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Up Coming Events

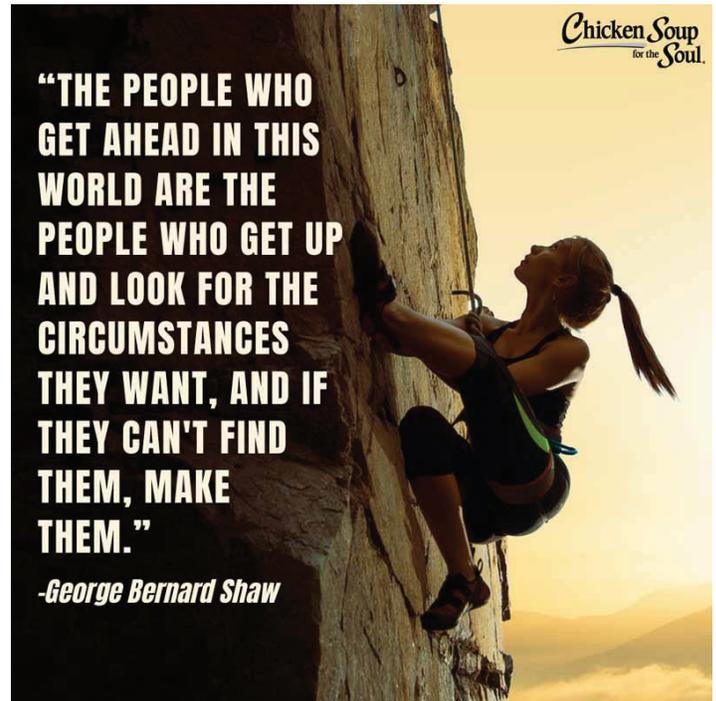
Sunday, March 20

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

14523 409th Ave

Conde, SD 57434

Truss Pros Help Wanted

Truss Pros in Britton is looking to hire a CDL driver to deliver trusses in the tri-state area. Home every night. Competitive wage! Full benefit package!

To apply call 605-277-4937 or go to www.uslbn.com/careers and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

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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Prismatic Sensations take second at Mitchell

The Groton Area Prismatic Sensations took second in their division at the Mitchell competition held Saturday. According to director Kayla Duncan, "These kids reworked their whole formations in a week and showed an unbelievable amount of commitment to each other to make it work-I can't even begin to say how proud I am of them! Finished the season strong with a 2nd place finish in our division! I am so thankful for all the help I've had and for Amy Rohrbach Warrington and Dez Yeigh for taking them and making sure they could still compete! What a great season!" Yeigh added, "A special thank you to Kaitlin O'Neill for helping the kids with their new placements and working with them today! The pit band was also excited that we had the highest band score in our division. Thanks everyone for a great season!!"



The Prismatic Sensations performing at Mitchell. (Photo from Desiree Yeigh's Facebook Page)

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#522 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The numbers continue to decline. Seven-day, new-case average is down to 29,715 and the pandemic total is up to 79,616,279. Hospitalizations have dropped to 23,433. And the seven-day deaths average is 1127, with a total death count now of 969,999. Everything's down, but the rates of decline have dropped; it is difficult to know whether this is simply leveling off in a continuing decline or the sign of an incipient turnaround. We'll know soon.

Last time we talked, we discussed rising cases in Europe and the implications of that for us here in the US. Now, the WHO is making some of the same kinds of noises, citing new increases worldwide by eight percent in the past week after over a month of decrease. The situation in many parts of East Asia, particularly China and South Korea who are experiencing growth by 25 percent or more, is clearly contributing to this overall picture; but Africa is up by 12 percent as well. The increase in Europe is smaller, but there is much less testing being done there, which means we might just be missing the true magnitude of the problem. I do note that Austria has slapped their mask mandates back on, a quick response to the increases there. WHO leader, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in a public statement, "These increases are occurring despite reductions in testing in some countries, which means the cases we're seeing are just the tip of the iceberg."

Now on ABC's Sunday morning show today, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, indicated he is expecting "an uptick" in cases. He said he doesn't necessarily expect a big surge, but that the rise of highly-infectious BA.2 coupled with the reduction in precautions here is likely to produce some increases. He also mentioned the potential for the emergence of more variants while transmission remains so high. I also expect any increase to create critical shortages of clinical testing because many states are closing or have closed testing sites and would not be able to ramp them back up in time to respond to any increase in demand. That demand would devolve onto hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies who are still straining at the seams to absorb the demand. I suspect we will also have a surge in undiagnosed cases due to a shortfall in federal funding for free testing and lack of access for people who are already not well served by the health care system. That leaves public health authorities with blind spots in terms of spotting trends early on. This will all bear watching.

Things may have taken a bad turn in American Samoa. You may recall this South Pacific island territory of the US had stayed free of virus until late last fall and even then kept things under control until the first of the year, since which they've recorded over 400 cases. Over last weekend, they identified their first community, locally-transmitted case, that is, a case with no known path of transmission. There is still a need to spare the health care system on the islands; it is not robust to begin with. The territory has locked down farther, and contact tracing is underway. I hope that's enough. The good news is there have still been no deaths.

We've been seeing a lot more hospitalizations of infants and young children with the Omicron variant than we were seeing with earlier variants. Since Omicron arrived, hospitalization rates have been five times higher in those under 5 and six time higher in infants. A greater proportion of hospitalized kids were those who had been basically healthy with no underlying conditions, and 44 percent of them were under 6 months of age. The good news is that the proportion of those kids who ended up in ICU or dying was smaller than it was earlier in the pandemic. No one's really sure what's happening there, but the most likely explanation goes back to the fact that Omicron seems more suited to the upper airway and less suited to the lung tissue; and very small children are more vulnerable to severe upper respiratory outcomes because their airways are narrower than in adults and therefore more easily blocked by inflammation. We talked

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a few weeks ago (Update #506 posted January 15 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5538246669525027>) about the fact that there have been many cases of croup—or something like it—occurring in small children with Covid-19; that narrow airway is the issue with these kids. They are easier to treat than lower respiratory disease and less frequently progress to very severe disease, so death is not a likely outcome; but hospitalization is more likely for them than it was. One other factor that certainly plays into this situation is that children under 5 still cannot be vaccinated, and with case numbers and a highly-transmissible variant running rampant, they're highly likely to be exposed. The best protection for children who cannot be vaccinated is to surround them with vaccinated adults, and we frankly haven't done a very good job of that either.

Looks like we may have another new recombinant variant or sublineage, this one due to recombination of BA.1 and BA.2 and tentatively being called BA.2.2. You may recall that recombination is an exchange of genetic material that occurs when a cell is co-infected by two variants and components of both variants get packaged together in the next generation of viruses assembled in that cell. We talked just last week about another recombinant (sub)variant, Deltacron, in my Update #520 posted March 12 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5740214882661537>.

This BA.2.2 recombinant has been identified in two patients in Israel and has also been reported from Thailand. The Israeli patients had mild symptoms and did not, according to Israel's Health Ministry, require specialized care. It is, of course, too soon to have any sort of read on what this one might look like. This will be monitored as we go along, and I guess we'll see what we have as time goes on.

Meanwhile, we do have more information about how we might fare against the BA.2 sublineage of the Omicron variant. We know, for example, that BA.2 seems to be transmitting somewhere between 40 and 80 percent faster than BA.1. This leaves very little margin for error in our response. We see significant surges in Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, as well as another nine or 10 nations from Greece to Finland, all while we remember that Europe has been a harbinger of our future throughout the pandemic. Our cases are still dropping, but our trajectory has lagged Europe's by two to three weeks for each prior wave. History is not destiny, but it should inform our decision-making as the number of BA.2 cases rises here.

Last time we talked, we discussed the fact that vaccination rates could be an important factor in how BA.2 goes and that our vaccination rates are well below those in Europe. For example, the UK has 82 percent of adults who have received a third dose of vaccine, something we know is highly effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths. By comparison, the US has just 65.3 percent with two doses and only 36 percent with a third dose. That's a stark difference that is almost certain to yield very different results. Worse, a third of Americans over 65 haven't received a third dose; that's something like 15 million of our most vulnerable citizens who are pretty much sitting ducks for Omicron, a variant which has been having its way with those who've received fewer than three doses. We can add to that a concern about the durability of protection from even a third dose, with some evidence that protection wanes at five or six months. This is most likely why the FDA's willing to entertain Pfizer and BioNTech's application for an emergency use authorization (EUA) extension to second booster doses for those 65 and over.

Something that might play in our favor, at least in the short term, is the high rate of prior Omicron infection in our population. We are not sure of this, but it has appeared that BA.2 reinfections of those who've had a BA.1 infection are not very common. This is reason to think a prior Omicron (which would very likely have been BA.1) infection is likely to confer some protection. What we do not yet know is how durable that protection is. When we consider that Omicron only showed up four months ago and took a while to become dominant, we recognize that prior Omicron infections are almost all very recent. The

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only way to know how strong this protection is or how long it will last is to wait until it wanes. It could be that, if BA.2 hits soon enough to catch us while these folks are still covered, we might escape a surge. Maybe. And maybe not.

What we really need is to get more people vaccinated and boosted. I see no signs we're going to be willing to do that. The number of people who are willing but have access issues and those who just need some questions answered is dwindling. The vaccination rate has dropped precipitously. And those who remain unvaccinated at this point are largely the hard-core refuseniks who just don't care to protect their friends and neighbors; and I don't have a clue what to do about that. Hardened hearts are not my area of expertise.

Something cool that's happening is that the Medicines Patent Pool, a United Nations initiative to get high-priced new therapeutics into the hands of the world's poorest nations, has scored a big win. As of last week, 35 manufacturers around the world have contracted to produce generic versions of Pfizer's Paxlovid, and other manufacturers have contracted to produce generic versions of Merck's molnupiravir. The way these deals have been negotiated is that the companies holding these patents will transfer their technology, royalty-free, to the other manufacturers so the supply can be ramped up sooner and the treatments available at lower cost. This arrangement will last as long as the pandemic is officially a public health emergency according to the WHO. Once the emergency has ended, low-income countries will continue to produce them royalty-free, but sales to middle-income countries will carry a 5 to 10 percent royalty. This is an imminently reasonable deal that protects the companies' intellectual property (and still insures killer profits, by the way) while enabling these valuable drugs to be provided to the world's most vulnerable populations. I call that a win all around. This same sort of proposal has gone nowhere on vaccines; I'm not sure that it will.

As of Thursday, Moderna has now also applied to the FDA for an extension of its emergency use authorization (EUA) for its vaccine to cover a second booster dose (fourth dose overall) for any adults who have received a first booster of any vaccine. They're citing some of the same Israeli data that Pfizer and BioNTech cited in their application a few days sooner (see Update #517 posted February 25 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5696243213725371>). I'm going to guess this discussion will be placed on the agenda for the same April meeting as the Pfizer/BioNTech application; but it may have more of an uphill battle since it seeks fourth dose authorization for all adults, not just the elderly. This is a step farther than Pfizer and BioNTech's application goes.

I've been following some conversations among experts about who, if anyone, should receive a fourth dose/second booster. The thing is, if we go out and just give fourth doses, willy-nilly, to anyone who wants one, we might put people in a position where their immunity is waning just in time for the next surge, particularly if that surge happens in the fall. People 65 and older, however, if another surge is right around the corner, might want to be boosted sooner. Its difficult to know just what makes sense at this point, and I'm not convinced the weight of the evidence currently available is going to clear that up much. I suspect this will be more judgement call than many of the agency's earlier regulatory decisions around vaccines. I'm going to guess we'll hear those younger than 65 who are vaccinated and boosted and basically healthy might just want to sit tight for a while. This is particularly true when we know better vaccines may be in development, especially some that will elicit an immune response in the upper respiratory tract where it will shut down the infection most efficiently. If you can wait, doing so might net you stronger protection than if you get a fourth dose now.

Of course, the thing that would offer the greatest protection to everyone, old and young, compromised and not, healthy and with chronic conditions, would be if a whole lot more of us got vaccinated and boosted for the first time. This would do the most to reduce transmission and lessen the likelihood of new variants

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emerging so we could all have something approaching normality. And, of course, this is simply not going to happen because too few of us give a good goddamn about our friends and neighbors. This is my greatest disappointment in this entire pandemic—discovering how few people do.

A significant concern at this point in the pandemic is therapeutics going unused, even being discarded because they've reached their expiration dates, while patients go without when they need these drugs. Let's do a quick review here of what's on the table at the moment.

Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody therapy which is effective against BA.1, but probably not against BA.2. Just upwards of 90 percent of the available supply has been ordered, and a little over 40 percent has been used. Around three-quarters of infections in the US are with BA.1, which means there are a whole lot of people who would benefit from the therapy and have not received it. Paxlovid, the Pfizer drug which has, given early, proven highly (90 percent) effective at reducing hospitalization is in short supply and is still not being fully utilized. Around 70 percent of the available supply has been ordered and about 35 percent of it used. Molnupiravir, the treatment from Merck, which is considerably less effective than Paxlovid, but still provides clear benefit, has been 70 percent ordered and about 15 percent used. Very worrying is that Evusheld is even less fully utilized. This is the long-duration monoclonal antibody used prophylactically in the immunocompromised, and the available supply of this drug is less than 60 percent ordered and far below 20 percent utilized. Last, a monoclonal antibody operating under an EUA issued without clear evidence of benefit, bebtelovimab, has had around 50 percent of its available supply ordered and far less than five percent used.

So what's going on here? I would have thought people would be clamoring for these drugs and the supply would have been pretty much used up as fast as it could be produced, but I guess not. To some extent, there may be reporting lags—doses used which have not yet been reported; but it is clear these drugs are being underutilized. Some of the problem is that, early on, doctors were prioritizing patients, reserving the drugs for those most in need, so some patients were unable to access them. Then some were refusing them or were outside the window of opportunity (within five days of symptom onset for Paxlovid, for example) by the time they were diagnosed. Many of the therapeutics must be given early to be effective, so this could leave a lot of people out. Some of the issue is that the drugs are in the wrong locations and it appears no real effort has been made to shift supplies to areas of higher demand. There are also issues with awareness: People who could benefit and the physicians treating them are not always aware that they are available, that they could be beneficial, and how to use them since some have complicated prescribing guidance. It may also be that availability may not be well known or it can be difficult to identify infusion centers prepared to administer those given by infusion. It has been suggested that it may be time to widen the criteria for eligibility rather than trash doses when they expire.

There have been some recent efforts to more directly link diagnosis to treatment in the latest "test-to-treat" program rolled out. And there may be some hindrance to availability as federal funding dries up, which is currently looking like will start to happen in May. When the government is the sole buyer and their money is no longer available, then no one's going to receive these life-saving treatments. Dr. Amesh Adalja, infectious disease physician and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, told NPR, "It's a bad situation when these drugs are going left unused, when we have people hospitalized and dying from COVID. It's the way this pandemic has gone. A lot of the medical countermeasures haven't been able to be used optimally." And that's a sad, sad thing. Lives are being lost.

We have a new study from the CDC of the effectiveness of vaccines in providing protection against mechanical ventilation and death published on the agency's website on Friday. The study covered a time period from March 2021 to January 2022. The work included case reports from 21 hospitals in 18 states during a time period that included the dominance of the Alpha, Delta and then Omicron variants. Once

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the Omicron variant became the dominant variant in the US, two doses of vaccine still were 79 percent effective at preventing ventilation or death, and three doses were 94 percent effective. Coupled with the recent research showing the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine, long our poor orphan stepchild of vaccines, is as effective and maybe for longer than the mRNA vaccines, we can feel some confidence that the vaccinated and boosted are largely protected from severe outcomes. So no matter which variant is circulating, vaccines continue to do a good job at preventing severe disease and deaths. They really have done a remarkable of protecting those who receive them; unfortunately, they're not a lot of help to those who don't.

And that's it for this first Sunday of spring. I did not dream when this started that I'd still be at this for a third consecutive vernal equinox, but here we are. Keep yourself safe. I'll be back in a few days.

The 3M logo is displayed in a large, bold, red sans-serif font.The words "NOW HIRING" are written in a bold, black, distressed, stamp-like font, slanted slightly to the right.

- Production Operators
- Maintenance Technicians
- Electrical Systems Technicians
- Manufacturing Process Engineers
- Summer Student Temp-Production & Maintenance

Apply at [3M.com/apply](https://www.3m.com/apply)

The Welcome Home



The last time . . . Coach Brian Dolan reminded the seniors and the group that this would be last time they would be together as a team. The three seniors spoke briefly. Wyatt Hearnen thanked everyone for their support in the past four years. "You have taught me many things - to be a teammate, a leader and to over adversity. I love these guys. Go Tigers!" Kaden Kurtz said that the three seniors did an interview on SDPB. "I said we had the best fans in Class A - and you proved me right. Coach Dolan talked about all these lasts that we would have, but we'll be here all the time up on that banner" as he pointed to the banners on the wall. Jayden Zak said, "I'll never forget playing in this gym. It's the loudest and best environment to be play in. I wouldn't give up anything for all of these relationships. It's been a hell of a ride." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Coach Brian Dolan did most of the talking at the Welcome Home celebration Sunday afternoon, at times, he had to fight back the tears from what has been an emotional year for this family of players. He gave many thank yous during the event and had high praise for the team. One individual that he had really high praise was for Wyatt Hearnen. "There is a lightning difference from when I first met him to this year. I was wrong about Wyatt. I wasn't sure about him at first, but he has improved the most over the years."

Dolan said this year was a good experience for the team, community and parents. "Parents - this ride started with all of you guys. Thank you very much for letting me be their coach."

Dolan said he had three officials at the state tournament come up to him to compliment him on the team and their good behavior. "People were impressed. We proved to people that we had the right to be there."

Dolan said that one team had seven assistant coaches. "I don't need six other assistant coaches - I have Kyle - I have the best one here."

Coach Kyle Gerlach also spoke briefly and talked about the huge fan support and thanked everyone for their support. He talked about the huge crowd at the Region 1 game with Milbank. "When we came out of the locker room and came in the gym, I have never seen so many fans filling up this side of the gym. The student section was great. The parents were great. There were people here that have not watched a game in a long time."

In concluding, Dolan said, "It was an amazing year."

Historic Impact of Public Health

Life expectancy is a measure commonly considered when it comes to the overall health of a population. In this day and age, when most of us think about which medical interventions are most important to increase life expectancy, we probably think about things like treatment of cancer, interventions to treat heart attacks, or surgeries for life threatening illnesses. While those things are all important, their overall impact on a population's life expectancy pales in comparison to the prevention of infectious disease.

Average life expectancy around the world has doubled in the last two hundred years, from about 40 years to 80 years, with the bulk of that change occurring long before we had effective cancer treatment or cardiac catheterization. Before the 20th century, infant and childhood death was extremely common due to infections spread by contaminated water and food. It is estimated that through most of human history nearly half of children died before adulthood, almost entirely due to infections.

Armed with the new knowledge of germ theory, societies in the late 1800's began instituting early public health interventions such as sewage management, water treatment, milk pasteurization, and garbage collection, which resulted in rapid decreases in death from food and water borne infections, and thus increased population wide life expectancy.

Later, widespread use of vaccines for many fatal diseases led to enormous improvements in the health and longevity of populations across the globe. Try to imagine a world in which almost everyone is affected by the death of children due to polio, measles, smallpox, tetanus, the list goes on. That these deaths are now extremely rare or eliminated altogether is nothing short of a modern miracle, and we ought not take it for granted.

Antibiotic use has exploded since the discovery of penicillin in 1928, and the proper use of antibiotics continues to help us prevent early death due to infections that might have been fatal left untreated. Modern science has led to effective treatments for even the most challenging infections such as tuberculosis and HIV.

Modern medicine uses abundant, wonderful technologies and treatments which help us extend lives and reduce suffering of our individual patients. But statistically, no fancy new development is likely to have the quantitative impact on human society that compares to those early public health measures. As a society, we would be careless to forget the worth of our public health institutions which have helped us thrive and double our average life expectancy.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

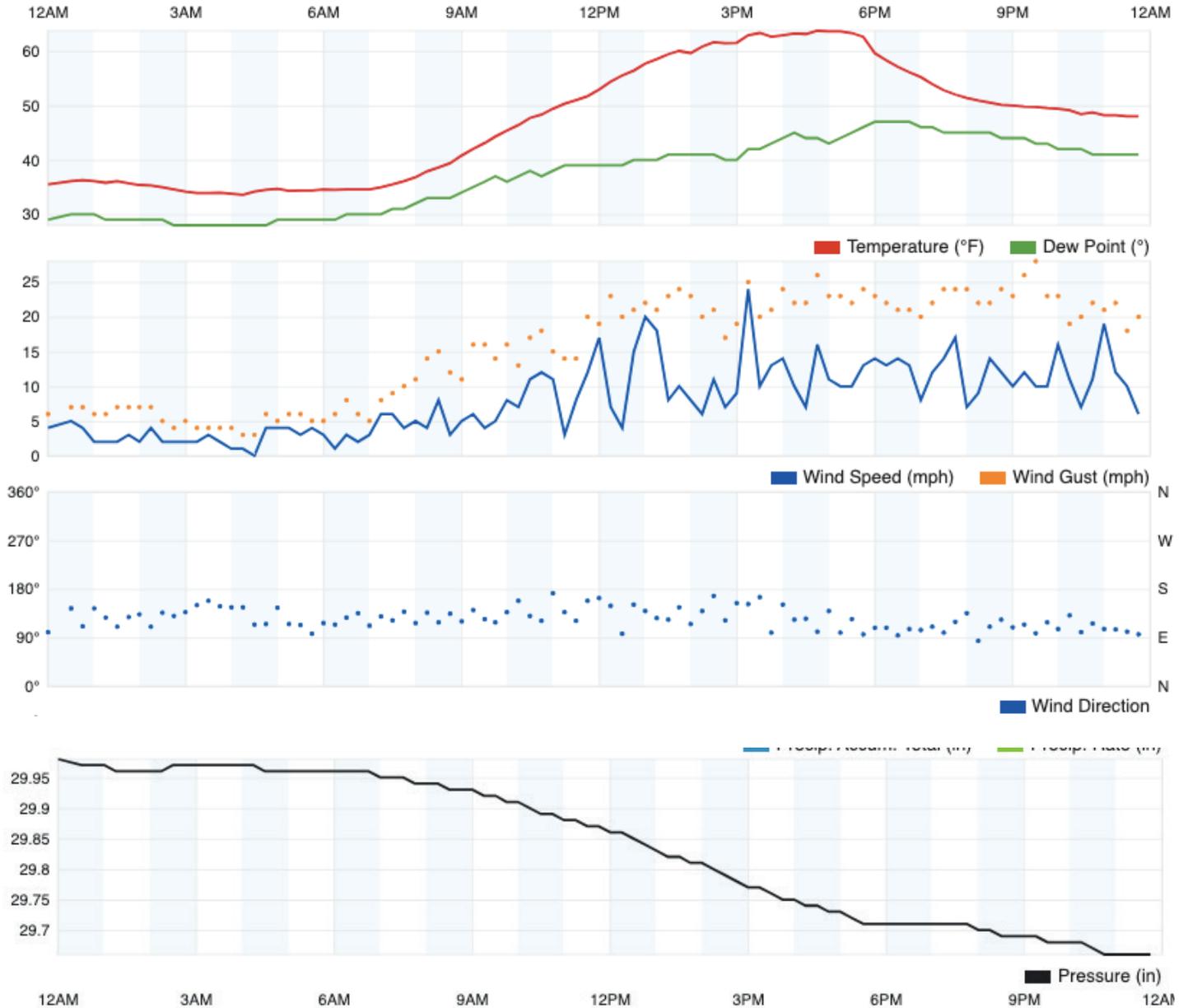


Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

High: 51 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy and Blustery then Partly Cloudy

Low: 30 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 51 °F

Tuesday Night



Partly Cloudy and Blustery then Slight Chance Snow

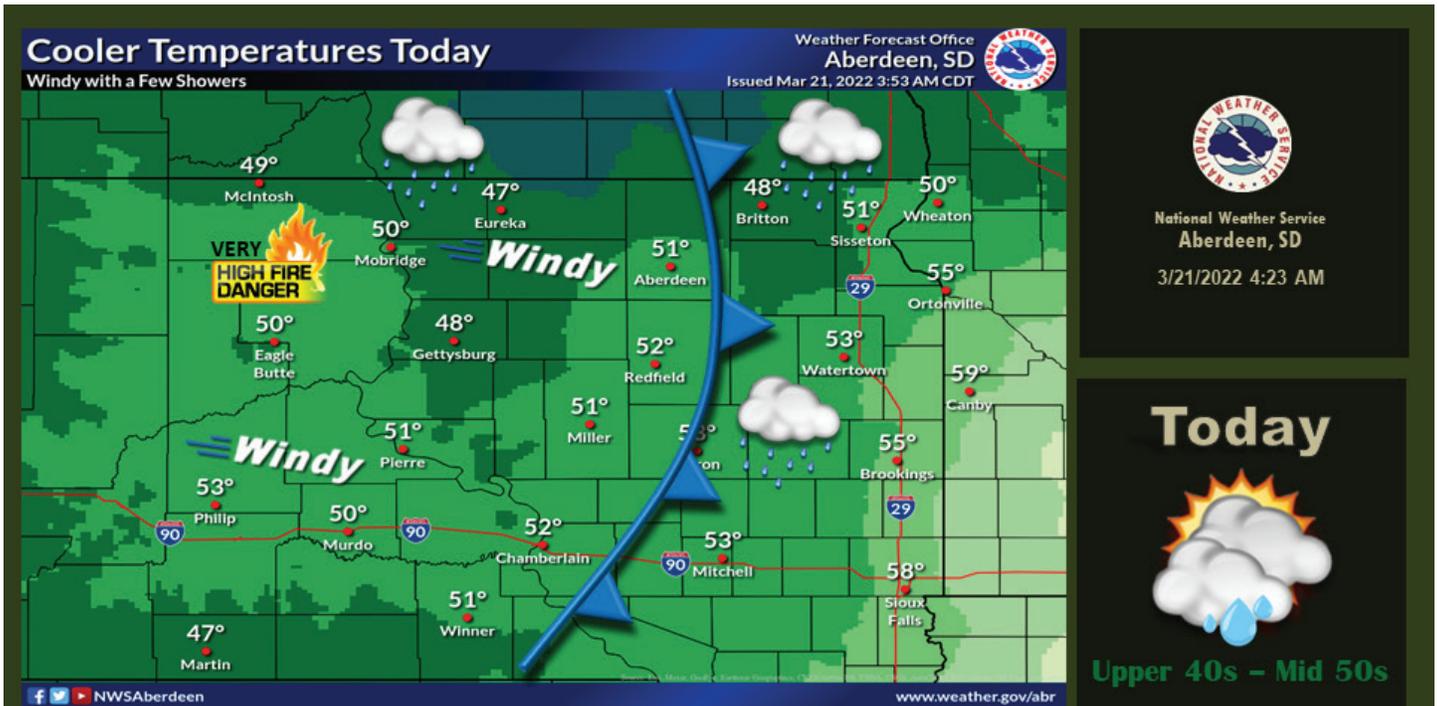
Low: 30 °F

Wednesday



Breezy. Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain

High: 44 °F



Today's Forecast Details

- A cold front pushes through during the day.
- Strong northwest winds with gusts of 35-50mph possible.
- Very High Fire Danger across Central South Dakota.
- A few passing showers through this evening.

