-year-old son played with a yellow balloon.

Before she left him at their home in Chornomorsk, on the outskirts of Ukraine's biggest port city of Odesa, he promised they would get married after the war. But "when we said goodbye, it felt like it was

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forever," Karpenko said, wiping tears from her eyes.

Normally, she said, she's an optimistic person. Now she and her son both cry every day.

Russian ships have made repeated attempts to fire on the Black Sea port of Odesa, according to Ukrainian officials. Karpenko said people in her town had gathered on beaches to fill bags with sand.

Originally from Crimea, Karpenko speaks Russian, worked for a Russian language school and has relatives in Donetsk, one of two Russian-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has divided her family, with her Donetsk relatives supporting Putin.

"They think that all of their problems are caused by Ukraine," she explained in frustration. "They worship (Putin) as if he was a God."

She's given up trying to tell them it was Russian strikes she was fleeing.

By the next morning, Okhrimenko and her corgi had left. Her husband, who had moved to Germany only a few months ago, drove down to pick them up. She had planned to join him eventually, but never thought she would suddenly be chased out by sirens and explosions.

"We just took a deep sigh of relief together and hugged each other so strong," Okhrimenko told AP by text message from the road to Germany.

Karpenko, her son and her mother boarded a bus also bound for Germany. On the same bus were Yefanova and Nahorna, the 85-year-old grandmother.

Thirty hours after leaving the makeshift shelter, they were still on the road. "The longest journey in my life," Karpenko texted AP from a gas station in Austria.

As one bus left, others arrived at the Hotel Mandachi, full of freezing refugees carrying their children and their belongings. With no end to the war in sight, the wedding parties that once took place in the ballroom have been postponed indefinitely.

## Macron keeps an open line to Putin as war in Ukraine rages

By BARBARA SURK Associated Press

NICE, France (AP) — While most of the world is shunning President Vladimir Putin over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one of the few leaders keeping an open line of communication is French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron's diplomatic efforts to prevent the war failed, but he's not giving up: the two men have spoken four times since Russian forces attacked Ukraine on Feb. 24, and 11 times over the past month.

The French leader, whose country holds the European Union's rotating presidency, is now one of the few outsiders with a view into Putin's mindset at the time of the largest military invasion in Europe since World War II. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is also becoming a mediator, meeting Putin on a surprise visit to Moscow on Saturday and speaking with him again by phone on Sunday.

Macron's relentless push for dialogue reflects France's post-World War II tradition of carving out its own geopolitical path and its refusal to blindly follow the United States.

After Russian troops pushed deep into Ukraine, Macron's resolve to maintain communication channels with Putin is providing Western allies with insight into the Russian leader's state of mind, his intentions on the battlefield and at home in Russia as the Kremlin cracks down on opponents.

"He is keeping a diplomatic channel open for the West in case Putin might want to de-escalate and look for a way out of this crisis," said Benjamin Haddad, a senior director for Europe at the Atlantic Council in Paris and a member of Macron's party.

The two leaders address each other through interpreters with the familiar French word for "you" — "tu" — rather than the formal "vous," an Elysee presidential palace official said after one phone call.

Macron has also spoken to Putin on behalf of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Haddad said, trying to extract some mercy from Putin: local cease-fires, safe passage for trapped civilians and access to humanitarian aid.

Instead of mercy, the French president on Monday denounced Moscow's "cynicism" after a new pledge for humanitarian corridors from some under-fire Ukrainian cities — with most of the routes leading toward

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Russia or its ally Belarus, which served as a launching ground for the invasion.

Saying that "we are going to protect people by bringing them to Russia" is "hypocritical," Macron said in an interview on LCI television.

During their most recent call on Sunday that came at Macron's request, the French leader and Putin focused for nearly two hours on the safety of Ukraine's nuclear plants.

Putin said he doesn't intend to attack them and agreed on the principle of "dialogue" between the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ukraine and Russia on the issue, according to a French official who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with the French presidency's practices.

There is "absolutely no illusion at the Elysee that Putin will keep his word on anything he promises," Haddad said, or that Putin will change his mind about the invasion. But Haddad said that it's important that Macron keeps trying to engage Putin even as the West punishes Russia and strengthens Ukraine's defenses.

And breaking with the diplomatic norm of keeping such conversations secret, the French presidency has widely shared the content of Macron's talks with Putin. Macron's advisers and the president himself detailed the excruciating efforts to prevent the war and then laid bare Putin's broken promises of peace.

That helped Macron galvanize support for the toughest sanctions against Russia, uniting the notoriously divided 27-member EU and revive NATO's geopolitical role.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will go to Paris on Tuesday to hear from Macron directly about his latest conversations with Putin. But U.S. officials remain unconvinced that Macron's efforts — or any other leader's — have had any significant impact on Putin's decision-making process.

The French president has been clear from the start: Putin alone is to blame for the death and destruction in Ukraine and the major consequences of the war for France and Europe. But on the other hand if Putin wants to talk, he will listen.

Putin called on Thursday. The number of refugees fleeing Ukraine had already topped 1 million and several towns in the east were in ruins. Macron picked up and they talked for 90 minutes.

An official in the French presidency rushed to brief reporters on the conversation. Putin told Macron the military operation in Ukraine is "going according to plan" and he will continue "until the end," the official said on customary condition of anonymity.

