

Groton Daily Independent

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“Don't you wish you could take a single childhood memory and blow it up into a bubble and live inside it forever?”
-Sarah Addison Allen



Saturday, March 19

State A Tournament in Rapid City. Groton Area vs. Dakota Tech at Noon.

Mitchell Show Choir Competition

Sunday, March 20

5 p.m.: Welcome Home Celebration in the Arena

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

Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice:

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 22nd, 2022 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist

Bates Township Clerk

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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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Sioux Falls Christian uses height advantage to get past Groton Area

Sioux Falls Christian used its height and it took its toll in the second half as the Knights defeated Groton Area, 86-56, in the consolation semifinal game. The State A Tournament is being played at Summit Arena at the Monument in Rapid City.

The Knights jumped out to a 4-0 lead and it was late in the first quarter before the Tigers were able to tie the game at 15 and the Tigers took a 17-15 lead. The game was tied at 17 and Jayden Zak made a three-pointer as the Ti-



Jayden Zak puts up this shot as he was double teamed under the basket. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

gers took a 20-17 lead at the break. Kaden Kurtz made a three-pointer and Groton Area took a 23-17 lead. The Knights battled back to tie the game 23 and the game was tied at 25, 27 and 29.



The game was very physical as you can tell with Kaden Kurtz getting a black eye during one of the elbowed events. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Area used three time-outs in the second quarter and Coach Brian Dolan said, "Every timeout called was necessary to keep us focused on the task at hand."

The lead changed hands four times before the Knights took a 37-35 lead at half time.

In the first half, Groton out-rebounded Sioux Falls Christian, 14-13, the Knights made four of 12 three-pointers while the Tigers missed four three-pointers. Groton Area made 16 of 29

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field goals compared to 14 of 27 for the Knights. Groton Area made five of six in free throws and Sioux Falls Christian made three of seven.

The game was tied three more times in the third quarter before the tide changed. "The officials started letting kids be more physical," Dolan said, " (off the ground) and it obviously favored the team with more size. Our kids came out and played just hard and executed in the third, things changed late in the third."

The Knights started to pull away with the help of controlling the boards. Sioux Falls Christian out-rebounded Groton Area in the second half, 23-7. The Knights took a 63-50 lead at the end of the third quarter.

There was no more catching up for the Tigers. Every time the Tigers scored, the Knights would answer. "I don't think they were quicker or that we were sluggish," Dolan said. "We were out of position at times. And



Jacob Zak dribbles the ball and tries to make a move inside. (Photo by Paul Kosel)




Lane Tietz made this shot from the wing to cut the Knights' lead down to two, 13-11, with 3:08 left in the first quarter. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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we're late getting back on defense."

The reserves for both teams got to play in the final minute of the game as the Knights went on to win, 63-50.

"The crowd was awesome," Dolan said. "We very much like to be a part of a community like Groton. The community should be proud of these boys as well, they played their tails off today."

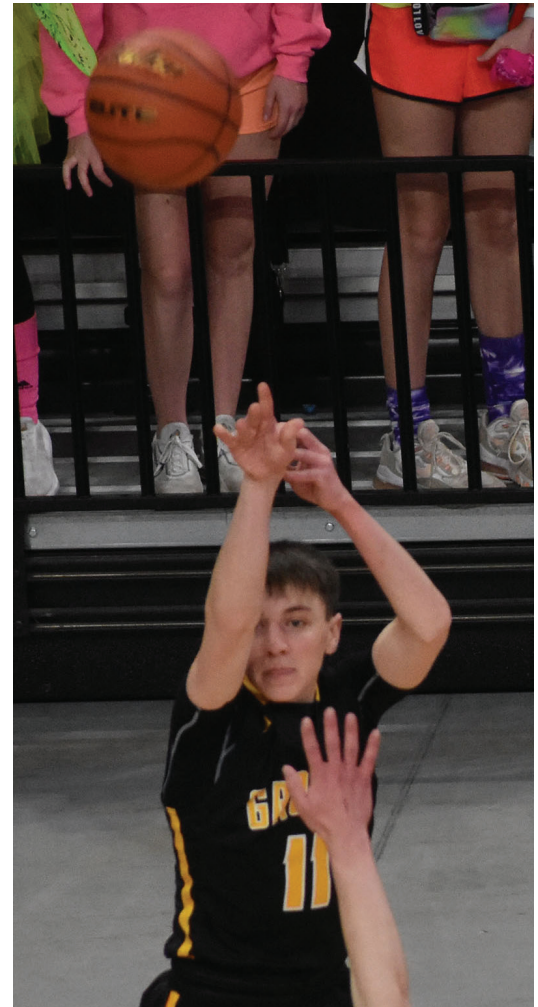
Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 18 points while Kaden Kurtz had 10, Jayden Zak nine, Wyatt Hearnen six, Jacob Zak and Cole Simon each had five and Tate Larson had three points.

Four players hit double figures for the Knights with Brooks Nelson leading the way with 18 points followed by Tayton Synder with 16, Ethan Bruns 14, Nathan Koole 12, Britton Muller and Jaden With each had nine, Isaiah Muller had four and Cole Snyder and Carson Engber's each had two points.

Groton Area had 10 turnovers, eight of which were steals. The Knights had eight turnovers, six of which were steals with Jayden Zak having two. The Knights had more offensive rebounds, 9-6, with Tate Larson having three for Groton Area. Sioux Falls Christian had more defensive rebounds, 27-15, with Lane Tietz having four for the Tigers.

Groton Area will play for seventh against Dakota Tech at noon Mountain Time. Winner defeated Dakota Tech, 60-53. Winner will play Sioux Falls Christian for fifth.

In the championship bracket, Dakota Valley defeated Flandreau, 59-47, and Sioux Valley defeated St. Thomas More, 54-46. The championship game will feature undefeated Dakota Valley against Sioux Valley with the third place match between Flandreau and St. Thomas More.



- Paul Kosel

Cole Simon made this three-point shot late in the third quarter as the Tigers cut their deficit to eight, 58-50. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Taylor Diegel

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Dillon Abeln

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Braxton Imrie

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Jacob Zak and Lane Tietz

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Cole Simon

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Coach Brian Dolan talks with Lane Tietz during a time-out. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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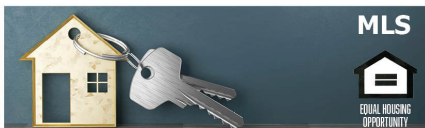
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Neon was the theme and you can certainly tell the Groton Area crowd at the Summit Arena.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney
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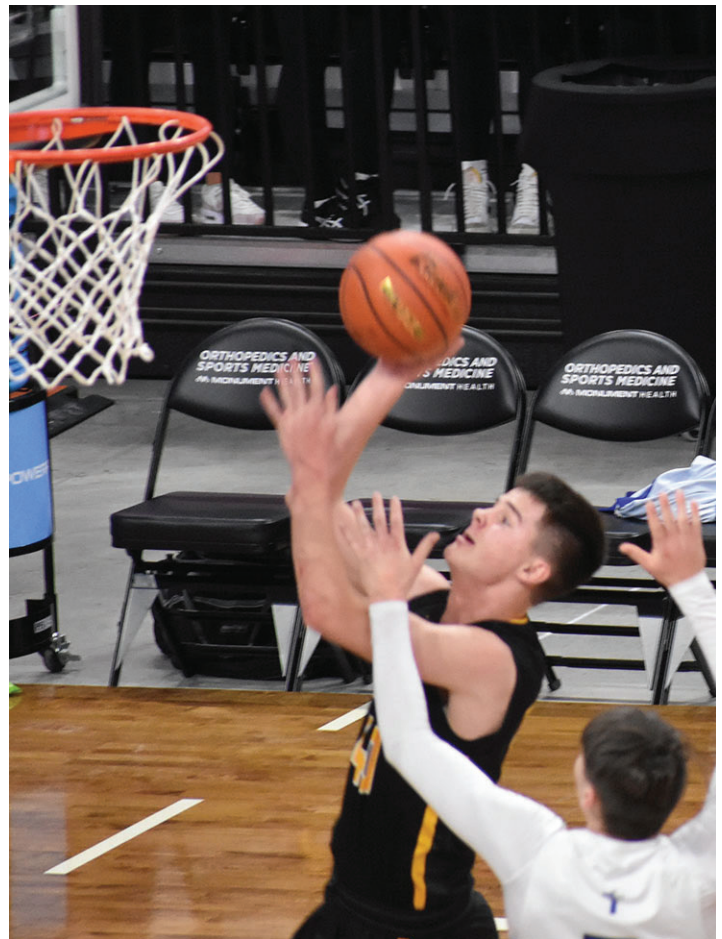
FOET | Come support our local Tigers in
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Cole Simon and Kaden Kurtz battle for the ball with Sioux Falls Christian's Tayton Snyder and Cole Snyder. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Tate Larson made this shot to bring the Tigers to within two, 15-13. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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The Groton huddle during a time-out. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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Wyatt Hearnen
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jayden Zak
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Sioux Falls Christian 86, Groton Area 56

Date: 3/18/2022
12:00 pm

Arena: Summit Arena
City, State: Rapid City, SD

VISITOR: Sioux Falls Christian (14-10)

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT		FTA		REBOUNDS							MIN	
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO	BK		S
2	Snyder, Tayton	*	6	8	2	3	2	4	0	4	4	1	16	4	1	0	2	24:54
5	Bruns, Ethan	*	4	9	0	0	6	8	3	6	9	3	14	2	1	0	1	23:44
10	Nelson, Brooks	*	8	11	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	4	18	3	3	0	1	23:31
34	Schipper, Logan	*	0	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	15:25
42	Koole, Nathan	*	6	7	0	0	0	0	2	8	10	2	12	2	1	3	1	26:35
3	Snyder, Cole		1	2	0	1	0	0	1	3	4	2	2	2	0	0	1	14:41
4	Engbers, Carson		1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1:54
22	vanDonkersgoed, Jude		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1:54
23	Mulder, Britton		3	3	0	0	3	3	1	0	1	0	9	2	0	0	1	7:30
24	Witte, Jaden		3	7	0	3	3	3	1	1	2	2	9	0	1	0	0	12:36
30	VanEgdom, Kade		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1:54
33	Anema, Elijah		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1:54
35	Mulder, Isaiah		2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	3:28
TEAM REBOUNDS										1	1	2						
Team Totals			34	57	4	13	14	18	9	27	36	17	86	16	8	4	8	160

Total FG% - 1st: 16/29 0.552 2nd: 18/28 0.643 Game: 0.596 Deadball
3-PT FG% - 1st: 0/4 0.000 2nd: 4/9 0.444 Game: 0.308 Rebounds
Total FT% - 1st: 5/6 0.833 2nd: 9/12 0.750 Game: 0.778 (3,0)

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT		FTA		REBOUNDS							MIN	
		P	FG	FGA	FG	FGA	FT	FTA	OFF	DEF	TOT	PF	TP	A	TO	BK		S
3	Zak, Jayden	*	3	7	2	5	1	1	0	2	2	2	9	2	1	0	2	27:49
10	Tietz, Lane	*	5	14	3	8	5	6	0	4	4	2	18	0	2	0	1	29:22
20	Kurtz, Kaden	*	4	9	1	4	1	6	0	2	2	1	10	1	0	0	0	30:06
22	Zak, Jacob	*	2	5	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	4	5	2	0	0	0	12:48
40	Larson, Tate	*	1	5	0	1	1	2	3	1	4	2	3	1	3	0	1	29:56
1	Imrie, Braxton		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1:46
4	Hearnen, Wyatt		3	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	6	2	1	0	1	11:52
11	Simon, Cole		2	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	5	1	0	0	0	7:21
14	Abeln, Dillon		0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:30
30	Larson, Cole		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:30
34	Dunker, Colby		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:37
42	Ringgenberg, Logan		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1:54
50	Sippel, Holden		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0:30
55	Diegel, Teylor		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	4:59
TEAM REBOUNDS										2	1	3						
Team Totals			20	50	7	21	9	17	6	15	21	17	56	9	10	0	6	160

Total FG% - 1st: 14/27 0.519 2nd: 6/23 0.261 Game: 0.400 Deadball
3-PT FG% - 1st: 4/12 0.333 2nd: 3/9 0.333 Game: 0.333 Rebounds
Total FT% - 1st: 3/7 0.429 2nd: 6/10 0.600 Game: 0.529 (3,0)

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Sioux Falls Christian	17	20	26	23	86
Groton	20	15	15	6	56

Last FG: Sioux Falls Christian 4th- 0:58, Groton 4th- 4:45

Largest lead: Sioux Falls Christian by 29 4th- 0:26, Groton by 6 2nd- 7:49

Score tied: 6 times, Lead changed: 4 times

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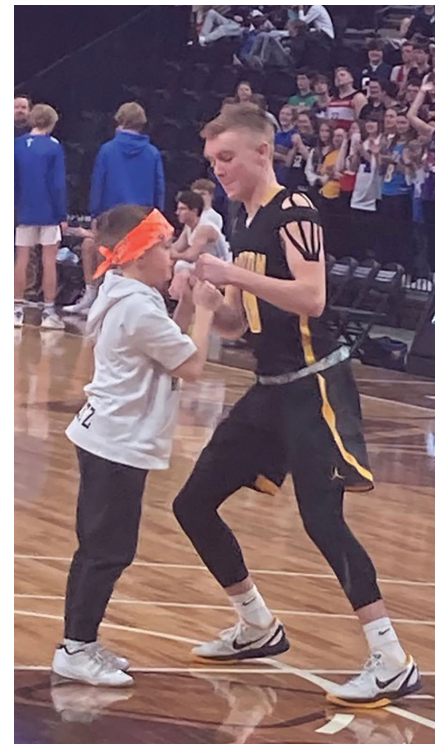
A large neon colored crowd on hand for the Tigers in Rapid City. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

The following wish the Tigers good luck at state and are sponsoring the coverage in the Groton Daily Independent and Groton Independent:

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Lane Tietz fist bumps his younger brother and ball boy, Trey Tietz, during the introductions. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Gov. Noem Signs Medical Cannabis and Hemp Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Governor Kristi Noem signed six medical cannabis and hemp bills into law. Implementing these bills will be part of Governor Noem’s focus on implementing a safe and responsible medical cannabis program that is the most patient-focused in the country.

SB 19 permits certain facilities to establish reasonable restrictions related to the medical use of cannabis.

SB 21 revises provisions related to the revocation of a medical cannabis registry identification card.

SB 24 establishes a maximum number of cannabis plants that may be cultivated by a medical cannabis cardholder.

SB 26 revises the definition of practitioner for purposes of the medical cannabis program.

SB 118 establishes provisions related to the testing of medical cannabis.

SB 201 revises provisions regarding industrial hemp.

Governor Noem had previously signed an additional 18 medical cannabis bills into law during the 2022 legislative session.

Governor Noem has signed 180 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Detected in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – The highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been detected in both domestic poultry flocks and wild birds in South Dakota.

Avian flu, commonly referred to as bird flu, occurs in all bird populations, especially waterfowl, shorebirds, and domestic fowl.

“The current strain appeared in both Canada geese and snow geese and other waterfowl in January in the eastern U.S and Canada,” said South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) senior waterfowl biologist, Rocco Murano. “Detections have now been found throughout the Atlantic, Central and Mississippi flyways.”

Avian flu is very similar to the seasonal flu that occurs within human populations Murano explained.

“This particular strain appears to be more severe in that it impacts wild birds, and more transmissible among these wild bird populations. With the spring migration, large numbers of birds are mixing together and moving across the landscape. The good news is that like the human flu, as the weather gets warmer, the virus is less present,” Murano said.

South Dakota has seen avian bird flu in 2008 and 2015, but wild bird mortality did not occur in those outbreaks. Although this strain seems to be more present in wild birds, mortality rates should be low and not have any population affects.

Avian flu is rarely transmitted from birds to humans, but precautions should be taken around dead or obviously sick birds.

“At this point, we are asking folks to report sick or dead birds, especially waterfowl,” Murano said.

GFP is asking citizens to report sick or unknown cause of death waterfowl, raptors, water birds or avian scavengers. Look for symptoms of unusual behavior, loss of coordination, or the inability to fly or walk properly. We recommend you avoid handling these sick or dead birds and report them to GFP at WildInfo@state.sd.us or your local conservation officer.

Murano went on to say that snow goose hunters should not worry about the outbreak. Cooking harvested birds to 165 degrees, and making sure to dry all their gear before their next hunting outing are two important takeaways for hunters. Harvested birds must be retrieved from the fields and carcasses properly disposed.

Visit <https://gfp.sd.gov/avian-flu/> to learn more about avian influenza.

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Gov. Noem Signs Bills to Take Care of People

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Governor Kristi Noem signed bills to take care of the South Dakota people, including SB 58, which funds both the construction of a new state public health lab and the renovation of the existing lab.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our State Health Lab helped us to take care of South Dakotans who needed it, and the new lab will bolster our capabilities to support our healthcare systems,” said Governor Noem. “Since I took office, we have placed a priority on taking care of people by cutting red tape and making it easier for South Dakotans to get the care they need in the way that they need it.”

The Governor also signed the following 12 bills to take care of people:

SB 86 revises certain definitions in laws regarding physical therapists.

SB 147 authorizes the construction and operation of a nursing facility in Lyman County.

SB 169 establishes a means for certain Department of Corrections inmates to earn credit against fines or costs ordered by the sentencing court.

HB 1038 establishes an opioid abatement and remediation fund.

HB 1129 prohibits forms of discrimination in access to organ transplantation.

HB 1133 provides that the cost of a home study required for adoption is the responsibility of the Department of Social Services.

HB 1229 authorizes the formation of corporations and limited liability companies by physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists.

HB 1272 revises provisions related to counseling for domestic abuse defendants.

HB 1278 revises the child support obligation schedule.

HB 1279 revises certain provisions relating to child support.

HB 1293 limits liability for certain child welfare agency licensees.

HB 1302 modifies tuition responsibilities for children in residential treatment centers.

Governor Noem has signed 174 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Jackelopes 19, Foxes 13, Coyotes 12 ½, Shih Tzus 10 1/2 , Chipmunks 9, Cheetahs 8

Men’s High Games: Lance Frohling 212, Mike Siegler 212, 203, TJ Sperry 199

Women’s High Games: Lori Wiley 179, Alexa Schuring 175, 171, Darci Spanier 167

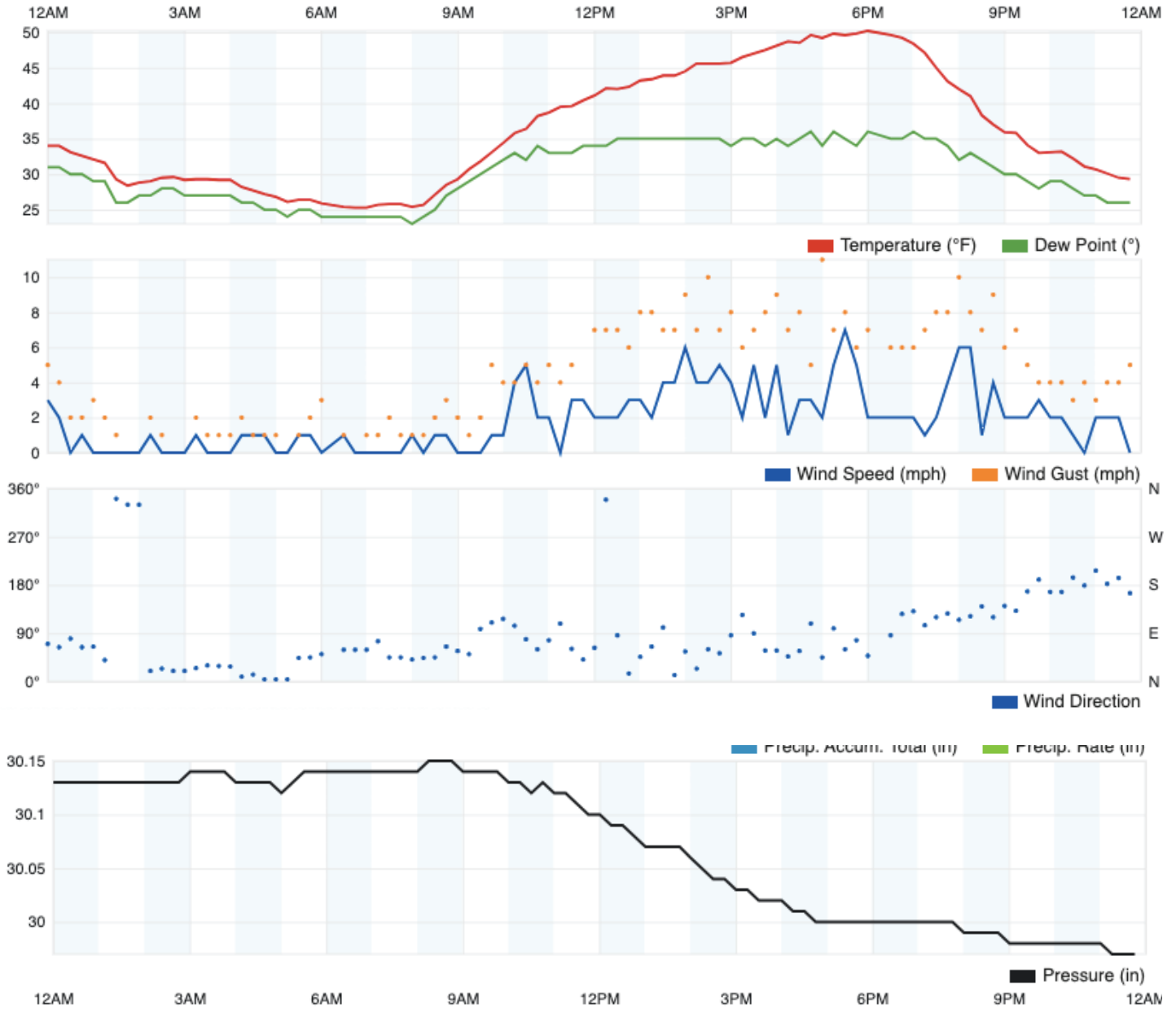
Men’s High Series: Mike Siegler 589, Lance Frohling 568, TJ Sperry 547

Women’s High Series: Alexa Schuring 493, Darci Spanier 462, Lori Wiley 455

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 60 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 32 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny
then Partly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 68 °F

Sunday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 37 °F

Monday



Slight Chance
Rain and
Breezy

High: 54 °F

Today:
Partly Cloudy & Mild
Highs 45-65°

Sunday:
Partly Sunny & Mild
Highs 50-75°

Monday through Wednesday

- Precipitation chances increasing
- Rain/snow expected
- Temperatures turning cooler

NOAA
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

Updated Saturday 2:45 AM CDT NWS Aberdeen SD

Mild and dry conditions are anticipated through Sunday. After that, precipitation chances will be on the increase for early next week. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

March 19, 1968: During a severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 2 miles south of Brookings. Also, hail 1.00 inch in diameter fell 3 miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

March 19, 2006: Heavy snow of 7 to as much as 20 inches fell on the afternoon of the 18th until around noon on the 20th. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety issued a travel advisory for any travel but especially for the State Basketball Tournament travelers. Interstate-90 was closed on Sunday into Monday morning, with many people stranded. Many cars and trucks were stuck on the roads. Many schools and meetings were postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 8 inches at Blunt, Onida, and Lake Sharpe, 9 inches at Mission Ridge, 10 inches at Pierre, 11 inches at Fort Pierre and near Stephan, 12 inches at Eagle Butte, 14 inches northwest of Presho, 16 inches at Murdo, and 20 inches near Iona.

1907: The highest March temperature in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was set when the temperature soared to 97 degrees. Dodge City, Kansas, also set a March record with 98 degrees. Denver, Colorado, set a daily record high of 81 degrees.

1948: An estimated F4 tornado moved through Fosterburg, Bunker Hill, and Gillespie, Illinois, killing 33 people and injuring 449 others. 2,000 buildings in Bunker Hill were damaged or destroyed. The total damage was \$3.6 million.

2003: One of the worst blizzards since records began in 1872, struck the Denver metro area and Colorado's Front Range started with a vengeance. Denver International Airport was closed, stranding about 4,000 travelers. The weight of the snow caused a 40-foot gash in a portion of the roof, forcing the evacuation of that section of the main terminal building. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced drifts six feet high in places around the city. Snowfall in foothills was even more impressive. The heavy wet snow caused numerous roofs of homes and businesses to collapse. The estimated cost of property damage alone, not including large commercial buildings, was \$93 million, making it the most costly snowstorm on record for the area. In Denver alone, at least 258 structures were damaged. Up to 135,000 people lost power during the storm, and it took several days for power to be restored. Mayor Wellington Webb of Denver said, "This is the storm of the century, a backbreaker, a record-breaker, a roof breaker." Avalanches in the mountains and foothills closed many roads, including Interstate 70, stranding hundreds of skiers and travelers. The Eldora Ski area 270 skiers were stranded when an avalanche closed the main access road. After the storm, a military helicopter had to deliver food to the resort until the road could be cleared. Two people died in Aurora from heart attacks after shoveling the heavy wet snow. The National Guard sent 40 soldiers and 20 heavy-duty vehicles to rescue stranded travelers along a section of I-70. The storm made March 2003 the snowiest March on record, the fourth snowiest month on record, and the fifth wettest March on record. The total of 22.9 inches is the most significant 24-hour total in March. The storm also broke 19 consecutive months of below-average precipitation for Denver. The 31.8 inches of snow was recorded at the former Stapleton Airport in Denver for its second-greatest snowstorm on record (the greatest was 37.5 inches on 12/4-12/5/1913) with up to three feet in other areas in and around the city and more than seven feet in the foothills. Higher amounts included: Fritz Peak: 87.5 inches, Rollinsville: 87.5 inches, Canin Creek: 83 inches, Near Bergen Park: 74 inches, Northwest of Evergreen: 73 inches, Cola Creek Canyon: 72 inches, Georgetown: 70 inches, Jamestown: 63 inches, Near Blackhawk: 60 inches, Eldora Ski Area: 55 inches, Ken Caryl Ranch: 46.6 inches, Aurora: 40 inches, Centennial: 38 inches, Buckley AFB: 37 inches, Southwest Denver: 35 inches, Louisville: 34 inches, Arvada: 32 inches, Broomfield: 31 inches, Westminster: 31 inches and Boulder: 22.5 inches. This storm was the result of a very moist intense slow-moving Pacific system that tracked across the four corners and into southeastern Colorado, which allowed a deep easterly upslope to form among the front-range.

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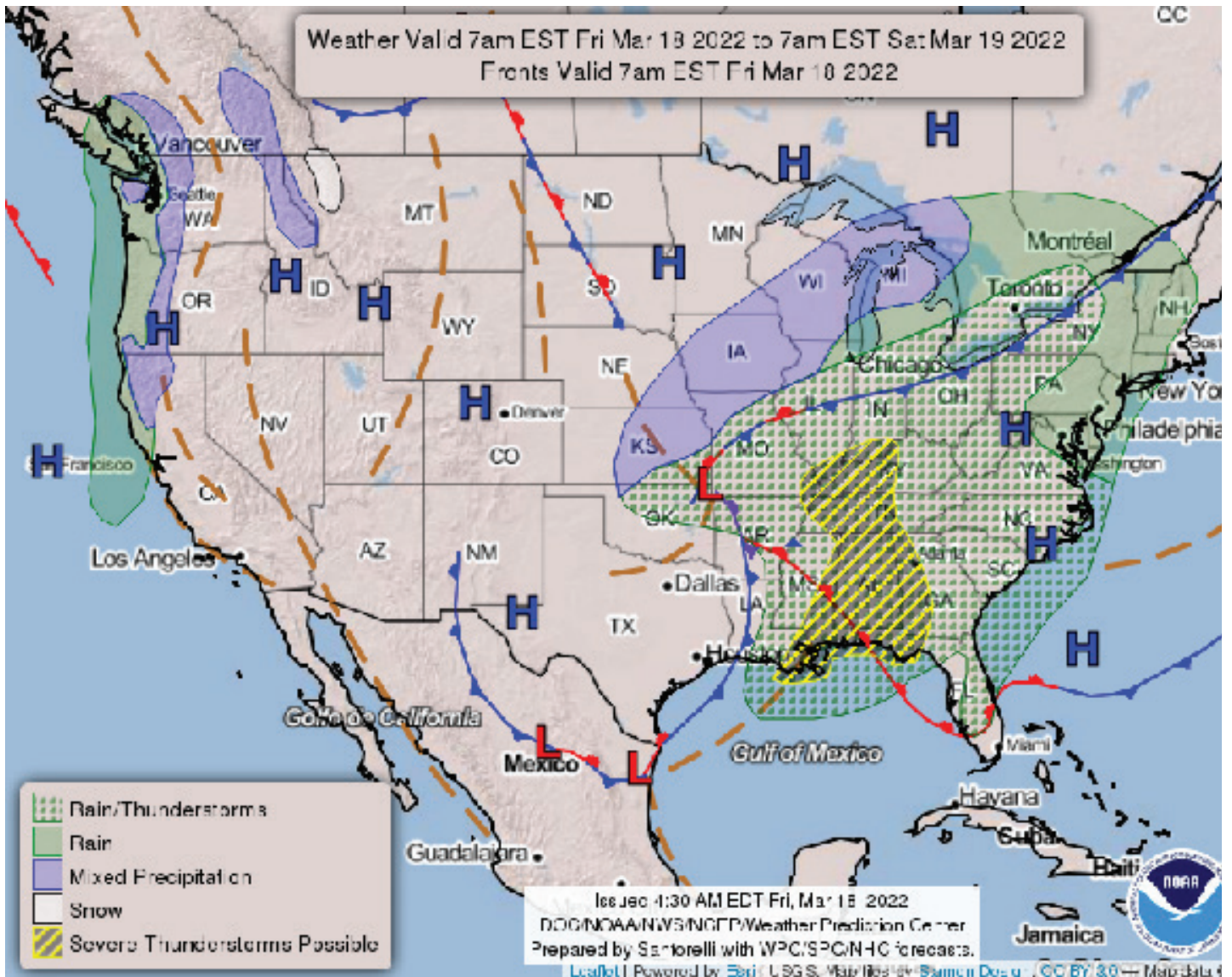
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 6:00
Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:54
Wind: 11 mph at 4:54 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 09 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 73 in 2012
Record Low: -11 in 1965
Average High: 43°F
Average Low: 21°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.49
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.66
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 7:44:58 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:17 AM



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Why God Hears Our Prayers

Our relationship with God began with His love for us. It is not about how much we love Him, or how long we have loved Him, or why we love Him, or what His love will do for us. It is God's love for us that makes our relationship with Him possible.