Cool Through Mid Week

Tuesday



43-52°

Wednesday



39-49°

Thursday



47-60°

A cold front will swing through the area today ushering in strong northwest winds and cooler air. A few passing showers will be possible here and there through the day into this evening. The strong winds and dry fuels across Central South Dakota will once again lead to the Grassland Fire Danger Index reaching the Very High category. A few rain or snow showers may be possible through midweek, but any accumulations will be very little at best.

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Today in Weather History

March 21, 1997: As temperatures began to warm up towards the end of March, the near-record to record winter snowpack over central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota started to melt. The resulting runoff filled up ditches, lakes, creeks, streams, and low-lying areas. The massive amount of water swamped hundreds of sections of county and township roads as well as several state and federal highways. The inundated parts of roads were either broken up or washed out. Tens of culverts were blown out or damaged, and several bridges were either destroyed or washed out by chunks of ice and the high water flow. Road closures were extensive, with rerouting taking place for school buses, mail carriers, farmers, and ranchers. Many spillways and dams received some damage or were washed out. Also, thousands of acres of farmland and pastureland were underwater. Due to the high groundwater, a countless number of homes received water in their basements. A few towns were partially flooded, including Twin Brooks in Grant County, Corona in Roberts County, and Raymond in Clark County. The following week, in the early morning hours of March 27, water flowed into Raymond filling the basements of several homes. In rural areas, several farms were surrounded by water and were inaccessible, leaving some people stranded and livestock marooned. Many other residences and businesses, mainly across northeast South Dakota, received significant damage or were a total loss. As a result, several people had to be evacuated. At the time, many long-term residents said this was the most significant flooding they had seen in their lifetimes. The flooding continued into early to mid-April.

March 21, 2012: Several record high temperatures occurred across the region in March. Click [HERE](#) for a recap.

1801: The Jefferson Flood hit the Connecticut Valley. The flooding was the greatest since 1692. The Federalists named the flood for the new President, who they blamed for the disaster.

1876: More than 40 inches of snow stopped traffic in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Trains were delayed, and mail carriers resorted to snowshoes.

1932: A tornado swarm occurred in the Deep South. Between late afternoon and early the next morning, severe thunderstorms spawned 31 tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. The tornadoes killed 334 persons and injured 1784 others. Northern Alabama was the hardest hit. Tornadoes in Alabama killed 286 persons and caused five million dollars damage.

1951: Antarctica is the windiest place in the world. Port Martin averaged 40 mph winds throughout the year. On this day, the winds averaged 108 mph.

1952 - Severe thunderstorms spawned thirty-one tornadoes across Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky. The tornadoes killed 343 persons and caused 15 million dollars damage. Arkansas and Tennessee each reported thirteen tornadoes. The towns of Judsonia AR and Henderson TN were nearly wiped off the map in what proved to be the worst tornado outbreak of record for Arkansas. A tornado, one and a half miles wide at times, left a church the only undamaged building at Judsonia. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the Northern High Plains Region produced blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Rapid City SD, and snowfall totals ranged up to 20 inches at Lead SD. The high winds produced snow drifts six feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitterly cold weather prevailed across the northeastern U.S. Portland ME reported their coldest spring day of record with a morning low of 5 above, and an afternoon high of just 21 degrees. Marquette MI reported a record low of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Snow blanketed the northeastern U.S. early in the day, with six inches reported at Rutland VT. Morning and afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds from southwestern Mississippi to southwest Georgia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The first full day of spring was a cold one for the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures damaged 62 percent of the peach crop in upstate South Carolina, and 72 percent of the peach crop in the ridge area of South Carolina. Elkins WV, which a week earlier reported a record high of 82 degrees, was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 16 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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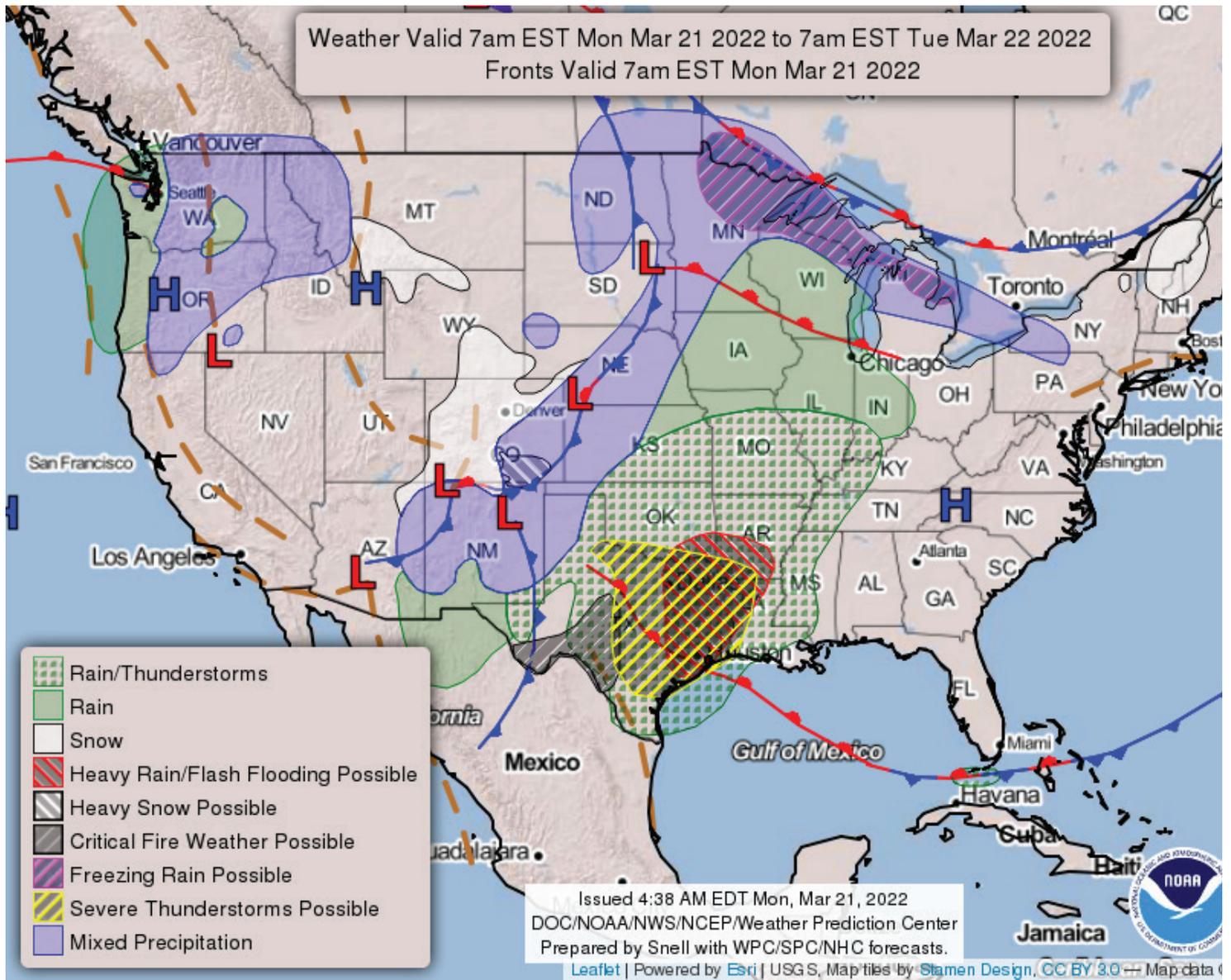
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 64 °F at 3:23 PM
Low Temp: 34 °F at 4:16 AM
Wind: 28 mph at 9:27 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 16 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 76 in 1926
Record Low: -12 in 1965
Average High: 44°F
Average Low: 22°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.55
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.72
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 7:47:35 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:29:28 AM



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Here's To Happiness!

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Most people are about as happy as they want to be!" Although it is a very simple statement, it is a very brilliant statement and leads us to the fact that each of us is responsible for our own happiness. Happiness, then, becomes an "inside" job.

Everyone seems to want to be happy. People often think happiness can be "discovered" in parties or riches or wealth or recognition or "things." Many who search for it never find it, even though they may spend an entire life looking for it.

True happiness cannot be found in material things or worldly pleasures. World history proves that fact. We see far too many examples of people who tried to find "it" in "things" and "pleasures." Finally, when it was too late, they realized that their journey to find true happiness led them to all the wrong places. When they took their final inventory, they discovered that they had "everything" but happiness.

The Psalmist wrote, "I rejoice - I am happy - in Your promise, like one who has great spoils." The "picture" the Psalmist "paints" for us here is one of a warrior who has returned from battle and is looking at his "booty." He opens God's Word - God's booty - and "finds great spoils."

For many, life is a battle against the forces of evil - the promise that happiness is in the "things" of this world. But, in the final analysis, when the smoke clears from the battlefield of life, it becomes obvious that happiness is only found in God's Word: the "gifts" we seek are there.

Prayer: Lord, we are reminded again, that whatever we need can always be found in Your Word if we seek it there. Lead us to seek the treasures of Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil. Psalm 119:162

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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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News from the Associated Press

South Dakota women shock Baylor 61-47 at No. 2 seed's home

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

WACO, Texas (AP) — Chloe Lamb, Hannah Sjerven and Liv Korngable are super-seniors at South Dakota who came back together hoping for a special season. They have something really sweet — and are still playing, even as a No. 10 seed in the women's NCAA Tournament.

Sjerven scored 16 points and Chloe Lamb added 15 as the Summit League champion Coyotes beat Baylor 61-47 on the No. 2 seed's home court Sunday. They are going to the Sweet 16 for the first time.

"It's a joy, it was a great experience to play in this environment, Yes, it's settling that there's only 16 teams left playing in the tournament, so it's very cool," said Korngable, who added 11 points and five assists.

"Well, it's so special to have the young ladies that we do, and for them to come back, I think, certainly speaks volumes of what they wanted to accomplished," coach Dawn Plitzuweit said. "And they obviously knew they needed all three of them together."

South Dakota scored the game's first 11 points and led throughout to become the second No. 10 seed to beat a No. 2 seed on Sunday, after Creighton had won 64-62 at Iowa. The eighth double-digit seeds winning on the opening weekend of the women's tournament this year matched a record.

Queen Egbo had 13 points while two-time AP All-America forward NaLyssa Smith matched her season low with 10 points on 4-of-11 shooting for the Bears (28-7) while being constantly surrounded by defenders. Smith could be the top overall pick in the next WNBA draft.

Baylor saw the end of its streak of 12 consecutive Sweet 16 appearances. Summit League player of the year Lamb, top defensive player Sjerven and the Coyotes are headed to Wichita instead next weekend.

"It looked like we were in slow motion to start the game," first-year Baylor coach Nicki Collen said. "I think we played them pretty even after that 11-0 start. ... They're really, really physical. We're pretty finessey."

In a building where Baylor rarely loses, the Coyotes had a loud contingency of roughly 150 fans, cheerleaders and pep band members that got to celebrate with them. The fans in the seats behind their bench stood chanting "U-S-D!" in the closing seconds and celebrated with their team long after Baylor had left the court.

"I thought our kids played really hard, I thought they played fearless, and I thought they made a lot of good things happen," Plitzuweit said. "They've earned this and now they have a chance to enjoy it."

Baylor had won 66 consecutive home games against non-conference opponents since UConn won in the Ferrell Center on Jan. 13, 2014.

The Bears won their 12th consecutive Big 12 title even after losing their first two conference games with Collen, the WNBA coach who took over when three-time national champion coach Kim Mulkey left after 21 seasons last spring for LSU. But this is their earliest NCAA tourney exit since 2008.

"I think slowly and surely, the Baylor family realized that maybe I do fit in here, whatever that sounds like or looks like. I think that was hard for them too. I think change is hard," Collen said. "I'm incredibly grateful. I'm sure they're not real happy with me right now. That's OK, because I'm not really happy with me right now, either."

South Dakota, in its 10th year of Division I eligibility, is in its fourth consecutive NCAA Tournament, and fifth overall. But the Coyotes had never won a tourney game before the last few days.

The Coyotes had their 11-0 lead in less than three minutes while hitting their first four shots, including two 3-pointers by Lamb. It was Sjerven made a 3-pointer on the first shot, just like in their 75-61 victory over Mississippi when leading throughout Friday in their first-round game.

"Hannah started the game off with another 3, I think we all kind of smiled and relaxed a little bit," Plitzuweit said.

"Just that this is fun," Sjerven said when asked her thoughts about the fast start. "And the game of basketball is as simple as five players going at another set of five players, and not to overthink it too much

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and it was a fun game.”

BIG PICTURE

South Dakota: The Coyotes, who have won 11 games in a row and 27 of 28 overall, played with confidence and were fearless on the road against a perennial Top 10 team. They are the second Summit League team to make the Sweet 16 (South Dakota State in 2019). Along with the three super seniors, there were two second-year freshmen in the starting lineup.

Baylor: The Bears shot a season-low 31.5% from the field (17 of 54) and were held 30 points below their season average while scoring their fewest points since December 2015. They missed seven shots and had seven turnovers before scoring their first points. They finished with 19 turnovers, leading to 22 points for South Dakota.

Double-digit seeds continue winning in women's NCAAs

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Double-digit seeds are leaving their mark on the first weekend of the women's NCAA Tournament and bouncing some of the top players and teams in the country, including Iowa's Caitlin Clark and Baylor's NaLyssa Smith.

Creighton and South Dakota continued the run of upsets as the two No. 10 seeds advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time ever.

The Bluejays got the second round started, shocking Clark and Iowa with a two-point win that silenced the sellout crowd in Iowa City. Hours later, South Dakota knocked off No. 2 Baylor, ending Smith's college career on her home court.

If you're counting, that's eight wins by double-digit seeds in this tournament — tying the most ever in NCAA women's basketball history through two rounds, a mark set in 2018.

Two double-digit seeds in the Sweet 16 already matches the record that's been accomplished a few times. And there's a chance for a few more to win Monday to break the mark when the regional semifinals field is completed.

Creighton was able to pull off its win thanks in part to sophomore Lauren Jensen, who transferred from Iowa after her freshman year. She scored 19 points, including a 3-pointer with 12 seconds left that gave the Bluejays the lead for good.

"I've gotten the question a lot," Creighton coach Jim Flanery said. "How is Lauren going to feel today, what's Lauren going to play like, da da da da?" Those last few minutes had to be magical and special, and we're super proud of her and we're super proud that she's part of our program."

While Creighton needed last-minute heroics from Jensen, South Dakota took it right at Baylor and never let up. The Coyotes' 14-point road win was the largest by a 10-seed over a No. 2 according to STATS.

South Dakota was led by a trio of super-seniors, who were hoping to have a special season. They certainly are.

"We had a very special team in 2020 that didn't have a chance to play in the NCAA tournament until — I think all — and that's young ladies were on that team at that point in time," coach Dawn Plitzuweit said. "So for them to have the opportunity, it has been something that they've wanted and they've relished and they've certainly taken advantage of being in the moment for two games."

Here are a few other tidbits from Sunday's games:

SHOWING UP

An average of 6,449 fans came to first-round games this year, including a sellout crowd of 14,382 at Carver Arena in Iowa. The Hawkeyes also sold out their second-round game against Creighton.

"A wonderful opportunity for a women's basketball game today on ABC in front of a sold-out crowd," Clark said. "I just feel bad for the fans because they've given us so much over these past two weeks, really willed us to a regular season title here at home versus Michigan, and I hope they come out and support us the exact same way next year. I know they will."

With crowds expected to be high in the remaining second-round games, the attendance is on pace for

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the most in the opening two rounds since the 2004 season when the average was nearly 6,700 a game.
HOLDING FORM

It wasn't all about the upsets Sunday, with No. 1 seeds South Carolina, Stanford and Louisville advancing to the Sweet 16. The Gamecocks continued playing stellar defense, holding Miami to just 33 points in a 16-point win. The 54 points allowed by South Carolina in the first two rounds of the women's NCAAs is 17 fewer than any other team has allowed in its first two games.

"There's a nastiness to us on that side of the basketball," Gamecocks coach Dawn Staley said. "It wins basketball games for us,"

Louisville and Stanford needed strong second halves to pull away from Gonzaga and Kansas, respectively. Tara VanDerveer's team used a 32-15 third quarter to turn a two-point halftime lead into a blowout.

N.C. State will look to join them as the fourth No. 1 seed in the Sweet 16 on Monday night.

SAYING GOODBYE

Texas and the NCAA Tournament are saying farewell to the Longhorns' home court at the Frank Erwin Center, also known as "The Drum."

Sunday's game was the last one at the 45-year-old building, which is being closed as Texas moves to new arena just a few blocks away. Texas has won eight consecutive tournament games at the Erwin Center and is 27-9 overall there. The Longhorns hadn't lost an NCAA Tournament game at home since the first round in 2009.

"It was an honor for me to play there," Texas freshman Rori Harmon said.

In all 72 games had been played at that site — tied for third-most of any arena in NCAA women's basketball history.

South Dakota ends daily COVID-19 reporting

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Health officials in South Dakota say COVID-19 case rates have dropped so dramatically they'll no longer give daily updates.

The Argus Leader reported that the state health department ended daily reports on Friday and will now give only weekly reports. The first is expected on Wednesday.

As of Friday the seven-day average of positive cases in South Dakota was 35. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention only five states had lower per-capita rates of new cases.

The health department shifted from daily to weekly reporting last summer but moved back to daily reports in August as the delta variant surged across the country.

Canadian Pacific rail work stoppage could hit US agriculture

DETROIT (AP) — Canadian Teamsters and CP Rail blamed each other for a work stoppage Sunday that brought trains to a halt across Canada and interrupted fertilizer and other shipments to and from the U.S.

More than 3,000 Canadian Pacific Rail conductors, engineers, train and yard workers represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference are off the job after both sides couldn't reach a deal by a midnight deadline.

Both sides say they are still talking with federal mediators.

Canadian Pacific covers much of the U.S. Midwest and is a large shipper of potash and fertilizer for agriculture. It also carries grain from the U.S. to its northern neighbor for domestic use and exports. The railroad serves the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri and other states, according to a map on its investor website. CP also operates in New England and upstate New York, spokesman Patrick Waldron said.

CP says it's the leading carrier of potash, a plant nutrient used in the production of multiple crops. The company says in investor documents that it carries 70% of the potash produced in North America, all from mines in Saskatchewan.

The railroad says it also carries fertilizers, including phosphate, urea, ammonium sulfate, ammonium nitrate and anhydrous ammonia. About half its fertilizer shipments originate from processing plants in Alberta.

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CP got 29% of its 2020 freight revenue from cross-border shipments between the U.S. and Canada, its investor website said.

A lengthy interruption of fertilizer shipments could hurt U.S. farmers, who are nearing the spring planting season. The work stoppage could also exacerbate existing supply chain bottlenecks in the U.S. and Canada that stem from the COVID-19 pandemic.

U.S. trains were not affected by the work stoppage, but the railroad cannot make shipments between the two nations, Waldron said.

On Saturday, the Teamsters said in a statement that the company had locked the workers out, but later issued another statement saying the workers were also on strike.

The original statement posted to the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference website late Saturday said the union wanted to continue bargaining but the company "chose to put the Canadian supply chain and tens of thousands of jobs at risk."

"As Canadians grapple with a never-ending pandemic, exploding commodity prices and the war in Ukraine, the rail carrier is adding an unnecessary layer of insecurity, especially for those who depend on the rail network," the statement said.

CP Rail, Canada's second-largest railroad operator, said it was the company that wanted to keep talking, and the union that pulled its employees off the job.

CP President Keith Creel said in a news release the union "failed to respond" to a new offer presented by mediators before the midnight deadline.

"Instead, the TCRC opted to withdraw their services before the deadline for a strike or lockout could legally take place," he said. "The TCRC is well aware of the damage this reckless action will cause to the Canadian supply chain."

Labor Minister Seamus O'Regan urged the two sides to keep bargaining.

The Canadian and U.S. supply chains also were hit by trucker convoy protests blocking border crossings in February, and now are dealing with the effects, particularly on global fuel supplies, of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies.

All the disruptions pushed inflation to its highest level since the early 1980s, with essentials such as food and fuel facing some of the sharpest price hikes.

CP and the union have been negotiating since September, with wages and pensions a sticking point. A clause on where employees take their federally mandated break periods is also an issue.

CP Rail says this is the fifth work stoppage since 1993.

State officials euthanize 85K birds amid avian flu outbreak

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — State officials have euthanized 85,000 birds in hopes of containing an avian flu outbreak at two factory farms.

South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported Saturday that the outbreaks occurred at farms in Charles Mix County in the southeastern portion of the state. The disease was found in turkeys at the facilities although other poultry in close contact with the turkeys were euthanized as well.

Assistant State Veterinarian Mendell Miller said the state doesn't release the names of facilities experiencing outbreaks. Miller said two other sites are under investigation for possible avian flu. Those counties will be identified if tests come back positive.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been reporting avian flu in wild birds, commercial facilities and backyard coops in multiple states since January. The first case was reported in South Dakota on March 6.

Chinese airliner crashes with 132 aboard in country's south

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A China Eastern Boeing 737-800 with 132 people on board crashed in the southern province of Guangxi on Monday, officials said.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China said in a statement the crash occurred near the city of Wuzhou

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in Teng county. The flight was traveling from Kunming in the western province of Yunnan to the industrial center of Guangzhou along the east coast, it added.