Putin claimed that "war crimes" were being committed by Ukrainians. He called them "Nazis," the official said. There's no need to negotiate, Putin said. He will achieve the "neutralization and disarmament of Ukraine" with his army.

Macron "spoke the truth" to Putin, the official said, and explained how his war on Ukraine is perceived by the West. "I asked him to stop attacks on Ukraine. At this point, he refuses," Macron tweeted.

He said dialogue will continue. "We must prevent the worst from happening."

Since he was elected president in 2017, Macron has shown a keen interest in forging personal relationships with world leaders.

"Macron stands out among European Union leaders with his willingness to be in the spotlight, to drive foreign policy and push things ahead," said Silvia Colombo, an expert on EU foreign relations at the International Institute in Rome.

There is no other foreign leader that Macron has tried to bring closer to his corner than Putin. Macron was confident that a mixture of personal charm and the splendor of France's past would convince Putin to keep Russia within the European security habitat.

Macron first hosted Putin in the Place of Versailles in 2017. Two years later they discussed stalled Ukraine peace talks in Macron's summer residence on the French Riviera as Macron tried to build on European diplomacy that had helped ease hostilities in the past.

It's become clear over the past several weeks that Putin was on the war path even as he denied it, sitting across from Macron at a very long table during his last visit to Moscow.

Macron wanted to believe him, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said after critics claimed the French president has fallen into the old European trap of appeasing Putin's Russia.



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"The president is not naive," Le Drian said on the eve of Russia's invasion. "He knows the methods, the character and the cynical nature of Putin."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 8, the 67th day of 2022. There are 298 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 8, 1965, the United States landed its first combat troops in South Vietnam as 3,500 Marines arrived to defend the U.S. air base at Da Nang.

On this date:

In 1618, German astronomer Johannes Kepler devised his third law of planetary motion.

In 1817, the New York Stock & Exchange Board, which had its beginnings in 1792, was formally organized; it later became known as the New York Stock Exchange.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, in *McCullum v. Board of Education*, struck down voluntary religious education classes in Champaign, Illinois, public schools, saying the program violated separation of church and state.

In 1971, Joe Frazier defeated Muhammad Ali by decision in what was billed as "The Fight of the Century" at Madison Square Garden in New York. Silent film comedian Harold Lloyd died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 77.

In 1983, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals convention in Orlando, Florida, President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

In 1988, 17 soldiers were killed when two Army helicopters from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, collided in mid-flight.

In 1999, baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio died in Hollywood, Florida, at age 84.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton submitted to Congress legislation to establish permanent normal trade relations with China. (The U.S. and China signed a trade pact in November 2000.)

In 2004, Iraq's Governing Council signed a landmark interim constitution.

In 2008, President George W. Bush vetoed a bill that would have banned the CIA from using simulated drowning and other coercive interrogation methods to gain information from suspected terrorists.

In 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, vanished during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, setting off a massive and ultimately unsuccessful search.

In 2016, Sir George Martin, the Beatles' urbane producer who guided the band's swift, historic transformation from rowdy club act to musical and cultural revolutionaries, died at age 90.

Ten years ago: Jesse Owens was posthumously made an inaugural member of the IAAF Hall of Fame more than 75 years after he won four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. (Owens, Carl Lewis, Jackie Joyner-Kersey and nine others were the first athletes to be honored by the IAAF in its newly created Hall of Fame.) James T. "Jimmy" Ellis, 74, the frontman for The Trammps who released "Disco Inferno," died in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Five years ago: Hawaii became the first state to sue to stop President Donald Trump's revised travel ban (the state had previously sued over Trump's initial travel ban, but that lawsuit was put on hold while other cases played out across the country). Many American women stayed home from work, joined rallies or wore red to demonstrate how vital they were to the U.S. economy, as International Women's Day was observed with a multitude of events around the world, including the Day Without a Woman in the U.S. Fire swept through a crowded youth shelter near Guatemala City, killing 40 girls.

One year ago: According to some long-awaited guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fully vaccinated Americans could now gather with other vaccinated people indoors without wearing a mask or social distancing. Novak Djokovic surpassed Roger Federer for the most weeks at No. 1 in the ATP rankings; it was his 311th week in the top spot.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz musician George Coleman is 87. Actor Sue Ane (correct) Langdon is 86. College

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Football Hall of Famer Pete Dawkins is 84. Songwriter Carole Bayer Sager is 78. Actor-director Micky Dolenz (The Monkees) is 77. Singer-musician Randy Meisner is 76. Pop singer Peggy March is 74. Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Rice is 69. Jazz musician Billy Childs is 65. Singer Gary Numan is 64. NBC News anchor Lester Holt is 63. Actor Aidan Quinn is 63. Actor Camryn Manheim is 61. Actor Leon (no last name) is 61. Country-rock singer Shawn Mullins is 54. Neo-soul singer Van Hunt is 52. Actor Andrea Parker is 52. Actor Boris Kodjoe is 49. Actor Freddie Prinze Jr. is 46. Actor Laura Main is 45. Actor James Van Der Beek is 45. R&B singer Kameelah Williams (702) is 44. Actor Nick Zano is 44. Rock singer Tom Chaplin (Keane) is 43. Rock musician Andy Ross (OK Go) is 43. Actor Jessica Collins is 39. R&B singer Kristinia (kris-teh-NEE'-ah) DeBarge is 32.