There is a beautiful story about God's love in John's Gospel. It is the story of Lazarus. His sisters, Mary and Martha, sent a message to Jesus saying that "the one You love is sick." Notice that they did not say, "Our brother, Lazarus, who loves You, is sick and needs Your help." While that was certainly true, the important fact here is that it was Jesus' love for Lazarus that mattered most.

Our love for God varies. There are days when we love Him dearly. Then, when we pray and don't get the results we want or expect, our love diminishes. But God's love for us is everlasting and does not vary. No one can end His love for us, nor can we ever do anything that will separate us from His love. He gives it freely and forever.

Our Psalmist knew this. He prayed, "Hear my voice in accordance with Your love." He did as the sisters of Lazarus did: he went to God for His help because he knew that God loved Him. He knew that God "would preserve his life in accordance with His laws."

What a comforting promise. God's love is as eternal as His laws. Unlike us, He and the universe He created, are and will be the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We do not need to fear anything or anyone at any time. We have Him.

Prayer: We are grateful, Father, to know that we have Your enduring love that will never end or change. Revive us in Your love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, Lord, according to your laws. Psalm 119:149

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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
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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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 Friday:

Mega Millions

02-06-25-40-45, Mega Ball: 5, Megaplier: 4

(two, six, twenty-five, forty, forty-five; Mega Ball: five; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$29 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$147 million

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA State Tournament=

Class AA=

Consolation Semifinal=

Mitchell 66, Yankton 56

Sioux Falls Lincoln 69, Sioux Falls Jefferson 68

Semifinal=

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 58, Sioux Falls Washington 57

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 61, Harrisburg 46

Class A=

Consolation Semifinal=

Sioux Falls Christian 86, Groton Area 56

Winner 60, Lakota Tech 53

Semifinal=

Dakota Valley 59, Flandreau 47

Sioux Valley 54, St. Thomas More 46

Class B=

Consolation Semifinal=

Castlewood 64, Freeman Academy/Marion 48

Waubay/Summit 56, Aberdeen Christian 42

Semifinal=

DeSmet 67, Potter County 45

Lower Brule 86, White River 83, 3OT

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

Noem signs medical pot bills, placing a limit on homegrown

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday signed five bills to make changes to the state's medical marijuana laws, including putting a cap on the number of cannabis plants that medical marijuana patients can grow in their homes.

The Republican governor cast the bills as part of her effort to implement a "safe and responsible" medical marijuana program that is focused on patients. South Dakota voters in 2020 enacted the law to legalize medical marijuana in the state, and Noem this year pushed for several changes to the program.

The voter-passed law placed no maximum cap on the number of plants that may be grown in patients' homes, but lawmakers moved this year to limit the number to four: two flowering and two non-flowering. The number was a compromise after the Republican-controlled House proposed banning homegrown cannabis entirely, and Republicans in the Senate pushed a six-plant cap.

Another bill Noem signed allows physician assistants and advanced nurse practitioners to recommend medical marijuana to patients. She also signed a bill regulating industrial hemp.

Lawmakers this year also debated legalizing recreational pot for adults. The proposal narrowly passed the Senate, but failed in the House. Noem had also weighed in to say she was opposed to full legalization.

South Dakota women beat Ole Miss 75-61 for 1st NCAA victory

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Sports Writer

WACO, Texas (AP) — Hannah Sjerven looked around as the final seconds wound down and the vocal batch of South Dakota fans chanted "U-S-D" in anticipation of the school's first NCAA Tournament victory.

The senior center tried to relate it to another feeling she's had, but had to catch herself.

"Just looking around in that last 15 seconds when we knew that we had done it," Sjerven said after a 75-61 first-round victory over Mississippi on Friday. "It was a really good feeling, similar to ... actually it's not similar to anything we've experienced before. It was a great feeling, though."

Sjerven had 20 points and seven rebounds and fellow senior Chloe Lamb also scored 20 as the 10th-seeded Coyotes (28-5) broke through in their fourth consecutive tournament appearance and fifth in 10 eligible seasons.

The difference in experience showed with the Rebels (23-9) making their first NCAA appearance in 15 years as seventh-seeded Ole Miss never led while shooting 27% in the first quarter and 39% for the game.

Shakira Austin, the leading scorer for the Rebels, was 3 of 16 from the field and finished with nine points and 11 rebounds. Angel Baker was the only Ole Miss player in double figures with 23.

"I wasn't able to make shots," Austin said. "They were calling some flops and that definitely allowed it to get into my head for a few moments. It was frustrating. It was tough. It was definitely tough."

Sjerven and Lamb were steady from the start, with Sjerven opening the game by swishing a 3-pointer and screaming toward the rafters at the home of Baylor, the No. 2 seed in the Wichita Regional. The Coyotes play the Baylor on Sunday.

Lamb and Korngable, who had 10 points and seven assists, embraced as the final buzzer sounded and their teammates converged for a group hug on one of the Bear logos.

Coach Dawn Plitzuweit smiled widely as the band played the school and she and her players sang while facing the fans across from the team bench.

"We don't even know what this looks like because we haven't done this before," Plitzuweit said. "Are we supposed to stay and watch the next team, the game? Are we supposed to recover? How much time do you get with your family? Those are all things we told them, 'We're going to figure this out.' But our kids are pretty good I think in that moment."

The Rebels were down six and had the ball early in the third quarter when Liv Korngable knocked the ball out of Snudda Collins' hands and took off the other way. Kyah Watson hit a shot, Lamb connected on a 3 and Watson scored again after another Ole Miss turnover for a 46-33 lead.

The Coyotes took control with a 13-0 run in the second quarter for a 32-16 lead. Lamb had a pair of buckets, and Korngable scored the last five points.

For Ole Miss coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin, Sjerven's opening 3 started it all.

"We had said we didn't want her to hit that 3, because it would give everybody on their team confidence," McPhee-McCuin said. "Once she hit that, it gave them that momentum, and it kind of felt like it did in the past, maybe when we didn't win a game. That's just the sign of a young team. I think experienced teams know who they are."

BIG PICTURE

South Dakota: Freshman Maddie Krull showed no nerves in her NCAA debut, running the offense at

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times, while finishing with 13 points, four assists and no turnovers. The Coyotes had 19 assists on 29 buckets with nine turnovers and outscored Ole Miss 13-9 in points off turnovers.

Mississippi: Austin's struggles epitomized the game for the Rebels. The 6-foot-5 senior was 1 of 7 from the field at the half, then missed three easy shots in the first minute of the third quarter. McPhee-McCuin took her out and the pair had an extended chat on the sideline before Austin went to the bench. She soon returned.

Supreme Court: Board had authority to reject large hog farm

REDFIELD, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court agrees that a Spink County board had the authority to reject an application for a large-scale hog operation in 2018.

The high court's decision upholds a lower court ruling which rejected calls for additional testimony in the case.

Arrow Farms, in 2017, applied for a conditional use permit to operate a concentrated animal feeding operation, also called a CAFO, which would include more than 7,500 hogs. Arrow Farms said it met setbacks required by the county, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

The Spink County Board of Adjustment rejected the permit which led to a lawsuit by Preston Miles. He alleged the board's denial was arbitrary and that its members were biased against him and his project.

Some of the board members say they rejected the permit over concerns about foul odors emanating from the operation.

The Supreme Court said the board members did not have a disqualifying interest in the permit hearing.

Highway superintendent sentenced for embezzlement

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former Minnehaha County highway superintendent has been sentenced to 180 days in jail for embezzlement, with 80 days of that sentence suspended.

Duane Buthe, 41, earlier pleaded guilty to embezzling about \$127,000 from the county and the South Dakota Association of County Highway Superintendents.

A judge Thursday suspended a 10-year prison sentence, noting Buthe had already made restitution.

Buthe expressed remorse for his actions, the Argus Leader reported.

"I'm embarrassed and ashamed to the core of my being," he said. "I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make amends and showing that I'm a better person than what my actions have shown throughout this."

The South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation began looking into some funds missing from the state association of superintendents last year. Buthe had served as the associations secretary since 2013.

According to the charges, Buthe made retail transactions, cash withdrawals and other misappropriations from the association's account. He admitted to the misappropriations as well as using county funds for his personal benefit.

The judge asked why he had committed the actions and Buthe explained because he got away with it once, "I let myself do it a few more times and that went on for quite some time."

Buthe served as the Minnehaha County highway superintendent for seven years before leaving the job in 2020 to become the public works director in Brookings.

Ukraine's leader warns war will cost Russia for generations

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

Ukraine's president said Russia is trying to starve his country's cities into submission but warned Saturday that continuing the invasion would exact a toll on Russia for "generations." The remarks came after Moscow held a mass rally in support of its bogged-down forces.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the Kremlin in an overnight video address of deliberately creating "a humanitarian catastrophe" and appealed again for Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet with him to prevent more bloodshed.

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Noting that the 200,000 people reported to have attended the rally was similar to the number of Russian forces deployed to Ukraine, Zelenskyy said Friday's event in Moscow illustrated the stakes of the largest ground conflict in Europe since World War II.

"Picture for yourself that in that stadium in Moscow there are 14,000 dead bodies and tens of thousands more injured and maimed," the Ukrainian leader said, standing outside the presidential office in the capital, Kyiv. "Those are the Russian costs throughout the invasion."

Putin lavished praise on his country's military forces during Friday's flag-waving rally, which took place on the anniversary of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. The event included patriotic songs such as "Made in the U.S.S.R.," with the opening lines "Ukraine and Crimea, Belarus and Moldova, it's all my country."

"We have not had unity like this for a long time," Putin told the cheering crowd.

Taking to the stage where a sign read "For a world without Nazism," he railed against his foes in Ukraine with a baseless claim that they are "neo-Nazis" and insisted his actions were necessary to prevent "genocide" — an idea flatly rejected by leaders around the globe.

The rally took place as Russia has faced heavier-than-expected losses on the battlefield and increasingly authoritarian rule at home. There were suspicions the event was a Kremlin-manufactured display of national pride. Russian police have detained thousands of antiwar protesters.

Fighting continued on multiple fronts in Ukraine. In the besieged port city of Mariupol, the site of some of the war's greatest suffering, Ukrainian and Russian forces battled over the Azovstal steel plant, one of the biggest in Europe, Vadym Denysenko, adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, said Saturday.

"I can say that we have lost this economic giant," Denysenko said in televised remarks. "In fact, one of the largest metallurgical plants in Europe is actually being destroyed."

The Russian military reported Saturday that it has used its latest hypersonic missile for the first time in combat. A spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Kinzhal missiles destroyed an underground warehouse storing Ukrainian missiles and aviation ammunition in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region of Ukraine.

Russia says the Kinzhal, carried by MiG-31 fighter jets, has a range of up to 2,000 kilometers (about 1,250 miles) and flies at 10 times the speed of sound.

Konashenkov said Russian forces also used the anti-ship Bastion missile system to strike Ukrainian military facilities near the Black Sea port of Odesa. Russia first used the weapon during its military campaign in Syria in 2016.

Ukrainian and Russian officials agreed to establish 10 humanitarian corridors for bringing aid in and residents out — one from Mariupol and several around Kyiv and in the eastern Luhansk region, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Saturday.

She also announced plans to deliver humanitarian aid to the southern city of Kherson, which was seized by Russian forces.

In a separate development, Norway said four U.S. service members died in a plane crash during NATO drills in that country's north. The annual exercise, "Cold Response," is unrelated to the war in Ukraine.

In his nightly video address, Zelenskyy said Russian forces were blockading the largest cities with the goal of creating such miserable conditions that Ukrainians will surrender. But he warned that Russia would pay the ultimate price.

"The time has come to restore territorial integrity and justice for Ukraine. Otherwise, Russia's costs will be so high that you will not be able to rise again for several generations," he said.

In the wake of the invasion, the Kremlin has clamped down harder on dissent and the flow of information, banning sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and instituting tough prison sentences for what is deemed to be false reporting on the war, which Moscow refers to as a "special military operation."

High above the conflict, three Russian cosmonauts arrived Friday at the International Space Station wearing bright yellow flight suits with blue accents matching the colors of the Ukrainian flag. But cosmonaut Oleg Artemyev said every crew chooses its own suits, and they had a lot of yellow material they needed

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to use, "so that's why we had to wear yellow."

Vladimir Medinsky, who has led Russian negotiators in several rounds of talks with Ukraine, said the two sides have moved closer to agreement on the issue of Ukraine dropping its bid to join NATO and adopting a neutral status. In remarks carried by Russian media, he said the sides are now "halfway" on issues regarding the demilitarization of Ukraine.

However, Mikhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, said that assessment was intended "to provoke tension in the media." He tweeted: "Our positions are unchanged. Ceasefire, withdrawal of troops & strong security guarantees with concrete formulas."

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, during a Saturday visit to NATO ally Bulgaria, condemned Russia's invasion as "reckless and ruthless." He said the U.S. has not yet seen Russia mobilize additional forces to compensate for its significant battlefield losses.

"Because of the fact that they've stalled on a number of fronts there, it makes sense that (Putin) would want to increase his capabilities going forward," Austin said. "We've just not seen that yet."

Around Ukraine, hospitals, schools and buildings where people sought safety have been attacked. Ludmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Parliament's human rights commissioner, said at least 130 people had survived Wednesday's bombing of a Mariupol theater that was being used as a shelter but that another 1,300 are still inside.

"We pray that they will all be alive, but so far there is no information about them," Denisova told Ukrainian television.

Satellite images on Friday from Maxar Technologies showed a long line of cars leaving Mariupol as people tried to evacuate. Zelenskyy said more than 9,000 people were able to leave the city in the past day along a route that leads 227 kilometers (141 miles) northwest to the city of Zaporizhzhia.

The governor of the Zaporizhzhia region, Oleksandr Starukh, announced a 38-hour curfew in the southeastern city of the same name after two missile strikes on its suburbs killed nine people Friday.

Early morning barrages that hit a residential building in the Podil neighborhood of Kyiv killed at least one person. Emergency services said 98 people were evacuated from the building and Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said 19 were wounded.

Maj. Gen. Oleksandr Pavlyuk, who is leading the defense of the region around Ukraine's capital, said his forces are well-positioned to defend the city and vowed: "We will never give up. We will fight until the end. To the last breath and to the last bullet."

The British Department of Defense said in its latest intelligence assessment that the Kremlin "has been surprised by the scale and ferocity of Ukrainian resistance" and "is now pursuing a strategy of attrition" after being forced to switch gears.

"This is likely to involve the indiscriminate use of firepower resulting in increased civilian casualties, destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure, and intensify the humanitarian crisis," the U.K. ministry said.

Live updates: UK: Putin uses Ukraine talks to up violence

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — Britain's foreign secretary has accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of using talks with Ukraine as a "smokescreen" while he ramps up violence against the country.

Liz Truss told the Times of London newspaper that she was "very skeptical" about Russia's seriousness in the talks, accusing Russian forces of trying to create space to regroup and unblock their stalled campaign.

She said that "we don't see any serious withdrawal of Russian troops or any serious proposals on the table" and said Russia would resort to "worse and worse" violence as its military campaign falters.

The head of Britain's defense intelligence agency, Lt. Gen. Jim Hockenhull, says Russian forces have shifted to a "strategy of attrition" after failing to take major Ukrainian cities during the three-week invasion.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

— Putin rallies behind troops while lethal fire rains down

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- President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping spoke as the White House looks to deter Beijing from providing assistance to Russia.
- Ukraine's cultural capital no longer distant from the war
- Minister: Clearing live ordnance in Ukraine will take years
- An estimated 6.5 million people have been displaced inside Ukraine, on top of the 3.2 million who have already fled the country
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS TODAY:

BERLIN — Germany's federal police has registered more than 200,000 Ukrainian refugees in the country since the outbreak of the war more than three weeks ago.

The country's interior ministry said 207,747 Ukrainian refugees had arrived as of Saturday. However, the real number of Ukrainian refugees in Germany is expected to be much higher.

Ukrainians don't need a visa to come to Germany, and federal police only register refugees entering Germany by train or bus. There are not thorough border controls inside the European Union's internal borders, so Ukrainians coming to Germany from Poland by car are normally not registered. Those who stay with family and friends in Germany are also not counted unless they apply for financial aid from German authorities.

SOFIA, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov has ruled out providing military aid to Ukraine but says his country, a NATO ally, will continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

"Being so close to the conflict, right now I have to say that currently we will not be able to send military assistance to Ukraine. This will not be possible," Petkov said Saturday at a news conference in the Bulgarian capital with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Bulgaria, which does not border Ukraine but has received thousands of refugees, has agreed to host a new contingent of NATO troops as part of the alliance's push to reinforce its eastern flank. That contingent includes about 150 U.S. Army infantry soldiers.

LVIV, Ukraine — Zaporizhzhia regional governor Oleksandr Starukh has announced a 38-hour curfew in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, to last from 4 p.m. local time on Saturday until 6 a.m. on Monday.

Starukh said on Telegram on Saturday: "For your safety, do not go out into the streets and other public places during this time."

Two missile strikes on the suburbs of Zaporizhzhia killed nine people on Friday, wounded 17 more and left five others with injuries, a spokesman of the Zaporizhzhia regional administration Ivan Arefiev reported Saturday.

Local authorities continue to evacuate people from settlements taken over by the Russians and deliver humanitarian aid to them, he said.

LVIV, Ukraine - Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk announced Saturday that 10 humanitarian corridors have been agreed on with the Russians.

They include a corridor from the besieged port city of Mariupol, several in the Kyiv region and several in the Luhansk region.

She also announced plans to deliver humanitarian aid to the city of Kherson, which is currently under control of the Russian forces.

In his nightly video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian forces are blockading the largest cities with the goal of creating such miserable conditions that Ukrainians will cooperate. He said the Russians are preventing supplies from reaching surrounded cities in central and southeastern Ukraine.

Satellite images on Friday from Maxar Technologies showed a long line of cars leaving Mariupol as people tried to evacuate. Zelenskyy said more than 9,000 people were able to leave the city in the past day.

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The Russian military says it used its latest hypersonic missile, Kinzhal, for the first time in combat during its offensive in Ukraine.

Spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the hypersonic missiles destroyed an underground warehouse storing missiles and aviation ammunition of Ukrainian troops in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region.

Konashenkov also said that the Russian forces used the anti-ship missile system Bastion to strike Ukrainian military facilities near the Black Sea port of Odesa. Russia first used the weapon during its military campaign in Syria in 2016.

OSLO, Norway — The prime minister of Norway says four U.S. service members have died in a plane crash during NATO drills.

Jonas Gahr Støre tweeted that the service members were participating in the NATO exercise "Cold Response," which is taking place in northern Norway.

He wrote: "Our deepest sympathies go to the soldiers' families, relatives and fellow soldiers in their unit."

The annual drills in Norway are unrelated to the war in Ukraine. This year they included around 30,000 troops, 220 aircraft and 50 vessels from 27 countries. Non-NATO members Finland and Sweden are also participating.

The exercises began on March 14 and end on April 1.

According to the Norwegian police, the American V-22B Osprey aircraft that crashed belonged to the U.S. Marine Corps.

The aircraft had a crew of four and was out on a training mission in Nordland County on Friday. It was on its way north to Bodø, where it was scheduled to land just before 6 p.m. Friday.

The plane crashed in Gråtådalen in Beiarn, south of Bodø. Police said a search and rescue mission was launched immediately. At 1:30 a.m. Saturday, the police arrived at the scene and confirmed that the crew of four had died.

LVIV, Ukraine — The Prosecutor General's office in Ukraine says a total of 112 children have died in the country since the start of the Russian invasion.

The office says more than 140 children have been wounded since Feb. 24.

According to the U.N. children's agency, more than 1.5 million children had fled Ukraine.

Most families have fled to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Moldova and Romania.

UNCIEF says women and girls travelling on their own are especially at risk of gender-based violence.

LVIV, Ukraine — In the besieged port city of Mariupol, Ukrainian and Russian forces are fighting for the Azovstal steel plant, one of the biggest in Europe, said Vadym Denysenko, an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, in televised remarks on Saturday.

"Now there is a fight for Azovstal. ... I can say that we have lost this economic giant. In fact, one of the largest metallurgical plants in Europe is actually being destroyed," Denysenko said.

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Russian forces are blockading Ukraine's largest cities to create a "humanitarian catastrophe" with the aim of persuading Ukrainians to cooperate with them.

He says Russians are preventing supplies from reaching surrounded cities in the center and southeast of the country.

"This is a totally deliberate tactic," Zelenskyy said in his nighttime video address to the nation, filmed outside in Kyiv, with the presidential office in the lamplight behind him.

He said more than 9,000 people were able to leave besieged Mariupol in the past day, and in all more than 180,000 people have been able to flee to safety through humanitarian corridors.

He again appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold talks with him directly. "It's time to meet,

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time to speak," he said. "I want to be heard by everyone, especially in Moscow."

He noted that the 200,000 people Putin gathered in and around a Moscow stadium on Friday for a flag-waving rally was about the same number of Russian troops sent into Ukraine three weeks ago.

Zelenskyy then asked his audience to picture the stadium filled with the thousands of Russians who have been killed, wounded or maimed in the fighting.

NEW YORK — Three Russian cosmonauts have arrived at the International Space Station wearing flight suits in yellow and blue colors that match the Ukrainian flag.

The men were the first new arrivals on the space station since the start of the Russian war in Ukraine last month.

Video of one of the cosmonauts taken as the capsule prepared to dock with the space station showed him wearing a blue flight suit. It was unclear what, if any, message the yellow uniforms they changed into were intended to send.

Oleg Artemyev was asked about the yellow flight suits when the newly arrived cosmonauts were able to talk to family back on Earth.

He said every crew chooses its own flight suits, so that they are not all the same.

"It became our turn to pick a color. But in fact, we had accumulated a lot of yellow material so we needed to use it. So that's why we had to wear yellow," he said.

Artemyev, Denis Matveyev and Sergey Korsakov blasted off successfully from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan in their Soyuz MS-21 spacecraft at 8:55 p.m. Friday (11:55 a.m. EDT). They smoothly docked at the station just over three hours later, joining two Russians, four Americans and a German on the orbiting outpost.

LVIV, Ukraine -- Ukraine lost access to the Azov Sea during Russia's siege of the southern port city of Mariupol, the Ukrainian General Staff said late Friday.

Mariupol is the key commercial port on the Azov Sea, which is connected to the much larger Black Sea by a narrow strait.

The General Staff said the Russian forces were still trying to storm Mariupol and the fighting was ongoing. It was unclear from its statement whether the Russians have seized the city.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's interior minister said Friday that it will take years to defuse unexploded ordnances after the Russian invasion.

Speaking to The Associated Press in the besieged Ukrainian capital, Denys Monastyrsky said that the country will need Western assistance to cope with the massive task once the war is over.

"A huge number of shells and mines have been fired at Ukraine and a large part haven't exploded, they remain under the rubble and pose a real threat," Monastyrsky said. "It will take years, not months, to defuse them."

In addition to the unexploded Russian ordnances, the Ukrainian troops also have planted land mines at bridges, airports and other key infrastructure to prevent Russians from using them.

"We won't be able to remove the mines from all that territory, so I asked our international partners and colleagues from the European Union and the United States to prepare groups of experts to demine the areas of combat and facilities that came under shelling," Monastyrsky told the AP.

He noted that another top challenge is dealing with fires caused by the relentless Russian barrages. He said there's a desperate shortage of personnel and equipment to deal with the fires amid the constant shelling.

UNITED NATIONS — Russia's first deputy U.N. ambassador says Twitter has blocked his account, accusing him of "abuse and harassment," due to a tweet about the maternity hospital in the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol.

"This is very deplorable," Dmitry Polyansky told reporters after a U.N. Security Council meeting Friday,

"and this clearly illustrates how much alternative view and free press, and free information is valued by Twitter and in this country."

Polyansky, who had more than 22,000 followers and was a prolific Twitter user, said he received a message earlier Friday from Twitter's cloud service saying he was violating Twitter's rules and was "engaged in abuse and harassment."

He said Twitter referred to his warning in a tweet on March 7 "that the hospital in Mariupol had been turned into a military object by radicals. Very disturbing that UN spreads disinformation without verification."

Associated Press journalists, who have been reporting from inside blockaded Mariupol since early in the war, documented the March 10 attack on the maternity hospital and saw the victims and damage firsthand. They shot video and photos of several bloodstained, pregnant mothers fleeing the blown-out maternity ward as medical workers shouted and children cried.

China reports first COVID-19 deaths in more than a year

BEIJING (AP) — China's health authorities reported two COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, the first since January 2021, as the country battles its worst outbreak in two years driven by a surge in the highly transmissible omicron variant.

The deaths, both in northeastern Jilin province, bring the country's coronavirus death toll to 4,638.

Both fatalities occurred in elderly patients and were the result of their underlying conditions, Jiao Yahui, an official with the National Health Commission, told a news briefing on Saturday. One of them had not been vaccinated for COVID-19, she said.

The majority of new 2,157 community transmissions reported Saturday came from Jilin. The province has imposed a travel ban, with people needing permission from police to travel across borders.

Nationwide, China has reported more than 29,000 confirmed cases since the beginning of March.

It has pressed on with its tried-and-true policy of lockdowns and mass testing of millions of people as part of a successful, if burdensome, "zero-COVID" strategy since the initial outbreak in Wuhan in 2019.

The country has seen relatively few infections from the virus so far because clusters are tamped down as quickly as they're discovered. The strategy has received popular support and prevented the large numbers of deaths seen in other countries, many of which have started to forgo any kind of social distancing measures.

Faced with the worst surge since late 2019, officials have vowed to double down on the zero-tolerance strategy to contain multiple outbreaks across China. However, leader Xi Jinping acknowledged for the first time the burden of the measures on Thursday, saying that China should seek "maximum effect" with "minimum cost" in controlling the virus.

Hong Kong, which is facing its worst surge of the pandemic, recorded 16,583 new cases Saturday. The city's total coronavirus infections exceeded 1 million on Friday, and its number of deaths has already surpassed mainland China's.

Mainland China's COVID-19 data is counted separately from Hong Kong, a special administrative region.

4 US troops die in Norway plane crash; unrelated to Ukraine

HELSINKI (AP) — Four U.S. soldiers were killed in a plane crash in a Norwegian town in the Arctic Circle during a NATO exercise unrelated to the Ukraine war, Norway's prime minister said Saturday.

Jonas Gahr Støre tweeted that they were killed in the crash on Friday night. The cause was under investigation, but Norwegian police reported bad weather in the area.

"The soldiers participated in the NATO exercise Cold Response," Gahr Støre said. "Our deepest sympathies go to the soldiers' families, relatives and fellow soldiers in their unit."

The plane was a V-22B Osprey that belongs to the U.S. Marine Corps, Norway's armed forces said.

"The aircraft had a crew of four and was out on a training mission in Nordland County" in northern Norway, according to a statement.

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It was on its way north to Bodoe, where it was scheduled to land just before 6 p.m. Friday. The plane crashed in Graetaedalen in Beiarn, south of Bodoe. Police said a search and rescue mission was launched immediately. At 1:30 a.m. Saturday, the police arrived at the scene and confirmed that the crew of four had died.

"We can confirm an incident has occurred involving a Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey aircraft," the U.S. Marines said in a tweet. "The cause of the incident is under investigation, and additional details will be provided as available."

The annual NATO drills in Norway are unrelated to the war in Ukraine. This year they include around 30,000 troops, 220 aircraft and 50 vessels from 27 countries. Non-NATO members Finland and Sweden are also participating.

The exercises began on March 14 and end on April 1.

No cause was given for the crash, but the Norwegian armed forces said that Cold Response "will carry on as planned, with the measures we have to take due to the weather."

Police launched an investigation into the crash and accident commission members and police representatives were due to arrive at the crash site on Saturday.

"The weather is very bad in the area to complete work at the scene, but police will take it up again as soon as the weather conditions allow it," operations manager Ivar Bo Nilsson from the Norland police district told reporters.

Lt. Gen. Yngve Odlo, head of the Norwegian Armed Forces' operational headquarters, said that Cold Response would continue despite the crash.

"Right now there is full focus on ending the rescue operation, taking care of the people and then there will be a normal procedure with causation," Odlo was quoted as saying by Norwegian public broadcaster NRK.

The first Cold Response exercise was held in 2006, and the drills have been conducted a total of eight times over the years. They take place in southeastern, central and northern Norway.

Ukraine's cultural capital no longer distant from the war

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Until the missiles struck within walking distance of the cathedrals and cafes downtown, Ukraine's cultural capital was a city that could feel distant from the war. The early panic had eased, and the growing response to morning air raid sirens was not to head downstairs but roll over in bed.

But Friday's Russian airstrikes at dawn in Lviv, just outside the international airport, made nearby buildings vibrate and shook any sense of comfort as thick black smoke billowed.

Still, the hours after the airstrikes were absent of the scenes in other Ukrainian cities that have horrified the world: shattered buildings and people fleeing under fire. Lviv was already returning to its centuries-old role as an ever-adapting crossroads.

"In the morning it was scary, but we have to go on," said Maria Parkhuts, a local restaurant worker. "People are arriving with almost nothing, and from where it's worse."

The city has been a refuge since the war began nearly a month ago, the last outpost before Poland and host to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians streaming through or staying on. From the other direction come aid and foreign fighters.