There was no immediate word on numbers of dead and injured. The plane was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members, the CAAC said, correcting earlier reports that 133 people had been on board.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an "all-out effort" to be made in the rescue operation, for post-crash arrangements to be handled appropriately and potential safety hazards investigated to ensure complete civil aviation flight safety.

People's Daily reports that 117 rescuers have already arrived at the crash site. Guangxi fire department is organizing 650 rescuers who are heading to the site from three directions.

CCTV reports that China Eastern Airlines set up nine teams with focuses like aircraft disposal, accident investigation and family assistance, and they are heading to the site. The CAAC said it had sent a team of officials, and the Guangxi fire service said work was underway to control a mountainside blaze ignited by the crash.

Satellite data from NASA showed a massive fire just in the area of where the plane went down at the time of the crash.

Calls to China Eastern offices were not immediately answered. State media said local police first received calls from villagers alerting the crash around 2:30 p.m. (0630 GMT). Guangxi provincial emergency management department said contact with the plane was lost at 2:15 p.m. (0615 GMT).

Chicago-based Boeing Co. said it was aware of the initial reports of the crash and was "working to gather more information." Boeing stock dropped over 8% in pre-market trading early Monday.

Shanghai-based China Eastern is one of China's top three airlines, operating scores of domestic and international routes serving 248 destinations.

China Eastern's flight No. 5735 had been traveling at around 30,000 feet when suddenly, just after 0620 GMT, the plane entered a deep dive at its cruising altitude speed of 455 knots (523 mph, 842 kph), according to data from flight-tracking website FlightRadar24.com. The data suggests the plane crashed within a minute and a half of whatever went wrong.

The plane stopped transmitting data just southwest of the Chinese city of Wuzhou.

The aircraft was delivered to China Eastern from Boeing in June 2015 and had been flying for more than six years. China Eastern Airlines uses the Boeing 737-800 as one of the main workhorses of its fleet — of its over 600 planes, 109 are Boeing 737-800s.

China Eastern online made its website have a black-and-white homepage after the crash.

Boeing began delivering the 737-800 to customers in 1997 and delivered the last of the series to China Eastern in 2020. It made over 5,200 of the narrow-body aircraft, a popular, single-aisle commuter plane.

The twin-engine, single aisle Boeing 737 is one of the world's most popular planes for short and medium-haul flights. China Eastern operates multiple versions of the common aircraft, including the 737-800 and the 737 Max.

The deadliest crash involving a Boeing 737-800 came in January 2020, when Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard accidentally shot down a Ukraine International Airlines flight, killing all 176 people on board.

The 737 Max version was grounded worldwide after two fatal crashes. China's aviation regulator cleared that plane to return to service late last year, making the country the last major market to do so.

China's last deadly crash of a civilian jetliner was in 2010.

Jackson, 1st Black female high court pick, faces senators

By MARK SHERMAN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Judiciary Committee begins historic confirmation hearings Monday for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who would be the first Black woman on the Supreme Court.

Barring a significant misstep by the 51-year-old Jackson, a federal judge for the past nine years, Democrats who control the Senate by the slimmest of margins intend to wrap up her confirmation before Easter.

Jackson is expected to present an opening statement Monday afternoon, then answer questions from

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the committee's 11 Democrats and 11 Republicans over the next two days. She will be introduced by Thomas B. Griffith, a retired judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and Lisa M. Fairfax, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

Jackson appeared before the same committee last year, after President Joe Biden chose her to fill an opening on the federal appeals court in Washington, just down the hill from the Supreme Court.

Her testimony will give most Americans, as well as the Senate, their most extensive look yet at the Harvard-trained lawyer with a resume that includes two years as a federal public defender. That makes her the first nominee with significant criminal defense experience since Thurgood Marshall, the first Black American to serve on the nation's highest court.

In addition to being the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, Jackson would be the third Black justice, after Marshall and his successor, Justice Clarence Thomas.

The American Bar Association, which evaluates judicial nominees, on Friday gave Jackson's its highest rating, unanimously "well qualified."

Janette McCarthy Wallace, general counsel of the NAACP, said she is excited to see a Black woman on the verge of a high court seat.

"Representation matters," Wallace said. "It's critical to have diverse experience on the bench. It should reflect the rich cultural diversity of this country."

It's not yet clear how aggressively Republicans will go after Jackson, given that her confirmation would not alter the court's 6-3 conservative majority.

Still, some Republicans have signaled they could use Jackson's nomination to try to brand Democrats as soft on crime, an emerging theme in GOP midterm election campaigns. Biden has chosen several former public defenders for life-tenured judicial posts. In addition, Jackson served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission, an independent agency created by Congress to reduce disparity in federal prison sentences.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., highlighted one potential line of attack. "I've noticed an alarming pattern when it comes to Judge Jackson's treatment of sex offenders, especially those preying on children," Hawley wrote on Twitter last week in a thread that was echoed by the Republican National Committee. Hawley did not raise the issue when he questioned Jackson last year before voting against her appeals court confirmation.

The White House pushed back forcefully against the criticism as "toxic and weakly presented misinformation." Sentencing expert Douglas Berman, an Ohio State law professor, wrote on his blog that Jackson's record shows she is skeptical of the range of prison terms recommended for child pornography cases, "but so too were prosecutors in the majority of her cases and so too are district judges nationwide."

Hawley is one of several committee Republicans, along with Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, who are potential 2024 presidential candidates, and their aspirations may collide with other Republicans who would just as soon not pursue a scorched-earth approach to Jackson's nomination.

Biden chose Jackson in February, fulfilling a campaign pledge to nominate a Black woman to the Supreme Court for the first time in American history. She would take the seat of Justice Stephen Breyer, who announced in January that he would retire this summer after 28 years on the court.

Jackson once worked as a high court law clerk to Breyer early in her legal career.

Democrats are moving quickly to confirm Jackson, even though Breyer's seat will not officially open until the summer. They have no votes to spare in a 50-50 Senate that they run by virtue of the tiebreaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris.

But they are not moving as fast as Republicans did when they installed Amy Coney Barrett on the court little more than a month after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and days before the 2020 presidential election.

Barrett, the third of President Donald Trump's high court picks, entrenched the court's conservative majority when she took the place of the liberal Ginsburg.

Last year, Jackson won Senate confirmation by a 53-44 vote, with three Republicans supporting her. It's not clear how many Republicans might vote for her this time.

Jackson is married to Patrick Johnson, a surgeon in Washington. They have two daughters, one in college and the other in high school. She is related by marriage to former House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.,

who also was the Republican vice presidential nominee in 2012. Ryan has voiced support for Jackson's nomination.

Jackson has spoken about how her children have kept her in touch with reality, even as she has held a judge's gavel since 2013. In the courtroom, she told an audience in Athens, Georgia, in 2017, "people listen and generally do what I tell them to do."

At home, though, her daughters "make it very clear I know nothing, I should not tell them anything, much less give them any orders, that is, if they talk to me at all," Jackson said.

Ukraine rejects Russian demand for surrender in Mariupol

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian officials defiantly rejected a Russian demand that their forces in Mariupol lay down arms and raise white flags Monday in exchange for safe passage out of the besieged strategic port city.

Even as Russia intensified its attempt to bombard Mariupol into surrender, its offensive in other parts of Ukraine has floundered. Western governments and analysts see the broader conflict grinding into a war of attrition, with Russia continuing to barrage cities.

In the capital Kyiv, Russian shelling devastated a shopping center near the city center, killing at least eight people and leaving a sea of rubble amid scarred high-rises. Ukrainian authorities also said Russia shelled a chemical plant in northeastern Ukraine, causing an ammonia leak, and hit a military training base in the west with cruise missiles.

The encircled southern city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov has seen some of the worst horrors of the war, under Russian pounding for more than three weeks. Strikes hit an art school sheltering some 400 people only hours before Russia's offer to open two corridors out of the city in return for the capitulation of its defenders, according to Ukrainian officials.

Ukrainian officials rejected the Russian proposal for safe passage out of Mariupol even before Russia's deadline of 5 a.m. Moscow time (0200GMT) for a response came and went.

"There can be no talk of any surrender, laying down of arms," Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Irina Vereshchuk told the news outlet Ukrainian Pravda. "We have already informed the Russian side about this."

Mariupol Mayor Piotr Andryushchenko also quickly dismissed the offer, saying in a Facebook post he didn't need to wait until the morning deadline to respond and cursing at the Russians, according to the news agency Interfax Ukraine.

Russian Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev had offered two corridors — one heading east toward Russia and the other west to other parts of Ukraine. He did not say what Russia planned if the offer was rejected.

The Russian Ministry of Defense said authorities in Mariupol could face a military tribunal if they sided with what it described as "bandits," the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Multiple attempts to evacuate residents from Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities have failed or only partly succeeded, with bombardments continuing as civilians tried to flee. Mariupol officials said at least 2,300 people have died in the siege, with some buried in mass graves.

Ahead of the rejected surrender offer, a Russian airstrike hit the school where some 400 civilians were taking shelter and it was not clear how many casualties there were, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video address early Monday.

"They are under the rubble, and we don't know how many of them have survived," he said. He said Ukraine would "shoot down the pilot who dropped that bomb."

The strike on the art school was the second time in less than a week that officials reported an attack on a public building where Mariupol residents had taken shelter. On Wednesday, a bomb hit a theater where more than 1,000 people were believed to be sheltering. At least 130 people were reported rescued on Friday, but there has been no update since then.

City officials and aid groups say food, water and electricity have run low in Mariupol and fighting has kept out humanitarian convoys. Communications are severed.

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Some who were able to flee Mariupol tearfully hugged relatives as they arrived by train Sunday in Lviv, about 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) to the west.

"Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target," said Olga Nikitina, who was embraced by her brother as she got off the train. "Gunfire blew out the windows. The apartment was below freezing."

The fall of Mariupol would allow Russian forces in southern and eastern Ukraine to unite. But Western military analysts say that even if the city is taken, the troops battling a block at a time for control there may be too depleted to help secure Russian breakthroughs on other fronts.

More than three weeks into the invasion, the two sides now seem to be trying to wear each other down, experts say, with bogged-down Russian forces launching long-range missiles at cities and military bases as Ukrainian forces carry out hit-and-run attacks and seek to sever Russian supply lines.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Ukrainian resistance means Russian President Vladimir Putin's "forces on the ground are essentially stalled."

"It's had the effect of him moving his forces into a woodchipper," Austin told CBS on Sunday.

Talks between Russia and Ukraine have continued but failed to bridge the chasm between the two sides, with Russia demanding Ukraine disarm and Ukraine saying Russian forces must withdraw from the whole country.

U.S. President Joe Biden was expected to talk later Monday with the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Britain to discuss the war, before heading later in the week to Brussels and then Poland for in-person talks.

In Ukraine's major cities, hundreds of men, women and children have been killed in Russian attacks.

Ukraine's prosecutor general said a Russian shell struck a chemical plant outside the eastern city of Sumy just after 3 a.m. Monday, causing a leak in a 50-ton tank of ammonia that took hours to contain.

Russian military spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed the leak was a "planned provocation" by Ukrainian forces to falsely accuse Russia of a chemical attack.

Konashenkov also said an overnight cruise missile strike hit a military training center in the Rivne region of western Ukraine. He said 80 foreign and Ukrainian troops were killed, though the figure could not be independently confirmed. Vitaliy Koval, the head of the Rivne regional military administration, confirmed a twin Russian missile strike on a training center there early Monday but offered no details about injuries or deaths.

In Kyiv, eight people were killed by shelling in the densely populated Podil district not far from the city center Sunday, emergency officials said. It devastated a shopping center, leaving a flattened ruin still smoldering Monday morning in the midst of high-rise towers. The force of the explosion shattered every window in the high-rise next door and twisted their metal frames.

In the distance, the sound of artillery rang out as firefighters picked their way through the destruction. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Russian shelling also hit several houses in Podil. Klitschko announced a curfew in the capital from Monday evening to 7 a.m. local time Wednesday, telling residents to stay at home or in shelters. Shops, pharmacies and gas stations will all be closed.

Russian troops have been shelling Kyiv for a fourth week now and are trying to surround the capital, which had nearly 3 million people before the war.

Britain's defense ministry said Monday that Ukrainian resistance had kept the bulk of Russian forces more than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the city center, but that Kyiv "remains Russia's primary military objective."

The U.N. has confirmed 902 civilian deaths in the war but concedes the actual toll is likely much higher. It says nearly 3.4 million people have fled Ukraine. Estimates of Russian deaths vary, but even conservative figures are in the low thousands.

The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office says at least 115 children have been killed and 148 injured.

Some Russians also have fled their country amid a widespread crackdown on dissent. Russia has arrested thousands of antiwar protesters, muzzled independent media and cut access to social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

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Live updates: Ukraine says Russia shelled chemical plant

By The Associated Press undefined

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's prosecutor general said a Russian shell struck a chemical plant outside the city of Sumy a little after 3 a.m. Monday, causing a leak in a 50-ton tank of ammonia that took hours to contain.

Russian military spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed the leak was a "planned provocation" by Ukrainian forces to falsely accuse Russia of a chemical attack.

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KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

— Russia demands Mariupol lay down arms but Ukraine says no

— 'No city anymore': Mariupol survivors take train to safety

— Biden adds stop in Poland, crucial ally in the Ukraine crisis, to his trip this week to Europe

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

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS TODAY:

NEW YORK — Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov says more progress must be made in talks with Ukraine before Russian President Vladimir Putin can meet his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Peskov says that "in order to talk about a meeting of the two presidents, first it's necessary to do the homework, it's necessary to hold talks and agree the results."

He adds that "so far significant movement has not been achieved" in the talks and that "there are not any agreements which they could commit to" at a joint meeting.

Ukraine and Russia's delegations have held several rounds of talks both in person and more recently via video link. Zelenskyy has said he would be prepared to meet Putin directly to seek agreements on key issues.

BRUSSELS — EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell is accusing Russia of committing war crimes in Ukraine, most notably in the besieged port city of Mariupol where hundreds of civilians have been killed.

Borrell says that "what's happening in Mariupol is a massive war crime. Destroying everything, bombarding and killing everybody in an indiscriminate manner. This is something awful."

He says Russia has lost any moral high ground and he underlined that "war also has law." Borrell's remarks Monday came as he arrived to chair a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels.

The International Criminal Court in the Netherlands is gathering evidence about any possible war crimes in Ukraine, but Russia, like the United States, does not recognize the tribunal's jurisdiction.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney says his country is "certainly open to other mechanisms for accountability in terms of the atrocities that are taking place in Ukraine right now."

Coveney says social media images of the war are "driving a fury across the European Union" for those responsible to be held to account.

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister says that while there have been advances in cease-fire talks between Russia and Ukraine, "very large" gaps remain between the two sides.

Naftali Bennett, who has acted as intermediary between the two warring countries in recent weeks, said at a conference on Monday that Israel "will continue — together with other friends in the world — to try and bridge the gap and bring an end to the war."

Israel has good relations with both Ukraine and Russia and has acted as a broker between the two sides since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February. Bennett has held multiple phone calls with both leaders in

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recent weeks and flew to Moscow earlier this month to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Bennett has offered to host a summit in Jerusalem.

"There's still a long way to go, because as I stated, there are a number of controversial issues, some of them fundamental," the prime minister said at the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper's conference.

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia — Slovenia says it plans to send the country's diplomatic representatives back to Ukraine later this week.

Prime Minister Janez Jansa has urged other European Union nations to do the same. He said on Twitter late on Sunday that "Ukraine needs diplomatic support."

Slovenia's diplomats left Ukraine with the start of the Russian invasion on Feb. 24 as other countries withdrew their representatives as well.

Jansa visited Kyiv last week along with the prime ministers of Poland and the Czech Republic. He has said after the visit that Ukraine was feeling abandoned and urged the EU to send a bloc's representative there.

Jansa said the return of Slovenia's diplomats will be organized on voluntary basis.

LONDON — Britain's defense ministry says heavy fighting is continuing north of Kyiv as Russian forces press on with a stalled effort to encircle Ukraine's capital city.

In an update Monday on social media, the ministry said Russian forces advancing on the city from the northeast have stalled, and troops advancing from the direction of Hostomel to the northwest have been pushed back by fierce Ukrainian resistance. It said the bulk of Russian forces were more than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the city center.

U.K. officials said that "despite the continued lack of progress, Kyiv remains Russia's primary military objective and they are likely to prioritise attempting to encircle the city over the coming weeks."

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister says the country is managing its involvement with Ukraine and Russia "in a sensitive, generous and responsible way while balancing various and complex considerations" after Ukraine's president called on Israel to take sides.

Naftali Bennett spoke on the tarmac at Israel's main international airport as an aid delegation was set to depart for Ukraine to set up a field hospital for refugees near the Polish border.

A day earlier Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy rebuked Israel in a televised address to Israeli parliament members, saying Israel should provide arms and impose sanctions on Russia.

Israel has good relations with both Ukraine and Russia and has acted as an intermediary between the two sides since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February. While Israel has condemned Russia's invasion, it has also refrained from taking action that would anger Moscow out of concern of jeopardizing its military coordination in neighboring Syria.

Bennett said that "Israel has extended its hand in aid in the Ukraine crisis for several weeks, very much from the first moment, through different channels," pointing to humanitarian aid shipments and taking in Ukrainian refugees and immigrants.

LVIV, Ukraine — Emergency officials have contained an ammonia leak at a chemical plant that contaminated wide area in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sumy, officials said Monday.

Sumy regional governor Dmytro Zhyvytsky didn't say what caused the leak, which spread about 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) in all directions from the Sumykhimprom plant.

The plant is on the eastern outskirts of the city, which has a population of about 263,000 and has been regularly shelled by Russian troops in recent weeks.

KYIV, Ukraine — Shelling in a Kyiv neighborhood has devastated a shopping center, leaving a flattened ruin still smoldering Monday morning in the midst of high-rise towers.

Overnight shelling near the city center late Sunday left at least eight dead according to emergency officials. The force of the explosion shattered every window in the high-rise next door and twisted their

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metal frames.

In the distance, the sound of artillery rang out as firefighters picked their way through the destruction in the densely populated Podil district.

LVIV, Ukraine — An ammonia leak at a chemical plant in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sumy has contaminated an area with a radius of more than 2.5 kilometers (about 1.5 miles), officials said early Monday.

Sumy regional governor Dmytro Zhyvytskyi didn't say what caused the leak.

The Sumykhimprom plant is on the eastern outskirts of the city, which has a population of about 263,000 and has been regularly shelled by Russian troops in recent weeks.

"For the center of Sumy, there is no threat now, since the wind does not blow on the city," said Zhyvytskyi. He said the nearby village of Novoselytsya, about 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) southeast of Sumy, is under threat.

Emergency crews were working to contain the leak.

NEW YORK — The Russian military has offered the Ukrainian troops defending the strategic port of Mariupol to lay down arms and exit the city via humanitarian corridors, but that proposal was quickly rejected by the Ukrainian authorities.

Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev said Sunday that all Ukrainian soldiers could leave the Azov Sea port Monday using safe routes for evacuating civilians that had been previously agreed with Ukraine and head to areas controlled by the Ukrainian authorities. He said that "all those who lay down arms will be guaranteed a safe exit from Mariupol."

Mizintsev added that Russia will wait until 5 a.m. Monday for a written Kyiv's response to the Russian proposal for the Ukrainian troops to leave Mariupol but didn't say what action Russia will take if its "humanitarian offer" is rejected.

Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in remarks carried by Ukrainska Pravda news outlet that Kyiv already had told Russia that "there can be no talk about surrender and laying down weapons." She rejected the Russian statement as "manipulation."

Mizintsev said that the deliveries of humanitarian supplies to the city will immediately follow if the Ukrainian troops agree to leave the city. He added that civilians will be free to choose whether to leave Mariupol or stay in the city.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denounced the Russian bombing of a school in Mariupol where civilians took refuge.

Speaking in a video address early Monday, Zelenskyy said about 400 civilians were taking shelter at the art school in the besieged Azov Sea port city when it was struck by a Russian bomb.

"They are under the rubble, and we don't know how many of them have survived," he said. "But we know that we will certainly shoot down the pilot who dropped that bomb, like about 100 other such mass murderers whom we already have downed."

Zelenskyy, who spoke to members of the Israeli parliament via video link on Sunday, thanked Israel for its efforts to broker talks with Russia. He praised Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for trying to help "find a negotiation track with Russia ... so that we sooner or later start talking with Russia, possibly in Jerusalem."

"It would be the right place to find peace if possible," he added.

The Ukrainian president also said that he had a call Sunday with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a "true friend of Ukraine," to discuss support for Ukraine during this week's summit of the Group of Seven and NATO.

Zelenskyy said 7,295 Ukrainians were evacuated from zones of combat on Sunday, including nearly 4,000 from Mariupol. He also hailed people in the southern city of Kherson for taking to the streets Sunday to protest the Russian occupation, showing "Ukrainian courage, armless against the occupiers."

We witnessed Mariupol's agony and fled a Russian hit list

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine (AP) — The Russians were hunting us down. They had a list of names, including ours, and they were closing in.

We had been documenting the siege of the Ukrainian city by Russian troops for more than two weeks and were the only international journalists left in the city. We were reporting inside the hospital when gunmen began stalking the corridors. Surgeons gave us white scrubs to wear as camouflage.

Suddenly at dawn, a dozen soldiers burst in: "Where are the journalists, for fuck's sake?"

I looked at their armbands, blue for Ukraine, and tried to calculate the odds that they were Russians in disguise. I stepped forward to identify myself. "We're here to get you out," they said.

The walls of the surgery shook from artillery and machine gun fire outside, and it seemed safer to stay inside. But the Ukrainian soldiers were under orders to take us with them.

Mstyslav Chernov is a video journalist for The Associated Press. This is his account of the siege of Mariupol, as documented with photographer Evgeniy Maloletka and told to correspondent Lori Hinnant.

We ran into the street, abandoning the doctors who had sheltered us, the pregnant women who had been shelled and the people who slept in the hallways because they had nowhere else to go. I felt terrible leaving them all behind.

Nine minutes, maybe 10, an eternity through roads and bombed-out apartment buildings. As shells crashed nearby, we dropped to the ground. Time was measured from one shell to the next, our bodies tense and breath held. Shockwave after shockwave jolted my chest, and my hands went cold.

We reached an entryway, and armored cars whisked us to a darkened basement. Only then did we learn from a policeman we knew why the Ukrainians had risked the lives of soldiers to extract us from the hospital.

"If they catch you, they will get you on camera and they will make you say that everything you filmed is a lie," he said. "All your efforts and everything you have done in Mariupol will be in vain."

The officer, who had once begged us to show the world his dying city, now pleaded with us to go. He nudged us toward the thousands of battered cars preparing to leave Mariupol.

It was March 15. We had no idea if we would make it out alive.

As a teenager growing up in Ukraine in the city of Kharkiv, just 20 miles from the Russian border, I learned how to handle a gun as part of the school curriculum. It seemed pointless. Ukraine, I reasoned, was surrounded by friends.

I have since covered wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, trying to show the world the devastation first-hand. But when the Americans and then the Europeans evacuated their embassy staffs from the city of Kyiv this winter, and when I pored over maps of the Russian troop build-up just across from my hometown, my only thought was, "My poor country."

In the first few days of the war, the Russians bombed the enormous Freedom Square in Kharkiv, where I had hung out until my 20s.

I knew Russian forces would see the eastern port city of Mariupol as a strategic prize because of its location on the Sea of Azov. So on the evening of Feb. 23, I headed there with my long-time colleague Evgeniy Maloletka, a Ukrainian photographer for The Associated Press, in his white Volkswagen van.

On the way, we started worrying about spare tires, and found online a man nearby willing to sell to us in the middle of the night. We explained to him and to a cashier at the all-night grocery store that we were preparing for war. They looked at us like we were crazy.

We pulled into Mariupol at 3:30 a.m. The war started an hour later.

About a quarter of Mariupol's 430,000 residents left in those first days, while they still could. But few

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people believed a war was coming, and by the time most realized their mistake, it was too late.

One bomb at a time, the Russians cut electricity, water, food supplies and finally, crucially, the cell phone, radio and television towers. The few other journalists in the city got out before the last connections were gone and a full blockade settled in.

The absence of information in a blockade accomplishes two goals.

Chaos is the first. People don't know what's going on, and they panic. At first I couldn't understand why Mariupol fell apart so quickly. Now I know it was because of the lack of communication.

Impunity is the second goal. With no information coming out of a city, no pictures of demolished buildings and dying children, the Russian forces could do whatever they wanted. If not for us, there would be nothing.

That's why we took such risks to be able to send the world what we saw, and that's what made Russia angry enough to hunt us down.

I have never, ever felt that breaking the silence was so important.

The deaths came fast. On Feb. 27, we watched as a doctor tried to save a little girl hit by shrapnel. She died.

A second child died, then a third. Ambulances stopped picking up the wounded because people couldn't call them without a signal, and they couldn't navigate the bombed-out streets.

The doctors pleaded with us to film families bringing in their own dead and wounded, and let us use their dwindling generator power for our cameras. No one knows what's going on in our city, they said.

Shelling hit the hospital and the houses around. It shattered the windows of our van, blew a hole into its side and punctured a tire. Sometimes we would run out to film a burning house and then run back amid the explosions.

There was still one place in the city to get a steady connection, outside a looted grocery store on Budivěl'nykiv Avenue. Once a day, we drove there and crouched beneath the stairs to upload photos and video to the world. The stairs wouldn't have done much to protect us, but it felt safer than being out in the open.

The signal vanished by March 3. We tried to send our video from the 7th-floor windows of the hospital. It was from there that we saw the last shreds of the solid middle-class city of Mariupol come apart.

The Port City superstore was being looted, and we headed that way through artillery and machine gun-fire. Dozens of people ran and pushed shopping carts loaded with electronics, food, clothes.

A shell exploded on the roof of the store, throwing me to the ground outside. I tensed, awaiting a second hit, and cursed myself a hundred times because my camera wasn't on to record it.

And there it was, another shell hitting the apartment building next to me with a terrible whoosh. I shrank behind a corner for cover.

A teenager passed by rolling an office chair loaded with electronics, boxes tumbling off the sides. "My friends were there and the shell hit 10 meters from us," he told me. "I have no idea what happened to them."

We raced back to the hospital. Within 20 minutes, the injured came in, some of them scooped into shopping carts.

For several days, the only link we had to the outside world was through a satellite phone. And the only spot where that phone worked was out in the open, right next to a shell crater. I would sit down, make myself small and try to catch the connection.

Everybody was asking, please tell us when the war will be over. I had no answer.

Every single day, there would be a rumor that the Ukrainian army was going to come to break through the siege. But no one came.

By this time I had witnessed deaths at the hospital, corpses in the streets, dozens of bodies shoved into a mass grave. I had seen so much death that I was filming almost without taking it in.

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On March 9, twin airstrikes shredded the plastic taped over our van's windows. I saw the fireball just a heartbeat before pain pierced my inner ear, my skin, my face.

We watched smoke rise from a maternity hospital. When we arrived, emergency workers were still pulling bloodied pregnant women from the ruins.

Our batteries were almost out of juice, and we had no connection to send the images. Curfew was minutes away. A police officer overheard us talking about how to get news of the hospital bombing out.

"This will change the course of the war," he said. He took us to a power source and an internet connection.

We had recorded so many dead people and dead children, an endless line. I didn't understand why he thought still more deaths could change anything.

I was wrong.

In the dark, we sent the images by lining up three mobile phones with the video file split into three parts to speed the process up. It took hours, well beyond curfew. The shelling continued, but the officers assigned to escort us through the city waited patiently.

Then our link to the world outside Mariupol was again severed.

We went back to an empty hotel basement with an aquarium now filled with dead goldfish. In our isolation, we knew nothing about a growing Russian disinformation campaign to discredit our work.

The Russian Embassy in London put out two tweets calling the AP photos fake and claiming a pregnant woman was an actress. The Russian ambassador held up copies of the photos at a U.N. Security Council meeting and repeated lies about the attack on the maternity hospital.

In the meantime, in Mariupol, we were inundated with people asking us for the latest news from the war. So many people came to me and said, please film me so my family outside the city will know I'm alive.

By this time, no Ukrainian radio or TV signal was working in Mariupol. The only radio you could catch broadcast twisted Russian lies — that Ukrainians were holding Mariupol hostage, shooting at buildings, developing chemical weapons. The propaganda was so strong that some people we talked to believed it despite the evidence of their own eyes.

The message was constantly repeated, in Soviet style: Mariupol is surrounded. Surrender your weapons.

On March 11, in a brief call without details, our editor asked if we could find the women who survived the maternity hospital airstrike to prove their existence. I realized the footage must have been powerful enough to provoke a response from the Russian government.

We found them at a hospital on the front line, some with babies and others in labor. We also learned that one woman had lost her baby and then her own life.

We went up to the 7th floor to send the video from the tenuous Internet link. From there, I watched as tank after tank rolled up alongside the hospital compound, each marked with the letter Z that had become the Russian emblem for the war.

We were surrounded: Dozens of doctors, hundreds of patients, and us.

The Ukrainian soldiers who had been protecting the hospital had vanished. And the path to our van, with our food, water and equipment, was covered by a Russian sniper who had already struck a medic venturing outside.

Hours passed in darkness, as we listened to the explosions outside. That's when the soldiers came to get us, shouting in Ukrainian.

It didn't feel like a rescue. It felt like we were just being moved from one danger to another. By this time, nowhere in Mariupol was safe, and there was no relief. You could die at any moment.

I felt amazingly grateful to the soldiers, but also numb. And ashamed that I was leaving.

We crammed into a Hyundai with a family of three and pulled into a 5-kilometer-long traffic jam out of the city. Around 30,000 people made it out of Mariupol that day — so many that Russian soldiers had no time to look closely into cars with windows covered with flapping bits of plastic.

People were nervous. They were fighting, screaming at each other. Every minute there was an airplane or airstrike. The ground shook.

We crossed 15 Russian checkpoints. At each, the mother sitting in the front of our car would pray furi-

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ously, loud enough for us to hear.

As we drove through them — the third, the tenth, the 15th, all manned with soldiers with heavy weapons — my hopes that Mariupol was going to survive were fading. I understood that just to reach the city, the Ukrainian army would have to break through so much ground. And it wasn't going to happen.

At sunset, we came to a bridge destroyed by the Ukrainians to stop the Russian advance. A Red Cross convoy of about 20 cars was stuck there already. We all turned off the road together into fields and back lanes.

The guards at checkpoint No. 15 spoke Russian in the rough accent of the Caucasus. They ordered the whole convoy to cut the headlights to conceal the arms and equipment parked on the roadside. I could barely make out the white Z painted on the vehicles.

As we pulled up to the sixteenth checkpoint, we heard voices. Ukrainian voices. I felt an overwhelming relief. The mother in the front of the car burst into tears. We were out.

We were the last journalists in Mariupol. Now there are none.

We are still flooded by messages from people wanting to learn the fate of loved ones we photographed and filmed. They write to us desperately and intimately, as though we are not strangers, as though we can help them.

When a Russian airstrike hit a theater where hundreds of people had taken shelter late last week, I could pinpoint exactly where we should go to learn about survivors, to hear firsthand what it was like to be trapped for endless hours beneath piles of rubble. I know that building and the destroyed homes around it. I know people who are trapped underneath it.

And on Sunday, Ukrainian authorities said Russia had bombed an art school with about 400 people in it in Mariupol.

But we can no longer get there.

Kuwait, among world's hottest places, lags on climate action

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JAHRA, Kuwait (AP) — It was so hot in Kuwait last summer that birds dropped dead from the sky.

Sea horses boiled to death in the bay. Dead clams coated the rocks, their shells popped open like they'd been steamed.

Kuwait reached a scorching temperature of 53.2 degrees Celsius (127.7 degrees Fahrenheit), making it among the hottest places on earth.

The extremes of climate change present existential perils all over the world. But the record heat waves that roast Kuwait each season have grown so severe that people increasingly find it unbearable.

By the end of the century, scientists say being outside in Kuwait City could be life-threatening — not only to birds. A recent study also linked 67% of heat-related deaths in the capital to climate change.

And yet, Kuwait remains among the world's top oil producers and exporters, and per capita is a significant polluter. Mired in political paralysis, it stayed silent as the region's petrostates joined a chorus of nations setting goals to eliminate emissions at home — though not curb oil exports — ahead of last fall's U.N. climate summit in Glasgow.

Instead, Kuwait's prime minister offered a years-old promise to cut emissions by 7.4% by 2035.

"We are severely under threat," said environmental consultant Samia Alduaij. "The response is so timid it doesn't make sense."

Racing to burnish their climate credentials and diversify their economies, Saudi Arabia pitches futuristic car-free cities and Dubai plans to ban plastic and multiply the emirate's green parks.

While the relatively small populations of oil-rich Gulf Arab states mean their pledges to cut emissions are minor in the grand scheme to limit global warming, they have symbolic significance.

Yet the gears of government in Kuwait, population 4.3 million, seem as stuck as ever — partly because of populist pressure in parliament, and partly because the same authorities that regulate Kuwait's emissions get nearly all of their revenue from pumping oil.

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"The government has the money, the information and the manpower to make a difference," said lawmaker Hamad al-Matar, director of the parliamentary environmental committee. "It doesn't care about environmental issues."

The country continues to burn oil for electricity and ranks among the top global carbon emitters per capita, according to the World Resources Institute. As asphalt melts on highways, Kuwaitis bundle up for bone-chilling air-conditioning in malls. Renewable energy accounts for less than 1% of demand — far below Kuwait's target of 15% by 2030.

An hour drive outside the dingy suburbs of Jahra, wind turbines and solar panels rise from clouds of sand — the fruit of Kuwait's energy transition ambitions.

But nearly a decade after the government set up the solar field in the western desert, its empty lots are as glaring as its silicon and metal.

At first, the Shagaya Energy Park exceeded expectations, engineers said. The Persian Gulf's first plant to combine three different renewables — solar, wind and solar thermal — put Kuwait at the vanguard. The wind farm over-performed, generating 20% more power in the first year than anticipated, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research reported.

But optimism and momentum soon evaporated. The government gave up control of the project to attract private money, an unprecedented move that raised a tangle of legal questions over how developers would sell electricity to the nation's sole power provider.

Instead of pressing ahead with the successful hybrid energy model, investors devoted the rest of the park to the production of solar thermal power, the costliest kind. Years of delays and canceled tenders ensued. The project's fate remains uncertain.

"The people in charge made the wrong decisions," said Waleed al-Nassar, member of Kuwait's Supreme Councils for the Environment and Planning and Development. "There was no one who took action or wanted to understand. Everyone says, 'Let's just do what we've been doing for the last 70 years.'"

Disputes also have marred the natural gas industry. While natural gas causes sizable emissions of climate-warming gases, it burns more cleanly than coal and oil and could play a big role in a low-carbon future for Kuwait.

Kuwait's 63 trillion cubic feet meters of gas reserves, 1% of the world's total, remain largely untapped. Fields shared with Saudi Arabia in what's known as the neutral zone shut down for years as the countries sparred over land use.

The elected parliament, which views itself as a defender of Kuwait's natural resources against foreign companies and corrupt businessmen, frequently hampers gas exploration. Lawmakers long have sought to challenge the government's authority to award lucrative energy contracts, summoning oil ministers for interrogations on suspicion of mismanagement and stalling major projects.

The legislature similarly carries the mantle of preserving Kuwait's lavish welfare state, believing the government lacks accountability. Kuwaitis enjoy among the cheapest electricity rates and petrol prices in the world.

When ministers suggest the government stop spending so much on subsidies, lawmakers put up a fight — literally. Debates in the chamber can devolve into fisticuffs.

"This is one of the biggest challenges. It's seen as an engrained right for every Kuwaiti citizen," said urban development expert Sharifa Alshalfan.

With sumptuous subsidies even for the wealthiest, she added, Kuwaitis live wastefully, leaving home air-conditioners running for months-long vacations.

"We have no measures that cities have taken around the world to incentivize individuals to change their behavior," she said.

Stagnation has plunged the country into a historic financial crisis. Kuwait's budget deficit soared over \$35.5 billion last year as oil prices plummeted.

While Saudi Arabia and the UAE compete for shares of a fast-growing renewable energy market, Kuwaiti environmentalists are taking on the role of town crier.

"Renewables make so much more financial sense," said Ahmed Taher, an energy consultant promoting a new economic model that cuts Kuwait's power subsidies by inviting homeowners to buy shares in a solar project. "(The government) needs to know how much more money Kuwait could save and how many more jobs it could have."

But for now, Kuwait keeps burning oil.

Layers of dense pollution blanket the streets. Sewage rushes into the steaming bay. Fish carcasses that wash ashore produce a lingering stench, what activists describe as a pungent manifestation of the country's politics.

"When you walk by the bay, you sometimes want to vomit," said Kuwaiti environmental advocate Bashar Al Huneidi. "The abusers are winning, and I get discouraged every day."

Shanghai Disneyland closes as virus rises, Shenzhen reopens

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Shanghai Disneyland closed Monday as China's most populous city tried to contain its biggest coronavirus flareup in two years, while the southern business center of Shenzhen allowed shops and offices to reopen after a weeklong closure.

Meanwhile, the cities of Changchun and Jilin in the northeast began another round of citywide virus testing following a surge in infections. Jilin tightened anti-disease curbs, ordering its 2 million residents to stay home.

China's case numbers in its latest infection wave are low compared with other major countries, but authorities are enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy that has suspended access to some major cities.

The government reported 2,027 new cases on the Chinese mainland on Sunday, up from the previous day's 1,737. That included 1,542 infections in Jilin province, where Changchun and Jilin are located.

Shanghai, which has a population of 24 million, has avoided a citywide shutdown but appealed to the public to stay home. Bus service into the city has been suspended and visitors are required to show a negative virus test.

Disney Co. said Shanghai Disneyland, Disneytown and Wishing Star Park were closed until further notice.

On Monday, Shanghai reported 24 new cases. The city earlier suspended access to two residential areas and carried out mass testing at dozens of others.

Shanghai residents posted photos on the internet showing empty streets and subways during what usually is a crowded Monday morning rush hour.

The government of Shenzhen, a finance and technology center that abuts Hong Kong, announced businesses and government offices were allowed to reopen Monday while authorities took steps to try to prevent a resurgence of virus cases. Bus and subway service, which had been suspended, was restarted.

Last week, the city of 17.5 million shut down all businesses except those that supply food and other necessities and told the public to stay home following a spike in cases.

Shenzhen is home to some of China's biggest companies including telecom equipment maker Huawei, electric car brand BYD Auto and Tencent, operator of the popular WeChat message service.

The shutdowns prompted concern trade might be disrupted if ports near Shanghai and Shenzhen that are among the world's busiest are affected. The Shanghai port moved paperwork functions online but said cargo was moving normally. The smaller port of Lianyungang barred foreign sailors from coming ashore.

The government said last week it was trying to fine-tune anti-disease controls to reduce their economic cost and impact on society.

Tangshan, a steel industry center east of Beijing, the Chinese capital, imposed controls Sunday that allow only emergency vehicles to move around the city after seven cases were found, state media reported.

Authorities in Beijing were investigating a duck restaurant where four employees contracted the virus. State media said owners of the Yu Le Xuan restaurant were accused of failing to register the identities of 477 diners as required over five days, making it harder to trace potential contacts.

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AP Exclusive: US admiral says China fully militarized isles

By JIM GOMEZ and AARON FAVILA Associated Press

OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA (AP) — China has fully militarized at least three of several islands it built in the disputed South China Sea, arming them with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment, and fighter jets in an increasingly aggressive move that threatens all nations operating nearby, a top U.S. military commander said Sunday.

U.S. Indo-Pacific commander Adm. John C. Aquilino said the hostile actions were in stark contrast to Chinese President Xi Jinping's past assurances that Beijing would not transform the artificial islands in contested waters into military bases. The efforts were part of China's flexing its military muscle, he said.

"I think over the past 20 years we've witnessed the largest military buildup since World War II by the PRC," Aquilino told The Associated Press in an interview, using the initials of China's formal name. "They have advanced all their capabilities and that buildup of weaponization is destabilizing to the region."

There were no immediate comments from Chinese officials. Beijing maintains its military profile is purely defensive, arranged to protect what it says are its sovereign rights. But after years of increased military spending, China now boasts the world's second-largest defense budget after the U.S. and is rapidly modernizing its force with weapons systems including the J-20 stealth fighter, hypersonic missiles and two aircraft carriers, with a third under construction.

Aquilino spoke with the AP onboard a U.S. Navy reconnaissance aircraft that flew near Chinese-held outposts in the South China Sea's Spratly archipelago, one of the most hotly contested regions in the world. During the patrol, the P-8A Poseidon plane was repeatedly warned by Chinese callers that it illegally entered what they said was China's territory and ordered the plane to move away.

"China has sovereignty over the Spratly islands, as well as surrounding maritime areas. Stay away immediately to avoid misjudgment," one of the stern radio messages said in a veiled threat.

But the U.S. Navy plane dismissed the multiple warnings and pressed on defiantly with its reconnaissance in brief but tense moments witnessed by two AP journalists invited onboard. "I am a sovereign immune United States naval aircraft conducting lawful military activities beyond the national airspace of any coastal state," a U.S. pilot radioed back to the Chinese.

"Exercising these rights is guaranteed by international law and I am operating with due regard to the rights and duties of all states," he said.

Navy commanding officer Joel Martinez, who led the P-8A Poseidon's crew, said there has been an incident when a Chinese jet flew close to a U.S. aircraft in a dangerous maneuver in the disputed region. The U.S. flight crew calmly reminded the Chinese to comply with aviation safety regulations, he said.

As the P-8A Poseidon flew as low as 15,000 feet (4,500 meters) near the Chinese-occupied reefs, some appeared to be like small cities on screen monitors, with multi-story buildings, warehouses, hangars, seaports, runways and white round structures Aquilino said were radars. Near Fiery Cross, more than 40 unspecified vessels could be seen apparently anchored.

Aquilino said the construction of missile arsenals, aircraft hangars, radar systems and other military facilities on Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross appeared to have been completed but it remains to be seen if China will pursue the construction of military infrastructure in other areas.

"The function of those islands is to expand the offensive capability of the PRC beyond their continental shores," he said. "They can fly fighters, bombers plus all those offensive capabilities of missile systems."

He said any military and civilian plane flying over the disputed waterway could easily get within range of the Chinese islands' missile system.

"So that's the threat that exists, that's why it's so concerning for the militarization of these islands," he said. "They threaten all nations who operate in the vicinity and all the international sea and airspace."

China sought to shore up its vast territorial claims over virtually the entire South China Sea by building island bases on coral atolls nearly a decade ago. The U.S. responded by sending its warships through the region in what it calls freedom of operation missions. The United States has no claims itself but has deployed Navy ships and aircraft for decades to patrol and promote free navigation in international wa-

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terway and airspace.

China routinely objects to any action by the U.S. military in the region. The other parties — the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei — claim all or part of the sea, through which approximately \$5 trillion in goods are shipped every year.

Despite China's aggression, the long-simmering territorial conflicts should only be resolved peacefully, Aquilino said, and cited the Philippine government's successful move to bring its disputes with China to international arbitration in 2013 as a good template.

A U.N.-backed arbitration tribunal that handled the case invalidated China's sweeping historical claims in the South China Sea under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. Beijing dismissed the ruling as sham and continues to defy it.

Washington's main objective in the disputed region is "to prevent war" through deterrence and promote peace and stability, including by engaging American allies and partners in projects with that objective, Aquilino said.

"Should deterrence fail, my second mission is to be prepared to fight and win," said Aquilino, who leads the largest U.S. combatant command with 380,000 military and civilian personnel covering 36 nations and territories.

White House: Biden to visit Poland on Europe trip this week

By COLLEEN LONG and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has added a stop in Poland to his trip this week to Europe for urgent talks with NATO and European allies, as Russian forces concentrate their fire upon cities and trapped civilians in a nearly month-old invasion of Ukraine.

Biden will first travel to Brussels and then to Poland to meet with leaders there, press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement Sunday night.

Poland is a crucial ally in the Ukraine crisis. It is hosting thousands of American troops and is taking in more people fleeing the war in Ukraine — more than 2 million — than any other nation in the midst of the largest European refugee crisis in decades.

Biden will head to Warsaw for a bilateral meeting with President Andrzej Duda scheduled for Saturday. Biden will discuss how the U.S., along with its allies and partners, is responding to "the humanitarian and human rights crisis that Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war on Ukraine has created," Psaki said.

On Monday ahead of his trip, Biden will discuss the war with European leaders. President Emmanuel Macron of France, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, Prime Minister Mario Draghi of Italy and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom are expected to take part, the White House said Sunday.

White House officials have said Biden has no plans to travel to Ukraine. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, while in Poland this month, briefly crossed into neighboring Ukraine in a show of solidarity alongside that country's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba. Poland has been one of the most vocal countries in asking fellow NATO members to consider getting more involved to rein in the bloodshed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine largely has united the U.S. and NATO and European allies, as well as allies in Asia and elsewhere. The United States and European governments see Moscow's military aggression as a threat to their security and strategic interests.

Biden and NATO have said repeatedly that while the U.S. and NATO will provide weapons and other defensive support to non-NATO member Ukraine, they are determined to avoid any escalation on behalf of Kyiv that risks a broader war with Russia.

The Pentagon on March 9 rejected a Polish proposal for providing Ukraine with MiG fighter jets via a NATO air base, saying allied efforts against the Russian invasion should focus on more useful weaponry and that the MiG transfer with a U.S. and NATO connection would run a "high risk" of escalating the war.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has pleaded for the U.S. to provide his military with more aircraft and advanced air-defense systems. NATO and the United States have rejected his appeals to establish a "no-fly zone" over Ukraine to suppress Russian air power, saying it would put Western forces in

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direct conflict with Russian ones.

Determined resistance by Ukrainian fighters when Russian tanks and troops rolled into Ukraine in late February quickly defeated Russian forces' attempts to storm Ukraine's capital and unseat the westward-looking government. Denied an easy and early victory, Russia's military is reverting to the scorched earth tactics of its past offensives in Syria and Chechnya, and pounding population centers with airstrikes and artillery barrages that leave civilians like those in the port city of Mariupol able to safely venture out for food or water, to bury the dead, or to flee.

After Biden rallied European allies to join in sweeping sanctions against Russia over the invasion at the outset, his tasks now include dealing with some NATO members that are pushing for more involvement directly in the fighting. That includes proposals by Poland for peacekeepers.

Biden's trip includes a summit Thursday of NATO leaders, who will use the meeting to look at strengthening the bloc's own deterrence and defense, immediately and in the long term, to deal with the now openly confrontational Putin.

That gathering is intended not just to show NATO's "support to Ukraine, but also our readiness to protect and defend all NATO allies," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday.

"And by sending that message, we are preventing an escalation of the conflict to a full-fledged war between NATO and Russia," Stoltenberg said.

Front-line NATO members on the alliance's eastern flank are also asking for advanced U.S. and British air defense systems to guard against the kind of missile and air assaults Russia is unleashing on Ukraine.

"We have to strengthen our eastern flank of NATO. We have been talking about this for years, but now it's time for action," Estonia's prime minister, Kaja Kallas, told CNN's "State of the Union."

She added: "We need some more capabilities to support ourselves and defend ourselves by air defense systems, what is definitely necessary here, but also the troops that are present that act as a deterrent also to the Russian military."

Noting that Russia is firing missiles "from such a long range that they can also reach Paris from where they are shooting right now," Kallas said European leaders must "understand that this defense is our common issue, and it's not a theoretical discussion, but issue in real life."

Biden also will participate in a European Council summit to discuss the allies' sanctions on Russia and humanitarian efforts for the millions of Ukraine's people displaced by Russia's attacks, Psaki said last week.

His agenda includes a meeting of leaders of the the Group of Seven countries to discuss the punishing financial and economic penalties that the West and its allies have leveled on Russia over its invasion, Psaki said.

Pence distances himself from Trump as he eyes 2024 campaign

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After Donald Trump was caught on video bragging about sexually assaulting women, Mike Pence stayed on his ticket. As the coronavirus ravaged the U.S., the then-vice president praised the administration's response. And after a violent mob threatened his life during an attack on the U.S. Capitol, Pence rejected entreaties to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office.

But after years of being a subservient sidekick, Pence is beginning to distance himself from Trump as he takes increasingly overt steps toward a White House bid of his own.