Midstream is a city that, on the surface, carries on amid world heritage churches and coffee kiosks. Food delivery cyclists with backpacks of global brands wobble down the cobblestones. Yellow trams ding through narrow streets lined with the history of one occupation after another, from the Cossacks to the Swedes to the Germans and the Soviet Union.

The threat of another occupation by Russia, after so long a fight to break from its influence, and so close to the rest of Europe, is where the new Lviv emerges now.

"It's war," said Maxim Tristan, a 28-year-old soldier, of Friday's attack. "It only makes us more motivated to fight."

On a street corner, young men line up outside a weapons shop, passing around a gun sight. Anything's

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available if you have cash, one man said, prompting grins from the others. On the same block is a range for target practice, with the face of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the bull's-eye. Elsewhere in the city, military veterans train civilians how to shoot.

In a popular city park, a bunker from World War II has been reopened just steps from the playground. Outside an academy for architecture, men are filling sandbags. Some of the city's churches have wrapped up their statues and covered their stained-glass windows. Others leave their fate to God.

In the military section of the main cemetery are more than a dozen graves too new for marble crosses. The earth is piled with frosted flowers. The ground is marked with boot tracks. Behind the graves is open ground ready for several rows more.

Tattoo artists prick clients with patriotic symbols. A brewery turns to making "Molotov cocktails." A street poster shows a woman in Ukraine's yellow and blue colors, jabbing a pistol into the mouth of a kneeling Putin. In the front room of a local business, a young woman sketches a drawing of a dove.

Volunteerism has seized the city. People are opening their homes, and local news outlets report on residents cutting up old clothing to make camouflage netting for checkpoints.

"War is not just people who fight," said Volodymyr Pekar.

The 40-year-old local businessman is behind a drive to dot the countryside around the city with yellow-and-blue billboards with slogans including "God save Ukraine" and "Do not run, defend." He was uncomfortable with the profane language that emerged early on in war messaging, and he said the more religious villagers were too.

At the same time, Pekar has used crowdfunding to raise money for what he called two of Ukrainian soldiers' biggest needs: flak jackets and cigarettes.

"After you fight, you need to smoke," he said.

In the shadow of slogans and bravado are the estimated 200,000 people who have fled to Lviv from harder-hit parts of Ukraine. Embraced by the city's residents and absorbed into homes and shelters, they look the most nervous of all.

The displaced pick through boxes at aid collection points, scan notices, check their phones. Their presence has led Lviv to pivot from getaway to refuge: Instead of promoting local confectionaries and romantic places, the city's official tourism website now shares information on bomb shelter locations and radiation alerts.

Promising "warmth for the soul," locals on Friday launched a distinctly Lviv series of free cultural walks for internally displaced people, with the aim of visiting galleries, the medieval quarter and more.

Just days ago, thousands of newcomers crammed the central train station at the height of the flood of refugees heading west. Now the station's platforms at times are almost bare, awaiting the millions who continue to roam Ukraine looking for a place of rest or a new purpose.

There was the furniture maker from the bombarded capital, Kyiv, who trained in air defense years ago and was on his way to an army post. Standing alone on the platform with a backpack and sleeping mat, he planned to visit his family in the western Transcarpathia region before heading east again.

Farther down the platform was a young couple, restlessly remaining in Ukraine because the man, 20, is of fighting age and is prohibited from leaving.

"I didn't travel my country this much. Now I have to," said the woman, Diana Tkachenko, 21. Their journey began last month in Kyiv on a crowded train and with no idea where they were going.

Their arrival in Lviv was terrible. Fellow travelers pushed and screamed, Tkachenko said. Some were coming from so far east, from Russian-speaking areas, that they didn't speak Ukrainian.

Their train had pulled into the most Ukrainian of cities. For Tkachenko, it was her first visit to Lviv.

"I walked a lot," she said. "I tried to enjoy the place. It's really beautiful. It feels a lot more safe."

But there were too many people and no place to live, she said. She and her boyfriend decided to head back east, toward Kyiv.

As their train prepared for departure, yet another was arriving.

Minister: Clearing live ordnance in Ukraine will take years

By NEBI QENA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky says it will take years to defuse the unexploded ordnance once the Russian invasion is over.

Monastyrsky told The Associated Press in an interview on Friday that the country will need Western assistance to carry out the massive undertaking after the war.

"A huge number of shells and mines have been fired at Ukraine, and a large part haven't exploded. They remain under the rubble and pose a real threat," Monastyrsky said in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. "It will take years, not months, to defuse them."

In addition to the unexploded Russian ordnance, Ukrainian troops have planted land mines at bridges, airports and other key locations to prevent the Russians from using them.

"We won't be able to remove the mines from all that territory, so I asked our international partners and colleagues from the European Union and the United States to prepare groups of experts to demine the areas of combat and facilities that came under shelling," Monastyrsky told the AP.

He noted that his ministry's demining equipment was left in Mariupol, a besieged port city of 430,000 people that has been subjected to relentless shelling for much of the war.

"We lost 200 pieces of equipment there," Monastyrsky said.

One of the biggest challenges the Interior Ministry faces is fighting the fires caused by the relentless Russian shelling and airstrikes, Monastyrsky said. The country's emergency service, which the ministry oversees, is facing desperate shortages of personnel and equipment, he said.

A firefighter was killed Thursday during the Russian shelling of Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, while working to extinguish a blaze at a market that was caused by a previous attack.

Monastyrsky added that the emergency service's facilities in Kharkiv and Mariupol were completely destroyed in the Russian barrage.

Monastyrsky stressed that Ukrainian emergency responders urgently need more specialized vehicles and protective equipment.

"The coming days will exacerbate a humanitarian catastrophe in critical areas," he said. "I must say that casualties among civilians exceed our military losses by several times."

The interior ministry has been busy trying to counter groups of Russian saboteurs that inundated the country to target bridges, gas pipelines and other infrastructure facilities, Monastyrsky said, adding that dozens of such groups have operated in Ukraine.

"We realize that sabotage is a key tool in the war," he said, adding that Ukrainian forces have managed to spot Russian saboteurs by tracking their Russian cellphones. "We reacted immediately ... by searching locations where these phones were detected and acted against those groups."

In occupied areas, Russian forces tried to scare Ukrainian police who remained there by visiting their homes and sometimes even planting explosives at their doors, Monastyrsky said.

"They are trying to pressure people in the occupied territories," he said.

Massive protests that broke out in Berdyansk, Melitopol, Kherson and other occupied Ukrainian cities came as a surprise to the Russians, who expected to be welcomed by local native-Russian speakers, Monastyrsky said.

"They have faced civilians who speak Russian but stand for Ukraine," he said. "They realize now that they made a major mistake."

East Timor vote highlights young nation's political impasse

By FERNANDO da COSTA Associated Press

DILI, East Timor (AP) — Voters in East Timor cast ballots for president on Saturday in an election that will test the young nation's stability amid a protracted political crisis and economic uncertainty.

Incumbent Francisco "Lu Olo" Guterres, 67, a former guerilla leader from the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor party, known by its local acronym Fretilin, is running against 15 other candidates,

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including four women.

"I am confident that I will win the election again," Guterres told reporters after casting his vote in Dili, the capital. "I call on people to accept whatever the result and I am ready to work with whoever wins this election."

Surveys showed Guterres and former President Jose Ramos-Horta, both of whose popularity owes much to their history as fighters in East Timor's struggle for independence from Indonesia, were among the front-runners according to a recent opinion survey, with Ramos-Horta in the lead.

Ramos-Horta, 72, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is backed by the National Congress of the Reconstruction of East Timor, known as CNRT, a party led by former Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, an ex-resistance leader who remains influential.

Ramos-Horta, speaking to media while casting his vote, said the benefits of his party's development plans would be spread more widely in society and he vowed to work closely with Gusmao to implement them.

"We have voted based on our own wish for a new president who is able to maintain stability, to develop our economy and to change the current situation," Ramos-Horta said.

More than 835,000 of the country's 1.3 million people were registered to vote, and the winner will take the oath of office May 20 to mark the 20th anniversary of East Timor's independence from Indonesia, which had invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975.

If none of the candidates secures more than 50% of the votes in the first round, a runoff between the two top vote-getters is scheduled for April 19.

Polls closed at 3 p.m. on Saturday and official results are not expected until Thursday.

East Timorese voted overwhelmingly in a U.N.-supervised referendum in 1999 to end 24 years of brutal Indonesian occupation. Indonesia's military and pro-Indonesian militias responded to the independence referendum with scorched-earth attacks that devastated the East Timorese half of the island.

East Timor's transition to a democracy has been rocky, with leaders battling massive poverty, unemployment and corruption as the nation continues to recover from the bloody break for independence two decades ago, with an economy reliant on dwindling offshore oil revenues and bitter factional politics that have occasionally erupted into violence.

In the last four years, continuing tensions between the two largest parties, Fretilin and CNRT, led to the resignation of Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak in February 2020 after the government repeatedly failed to pass a budget.

Ruak agreed to stay on until a new government is formed and to oversee the battle against the coronavirus pandemic with a \$250 million war chest. His government has operated without an annual budget and has relied on monthly injections from its sovereign fund savings, called the Petroleum Fund.

Guterres refused to swear in nine people nominated by CNRT as cabinet ministers in 2018, so the government is made up of ministers from two smaller parties, and several portfolios remain vacant.

CNRT has accused Guterres and Fretilin of acting unconstitutionally and illegally seizing the post of speaker of parliament.

Fretilin said that Horta is not fit to be president, accusing him of causing a crisis as prime minister in 2006 when dozens were killed as political rivalries turned into open conflict on the streets of Dili.

A clash between Fretilin and CNRT supporters also broke out in 2018, leaving more than a dozen injured and cars torched.

Campaigning, which was punctuated by parties trading political accusations, ended on Wednesday without major incident.

Joaquim Fonseca, a political analyst at RENETIL, a youth organization established during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, said, "It will be quite difficult for one political party to acquire a parliamentary majority and form a government on its own. Political parties will have to rely on coalitions to form a government."

"This remains a challenge for both of the candidates," said Fonseca, who is also East Timor's former Ambassador for the United Kingdom. "At this point, there is no absolute certainty that either of the can-

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didates will bring the desired changes.”

The U.N. estimates that nearly half of East Timor’s population lives below the extreme poverty line of \$1.90 a day and half of children under the age of 5 suffer physical and mental stunting as a result of malnutrition.

“I do hope the winning president will look after the clean water, the roads to villages and health facilities,” said Lucio Cardozo, a Dili resident.

Oil revenues, which finance more than 90% of government spending, are rapidly dwindling and the country’s nearly \$19 billion sovereign wealth fund could be empty within a decade as the government’s annual withdrawals exceed its investment returns, according to La’o Hamutuk, an East Timorese research institute.

“The finite amount in our Petroleum Fund will be quickly exhausted if we don’t use it wisely to support building strong human resources and sustainable productive sectors,” La’o Hamutuk said last November in recommendations to the government about its proposed 2022 budget.

While over 30% of the population is illiterate, the wealthiest top 10% in East Timor earn over 42% of the national income and the bottom 50% of the population take only about 16%, said Dinna Prapto Raharja, an international relations analyst and the founder of Synergy Policies, an independent consulting firm based in Jakarta.

“This is a big gap that’s not easy to bridge unless there is a fundamental governance change from whoever wins the 2022 election,” she said.

“The elite may need to discuss different models of sharing power,” Raharja said.

Coach K guides Duke to no-fuss win over Cal State Fullerton

By The Associated Press undefined

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Duke began retiring Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski’s final NCAA Tournament with minimal stress, beating Cal State Fullerton 78-61 on Friday night.

Freshman Paolo Banchero scored 17 points to lead the Blue Devils (29-6), who jumped to a double-digit lead in the first 4 1/2 minutes and remained in control throughout. Duke led by 10 at halftime and pushed the margin to 20 midway through the second half.

The West Region’s No. 2 seed had five players score in double figures while playing its neighboring state, backed by vocal sections of fans eager to be part of what they hope will be Krzyzewski’s six-game run to title No. 6. Next up: Michigan State in Sunday’s second round.

Damari Milstead scored 12 points to lead 15th-seeded Titans (21-11), who missed 15 of 18 shots to open the game.

MICHIGAN STATE 74, DAVIDSON 73

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Joey Hauser scored a career-high 27 points and Michigan State edged Davidson to set up a second-round matchup between Hall of Fame coaches — the Spartans’ Tom Izzo and Duke’s Mike Krzyzewski.

A.J. Hoggard added 14 points for the seventh-seeded Spartans (23-12). They had to wrestle away control of a tight game in the second half and then hang on against a desperate comeback push in the final seconds.

The 10th-seeded Wildcats (27-7) took the fight to the final minute even while getting tripped up by several quick — and sometimes borderline — whistles down the stretch.

Luka Brajkovic scored 18 points on 8-for-10 shooting to lead Davidson. Sam Mennenga added 15 points.

TEXAS TECH 97, MONTANA STATE 62

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 20 points and set a dominating tone in the opening minutes for Texas Tech, which overwhelmed Montana State with one of the best-shooting games in the first round since the tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985.

Bryson Williams also scored 20 points for Texas Tech (26-9), which shot 66.7% (36 of 54) from the field, including making 12 of 20 3-pointers. At one point the Red Raiders were trending toward breaking

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Syracuse's record of 67.9% (38 of 56) against Southern Illinois in 1995. They settled for a tie for fourth. Texas Tech, the No. 3 seed, was too big, quick and talented for the Bobcats (27-8), who were making their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1996. The Red Raiders will play 11th-seeded Notre Dame in the second round.

Xavier Bishop led Montana State with 12 points.

NOTRE DAME 78, ALABAMA 64

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Cormac Ryan scored a career-high 29 points, including seven 3-pointers, and 11th-seeded Notre Dame recovered from a grueling First Four win and late-night flight to beat sixth-seeded Alabama.

Ryan, a senior guard, was 10 of 13 from the field and made a career-best seven of his nine tries from beyond the arc for Notre Dame (24-10), which beat Rutgers in double overtime Wednesday night in Dayton, Ohio, to earn a trip to San Diego.

Blake Wesley had 18 points while Paul Atkinson Jr. added 13 points and eight rebounds. The Fighting Irish missed six of their first seven shots but went 28 of 47 the rest of the way.

Keon Ellis led Alabama (19-14) with 16 points and Jaden Shackelford scored 13. Junior guard Jahvon Quinerly suffered a left knee injury early in the game and did not return.

SOUTH REGION

OHIO STATE 54, LOYOLA CHICAGO 41

PITTSBURGH (AP) — E.J. Liddell scored 16 points, Big Ten Freshman of the Year Malaki Branham added 14 and seventh-seeded Ohio State shut down 10th-seeded Loyola Chicago from start to finish.

The Buckeyes (20-11) advanced to play Villanova on Sunday while preventing another March run by the Ramblers (25-8), who shot 27% (15 of 56) from the floor.

Braden Norris led Loyola with 14 points but star Lucas Williamson endured perhaps his worst game of the season. The winningest player in program history finished with four points on 1-of-10 shooting and committed three turnovers as Loyola fell in the first round after reaching the Sweet 16 last season and the Final Four in 2018.

VILLANOVA 80, DELAWARE 60

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Justin Moore scored 21 points, Collin Gillespie added 14 and second-seeded Villanova had little trouble with 15th-seeded Delaware.

The Wildcats (27-7) used a 35-10 surge spanning the end of the first half and the start of the second to turn an eight-point deficit into a blowout.

Delaware (22-13) showed some early fight against its northern neighbor in a meeting of programs separated by 43 miles on the map and considerably more in the college basketball landscape.

It wasn't nearly enough as Villanova overwhelmed the Blue Hens under a barrage of 3-pointers to begin the school's quest for a third national title in seven seasons.

Jyare Davis led Delaware with 17 points.

ILLINOIS 54, CHATTANOOGA 53

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Alfonso Plummer scored 15 points, including the go-ahead free throws with 12 seconds to go, and fourth-seeded Illinois escaped 13th-seeded Chattanooga.

The Big Ten co-champion Illini (23-9) never led until the final minute and survived when Chattanooga star Malachi Smith missed twice in the closing seconds.

Illinois will play fifth-seeded Houston on Sunday.

Illinois All-America center Kofi Cockburn had 17 points, 13 rebounds and four blocks. His putback gave the Illini a 52-51 lead with 48 seconds to go. Smith, the Southern Conference Player of the Year, responded by drilling a pair of free throws to put Chattanooga (27-8) back in front.

Plummer, who hit three 3-pointers to help Illinois climb back from an 11-point second-half deficit, drove the left side and was fouled. He knocked down both shots.

HOUSTON 82, UAB 68

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Kyler Edwards scored 25 points, Fabian White Jr. added 14 and Houston looked

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like a team capable of making another deep run in March as it beat UAB.

Edwards, who played three years at Texas Tech before transferring to Houston, made six 3-pointers — the last an exclamation point in the final minute — and controlled the fast tempo.

Houston (30-5) made it to the Final Four a year ago but doesn't have a single starter left from that squad. The Cougars have won 10 of 11 — nine by double digits.

Jordan "Jelly" Walker finished with 17 points on 6-of-18 shooting to lead UAB (27-8).

ARIZONA 87, WRIGHT STATE 70

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Christian Koloko scored 17 points, grabbed 13 rebounds and keyed a big second-half surge for top-seeded Arizona, which beat Wright State.

Benedict Mathurin scored 18 points and Dalen Terry had 16 for the Wildcats (32-3). Arizona won its seventh straight game and earned its first NCAA Tournament win since beating Saint Mary's in the second round in 2017. First-year coach Tommy Lloyd, a longtime assistant at Gonzaga, has Arizona in the NCAAs for the first time since 2018.

Arizona advanced to face TCU.

Grant Basile scored 21 points and Trey Calvin had 16 for Wright State (22-14).

TCU 69, SETON HALL 42

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Mike Miles Jr. scored 21 points and ninth-seeded TCU got its first NCAA Tournament victory in 35 years, easily dispatching eighth-seeded Seton Hall.

The Horned Frogs' last tournament victory was in 1987 against Marshall, when coach Jamie Dixon was a senior at his alma mater.

Damion Baugh scored 14 points for TCU (21-12), which shot 27 of 53 (50.9%) from the field and led most of the game.

Jamir Harris and Myles Cale each scored 11 points for Seton Hall (21-11), which shot 28.8% from the field, its worst performance in an NCAA Tournament game.

EAST REGION

PURDUE 78, YALE 56

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Jaden Ivey raced his way to 22 points and Zach Edey controlled the action inside, helping Purdue overpower Yale.

Ivey, one of the fastest players in college basketball, went 3 for 6 from 3-point range and 7 for 9 at the free-throw line in 27 minutes. The 7-foot-4 Edey made the most of his size advantage against the Ivy League champion Bulldogs, finishing with 16 points and nine rebounds in 19 minutes.

No. 3 seed Purdue (28-7) won its NCAA opener for the fourth time in its last five tournaments. Next up is Texas in the second round on Sunday.

Azar Swain scored 18 points on 8-for-19 shooting for Yale (19-12), which had won 11 of 13.

TEXAS 81, VIRGINIA TECH 73

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Andrew Jones scored 21 points, Marcus Carr beat the halftime buzzer with a shot from well beyond halfcourt to put Texas ahead for good, and the Longhorns beat Virginia Tech.

The sixth-seeded Longhorns (22-11) won their first tournament game since 2014.

Texas built on the momentum from Carr's improbable basket and led by 17 with 5 1/2 minutes left.

Carr had 15 points and Timmy Allen added 14. Texas went 10 of 19 from 3-point range while ending a five-game tournament losing streak.

Sean Padulla scored 19 points for Virginia Tech (23-13) with 13 coming in the last 4 1/2 minutes.

MIDWEST REGION

AUBURN 80, JACKSONVILLE STATE 61

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Freshman Jabari Smith had 20 points and 14 rebounds as second-seeded Auburn pulled away from Jacksonville State late in the first half.

Walker Kessler, Smith's partner in the paint, finished with 13 points, 10 rebounds and nine blocks. The Tigers (28-5) won their 10th straight NCAA opener and will face Miami on Sunday for a spot in the Sweet 16.

K.D. Johnson ended his shooting slump — he was 0-for-14 in a Southeastern Conference Tournament

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quarterfinal loss to Texas A&M — and had 10 points and a couple of 3s during a 17-3 run that put the Tigers in control.

Jalen Gibbs hit four 3s and led the Gamecocks (21-11) with 20 points.

MIAMI 68, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA 66

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Charlie Moore made two free throws with 3 seconds left and finished with 16 points to lift 10th-seeded Miami over No. 7 seed Southern California.

Moore drove the lane in the final moments and appeared to have his layup blocked by Chavez Goodwin. But a foul was called and Moore made the free throws.

Miami (24-10) got its first tournament win in six years.

Isaiah Wong led Miami with 22 points before fouling out with 2:07 to play with his team ahead 59-58. The Hurricanes stretched the lead to 65-58 with 44 seconds left, but Drew Peterson, who led the Trojans (26-8) with 17 points, hit consecutive 3s and his inside basket tied it.

Miami led 29-16 late in the first half, but the Trojans opened the second half on 17-2 run to go ahead and set up a tight battle to the finish.

IOWA STATE 59, LSU 54

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Freshman Tyrese Hunter scored 23 points and Iowa State used its hard-nosed defense to beat No. 6 seed LSU.

Izaiah Brockington added 19 points as the 11th-seeded Cyclones (21-12) got their first win in the NCAA tourney since 2017 — also in Milwaukee. They held the Tigers to 37% shooting and forced 19 turnovers, stopping a three-game slide.

The Cyclones will face Wisconsin on Sunday.

Tari Eason scored 18 points for LSU (22-12) and senior Darius Days had 14. It was the first game for the Tigers since coach Will Wade was fired last weekend amid allegations of NCAA violations.

WISCONSIN 67, COLGATE 60

MILWAUKEE (AP) — All-America guard Johnny Davis scored 25 points and sparked a second-half comeback as Wisconsin withstood Colgate's 3-point assault.

The third-seeded Badgers (25-7) snapped Colgate's 15-game winning streak.

Davis had Wisconsin's last 14 points and showed he's all the way back from the injured left ankle that knocked the Big Ten player of the year out of the Badgers' regular-season finale.

After shooting 3 of 11 in the first half, Davis caught fire when the Badgers needed him. They trailed by as many as five in the second half before going on a 10-0 run and holding Colgate scoreless for more than seven minutes.

Tyler Wahl added 15 points and nine rebounds for Wisconsin. Nelly Cummings scored 20 points and Tucker Richardson had 15 for Colgate (23-12), which shot 10 of 22 from 3-point range.

Hydropower eyes bigger energy role, less environmental harm

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In southwestern Pennsylvania, eight locks and dams that for decades helped barges move goods along the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers will in a few years also generate enough power for 75,000 homes.

Rye Development, a Boston-based hydropower company, is retrofitting the dams with turbines to generate electricity and says the upgraded structures will limit damage to the rivers' water quality and fish.

The project reflects a recent thawing between the industry and conservation groups, which had long opposed dams that can prevent fish migration, alter water temperatures and cause other environmental problems. As the U.S. pushes to transition to low-carbon energy, Rye is among the companies that sees an opportunity to expand hydropower production at existing dams while working to minimize environmental harms.

The recent compromises between the industry and environmental groups are reflected in President Joe Biden's infrastructure law, which puts \$2.5 billion toward projects including dam removals as well as

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upgrades at existing structures for hydropower and energy storage.

"We do recognize that (hydropower) is probably going to play some role in the transition. It's certainly better than coal," said Ted Illston of American Rivers, which has advocated for dam removals on environmental grounds.

Hydropower, which uses flowing water to spin turbines connected to generators, is the oldest and second-largest renewable energy source in the U.S. after wind power. In 2020, it accounted for roughly 7% of the electricity generated in the country.

The industry hasn't received as much federal funding and tax incentives as wind and solar, but sees room for growth. Of the 90,000 dams in the country, about 2,500 produce power. Non-powered dams could produce enough power for 9 to 12 million homes, according to an estimate by the Electric Power Supply Association based on federal data from 2012.

Part of the challenge is that most dams in the U.S. were built more than half a century ago. The risk of dam collapses has fueled demolitions in recent years, with more than 40% of the country's nearly 2,000 dam removals in the past century happening in the last decade. Some are also torn down largely for environmental reasons.

Last month, federal regulators moved a step closer to approving what would be the largest dam demolition in U.S. history. Removal of the four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River near the Oregon-California border would help save the river's salmon and other fish species that can't reach breeding habitat because of the structures.

The hydropower industry and conservation groups still clash over dams too. On Maine's Kennebec River, conservation groups and state environmental agencies are pushing for the removal of four hydropower dams that block endangered Atlantic salmon from reaching key habitat. The dams generate about 5% of the state's renewable energy.

"It's very easy for individual river systems to get lost in the message of climate change and the need for renewable energy," said Shannon Ames, executive director of the Low Impact Hydropower Institute, which grades hydropower dams based on environmental criteria.

With persisting drought affecting hydropower production west of the Mississippi River, the industry has a more direct path to expansion in eastern states.

In Pennsylvania, Rye consulted with the Low Impact Hydropower Institute early in its process and is among a small number of companies seeking certification from the group.

To get certified, companies must show their structures meet protections for endangered species, cultural and historic uses of rivers, passage for fish and recreational areas. The group says its environmental standards are often stricter than state or federal guidelines.

On a recently certified dam in West Virginia on the Ohio River, for example, dissolved oxygen levels — an important measure of river water quality — were meeting or exceeding state standards, according to a five-year study. In some states, dams certified by the organization qualify for green-energy programs.

Rye said its dams in Pennsylvania will include structures to support fish migration, and that it is building a fishing pier since federal regulators require hydropower producers to support recreation on river systems. The retrofits are expected to be operational as early as 2025.

Duke tops Cal State Fullerton to open Coach K's last NCAAs

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Mike Krzyzewski got the defensive improvement he wanted to start the NCAA Tournament after some shaky performances down the stretch of his final season.

Duke began the retiring Hall of Famer's last journey through the brackets with minimal stress, beating Cal State Fullerton 78-61 on Friday night.

"We played better tonight than we have been playing," Krzyzewski said.

Freshman Paolo Banchero scored 17 points to lead the Blue Devils (29-6), who jumped to a double-digit lead in the first 4 1/2 minutes. Duke led by 10 at halftime and pushed the margin to 20, avoiding the shock-

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ing exit that befell another of the sport's top programs — Kentucky — in a 2-vs.-15 matchup a night earlier.

"I mean, we all watched the game last night," said Wendell Moore Jr., who had 13 points, six rebounds and six assists. "I mean, obviously we didn't want it to happen to us as well."

The West Region's No. 2 seed had five players score in double figures while playing in its neighboring state, backed by vocal sections of fans eager to be part of what they hope will be Krzyzewski's six-game run to title No. 6. Next up: a matchup with seventh-seeded Michigan State and its Hall of Fame coach, Tom Izzo.

Krzyzewski was pleased by the way his team used the time leading up to the tournament to regroup and recharge, along with maybe rebuilding some defensive cohesion and communication that had been there earlier this season.

"Their offense really puts you in a tough position to communicate because there's a lot of dribble exchanges," Krzyzewski said, adding: "So it's a big improvement. We've been a really good defensive team, but the last four games we were a really bad defensive team."

Damari Milstead scored 12 points to lead 15th-seeded Titans (21-11), who missed 15 of 18 shots to open the game. The Big West Conference champions finished the game shooting 38%, including 5 for 17 on the 3s needed for any mid-major to take down a big favorite.

"Even in the timeouts, I said to the guys: 'The shots we're getting are good shots,'" Titans coach Dedrique Taylor said. "They just weren't falling. I think at the end of the day, Duke's size and athleticism and strength — those shots looked a little different today than they did last Saturday" in the Big West Tournament.

Duke has long begun its postseason runs with added attention as a blueblood program with five NCAA titles. There's extra scrutiny this year with any game potentially being the last for the winningest coach in college basketball history, now with 1,199 victories — down to TV cameras following Krzyzewski walking into the arena hand-in-hand with his wife, Mickie, and the team.

The Blue Devils haven't looked quite the same of late, potentially weighed down by the enormity of playing through a legend's final games in a 47-year career. The Blue Devils suffered a dispiriting loss to rival North Carolina in Krzyzewski's emotional final game at Cameron Indoor Stadium and fell last weekend to Virginia Tech in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament championship game.

But Krzyzewski said he thought his team looked "fresher" in workouts, and the Blue Devils got off to a fast start that backed up their coach.

BIG PICTURE

Cal State Fullerton: The Titans were playing in their fourth NCAA Tournament and first since 2018. Taylor said he had a mature team but acknowledged this stage was "a different animal." His team didn't look intimidated, but it couldn't knock down the open shots it got while struggling to handle Duke's size and length.

"Just having the opportunity to compete against Duke, for us seniors, there's no better team we want to play in the NCAA Tournament," said Titans forward E.J. Anosike, who had 10 points and 10 rebounds. "That alone, playing against Coach K, we gave it our all."

Duke: Moore had said the team used days leading up to the tournament to work on recovering its defensive edge. There were some positive signs on the stat sheet, namely 10 blocked shots — five by the 7-foot-1 Williams.

SLIPPERY

The first half featured multiple players slipping and falling on the court. That included Moore, who slipped on a slick spot, got up, then slipped again and ended up in a near split.

That aggravated Moore's hip and had him exiting early in the second half to slowly pedal an exercise bike at the end of the bench before returning — along with a more intensive effort by staffers to wipe down the court at every stoppage.

"That damn floor was slippery," Krzyzewski said. "I mean, on both ends. So I don't know what it was. I know it wasn't the shoes. Nike called me and wanted me to make sure I didn't say it was the shoes."

Denied easy victory, Russia presses reduced goals in Ukraine

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The signs are abundant of how Ukraine frustrated Vladimir Putin's hopes for a swift victory, and how Russia's military proved far from ready for the fight.