Last month, Pence called out Trump by name, saying his former boss was "wrong" to insist that he had the power to unilaterally overturn the results of the 2020 election — a power vice presidents do not possess. In a separate speech before top Republican donors, Pence urged the GOP to move on from Trump's 2020 grievances and declared "there is no room in this party for apologists" for Vladimir Putin after Trump praised the Russian leader's maneuvering as "genius" before his brutal invasion of Ukraine.

The moves show how Pence, a former congressman and Indiana governor, is working to craft a political identity independent of his former boss. The strategy carries substantial risk in a party still dominated by

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Trump and his lie that the 2020 election was stolen. But if Pence successfully navigates this moment, it could offer a model for Republicans to benefit from their work with Trump without being tied to his most toxic behavior, which has consistently hurt the party with crucial suburban voters who often determine elections.

"When you're in the role of vice president, there's certain opportunities that affords and certainly certain constraints," Marc Short, who served as Pence's chief of staff at the White House, said of Pence's recent moves. "You sort of assume a different identity for those four years because your job is to support the president and what he's doing."

Aides stress that Pence, who spent decades in conservative radio and politics before joining Trump's ticket in 2016, has a host of views and principles that are deeply held, including some that deviate from Trump's. They expect him to frequently invoke those views, including his fierce opposition to abortion rights, as he campaigns for Republicans ahead of this year's midterms.

They note in particular that Pence has long been a critic of Putin, and expect him to keep speaking out on Ukraine. In a trip that seemed to cast Pence with a presidential aura, he made an unannounced visit to the Ukrainian border with Poland shortly after the invasion, where he crossed into Ukraine and helped deliver aid to the flood of refugees who were escaping the war.

The Rev. Franklin Graham, the evangelist and president of Samaritan's Purse, the international Christian relief organization that organized Pence's visit to the Ukrainian border, said Pence's evolution was a natural one.

"People are seeing the real Mike Pence. As vice president, you have to toe the line of the president and you have to be in step with everything the president says," Graham said. Now, "people are seeing who he is and what he's standing for and what he says. So it's not repeating what the president says. It's saying what he believes. ... He's speaking for himself now and not President Trump."

Pence has spent the past several months traveling the country, delivering policy speeches, raising money for midterm candidates and visiting early-voting states, while working on a pair of books. In the coming months, he is planning a return visit to Iowa, which holds the party's first nominating contests of the presidential election cycle, as well as two visits to South Carolina, another early-voting state.

His political group, Advancing American Freedom, announced a \$10 million ad campaign targeting congressional Democrats and urging them to support an expansion of American energy production in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And he is preparing to release a new "Freedom Agenda" aimed at providing candidates a positive policy agenda that makes clear to voters what Republicans are not just against, but what they're for.

He has also been spending time with top donors. Before his visit to Ukraine, Pence flew to Israel where he had dinner with former prime minister and opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Trump has reportedly criticized, and met with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Pence also spent time with billionaire donor Miriam Adelson, on whose plane he flew, marking the second time the two have met in recent months.

The efforts also make clear the lane Pence could occupy if he chooses to compete in what may be a crowded 2024 GOP primary contest that could include Trump himself. While there remains a portion of the party that will never forgive him for abiding by his constitutional role on Jan. 6, allies believe that Pence could be in a unique position to merge the traditional conservative movement with successes of the Trump-Pence administration.

Still, early polls show that Trump remains the decisive favorite among GOP voters if he chooses to mount another run. Without Trump in the race, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis so far appears to be the early favorite.

Other potential candidates are trying to make similar moves as they deliver high-profile speeches and visit early-voting states. Mike Pompeo, who served as Trump's CIA director and secretary of state, for instance, recently traveled to Taiwan and met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, while Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, in a high-profile speech at the Reagan Library, praised Trump's record while also criticizing him for signing bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation.

Pence so far has been coy about his plans for the future. Asked on Fox Business whether he intended to run, Pence said all his focus currently is on 2022.

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"In 2023, I'm confident the Republican Party will nominate a candidate who will be the next president of the United state of America," he went on. "And at the right time, my family and I'll reflect and consider how we might participate in that process."

For now, Trump has kept mum on Pence's attacks, unusual for someone who responds to the most minor slights. Trump's spokesman did not respond to questions, but some speculate that the former president doesn't want to antagonize Pence before his book publishes and he begins a publicity tour.

Still Trump has made clear that his anger has not subsided.

"Mike and I had a great relationship except for the very important factor that took place at the end," Trump told the Washington Examiner in an interview last week. "I haven't spoken to him in a long time."

He also ruled out the possibility of another Trump-Pence ticket.

"I don't think the people would accept it," said Trump, who has mused about other vice presidential prospects.

US official: Biden fortified Saudi's Patriot missile supply

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. has transferred a significant number of Patriot antimissile interceptors to Saudi Arabia in recent weeks as the Biden administration looks to ease what has been a point of tension in the increasingly complicated U.S.-Saudi relationship.

A senior administration official confirmed Sunday night that the interceptors have been sent to Saudi Arabia. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a decision that has not been formally announced, said the decision was in line with President Joe Biden's promise that "America will have the backs of our friends in the region."

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan on Sunday condemned Houthi forces in Yemen after they unleashed one of their most intense barrages of drone and missile strikes on Saudi Arabia's critical energy facilities, sparking a fire at one site and temporarily cutting oil production at another.

The Associated Press reported in September that the U.S. had moved its own Patriot defense system from Prince Sultan Air Base outside of Riyadh even as the kingdom faced continued to face air attacks from Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The kingdom has insisted that the interceptors are critical to their defense against Houthi attacks. The Saudis have been locked in a stalemate war with the Houthis since March 2015.

At the time the U.S. Patriot systems were moved out of the kingdom, administration officials said the shift in defense capabilities was made in part due to a desire to face what American officials see as the looming "great powers conflict" with China and Russia. Pentagon officials noted that the U.S. maintained tens of thousands of forces and a robust force posture in the Middle East representing "some of our most advanced air power and maritime capabilities."

The decision to fortify Saudi Arabia's supply of interceptors was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

The U.S.-Saudi relationship has been strained since Biden took office. The president has refused to deal directly with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and has removed the Houthis from a list of designated terrorist groups.

The Biden administration last year released a declassified intelligence report concluding that the crown prince, son of the aging King Salman and known as MBS, had authorized the team of Saudi security and intelligence officials that killed journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

The killing of Khashoggi, a critic of MBS, drew global condemnation. The crown prince insists he was not involved in the operation carried out by Saudi operatives.

In a recent interview with The Atlantic, the crown prince was asked whether Biden misunderstands something about him. He responded, "Simply, I do not care" and that it was up to Biden to think "about the interests of America" when weighing his dealings with the Saudi monarchy.

The White House dispatched Brett McGurk, the National Security Council's Middle East coordinator, and the State Department's energy envoy, Amos Hochstein, to Riyadh last month to talk to Saudi officials about

a range of issues — chief among them the ongoing war in Yemen and global energy supplies.

The Saudis have thus far declined to pump more crude to alleviate a spike in global oil prices that's been spurred by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

S. Korean slavery victim seeks UN justice as time runs out

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Thirty years after going public with her story of abduction, rape and forced prostitution by Japan's wartime military, Lee Yong-soo fears she's running out of time to get closure to her ordeal.

The 93-year-old is the face of a dwindling group of South Korean sexual slavery survivors who have been demanding since the early 1990s that the Japanese government fully accept culpability and offer an unequivocal apology.

Her latest — and possibly final — push is to persuade the governments of South Korea and Japan to settle their decades-long impasse over sexual slavery by seeking judgement of the United Nations.

Lee leads an international group of sexual slavery survivors and advocates — including those from the Philippines, China, Indonesia, Australia and East Timor — who sent a petition U.N. human rights investigators last week to press Seoul and Tokyo to jointly refer the issue to U.N.'s International Court of Justice. The group wants Seoul to initiate arbitration proceedings against Japan with a U.N. panel on torture if Tokyo doesn't agree to bring the case to the ICJ.

It's unclear whether South Korea, which will swear in a new government in May, will consider bringing the matter to the U.N. when it faces pressure to improve relations with Japan amid a turbulent moment in global affairs. The country has never fought a case under such proceedings, and anything less than a lopsided victory might be seen at home as a defeat.

It's hard for Lee to be patient when other survivors keep dying.

She worries about their plight being forgotten or distorted by Japan's apparent efforts to downplay the coercive and violent nature of the World War II sexual slavery and exclude it from schoolbooks.

She cried as she described how she was dragged from home as a 16-year-old to serve as a sex slave for Japan's Imperial Army, and the harsh abuse she endured at a Japanese military brothel in Taiwan until the end of the war — a story she first told the world in 1992.

"Both South Korea and Japan keep waiting for us to die, but I will fight until the very end," Lee said in a recent interview at The Associated Press office in Seoul, across the street from the Japanese Embassy. She said her campaign is aimed at pressuring Japan to fully accept responsibility and acknowledge its past military sexual slavery as war crimes and properly educate its public about the abuses, through textbooks and memorials.

"I think time has so far waited for me so that I can clinch my teeth and do everything that I can to resolve this issue," Lee said.

Grievances over sexual slavery, forced labor and other abuses stemming from Japan's brutal colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula before the end of World War II have strained Seoul-Tokyo relations in recent years as the animosities spilled over to trade and military cooperation issues. The disputes have frustrated Washington, which wants stronger three-way cooperation with its Asian allies to confront challenges posed by North Korea and China.

The upcoming government change in Seoul has inspired cautious hope in Japan about improved ties. After winning the election earlier this month, conservative South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol vowed "future-focused" cooperation with Japan.

Still, the countries may find it difficult to focus on the future if they can't narrow their disagreements over the past.

Lee, who in 2007 testified at the U.S. House of Representatives before it passed a landmark resolution urging Japan to acknowledge the wartime sexual slavery, no longer believes Seoul and Tokyo can settle their history dispute without a U.N. process.

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Years of bilateral diplomatic talks were largely fruitless. A haphazard settlement reached between the countries' foreign ministers in 2015 — including Fumio Kishida, the current prime minister of Japan — never lived up to its goal of “finally and irreversibly” resolving the issue.

Lee and other survivors said Seoul officials didn't consult them before making the deal, under which Japan agreed to contribute 1 billion yen (\$8 million) to a South Korean fund to help support the victims. They questioned the sincerity of the Japanese government — then led by right-wing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who had long been accused by South Koreans of sanitizing Japan's war crimes — because Japanese officials stressed the payments shouldn't be considered as compensation.

South Korean court rulings in recent years calling for Japan's government and companies to provide reparations to victims of sexual slavery and forced labor have been angrily rejected by Tokyo, which insists all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations between the two nations.

Historians say tens of thousands of women mostly from around Asia, many of them Korean, were sent to front-line military brothels to provide sex to Japanese soldiers. At the time of the 2015 deal, 46 of the 239 women who registered with the Seoul government as victims were still alive in South Korea, but there are now only 12.

Japan has repeatedly expressed regret over its wartime actions. It conducted a study of the practice and established a fund from private contributions in 1995 to compensate victims in the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan before it expired in 2007.

Many South Koreans believe Tokyo's previous comments and actions lacked sincerity and fell short of legal reparations before they were further ruined by conservatives who've continued to downplay or question Japan's wartime past. There's also frustration over views that Japanese schoolbooks sugarcoat past brutalities.

A U.N. report from 1996 concluded that sex slaves were taken through “violence and outright coercion.” A statement from Japan in 1993 acknowledged that women were taken “against their own will, through coaxing, coercion,” but the nation's leaders later denied it.

Japan's Foreign Affairs Ministry now says its government has found no documents showing the use of coercion in the recruitment of the so-called “comfort women” and refuses to describe the system as sexual slavery. Tokyo has urged Seoul to abide by the 2015 agreement and described recent lawsuits filed by South Korean sexual slavery victims seeking compensation as “extremely regrettable and absolutely unacceptable.”

Lee began campaigning last year for Seoul and Tokyo to jointly refer their sexual slavery-related disputes to the ICJ in The Hague, the U.N.'s highest court. After a muted response from both governments, Lee is now demanding that South Korea call for a U.N. panel to examine whether Tokyo is failing to carry out its obligations under the 1984 Convention against Torture by denying or downplaying its past brutalities.

South Korea can either file a complaint against Japan with the convention's committee against torture or sue Japan at the ICJ for violations of the convention, said Ethan Hee-Seok Shin, an international law expert who is helping with Lee's efforts. In handling disputes between countries, the convention allows for any one party to refer the matter to the ICJ if the countries can't agree within six months on an arbitration panel. ICJ decisions are binding upon U.N. member states.

“This issue doesn't die with the survivors,” Lee said. “If I can't take care of it, the problems get passed to our next generation.” ___ AP writer Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Miller scores 24, Terps roll past Florida Gulf Coast 89-65

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP) — Diamond Miller and Maryland may be peaking at the right time.

At the very least, the Terrapins are showing why they were ranked in the top five at the beginning of the season — and what a threat they are if their key players are indeed healthy now.

Miller scored 24 points, and fourth-seeded Maryland used a 19-0 run spanning parts of both halves to pull away to an 89-65 win over 12th-seeded Florida Gulf Coast on Sunday. Angel Reese added 21 points

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and Ashley Osusu scored 20 for the Terrapins, who advanced to the Sweet 16 for the 10th time under coach Brenda Frese.

Maryland (23-8) faces Stanford in the next round. The Terps were ranked fourth in the nation at the start of the season, but injuries and lack of depth kept them from reaching that potential. There's still time.

"We're thriving right in the right moments," Miller said. "We're all 100% healthy, and this is how we are expected to play. We're not expected to play no other way. So this is what you all have been waiting for."

Kendall Spray scored 17 points in the first half but none in the second for FGCU, and the Eagles (30-3) couldn't follow their first-round win over Virginia Tech with another victory.

Spray, who is fourth on the career list for 3-pointers, made five in the first half for FGCU, but the Terrapins withstood that. After a 3-pointer by Spray put the Eagles up by three, Maryland ran off the final 11 points of the half to lead 47-39.

Miller then made a layup to start the second half and put Maryland up by 10. Her putback made it 53-39, and Reese capped the run with a couple free throws.

"Just incredibly proud and so happy for this group. It has not been an easy year by any stretch," Frese said. "Just the way we fought, I mean, especially in both these games, but against a really, really good Florida Gulf Coast team. I knew coming in this was going to be a difficult scout, obviously them being underseeded."

The undersized Eagles brought a distinctive style to this tournament, relying heavily on 3-pointers and using good spacing to open up the lane for occasional 2s. The Terrapins, however, were athletic enough to defend all of it, and Maryland is comfortable playing an up-tempo style despite not being all that deep.

"They had really good ball pressure, and they switch a lot of things," FGCU coach Karl Smesko said. "They have great length at a lot of positions."

Miller, who missed extensive time early this season because of knee problems, was taller than anyone on FGCU's roster at 6-foot-3. She also did plenty of damage from the perimeter, making three 3s in the first half.

In addition to all her scoring, Miller contributed nine rebounds, three assists, three steals and one emphatic blocked shot.

Owusu missed a few games down the stretch, but she's back now as well.

"We've been through so much this season, and we're just coming together at the right time," Reese said. "I don't think this team has folded yet."

BIG PICTURE

FGCU: The Eagles were a dangerous team, but on this day they were facing an opponent that could match their quickness. A first-ever Sweet 16 appearance for FGCU will have to wait.

Maryland: The Terps seem to be hitting their stride. They turned a close game into a blowout in impressive fashion.

"I really think Maryland with everybody healthy is a Final Four-caliber team," Smesko said.

TOUGH TASK

Smesko said he appreciated the atmosphere — even if playing a road game was difficult.

"I still think that's great for basketball because it's great to have so many people. That crowd was great tonight. To have a charged environment like that is a great experience to be a part of," he said. "But it's definitely, on the women's side, difficult for the mid-majors to make that run to the Sweet 16, largely because you don't get a neutral court game usually to go to the Sweet 16. You're going to have to play on somebody's home court."

UP NEXT

Maryland heads to the Sweet 16 in Spokane, Washington, and will take on reigning national champs Stanford.

White House: Biden to visit Poland on Europe trip this week

By COLLEEN LONG and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has added a stop in Poland to his trip this week to Europe

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for urgent talks with NATO and European allies, as Russian forces concentrate their fire upon cities and trapped civilians in a nearly month-old invasion of Ukraine.

Biden will first travel to Brussels and then to Poland to meet with leaders there, press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement Sunday night.

Poland is a crucial ally in the Ukraine crisis. It is hosting thousands of American troops and is taking in more people fleeing the war in Ukraine — more than 2 million — than any other nation in the midst of the largest European refugee crisis in decades.

Biden will head to Warsaw for a bilateral meeting with President Andrzej Duda scheduled for Saturday. Biden will discuss how the U.S., along with its allies and partners, is responding to “the humanitarian and human rights crisis that Russia’s unjustified and unprovoked war on Ukraine has created,” Psaki said.

On Monday ahead of his trip, Biden will discuss the war with European leaders. President Emmanuel Macron of France, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, Prime Minister Mario Draghi of Italy and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom are expected to take part, the White House said Sunday.

White House officials have said Biden has no plans to travel to Ukraine. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, while in Poland this month, briefly crossed into neighboring Ukraine in a show of solidarity alongside that country’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba. Poland has been one of the most vocal countries in asking fellow NATO members to consider getting more involved to rein in the bloodshed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine largely has united the U.S. and NATO and European allies, as well as allies in Asia and elsewhere. The United States and European governments see Moscow’s military aggression as a threat to their security and strategic interests.

Biden and NATO have said repeatedly that while the U.S. and NATO will provide weapons and other defensive support to non-NATO member Ukraine, they are determined to avoid any escalation on behalf of Kyiv that risks a broader war with Russia.

The Pentagon on March 9 rejected a Polish proposal for providing Ukraine with MiG fighter jets via a NATO air base, saying allied efforts against the Russian invasion should focus on more useful weaponry and that the MiG transfer with a U.S. and NATO connection would run a “high risk” of escalating the war.

Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has pleaded for the U.S. to provide his military with more aircraft and advanced air-defense systems. NATO and the United States have rejected his appeals to establish a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine to suppress Russian air power, saying it would put Western forces in direct conflict with Russian ones.

Determined resistance by Ukrainian fighters when Russian tanks and troops rolled into Ukraine in late February quickly defeated Russian forces’ attempts to storm Ukraine’s capital and unseat the westward-looking government. Denied an easy and early victory, Russia’s military is reverting to the scorched earth tactics of its past offensives in Syria and Chechnya, and pounding population centers with airstrikes and artillery barrages that leave civilians like those in the port city of Mariupol able to safely venture out for food or water, to bury the dead, or to flee.

After Biden rallied European allies to join in sweeping sanctions against Russia over the invasion at the outset, his tasks now include dealing with some NATO members that are pushing for more involvement directly in the fighting. That includes proposals by Poland for peacekeepers.

Biden’s trip includes a summit Thursday of NATO leaders, who will use the meeting to look at strengthening the bloc’s own deterrence and defense, immediately and in the long term, to deal with the now openly confrontational Putin.

That gathering is intended not just to show NATO’s “support to Ukraine, but also our readiness to protect and defend all NATO allies,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told CBS’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday.

“And by sending that message, we are preventing an escalation of the conflict to a full-fledged war between NATO and Russia,” Stoltenberg said.

Front-line NATO members on the alliance’s eastern flank are also asking for advanced U.S. and British air defense systems to guard against the kind of missile and air assaults Russia is unleashing on Ukraine.

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"We have to strengthen our eastern flank of NATO. We have been talking about this for years, but now it's time for action," Estonia's prime minister, Kaja Kallas, told CNN's "State of the Union."

She added: "We need some more capabilities to support ourselves and defend ourselves by air defense systems, what is definitely necessary here, but also the troops that are present that act as a deterrent also to the Russian military."

Noting that Russia is firing missiles "from such a long range that they can also reach Paris from where they are shooting right now," Kallas said European leaders must "understand that this defense is our common issue, and it's not a theoretical discussion, but issue in real life."

Biden also will participate in a European Council summit to discuss the allies' sanctions on Russia and humanitarian efforts for the millions of Ukraine's people displaced by Russia's attacks, Psaki said last week.

His agenda includes a meeting of leaders of the the Group of Seven countries to discuss the punishing financial and economic penalties that the West and its allies have leveled on Russia over its invasion, Psaki said.

Jensen leads Creighton past Iowa in NCAA second round

By JOHN BOHNENKAMP Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Lauren Jensen found a new place last spring when she transferred from Iowa to Creighton.

She came back into her former home on Sunday and knocked her ex-teammates out of the women's NCAA tournament.

Jensen scored 19 points, including the go-ahead 3-pointer with 12 seconds left that lifted No. 10 seed Creighton over Caitlin Clark and second-seeded Iowa 64-62 in a Greensboro Region second-round game.

Iowa (24-8), which shared the Big Ten regular-season title and won the conference tournament, had two chances to tie the game in the closing three seconds. Monika Czinano missed a layup with three seconds left, then Kate Martin missed a putback as time ran out.

Jensen scored nine of the Bluejays' last 10 points.

"I've gotten the question a lot," Creighton coach Jim Flanery said. "How is Lauren going to feel today, what's Lauren going to play like, da da da da?" Those last few minutes had to be magical and special, and we're super proud of her and we're super proud that she's part of our program."

"Right away from summer workouts, this team welcomed me with open arms and made me feel at home and a part of the team, and I'm just so grateful for that," Jensen said. "To be able to do that with them here today is just so great."

Jensen had a layup with 1:26 left to cut Iowa's lead to 62-60, then her 3-pointer gave the Bluejays a lead.

"I just wanted to go in and play my game and didn't know what to expect with a sold out crowd," she said. "Play my game and play with my teammates and hopefully come out with the win, which we did."

"She goes over there and she comes back and beats us on our home court, and I want to congratulate her because she's a great kid," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "She is a really, really good kid. I'm happy for her. I wish it wasn't in this situation, but I am happy for her that she's found a really good home and is really having a lot of success."

After Clark missed a layup Emma Ronziek made the second of two free throws for the final margin.

Ronziek and Payton Brotzki had 13 points for the Bluejays (22-9), who advance to their first Sweet 16. They were the seventh double-digit seed to win in the women's NCAA Tournament so far, matching the record set in 1998.

"This is for everyone who has played at Creighton and put on a uniform in the past," Flanery said. "So happy for everyone who has been here. It means a lot. We have so much respect for Iowa and their program. The familiarity led to a lower scoring game than I anticipated. To make a Sweet 16 is really special."

Czinano led Iowa with 27 points. Clark, who came into the game as the nation's leading scorer at 27.4 points per game, finished with 15. Clark had a rough game, shooting just 4-for-19 from the field, including missing all eight shots in the second half.

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"I missed some bunnies I usually make," Clark said. "But that's how basketball goes."

Creighton led by as much as 12 points in the first half before a six-point Iowa run in the final two minutes cut the Bluejays' lead to 38-32 at halftime. The Hawkeyes struggled offensively outside of Clark and Czinano, who had Iowa's first 26 points of the game.

Iowa, which ranked second in the nation in scoring at 84.9 points per game, was held to a season-low in points.

ANOTHER IOWA CONNECTION

Creighton guard Rachel Saunders is an Iowa City native. Her father, Mike, played football at Iowa.

SELLOUT CROWD

Both sessions were sellouts, with an attendance of 14,382. The Iowa site had the best attendance of the 16 sites for the first round. Arizona was second with 9,573.

"To get that many people into a gym to watch women's sports, I think that's huge," Czinano said.

"I apologize to our fans that they couldn't celebrate a victory with us today," Bluder said.

BIG PICTURE

Creighton: Flanery said on Saturday that playing in this game in front of a national television audience would be a chance to showcase his program, and the Bluejays took advantage of the spotlight to reach the regional semifinals.

Iowa: The Hawkeyes had the homecourt advantage, but struggled to get a lead against Creighton until late. The program had made back-to-back appearances in the second weekend of the tournament.

UP NEXT

Creighton will play Iowa State on Friday.

Coach K's last ride continues as Duke closes out Spartans

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Mike Krzyzewski's emotions began to flow with a few seconds left on the clock, when it was finally certain Duke would extend his last NCAA Tournament run.

He whirled around to face the section where his family was sitting behind him and extended both arms to point their way in celebration. He traded high-fives and hugs with his players, then shared a long post-game hug at midcourt with Michigan State's Tom Izzo after beating his friend in the Hall of Fame coaches' bittersweet final tussle.

Krzyzewski's retirement will be on hold for several more days at least. The Blue Devils survived a tense finish to beat the Spartans 85-76 on Sunday, earning another trip to the Sweet 16 and giving their coach his latest milestones.

Trailing by five near the 5-minute mark and with their season in peril, the Blue Devils (30-6) responded with one big shot after another, a resilient performance amid uncommon pressure.

It was almost too much for Krzyzewski, who struggled to find the right words to start his postgame news conference.

"You guys were terrific, man," Krzyzewski told the players sitting alongside him, his voice quavering with emotion. "I'm so — I'm really proud to be your coach."

"It had nothing to do with coaching in those last four or five minutes. It all had to do with heart and togetherness. They followed their hearts and God bless them — we're in the Sweet 16."

Star freshman Paolo Banchemo scored 19 points and muscled in the go-ahead drive through contact with 2:05 left, putting the Blue Devils ahead to stay in the record-extending 1,200th win of Krzyzewski's career. Duke reached the Sweet 16 for the 26th time under Coach K, who announced last summer that his 42nd season with the Blue Devils would be his last.

Those coaching milestones came against his longtime friend and frequent rival. The 75-year-old Krzyzewski — who has five NCAA titles and a record-tying 12 Final Four appearances — improved to 13-3 against the 67-year-old Izzo, who won the 2000 national championship and has reached eight Final Fours.

Krzyzewski will continue his push for a career-capping championship when the second-seeded Blue Devils

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head to San Francisco to third-seeded Texas Tech on Thursday in the West Region semifinals.

The Blue Devils shot 61% after halftime and 57% for the game, and they needed every bit of that production to survive against the seventh-seeded Spartans (23-13) in a riveting fight to the final minute.

"It's the NCAA Tournament, our season's on the line every single game," Banchemo said. "That's really all that needs to be said. ... We were like, 'We've got four minutes: we can either lay down or turn it up.'"

The 6-foot-10 Banchemo had the biggest basket, putting the ball on the floor and scoring in a mauling drive against the smaller Joey Hauser for the 75-74 lead. Then Jeremy Roach hit a 3-pointer to beat the shot clock for a four-point lead with 1:16 left, sending an already-charged crowd into a full roar.

"I think they showed their truest colors," Izzo said.

"An average team without a lot of heart might've just drifted into the sunset. And I thought they reached down in Mike Krzyzewski fashion, and did an unbelievable job of kind of taking it at us. We just didn't have enough left."

Even more impressive, Duke did it all with freshman starter A.J. Griffin sidelined the last 8:24 with an apparent left ankle injury. The Blue Devils closed out the game by outscoring the Spartans 20-6.

Gabe Brown scored 18 points to lead Michigan State, while Tyson Walker scored all 13 of his points after halftime. The Spartans shot 42% for the game and had only one field goal over the final 2 1/2 minutes in possession-by-possession fight as Duke made its move.

"I want to be proud, but at the same time, mad that we're not playing another night," said Spartans big man Marcus Bingham Jr., who had 16 points and 10 rebounds. "I think the guys went out there and played hard from the first half into the second half. We fought. Just some situations, we just didn't pull through."

BIG PICTURE

Michigan State: Izzo, who won the 2000 NCAA title and has eight Final Fours in 27 seasons, acknowledged all the "weird emotions" sure to come for both teams in this game. His team gave itself a chance but couldn't slow the Blue Devils' late push. Izzo fell to 2-4 against Krzyzewski in the NCAA Tournament.

"I'll always pull for Mike," Izzo said. "I think he's done some things that will go down in the lore of basketball. You can remember this game in a lot of ways. My way of remembering it won't be quite as enjoyable, but it will be respectful."

Duke: Banchemo, a top NBA prospect, and 7-foot-1 Mark Williams (15 points, eight rebounds, five blocks) overpowered the Spartans — who have plenty of length themselves — and showed how good the Blue Devils can be in the front court. Duke was balanced with five double-figure scorers, including Wendell Moore Jr. (15 points), Roach (15) and Trevor Keels (12) — all of whom hit key shots late.

"I knew once we got our foot in the door," Moore said, "there was no looking back from there."

UP NEXT

The Blue Devils meet the Red Raiders, who own KenPom's No. 1-rated defense by surrendering 84.6 points per 100 possessions this year.

Justice Thomas hospitalized with infection, high court says

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Clarence Thomas has been hospitalized because of an infection, the Supreme Court said Sunday.

Thomas, 73, has been at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C., since Friday after experiencing "flu-like symptoms," the court said in a statement.

The court offered no explanation for why it waited two days to disclose that the justice was in the hospital.

It also provided no additional details about the infection, but said Thomas is being treated with antibiotics and his symptoms are abating.

He could be released in the next couple of days, the court said.

The Supreme Court is meeting this week to hear arguments in four cases. Thomas plans to participate in the cases even if he misses the arguments, the court said.

Thomas has been on the court since 1991. News of his hospitalization came as the Senate Judiciary

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Committee prepared to begin hearings Monday in the nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson, who President Joe Biden named to replace Stephen Breyer. He is retiring at the end of the session.

'No city anymore': Mariupol survivors take train to safety

By CARA ANNA and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — The heat on the train was as thick as the anxiety. Ukrainian survivors of one of the most brutal sieges in modern history were in the final minutes of their ride to relative safety.

Some carried only what they had at hand when they seized the chance to escape the port of Mariupol amid relentless Russian bombardment. Some fled so quickly that relatives who were still in the starving, freezing Ukrainian city on the Sea of Azov aren't aware that they have gone.

"There is no city anymore," Marina Galla said. She wept in the doorway of a crowded train compartment that was pulling into the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

The relief of being free from weeks of threats and deprivation, of seeing bodies in the streets and drinking melted snow because there was no water, was crushed by sadness as she thought of family members left behind.

"I don't know anything about them," she said. "My mother, grandmother, grandfather and father. They don't even know that we have left."

Seeing her tears, her 13-year-old son kissed her over and over, offering comfort.

Mariupol authorities say nearly 10% of the city's population of 430,000 have fled over the past week, risking their lives in convoys out.

For Galla, the memories are too fresh.

For three weeks, she and her son lived in the basement of Mariupol's Palace of Culture to hide from the constant Russian shelling, moving underground after the horizon turned black with smoke.

"We had no water, no light, no gas, absolutely no communications," she said. They cooked meals outside with wood in the yard, even while under fire.

Even as they finally fled Mariupol, aiming to reach trains heading west to safety, Russian soldiers at checkpoints made a chilling suggestion: It would be better to go to the Russian-occupied city of Melitopol or the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula instead.

It's a suggestion that residents found ludicrous after the Russians on Wednesday bombed a Mariupol theater where children and others were sheltering, and after authorities on Sunday said an art school holding hundreds of people in Mariupol had been bombed.

For hours on Sunday's train journey, survivors shared their experiences with fellow passengers. Even residents of other Ukrainian cities that have been battered or occupied by the Russians see Mariupol as a horror apart.

One resident of Melitopol, Yelena Sovchyuk, shared a train compartment with a Mariupol family. She bought them food, she said. They had nothing, only a small bag.

"Everyone from there is in deep shock," Sovchyuk said.

She recalled seeing convoys from the besieged city on the road. "There's a way to tell a Mariupol car," she said. "They have no glass in their windows."

With deep disdain, Sovchyuk said Russian soldiers amid such devastation were still encouraging Ukrainians to come to Russia, claiming it would be for their safety.

The Mariupol City Council has asserted that several thousand residents were taken into Russia against their will over the past week. On Sunday, the Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine said 2,973 people had been "evacuated" from Mariupol since March 5, including 541 over the last 24 hours.

The train of survivors on Sunday afternoon approached the central station of Lviv, the city near Poland that has absorbed an estimated 200,000 people fleeing other areas of Ukraine. As they climbed off one by one into the arms of family and friends after weeks of fearing for their lives, some Mariupol survivors wept.

A mother embraced a red-faced, teary teenage boy at the foot of the steps. An elderly woman in a kerchief, helped off the train, walked away in silence. Another stood motionless among her bags, blinking

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behind thick glasses. Her neighbor, who fled with her, described cars in their convoy coming under fire.

Her hair askew, clutched by family, Olga Nikitina cried on the platform.

"They began to destroy our city, completely, house after house," the young woman said. "Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target."

Gunshots blew out the windows. When the temperatures in her apartment dropped below freezing, Nikitina moved in with her godmother, who has cancer and takes care of her elderly father. Ukrainian soldiers later came and warned them that their house would come under fire.

"Either hide or move out," the soldiers said.

Nikitina left. The others were too fragile to flee. Now, like so many Mariupol survivors who escaped, she doesn't know the fate of those left behind.

Yemen rebels launch barrage of strikes on Saudi sites

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels unleashed one of their most intense barrages of drone and missile strikes on Saudi Arabia's critical energy facilities on Sunday, sparking a fire at one site and temporarily cutting oil production at another.

The salvo marked a serious escalation of rebel attacks on the kingdom as the war in Yemen rages into its eighth year and peace talks stall.

The attacks did not cause casualties, the Saudi-led military coalition fighting in Yemen said, but struck sites belonging to one of the world's most important energy companies and damaged civilian vehicles and homes. The coalition also said it destroyed a remotely piloted boat packed with explosives dispatched by the Houthis in the busy southern Red Sea.

Hours after oil giant Aramco's CEO Amin H. Nasser told reporters the attacks had no impact on oil supplies, the Saudi energy ministry acknowledged that a drone strike targeting the Yanbu Aramco Sinopec Refining Company caused "a temporary reduction in the refinery's production."

The disruption, as oil prices spike in an already-tight energy market, "will be compensated for from the inventory," the ministry said, without elaborating.

Another aerial attack later in the day struck a fuel tank at an Aramco distribution station in the port city of Jiddah and ignited a fire. Later at night, the roar and thump of missile interceptors rattled the port city as the Saudi military coalition said it destroyed more projectiles over Jiddah. Residents posted footage on social media showing streaks of light from missile defenses pierce the dark sky.

The relentless wave of strikes revealed the expanding reach and precision of the rebels and the persistent gaps in the kingdom's air defenses. A sophisticated strike in 2019 on Aramco oil facilities knocked out half the kingdom's oil production and threatened to ignite a regional crisis — an attack that the U.S. and Riyadh later alleged came from Iran.

The attacks on Sunday came as Saudi Arabia's state-backed Aramco, the world's largest oil company, announced its profits surged 124% in 2021 to \$110 billion, a jump fueled by renewed anxieties about global supply shortages and soaring oil prices.

Aramco, also known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., released its annual earnings after weeks of intense volatility in energy markets triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The international oil benchmark Brent crude spiked over \$107 on Sunday after nearly hitting a peak of \$140 earlier this month. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have so far resisted Western appeals to increase oil production to offset the loss of Russian oil as gasoline prices skyrocket.

Yehia Sarie, a spokesman for Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis, said the rebels had launched "a wide and large military operation" in retaliation for the Saudi-led "aggression and blockade" that has turned much of Yemen into a wasteland.

The escalation followed a flurry of diplomacy over the weekend in Oman's capital of Muscat. The U.N. special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, met with the chief Houthi negotiator and Omani officials to discuss "a possible truce during the holy month of Ramadan" in early April, the U.N. mission said.

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The White House condemned the attacks, blaming Iran for supplying the Houthis with missile and drone parts, as well as training and expertise.

"It is time to bring this war to a close, but that can only happen if the Houthis agree to cooperate with the United Nations," said U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. "The United States stands fully behind those efforts."

The Saudi-led military coalition reported aerial strikes on a range of facilities: an Aramco liquefied gas plant in the Red Sea port of Yanbu, an oil storage plant in Jiddah, a desalination facility in Al-Shaqeeq on the Red Sea coast and an Aramco oil facility in the southern border town of Jizan, among others.

The extent of damage on Saudi infrastructure remained unclear, and the ministry said only the Yanbu refinery saw a temporary drop in output. A joint venture between Aramco and China, the \$10 billion Yanbu Aramco Sinopec Refining Company on the Red Sea pumps 400,000 barrels of oil a day.

The Saudi Press Agency shared photos of firetrucks dousing leaping flames with water and a trail of rubble wrought by shrapnel that crashed through ceilings and pocked apartment walls. Other images showed wrecked cars and giant craters in the ground.

The barrage comes days after the Saudi-based Gulf Cooperation Council invited Yemen's warring sides for peace talks in Riyadh — an offer dismissed out of hand by the Houthis, who demanded that negotiations take place in a "neutral" country.

Negotiations have floundered since the Houthis have tried to capture oil-rich Marib, one of the last remaining strongholds of the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in the country's north.

Yemen's brutal war erupted in 2014, after the Iran-backed Houthis seized the country's capital, Sanaa. Saudi Arabia and its allies launched a devastating air campaign to dislodge the Houthis and restore the internationally recognized government.

But years later, the war has settled into a bloody stalemate and created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Coalition airstrikes have struck civilian targets in Yemen like hospitals, telecommunications centers and wedding parties, drawing widespread international criticism.

Repeated Houthi cross-border attacks have rattled world energy markets and raised the risk of disruptions to output at Aramco sites.

As part of its 2021 report, Aramco said it stuck to its promise of paying quarterly dividends of \$18.75 billion — \$75 billion last year — due to commitments the company made to shareholders in the run-up to its initial public offering. Nearly all of the dividend money goes to the Saudi government.

Despite Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's increasing efforts to diversify the Saudi economy away from oil, the kingdom remains heavily dependent on oil exports to fuel government spending.

Riding on its 2021 income surge, Aramco said it expects to raise its capital expenditure to between \$40 and \$50 billion this year to meet growing energy demand, a sizable increase from last year's spending of \$31.9 billion.

Aramco shares were up over 3% on Sunday to trade around 43.20 riyals (\$11.50) a share on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange.

Moore scores 21, Houston hammers Illinois to make Sweet 16

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Once back in their locker room, Houston's players emptied their water bottles on coach Kelvin Sampson, who peeled off his shirt for the celebratory dousing.

A sweet soaking indeed.

Taze Moore scored 21 points and Jamal Shead added 18 as the Cougars, a Final Four team last season, advanced in the South Region of the NCAA Tournament with a 68-53 win Sunday over Illinois, ousted in the opening weekend for the second straight year.

The fifth-seeded Cougars (31-5) are making another serious run at a national title despite losing their two best players to season-ending injuries. Now, with a trio of transfers and a defense with some serious

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teeth, they're headed home to Texas for the next round — in San Antonio, against either Arizona or TCU.

"It's our heart," Shead said when asked about this team's toughness. "We don't want to lose. We want to win for each other. We love each other so much, these guys are like my brothers, you know, it goes way beyond basketball.

"We want to keep it going as long as we possibly can."

Kyler Edwards added 15 points for Houston, a team often overlooked but making major noise again this March.

With Houston's fans chanting "Sweet 16, Sweet 16" in the closing seconds, Edwards dropped one last 3-pointer from the corner and seconds later lifted Moore, another of Houston's transfers, off the floor.

The Cougars faced major adversity in December when guards Marcus Sasser and Tramon Mark, two of the holdovers from last year's talented squad, were lost to injuries. But instead of folding, Houston's players formed an even tighter bond.

"We got a brand-new bunch," Sampson said, dried off and fully dressed. "But the culture never changes. Because they're great kids and they're high-character kids, they buy in. It's never about them. Our program is always about we and us, and that's what happens when you have great kids."

For Illinois, it's another year of deep disappointment. The fourth-seeded Fighting Illini (23-10) were determined to go farther after being bumped by Loyola Chicago last year, but couldn't get past the second round again.

All-American center Kofi Cockburn did his part, scoring 19 in 38 minutes to lead Illinois. The big man spurned the NBA last year for a shot at some tournament redemption, only to come up short in what was likely his last college game.

"It hurts really bad, especially for the guys that's leaving," Cockburn said. "We always want to leave with with a good feeling, you know? We fell short. Can't really put it into words."

Illinois coach Brad Underwood credited Houston's defense, but didn't have an answer for his team's poor shooting (6 of 25 on 3s) or turnovers (17). He got a nice lift from freshmen Luke Goode and RJ Melendez, but not enough from his other regulars.

"We didn't play very well. We didn't shoot it very well," Underwood said. "We played well enough; we didn't shoot it very well. You look at our two games here, and we just shot it terrible.

"We got great shots, we just couldn't make them."

Down by 12 in the first half, Illinois battled back and was within 56-49 after Alfonso Plummer's four-point play.

But after Shead hit a floater, Houston's Fabian White Jr. made the play of the game by racing into the backcourt and swatting the ball before it went out of bounds with his left hand to Moore for a layup.

"Culture play, that's what we call it," Sampson said. "Those are culture plays. Whenever we watch film, we do edits. We always end our film sessions with culture plays. Everybody wants to be on the edit.

"There were three guys involved in that play. Somebody made a great effort play on the baseline, Fabian made a great effort play, and next thing you know, Taze is getting a layup."

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

As Illinois was fighting back, Melendez was called for a questionable technical foul by referee Brian O'Connell for hanging on the rim after a dunk.

The bucket brought the Illini within four in the final 10 minutes, but the call seemed to have a negative effect.

Melendez said he didn't get an explanation.

Underwood was both puzzled and perturbed by the call

"I can't wait to see it," Underwood said. "He (O'Connell) told me he shouldn't ever have called it, but in the moment he calls it. Maybe it's personal, I don't know. When a kid has a full head of steam going 100 miles an hour, and we all talk about safety and well-being of student-athletes, come on.

"And then to kill momentum like that? Horrible."

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Zelenskyy evokes Holocaust as he appeals to Israel for aid

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Ukraine's president on Sunday called on Israel to take a stronger stand against Russia, delivering an emotional appeal that compared Russia's invasion of his country to the actions of Nazi Germany.

In a speech to Israeli lawmakers over Zoom, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it was time for Israel, which has emerged as a key mediator between Ukraine and Russia, to finally take sides. He said Israel should follow its Western allies by imposing sanctions and providing arms to Ukraine.

"One can ask for a long time why we can't accept weapons from you or why Israel didn't impose sanctions against Russia, why you are not putting pressure on Russian business," he said. "It is your choice, dear brothers and sisters."

Zelenskyy, who has carefully catered a series of similar parliamentary speeches to his audiences, made frequent references to the Holocaust as he tried to rally support. The comparisons drew an angry condemnation from Israel's national Holocaust memorial, which said Zelenskyy was trivializing the Holocaust.

Zelenskyy accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of trying to carry out a "final solution" against Ukraine -- using the Nazi term for its planned genocide of 6 million Jews during World War II.

"You remember it and will never forget it for sure," he said. "But you should hear what is coming from Moscow now. They are saying the same words now: 'final solution.' But this time it's about us, about the Ukrainian question."

Zelenskyy, who himself is Jewish, also noted that a Russian missile slammed into Babi Yar -- the spot of a notorious Nazi massacre in 1941 that now hosts Ukraine's main Holocaust memorial.

"The people of Israel, you saw how Russian rockets hit Babi Yar. You know what this place means, where the victims of the Holocaust are buried," he said.

The use of such sensitive language was a clear attempt by Zelenskyy to connect with his audience. Israel was founded in 1948 as a refugee for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. The country is home to tens of thousands of elderly survivors, and many of its leaders are children of survivors.

Putin has also sought to paint his enemies in Ukraine as neo-Nazis as he tries to legitimize his war in Ukraine. But historians, noting that Ukraine is a democracy led by a Jewish president, have condemned his use of such terminology as disinformation and a cynical ploy to further the Russian leader's aims.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, whose late father was a Holocaust survivor, thanked Zelenskyy for the speech.

"We will continue to assist the Ukrainian people as much as we can and we will never turn our backs to the plight of people who know the horrors of war," Lapid said.

But Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, which had previously condemned Putin's Nazi references, also harshly criticized Zelenskyy, without naming him.

"Propagandist discourse accompanying the current hostilities is saturated with irresponsible statements and completely inaccurate comparisons with Nazi ideology and actions before and during the Holocaust," it said. "Yad Vashem condemns this trivialization and distortion of the historical facts of the Holocaust."

The Israeli public has been largely supportive of Ukraine since Russia invaded its western neighbor on Feb. 24. Several thousand people, many holding Ukrainian flags, gathered in a central Tel Aviv square to watch his speech on a large screen.

But Israel's government has been much more cautious as it carves out a role as a mediator in the war. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett paid a surprise visit to Moscow to meet with Putin on March 5. Since then, he has spoken to the Russian leader at least twice and to Zelenskyy at least six times, according to his office.

While Israel's foreign minister has strongly condemned the invasion, Bennett has used more tepid language to maintain an air of neutrality.

With large Jewish populations in both Ukraine and Russia, Israel is wary of antagonizing either side. Israel also has good working relations with the Russian military in neighboring Syria -- where both sides' maintain a special hotline to make sure their air forces do not come into conflict.

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Israel has delivered tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine and is set to open a special field hospital in western Ukraine later this week. But it has rejected pleas to provide arms or impose sanctions against Russia or its oligarchs, some of whom are Jewish and have strong ties to Israel.

Zelenskyy said it was time for this to change.

"Everyone in Israel knows that your missile defense is the best. Everyone knows that your weapons are strong, everyone knows that you are great and you know how to defend your national interests, interests of your people and you can definitely help defend ours," he said.

Private investigator says drug kingpin targeted David Ortiz

BOSTON (AP) — A Dominican drug trafficker who was jealous of David Ortiz and felt disrespected by him had him shot at a Dominican nightclub in 2019, according to private investigators the Red Sox slugger hired to look into the attack that nearly killed him.

The findings by former Boston police commissioner Edward Davis reported by the Boston Globe on Saturday contradict the theory of the crime developed by Dominican prosecutors.

Davis told the newspaper that he identified the drug-trafficker César Peralta as having orchestrated the shooting by placing a bounty on Ortiz and sanctioning the hit squad that tried to kill him. Dominican authorities did not cooperate with the private investigation.

Peralta is being held in held without bail in Puerto Rico on unrelated charges of conspiracy to import cocaine and heroin. The U.S. Treasury designated Peralta a drug kingpin in 2019 and he was extradited to the U.S. territory in December.

Ortiz's spokesperson, Joe Baerlein, told the Globe that Davis' findings were withheld for Ortiz's safety until Peralta was in U.S. custody.

Peralta has not been charged in relation to Ortiz's shooting. Peralta's lawyer, Joaquin Perez, said Peralta had nothing to do with the attempt on Ortiz's life.

"As bad as César Peralta is, it's not even close to being in the ballpark to say he had something to do with this," Perez said.

Perez described Ortiz and Peralta as "close friends." Ortiz told The Globe he knew Peralta only casually and that he was "sad, confused, angry, all kinds of emotions" when he received the news from Davis and Ric Prado, a former high-ranking CIA official who participated in the inquiry.

Dominican authorities have said the target was meant to be Sixto David Fernandez, who was sharing a table with Ortiz when he was shot. Authorities said the hit men confused Fernandez with Ortiz, one of the most popular Dominican ballplayers ever.

Thirteen people have been charged in relation to Ortiz's shooting and are awaiting trial in the Dominican Republic.

Baerlein said Ortiz was waiting further legal action in the Dominican and U.S. courts to bring clarity about why this happened to him.

A 10-time All-Star, Ortiz helped the Red Sox end their 86-year championship drought in 2004 and batted .688 against the St. Louis Cardinals in 2013 to win the Series MVP.

Ortiz retired after the 2016 season with 541 home runs, and the team retired his uniform No. 34. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first appearance on the ballot in January.

Ortiz maintained a home in the Boston area and had been living part of the year in the Dominican Republic. He was seriously wounded in the June 9, 2019 shooting. Doctors in the Dominican Republic removed Ortiz's gallbladder and part of his intestine after the shooting and he underwent further surgery in the U.S.

Ortiz told the Globe he wants to know why anyone might want him dead, but "the most important thing is, thank God I'm alive."

'The Batman,' still No. 1, crosses \$300 million

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"The Batman" is still going strong three weeks into its theatrical run, with a tight grip on the top spot

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at the box office.

Robert Pattinson's debut as the Dark Knight earned an additional \$36.8 million over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. It also slid past the \$300 million mark ahead of projections.

The Warner Bros. film is the highest grossing movie of 2022 and the second highest since the beginning of the pandemic (first place goes to "Spider-Man: No Way Home").