A truck carrying Russian troops crashes, its doors blown open by a rocket-propelled grenade. Foreign-supplied drones target Russian command posts. Orthodox priests in trailing vestments parade Ukraine's blue and yellow flag in defiance of their Russian captors in the occupied city of Berdyansk.

Russia has lost hundreds of tanks, many left charred or abandoned along the roads, and its death toll is on a pace to outstrip that of the country's previous military campaigns.

Yet more than three weeks into the war, with Putin's initial aim of an easy regime change in Ukraine long gone, Russia's military still has a strong hand. With their greater might and stockpile of city-flattening munitions, Russian forces can fight on for whatever the Russian president may plan next, whether leveraging a negotiated settlement or brute destruction, military analysts warn.

Despite all the determination of Ukraine's people, all the losses among Russia's forces, and all the errors of Russia's leaders, there is no sign that the war will soon be over. Even if he fails to take control of the country, Putin can keep up the punishing attacks on its cities and people.

"His instinct will be always to double down, because he's got himself into a dreadful mess, a huge strategic blunder," said Michael Clarke, former head of the British-based Royal United Services Institute, a defense think tank.

"And I don't think it's in his character to try to retrieve that, except by carrying on, going forward," he said.

Putin's forces in Ukraine are waging Russia's largest, most complex combined military campaign since taking Berlin in 1945. His initial objective, which he announced in a television address on Feb. 24 as the invasion began, was to "demilitarize" Ukraine and save its people from "neo-Nazis," a false description of Ukraine's government, which is led by a Jewish president.

Fatefully, Putin underestimated the national pride and battlefield skills that Ukrainians have built up over the past eight years of battling Russian-backed separatists in the country's east.

At the start, Russians thought "they would install, you know, some pro-Russian government and call it a day and declare victory," said Dmitry Gorenburg, a researcher on Russia's security at the Virginia-based CNA think tank. "That was sort of Plan A, and as near as we can tell, they didn't really have a Plan B."

Russia's first apparent plan — attack key Ukrainian military targets, and make a quick run to Kyiv — failed immediately. It was foiled by Ukraine's defenses along with the countless mistakes and organizational failures by a Russian force that had been told it was only mobilized for military drills.

Clarke, the British researcher, related accounts of Russian troops selling communication equipment and fuel out of military vehicles to locals during the weeks they waited on Ukraine's borders.

With no friendly population to welcome them, Russian forces reverted to tactics from their past offensives in Syria and Chechnya — dropping bombs and lobbing missiles into cities and town, sending millions of men, women and children fleeing.

Putin's forces are in position to capture the besieged port city of Mariupol. Overall, Russians appear to be fighting with three objectives now: to surround Kyiv, to encircle spread-out Ukrainian fighters in the east, and to break through to the major port city of Odessa in the west, said Michael Kofman, an expert on the Russian military and program director at CNA.

Kofman cautions that much of the information on the war is coming from Ukrainians, or their American or other allies. That makes the partial picture skewed, and a full picture impossible.

A senior U.S. defense official on Friday said the Russians have launched more than 1,080 missiles since the start of the war as they remain largely stalled across the country. The official said they retain about 90% of the combat power they had arrayed around Ukraine at the start of the war.

The U.S. assesses that the airspace over Ukraine remains contested, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the military assessments. The Ukrainian air force is continuing to fly aircraft and employ air and missile defense

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"Just look at the map, and you just look at how little progress the Russians have been able to make," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said recently.

The math of military conquests and occupation may be against Putin in Ukraine.

Estimates of Russian deaths vary widely. Yet even conservative figures are in the low thousands. That's a much faster pace than in previous Russian offensives, threatening support for the war among ordinary Russians. Russia had 64 deaths in five days of fighting during its 2008 war with Georgia. It lost about 15,000 in Afghanistan over 10 years, and more than 11,000 over years of fighting in Chechnya.

Russia's number of dead and wounded in Ukraine is nearing the 10% benchmark of diminished combat effectiveness, Gorenburg said. The reported battlefield deaths of four Russian generals — out of an estimated 20 in the fight — signal impaired command, he said.

Researchers tracking only those Russian equipment losses that were photographed or recorded on video say Russia has lost more than 1,500 tanks, trucks, mounted equipment and other heavy gear. Two out of three of those were captured or abandoned, signaling the failings of the Russian troops that let them go.

Meanwhile, Russia needs to limit its use of smart, long-range missiles in case they're needed in any larger war with NATO, military analysts say.

When it comes to the grinding job of capturing and holding cities, conventional military metrics suggest Russia needs a 5-to-1 advantage in urban fighting, analysts say. Meanwhile, the formula for ruling a restive territory in the face of armed opposition is 20 fighters for every 1,000 people — or 800,000 Russian troops for Ukraine's more than 40 million people, Clarke notes. That's almost as many as Russia's entire active-duty military of 900,000.

On the ground, that means controlling any substantial chunk of Ukrainian territory long-term would take more resources than Russia could foreseeably commit.

Other Russian options remain possible, including a negotiated settlement. Moscow is demanding that Ukraine formally embrace neutrality, thus swearing off any alliance with NATO, and recognize the independence of the separatist regions in the east and Russian sovereignty over Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.

Russia's other options include an unrelenting air campaign in which it bombs and depopulates cities as it did in Chechnya and Syria. U.S. officials also warn of the risk of Russian chemical attacks, and the threat of escalation to nuclear war.

"Unless the Russians intend to be completely genocidal — they could flatten all the major cities, and Ukrainians will rise up against Russian occupation — there will be just constant guerrilla war" if Russian troops remain, Clarke said.

First woman on high court, O'Connor faced little opposition

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — 99-0. That was the tally, unimaginable in today's hyperpolarized environment, by which the Senate made Sandra Day O'Connor the first woman on the Supreme Court.

Such a lopsided result is certainly not in the cards for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who would be the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court if she wins Senate confirmation after hearings that begin Monday.

Democrats, who hold a Senate majority by virtue of the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris, all appear to be on board to support Jackson, and could confirm her without a single Republican vote.

Most Republicans, who largely opposed Jackson's confirmation to a federal appeals court last year, are expected to vote against her again.

Both nominations resulted from pledges that presidents made on the campaign trail.

President Joe Biden sought to revive his flagging campaign by promising to put a Black woman on the court. President Ronald Reagan, seeking to soften his conservative edges, said he would pry open the doors to the exclusive men's club that was the Supreme Court for its first 192 years.

What little opposition there was to O'Connor, then a little-known Arizona judge, was over her record on

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abortion when she had earlier served in the Arizona senate. Anti-abortion groups rose up in alarm, complaining that Reagan was going back on the Republican platform promise to appoint judges who respect "the sanctity of innocent human life."

Father Charles Fiore, an anti-abortion leader who testified at O'Connor's hearing, said Reagan's choice of O'Connor elicited "virtually unanimous disappointment on the part of rank-and-file right-to-lifers" because it was at odds with the party platform and Reagan's appeal to white Democrats who were so important to his victory.

Public opinion polls, though, found deep support for the nomination. And with the president having made his choice, the White House had little interest in probing too deeply on the subject of abortion, as the author Joan Biskupic noted in her biography of O'Connor. "President Reagan already had put himself on the line with the nominee," Biskupic wrote in "Sandra Day O'Connor: How the First Woman on the Supreme Court Became Its Most Influential Justice."

Senate Republicans largely followed suit, even if some privately expressed their doubts to Reagan.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, the Republican chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, made clear his distaste for the high court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, which guaranteed a woman's right to an abortion. But he said O'Connor was constrained in what she could say about it because the issue was certain to come before the court again.

"I do not think she could be censured ... for not saying how she would vote as a member of the Supreme Court on abortion because she would disqualify herself from voting on that question if it does come before the Supreme Court again," Thurmond said.

As it turned out, the anti-abortion opposition to O'Connor was not unfounded. She would go on to be one of three authors of the 1992 decision that reaffirmed a woman's right to choose, although the court also strengthened states' ability to regulate abortion.

Some Democrats also raised mild concerns about O'Connor, including Biden, then the junior senator from Delaware. "If there is one aspect of this nomination that concerns me — and I must acknowledge it does not concern me very much at this point — it is your lack of extensive constitutional experience," Biden said.

But when the Senate held its final vote on Sept. 21, 1981, Biden was a vote to confirm, one of 45 Democrats and 54 Republicans. One Democrat was out of town the day of the vote.

"That's almost unthinkable today, that that would happen," said Renee Knake Jefferson, a University of Houston law professor and the co-author of "Shortlisted," about women who have been under consideration for Supreme Court openings.

Two senators remain from 1981: Democrat Pat Leahy of Vermont and Republican Chuck Grassley of Iowa. Leahy voted for Jackson last year; Grassley opposed her confirmation to the appeals court.

O'Connor, who turns 92 next week, served nearly 25 years on the court, retiring in 2006. Suffering from dementia, she withdrew from public life several years ago.

Plummer's late free throws lift Illini by Chattanooga 54-53

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The result didn't make sense to Brad Underwood. For the better part of 39 minutes Friday night, the Illinois coach watched his fourth-seeded team chasing 13th-seeded Chattanooga.

The Southern Conference champion Mocs, with alum and Pro Football Hall of Famer Terrell Owens cheering them on, smothered Illini All-America center Kofi Cockburn. They took double-digit leads in each half. They responded every time the Illini made a push.

The Illini didn't panic. They dug in behind Cockburn and guard Alfonso Plummer, whose go-ahead free throws with 12 seconds to go helped them pull out a 54-53 NCAA Tournament win that maybe they didn't deserve but will certainly take.

"I told (Chattanooga coach) Lamont (Paris) they played better than us, and we just happened to have more points than them at the end, and we led at the right time," Underwood said.

The only time it mattered.

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The Big Ten co-champions will play fifth-seeded Houston on Sunday after narrowly avoiding becoming the seventh team to fall to a double-digit seed.

"We just kind of hung in there," Underwood said.

Plummer scored 13 of his 15 points in the second half, including three 3-pointers that kept Illinois (23-9) within striking distance. The 7-foot Cockburn, fending off bodies left and right, finished with 17 points and 13 rebounds while absorbing 11 fouls. His putback with 45 seconds left gave the Illini the first of just two leads they held all night.

"It wasn't frustrating," Cockburn said. "I've been going through that all year. Probably all my whole career. I think it was just another challenge. This is the NCAA Tournament, and things get tough."

Chattanooga still had two chances to pick up its first NCAA Tournament win since 1997 in the closing seconds but sophomore star Malachi Smith missed twice. His runner with 4 seconds left was blocked by Coleman Hawkins. Smith chased down the rebound and pulled up from about 12 feet, but the ball clanged off the rim and into Hawkins' hands, capping a 4 for 20 performance for the Southern Conference Player of the Year.

"My mindset was, I just got fouled the last possession, so I tried to do it again, and just going too fast," Smith said. "And then luckily got the rebound, and then got a shot that I felt like if you're gonna get a shot for the win, that's a shot you'll take."

Unlike the Mocs' overtime thriller in the Southern Conference final — which ended with a game-winning 30-foot heave by David Jean-Baptiste — this time there would be no last-second heroics.

"And it's frustrating because it's a shot I work on a lot, and it didn't go in," Smith said. "And that's all I can say. I just let my teammates down, and I just missed a shot that I usually make."

Illinois didn't exactly light it up either. Senior Trent Frazer missed all six of his shots but did make two free throws with 3:37 to go. Andre Curbelo was 1 for 7. The Illini made just 3 of 17 3-pointers, turned it over 14 times — including a couple of baffling passes to nowhere that sailed out of bounds — and survived anyway.

"You're relieved, you're encouraged," Underwood said. "And, again, I've been in this thing enough to know it's literally just every game is gonna be close, and there (are) very few blowouts, and it's 'Survive and advance.' And literally, you take them any way you can get them."

Paris promised to throw multiple bodies at Cockburn in an effort to keep the 7-footer in check. It worked early, as the Mocs harassed him nearly every time down the floor.

It led to a lot of pushing, a lot of shoving and — for a while — a lot of fouls. Josh Ayeni and Silvio De Sousa each drew three whistles in the first half alone. Cockburn struggled to take advantage, missing 5 of 8 free throws early before he and the Illini started to get into a rhythm after the Mocs were forced to go small.

"He got a couple (of) easy ones, but I think for the most part, he earned a lot of the stuff that he got," Paris said of Cockburn. "And he's a good player."

Live updates: Zelenskyy says 9,000 leave besieged Mariupol

By The Associated Press undefined

LVIIV, Ukraine -- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Russian forces are blockading Ukraine's largest cities to create a "humanitarian catastrophe" with the aim of persuading Ukrainians to cooperate with them.

He says Russians are preventing supplies from reaching surrounded cities in the center and southeast of the country.

"This is a totally deliberate tactic," Zelenskyy said in his nighttime video address to the nation, filmed outside in Kyiv, with the presidential office in the lamplight behind him.

He said more than 9,000 people were able to leave besieged Mariupol in the past day, and in all more than 180,000 people have been able to flee to safety through humanitarian corridors.

He again appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold talks with him directly. "It's time to meet, time to speak," he said. "I want to be heard by everyone, especially in Moscow."

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He noted that the 200,000 people Putin gathered in and around a Moscow stadium on Friday for a flag-waving rally was about the same number of Russian troops sent into Ukraine three weeks ago.

Zelenskyy then asked his audience to picture the stadium filled with the thousands of Russians who have been killed, wounded or maimed in the fighting.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

— Russia has attacked the outskirts of the western city of Lviv, a crossroads for people fleeing the war and for others entering to deliver aid or fight.

— President Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge patriotic rally in Moscow and praised the Russian military

— President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping spoke as the White House looks to deter Beijing from providing assistance to Russia.

— Rescuers search for survivors at a Mariupol theater hit by Russian airstrike; 130 rescued, hundreds still missing

— An estimated 6.5 million people have been displaced inside Ukraine, on top of the 3.2 million who have already fled the country

— Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS TODAY:

NEW YORK — Three Russian cosmonauts have arrived at the International Space Station wearing flight suits in yellow and blue colors that match the Ukrainian flag.

The men were the first new arrivals on the space station since the start of the Russian war in Ukraine last month.

Video of one of the cosmonauts taken as the capsule prepared to dock with the space station showed him wearing a blue flight suit. It was unclear what, if any, message the yellow uniforms they changed into were intended to send.

Oleg Artemyev was asked about the yellow flight suits when the newly arrived cosmonauts were able to talk to family back on Earth.

He said every crew chooses its own flight suits, so that they are not all the same.

"It became our turn to pick a color. But in fact, we had accumulated a lot of yellow material so we needed to use it. So that's why we had to wear yellow," he said.

Artemyev, Denis Matveyev and Sergey Korsakov blasted off successfully from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan in their Soyuz MS-21 spacecraft at 8:55 p.m. Friday (11:55 a.m. EDT). They smoothly docked at the station just over three hours later, joining two Russians, four Americans and a German on the orbiting outpost.

LVIV, Ukraine -- Ukraine lost access to the Azov Sea during Russia's siege of the southern port city of Mariupol, the Ukrainian General Staff said late Friday.

Mariupol is the key commercial port on the Azov Sea, which is connected to the much larger Black Sea by a narrow strait.

The General Staff said the Russian forces were still trying to storm Mariupol and the fighting was ongoing. It was unclear from its statement whether the Russians have seized the city.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's interior minister said Friday that it will take years to defuse unexploded ordnances after the Russian invasion.

Speaking to The Associated Press in the besieged Ukrainian capital, Denys Monastyrsky said that the country will need Western assistance to cope with the massive task once the war is over.

"A huge number of shells and mines have been fired at Ukraine and a large part haven't exploded, they remain under the rubble and pose a real threat," Monastyrsky said. "It will take years, not months, to defuse them."

In addition to the unexploded Russian ordnances, the Ukrainian troops also have planted land mines at

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bridges, airports and other key infrastructure to prevent Russians from using them.

"We won't be able to remove the mines from all that territory, so I asked our international partners and colleagues from the European Union and the United States to prepare groups of experts to demine the areas of combat and facilities that came under shelling," Monastyrsky told the AP.

He noted that another top challenge is dealing with fires caused by the relentless Russian barrages. He said there's a desperate shortage of personnel and equipment to deal with the fires amid the constant shelling.

UNITED NATIONS — Russia's first deputy U.N. ambassador says Twitter has blocked his account, accusing him of "abuse and harassment," due to a tweet about the maternity hospital in the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol.

"This is very deplorable," Dmitry Polyansky told reporters after a U.N. Security Council meeting Friday, "and this clearly illustrates how much alternative view and free press, and free information is valued by Twitter and in this country."

Polyansky, who had more than 22,000 followers and was a prolific Twitter user, said he received a message earlier Friday from Twitter's cloud service saying he was violating Twitter's rules and was "engaged in abuse and harassment."

He said Twitter referred to his warning in a tweet on March 7 "that the hospital in Mariupol had been turned into a military object by radicals. Very disturbing that UN spreads disinformation without verification."

Associated Press journalists, who have been reporting from inside blockaded Mariupol since early in the war, documented the March 10 attack on the maternity hospital and saw the victims and damage firsthand. They shot video and photos of several bloodstained, pregnant mothers fleeing the blown-out maternity ward as medical workers shouted and children cried.

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to lift the siege of Mariupol, allow humanitarian access and order an immediate cease-fire, Macron's office said.

Macron spoke with the Russian leader on the phone for 70 minutes. Earlier in the day, Putin had a conversation with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who also pressed for an immediate cease-fire.

Macron, who has spoken numerous times with Putin, revisited complaints over repeated attacks on civilians and Russia's failure to respect human rights in Ukraine, the presidential Elysee Palace said.

It said that Putin, in turn, laid the blame for the war on Ukraine.

Macron, who is campaigning to renew his mandate in April elections, said during a town hall-style meeting shortly before the call that he talks to Putin because he believes there is a way toward peace, between the Ukrainian resistance, tough Western sanctions and diplomatic pressure. "We must do everything to find it," he said.

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian officer in charge of defending the region around the country's capital says his forces are well positioned to defend the city.

Maj. Gen. Oleksandr Pavlyuk said in an interview with The Associated Press that "the enemy is halted," adding that "we are improving this system of defensive lines" to make Kyiv "inapproachable for the enemy."

Despite three weeks of Russian bombardment, Ukraine has kept up a stiff defense of its cities. Fighting continued in Kyiv's suburbs, depriving thousands of heat and clean water.

"From time to time, the enemy tests our defenses," said Pavlyuk, a battle-hardened officer who earned his rank by leading Ukrainian troops in the conflict with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine that erupted in 2014. "But our boys are strong in their positions and also play an active role in preventing the enemy to fulfill their plans."

Pavlyuk, who has been put in charge of Kyiv's defenses earlier this week, said that the Russians are using the same tactics as they used in the east to target civilian structures to try to break Ukraine's resistance.

"That's why now that war has been transformed into killing civilians, destroying civilian infrastructure, to frighten our people to the maximum," he said. "But we will never give up. We will fight until the end."

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To the last breath and to the last bullet.”

UNITED NATIONS — Six Western nations have accused Russia of using the U.N. Security Council to launder disinformation, spread propaganda, and justify its unprovoked attack on Ukraine. And the U.S. is again warning that Moscow’s claim that the U.S. has biological warfare laboratories in Ukraine “is really a potential false flag effort in action.”

Friday’s council meeting was supposed to be for a vote on Russia’s draft resolution on humanitarian relief for Ukraine which has been widely criticized for making no mention of Moscow’s invasion of its neighbor. Russia instead raised allegations again of U.S. involvement in biological warfare activities, which have been repeatedly denied by both the United States and Ukraine.

The six Western nations — U.S., U.K., France, Albania, Ireland and Norway — delivered a joint statement just before the council session, saying: “This meeting and these lies are designed for one purpose, to deflect responsibility for Russia’s war of choice and the humanitarian catastrophe it has caused.”

They stressed that Russia has long maintained a biological weapons program in violation of international law and has a well-documented history of using chemical weapons — not Ukraine.

“There are no Ukrainian biological weapons laboratories — not near Russia’s border, not anywhere,” U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.

Reiterating the Biden administration’s serious concern of a potential false flag effort, the U.S. envoy said, “We continue to believe it is possible that Russia may be planning to use chemical or biological agents against the Ukrainian people.”

MOSCOW — The head of the Russian delegation in talks with Ukrainian officials says the parties have come closer to an agreement on a neutral status for Ukraine.

Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian negotiators in several rounds of talks with Ukraine, including this week, said Friday that the sides have narrowed their differences on the issue of Ukraine dropping its bid to join NATO and adopting a neutral status.

“The issue of neutral status and no NATO membership for Ukraine is one of the key issues in talks, and that is the issue where the parties have made their positions maximally close,” Medinsky said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies.

He added that the sides are now “half-way” on issues regarding the demilitarization of Ukraine. Medinsky noted that while Kyiv insists that Russia-backed separatist regions in Ukraine’s east must be brought back into the fold, Russia believes that people of the regions must be allowed to determine their fate themselves.

Medinsky noted that a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is possible after the negotiators finalize a draft treaty to end the hostilities and it receives a preliminary approval by the countries’ governments.

Medinsky also bristled at a recent statement by Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Zelenskyy, who called for disrupting railway links to supply Russian troops in Ukraine, saying it could undermine the talks.

LVIV, Ukraine — The president of Belarus, who has allowed Russia to use his country’s territory to invade Ukraine, says he has no intention to host Russian nuclear weapons.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has beefed up military ties with Moscow after Western sanctions over his crackdown on protests after his reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that the opposition and the West rejected as rigged. He has

Lukashenko had previously offered to host Russian nuclear weapons, but in an interview with Japanese broadcaster TBS released by his office on Friday, he said he has no such plans.

“I’m not planning to deploy nuclear weapons here, produce nuclear weapons here, create and use nuclear weapons against anyone,” he said, dismissing the allegations of such plans as an “invention by the West.”

Lukashenko said that he had made an earlier statement about a possible deployment of Russian nuclear weapons to Belarus in response to the talk in the West about a possible redeployment of U.S. tactical

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nuclear weapons from Germany to Poland.

The Belarusian leader noted that the constitutional amendments approved in a vote last month that shed Belarus' neutral status has no relation to nuclear weapons.

GENEVA — The U.N. migration agency estimates that nearly 6.5 million people have now been displaced inside Ukraine, on top of the 3.2 million refugees who have already fled the country.

The estimates from the International Organization for Migration suggests Ukraine is fast on a course in just three weeks toward the levels of displacement from Syria's devastating war – which has driven about 13 million people from their homes both in the country and abroad.

The findings come in a paper issued Friday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It cited the IOM figures as "a good representation of the scale of internal displacement in Ukraine — calculated to stand at 6.48 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine as of March 16."

WASHINGTON — There have been no indications that Russia is moving troops out of Syria to bolster its forces in Ukraine, or that any more than a few Syrian fighters have been recruited to join the war, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East said Friday.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie told reporters that he has seen little change in Russian military activities in Syria. And he added that the U.S. military still has and uses a deconfliction phone line with the Russians in Syria, in contrast to the mixed success the U.S. has had in maintaining such contact in connection with the Ukraine war.

"We can always contact them if we have a problem. They'll always pick up the phone, and we feel that we respond in kind to them," said McKenzie about the Russians, whose forces in Syria support the regime of President Bashar Assad. "That relationship has been very, very professional."

McKenzie, who is retiring after three years at the head of U.S. Central Command, said he also has seen no indication that Russia is moving any troops or assets from Syria or central Asian countries such as Tajikistan, to Ukraine. And he said he also has seen no evidence that "the temperature is rising" between Russia and the U.S. in Syria as a result of the Ukraine war.

LONDON — Britain's defense intelligence chief says Russia is shifting to a "strategy of attrition" after failing to reach its goals in the invasion of Ukraine.

Chief of Defense Intelligence Lt. Gen. Jim Hockenhull says Russian forces have changed their approach after failing to take major Ukrainian cities during the three-week invasion.

He said Friday that the battle of attrition "will involve the reckless and indiscriminate use of firepower. This will result in increased civilian casualties, destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and intensify the humanitarian crisis."

Western officials say Russian forces have enough artillery ammunition to keep up the bombardments for weeks or even longer.

Despite the fact that there have been thousands of Ukrainian civilian casualties, Russia denies targeting civilians during what it calls a special military operation in Ukraine.

ROME — For the second time this week, Italy's financial police have carried out measures to freeze luxurious assets of Russian magnates being sanctioned by the European Union for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The latest action on Friday involved the seaside villa, valued at some 105 million euros (\$116 million) and located in the Sardinian town of Portisco, belonging to Alexei Mordaschov, a steel baron, the Italian government said.

Just a few days earlier, a sprawling real estate complex on Sardinia's coast belonging to Petr Aven, a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, was sequestered. A yacht moored off the Italian Riviera and belonging to Mordaschov was sequestered earlier this month by Italian authorities. That vessel is valued at 27 million euros (\$30 million).

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ATLANTA — NASA Administrator Bill Nelson on Friday played down recent comments by the head of Russia's space agency that the United States would have to use broomsticks to fly to space after Russia said it would stop supplying rocket engines to U.S. companies.

"That's just Dmitry Rogozin. He spouts off every now and then. But at the end of the day, he's worked with us," Nelson told The Associated Press. "The other people that work in the Russian civilian space program, they're professional. They don't miss a beat with us, American astronauts and American mission control."

The war has resulted in canceled spacecraft launches and broken contracts, and many worry Rogozin is putting decades of a peaceful off-planet partnership at risk, most notably at the International Space Station.

NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei is due to leave the International Space Station with two Russians aboard a Soyuz capsule for a touchdown in Kazakhstan on March 30.

NASA has said Vande Hei's homecoming plans remain unchanged.

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping spoke Friday for nearly two hours via a video call as the White House looks to deter Beijing from providing military or economic assistance for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

China's Foreign Ministry was the first to issue a readout of the conversation, deploring "conflict and confrontation" as "not in anyone's interest," without assigning any blame to Russia.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying in a Twitter message called the U.S. position "overbearing."

Ahead of the call, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden would question Xi about Beijing's "rhetorical support" of Putin and an "absence of denunciation" of Russia's invasion.

LVIV, Ukraine — Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show the Russian strike on the Lviv airport Friday destroyed the repair hangar just to the west of the north end of its runway. Firetrucks stood parked amid the rubble.

A row of fighter jets near the hangar appeared intact, though an apparent impact crater sat right in front of them. Two other buildings nearby the hangar also appear to have taken direct hits in the strike, with debris littered around them.

The early morning attack on Lviv's edge was the closest strike yet to the center of the city, which has become a crossroads for people fleeing from other parts of Ukraine and for others entering to deliver aid or fight. The war has swelled Lviv's population by some 200,000.

BERLIN — Switzerland is adopting the latest round of European Union sanctions against Russia targeting luxury goods and banning rating agencies from working with Russian clients.

The Swiss government said Friday that it will echo the EU's fourth package of sanctions imposed on Russia following its attack on Ukraine.

It said that "the ban on the export of luxury goods contained in the new sanctions affects only a small portion of Switzerland's global exports of such goods."

However, it said that "specific companies could be seriously affected," without naming them.

Unlike the EU and the United States, Switzerland has not yet decided whether to remove Russia from its list of "most favored" trading partners.

MARIUPOL, Ukraine — Officials say 130 people have been rescued from the ruins of a theater that served as a shelter when it was blasted by a Russian airstrike Wednesday in the besieged southern city of Mariupol.

Ludmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian parliament's human rights commissioner, said Friday that 130 people had survived the theater bombing.

"As of now, we know that 130 people have been evacuated, but according to our data, there are still

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more than 1,300 people in these basements, in this bomb shelter," Denisova told Ukrainian television. "We pray that they will all be alive, but so far there is no information about them."

ATHENS, Greece — Greece's prime minister is offering to rebuild the maternity hospital in Mariupol that was bombed by Russian forces last week.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis tweeted Friday that "Greece is ready to rebuild the maternity hospital in Mariupol, the center of the Greek minority in Ukraine."

Some 100,000 people of Greek origin were living in the besieged city before the Russian invasion.

Mitsotakis called Mariupol "a city dear to our hearts and symbol of the barbarity of the war."

Associated Press journalists documented the attack and saw the victims and damage firsthand. They shot video and photos of several bloodstained, pregnant mothers fleeing the blown-out maternity ward as medical workers shouted and children cried.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — The Finnish government has begun posting information in Russian about the invasion of Ukraine.

"We ... want to provide Russian speakers with fact-based information from the authorities," the Finnish government tweeted Friday.

The move comes in the face of a Russian propaganda and disinformation campaign that aims to strengthen domestic support for the invasion and undermine the resolve of Ukrainians.

The website of the Finnish government is available in Finnish and Swedish — the Nordic country's two official languages — and in English.

President Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge patriotic rally Friday at a Moscow stadium on the eighth anniversary of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine.

Putin, speaking to a crowd of tens of thousands of people waving Russian flags at the Luzhniki Stadium, praised the Russian military for its actions in Ukraine.

"Shoulder to shoulder, they help and support each other," Putin said in a rare public appearance. "We have not had unity like this for a long time," he added to cheers from the crowd.

Before Putin spoke, bands played patriotic Soviet songs about national identity and speakers praised Putin as fighting "Nazism" in Ukraine, a claim flatly rejected by leaders across the globe.

Some people, including presenters at the event, wore T-shirts or jackets with a "Z" — a symbol seen on Russian tanks and military vehicles in Ukraine and embraced by supporters of the war.

ROME — Pope Francis has denounced the "perverse abuse of power" on display in Russia's war in Ukraine. He is calling for aid to Ukrainians who he said had been attacked in their "identity, history and tradition" and were "defending their land."

Francis' comments, in a message Friday to a gathering of European Catholic representatives, marked some of his strongest yet in asserting Ukraine's right to exist as a sovereign state and to defend itself against Russia's invasion.

It came just days after Francis told the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, that the concept of a "just war" was obsolete since wars are never justifiable and that pastors must preach peace, not politics.

Putin appears at big rally as troops press attack in Ukraine

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge flag-waving rally at a packed Moscow stadium Friday and lavished praise on his troops fighting in Ukraine, three weeks into the invasion that has led to heavier-than-expected Russian losses on the battlefield and increasingly authoritarian rule at home.

Meanwhile, the leader of Russia's delegation in diplomatic talks with Ukraine said the sides have nar-

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rowed their differences. The Ukrainian side said its position remained unchanged.

The invasion has touched off a burst of antiwar protests inside Russia, and the Moscow rally was surrounded by suspicions it was a Kremlin-manufactured display of patriotism. Several Telegram channels critical of the Kremlin reported that students and employees of state institutions in a number of regions were ordered by their superiors to attend rallies and concerts marking the eighth anniversary of Moscow's annexation of Crimea, which was seized from Ukraine. Those reports could not be independently verified.

Elsewhere, Russian troops continued to rain lethal fire on Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and pounded an aircraft repair installation on the outskirts of Lviv, close to the Polish border. Ukrainian officials said late Friday that the besieged southern port city of Mariupol lost its access to the Azov Sea, and Russian forces were still trying to storm the city. It was unclear whether they had seized it.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian forces are blockading the largest cities to create a "humanitarian catastrophe" with the goal of persuading Ukrainians to cooperate. He said the Russians are preventing supplies from reaching surrounded cities in central and southeastern Ukraine.

"This is a totally deliberate tactic," Zelenskyy said in his nighttime video address to the nation, which was recorded outside in Kyiv, with the presidential office behind him.

In a rare public appearance by Putin since the start of the war, he praised Russian troops: "Shoulder to shoulder, they help and support each other," he said. "We have not had unity like this for a long time," he added to cheers from the crowd.

Moscow police said more than 200,000 people were in and around the Luzhniki stadium. The event included patriotic songs, including a performance of "Made in the U.S.S.R.," with the opening lines "Ukraine and Crimea, Belarus and Moldova, it's all my country."

Seeking to portray the war as just, Putin paraphrased the Bible to say of Russia's troops: "There is no greater love than giving up one's soul for one's friends."

Taking to the stage where a sign read "For a world without Nazism," he railed against his foes in Ukraine with a baseless claim that they are "neo-Nazis." Putin continued to insist his actions were necessary to prevent "genocide" — an idea flatly rejected by leaders around the globe.

Video feeds of the event cut out at times but showed a loudly cheering crowd that broke into chants of "Russia!"

Putin's appearance marked a change from his relative isolation of recent weeks, when he has been shown meeting with world leaders and his staff either at extraordinarily long tables or via videoconference.

In the wake of the invasion, the Kremlin has clamped down harder on dissent and the flow of information, arresting thousands of antiwar protesters, banning sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and instituting tough prison sentences for what is deemed to be false reporting on the war, which Moscow refers to as a "special military operation."

The OVD-Info rights group that monitors political arrests reported that at least seven independent journalists had been detained ahead of or while covering the anniversary events in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

High above the conflict, three Russian cosmonauts arrived Friday at the International Space Station wearing bright yellow flight suits with blue accents matching the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Video of one of the cosmonauts taken as the capsule prepared to dock with the space station showed him wearing a blue flight suit. It was unclear what, if any, message the yellow uniforms were intended to send.

When cosmonaut Oleg Artemyev was asked about the yellow suits, he said every crew chooses its own suits, and they had a lot of yellow material they needed to use "so that's why we had to wear yellow."

Since the war started, many people have used the Ukrainian flag and its colors to show solidarity with the country.

Back in Moscow, Putin stood on stage in a white turtleneck and a blue down jacket and spoke for about five minutes. Some people, including presenters at the event, wore T-shirts or jackets with a "Z" — a symbol seen on Russian tanks and other military vehicles in Ukraine and embraced by supporters of the war.

Putin's quoting of the Bible and an 18th-century Russian admiral reflected his increasing focus in recent years on history and religion as binding forces in Russia's post-Soviet society. His branding of his enemies

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as Nazis evoked what many Russians consider their country's finest hour, the defense of the motherland from Germany during World War II.

The rally came as Vladimir Medinsky, who led Russian negotiators in several rounds of talks with Ukraine, said that the sides have moved closer to agreement on the issue of Ukraine dropping its bid to join NATO and adopting a neutral status.

"That is the issue where the parties have made their positions maximally close," Medinsky said in remarks carried by Russian media. He added that the sides are now "halfway" on issues regarding the demilitarization of Ukraine.

Mikhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, characterized the Russian assessment as intended "to provoke tension in the media." He tweeted: "Our positions are unchanged. Ceasefire, withdrawal of troops & strong security guarantees with concrete formulas."

Zelenskyy again appealed to Putin to hold talks with him directly. "It's time to meet, time to speak," he said. "I want to be heard by everyone, especially in Moscow."

In other developments, U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping spoke for nearly two hours in a bid by the U.S. to deter Beijing from providing military or economic assistance for Russia's invasion.

Earlier Friday, one person was reported killed in the missile attack near Lviv. Satellite photos showed the strike destroyed a repair hangar and appeared to damage two other buildings. Ukraine said it had shot down two of six missiles in the volley, which came from the Black Sea.

The early morning attack was the closest strike yet to the center of Lviv, which has become a crossroads for people fleeing from other parts of Ukraine and for others entering to deliver aid or join the fight. The war has swelled the city's population by some 200,000.

Zelenskyy boasted that Ukraine's defenses have proved much stronger than expected, and Russia "didn't know what we had for defense or how we prepared to meet the blow."

But British Chief of Defense Intelligence Lt. Gen. Jim Hockenhull warned that after failing to take major Ukrainian cities, Russian forces are shifting to a "strategy of attrition" that will entail "reckless and indiscriminate use of firepower," resulting in higher civilian casualties and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

In city after city around Ukraine, hospitals, schools and buildings where people sought safety have been attacked. Rescue workers continued to search for survivors in the ruins of a theater that was being used as a shelter when it was blasted by a Russian airstrike Wednesday in Mariupol.

Ludmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Parliament's human rights commissioner, said at least 130 people had survived the theater bombing.

"But according to our data, there are still more than 1,300 people in these basements, in this bomb shelter," Denisova told Ukrainian television. "We pray that they will all be alive, but so far there is no information about them."

Satellite images on Friday from Maxar Technologies showed a long line of cars leaving Mariupol as people tried to evacuate, as well as devastation to homes, apartment buildings and stores.

Early morning barrages also hit a residential building in the Podil neighborhood of Kyiv, killing at least one person, according to emergency services, who said 98 people were evacuated from the building. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said 19 were wounded in the shelling.

Ukrainian officials said a fireman was killed when Russian forces shelled an area where firefighters were trying to put out a blaze in the village of Nataevka, in the Zaporizhzhia region.

Two others were killed when strikes hit residential and administrative buildings in the eastern city of Kramatorsk, according to the regional governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko.

Maj. Gen. Oleksandr Pavlyuk, who is leading the defense of the region around Ukraine's capital, said his forces are well-positioned to defend the city and vowed: "We will never give up. We will fight until the end. To the last breath and to the last bullet."

Syria's Assad visits UAE, 1st trip to Arab country since war

By ALBERT AJI and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

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DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian President Bashar Assad was in the United Arab Emirates on Friday, his office said, marking his first visit to an Arab country since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011.

In a statement posted on its social media pages, the office says that Assad met with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, vice president and prime minister of the UAE and the ruler of Dubai. The two discussed expanding bilateral relations between their countries, it said.

The visit sends the clearest signal yet that the Arab world is willing to re-engage with Syria's once widely shunned president. It comes against the backdrop of the raging war in Ukraine where Assad's main ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin, is pressing on with a military offensive, now in its fourth week, raining lethal fire on Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv. Syria has supported Russia's invasion, blaming the West for having provoked it.

Syria was expelled from the 22-member Arab League and boycotted by its neighbors after the conflict broke out 11 years ago. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in the war, which displaced half of Syria's population. Large parts of Syria have been destroyed and reconstruction would cost tens of billions of dollars.

Arab and Western countries generally blamed Assad for the deadly crackdown on the 2011 protests that evolved into civil war, and supported the opposition in the early days of the conflict.

When asked about Assad's visit to the UAE, U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Washington was "profoundly disappointed and troubled by this apparent attempt to legitimize Bashar Al-Assad, who remains responsible and accountable for the death and suffering of countless Syrians, the displacement of more than half of the pre-war Syrian population, and the arbitrary detention and disappearance of over 150,000 Syrian men, women and children."

Assad has very rarely traveled outside the country during Syria's civil war, only visiting Russia and Iran. Tehran has given the Syrian government billions of dollars in aid and sent Iran-backed fighters to battle alongside his forces — assistance that, along with Russian air power, has helped turn the tide in Assad's favor.

With the war having fallen into a stalemate and Assad recovering control over most of the country thanks to military assistance from his two allies, Arab countries have inched closer toward restoring ties with the Syrian leader in recent years.

The UAE reopened its embassy in Syria in late 2018 in the most significant Arab overture toward the Assad government, though relations remained cold. Last fall, the Emirati foreign minister flew to Damascus for a meeting with Assad, the first visit by the country's top diplomat since 2011. The United States, a close Emirati partner, criticized the visit at the time, saying it would not support any normalization with Assad's government.

A key motive for the overtures by Sunni Muslim countries in the Persian Gulf is to blunt the involvement of their Shiite-led foe, Iran, which saw its influence expand rapidly in the chaos of Syria's war.

The rapprochement, however, could serve both sides.

Syria badly needs to boost relations with oil-rich countries as its economy is being strangled by crippling Western sanctions and as it faces the task of post-war reconstruction. The UAE is also home to thousands of Syrians who work in the Gulf Arab nation and send money to their relatives at home.

The UAE's state-run WAM news agency said the country's de facto ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan welcomed Syria's Bashar al-Assad at his palace in Abu Dhabi.

At the meeting, Sheikh Mohammed expressed his hope "this visit would be the beginning of peace and stability for Syria and the entire region."

The report said Assad briefed Sheikh Mohammed on the latest developments in Syria and the two leaders discussed mutual interests in the Arab world. Assad was reported to have left the UAE later on Friday from Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Mohammed stressed to Assad that Syria remains a "fundamental pillar of Arab security" and that he hopes the UAE can facilitate its development. The leaders also discussed the importance of "the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and withdrawal of foreign forces," the report added.

The similarly vague statement said Dubai's Sheikh Mohammed affirmed the UAE's desire to "discover new paths of constructive cooperation" with Syria and made no reference to the war.

Don't help Russia's invasion, Biden tells China's Xi

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Face to face by video, President Joe Biden laid out to Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday the stiff consequences the Chinese would face from the U.S. if they provide military or economic assistance for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

There was no indication he got any assurance in return.

In fact, Xi blamed the U.S. for the crisis and insisted with a Chinese proverb that the next move was up to Biden:

"He who tied the bell to the tiger must take it off," Xi said, according to a Chinese government readout.

More formally after the nearly two-hour conversation, China's Foreign Ministry deplored "conflict and confrontation" as "not in anyone's interest," but assigned no blame to Russia and said nothing of next steps.

At the White House, press secretary Jen Psaki said, "China has to make a decision for themselves, about where they want to stand and how they want the history books to look at them and view their actions."

She declined to detail possible consequences Biden specified to the Chinese president if his country provides support for the Russian invasion.

But a senior administration official who briefed reporters following the leaders' call said that Biden pointed to the economic isolation that Russia has faced — including economy-battering sanctions and major Western corporations suspending operations — as he sought to underscore the costs that China might suffer.

Xi urged the U.S. and Russia, which have had limited engagement since the Feb. 24 invasion, to negotiate. He noted China's donations of humanitarian aid for Ukraine, while accusing the U.S. of provoking Russia and fueling the conflict by shipping arms to the embattled country. He also renewed China's criticism of sanctions imposed on Russia over the invasion, according to State media. As in the past, Xi did not use the terms war or invasion to describe Russia's actions.

Ahead of the call, Psaki noted Beijing's "rhetorical support" of Putin and an "absence of denunciation" of Russia's invasion.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying pushed back, calling the U.S. administration "overbearing" for suggesting China risks falling on the wrong side of history.

The two leaders also discussed the longer-simmering U.S.-China dispute over Taiwan. In a reminder of China's threat to assert its claim by force, the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Friday, just hours before the Biden-Xi call. The U.S. is legally obligated to ensure the self-governing island democracy can defend itself and treats threats to it with "grave concern."

Planning for the leaders' discussion had been in the works since Biden and Xi held a virtual summit in November, but differences between Washington and Beijing over Russian President Vladimir Putin's prosecution of his three-week-old war against Ukraine were at the center of Friday's conversation.

The U.S.-China relationship, long fraught, has only become more strained since the start of Biden's presidency. Biden has repeatedly criticized China for military provocations against Taiwan, human rights abuses against ethnic minorities and efforts to squelch pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong.

But the relationship may have reached a new low with the Russian invasion.

In the days after Putin deployed Russian forces in Ukraine, Xi's government tried to distance itself from Russia's offensive but avoided the criticism many other nations have leveled at Moscow. At other moments, Beijing's actions have been provocative including amplifying unverified Russian claims that Ukraine ran chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support.

Earlier this week, the U.S. informed Asian and European allies that American intelligence had determined that China had signaled to Russia that it would be willing to provide both military support for the campaign in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the West.

The White House says China has been sending mixed messages. There were initial signs that Chinese

state-owned banks were pulling back from financing Russian activities, according to a senior Biden administration official who insisted on anonymity to discuss internal analyses. But there have also been public comments by Chinese officials who expressed support for Russia being a strategic partner.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan and senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi met in Rome this week for an intense, seven-hour talk about the Russian invasion and other issues.

Ahead of the Rome talks, Sullivan said the U.S. wouldn't abide China or any other country helping Russia work around economy-jarring sanctions inflicted by the U.S. and other allies in response to the invasion.

Sullivan also said the administration determined China knew that Putin "was planning something" before the invasion of Ukraine, but the Chinese government "may not have understood the full extent" of what Putin had in mind.

Xi and Putin met in early February, weeks before the invasion, with the Russian leader traveling to Beijing for the start of the Winter Olympics. The two leaders issued a 5,000-word statement declaring limitless "friendship."

Beijing's leaders would like to be supportive of Russia, but they also recognize how badly the Russian military action is going as an overmatched Ukrainian military has put up stiff resistance, according to a Western official familiar with current intelligence assessments.

The official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Beijing is weighing the potential "reputational blowback" of being associated with the Russian camp. The Chinese response to Russia's request for help is still being formulated, the official said.

Though seen as siding with Russia, China has also reached out to Ukraine, with its ambassador to the country on Monday quoted as saying: "China is a friendly country for the Ukrainian people. As an ambassador, I can responsibly say that China will forever be a good force for Ukraine, both economically and politically."

"We have seen how great the unity of the Ukrainian people is, and that means its strength," Fan Xianrong was quoted by Ukraine's state news service Ukrinform as telling regional authorities in the western city of Lviv, where the Chinese Embassy has relocated to.

State media quoted Xi as saying China-U.S. relations had yet to "emerge from the dilemma created by the previous U.S. administration, but instead encountered more and more challenges," singling out Taiwan as one area in particular.

"If the Taiwan issue is not handled properly, it will have an undermining impact on the relationship between the two countries," Xi reportedly told Biden.

Deshaun Watson changes mind, QB accepts trade to join Browns

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

Deshaun Watson changed his mind. The Browns have their franchise quarterback, one with some extra heavy baggage.

Despite sexual misconduct allegations made by nearly two dozen women against Watson while he was with Houston, Cleveland will make him its starting QB, the face of its organization and the highest-paid player in the NFL.

Watson waived his no-trade clause Friday and accepted a trade to the Browns after previously rejecting the team — a stunning reversal that rocked the NFL and changed the trajectory of two organizations.

In deciding to bring on Watson, the Browns have gone all in to win a Super Bowl. It's a choice they hope not to regret.

The Texans announced that they're agreed to terms with the Browns, one of four teams to actively court Watson this week.

The three-time Pro Bowler, who didn't play last season, had informed the Browns on Thursday that he wasn't coming. However, he had a change of heart, called them Friday and said he was ready to start fresh in Cleveland, said a person who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation.

The Browns are paying a hefty price for Watson. They're sending the Texans first-round draft picks the

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next three years plus a 2023 third-round pick and 2024 fourth-round pick. Houston is shipping Watson and a 2024 fifth-round pick to Cleveland.

"I felt it was the right move for our organization as we head into the new league year focused on building our roster for the 2022 season," Texans general manager Nick Caserio said. "Our priority right now is adding talented players to the foundation we have already put in place over the last 15 months and this trade supports that plan."

The Browns have yet to officially welcome Watson, who posted a photo on Instagram of him wearing a No. 4 Browns jersey and flexing. He wrote: "Cleveland, LETSSSS GOOOO!! #DawgPound Ready To Work!"

He should be happy. Watson's also receiving a five-year, \$230 million guaranteed contract, a record.

Watson will be joining a Cleveland team with plenty of talent, but one that underachieved last season (8-9) and has been in search of a franchise quarterback for years. He became a target of the Browns after a grand jury declined to indict him on sexual misconduct claims made by 22 women.

Watson is still dealing with civil lawsuits from the women, massage therapists who accused him of assault and harassment. He's also possibly facing a suspension by the NFL for violating the league's personal conduct policy.

The trade will not affect the league's inquiry into Watson.

"Any transaction would have no effect on the NFL's ongoing and comprehensive investigation of the serious allegations against Deshaun Watson," league spokesman Brian McCarthy said in an email to AP. "Nor would it affect his status under the Collective Bargaining Agreement and the Personal Conduct Policy.

"If the league's investigation determines that Watson violated the Personal Conduct Policy, discipline may be imposed pursuant to the policy and the CBA."

Watson's arrival in Cleveland is certain to trigger a backlash by some fans, but the Browns are comfortable with his character after doing their own investigation of Watson before committing to chasing him.

The team will undoubtedly feel some heat and deal with tough questions about why they're bringing on Watson despite his off-field issues. As part of their presentation to him in Houston earlier this week, the team outlined a plan to help Watson reshape his image.

Cleveland does have some experience in that area after signing running back Kareem Hunt, who was seen on video shoving a woman when he was with Kansas City. Hunt served an eight-game league suspension for his actions in 2019.

The Browns' public pursuit of Watson angered incumbent starter Baker Mayfield, who requested a trade. Cleveland turned down Mayfield's demand before learning Watson had agreed to waive his no-trade clause and jump to the AFC North.

Mayfield will likely be dealt in the next few days and there are several teams that may be interested in signing the 26-year-old. He struggled last season after injuring his left shoulder in Week 2, but has shown he's capable of being a quality starter after leading the Browns to the playoffs in 2020.

Indianapolis, New Orleans and Seattle are among the possible landing spots for Mayfield.

After the Browns were initially rejected by Watson, the team was trying to figure out how to mend a broken relationship with him. That's no longer necessary as Cleveland's focus will shift to welcoming Watson.

Watson had also been courted by Atlanta, Carolina and New Orleans. Cleveland seemed to have the longest odds to get him, but he was intrigued by their talented roster, which includes star defensive end Myles Garrett and running back Nick Chubb.

It may have also helped Cleveland's chances of getting Watson when the team signed free agent wide receiver Amari Cooper last week.

Browns owners Dee and Jimmy Haslam have spent the entirety of their tenure trying to find the right quarterback. The team had tried almost every possible avenue, signing veteran free agents and drafting college stars like Johnny Manziel and Mayfield, who was selected first overall in 2018.

The Watson trade smacks of some desperation, considering his legal woes but it does give them an elite player capable of matching up with Patrick Mahomes, Josh Allen, Justin Herbert and any of the other top QBs in the AFC.

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Watson had originally demanded the Texans trade him after the 2020 season, before the sexual misconduct accusations.

Cleveland had a chance to draft the former Clemson star in 2017, but twice passed on him. They didn't overlook him this time, and may have finally solved a position that confounded the team since its expansion rebirth in 1999.

Watson had his best season in 2020, leading the league with 4,823 yards passing along with 33 touchdowns.

Texas beats Hokies 81-73 for 1st NCAA tourney win since 2014

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Texas' Marcus Carr says he doesn't leave the gym on most practice days until he makes at least one halfcourt shot.

"Sometimes it takes me one rep," Carr said. "Sometimes it takes me 11. However many it takes."

Practice made perfect for Carr on Friday.

Carr beat the halftime buzzer by banking in a shot from roughly 60 feet away to put Texas ahead for good in an 81-73 victory over Virginia Tech that gave the Longhorns their first NCAA Tournament victory since 2014.

The sixth-seeded Longhorns (22-11) advance to a second-round East Region game Sunday against No. 3 seed Purdue (28-7). The Boilermakers trounced Yale 78-56 on Friday.

"Just so happy for our guys that never won a game in a tournament, never been in the tournament," Texas coach Chris Beard said. "This whole deal's about our players. I think after the season it will be a chance to reflect, but we're in this tournament to win six games."

After Virginia Tech's Storm Murphy made two free throws with 2.1 seconds left in the first half to give the Hokies a 32-31 lead, Carr got about one-third of the way up the court before firing away.

Carr had taken just a couple of steps beyond the 3-point arc on the opposite end of the floor and hadn't even reached the "S" on the "March Madness" logo when he launched his shot.

"Anybody who knows me knows I shoot that shot a lot," said Carr, who had 15 points, nine assists and only one turnover. "It wasn't really a surprise when it went in."

Carr's coach vouched for him.

"He was able to get two dribbles and get a pretty high-percentage shot," Beard said. "It's not a 50% shot, but for Marcus that might be a 20% shot. He can make one out of five from that area."

Texas built on the momentum and led by 17 with 5 1/2 minutes left. Virginia Tech's Hunter Cattoor sank a 3-pointer with 45 seconds left to cut Texas' lead to 76-69, but the Hokies couldn't get any closer.

Andrew Jones scored 21 points to lead five Texas players in double figures as the Longhorns shot 10 of 19 from 3-point range. Timmy Allen had 14, Christian Bishop 11 and Courtney Ramey 10 to go along with Carr's 15.

The Longhorns ended a five-game NCAA Tournament losing streak. They were seeking to improve those postseason fortunes last year when they hired Beard, a former Texas student manager who led Texas Tech to the national championship game in 2019.

Beard improved to 5-0 in NCAA Tournament first-round games.

"We basically set it up for our guys as we've got to go beat one of the best teams in the country in the first round," Beard said. "So this will be a confidence builder as the tournament goes on because I do think we just beat one of the best teams in the tournament. We'll have to go through several teams like this."

Virginia Tech's Sean Padulla scored 19 points, with 13 coming in the last 4 1/2 minutes. Keve Aluma had 15 and Cattoor added 12 as Virginia Tech lost for just the third time in 16 games.

The 11th-seeded Hokies (23-13) had played their way into the NCAA field by winning their first Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament title last week.

"At the end of the day when you look at the big picture, when you look back, we're the first team at Virginia Tech to ever be ACC champs, so no one will ever be able to take that away from us," Cattoor said.

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"The relationships we build with each other and the coaching staff, it's more about life, it's not all about basketball. The relationships we take away from this, growing as humans, I'll be forever grateful for it."

KEY STAT

Heading into this game, Virginia Tech was ranked third in 3-point percentage (.393), while Texas was ranked 250th (.323). Yet the Longhorns outscored the Hokies 30-12 from beyond the arc as Virginia Tech went 4 of 12 on 3-point attempts.

BIG PICTURE

Texas: Beard overhauled his roster by bringing in plenty of transfers, and those newcomers made an impact Friday. Carr played at Minnesota last season. Allen played at Utah. Creighton transfer Bishop scored 11 points. But it was a holdover from former coach Shaka Smart's tenure who led the team in scoring. Jones shot 5 of 7 from 3-point range and had 17 points by halftime.

Virginia Tech: This marks the second straight first-round NCAA Tournament loss for the Hokies, who fell to Florida in overtime last season. ... In the second half, the Hokies had nine turnovers and allowed Texas to shoot 64% from the floor.

UP NEXT

Texas will be trying to reach the Sweet 16 for the first time since a 2008 regional final appearance when it faces Purdue on Sunday.

Notre Dame keeps rolling, beats Alabama 78-64 in 1st round

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Maybe playing tired suits Notre Dame.

Cormac Ryan scored a career-high 29 points, including seven 3-pointers, and 11th-seeded Notre Dame recovered from a grueling First Four win and late-night flight to beat sixth-seeded Alabama 78-64 on Friday in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

"I mean, I was just letting it fly. And when you have it rolling, you have it rolling. So picked a good night for it, I guess," Ryan said. "To be able to grit it out — people were saying double overtime, long flight, legs are going to be tired. We were gunning and we were ready to go."

Ryan, was 10 of 13 from the field and made a career-best seven of his nine tries from beyond the arc for Notre Dame (24-10), which beat Rutgers in double OT Wednesday night in Dayton, Ohio, to earn a trip to San Diego.

Even though Notre Dame goes with only a seven-player rotation, Ryan said the cross-country flight and playing two games in less than 48 hours might have been a benefit.

"We kind of rolled into California with that hunger. And I think the quick trip actually helped us because we were still hungry. It was like we just got off the court; put us back on, we're ready," he said.

Blake Wesley had 18 points while Paul Atkinson Jr. added 13 points and eight rebounds. The Fighting Irish missed six of their first seven shots but went 28 of 47 the rest of the way.

"I mean, gotta give Notre Dame a lot of credit to play in a play-in game and go double overtime, fly in here as late as they did, play with one-day rest and give the energy they got," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "We talk in college about veteran college players. I think it showed today."

Keon Ellis led Alabama (19-14) with 16 points and Jaden Shackelford scored 13. Junior point guard Jahvon Quinerly suffered a left knee injury early in the game and did not return. His knee was in an immobilizing brace when he came back to the Crimson Tide bench.

Oats said the injury was "significant," adding that Quinerly would have an MRI after the team returns to Tuscaloosa.

"He's a big piece of what we do. We definitely felt the impact of losing him," Ellis said.

Notre Dame will play Texas Tech Sunday in the second round of the West Region. The third-seeded Red Raiders breezed to a 97-62 victory over Montana State earlier Friday.

The Irish had a 41-36 advantage at halftime. Alabama scored six straight points early in the second half to get within 44-42 before Notre Dame pulled away with a 17-5 run. Ryan and Wesley each had six points during the spurt and Atkinson added five.

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Ryan's final 3-pointer, an off-balance shot from the corner, rolled around and went in as the shot clock expired to put the Irish up 66-55 with 4:55 remaining. Notre Dame's largest lead was 16 points (76-60) with under two minutes remaining.

Coach Mike Brey — who's in his 13th tournament with Notre Dame and 15th overall — credited his team's adjustments in the second half, when it held Alabama to 12 of 32 from the field. Alabama had two scoring droughts of more than three minutes.

"Really the last 30 minutes we defended. We couldn't guard them early. And certainly they're a different team when Quinerly goes down, and it looked bad and I feel for him because he's a heck of a guard," Brey said. "I'm thrilled about our resiliency and belief on wanting to survive and advance in this tournament."

Neither team led by more than four points the first 18 minutes before Notre Dame scored nine straight points to grab a 41-33 advantage with 40 seconds left in the first half. Nate Laszewski had the first five points during the run, including a layup to give the Irish the lead. Juwan Gary hit a 3-pointer to draw Alabama within five points at halftime.

QUINERLY'S INJURY

Quinerly was driving to the basket when his knee appeared to buckle three minutes into the game. The junior guard was moaning in pain as he was clutching his knee while being looked at by trainers. He was then taken to the locker room without putting much weight on his left leg.

"I feel for Jahvon. I thought he was ready to play. He had a great few weeks of practice," Oats said.

Quinerly was second on the Crimson Tide in scoring, averaging 13.8 points. Freshman JD Davison took over at the point and scored 11 points in 36 minutes.

BIG PICTURE

Notre Dame: The Irish made 10 3-pointers, the sixth time in the past 11 games they've reached double digits in 3s.

Alabama: The Tide made consecutive NCAA appearances for the first time since 2006 but ended their season with four straight losses.

UP NEXT

Notre Dame seeks its first Sweet 16 appearance since 2016, when it made the Elite Eight.

Disney 'regrets' performance by visiting school drill team

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (AP) — Officials at Walt Disney World said Friday that a performance by a visiting Texas high school drill team that used American Indian stereotypes, including chants of "scalp them," doesn't reflect the Florida resort's values.

The performance this week in the Magic Kingdom by the "Indianettes" drill team from Port Neches-Grove High School "did not reflect our core values, and we regret it took place," Disney spokeswoman Jacquie Wahler said in an emailed statement.

An audition tape that the school had provided in order to be selected to perform at the theme park resort was inconsistent with the actual performance, the statement said.

Wahler said new measures have been implemented to prevent that from happening again. She did not elaborate.

In a video of the performance posted on Twitter, members of the drill team are seen tapping their hands over their mouths and whooping, as a drum pounds in the background, in what is stereotypically called a "war cry."

Port Neches-Groves school district Superintendent Mike Gonzales and Indianettes director Cortnie Schexnaider did not immediately return messages seeking comment. However, the district issued a statement to KFDM-TV in Beaumont in which district officials said they are "aware of the concern regarding the performance of our band and Indianettes at Disney World."

"We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our school district. Our district is nearing 100 years old, and our Board of Trustees is committed to always making the best decisions for our students, staff, and the communities of Port Neches and Groves," the district stated.

According to a PN-G spokesperson, this is the 8th time that PN-G performed the routine at Disney World. The spokesperson says Disney has never asked ahead of time about the planned performance.

Port Neches is a petrochemical refining center located near the Gulf Coast about 13 miles (20 kilometers) southeast of Beaumont, Texas. The Indianettes have been a fixture at Port Neches-Groves High School for more than 50 years, according to the school district website.