"The Batman," directed by Matt Reeves, also picked up \$49.1 million internationally this weekend, bringing its global total to \$598.1 million. The only place "The Batman" seems to be stumbling is in China where it earned \$12.1 million in its first weekend. But about 43% of cinemas in China are closed due to the pandemic and "The Batman" still did slightly better than "Uncharted" which also opened there this weekend to \$10.3 million.

"The Batman" cost an estimated \$200 million to make, not counting the many millions spent on marketing. But it is already a win for Warner Bros., which took a hit at the box office in 2021 because all of its films were released simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max.

It also helps that marketplace competition has been slim. The biggest competitor this weekend was the anime "Jujutsu Kaisen 0," which was released by Crunchyroll and Funimation, and took in an estimated \$17.7 million in its first weekend in North America, where it was playing on 2,748 screens. The Japanese film is based on a best-selling manga and available to watch dubbed or with subtitles.

"Fans made this movie a big hit this weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "It shows how passionate fans of anime are and how beautiful these films are when presented on the big screen."

The horror film "X" also debuted this weekend on 2,865 screens and is projected to gross around \$4.4 million. Directed by Ti West and distributed by A24, "X" is about a group of people who are terrorized while shooting a pornographic film.

Focus Features launched the crime drama "The Outfit," starring Mark Rylance in 1,324 locations. It made an estimated \$1.5 million. And outside of the top 10, Vertical Entertainment and Roadside Attractions had "Alice," the Sundance breakout about an enslaved woman who gets transported to 1973, which made \$176,120 from 170 locations.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "The Batman," \$36.8 million.
2. "Jujutsu Kaisen 0," \$17.7 million.
3. "Uncharted," \$8 million.
4. "X," \$4.4 million.
5. "Dog," \$4.1 million.
6. "Spider-Man: No Way Home," \$3.2 million.
7. "Death on the Nile," \$1.7 million.
8. "The Outfit," \$1.5 million.
9. "The Kashmir Files," \$1.5 million.
10. "Sing 2," \$1.5 million.

'Do the right thing': How US, allies united to punish Putin

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just days before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, President Joe Biden quietly dispatched a team to European Union headquarters in Belgium.

These were not spy chiefs or generals, but experts in reading fine print and tracking the flow of money, computer chips and other goods around the world. Their mandate: inflict maximum pain on Russian President Vladimir Putin, making it harder, if not impossible, for him to fund a prolonged war in Ukraine and denying him access to technologies at the core of modern warfare.

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There were intense meetings in February in Brussels, Paris, London and Berlin, often running six hours at a time as the allies tried to craft the details of a historic economic blockade, according to Biden administration officials. Some of the exports the U.S. wanted to ban were met with reluctance by the Europeans, who would essentially be telling their own companies to forgo several billion dollars in annual revenues from Russia.

When there was a deadlock, U.S. negotiators would put Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on the phone.

"You can say 'no' now, but when the body bags are coming out of Ukraine, you're not going to want to be a holdout," Raimondo said she told allied counterparts. "Do the right thing."

Everyone signed on — and before the invasion.

Raimondo said what ultimately drove the agreement and the fast timeline was the threat of Putin's imminent attack on Ukraine.

"We all got religion fast that it was time to band together and stick together," she said. "If you cause enough pain, isolate Putin, it will bring this war to an end."

The wealthiest nations in the world — outside of China — are directly confronting Putin on their preferred terms. They have imposed sanctions in which their strengths intersect with Russia's vulnerabilities. Russia is reliant on the U.S., the EU, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan for cutting-edge technologies and investment, so the allies decided to cut Moscow off.

It's a strategic play designed to trap Putin in a downward spiral, as foreign investors pull out their money in response to the atrocities. It's also a remarkable show of unity that could be tested in the coming weeks by the allies' own dependence on fossil fuels.

A group of economists estimated Thursday that EU countries have transferred more than 13.3 billion euros (\$14.7 billion) to Russia for oil, natural gas and coal since the war began, essentially funding Putin's war machine.

While the allied talks in the lead-up to the war were critical, the EU was not just waiting around for U.S. direction to act. Bloc members had been consulting for months.

One EU diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal talks, outlined in an interview as far back as January potential penalties that included the export ban, noting that the EU had held together its coalition on enforcing sanctions since Russia's 2014 occupation of parts of the Donbas region in Ukraine.

But this time, the U.S. and EU responded to Russia's aggression with a novel set of policies to cripple Putin's ability to fight by denying it access to the semiconductors, computers, telecommunications equipment, lasers and sensors integral to war materiel.

This is a supply chain squeeze that will force Russia to raid existing airplanes, tanks and other gear for spare parts — essentially eroding its military and economic capacity. The same U.S. and EU officials dealing with their own supply chain challenges after the pandemic found a way to amplify the problem for Russia through trade regulations.

In a sign of early success, U.S. officials point to the closing of Lada auto plants in Russia and the more than 300 companies that have stopped doing business with Russia. The companies are not just Starbucks, but chipmakers such as Germany's Infineon that said it stopped all direct and indirect deliveries to Russia as well as technical support.

Within days of the invasion, the allies blocked the foreign assets of Russia's central bank. Two senior Biden administration officials, who were not authorized to publicly discuss the strategy and spoke on condition of anonymity, said this option was not initially presented to allies out of concern that Russia could move its money ahead of time. They waited to present the asset freeze until the invasion started and the images of bombings and death compelled the Europeans to almost immediately agree.

The freeze rendered half of the more than \$600 billion in Putin's war chest unusable. While the Russian stock market has been closed and the value of the ruble has plunged, the sanctions are designed so that the financial effects tightens over time. As long as Ukraine is able to hold out with military aid against severe casualties, the sanctions will do more to exhaust Putin.

EU Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis on Thursday praised the "very good coordination" among nations and said the sanctions "are biting hard. Russia's financial markets are close to collapse."

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He also noted that the sanctions create costs for the allies, though the price is much less than the consequences of the war spreading.

Yet with every new round of sanctions, the unity of the 27 EU members is tested ever more. If imposing a ban on Russian oil and gas comes up, Germany and Italy, both heavily dependent on Russian energy, will be in a tough spot to contain the drive of several eastern member nations like Poland and the Baltic states that want to hit Putin as hard as possible as soon as possible. The U.S. is less dependent on Russian oil and natural gas, making it easier for Biden to ban those imports earlier this month.

There is also the risk that the sanctions will fail to stop Putin or that Russia can still find ways to bring goods into its economy. Trade data analyzed by ImportGenius show that China supplanted Germany in 2021 as the leading source of exports to Russia — and U.S. officials say that Russia has solicited help from the Chinese government.

On Twitter, Olivier Blanchard, former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund and now a fellow at the Peterson Institute of International Economics, equated the sanctions to the bombing of German factories during World War II. Those bombings disrupted the German war machine in ways that made it impossible to prolong an extended fight — and economists had a role in choosing the targets.

For all that has been done, questions remain about whether it is enough.

Blanchard recommends expanding the export controls from defense-related production to “anything which disorganizes production” in the Russian economy. If Russian-made refrigerators need a gasket made in the EU, restricting access to that gasket makes it harder for the Russian economy to function, he said.

Tania Babina, a finance professor at Columbia University who was born in Ukraine, said that sanctions tend not to stop dictators and she warned that Putin might ultimately become even more entrenched unless the U.S. and EU take more aggressive action. She said Europeans need to add sanctions that ban the use of Russian oil and natural gas.

“He is going to throw everything to win, will send his grandma to fight if needed,” Babina said. “He cannot lose Ukraine. That is why it is so paramount to cut off Russia’s energy export revenues.”

But Babina noted that there is another far more chilling cost to the allied strategy of sanctions: Ukrainian lives.

“How many people do we let die before Putin runs out of assets?” she asked.

Time to retool census? Some think so after minorities missed

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Is it time to rethink the census and other surveys that measure changes in the U.S. population?

Policymakers and demographers have been asking that question since results released by the U.S. Census Bureau this month showed Black, Hispanic, American Indian and other minority residents were undercounted at greater rates in 2020 than in the previous decade.

On top of that, results from a version of its most comprehensive survey that compares year-to-year changes in U.S. life had to be mostly scrapped because disruptions caused by the pandemic produced fewer responses in 2020.

“The current model of coming up with a master address list, mailing everybody an invitation — like you’re inviting people to a party and hoping they respond, and if not, you’re going to track them down — I think it’s an obsolete system,” said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALEO Educational Fund, a nonpartisan nonprofit that supports Latino political engagement.

The undercounts in the 2020 census were blamed on the pandemic, natural disasters and political interference from the Trump administration, but undercounts of racial and ethnic minorities are nothing new to the census; they’ve been persistent for decades.

In recent years, the cost of censuses and surveys have grown while public participation rates for surveys have declined. The bureau’s biggest between-census effort to take the measure of the U.S. population, the American Community Survey, produces 11 billion statistics from interviews with 3.5 million households each year, and the once-a-decade census tallies every U.S. resident for a count used in divvying up federal

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funding and congressional seats among the states as well as redrawing political districts.

"What we have today largely is still a 20th century, survey-centric statistical system," Ron Jarmin, the chief operating officer of the Census Bureau, said last December when he was serving as the agency's acting director.

Even before the release of the 2020 report card earlier this month, the Census Bureau had been developing new ways of gathering data. Chief among them is the embryonic Frames Program that would combine all kinds of data sets, including administrative records from the private sector and government agencies, as well as surveys and censuses that have been staples of Census Bureau data-gathering for decades.

Under the concept, one data set such as an individual's IRS file would be linked to another, such as the individual's Census Bureau survey response. Eventually, data related to people's addresses, demographics, businesses and jobs would all be linked together.

In 2030, when the next census takes place, the program could help count people with good administrative records or links to other records, and more resources could be devoted toward households that are the hardest to count, Census Bureau Director Robert Santos said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

"We are looking to take advantage of existing technology, and that necessarily includes the merging of large databases on people, not to create a Big Brother society, but to supplement and reduce the burden on our population when it comes time to gather data," said Santos, who was appointed by President Joe Biden.

Relying on administrative records may have its own problems because some groups, such as people in the country illegally, often have little paper trail.

Besides naming an unusually high number of political appointees to the Census Bureau, the Trump administration unsuccessfully attempted to use administrative records to get a tally of the number of people in the country illegally so they could be eliminated from the count used for allocating congressional seats.

Any effort to revamp how the count is conducted will need to be protected from similar efforts to misuse the count for political purposes, said Paul Ong, a professor emeritus of urban studies at UCLA.

"The 2020 enumeration was a wakeup call," Ong said. "The Census Bureau has a very important and fundamental function in our society. It is the keeper of our demographic truths."

From a purely civic perspective, Terri Ann Lowenthal, a former congressional staffer who specializes in census issues, worries a greater reliance on administrative records at the expense of public participation will be one less thing that engages everyone in the U.S., no matter their background.

"If you are in a millionaire's mansion or living in a tent under a bridge, you matter to the census," Lowenthal said.

The Census Bureau has been at the forefront of advances in data gathering and processing — whether using punch cards and electronic tabulators at the end of the 19th century or employing the first modern computer installed by a civilian government agency for the 1950 census. For the 2020 census, it tried several new approaches.

For the first time, the internet was the primary mode for answering the census questionnaire, and the 2020 census was the first to use administrative records from places like the Social Security Administration to fill in data gaps for households that didn't respond. Bureau statisticians also are blending other data sets with census data for the first time to create yearly population estimates.

The Census Bureau could improve the accuracy of the undercounted communities if Congress would allow it to use a statistical method that adjusts the population count to compensate for undercounts, Lowenthal said. That statistical tool has been prohibited for the count used for dividing congressional seats among the states for more than two decades.

Outreach to overlooked communities and more consistent funding from Congress also needs to be in the mix, said Allison Plyer, chief demographer of The Data Center in New Orleans.

"There isn't going to be a silver bullet," said Plyer, former chair of the bureau's scientific advisory committee. "All of these things need to work together in concert."

Patriotic tattoos, billboards become popular in Ukraine

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Patriotic messages in the form of tattoos and billboards have become popular in war-torn Ukraine.

The Ukrainian flag and other symbols are favored additions for customers at a tattoo parlor in Lviv. Olena Barlevych, 18, recently got a tattoo of the Ukrainian coat of arms with a military aircraft, symbolizing the fight to defend her country.

"This tattoo means a lot to us," Barlevych said. "It is a very important phase for our country, which must go down in history, which must be passed on to future generations."

Artist Natalia Tanchynets has seen clients come in from several parts of Ukraine for similar tattoos. She said 70% of the proceeds from her patriotic tattoos are donated to the Ukrainian army.

At her shop, where a red stop sign on a wall had the handwritten word "war" added to it, Tanchynets said she's had a gamut of emotions about the rush of patriotism.

While the war has been good for her business, "I'm so sad about this situation in my country," Tanchynets said one of her clients was killed on the front lines last week.

Lviv print shop manager Yuri Kobryn said he initially thought his business that creates advertising billboards would be useless in the war. He since has found creative ways to support Ukrainian troops.

Instead of advertisements, Kobryn's company now prints motivational messages to his country — especially the Ukrainian army. Some are religious messages asking for protection of the troops.

"The guys from the army were pleasantly surprised and asked me if I could make smaller versions that they could give them to others," Kobryn said. "So that we can help them in our victory."

Russia invaded its smaller neighbor to the southwest in February. Thousands on both sides have reportedly died, and there is no immediate sign of a halt in hostilities despite numerous rounds of diplomatic talks.

State constitutional convention measures stoke partisan fear

By BECKY BOHRER and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Simmering public anger in Alaska over the legislature's failure to settle the state's most radioactive issue — how big a check residents should receive from the state's oil wealth fund — is colliding with a once-a-decade opportunity for political activists: The chance for voters to call a convention to amend the state's constitution.

The frustration over the long-festered oil check question is providing a tail wind for groups seeking to change the constitution to address a range of hot button topics, such as restricting abortion and altering the process for selecting judges in a way that opponents say could make the process more partisan.

This year's political turbulence could turn what is usually an overlooked ballot question into a high-stakes fight over the direction of the state. A convention would open Alaska's foundational document to any type of revision, something opponents consider dangerous in an era of deep partisan divides, culture wars and campaigns fueled by deep-pocketed donors from out of state.

Talking about changing the constitution is "like walking around in a dynamite storage room with a lighter. You better know what you're doing," said John Coghill, a conservative former state lawmaker whose father was one of the delegates to Alaska's original constitutional convention.

Alaska is one of three states where voters will decide this fall whether to call a convention to consider amendments to their constitution. The question has gained little attention in Missouri and has generated only mild interest so far in New Hampshire, where a group opposed to COVID-19 mandates and restrictions has discussed starting a campaign to advocate for a convention. That group, Rebuild NH, hasn't yet said what amendments it might favor.

In all, 14 states are required to hold periodic elections asking voters whether to convene a constitutional convention. Delegates typically have free reign to propose revisions — or even entirely new constitutions — that would then go back to voters for ratification.

State constitutional conventions called by voters have become increasingly rare. More than 30 such ballot

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questions have failed since Rhode Island voters last authorized one in 1984.

Voters in New Hampshire haven't authorized one since 1982. Delegates at that gathering debated more than 100 amendments, with 10 making it to the ballot. Voters approved six, including measures that required the legislature to meet annually instead of every other year and ensuring polling places would be accessible to disabled voters.

The country is more divided today.

"Whereas at one point a constitutional convention was seen as a way to empower the people and overcome challenges that they saw with the operation of government, the people now no longer have trust that constitutional conventions will work out," said John Dinan, a political science professor at Wake Forest University who studies the topic. "There's significant fear of runaway conventions or opening the Pandora's box of issues."

That's what is emerging in Alaska, where some groups are taking sides on the question that will be on the November ballot.

This year's vote will follow an expected mid-year decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in a case that could severely erode abortion rights across the country. The Alaska Supreme Court has interpreted the state constitution's right to privacy as encompassing abortion rights, but many conservatives want to do away with that interpretation.

The conservative Alaska Family Council says it considers calling for a convention one of its top priorities. It supports an amendment saying nothing in the constitution may be construed as protecting a right to abortion. The group also is supporting issues related to school choice and changes to the judicial selection process.

Existing precedent in the state provides "pretty significant insulation" for Alaska women "to continue to have reproductive choice," said Susan Orlansky, interim executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska. But she said her group is concerned about the potential for a convention. A convention carries the risk of possible changes to the constitution that could undermine those protections, she said.

A prominent advocate for a convention is Bob Bird, chair of the Alaskan Independence Party, which is one of the three recognized political parties in the state and considers itself a blend of conservative Republicanism, populism and libertarianism. Among other things, Bird has urged changes to the judiciary.

Critics of a convention say the heated political environment makes this a bad time to open the state constitution, but Bird disagrees: "If we didn't have this environment, it wouldn't even be considered. It would be brushed off like it has (been) in the past."

The last time the question was on the ballot in Alaska, in 2012, voters rejected calling for a convention by a nearly 2-to-1 margin.

Republican former lawmakers, including Coghill, Democratic former mayors and a union leader have joined as part of a group called Defend Our Constitution to oppose a convention. They worry that deep-pocketed outside interests will try to influence the process and that business interests might delay investments in Alaska while it plays out.

Bruce Botelho, a Democrat involved with the convention opposition group, said there are "a lot of people who are just generally angry at government and this may be their opportunity to cast a vote to express their frustrations at government."

Supporters say the fears are overblown and that if voters do approve a convention, sharply divisive issues are unlikely to go far.

Similar concerns have prevented a constitutional convention at the federal level, which several Republican-led states have proposed in recent years as a way to pass a balanced budget amendment. Those wary of constitutional conventions generally say they worry about the possibility of the gatherings turning into free-for-alls — Democrats seeking to mandate spending for social welfare programs, for example, and Republicans trying to outlaw abortion or prohibit any type gun control.

Successful constitutional conventions during the last century were aided by bipartisan cooperation, said Justin Dyer, director of the Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy at the University of Missouri.

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"We have a very tense partisan time right now," he said. "The idea of having good will from both parties ... it's hard to know if we would be able to do that or not."

Across Europe, Ukrainian exiles pray for peace back home

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Alona Fartukhova has been coming to Berlin's Ukrainian Orthodox Christian community every day since she arrived in Germany five days ago from war-torn Kyiv. The 20-year-old refugee has been attending daily prayers for peace and helped organize donations for her compatriots back home.

On Sunday, Fartukhova joined dozens of other Ukrainian worshippers at a red brick stone church in the German capital who sang together, lit candles, and received blessings from the head of the community, Father Oleh Polianko. Later they put medical crutches, sleeping bags, diapers, big boxes of gummi bears and countless jars of pickles — which were piling up everywhere inside the church — into big cardboard boxes to be sent to Ukraine.

"It's some help for our army, and it is ... a lot of things for children" said the university student, who fled by herself and is now living at a hotel in Berlin, as she stacked boxes onto the church pews. "It is so good that a lot of people support us, we really appreciate it."

Across Europe, Ukrainians gathered for church services on Sunday to pray for peace in their war-torn country. Newly arrived refugees mingled with long-time members of Europe's 1.5 million-strong Ukrainian diaspora at houses of worship all over the continent from Germany to Romania to Moldova.

Since Russia attacked Ukraine more than three weeks ago, over 3.38 million people have fled the country, according to the United Nations refugee agency. Altogether, 10 million people have fled their homes — more than 6 million of them have been displaced internally, the UNHCR said on Sunday.

Most have escaped to neighboring Poland, Romania or Moldova, but as the war continues many are moving further west.

Germany has registered more than 200,000 Ukrainian refugees but the real numbers are expected to be much higher as Ukrainians don't need a visa to come to Germany, and federal police only register refugees entering Germany by train or bus. Ukrainians coming to Germany from Poland by car are normally not registered.

Members of Germany's Ukrainian immigrant community, which counts around 300,000 people, have not only been raising money and collecting donations, but also driven the goods to the border and beyond and on their way back to Germany have taken along refugees. Families already living in Germany have squeezed together to accommodate refugees and are helping them find jobs and get their kids into schools.

The diaspora Ukrainians' religious communities — mostly Christian Orthodox, but also some Catholic and Jewish communities — have been leading refugee initiatives and have also become an anchor for those worrying about their families back in the war.

Polianko, who heads the 500-member-strong Orthodox Christian community in Berlin, held some one-on-one prayers on Sunday with worshippers who were especially distressed. He then gave blessings "for the souls of our soldiers who are fighting in Ukraine, and also for the souls of our soldiers who have died in Ukraine."

Because the Berlin community has been so overwhelmed by donations, they temporarily moved from their small church building in the city's Hermsdorf neighborhood to the bigger church of the Lutheran Philippus Nathanael community in Berlin-Friedenau. Here, they have plenty of space to organize donation drives and a wide driveway for trucks picking up the boxes, says Andriy Ilin, the deputy head of the community.

The Lutherans are currently holding their own services in a nearby community center.

"Initially, they offered us the church for March, now they've extended it to April, and they kindly let us know that if we need it beyond that, they will allow that too." Ilin said.

Elsewhere in Europe, local worshippers also opened their churches to welcome Ukrainians.

In Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, locals and refugees alike assembled for an Orthodox prayer service on Sunday.

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Angelica Gretsai, a refugee from the northern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, lit candles just before the religious service in Russian began at a small Sfintul Gheorghe church.

"(I pray) for peace of course, for peace in Ukraine, for these two peoples (Russians and Ukrainians) to make up, for this war to be no more," Gretsai said adding that she was yearning to go back home and be with friends and family.

"I'm basically alone here, it's the first time I came to Moldova," she said, adding that she was staying with some distant relatives she had never met before. Moldova has welcomed more than 360,000 refugees since Russia invaded Ukraine.

In Suceava, Romania, south of the Ukrainian border, locals and new arrivals from Ukraine held a service together at St. John's church. Romania has welcomed more than half a million refugees from Ukraine since the beginning of the war and several of them found their way to the church service.

Ariadna Belciug, a local resident at the service, said she was praying "especially for the children, because no one deserves to go through these times."

"I pray for them to be all right, to be safe and for better days for them to come," Belciug added.

Ukraine war is backdrop in US push for hypersonic weapons

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Lagging behind Russia in developing hypersonic weapons, the U.S. Navy is rushing to field its first, with installation on a warship starting as soon as late next year.

The United States is in a race with Russia and China to develop these weapons, which travel at speeds akin to ballistic missiles but are difficult to shoot down because of their maneuverability.

The Russian military says it already deployed hypersonic missiles, claiming on both Saturday and Sunday to have deployed them against targets in Ukraine marking the weapon's first use in combat. The Pentagon couldn't confirm a hypersonic weapon was used in the attacks.

The American military is accelerating development to catch up.

The U.S. weapon would launch like a ballistic missile and would release a hypersonic glide vehicle that would reach speeds seven to eight times faster than the speed of sound before hitting the target.

In Maine, General Dynamics subsidiary Bath Iron Works has begun engineering and design work on changes necessary to install the weapon system on three Zumwalt-class destroyers.

The work would begin at a yet-to-be-named shipyard sometime in fiscal year that begins in October 2023, the Navy said.

Hypersonic weapons are defined as anything traveling beyond Mach 5, or five times faster than the speed of sound. That's about 3,800 mph (6,100 kph). Intercontinental ballistic missiles far exceed that threshold but travel in a predictable path, making it possible to intercept them.

The new weapons are maneuverable.

Existing missile defense systems, including the Navy's Aegis system, would have trouble intercepting such objects because maneuverability makes their movement unpredictable and speed leaves little time to react.

Russia says it has ballistic missiles that can deploy hypersonic glide vehicles as well as a hypersonic cruise missile.

The U.S. is "straining just to catch up" because it failed to invest in the new technology, with only a fraction of the 10,000 people who were working on the program in the 1980s, said U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, a Tennessee Democrat who's chair of a subcommittee that monitors the program.

"If we want to pursue parity, we will need to back this effort with more money, time, and talent than we are now," he said.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine serves as a backdrop as the Pentagon releases its budget proposal that lays out its goals for hypersonics and other weapon systems later this month.

The three stealthy Zumwalt-class destroyers to be equipped with the new weapons have plenty of space to accommodate them — thanks to a design failure that works to the Navy's advantage in this instance.

The ships were built around a gun system that was supposed to use GPS-guided, rocket-boosted pro-

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jectiles to pound targets 90 miles (145 kilometers) away. But those projectiles proved to be too expensive, and the Navy canceled the system, leaving each of the ships with a useless loading system and a pair of 155-mm guns hidden in angular turrets.