Brazil judge bans messaging app Telegram for ignoring ruling

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A justice of Brazil's Supreme Court on Friday ordered the shutdown of messaging app Telegram nationwide, arguing it has not cooperated with authorities. The move is a blow to President Jair Bolsonaro, who has more than 1 million followers on the platform and defends it as a key tool for his reelection bid in October.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes said in his ruling that Telegram repeatedly ignored requests from Brazilian authorities, including a police request to block profiles and provide information linked to blogger Allan dos Santos, an ally of Bolsonaro's accused of spreading falsehoods.

The justice added that Telegram has also failed to name a legal representative in Brazil, unlike its competitors.

Many of Bolsonaro's supporters have turned to Telegram since the messaging app's competitor WhatsApp changed its policies on message sharing. The president has often accused de Moraes and Brazil's top court of rulings that go against freedom of speech.

De Moraes, who chairs a probe on misinformation in Brazilian social media, issued a warrant for dos Santos' arrest in October. The activist, a fugitive now based in the United States, has remained active on Telegram, though.

"The Telegram platform, at every possible opportunity, failed to heed judicial orders in a total disregard for the Brazilian judiciary," de Moraes said in his ruling. He added the suggestion to shut down the app came from federal police.

Dos Santos said de Moraes' decisions "are based solely on his will."

"At some point he will have to stop or be stopped," the blogger told Jovem Pan, a radio and TV channel which broadcasts Bolsonaro's live transmissions every week. "I don't believe the Brazilian people will accept these atrocities."

The justice said in his ruling that "the complete and full suspension of the works of Telegram in Brazil will remain until the judicial decisions previously issued are carried out."

De Moraes gave Apple, Google and Brazilian phone carriers five days to block Telegram from their platforms.

Bolsonaro and his allies have encouraged followers to join Telegram since January of 2021 — the same month former U.S. President Donald Trump, an inspiration for the Brazilian leader, was permanently suspended from Twitter in the wake of the riot at Capitol Hill.

In January, Bolsonaro was asked by supporters what he thought about investigations into Telegram.

"It is cowardice what they are trying to do to Brazil," he responded.

One of the messaging app's founders, Pavel Durov, said in a statement that Telegram "had an issue with emails going between our telegram.org corporate addresses and the Brazilian Supreme Court. As a result of this miscommunication, the Court ruled to ban Telegram for being unresponsive."

"I apologize to the Brazilian Supreme Court for our negligence. We definitely could have done a better job," Durov said. "We complied with an earlier court decision in late February and responded with a suggestion to send future takedown requests to a dedicated email address. Unfortunately, our response must have been lost, because the Court used the old general-purpose email address in further attempts to reach us."

Durov also asked the court to "consider delaying its ruling for a few days at its discretion to allow us to remedy the situation by appointing a representative in Brazil and setting up a framework to react to future

pressing issues like this in an expedited manner.”

The service remained operational Friday evening.

In his ruling, de Moraes also mentions Telegram failing to remove misleading content from the president’s page on the country’s electronic voting system.

While Bolsonaro’s Telegram page has more than 1 million followers, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the frontrunner to October’s presidential elections, has 48,000.

Members of Brazil’s electoral authority have expressed concern about Telegram’s long silence amid Bolsonaro’s unfounded claims that the election will be rigged unless printed receipts for votes are instituted.

The latest request from Brazilian authorities seeking Telegram’s cooperation came on March 9, when the chairman of the electoral authority wrote to Durov.

His predecessor also tried to reach Telegram leaders on Dec. 16. Brazil’s electoral authority said at the time that Durov was not found at the company’s headquarters in the United Arab Emirates.

Brazil’s justice minister Anderson Torres criticized the decision on Twitter, saying the Bolsonaro administration will “immediately seek a solution to reestablish the people’s right to use whatever social media they like.”

One of Bolsonaro’s closest allies, lawmaker Carla Zambelli, called de Moraes “a tyrant” for the decision.

Fact-checking website Aos Fatos, which monitors dozens of pro-Bolsonaro social media channels, said several supporters of the Brazilian president were sharing tutorials on how to install virtual private networks (VPNs) so they could continue using Telegram. Other Bolsonaro promised to keep sharing their messages on messaging app Gettr, which was founded by former Trump adviser Jason Miller.

Firing-squad executions get the greenlight in South Carolina

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina has given the greenlight to firing-squad executions, a method codified into state law last year after a decade-long pause in carrying out death sentences because of the state’s inability to procure lethal injection drugs.

The state Corrections Department said Friday that renovations have been completed on the death chamber in Columbia and that the agency had notified Attorney General Alan Wilson that it was able to carry out a firing-squad execution.

Lawmakers set about tweaking state law to get around the lethal injection drug situation. Legislation that went into effect in May made the electric chair the state’s primary means of execution while giving inmates the option of choosing death by firing squad or lethal injection, if those methods are available.

During South Carolina’s lengthy debate, Democratic state Sen. Dick Harpootlian — a prosecutor-turned-criminal-defense lawyer — introduced the firing squad option. He argued that it presented “the least painful” execution method available.

“The death penalty is going to stay the law here for a while,” Harpootlian said. “If we’re going to have it, it ought to be humane.”

According to officials, the death chamber now also includes a metal chair, with restraints, in the corner of the room in which inmates will sit if they choose execution by firing squad. That chair faces a wall with a rectangular opening, 15 feet away, through which the three shooters will fire their weapons.

State officials also have created protocols for carrying out the executions. The three shooters, all volunteers who are employees of the Corrections Department, will have rifles loaded with live ammunition, with their weapons trained on the inmate’s heart.

A hood will be placed over the head of the inmate, who will be given the opportunity to make a last statement.

According to officials, Corrections spent \$53,600 on the renovations.

South Carolina is one of eight states to still use the electric chair and one of four to allow a firing squad, according to the Washington-based nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center.

In June, the South Carolina Supreme Court blocked the planned executions of two inmates by electro-

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cution, saying they cannot be put to death until they truly have the choice of a firing squad option set out in the state's newly revised law.

The high court halted the scheduled executions of Brad Sigmon and Freddie Owens, writing that officials needed to put together a firing squad so that inmates could really choose between that or the electric chair. The state's plans, the court wrote in an unanimous order, were on hold "due to the statutory right of inmates to elect the manner of their execution."

Now that a firing squad has been formed, the court will need to issue a new order for any execution to be carried out.

The executions were scheduled less than a month after the passage of the new law. Prisons officials had previously said they still couldn't obtain lethal injection drugs and have yet to put together a firing squad, leaving the 109-year-old electric chair as the only option.

Attorneys for the two men argued in legal filings that death by electrocution is cruel and unusual, saying the new law moves the state toward less humane execution methods. They have also said the men have the right to die by lethal injection — the method both of them chose — and that the state hasn't exhausted all methods to procure lethal injection drugs.

Lawyers for the state have maintained that prisons officials are simply carrying out the law, and that the U.S. Supreme Court has never found electrocution to be unconstitutional.

South Carolina's last execution took place in 2011, and its batch of lethal injection drugs expired two years later. There are 37 men on the state's death row.

Tennessee, Michigan square off with Sweet 16 berth at stake

By GARY B. GRAVES AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Tennessee has already gone farther in the NCAA Tournament than the Vols did in their last appearance.

They opened with an opening-game rout that allowed the Volunteers to get comfortable. Just not too comfortable.

The road gets tougher Saturday in a South Region second-round matchup against Michigan (18-14). The third-seeded Volunteers (27-7) are looking to reach their first Sweet 16 in three years.

"I think we're playing really good basketball right now," Vols guard Josiah-Jordan James said Friday. "I think we have a lot of areas that we can get better in. That's the exciting part about it."

And they'll need to play well.

The 11th-seeded Wolverines figure to be a tough out, especially if guard Devante' James is available after sitting out Michigan's opening-round win in concussion protocol. It's the first meeting in the tournament between the teams since 2014 when Michigan won the Midwest Region semifinal.

James practiced with the team after missing Michigan's 75-63 victory over No. 6 Colorado State. Coach Juwan Howard said his availability will be a game-time decision and added that he'd be "on his knees praying" for him to ready.

Just seeing James on the floor was encouraging enough for Michigan players.

"It's not easy for a lot of guys, so it was great to see him back," Wolverines guard Jace Howard said. "Felt like we were a full team again and made us ready for (Saturday) even more."

The upside to James' absence was seeing players such as guard Frankie Collins fill the void with a career effort. He made 6 of 7 shots for 14 points and grabbed six rebounds, helping the Wolverines rally past the Rams after trailing at halftime.

Michigan's 60% shooting after halftime helped fuel the comeback, though not as much as its defense. Colorado State shot just 29% in the final 20 minutes and finished 35% overall.

Their aim is duplicating that performance against Tennessee, which has won eight in a row and clicked in nearly every phase to blow out Longwood 88-56 on Thursday.

The Vols never trailed as Santiago Vescovi sank six 3-pointers for 18 points to lead five players in double figures. Tennessee also clamped down defensively in holding Longwood to 39% shooting, the ninth time

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in 10 games it has held an opponent below 40%.

Michigan presents a size challenge with 7-foot-1 Hunter Dickinson, who could be more of a factor if James is available to open up the court.

"I think the versatility and the fact that they have some shooters around those guys, you can't just dare them to shoot the ball, you just can't," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said. "The biggest thing is they know exactly what they're looking for and exactly how they want to play. They're an unselfish team. I don't think they would still be playing if they weren't."

Neither would Tennessee, which effectively shared the ball with a school tournament-record 29 assists in its opener.

The Vols know the challenge they face, but are playing with confidence.

"We have a couple more games to win," guard Zakai Zeigler said. "We want bigger and better things."

Villanova breezes past Delaware 80-60 in NCAA 1st round

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Villanova's hangover from another Big East title lasted maybe 10 minutes. Once the Wildcats found their footing, they ran away from scrappy Delaware.

Justin Moore scored 21 points, Collin Gillespie added 14 and second-seeded Villanova had little trouble with the 15th-seeded Blue Hens, breezing to an 80-60 victory in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday.

The Wildcats (27-7) used a 35-10 surge spanning the end of the first half and the start of the second to turn an eight-point deficit into a blowout. Villanova will meet Ohio State in the second round of the South Region on Sunday. The No. 7-seeded Buckeyes downed Loyola Chicago 54-41 in the first of four games at PPG Paints Arena.

Villanova coach Jay Wright worried about his team's legs after watching conference rivals Marquette and UConn flame out of the NCAAs quickly during first-round losses on Thursday.

"They just looked worn down," Wright said.

The Wildcats, not so much. While Delaware (22-13) showed some early fight against its northern neighbor in a meeting of programs separated by 43 miles on the map and considerably more in the college basketball landscape, it wasn't nearly enough.

Villanova overwhelmed the Blue Hens under a barrage of 3-pointers to begin the school's quest for a third national title in seven seasons.

"I think over the course of the game, we decided to get a feel for what (Delaware) wanted to do, and we got comfortable with making plays for each other, and that's what it's all about," said Wildcats forward Jermaine Samuels, who had 15 points and nine rebounds.

Jyare Davis led Delaware with 17 points but over the course of 40 minutes, Villanova exposed the considerable gulf between schools that are bitter rivals in several sports, just not basketball.

Jameer Nelson Jr., the son of the former Saint Joseph's and NBA star who regularly battled the Wildcats as part of the city's Big Five, was limited to eight points on 3-of-13 shooting.

"(We) put a little scare in them," Delaware coach Martin Ingelsby said. "I think the end of the first half and early part of the second half they were able to extend that lead and we were battling uphill from there."

Early on, the Colonial Athletic Association champion Blue Hens didn't show any nerves or fear against one of the sport's bluebloods.

Graduate forward Dylan Painter, who began his career at Villanova, gave Delaware an early 15-8 lead, easing any anxiety that the stage would be too big. Guard Kevin Anderson made it a point to drink in the moment. Maybe a little too much.

"As soon as we started appreciating it, they started hitting 3s," Anderson said. "I think we appreciated it too long."

Gillespie got Villanova on track with a pair of 3-pointers, Samuels and Daniels added one each and the Wildcats closed the first half with a 13-2 burst to take a 35-25 lead into the break.

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Villanova's momentum carried over to the second half. Moore poured in 12 points in the first five minutes — including three 3-pointers — as the Wildcats' advantage quickly ballooned to 20 points. Delaware would not get within 16 the rest of the way.

COSTLY COLLISION

Villanova assistant Dwayne Anderson, a captain on the 2009 Wildcats team that reached the Final Four, had to be helped off the floor after getting slammed into by Samuels while Samuels was chasing down a loose ball with the Wildcats up big late in the second half.

Asked if maybe he could have eased up with the Wildcats comfortably in front, Samuels shook his head. "That's not what we do here at Villanova," Samuels said. "We're going to play a full 40 (minutes) no matter what's going on around us."

FIRST FAN

President Joe Biden filled out his brackets, picking Delaware over Gonzaga in the final to win the NCAA Tournament. No surprise, he's a proud alum.

Biden also selected Delaware to win the women's tournament.

"I'm proud of all the athletes competing in this year's NCAA tournament," he wrote on Twitter. "But at the end of the day, I'm a @UDelaware guy. Go Blue Hens!"

Stocks extend rally, notching biggest weekly gain since 2020

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Stocks recovered from an early slide on Wall Street and closed broadly higher Friday, notching their biggest weekly gain in 16 months.

The S&P 500 rose for the fourth straight day, adding 1.2% to a streak that included back-to-back days with gains of 2%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.8%, while the Nasdaq composite rose 2%. The three indexes each had their best week since November 2020.

This week's market rally came as Wall Street drew encouragement from the Federal Reserve, which announced its first interest rate hike since 2018 and signaled several more to come. The move, which had been widely expected for months by the market, sends a message that the central bank is focused on fighting the highest inflation in decades. Fed Chair Jerome Powell also stressed confidence that the economy is strong enough to withstand higher interest rates.

The Fed's action and economic outlook helped give markets a better sense of what to expect going forward, said Bill Northey, senior investment director at U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

"This resulted, to a certain extent, in a relief in the stock market that has ridden that over the course of the past several days," he said.

Stocks also got a boost as the price of U.S. crude oil, which briefly topped \$130 a barrel last week amid concerns that the conflict in Ukraine will squeeze energy markets, eased briefly below \$94 a barrel on Wednesday and has since been hovering below \$110 a barrel.

The S&P 500 rose 51.45 points to 4,463.12, bringing its weekly gain to 6.2%. The Dow gained 274.17 points to 34,754.93, and the Nasdaq added 279.06 points to 13,893.84.

Smaller company stocks also gained ground. The Russell 2000 index rose 21.12 points, or 1%, to 2,086.14.

The broader market has been volatile over the last few weeks as investors consider a number of concerns including inflation and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Major indexes are down for the year in a sharp reversal from solid gains over the last several years.

"That macro picture is not going to change, it's going to take weeks and months," said Jason Draho, head of asset allocation for the Americas at UBS Global Wealth Management. "Nothing in the past few days is going to alter that."

Russia's invasion Ukraine has weighed heavily on markets as investors try to gauge how the conflict could impact global economic growth. Markets in Europe have been particularly sensitive to the war and were mostly lower on Friday. Oil prices have been extremely volatile and U.S. benchmark crude oil remains above \$100. Energy prices were relatively stable on Friday, with U.S. crude oil settling at \$104.70 per barrel

and Brent crude, the international standard, settling at \$107.93 per barrel.

The ongoing war in Ukraine continues to drive sentiment after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for more help for his country after days of bombardment of civilian sites. Wall Street is also still concerned about rising interest rates, along with surging COVID-19 cases in China and Europe.

High energy prices are only adding to worries about inflation and whether the squeeze on consumers will eventually crimp spending and economic growth.

Rising inflation has prompted central banks to rethink their low interest-rate policies. The Bank of England has been one of the most aggressive, and it raised its key interest rate on Thursday for the third time since December. The Federal Reserve announced a 0.25% increase on its key interest rate on Wednesday. It is the first rate hike since 2018 and is expected to be followed by more this year as the Fed tries to tame inflation.

Friday's gains were broad. Technology and communication stocks, retailers, automakers and other companies that rely on consumer spending helped lift the market. Chipmaker Nvidia climbed 6.8%, Facebook parent Meta rose 4.2% and Tesla rose 3.9%. Only utilities stocks fell.

Bond yields fell. The yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 2.14% from 2.19% late Thursday.

Several stocks made big moves after releasing their latest financial results and updates. FedEx fell 4% after its fiscal third-quarter earnings fell short of Wall Street forecasts. U.S. Steel slid 4.6% after giving investors a disappointing profit forecast.

US education secretary to Florida LGBTQ kids: Got your back

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — In another clash between President Joe Biden's administration and Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona spoke with LGBTQ students to say the federal government supports them even if the governor does not.

Cardona's call Thursday with students, parents and teachers was a response to Florida legislation opponents call the "don't say gay" bill, which forbids instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade. The Legislature passed the bill and DeSantis is expected to sign it.

"The goal here is not to create division. We just want these kids to be able go to school, learn, get the support that they need. All parents want that for their children," Cardona said in a phone interview Friday. "We want to support all students, including our gay and transgender students, and they needed to hear that directly from me."

The "don't say gay" bill was one of several DeSantis pushed during the legislative session that many saw as a culture war he was creating to galvanize a conservative base as he considers running for president in 2024.

The bill states: "Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards." Parents would be able to sue districts over violations.

DeSantis has been outspoken in his support, saying that as a father of three young children, he doesn't want them to be "sexualized" in kindergarten.

"We would say to Secretary Cardona the same thing we would say to anyone else with concerns about the bill — they should read it carefully in its final form, and not be misled by false media narratives," DeSantis spokeswoman Christina Pushaw said in an email. "Developmentally appropriate education, which means no sex and gender theory instruction in grades K-3, promotes kids' emotional well being."

DeSantis has clashed with the Biden administration on a number of issues, from the coronavirus pandemic to immigration.

People on the call with Cardona said DeSantis is pushing backwards acceptance of LGBTQ people. They described the legislation as unnecessary and divisive.

"I wish our governor was as supportive as our secretary of education," said Jennifer Solomon, a Miami-

Dade County parent of a lesbian and a non-gender conforming 11-year-old son. "He has our back. He's going to do everything he can from the federal level to make sure that our kids are still going to be protected and respected."

Madeline Kopka, an 18-year-old high school student from Tallahassee, also was on the call.

"He told us about how he hates the bill that passed this past session and he will fight with us," she said. "It's going to kill children."

She said for many LGBTQ children, trusted teachers can be a source of comfort to discuss their feelings.

"A lot of them can't go home to their family and express who they really are. I think it's a big problem and we're just going back in time and it's horrible," she said. "I really don't understand why (DeSantis) is doing this."

Cardona declined to speculate on DeSantis' motives, but did say the bill would have a negative effect on students.

"I had one parent tell me he's using students as political pawns," Cardona said. "I don't know the motive; I will tell you the impact is creating a sense of fear and despair at a time when they need the most support."

He called DeSantis' push for the legislation "sad."

"It's an intentional effort to create division in our schools," Cardona said. "Our country needs unity now, not division."

Arkansas deputy convicted in teen's death, gets year in jail

CABOT, Ark. (AP) — A former Arkansas deputy was convicted Friday of negligent homicide and sentenced to a year in jail for fatally shooting an unarmed white teenager whose death last year drew the attention of national civil rights leaders.

Jurors acquitted Michael Davis of the more serious offense of manslaughter while finding him guilty of the misdemeanor charge in the death of 17-year-old Hunter Brittain during a June 23 traffic stop outside Cabot, a city of about 26,000 people roughly 30 miles (48 kilometers) northeast of Little Rock.

The maximum jail term that Davis, a former sergeant with the Lonoke County sheriff's office, faced was one year. Manslaughter is a felony for which he would have faced between three and 10 years in prison. The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported that Davis also was sentenced to a \$1,000 fine.

Davis remains free on bond pending an appeal.

Davis, who is white, told investigators he shot Brittain once in the neck during the stop outside an auto repair shop after the teen exited his truck and reached into the bed of the pickup while failing to comply with Davis' commands to show his hands, according to the arrest affidavit. A passenger and another witness testified they never heard Davis tell the teen to show his hands.

The jury's deliberations, which began Thursday afternoon and resumed Friday morning, lasted less than three hours total.

After the verdict was announced, Brittain's family and friends chanted "justice for Hunter" outside the Army National Guard facility that was used for the trial, which began Tuesday.

Rebecca Payne, Brittain's grandmother, said family members wanted the deputy convicted of the felony to ensure he could not serve as a law enforcement officer again.

"Now what's going to happen? Are people going to have to fear for their lives again?" she told reporters.

Davis was fired by Lonoke County Sheriff John Staley for not turning on his body camera until after shooting Brittain. The footage, presented at the trial, shows only the moments after it happened.

The passenger in Brittain's truck said he and the teen had been working on the pickup's transmission. Brittain's family members have said he was grabbing a container that held antifreeze to place behind the truck's wheel to stop it from rolling backward. Investigators found no evidence of firearms in or near the truck.

Emotionally recounting the shooting, Davis testified Thursday that he thought the teen was grabbing for a gun.

"I didn't get into this job to kill people," Davis said.

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Attorneys Ben Crump and Devon Jacob, who represent Brittain's family, criticized the sheriff for not firing Davis over the shooting itself. The civil rights attorneys, who also represented George Floyd's family after Minneapolis police killed him in May 2020, said: "Hunter deserved better."

"The jury's decision is a declaration that an Arkansas law enforcement officer, in full uniform, unlawfully killed Hunter Brittain," the attorneys said in a written statement.

Robert Newcomb, Davis' attorney, said he was pleased jurors didn't find his client guilty of manslaughter but planned to challenge the standard they used to determine whether he was negligent.

"The police officer has a lot more situational awareness of a danger than maybe your or I would be aware of," Newcomb told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

The sheriff said he respected the jury's decision.

"As I have said since day one, this was a tragic event and we all need to continue praying for those involved," Staley said in a statement posted on his office's Facebook page.

Brittain was eulogized last year by the Rev. Al Sharpton, as well as Jacob and Crump. They said the teen's death highlighted the need for interracial support for changes in policing.

American gunmakers help Ukrainians fight back against Putin

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Adrian Kellgren's family-owned gun company in Florida was left holding a \$200,000 shipment of semi-automatic rifles after a longtime customer in Ukraine suddenly went silent during Vladimir Putin's invasion of the country.

Fearing the worst, Kellgren and his company KelTec decided to put those stranded 400 guns to use, sending them to Ukraine's nascent resistance movement to help civilians fight back against a Russian military that has been repeatedly shelling their apartment buildings, schools, hospitals and hiding places.

"The American people want to do something," said Kellgren, a former U.S. Navy pilot. "We enjoy our freedoms, we cherish those things. And when we see a group of people out there getting hammered like this, it's heartbreaking."

Cocoa-based KelTec's donation is a high-profile example of Americans collecting guns, ammunition, body armor, helmets and other tactical gear in response to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's promise to arm his citizens. But many similar grassroots efforts have been snarled by inexperience with the complex web of regulations governing the international shipment of such equipment.

Kellgren, who has dealt with such red tape for years, managed to connect through a Ukrainian neighbor with a diplomat in the Ukrainian Embassy who helped him secure a federal arms export license in just four days. That process can often take months.

This week, as Congress debated whether to send more advanced weapons and defense systems to Ukraine, workers at KelTec's warehouse forklifted four plastic-wrapped pallets containing their 9 mm foldable rifles for delivery to an undisclosed NATO-run facility. From there, the shipment's new recipient, Ukraine's Ministry of Defense, will be responsible for smuggling the weapons into the war zone.

"That's when the real derring-do and heroism begins," Kellgren said.

From California to New York, elected officials, sheriff's departments and nonprofits say they have also collected thousands of sets of body armor and millions of rounds of ammunition for Ukraine.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis kicked off a campaign last week to ask police and sheriff's departments to donate surplus ballistic helmets and other equipment. "We know that it can urgently be used to help stop Putin and save Ukraine," he said.

But hazards abound: One New York City nonprofit leading an effort to collect tactical gear had 400 bulletproof vests stolen before they could be dispatched.

Many of the organizers have no clue how to navigate international arms export rules, which sometimes require approvals from the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense to ship even non-lethal tactical gear. Organizers of one such drive in New York are piggybacking on KelTec's license to export 60 long guns they recently collected.

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"I'm hoping that this movement spreads through the whole United States and every gun store and every gun manufacturer in the U.S. accepts these donations," Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman said at a news conference Friday.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation, a trade group for firearms manufacturers, distributed step-by-step instructions this week to its more than 8,000 members on how to apply for an expedited export license. They also provided a list of specific sniper rifles, pistols and ammo requested by Ukraine's Embassy in Washington.

KelTec hopes to arrange more shipments in the future. Its license allows the export of up to 10,000 weapons and the company has offered the Ukrainians their own production line and weekly shipments.

Details of KelTec's efforts surfaced in a Justice Department filing this week by a Maryland-based real estate lawyer, Lukas Jan Kaczmarek, who said that as a volunteer with the Ukrainian-American Bar Association he is helping Ukraine acquire weapons in tandem with Volodymyr Muzylov, the first secretary at the Ukraine Embassy.

"I expect to work in this capacity for the duration of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and I have not, am not, and shall not receive any monetary compensation for my assistance," Kaczmarek wrote in his registration as a foreign agent of the Zelenskyy government.

KelTec isn't the only arms manufacturer to have answered the call.

Another Florida company, Adams Arms, posted on its Facebook account a video of what it said is a shipment of carbine rifles destined for Ukraine. The company has also started selling T-shirts emblazoned with the iconic final broadcast of a bombarded Ukrainian Border Guard unit that told a Russian warship to "Go (expletive) Yourself!" Proceeds from shirt sales will go to the Ukrainian National Bank's war funds.

While rifles are no match for Putin's firepower of Sukhoi fighter jets and cluster bombs, they can play an important role if the Russians get bogged down in street-to-street combat, retired U.S. Army Major John Spencer said.

The semi-automatic rifles KelTec is shipping are perhaps even more valuable than high-tech, anti-aircraft missiles that require extensive training beyond the reach of most civilians, many of whom have never even held a gun before, he said.

"Every shipment of firearms is critical," said Spencer, an urban warfare analyst at the Madison Policy Forum, a New York-based think tank. "You're giving one more fighter, out of tens of thousands, the opportunity to resist with a simple-to-use weapon."

Kellgren said he's been inspired by the resourcefulness and tenacity of Ukrainian citizens and is confident the rifles he's sending will make a difference.

"The people of Ukraine have had mostly just civilian firearms and they're holding off a superpower," he said. "So the X-factor here not isn't necessarily what equipment you're holding. ... It comes down to the will to fight."

Record-setting defense leads S Carolina women to 79-21 win

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Aliyah Boston scored 10 points and had 12 rebounds while top-seeded South Carolina's stifling defense held Howard to the fewest points ever in a women's NCAA Tournament game in a 79-21 victory Friday.

It was the All-American's 25th straight double-double and one of the biggest cheers of the second half on her home floor came when she pulled down her 10th rebound with 7:10 to go in the third quarter.

The 21 points for the Bison broke the record held by Kansas State which scored 26 in a loss to UConn in 2012. The Gamecocks (30-2) held Howard (21-10) to a NCAA Tournament record low four points in the first half as they took a 44-4 lead.

The defense helped mask an off shooting night for the tournament's overall top seed. The Gamecocks shot 35% from the field and just 8-fo-38 on 3-pointers.

It was a total mismatch, even for a No. 1 versus No. 16 seed. The Gamecocks had 30 offensive rebounds to just six for Howard. The Bison turned the ball over 20 times and were outscored 38 to 8 in the paint.

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Thirteen of the fourteen South Carolina players who got in the game scored.

Iyanna Warren led Howard with eight points.

South Carolina didn't hold Howard scoreless in any quarter. The Gamecocks did that in 2021, shutting out Texas in the fourth quarter of a 62-34 win in last year's NCAA Tournament regional final.

The 21 points matched the fewest South Carolina has allowed in its history.

The Gamecocks play No. 8 seed Miami on Friday. The Hurricanes 78-66.

BIG PICTURE

Howard: The Bison do go home with their first NCAA Tournament win, a 55-51 victory over Incarnate Word in Wednesday's opening round. It's the first tournament win for the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference since South Carolina State won a play-in game in 1983.

South Carolina: There is nothing like an outmatched opponent to help shake off any rust from losing to Kentucky 64-62 in the Southeastern Conference final.

EXPLAINER: Why Putin uses WWII to justify war with Ukraine

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Vladimir Putin on Friday again painted his enemies in Ukraine as "neo-Nazis," even though the country has a Jewish president who lost relatives in the Holocaust and who heads a Western-backed, democratically elected government.

The Holocaust, World War II and Nazism have been important tools for Putin in his bid to legitimize Russia's war in Ukraine, but historians see their use as disinformation and a cynical ploy to further the Russian leader's aims.

Israel has proceeded cautiously, seeking not to jeopardize its security ties with the Kremlin, despite what it considers the sacred memory of the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

Here's a closer look at how the ghosts of the past are shaping today's conflict:

THE WAR THAT DEFINES RUSSIA

World War II, in which the Soviet Union lost an estimated 27 million people, is a linchpin of Russia's national identity. In today's Russia, officials bristle at any questioning of the USSR's role.

Some historians say this has been coupled with an attempt by Russia to retool certain historical truths from the war. They say Russia has tried to magnify the Soviet role in defeating the Nazis while playing down any collaboration by Soviet citizens in the persecution of Jews.

On Ukraine, Russia has tried to link the country to Nazism, particularly those who have led it since a pro-Russian leadership was toppled in 2014.

This goes back to 1941 when Ukraine, at the time part of the Soviet Union, was occupied by Nazi Germany. Some Ukrainian nationalists welcomed the Nazi occupiers, in part as a way to challenge their Soviet opponents, according to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial. Historians say that, like in other countries, there was also collaboration.

Some of Ukraine's politicians since 2014 have sought to glorify nationalist fighters from the era, focusing on their opposition to Soviet rule rather than their collaboration and documented crimes against Jews, as well as Poles living in Ukraine.

But making the leap from that to claiming Ukraine's current government is a Nazi state does not reflect the reality of its politics, including the landslide election of a Jewish president and the aim of many Ukrainians to strengthen the country's democracy, reduce corruption and move closer to the West.

"In terms of all of the sort of constituent parts of Nazism, none of that is in play in Ukraine. Territorial ambitions. State-sponsored terrorism. Rampant antisemitism. Bigotry. A dictatorship. None of those are in play. So this is just total fiction," said Jonathan Dekel-Chen, a history professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

What's more, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is Jewish and has said that three of his grandfather's brothers were killed by German occupiers while his grandfather survived the war. That hasn't stopped Russian officials from comparing Zelenskyy to Jews who were forced to collaborate with the Nazis

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during the Holocaust.

HOLOCAUST DISTORTION

Putin's attempts to stretch history for political motives is part of a trend seen in other countries as well. Most prominently is Poland, where authorities are advancing a nationalist narrative at odds with mainstream scholarship, including through a 2018 law that regulates Holocaust speech.

The legislation sought to fight back against claims that Poland, a victim of Nazi Germany, bore responsibility for the Holocaust. The law angered Israel, where many felt it was an attempt to whitewash the fact that some Poles did kill Jews during the German occupation during World War II. Yad Vashem also came out against the legislation.

Havi Dreifuss, a historian at Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem, said the world was now dealing with both Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion, where countries or institutions were bringing forth their own interpretations of history that were damaging to the commemoration of the Holocaust.

"Whoever deals with the period of the Holocaust must first and foremost be committed to the complex reality that occurred then and not with wars over memory that exist today," she said.

ISRAELI INTERESTS

The Holocaust is central to Israel's national identity. The country comes to a two-minute standstill on its Holocaust remembrance day. Schoolchildren, trade groups and soldiers make regular trips to Yad Vashem's museum. Stories of the last cohort of Holocaust survivors constantly make the news.

Israel has butted heads with certain countries, including Poland, over the memory of the Holocaust. But Israel has appeared more reticent to challenge Putin and his narrative, according to some observers, because of its current security interests. Israel relies on coordination with Russia to allow it to strike targets in Syria, which it says are often weapons caches destined for Israel's enemies.

Israel came under fire from historians in 2020 after a speech by Putin and a separate video presentation at a meeting of world leaders in Jerusalem to commemorate the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, which they said skewed toward his narrative and away from the historical facts.

Israel was conspicuously muted in its criticism of Russia in the lead-up to the war on Ukraine. Commentator Raviv Drucker wrote in the daily Haaretz that Israel was "on the wrong side of history" with its response, which initially sought to support Ukraine while not rattling Russia.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has repeatedly condemned Russia's invasion. But Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has stopped short of issuing a public condemnation of Russia. Through that neutral stance, he has emerged as an unlikely mediator between Kyiv and Moscow.

Vera Michlin-Shapir, a former official at Israel's National Security Council and the author of "Fluid Russia," a book about the country's national identity, said that Israel's regional security concerns were of greater interest than challenging Russia on its narrative.

"Russia can provide weapons systems to our worst enemies and therefore Israel is proceeding very cautiously — you could say too cautiously — because there is an issue here that is at the heart of Israel's security," she said.

Spain changes stance, backs Moroccan rule in Western Sahara

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spain on Friday declared "a new stage" in its strained relations with Morocco after the Spanish prime minister wrote to the Moroccan king, agreeing that having Western Sahara operate autonomously under Rabat's rule is "the most serious, realistic and credible" initiative for resolving a decades-long dispute over the vast African territory.

This marked an enormous departure from Spain's earlier stance of considering Morocco's grip on Western Sahara an occupation. The shift followed months of frosty diplomatic relations and led to the announcement of a flurry of visits by Spanish officials to its southern neighbor.

It also opened up disputes within Spain's left-to-center governing coalition.

The United Nations has continued to regard Madrid as the colonial administrative power for Western

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Sahara, even after its annexation by Morocco immediately after Spain abandoned its African province in 1975. Over the years, the Spanish government's official position, along with the European Union's, has been to support a U.N.-sponsored referendum to settle the territory's decolonization.

But according to a statement issued by Morocco's royal palace on Friday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez recognized "the importance of the Sahara issue for Morocco" in a letter to King Mohammed VI.

"Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for resolving the dispute," the royal palace quoted Sánchez.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares confirmed the Moroccan announcement.

"Today we begin a new stage in our relations with Morocco and finally close a crisis with a strategic partner," he told reporters. He added that the new chapter was "based on mutual respect, compliance with agreements, the absence of unilateral actions and transparency and permanent communication."

Relations between Spain and Morocco hit a historical low last year after Spain secretly hosted for medical treatment the leader of the Polisario Front, which has led the yearning for independence by many Saharawis.

But when media affiliated with the Moroccan government revealed Brahim Ghali's presence in Spain, Rabat allowed 10,000 people to cross the border into Ceuta, a Spanish city on the coast of North Africa. That leashed an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Morocco also recalled its ambassador in Madrid and hasn't reinstated her.

Abdulah Arabi, who represents the Polisario in Spain, said Sánchez "succumbs to the pressure and blackmail" from Morocco by paying "a toll" to mend their damaged political and diplomatic ties. He said having Western Sahara be autonomous under Morocco is only one of many options that should be voted upon in a referendum.

"The solution has to be based on the choice voted by the Saharawi people," Arabi said.

Some 176,000 Saharawi are believed to live in five refugee camps on Algerian soil, east of Western Sahara, in a sweltering desert that many consider no man's land. They rely on humanitarian help and goods from international aid agencies, under the governance of the Polisario Front, which presides over an exiled Sahrawi republic.

In late 2020, their frustration over three decades in limbo led to the end of a cease-fire and new hostilities between Polisario forces and the Moroccan army.

Morocco departed from the agreement to hold a referendum for Western Sahara when it introduced its 2007 proposal of greater autonomy under its sovereignty. Using its leverage in keeping extremism in North Africa at bay and controlling the flow of African migrants towards the EU, Rabat has increasingly scored support for its proposal. First it was backed by France, then in late 2019 by the United States under former President Donald Trump, and more recently from Germany.

Western Sahara sits on vast phosphate deposits and faces rich fishing grounds in the Atlantic Ocean. Thousands of Saharawis live in the Moroccan-controlled areas, where authorities keep a tight grip on dissent according to human rights groups.

A more assertive Morocco has also irked its regional foe, Algeria, a long-standing supporter of the Polisario that late last year severed diplomatic ties with Rabat.

Albares, the Spanish foreign minister, has been invited for meetings in Rabat later this month and officials were scheduling a visit by Sánchez himself, the Moroccan ministry of foreign affairs said.

In its statement, the Spanish government welcomed the invitations and said it wanted to face "common challenges" together with Rabat, "especially cooperation in the management of migratory flows in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic."

According to the Moroccan royal palace, in his message to the king, Sánchez wrote that Spain's goal is "to act with the absolute transparency that corresponds to a great friend and ally."

Sánchez, leader of Spain's Socialists, has been at the helm of a fragile coalition with the far-left United We Can (Unidas Podemos) party, with the two sides often clashing over their views on feminism, social spending and foreign policy.

Soon after Morocco's announcement, the junior partner's most prominent leader, Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, tweeted that she was committed "to the defense of the Saharawi people and to the resolu-

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tions of the United Nations Security Council.”

“Any solution to the conflict must go through dialogue and respect for the democratic will of the Saharawi people,” Díaz added.

Super-valued: Special copy of Marvel Comics #1 fetches \$2.4M

NEW YORK (AP) — A particularly prized copy of the first-ever Marvel comic book fetched more than \$2.4 million in an online auction, the auctioneer said Friday.

Known as the Marvel Comics #1 “pay copy,” it’s “arguably one of the top three comic books in the world of comics collecting,” said Vincent Zurzolo, chief operating officer of ComicConnect. The New York-based auctioneer sold the book Thursday night for a bit under \$2,427,800.

The buyer’s name has not been disclosed. He is “an extremely passionate comic book collector and investor” who also collects other items, Zurzolo said.

Published in 1939, Marvel Comics #1 introduced characters including Sub-Mariner and the original Human Torch, a precursor of the character of the same name that was later a member of Marvel’s Fantastic Four. The book launched what became the Marvel universe of comics, movies, TV shows and video games.

The very well-preserved “pay copy” is especially sought-after because it bears the publisher’s handwritten notes recording how much the multiple writers and artists were paid. For example, Frank R. Paul earned \$25 for drawing the cover of a book now worth nearly 100,000 times as much.

“It’s an incredibly important look into the world and behind the scenes of the creation” of a comics powerhouse, Zurzolo said.

The Marvel universe would eventually include such characters as Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, X-Men, the Avengers, Iron Man, Daredevil and the Hulk, often known on-screen as the Incredible Hulk.

“Without this comic book being made, who knows? Maybe none of that happens,” Zurzolo said. “Maybe the name ‘Marvel Comics’ resonated so much with people, in some way, that that’s what helped to birth all these other things.”

US demands Russia allow access to detained Brittney Griner

By The Associated Press undefined

The United States stepped up its push Friday for consular access to Brittney Griner, the WNBA star who is detained in Russia on allegations of drug smuggling, as a member of a Russian state-backed prison monitoring group said Griner was faring well behind bars.

Ekaterina Kalugina told The Associated Press on Friday that she visited Griner on Monday at the pretrial detention facility outside of Moscow where she’s being held and spoke to her with the help of a cellmate who speaks Russian and English and served as an interpreter.

“Her physical condition is fine, she’s holding up fine, and I’d even say that she is fairly calm and isn’t anxious,” Kalugina said of the Phoenix Mercury star, whose legal ordeal comes amid tension between Russia and the U.S. over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Kalugina is a member of the public monitoring commission that visits lockups in that part of Russia. Such commissions, which operate throughout the country, position themselves as independent but rarely challenge Russian authorities on major issues.

Griner’s lawyers have been visiting her regularly and have brought her care packages that include food and personal items, but she hadn’t met with a U.S. consul yet, Kalugina said.

The State Department issued a statement Friday demanding access to Griner, who plays professionally in Russia during the WNBA offseason.

“We are closely engaged on this case and in frequent contact with Brittney Griner’s legal team. We insist the Russian government provide consular access to all U.S. citizen detainees in Russia, including those in pre-trial detention, as Brittney Griner is,” it said.

“We have repeatedly asked for consular access to these detainees and have consistently been denied

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access," it added.

Griner was detained after arriving at a Moscow airport, reportedly in mid-February, after Russian authorities said a search of her luggage revealed vape cartridges that allegedly contained oil derived from cannabis, which could carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Russian state news agency Tass reported Thursday that a court had extended Griner's pretrial detention to May 19.

Kalugina said that when she met with Griner, Griner made no complaints about her treatment at the facility and said she was getting an hour a day to spend in an exercise yard.

Kalugina said Griner is being held at the facility where an Israeli woman, Naama Issachar, spent time before Russian President Vladimir Putin pardoned her in 2020. Russian authorities said they found hashish in Issachar's luggage while she was transferring between flights in Moscow en route from India to Israel, at the same airport where Griner was detained. Issachar was convicted and sentenced to 7 1/2 years in prison before she was freed after spending nine months behind bars.

Griner's legal team has been quietly seeking her release and has declined to speak out about the case since her arrest was made public earlier this month.

Of the thousands of U.S. citizens arrested and jailed in prisons abroad, a small subset are designated by the U.S. government as wrongfully detained — a category that affords their cases an extra level of government attention and places them under the auspices of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department. The U.S. government has not yet put Griner's case in that category.

Griner is not the only American detained in Russia. Marine veteran Trevor Reed was sentenced to nine years in prison in 2020 on charges alleging that he assaulted police officers in Moscow. And Michigan corporate security executive Paul Whelan is serving a 16-year sentence on espionage charges that his family and the U.S. government have said are false. U.S. officials have publicly called for Moscow to release them.

House passes bill to prohibit discrimination based on hair

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Black people who wear hairstyles like Afros, cornrows or tightly coiled twists should not face bias in society, school and the workplace, the U.S. House said Friday in voting to make it explicit that such discrimination is a violation of federal civil rights law.

"There are folks in this society who think because your hair is kinky, it is braided, it is in knots or it is not straightened blonde and light brown, that you somehow are not worthy of access," Democratic Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, the lead sponsor of the bill, said during debate on the House floor. "Well, that's discrimination."

The House voted 235-to-189 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of hair texture and hairstyles. The bill now goes to the Senate, where its fate is uncertain. President Joe Biden has already said he would sign the bill, known as the Crown Act, into law.

All but 14 Republicans voted against the measure, calling it unnecessary and a distraction. They said protections against hair discrimination already exist in several federal laws.

"This is what the Democrats are focused on," said Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan. "Fourteen months of chaos and we're doing a bill on hair."

But House Democrats noted that, in several instances, judges have dismissed civil rights cases on the basis that the law does not directly cover discrimination on the basis of hair. The House bill makes clear that hair is in fact included.

Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who is the first Somali-American lawmaker in Congress, called the opposition from her GOP colleagues "quite disheartening."

"These members, who are mostly male and white, who have never experienced this kind of discrimination, who don't have the ability to actually speak to it ... really should leave it up to the policymakers who have done the work and who have experienced this level of discrimination," the progressive lawmaker said in an interview Friday.

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In addition to Afros, cornrows and twists, the bill mentions protections for other hairstyles and textures of styles that often draw prejudice against Black people.

Supporters pointed to a 2019 study by Dove that showed that one in five Black women working in office or sales settings have said they had to alter their natural hair. The study also found Black students are far more likely to be suspended for dress code or hair violations.

Coleman, a New Jersey Democrat, began to work on the proposal after two incidents of discrimination made national headlines. One involved Mya and Deanna Cook of Malden, Massachusetts.

In 2017, the twin sisters were told by their high school staff to remove their box braids. They refused, saying the policy was discriminatory and unevenly enforced. School administrators told them that the ban on hair extensions had been designed to "foster a culture that emphasizes education rather than style, fashion or materialism."

For refusing to comply, Deanna, a runner who had qualified for the state finals, was kicked off the school track team. Mya was removed from the softball team and told she couldn't attend the prom.

"It's such a shock that it doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, what you are — when people have hatred towards a certain group, they don't care. They will treat you in that type of way," Deanna Cook told The Associated Press in an interview. "That's why we need the Crown Act because kids are being hurt from this so badly."

The Massachusetts attorney general eventually stepped in and ordered school officials to abandon the rule, which they did. But Mya and Deanna, now college students, said the traumatic experience stays with them.

"You expect the administration of your school to have your back, to be rooting for you and cheering you on," Mya Cook said. "And for us, it was the total opposite — they're trying to tear you down."

In a December 2018 incident in New Jersey, a high school student was forced to choose between forfeiting his wrestling game or cutting off his dreadlocks. Andrew Johnson, then 16, got his hair cut courtside and went on to win the match. But he appeared visibly distraught by what had happened.

"I'll tell you watching that was heartbreaking," Coleman said. "But the fact that he withstood that humiliation, that public humiliation, and immediately went and won that match says so much about that young man's character."

More than a dozen states have already passed legislation aimed at banning race-based discrimination of hair in employment, housing, school, and in the military.

An Associated Press investigation documented how some Black female service members faced discrimination in the ranks, navigating a culture that often labeled them as "aggressive or difficult" and their natural hair as unkempt or unprofessional.

Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey, the lead sponsor in the Senate, said passage of the bill will should ensure that all people can "wear their hair proudly without fear or prejudice."

"No one should be harassed, punished, or fired for their natural hairstyles that are true to themselves and their cultural heritage," Booker said.

EXPLAINER: Driver in Texas crash was 13; is that legal?

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

From the logging roads of the Pacific Northwest to the farm country of the Great Plains and beyond, it's not uncommon for people in rural parts of the U.S. to learn to drive when they're young, sometimes even before they reach their teens.

But the news that a 13-year-old was behind the wheel of a pickup truck that blew a tire and struck a van on a dark, two-lane road in West Texas on Tuesday night, killing nine people — including six members of a New Mexico college's golf teams and their coach — put a renewed focus on the practice.

At a news conference in Odessa, Texas, on Thursday, National Transportation Safety Board Vice Chairman Bruce Landsberg said the dangers of underage driving put it on the agency's "most-wanted list." Investigators have not yet said why the teen was behind the wheel before the crash, which also killed him

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and his 38-year-old father in the truck.

Along with drunk and distracted driving, Landsberg said "youthful driving" and excessive speed on rural roads are among the problems that make highway driving the most dangerous form of transit in the United States.

"Every two days we are killing the equivalent of a Boeing 737 crashing," he said, referring to highway fatalities from multiple causes. "It's long overdue that we start to do something about it."

LEGAL DRIVING AGE VARIES BY STATE

Cash Hogen, a 60-year-old who runs a kitchen and hardware store in Pierre, South Dakota, recalled learning to drive a Ford Bronco "as soon as my feet hit the pedals" — probably around age 10. He'd drive the two-track roads across his family's ranch in western South Dakota to repair barbed-wire fences or for other tasks.

But his father always stressed safety around vehicles and told stories of horrific tragedies to drive home the danger.

"Under no circumstances would I be out on a public road without my learner's permit," he said.

While it's legal for people of any age to drive on private property, such as farms or ranches, public roads where others are at risk is another matter, said William Van Tassel, the manager of driver training programs for AAA's national office.

Every U.S. state has some type of graduated driver's licensing program, by which teens as young as 14 can begin taking driver's education classes or begin driving with an instructor or guardian, he said. Eventually they gain more independence, being allowed to drive on their own or at night, until they have full privileges.

"Certainly in rural areas there's a general trend of lower minimum driving ages," Van Tassel said. "We see a lot of teen drivers have driving experience by the time they come to a formal driver's education course because they've been driving trucks or tractors or other vehicles on the farm. But when it comes to public roads, the laws are pretty clear: You can't be out there until you're legally eligible."

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data, there were 47 fatal crashes and 1,057 injury crashes in 2020 involving drivers 13 or younger.

In 2019, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled was 1.9 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

PERMIAN BASIN SEES HEAVY TRAFFIC ON RURAL ROADS

The cause of Tuesday's crash in Andrews County, Texas, near the New Mexico border, wasn't clear, but federal authorities said Thursday that the 13-year-old was driving a Dodge pickup on a road with a 75 mph speed limit when its front left tire, a spare, blew out.

The truck veered across the center line into an oncoming transit van carrying the golf team from the University of the Southwest, in Hobbs, New Mexico. The boy and his father were killed, along with members of the golf teams and their coach.

Investigators have not yet determined why the boy was behind the wheel, Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Steven Blanco said Friday.

While the area is rural, the surrounding oil fields of the Permian Basin that crosses from West Texas into New Mexico mean the traffic can be anything but, local residents said.

Gib Stevens, 57, of Hobbs, leads trucking operations for an oilfield servicing company. He said he himself started driving trucks at age 12 on dairy farms and quiet farm roads, but he said the road where the accident happened was clearly unsafe.

"For a 13-year-old to be driving that road, that was dumb," Stevens said. "These roads are all oil traffic."

'WORST-CASE SCENARIO' IN TEXAS CRASH

In Texas, one must be 14 to begin classroom instruction for a learner's license and 15 to receive that provisional license to drive with an instructor or licensed adult in the vehicle. Department of Public Safety Sgt. Victor Taylor said it would be illegal for a 13-year-old to drive on public roads.

Van Tassel noted that the crash involved several risk factors besides the youth of the driver: It happened

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at night and on a road with a high speed limit when the spare blew.

Further, teenage boys are one of "the most dangerous segments" of the driving population across the country, said Cathy Chase, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

"This is a worst-case scenario, on top of a worst-case scenario, on top of a worst-case scenario," Chase said.

UN: 6.5 million people displaced inside Ukraine due to war

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. migration agency said Friday that nearly 6.5 million people have been displaced inside Ukraine, on top of the 3.2 million who have already fled the country.

That means that around a quarter of Ukraine's 44 million people have been forced from their homes.

The estimates from the International Organization for Migration suggests Ukraine is fast on course in just three weeks toward the levels of displacement from Syria's devastating war, which has driven about 13 million people from their homes both in the country and abroad.

The findings come in a paper issued Friday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The projections also found that "over 12 million people are estimated to be stranded in affected areas or unable to leave due to heightened security risks, destruction of bridges and roads, as well as lack of resources or information on where to find safety and accommodation."

The paper cited the IOM figures as "a good representation of the scale of internal displacement in Ukraine — calculated to stand at 6.48 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine as of March 16."

UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency, has said fighting that has followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 has sparked Europe's gravest refugee crisis since World War II.

"By these estimates, roughly half the country is either internally displaced, stranded in affected areas or unable to leave, or has already fled to neighboring countries," he said, alluding to Ukraine's population of about 44 million before the war began.

The paper said that 9.56 million people have been displaced by the war so far, as of Wednesday, and another 2.2 million people were considering leaving. IOM estimates that more than 3 million people had fled abroad as of Wednesday.

UNHCR, in its latest figures released Friday, said more than 3.2 million people have fled Ukraine.

Everything you need to know about the 2022 Oscars

NEW YORK (AP) — Final preparations are underway for the 94th Academy Awards and a long awaited return to Hollywood's glamorous normalcy after a muted ceremony and ratings low last year. Here's everything you need to know about the 2022 Oscars, including where to watch the live show, who's expected to win and what the big controversies are this year.

WHEN ARE THE OSCARS?

The Oscars will be held on Sunday, March 27, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. The ceremony is set to begin at 8 p.m. ET and will be broadcast live on ABC.

WHO IS HOSTING THE 2022 OSCARS?

Regina Hall, Amy Schumer and Wanda Sykes are taking the stage to co-host the ceremony, which has been without an emcee for the past three years. Producer Will Packer said each woman brings something different to the show.

WHO IS PRESENTING?

Show producers will continue adding names throughout the week, but at the moment stars expected to hand out awards Oscar night include Lady Gaga, Kevin Costner, Samuel L. Jackson, Zoë Kravitz, Anthony Hopkins, Lily James, Daniel Kaluuya, Mila Kunis, John Leguizamo, Simu Liu, Rami Malek, Lupita Nyong'o, Rosie Perez, Chris Rock, Naomi Scott, Wesley Snipes, Uma Thurman, John Travolta, Yuh-jung Youn, Ruth

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E. Carter, Halle Bailey, Sean "Diddy" Combs, Jamie Lee Curtis, Woody Harrelson, Shawn Mendes, Tyler Perry and Tracee Ellis Ross.

WHICH MOVIES ARE NOMINATED FOR BEST PICTURE AT THE 2022 OSCARS?

The 10 movies competing for best picture this year are: "Belfast"; "CODA"; "Don't Look Up"; "Drive My Car"; "Dune"; "King Richard"; "Licorice Pizza"; "Nightmare Alley"; "The Power of the Dog"; "West Side Story." (Here's the full list of 2022 Oscar nominations.)

WHAT WERE THE MOST SURPRISING OSCAR SNUBS?

There were a lot of surprises Oscar nominations morning.

Some exclusions that stood out include Denis Villeneuve, whose "Dune" got the second most nominations (10) behind "The Power of the Dog" (12) including best picture, but who failed to get a directing nomination for himself.

The best actress category was especially brutal this year, leaving out Lady Gaga for "House of Gucci," Jennifer Hudson for "Respect" and Caitriona Balfe for "Belfast" and Renate Reinsve for "The Worst Person in the World."

WHAT ARE THE PREDICTIONS FOR THE WINNERS ON OSCAR NIGHT?

"The Power of the Dog" is the presumed frontrunner for best picture and best director, for Jane Campion, but there is also the possibility that "CODA" will take best picture. Either way, it'll be the first time a streaming service has won best picture. Other likely winners include Will Smith for best actor ("King Richard"), Jessica Chastain for best actress ("The Eyes of Tammy Faye"), Troy Kotsur for best supporting actor ("CODA") and Ariana DeBose for best supporting actress ("West Side Story").

WHAT ELSE CAN WE EXPECT FROM THE OSCARS?

Organizers have promised that they will keep the broadcast to three hours and Packer (whose films include crowd pleasers like "Girls Trip") wants to make it as entertaining as possible while still honoring the nominees and winners.

"The show will flow, not unlike a movie, in that there will be different themes and a different feel and different energy throughout the night," Packer said in an interview with IndieWire. "It will not feel or look or sound like one show for three hours. It's taking you through the course of this cinematic journey."

Best song nominees like Beyoncé, Van Morrison and Billie Eilish are also in talks to perform.

ARE THERE ANY CONTROVERSIES THIS YEAR?

The Oscars are so high profile that every year someone is upset about something (especially when changes are involved) but this year the biggest controversy is over the decision to present some awards before the live broadcast begins and edit them into the show later.

The eight awards are for shorts (live action, animated and documentary), editing, score, hair and makeup, sound and production design. The decision has its defenders, but also an army of high-profile detractors, including Campion, Villeneuve, Steven Spielberg, Chastain and Penelope Cruz.

GOP appeal seeks to curb state court power over US House map

By JONATHAN DREW Associated Press

North Carolina's Republican legislative leaders have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to curtail state courts' powers to intervene in the drawing of congressional districts as part of an ongoing battle over electoral maps.

The renewed effort is not expected to alter the current election cycle after the justices ruled earlier this month to allow North Carolina to use maps approved by state courts in 2022. But four conservative members of the high court have signaled they are open to revisiting the scope of state courts' ability to alter congressional maps in the future.

The new petition filed Thursday by North Carolina GOP legislators acknowledges that the maps for 2022 are set but says the larger issue should be decided before 2024 elections.

The filing argues that North Carolina's Supreme Court overstepped its authority when it struck down a congressional map created by legislators and later allowed implementation of districts drawn by court-

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appointed experts. The filing says the U.S. Constitution grants state legislatures, not state courts, the ability to oversee federal elections and draw congressional maps.

"The U.S. Constitution is crystal clear: state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional maps, not state court judges," North Carolina House Speaker Tim Moore said in a statement.

However, voters and advocacy groups who fought the Republican leaders over the maps have countered that past U.S. Supreme Court rulings and federal law give state courts remedial power over redistricting and the ability to interpret state constitutions' own rules for electoral maps.

Earlier this month, the high court issued separate rulings that allowed North Carolina and Pennsylvania to proceed with 2022 elections under court-ordered maps.

At the time, four conservative justices indicated that they think the court should consider, at a later date, how much power state courts have to intervene in congressional map drawing.

"The issue is almost certain to keep arising until the Court definitively resolves it," Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote on March 7. He said he would be in favor of considering the question in the court's next term but didn't want to interfere in this year's electoral process.

North Carolina has gained an extra seat in the U.S. House because of a rising population. Republican majorities in the Legislature produced an initial plan most likely to result in 10 seats for Republicans and four for Democrats. After Democrats sued, arguing the map was unfairly tilted to Republicans, state courts ruled that the districts must be redrawn to meet standards of partisan fairness. The maps approved by the state courts give Democrats a good chance to win at least six seats.

Tennessee guard members safe despite Russian reports

By ALI SWENSON undefined

Three current and former members of the Tennessee National Guard are safe and accounted for, despite a Russian newspaper's false report that the men were killed while fighting in Ukraine.

All three men named in a Russian news report, two of whom are still serving in the Tennessee National Guard, are alive and well — and no U.S. military personnel are currently on orders in Ukraine, National Guard Bureau spokesman Wayne Hall said in a phone interview Friday.

The false claim began circulating Thursday after the Russian newspaper Pravda published a story and tweets claiming the three Americans, whom it identified by name and as "mercenaries," had been "eliminated." It cited a pro-Russian militia in Ukraine's Donetsk region, which said it had identified the deceased using a Tennessee flag and other personal belongings left in a backpack near the remains.

In response to the false story, Tennessee National Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Marlin Malone said Friday that the military had confirmed the named individuals' whereabouts and "they are not in Ukraine."

Malone said the Tennessee National Guard is "monitoring the situation and will aid the members as needed."

The National Guard Bureau said in a statement on Thursday that it believed Russian media targeted the individuals because they appeared in articles associated with a 2018 deployment to Ukraine, which included members of the Tennessee National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

That mission included the development of instructors, firing ranges, training areas, equipment and instrumentation requirements, and a realistic operational training environment, according to the statement.

"All members of the Tennessee National Guard returned safely to their home state in 2019 after a successful mission," the statement said.

Pravda's false article, which was still live on its website Friday, is one of many distorted claims that have emerged from Russian media in recent weeks as part of a disinformation campaign to bolster domestic support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

How to get on the Supreme Court? Smile a lot, speak a little

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Keep a smile on your face. Don't talk too much. Avoid the news media.

It's advice Supreme Court nominees have heard for decades from the guides that presidents select to help steer candidates through the Senate confirmation process.

Federal judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, President Joe Biden's pick for the court, likely has been getting similar guidance from her helper, former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, for the one-on-one meetings she's been having with senators and for her confirmation hearing that opens Monday.

"Stay out of the way, be on time and keep your mouth shut," is what Republican Tom Korologos says he has told the hundreds of nominees for executive branch and judicial positions, including the Supreme Court, that he has shepherded along during decades in and out of the federal government.

"It's an arcane art to teach a brilliant Bork, a brilliant Scalia and a brilliant Rehnquist how to behave in a confirmation hearing when you're up before a bunch of senators, some of whom may not like you," Korologos said in an interview.

Because of the high stakes involved — a lifetime appointment to the nation's highest court, sometimes with the chance to shape its ideological direction — modern presidents have put together teams of advisers to help smooth a nominee's path through a grueling, time-consuming process that also has become increasingly contentious.

The job of a guide often goes to an experienced Washington hand and combines many roles into one: coach, confidant, liaison to Capitol Hill and to the administration, traffic cop and strategist with the singular goal of helping the nominee win confirmation. But that isn't always a given, as history has shown.

Korologos shepherded the late Supreme Court Justices William Rehnquist and Antonin Scalia to confirmation. But he suffered defeat with the late federal judge Robert Bork, whom the Senate rejected in 1987 for a seat on the high court.