The retrofit of all three ships will likely cost more than \$1 billion but will give a new capability to the tech-laden, electric-drive ships that already cost the Navy \$23.5 billion to design and build, said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

"The engineering is not that hard. It'll just take time and money to make it happen," Clark said.

The Navy intends to field the weapons on the destroyers in the 2025 fiscal year and on Virginia-class nuclear-powered attack submarines in the 2028 fiscal year, the Navy said.

The destroyers would be based in the Pacific Ocean, where they would be a deterrent to China, should it become emboldened by Russia's attack on Ukraine and consider attacking Taiwan, Clark said.

The U.S. focus on hypersonic weapons represents a pivot after hesitating in the past because of technological hurdles. Adversaries, meanwhile, continued research and development.

Russia fired off a salvo of Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles in late December, heralding the completion of weapon testing.

But Russia may be exaggerating the capability of such super weapons to compensate for weakness in other areas, said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute.

For the time being, Russia doesn't have many of the weapons, and it's unclear how effective they are, he said.

Urban mining transforms Brazil neighborhoods into ghost town

By ERALDO PERES Associated Press

MACEIO, Brazil (AP) — This part of Maceio, the capital of Brazil's northeastern Alagoas state, used to buzz with the sounds of cars, commerce and children playing. It went silent as residents evacuated en masse, eager to escape the looming destruction of their homes, which were cracking and crumbling.

Beneath their floors, the subsurface was riddled with dozens of cavities: the legacy of four decades of rock salt mining in five urban neighborhoods. That caused the soil above to settle and structures atop it to start coming apart. Since 2020, the communities have hollowed out as tens of thousands of residents accepted payouts from petrochemical company Braskem to relocate.

Few holdouts remain, several of whom told The Associated Press they imagine the ground under their feet resembling Swiss cheese. Still, Paulo Sergio Doe, 51, said he will never leave his home in the Pinheiro neighborhood where he grew up.

"The company can't impose what it wants overnight to do away with the lives and histories of so many families," he said in an interview outside his home.

Braskem is one of the biggest petrochemical companies in the Americas, owned primarily by Brazilian state-run oil company Petrobras and construction giant Novonor, formerly known as Odebrecht.

The company isn't forcibly evicting anyone, though those still here said it feels that way. It reached an agreement with prosecutors and public defenders to compensate families so they could uproot and start over elsewhere. By Braskem's count, 97.4% of affected homes — more than 14,000 — are now vacant, the company said in its 2021 earnings call on Thursday.

The 55,000 evacuees left behind not just neighbors and friends, but also jobs; 4,500 mostly small- and medium-sized businesses that sustained 30,000 people were shuttered, according to a study The Federal University of Alagoas published last year. Among those businesses were local supermarkets and a ballet school that operated for 38 years, according to Adriana Capretz, part of the university's work group to monitor the neighborhoods.

The exodus is evident from above; departing residents salvaged everything they could sell for extra cash, including their roof tiles. Their removal allows unimpeded views inside the once-occupied spaces.

The amount Braskem offered wasn't enough for Natália Gonçalves. The retired teacher, 77, also said she felt too old to start fresh. So she watched as everyone in Pinheiro left her. Now she lives inside a

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makeshift fortress behind boards and plants aimed at deterring would-be burglars. Braskem security guards do rounds on motorcycles, briefly interrupting the evenings' eerie silence.

"They've already done everything to force me to go, but I have my rights," she said from behind her home's fortified exterior. "I'm afraid, especially at night when no one is around. The light is dim, there's hardly any. I protect myself with my plants, but I'm alone, with God."

Braskem has so far disbursed about 40% of the more than 5 billion reais (about \$1 billion) it has set aside for relocation, compensation of individuals including residents and local employees and the transfer of facilities like schools and hospitals, the company said in its earnings call. It is directing 6 billion reais more for closing and monitoring the salt mines, as well as social, environmental and urbanistic measures.

Wrapping up the call, Braskem's CEO Roberto Lopes Pontes Simões highlighted the company's year, including "all the advance we had in Maceio" in having relocated nearly everyone from the neighborhoods.

No house has been swallowed by the earth, nor was any person killed. Capretz, a professor in the university's architecture and urbanism school, said that doesn't mean heartache was avoided.

"The tragedy is happening, not just regarding the geological phenomena but, primarily, because there are cases of people who committed suicide, many who became sick with depression, lost their social lives, family ties, friends and neighbors," Capretz said as she walked through the Bebedouro neighborhood. "None of that is being considered by Braskem."

The company's press office said in a lengthy response to AP questions that it provides free psychological consultations to any residents participating in the compensation and relocation program. It said the program was created based on law and legal rulings in similar cases and said compensation offers are always presented to individuals alongside their lawyer or a public defender.

But negotiations can be clouded by sentiment; the price of a house isn't the same as the value of a home.

Quitéria Maria da Silva, 64, and her grandson were waiting for the rest of their family to come play dominos on a table they set up beneath the only lamppost on their street that's still functional. Even as da Silva said she would move were Braskem to pay her requested amount, she expressed ambivalence:

"I always lived in my house and now, if I have to leave here, where will I go?" ___ AP reporter David Biller contributed from Rio de Janeiro

Campus ministries soothe, rally students shaken over Ukraine

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO, GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — Entering Yale University's St. Thomas More Catholic chapel, Oksana Goroshchuk spotted sunflowers adorning a candlelit altar and thought of the fields full of her country's national blossom near her grandmother's home in Ukraine.

A mezzo-soprano launched into a traditional folk tune that Goroshchuk used to sing growing up, and the postdoctoral medical researcher broke down in tears of grief — and gratitude for the university community's solidarity with her homeland.

"It's people who support us and people who love us," said Goroshchuk, 32, who was born in Kyiv and whose parents recently escaped the war-torn country.

Across the United States, campus ministries of different denominations are working to bring comfort to college students who, after two years of pandemic disruption and isolation, have been plunged deeper into feelings of crisis and helplessness by the war in Ukraine.

From Ivy League schools to public institutions to Catholic universities, they're holding prayer vigils, organizing medical supply drives and staging emotional performances of sacred music. Chaplains say religious and nonreligious students alike, especially those with loved ones in war zones, urgently need a sense of community to help them cope.

"One of the best things we do in campus ministry is we foster community," said Lisa Reiter, director of campus ministry at Loyola University Chicago.

At the Wednesday night peace concert and benefit at Yale, dozens of attendees gazed quietly at an image of a crucified Jesus Christ holding a dove, backlit by the blue and yellow of Ukraine's flag. Cello suites, organ pieces, classical violin and piano melodies and a Ukrainian Orthodox chant echoed through

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the chapel.

"There's this mass movement by Russia to take away lives of Ukrainians. But they can't take away the culture, and they can't take away the language or the song," said Sofiya Bidochko, a 19-year-old Yale student from Lviv, Ukraine. "I feel the importance of preserving my Ukrainian-ness when I hear these songs."

To the north at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, the campus' Hillel organization recently welcomed several Ukrainian students to a Shabbat dinner, where they supped on matzo ball soup and deli sandwiches. The Jewish group's members listened to their guests talk about their homes and families and promised to support them.

"It was just nice to have this bit of community," said Yevheniia, a 20-year-old student who came to the dinner even though she was baptized Orthodox Christian and considers herself agnostic.

She asked that her last name be withheld to protect her parents — they live in an area in eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed separatists and recently messaged her to say they were going to a bomb shelter.

Also this month, at the University of Rhode Island, an interfaith peace vigil drew people from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths together in prayer. A Buddhist chaplain struck a Tibetan singing bowl to mark a moment of silence for those suffering and killed in Ukraine.

Organizers stressed the importance of not only making divine appeals but carrying out concrete, earthly action, and provided resources for students to do so.

"Prayer alone is not enough," said Amy Olson, chair of the university's Chaplains Association and executive director of its Hillel group. "We really put an emphasis on ways that people could either make charitable donations or contribute funds to help the cause, how they could write to their politicians or offer support to the Ukrainian community locally."

A similar solidarity vigil was held at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. And at Loyola University Chicago, the campus ministry partnered with the newly re-created Ukrainian student club to stage a drive that collected 60 tons of medical supplies for war relief.

Campus ministers at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota, have been collecting money for humanitarian aid at religious services and say some \$700 was put in collection baskets at Ash Wednesday Masses alone. A kiosk has also been set up with a scannable QR code for online donations.

The school is home to many Somali American students who attended a recent prayer for peace. As the children of refugees or refugees themselves, they have seen firsthand the horrors of war and "get shaken by" seeing them repeated in Ukraine, Muslim chaplain Sadaf Shier said.

Many chaplains said that remote education and a lack of socializing and shared rituals during the pandemic have frayed the social fabric that would normally help assuage the struggles and anxiety of students, some of whom worry the hostilities in Ukraine could spill beyond borders and ignite a World War III.

That means their mission has changed, becoming less focused on just worship and more on helping young adults re-engage with each other and the world. Often that entails channeling their concern into charitable action.

"Students have been trying to figure out what to do," said Sister Jenn Schaaf, assistant Catholic chaplain at Yale.

The mezzo-soprano whose performance at Yale moved Goroshchuk to tears was Karolina Wojteczko, a native of Poland who recently graduated from the university and now serves as music director at St. Thomas More.

Wojteczko was inspired to organize the concert by the distress she has noticed among both Eastern European and American friends. That included Russians, who she said are being "shunned from the communities right now." One student with family in both Ukraine and Russia confessed to feeling utterly lost.

The concert has helped people unite, cope and heal.

"After COVID everyone has been so separated," Wojteczko said, "and this is ... a way to just sit there and be, and participate, and feel that you are connected to people who need help in the world."

Car runs into Carnival revelers in Belgium, killing 6

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A car slammed at high speed into Carnival revelers in a small town in southern Belgium early Sunday, killing six people and leaving 10 more with life-threatening injuries, authorities said, adding many others were lightly injured.

“What should have been a great party turned into a tragedy,” said Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden.

The prosecutor’s office, which gave the death toll, also said two local people in their thirties were arrested at the scene in Strépy-Bracquegnies, 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Brussels. Prosecutors said, in the early stages of their investigation, there were no elements to suspect a terror motive.

In an age-old tradition, Carnival revelers had gathered at dawn, intending to pick up others at their homes along the way, to finally hold their famous festivity again after it was banned for the past two years to counter the spread of COVID-19. Some dressed in colorful garb with bells attached, walking behind the beat of drums. It was supposed to be a day of deliverance.

Instead, said mayor Jacques Gobert, “what happened turned it into a national catastrophe.”

More than 150 people of all ages had gathered around 5 a.m. and were standing in a thick crowd along a long, straight road. Suddenly, “a car drove from the back at high speed. And we have a few dozen injured and unfortunately several people who are killed,” Gobert said.

The driver and a second person were arrested when their car came to a halt a few hundred meters (yards) further on.

Since Belgium was hit with twin terror attacks in Brussels and Zaventem that killed 32 civilians six years ago, thoughts of a terror motive are never far away.

But prosecutor Damien Verheyen said “there is no element in the investigation at this time that allows me to consider that the motivations of the two could have been terror related.”

The prosecutor’s office also denied media reports that the crash may have been caused by a car that was being chased by police.

King Philippe and Prime Minister Alexander De Croo were expected to visit Strépy-Bracquegnies later Sunday to express support for the families of the dead and those injured.

Carnival is extremely popular in the area. Carnival festivities in nearby Binche have even been declared a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Democratic gains in legislative maps might not last long

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The surprising advantage Democrats gained during the torturous process of rewriting the nation’s congressional maps may be short-lived, creating the potential for more frequent clashes over how political power should be distributed across the United States.

As the once-a-decade scramble to draw new legislative lines, a process known as redistricting, nears its conclusion, Democrats have succeeded in shifting the congressional map to the left. The typical U.S. House district now comes close to matching President Joe Biden’s 4 percentage point win in 2020. Though the impact may not be seen in this year voting, as Democrats face uphill odds to maintain their House majority, party leaders believe the new maps would make it easier to take the chamber in more favorable elections.

But all that could change.

Two major states — North Carolina and Ohio — are already poised to redraw their maps in the next few years. Several cases at the U.S. Supreme Court, meanwhile, could dramatically alter the rules that govern mapmaking nationwide. Those twists could ultimately transform redistricting into a regular political brawl that consumes state capitals already gripped by partisan tensions.

“This is the end of Act I, but there’s a lot more to come in the play,” said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks redistricting.

The uncertainty extends to other facets of elections, from the ability to challenge certain voting restrictions in court to whether minorities can have a chance to elect their preferred representatives. But it also

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leaves a significant asterisk over one of the biggest political twists of the past few years.

Many Democrats began the redistricting cycle haunted by what happened after the Republican wave in 2010. The following year, after the U.S. Census Bureau released its new population count, the GOP had control of drawing new legislative lines in a large number of states, shifting the national congressional map to the right. Democrats worried the same thing would happen in 2021, after the once-a-decade population update.

Republicans, however, had maxed out their gains in many places and turned to shoring up incumbents more than trying to make new seats winnable. Democrats still had far fewer districts to draw than the GOP but controlled more states than in 2011. In those that they did control, Democrats drew aggressive maps to maximize the number of seats they could win.

Republicans and many analysts note that, in doing so, Democrats effectively spread out their voters, making themselves vulnerable to shifts in political coalitions or bad election cycles, as 2022 is expected to be for the party. Still, Democrats say they're satisfied. They count 12 congressional seats that they have shifted into the "likely Democratic" category — though that includes some districts Democrats already represent.

Republicans say they are also happy with how they did. Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said the party has so far shifted 16 GOP-held seats from being in competitive districts to safely Republican ones. That, he argues, will free up millions of dollars to go after vulnerable Democrats.

"We are exactly in most states where we thought we would be," Kincaid said. The biggest surprise, he added, is that "Democrats, where they had control, they went wild."

A couple of significant wild cards remain, with five states lacking official maps.

Florida hasn't finalized its map, stuck in a standoff between Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and the GOP-controlled Legislature over how aggressively to expand their party's hold on the state's congressional delegation. Ohio's maps are in limbo as the state Supreme Court repeatedly strikes them down as illegal, pro-GOP gerrymanders, or misshapen maps drawn to help one party rather than represent communities.

The GOP is fuming over court intervention in places like Ohio that have helped Democrats, and that's one reason there could be a decadelong redistricting cycle.

Complex litigation over redistricting often drags on for years, sometimes leading to courts ordering new maps. Last decade, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas all had GOP-drawn maps thrown out by courts and new ones ordered. But legal experts say this cycle may be shaping up to be even more tumultuous and far-reaching.

That's because the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court has signaled its interest in changing some longtime standards that have governed redistricting.

"Their holdings may impact all 50 states in ways that holdings in 2011 didn't," Doug Spencer, a law professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder, said of the high court.

The first case the Supreme Court took was a challenge to Alabama's Republican-drawn maps last month. A lower court panel cited the Voting Rights Act in ruling that the GOP had to make a second district with enough Democratic-leaning Black voters that they could pick their own representatives without being blocked by whites who vote for the other party. The high court's conservative majority put that ruling on hold, saying it may revise its longtime rules for handling majority-minority districts next year.

Then, last week, the court rejected a GOP appeal of rulings by North Carolina and Pennsylvania's state Supreme Courts that adopted maps Republicans disliked. But four conservative justices — the minimum number required to hear a case — signaled they wanted to rule on the legal theory underlying the challenges, which holds that state legislatures have supreme power in making rules for congressional elections.

There's a wide range of ways the high court could decide both cases, but that already adds uncertainty to a combustible, hyperpartisan environment likely to lead North Carolina and Ohio to redraw their maps later this decade, representing 29 House seats. The unsettled nature of the debate in both states is due to litigation over Republican-drawn maps.

In North Carolina, after a Democratic majority on the state Supreme Court struck down the GOP maps

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in a 4-3 vote, Republicans vowed to flip the court to their control in November. Indeed, when a lower court panel sketched out a new map for November's election that was more equal than the one that would have given Republicans 10 of the state's 13 seats, the judges labeled it "interim."

In Ohio, the term-limited GOP chief justice of the state's high court joined Democrats to become the deciding vote to strike down repeated GOP maps as illegal gerrymanders. As in North Carolina, the GOP has vowed revenge at the ballot box, with its primary candidate to replace the chief justice pledging to approve maps drawn by the Republican-controlled legislature.

"We can change those courts," former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, co-chair of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said in a call with reporters this month. "The game is far from over in North Carolina and Ohio."

Experts worry that the partisan battles may spread wider than those two states. Mid-decade redistricting is rare but it does happen — Georgia Republicans tweaked their state legislative maps in 2017. In 2003, after Texas Republicans took over the Legislature they gerrymandered that state's maps to benefit the GOP. But with partisan polarization and mistrust higher than in decades, the incentive to squeeze a few more seats out of an improved political or legal position is strong.

Spencer cited Pennsylvania, where the GOP-controlled legislature was blocked by the Democratic governor, kicking map-drawing to the courts. But if Republicans win the governor's race there in November, they may be emboldened to try a whole new sets of the map that are far more tilted to the GOP than the state Supreme Court-approved ones.

If coalitions shift — say, Latino voters continue to trend toward the GOP, or Democrats make further inroads in the suburbs — mid-decade redistricting allows lawmakers to adjust lines to defend their districts.

"The volatility of the country's politics are not to be underestimated and people could adjust to that, and maps could change in a number of states," Li said.

S. Korea's next leader to abandon Blue House for new office

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's incoming president said Sunday he will abandon the mountainside presidential palace of Blue House and establish his office at the Defense Ministry compound in central Seoul to better communicate with the public.

The plan drew an immediate backlash from critics of the relocation plan, who warned that a hasty movement of top government offices would undermine South Korea's national security, require excessive spending and violate property rights of residents in the new presidential office area.

Relocating the presidential office was one of President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol's main campaign promises. The conservative former top prosecutor whose single five-year term begins on May 10 said the location and design of the Blue House have fed criticism that South Korean leaders are cut off from the public and wield excessive power.

At the Blue House compound, offices for presidential advisers and the press room are not in the same building where the president works and are hundreds of meters (yards) apart. Some former officials said they sometimes used bicycles or cars to visit the president.

Yoon told a televised news conference Sunday that he chose the Defense Ministry compound because it's already equipped with security-related command facilities. He said his team drooped other sites because of inconveniences to the public by presidential security.

Yoon said he'll begin his term at the new office. He said Defense Ministry officials would be moved to the Joint Chiefs of Staff building at the compound, and that JCS personnel would be moved in phases to a war command center on the outskirts of Seoul.

Yoon said a massive public park will be set up near the new presidential office and ordinary citizens will be able to look at his office at a close distance. He said he also plans to establish a press center and meet journalists frequently.

According to Yoon's plans, the current Blue House will be open to the public as a park on his inaugura-

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tion day. He said he'll collect public opinions to choose the name of the new office.

Critics of Yoon's plan have called on him not to rush the relocation, saying other tasks require more urgent attention, such as surging COVID-19 cases, the North Korean nuclear threat and diverse economic woes.

Yun Ho-jung, a leader of the liberal Democratic Party, the biggest political party in South Korea, said the relocation would cause "a big hole in national security" amid North Korean threats because of the hasty movement of key facilities at the Defense Ministry compound. He said some Seoul residents will also likely suffer "immense damage" in their property rights because of expected government-imposed restrictions on developments in the areas near the new office.

"Is it appropriate to unilaterally push for the relocation of the Blue House and the Defense Ministry, which would determine national security and citizens' property rights, without asking the public opinions?" Yun said. He urged the president-elect to cancel the relocation.

A group of 11 former heads of the Joint Chiefs of Staff conveyed to Yoon's transition team a statement opposing the relocation. They said it would allow the enemy to strike the presidential office and military headquarters simultaneously, according to South Korean media.

Outgoing liberal President Moon Jae-in, a Democratic Party member, had earlier also promised to move out of the Blue House but canceled the plans after failing to find a site for the new office.

Yoon said he was aware of concerns but said if he starts his term at the Blue House, which critics have called "a symbol of imperial power," it will become harder to move out.

"I know relocating the presidential office isn't an easy thing. But if I back down on a promise with the people (on the relocation) again, no other future president would attempt to do it," Yoon said. "I've made this decision for the future of the country."

Yoon said the relocation would cost about 50 billion won (\$41 million). Some critics earlier said it would cost up to 1 trillion won (\$825 million), an estimate Yoon called "groundless."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 21, the 80th day of 2022. There are 285 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 21, 1965, civil rights demonstrators led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began their third, successful march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

On this date:

In 1685, composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany.

In 1935, Persia officially changed its name to Iran.

In 1945, during World War II, Allied bombers began four days of raids over Germany.

In 1952, the Moondog Coronation Ball, considered the first rock and roll concert, took place at Cleveland Arena.

In 1972, the Supreme Court, in *Dunn v. Blumstein*, ruled that states may not require at least a year's residency for voting eligibility.

In 1990, Namibia became an independent nation as the former colony marked the end of 75 years of South African rule.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrapped up their summit in Helsinki, Finland, still deadlocked over NATO expansion, but able to agree on slashing nuclear weapons arsenals.

In 2006, the social media website Twitter was established with the sending of the first "tweet" by co-founder Jack Dorsey, who wrote: "just setting up my twttr."

In 2007, former Vice President Al Gore made an emotional return to Congress as he pleaded with House and Senate committees to fight global warming; skeptical Republicans questioned the science behind his climate-change documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

In 2016, laying bare a half-century of tensions, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul

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Castro prodded each other over human rights and the longstanding U.S. economic embargo during an unprecedented joint news conference in Havana.

In 2019, President Donald Trump abruptly declared that the U.S. would recognize Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights, a major shift in American policy.

In 2020 during a White House briefing, President Donald Trump doubled down on his support for the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a possible treatment for the coronavirus, while Dr. Anthony Fauci said the evidence was "anecdotal."

Ten years ago: A previously divided U.N. Security Council sent a strong and united message to the Syrian government and its opposition, telling both sides to immediately implement proposals by international envoy Kofi Annan to end Syria's yearlong bloodshed. Meting out unprecedented punishment for a bounty system that targeted key opposing players, the NFL suspended New Orleans Saints head coach Sean Payton without pay for the coming season and indefinitely banned the team's former defensive coordinator; Commissioner Roger Goodell fined the Saints \$500,000 and took away two draft picks.

Five years ago: U.S. and British officials announced they were barring laptops and tablets from the cabins of some international flights because of longstanding concerns about terrorists targeting jetliners. On the second day of his Senate confirmation hearing, Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch declared he'd made no promises to President Donald Trump or anyone else about how he would vote on abortion or other issues. Chuck Barris, whose game show empire included "The Dating Game," "The Newlywed Game" and "The Gong Show," died at his home in Palisades, New York, at age 87.

One year ago: Officials in Miami Beach extended an emergency 8 p.m. curfew for at least another week; the move came after after fights, gunfire, property destruction and dangerous stampedes broke out among huge crowds of people during the spring break season.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kathleen Widdoes is 83. Songwriter Chip Taylor ("Wild Thing") is 82. Folk-pop singer-musician Keith Potger (The Seekers) is 81. Actor Marie-Christine Barrault is 78. Singer-musician Rose Stone (Sly and the Family Stone) is 77. Actor Timothy Dalton is 76. Singer Ray Dorset (Mungo Jerry) is 76. Rock singer-musician Roger Hodgson (Supertramp) is 72. Rock musician Conrad Lozano (Los Lobos) is 71. R&B singer Russell Thompkins Jr. is 71. Comedy writer-performer Brad Hall is 64. Actor Sabrina LeBeauf is 64. Actor Gary Oldman is 64. Actor Kassie Depaiva is 61. Actor Matthew Broderick is 60. Comedian-actor Rosie O'Donnell is 60. Actor Cynthia Geary is 57. Hip-hop DJ Premier (Gang Starr) is 56. Rock musician Jonas "Joker" Berggren (Ace of Base) is 55. Rock MC Maxim (Prodigy) is 55. Rock musician Andrew Copeland (Sister Hazel) is 54. Actor Laura Allen is 48. Rapper-TV personality Kevin Federline is 44. Actor Sonequa Martin-Green (TV: "The Walking Dead") is 37. Actor Scott Eastwood is 36. Tennis player Karolina Pliskova is 30. Actor Jasmin Savoy Brown is 28. Actor Forrest Wheeler is 18.