In the case of Jackson, Biden called on Jones to help guide the 51-year-old federal appeals court judge through the process. If confirmed by the Senate, Jackson will become the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court in its more than 232-year history.

White House counsel Dana Remus said Jones, himself a lawyer, was the "perfect choice" because of the relationships he developed in both parties during a short Senate stint that ended in 2021 after he lost a bid to be elected to a full Senate term.

"He is much beloved by R's and D's, with good reason," Remus told The Associated Press. "He's such a warm, engaging person."

Jones travels from Senate office to Senate office with Jackson and a White House entourage, filling her in on what to expect from each senator and often joining the small talk before and after meetings. She has met with 44 senators of both parties, including all 22 Senate Judiciary Committee members, in the three weeks since Biden announced her as his pick.

"These have been engaging and respectful discussions that showcase her extraordinary qualifications, experience, intellect, and character," Jones said Thursday in a statement.

Stephanie Cutter, a veteran Democratic strategist who guided Justice Sonia Sotomayor, said Supreme Court nominees should decline interview requests to avoid saying anything that could be taken out of context and become so problematic that it jeopardizes the nomination.

A nominee's judicial opinions, other writings and speeches provides their opponents with plenty of fodder to chew over, she said.

"You don't want to add anything new to it," Cutter said during a recent Politico podcast.

Jackson wrote nearly 600 opinions as a federal trial and appellate court judge. Her nominee questionnaire tops out at more than 2,000 pages and the Judiciary Committee has access to more than 12,000 pages from the Sentencing Commission, where she once served.

She has been on a charm offensive since Biden announced her on Feb. 25, meeting individually with as many of the 100 senators as possible before the hearing, which will consume most of next week. She will spend at least two days answering questions from Judiciary Committee members before the full Senate votes on her nomination.

"That's something they need to be prepared for before they just walk into it," said Dan Coats, a Re-

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publican former U.S. senator from Indiana who helped guide Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers until she withdrew after encountering bipartisan opposition. President George W. Bush then nominated judge Samuel Alito, and Coats helped usher him to confirmation.

Coats said his team's motto was "three months of hell, lifetime job" — a reminder that "it's going to be over in three months and then nobody's going to mess with you for the rest of your life."

The timetable has narrowed considerably, though, since Alito's confirmation in January 2006.

Republicans rushed Amy Coney Barrett, the court's newest justice, through the process in about a month after her nomination by President Donald Trump. She joined the court just before the November 2020 election, which Trump lost.

Democrats are eyeing an equally swift process for Jackson, hoping she can be confirmed by mid-April to succeed retiring Justice Stephen Breyer. White House officials working on her nomination declined to discuss their process in any detail.

Coats said his team met at the White House every morning to review the list of senators the nominee was scheduled to see that day and go over their known concerns, anticipate questions and hash out answers. The team met again afterward to discuss how things went.

He said he counseled Alito to "keep a smile on your face."

"It was the best unpaid job I ever had," Coats said of his stint as a guide.

Korologos said he always advised nominees to "have the passion and enthusiasm of a commencement address, inspiring and lofty" in their answers, but at the same time "say nothing."

He encouraged them to be deferential to senators and to follow one of his most important pieces of advice, something he calls the "80-20 rule."

In Korologos' view, a nominee is "winning" if senators on the committee are doing 80% of the talking. A 60-40 ratio means the nominee is "arguing" and is "in trouble."

At 50-50, it's over. They've "blown it," Korologos said.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Congress members didn't boost own salaries in March 2022

CLAIM: Members of Congress gave themselves a 21% pay raise in early March.

THE FACTS: Social media users are misrepresenting a government spending bill that increased funding for legislative office budgets — which members of Congress use to hire and pay staff and cover other official expenses — not lawmakers' salaries. Congress on March 10 approved the bipartisan \$1.5 trillion government spending bill, financing federal agencies through the rest of the fiscal year and providing \$13.6 billion to help Ukraine amid Russia's invasion. After President Joe Biden signed the bill into law, many social media users began falsely claiming it included a 21% pay bump for federal lawmakers. "Congress gave themselves a 21% raise," read a widely shared tweet. "They need an extra 30+ grand a year but they won't raise minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour?" But the bill doesn't at all change Congress members' salaries, which have stayed the same at \$174,000 a year since 2009, according to a report from the Congressional Research Service. A summary of the bill from Republicans on the Senate Appropriations Committee says the bill prevents "any pay increases in FY22" for members of Congress. Instead, the bill includes \$774.4 million for the Members Representational Allowance, a budget that allows every House member to hire and pay legislative staff and manage other official expenses. That \$774.4 million number is \$134.4 million higher, or 21% more, than the fiscal year 2021 budget provided for the same purpose, according to a report from the House Appropriations Committee. The House Ethics Committee explains on its website that members of Congress may only use the Members Representational Allowance budget

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for "ordinary and necessary expenses" incurred as part of a member's official duties. "The MRA may not be used to pay for any expenses related to activities or events that are primarily social in nature, personal expenses, campaign or political expenses, or House committee expenses," the committee's website says. Top Democrats in the House said the higher MRA funding will help lawmakers recruit and retain staff who have been leaving for more competitive opportunities. About 1 in 8 Washington-based congressional staffers made less than a living wage in 2020, according to an analysis of salary data by Issue One, a bipartisan advocacy group.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

Green New Deal falsely identified as the cause of high gas prices

CLAIM: The Green New Deal is causing gas prices to spike.

THE FACTS: The Green New Deal, a broad plan intended to address climate change, has not been enacted into law and is not impacting gas prices, experts say. But posts claiming that the increase in U.S. gas prices is due to the regulations associated with the Green New Deal have circulated widely on social media in recent days. "It's Not Russia (they supply just 3% of our oil)," a Facebook user wrote last week. "It's not the oil companies, It Is the GREEN NEW DEAL regulations. They are lying to us..." The claim is false. The Green New Deal, a sweeping plan backed by some Democrats to address climate change, has not been enacted by the federal government, experts told The Associated Press. "It's like blaming what's happening in the world on a boogeyman that doesn't exist," said Michael Wara, director of the climate and energy policy program at the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment. "That's not correct." The Green New Deal, which originally existed as a nonbinding resolution, called for a "10-year national mobilization" to move the U.S. economy away from fossil fuels and replace them with renewable sources, the AP reported in March 2019. But the resolution didn't pass Congress. Wara noted that Build Back Better, President Joe Biden's roughly \$2 trillion spending plan, included provisions that were inspired by the Green New Deal, such as rebates for electric vehicles. However, the spending plan has been stalled in Congress for months. Amy Myers Jaffe, a research professor and managing director of the Climate Policy Lab at Tufts University, said that high gas prices are not being caused by other federal climate change-oriented policies, either. There are many reasons gasoline prices have pushed higher. The biggest driver is the price of crude oil, which has been rising over the past year. As more people get on the road after being cooped up during the pandemic, oil and gas suppliers that had scaled back production during the pandemic lull in demand are struggling to keep up. And decisions by the OPEC+ oil cartel, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, to only modestly increase the oil they released to the market kept prices high. Global oil prices have climbed even higher as Russia, a major oil supplier to the world, invaded Ukraine and many buyers shunned Russian crude, reducing the viable global oil supply. "The current spike in gasoline prices is tied to the spike in global crude oil prices. Global crude oil production dropped during COVID and has been relatively slow to recover for a number of reasons, none of which are Green Deal related," Robert Johnston, an adjunct senior research scholar at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, wrote in an email to the AP. "The key reasons include OPEC production policy, extremely strong demand post-COVID, low inventories, and now the major geopolitical disruption in Russia," Johnston added.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report with additional reporting from Associated Press writer Cathy Bussewitz.

Pfizer's stock has not been removed from the NYSE

CLAIM: Pfizer has been delisted from the New York Stock Exchange.

THE FACTS: Drug maker Pfizer Inc., which produces a COVID-19 vaccine, has not been removed from the NYSE, a company spokesperson confirmed. Many social media users cited a specific U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission form as proof that Pfizer has been removed from the stock exchange. The form features the text, "NOTIFICATION OF REMOVAL FROM LISTING AND/OR REGISTRATION." "PFIZER delisting from NYSE. How is this not much bigger news? This means they know they will crash!!! Share,"

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said a tweet that shared an image of the form. Another tweet posted on Monday states, "Pay attention - this is important: 3/07/2022: Pfizer requests to be delisted from the NY Stock Exchange." But the claims are false. The form being shared on social media actually concerns the delisting of a debt security, which is tradeable corporate debt, similar to a bond. The form was filed by the NYSE on March 7. "The 0.250% Notes due 2022 were euro denominated notes that were paid in full on March 7, 2022 in accordance with their terms and maturity date," the Pfizer spokesperson wrote, referring to Pfizer's debt security. "As a result, the 0.250% Notes due 2022 are no longer outstanding and thus are delisted from the NYSE." In other words, once the debt is paid off, it is delisted. The spokesperson added that Pfizer's common stock continues "to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange." Ludwig Chincarini, a professor of finance at the University of San Francisco, told The Associated Press that corporate debt trading is common, though it typically isn't conducted in exchanges and is done in the "over the counter market." "Companies issue debt all the time because they borrow," he said. "It's another form of financing." "What happens is the notes matured, they're done, so the exchange has to remove them and they have to inform the SEC," Chincarini added. A spokesperson for the NYSE declined to comment. The Securities and Exchange Commission did not respond to the AP's request for comment.

— Josh Kelety

Video of Ukrainian funeral procession misrepresented

CLAIM: A recent video shows sacred Christian materials being transferred from a Kyiv cathedral to a secure bunker.

THE FACTS: The video dates back to at least 2015 and shows a Ukrainian funeral procession, not the transfer of a Christian sacrament to a bunker for safekeeping. Amid Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, some social media users are miscaptioning the somber video of a funeral procession from several years ago to suggest it shows recent footage of a religious ceremony in the embattled Ukrainian capital. Set to folk music, the blurry clip follows a procession of cars driving through a town as people kneel along the streets. A Twitter user shared it last week, falsely claiming it showed the "Blessed Sacrament" — a reference to the consecrated bread or wine used to celebrate Communion in some Christian denominations — being evacuated from a cathedral. The user, who identifies themselves in their Twitter bio as deacon, wrote: "Transfer of the Blessed Sacrament from Kyiv Cathedral to a bunker." The post received more than 3,000 retweets and 11,000 likes. But the video was taken years before the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine and does not show the transfer of sacraments. The same footage was posted online in April 2015 and again on YouTube in November 2015. The longer 8-minute video shows a car procession flanked by crowds of people kneeling and watching as it passes. Eventually, the cars stop and a casket is carried through a crowd. While the video does not state where the footage was captured, several people can be seen waving Ukrainian flags. One of the cars also displays a Ukrainian license plate with a code for Lviv, though it's unclear whether that's where the footage was filmed. Text displayed at the beginning of the video states: "Ukrainians meet the cyborg hero who died at the hands of the Russian occupiers," and text at the end reads, in part: "Glory to the heroes of Ukraine." The term "cyborg" has been used to describe a group of Ukrainian soldiers who fought at an airport in the Donetsk region during attacks in 2014.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

Florida did not repeal its state gas tax

CLAIM: Florida, led by Gov. Ron DeSantis, has eliminated its tax on gas.

THE FACTS: Florida's longstanding state gas tax has not been repealed. In reality, Florida lawmakers approved a plan to temporarily suspend the gas tax for one month in October 2022. Posts claiming that Florida has eliminated its gas tax have circulated widely on social media platforms in recent days. "Florida just eliminated their State Tax on Gas!!! Red State leading the way..." said a tweet posted on Tuesday with more than 27,000 likes. But Florida has not eliminated local gas taxes. Social media users are misrepresenting a plan that was recently approved by Florida lawmakers that would suspend gas taxes this year for the

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month of October. The provision is part of a \$112.1 billion state budget that was approved by lawmakers on Monday, The Associated Press reported. The cost of the one-month suspension will be paid for by federal coronavirus relief dollars. Republicans have said that lawmakers chose October, a month before statewide elections, because there are usually less tourists in Florida then. Dominic Calabro, president and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, a business-backed group that scrutinizes state spending, said that the gas tax has existed for decades and hasn't been eliminated. "It's misinformation, it's not correct. We will suspend it for one month, the month of October 2022," Calabro told the AP. "All we passed was a one-month reprieve," said Democratic Florida state Sen. Annette Taddeo. "The gas tax is still here." Bethany Wester, a spokesperson for the Florida Department of Revenue, wrote in an email to the AP that the temporary gas tax suspension will "affect anyone who purchases motor fuel in Florida during the exemption period." Republican Gov. DeSantis had originally called for a five-month suspension of the state's gas tax in response to inflation he blamed on Democratic President Joe Biden, the AP reported. With gas prices in the U.S. hitting record highs, governors and lawmakers in other states have also called for suspending fuel taxes.

Ukraine war ups pressure for US oil; industry faces hurdles

By MATTHEW BROWN and SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — In the oil fields of northern Montana, industry veteran Mac McDermott watched crude prices whipsaw from \$75 a barrel in January to more than \$120 as Russia pressed its war in Ukraine, then down again when coronavirus worries in China raised the specter of a global slowdown.

McDermott said his family-owned company will modestly increase drilling if oil prices stabilize. But for the next few months, he's waiting on the sidelines and struggling to get enough workers to watch over roughly 100 oil wells the company operates. That includes some wells idled during the pandemic that he's been trying to bring online since last year.

President Joe Biden's move to ban Russian oil imports over its invasion of Ukraine was met with Republican demands to boost U.S. production to address high gasoline prices. The White House, too, called for more drilling and cited the war as it shelved Biden's campaign pledge to curb drilling on public lands because of climate change.

Yet political rhetoric about quickly ramping up U.S. crude output is at odds with the industry's reality: There's not enough workers to rapidly expand, scant money to invest in drilling and wariness that today's high prices won't last, according to industry representatives, analysts and state officials.

"It would be great to produce more domestically," McDermott said. "(But) it's so volatile. ... We haven't had any access to capital for years. If we drilled, money would have to come from existing production. It's a risky business."

Republicans from energy states have brushed past the industry's logistical constraints to pin blame for slow U.S. oil growth on Democrats and Biden. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Montana Sen. Steve Daines have called for American energy to be "unleashed" and more public lands opened to drilling. Daines accused Democrats of using the Russia oil ban to cover up a supposed scheme to "ban all oil."

The U.S. doesn't import much Russian oil and Biden's administration has effectively halted new oil or natural gas lease sales from federal lands and waters. But it's approved almost 4,000 new drilling permits on federal lands and companies have thousands more stockpiled. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said companies should use those permits to "go get more supply out of the ground."

Federal energy reserves account for about a quarter of U.S. oil, with the remainder coming from private, tribal and state land.

Pumping rates overall slowly increased during Biden's first year as the industry climbed out of the pandemic, when oil future prices briefly dipped below \$0 a barrel.

Obstacles to more U.S. oil are surmountable, according to analysts, yet will take months to work through and it could be late this year or early next before a significant production increase materializes.

"It's going to be a slower ramp up for fields like ours," McDermott said. "Everybody in the industry would say if we have a consistent price, then you know what you would get for an extended period of time and

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it's easy to make business decisions."

In the short term, the world's looking to other sources. The United Arab Emirates said last week it would urge OPEC to consider boosting oil output, which sent oil prices tumbling. Saudi Arabia alone has roughly 2 million barrels a day of additional capacity standing by, said Rice University energy researcher Jim Krane.

By comparison, total U.S. production last year was about 11 million barrels a day.

Even with favorable conditions — strong prices, political pressure and less-cautious shareholders — companies in the U.S. could see production rise by just over 1 million barrels daily by the end of the year, said Robert Johnston with Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

Some of the biggest U.S. reserves are offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. However, the massive platforms used in deep Gulf waters take years to finance, build and put into place.

A near-term crude boost would have to come from onshore oil resources already developed, such as the Permian Basin in New Mexico and Texas and the Bakken of North Dakota and Montana, said Andy McConn with Enverus, an energy analytics company whose data is used by industry and government agencies.

Even in those areas, there's no way to simply crank open the spigot immediately. The most easily accessible reserves already have been drilled, McConn said.

"There's not a lot of low-hanging fruit," he said.

Some oil producing regions already were bouncing back as the industry shakes off its pandemic slowdown, particularly the Permian Basin — the nation's busiest oil patch with 45,000 wells drilled over the past decade, according to the Energy Information Administration. Other oil patches that could see expansions include Oklahoma's Midcontinent area and Colorado's D-J Basin, McConn said.

Operators in the Permian Basin described growth as steady since last spring. By January, they topped 5 million barrels a day.

Still, the mood this time around is different. "It's not a 'drill baby drill' type of mentality like there was before," said Stephen M. Robertson with the Permian Basin Petroleum Association.

Multiple factors are tempering a production boom, he said, including volatile prices, labor issues and longer wait times for parts to be fabricated and supplies shipped. Even the custom cowboy boots favored by some workers have been hard to come by.

"It's not just one factor that is telling the industry out here what it should do. It's not just high prices," Robertson said.

If the conflict in Ukraine drags on, prices stay high and the logistical hurdles are overcome, companies could move into relatively untapped fields, including Wyoming's Powder River Basin and Utah's Uinta Basin.

But it won't be anything like booms that swept through those regions over the past decade, drawing thousands of workers who overwhelmed housing and other services and transformed rural communities into centers of industry.

Larry Scott, an engineer who has worked in the oil business for decades and now represents a portion of the Permian Basin as a Republican in the New Mexico Legislature, said oil and gas companies still have to conquer the labor challenge.

"You can't ramp up if you can't find qualified people to do it," he said.

How (and where) to watch the 2022 Oscar nominees online

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Looking to watch top Oscar nominees before the 94th Academy Awards air on March 27? There are many ways to get that done, and a trip to the theater isn't absolutely necessary. Here's the way to find the top nominees online, though there are many myriad paths to digitally buy, rent and stream:

"THE POWER OF THE DOG"

12 nominations. Netflix.

The leading nominee received nods for Kirsten Dunst, Benedict Cumberbatch, Jesse Plemons and Kodi Smit-McPhee. It also received a best picture nomination and a best director nomination for Jane Campion. Cumberbatch is a rough-hewn Montana rancher with a menacing arrogance in a Gothic story brought alive

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on the Western plain.

"DUNE"

10 nominations. HBO Max.

It's back on HBO Max, and in the iTunes store and on Amazon Prime Video for a price. The sweeping desert sci-fi saga based on Frank Herbert's 1965 novel received nods that included best picture and cinematography. It stars Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya. Denis Villeneuve directed.

"BELFAST"

Seven nominations. Digital rental.

Based on the childhood of Kenneth Branagh, the film notched nominations for best picture, a directing nod for Branagh, best supporting actress for Judi Dench and supporting actor for her screen husband, Ciarán Hinds, among others. Absent was a nomination Jamie Dornan, who stars as a Belfast dad struggling to keep his family safe as the troubles began in 1969. It's available at a cost on Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, YouTube, Redbox, Vudu and more.

"WEST SIDE STORY"

Seven nominations. HBO Max and Disney+.

Steven Spielberg's reimagining of the 1961 classic received nominations for best picture, and director for him. Ariana DeBose was nominated for her Anita. Spielberg, Tony Kushner and Steven Sondheim dug deep to reconsider the iconic Romeo and Juliet tale that has the Sharks and the Jets front and center in New York City.

"KING RICHARD"

Six nominations. Digital rental.

Directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green, the story of Richard Williams — father, coach and driving force behind tennis greats Venus and Serena Williams — has Will Smith in the leading role. It earned nominations for Smith, Aunjanue Ellis, best picture and original song for "Be Alive" by DIXSON and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, among others. It's available at a cost on Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, Google Play, YouTube and more.

"DON'T LOOK UP"

Four nominations. Netflix.

Adam McKay's apocalyptic comedy nabbed nominations that included best picture, original score and original screenplay. The climate change satire that stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence gives Earth six months before a massive comet destroys the planet.

"DRIVE MY CAR"

Four nominations. HBO Max.

From Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi, the three-hour drama earned nods for best picture and best director, among others. It's based on a Haruki Murakami short story and follows an actor played by Hidetoshi Nishijima. He seeks a chauffeur and winds up with a taciturn 20-year-old girl, played by Toko Miura. A touching friendship develops against a backdrop of loss and sorrow.

"NIGHTMARE ALLEY"

Four nominations. HBO Max and Hulu.

The Guillermo del Toro remake of the 1947 neo-noir classic earned nominations that included best picture and cinematography. The cast is star packed, led by Bradley Cooper and Rooney Mara. It's the story of the brief rise of a handsome hustler, from low level carney to highly paid showman.

"BEING THE RICARDOS"

Three nominations. Amazon Prime Video.

The behind-the-scenes look at the work and marriage of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz received nominations for Javier Bardem as Desi, Nicole Kidman as Lucy and J.K. Simmons in a supporting role. Aaron Sorkin has created a loving and sharp dramatization of a particularly fraught week during the making of the TV classic "I Love Lucy."

"CODA"

Three nominations. Apple TV+.

Apple received its first best-picture nomination with this drama, which also made history as supporting

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actor nominee Troy Kotsur became only the second deaf actor ever nominated. (His "CODA" co-star Marlee Matlin was the first.) The film follows the Rossi family of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Ruby, a high school senior, is the only hearing member of her family and often their only connection to the hearing world.

"ENCANTO"

Three nominations. Disney+.

There's something about this Disney animated feature. Rather, there's something about the music that has tickled many. The soundtrack became the first from a film since 2019 to reach No. 1 on the Billboard chart. Its most popular song, "We Don't Talk About Bruno," became the highest-charting song from a Disney animated film in more than 26 years. The music magic was made by Lin-Manuel Miranda. The story features a charmed family in the mountain hamlet of Encanto. Miranda earned a nomination for original song for "Dos Oruguitas," as opposed to the tune that made all the fuss.

"FLEE"

Three nominations. Hulu.

With the exception of live-action archival footage, this grand jury prize winner at Sundance is entirely animated. It's the story of Amin, a pseudonym for a refugee boy who filmmaker Jonas Poher Rasmussen befriended in his sleepy Danish town when he himself was 15. Amin didn't talk about his past in Afghanistan or his family when they were kids. It took Amin some 20 years to open up to his friend. Nominations include both best animated feature film and best documentary.

"LICORICE PIZZA"

Three nominations. Digital rental.

The 1970s-set romp in director Paul Thomas Anderson's sunny Southern California is available for a price on Amazon Prime Video, the iTunes store, Google Play and Vudu. Anderson earned a director nod and the film was nominated for best picture. It's a charmingly loose love letter to the San Fernando Valley of Anderson's youth.

"THE LOST DAUGHTER"

Three nominations. Netflix.

Starring Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley and Dakota Johnson, its nominations include nods for Colman and Buckley. The adaptation of an Elena Ferrante novel of the same name is a psychological drama that has Colman and Buckley in the same role as young and older versions of the sad and frustrated translator Leda Caruso, set on holiday in Greece.

"NO TIME TO DIE"

Three nominations. Digital rental.

The 25th film in the James Bond universe has Daniel Craig enjoying the good life in Jamaica after leaving active service, only to be sucked back in again by old friend Felix Leiter from the CIA. Available for a price on Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, Google Play, YouTube and more. Among its nominations is one for the title song, "No Time To Die," with music and lyrics by Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell.

"THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH"

Three nominations. Apple TV+.

Joel Coen directed, with Denzel Washington starring as a gray-haired Macbeth who knows in his aching bones that the witches' prophecy has given him his last chance to be what he wants, King of Scotland. Washington's turn at Shakespeare in this black-and-white version earned him a lead actor Oscar nod. Frances McDormand co-stars.

"CRUELLA"

Two nominations. Disney+.

This dog hater's origin story has Emma Stone taking a turn as villainous Cruella. The story goes back to when she was known simply as Estella, played as a 5-year-old by Billie Gadson. Nominations include one for makeup and hairstyling, two of the other stars.

"THE EYES OF TAMMY FAYE"

Two nominations. HBO Max.

The rise-and-fall story of televangelist power couple Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker secured Jessica Chastain

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her third Oscar nomination. The film received also received a nod for makeup and hairstyling — notable for the brash Tammy. Andrew Garfield plays Bakker.

“PARALLEL MOTHERS”

Two nominations. Digital rental.

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar and starring Penélope Cruz, the Spanish-language drama follows two women who gave birth on the same day at the same hospital. It’s simultaneously personal and political. Oscar nominations include the fourth for Cruz, who has one Oscar already.

“tick, tick ... BOOM!”

Two nominations. Netflix.

Andrew Garfield earned an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Jonathan Larson, who upended the theater world as the creator of “Rent.” The adaption of an autobiographical musical by Larson, who died suddenly and young in 1996, was Lin-Manuel Miranda’s feature directorial debut and also earned a nod for film editing.

ALSO NOMINATED

“SPENCER”

Best Actress nominee. Hulu.

Kristen Stewart’s unhinged Princess Diana earned her the nod after snubs from the British academy and the Screen Actors Guild. Director Pablo Larraín takes a tragic surreal approach in this biopic. Though reviews were mixed, some critics consider it an evocative and artful look at one of the most famous women to ever live.

“SUMMER OF SOUL (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)”

Best documentary nominee. Hulu.

Thanks to Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival has received its due. Held in Mount Morris Park (now Marcus Garvey Park), the film includes performances at the New York festival by Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly & the Family Stone, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King, The 5th Dimension and more.

“THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES”

Animated feature nominee. Netflix.

The oddball Mitchell family must quell an uprising by the world’s electronic devices while on a road trip to drop off daughter Katie (voiced by Abbi Jacobson) for her first year of film school. Thank goodness for two friendly robots. The best animated feature nominee is directed by Mike Rianda, who made “Gravity Falls.”

“LUCA”

Best animated feature nominee. Disney+.

The Disney and Pixar coming-of-age story is about a boy and his summer on the Italian Riviera. Luca is voiced by Jacob Tremblay. He befriends another boy, Alberto, voiced by Jack Dylan Grazer. There’s lots of seaside fun, but the two share a menacing secret. Directed by Enrico Casarosa.

“RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON”

Best animated feature nominee. Disney+.

Take a trip to Kumandra, where an evil force destroyed the harmony between humans and dragons 500 years ago. The dragons sacrificed themselves to save humanity. Now, that evil has returned and warrior Raya goes in search of a legendary last dragon to restore order once again.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 19, the 78th day of 2022. There are 287 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On March 19, 1945, during World War II, 724 people were killed when a Japanese dive bomber attacked the carrier USS Franklin off Japan (the ship was saved). Adolf Hitler ordered the destruction of German

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facilities that could fall into Allied hands in his so-called "Nero Decree," which was largely disregarded.

On this date:

In 1859, the opera "Faust" by Charles Gounod premiered in Paris.

In 1931, Nevada Gov. Fred B. Balzar signed a measure legalizing casino gambling.

In 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered men between the ages of 45 and 64, inclusive, to register for non-military duty.

In 1977, the series finale of "Mary Tyler Moore" aired on CBS-TV, ending the situation comedy's seven-season run.

In 1987, televangelist Jim Bakker resigned as chairman of his PTL ministry organization amid a sex and money scandal involving Jessica Hahn, a former church secretary.

In 1991, Polish President Lech Walesa arrived in Washington for his first state visit to the United States.

In 1995, after a 21-month hiatus, Michael Jordan returned to professional basketball with his former team, the Chicago Bulls.

In 1997, artist Willem de Kooning, considered one of the 20th century's greatest painters, died in East Hampton, New York, at age 92.

In 2003, President George W. Bush ordered the start of war against Iraq. (Because of the time difference, it was early March 20 in Iraq.)

In 2007, a methane gas explosion in a Siberian coal mine killed 110 workers.

In 2013, Pope Francis officially began his ministry as the 266th pope, receiving the ring symbolizing the papacy and a wool stole exemplifying his role as shepherd of his 1.2-billion strong flock during a Mass at the Vatican.

In 2020, President Donald Trump focused attention on a malaria drug, chloroquine, as a possible coronavirus treatment; the FDA issued a statement saying that there were "no FDA-approved therapeutics" to treat COVID-19.

Ten years ago: An assailant on a motorbike opened fire with two handguns in front of a Jewish school in the southern French city of Toulouse, killing a rabbi, his two young sons and a girl. (The gunman, French-born Mohammed Merah, was killed in a gunfight with police after a 32-hour standoff at his apartment; he had also killed three French paratroopers.) The Justice Department announced it had begun an investigation into the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida by a neighborhood watch captain, George Zimmerman. (No federal civil rights charges were filed; Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder after claiming self-defense.)

Five years ago: Author-columnist Jimmy Breslin, the legendary street-smart chronicler of wise guys and underdogs, died at his Manhattan home at age 87.

One year ago: President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris visited Atlanta, days after a white gunman killed eight people, most of them Asian American women, in the Atlanta area. The United States accused China of committing "genocide and crimes against humanity" against Uyghur (WEE'-gur) Muslims and other minorities; China accused the U.S. of discrimination "and even savage murder of people of African and Asian descent." Four men described as leaders of the far-right Proud Boys were indicted on charges stemming from the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. (The four remain jailed and are awaiting trial.) The U.S. cleared President Joe Biden's goal of injecting 100 million coronavirus shots, more than a month before his target date of his 100th day in office.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Renee Taylor is 89. Actor Ursula Andress is 86. Singer Clarence "Frogman" Henry is 85. Singer Ruth Pointer (The Pointer Sisters) is 76. Actor Glenn Close is 75. Actor Bruce Willis is 67. Actor-comedian Mary Scheer is 59. Playwright Neil LaBute is 59. Actor Connor Trinneer is 53. Rock musician Gert Bettens (K's Choice) is 52. Rapper Bun B is 49. Rock musician Zach Lind (Jimmy Eat World) is 46. Actor Virginia Williams is 44. Actor Abby Brammell is 43. MLB pitcher Clayton Kershaw is 34. Actor Craig Lamar Traylor is 33. Actor Philip Bolden is 27.