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UpComing Events

Saturday, March 26

State DI at Tri-Valley

Monday, March 28

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

FFA CDE at Tri-Valley

Friday, April 1

FFA CDE at SDSU, Brookings

Saturday, April 2

ACT testing in Groton, 8 a.m. to Noon

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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Gov. Noem Signs Military and Veterans Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed legislation to improve readiness capabilities for the South Dakota National Guard:

SB 41 revises the appropriation for the construction of a National Guard Readiness Center in Sioux Falls, for the purchase and exchange of property between the state and the Sioux Falls Development Foundation.

SB 48 makes an appropriation for the redesign and renovation of the Wagner Readiness Center.

SB 49 authorizes the Department of the Military to construct a cold storage building located in Rapid City, South Dakota and makes an appropriation therefor.

“Our South Dakota National Guard is the best in the country for our readiness capabilities, and these facility enhancements will further improve on those capabilities,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Our men and women in uniform deserve the very best, and we will continue to support them with our thanks, our prayers, and with the resources they need to be successful.”

Governor Noem also signed additional military and veterans bills into law:

SB 63 revises the appropriation for road improvements to the State Veterans Cemetery and provides for ordinary operations of the cemetery.

SB 197 requires the POW/MIA flag be displayed in the Senate and House of Representatives chambers.

HB 1273 authorizes the Department of Military to purchase certain real property in Chamberlain.

Governor Noem has signed 198 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

Hearnen Thank You

Paul - on behalf of Jerry and I, thank you so much for your outstanding coverage of Groton's basketball games. We so appreciated getting to watch Wyatt play from our living room in Arizona. Your photos and your play by play were just terrific. We traveled from AZ to the State A to watch the games and enjoy the experience.

We are proud of Wyatt and the team and glad they had the opportunity to go to State - an experience none of them will forget. Thank you again for providing such a great service!

Marilyn Hearnen

Weekly Vikings Roundup

Free Agency Begins

By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

It was a wild and crazy first week of free agency in the NFL. Not only did some unrestricted free agents get deals with new teams but there were also few monumental trades that could sway the divisions for years to come.

Starting in the NFC North, the rival Green Bay Packers had to say goodbye to what many consider the best wide receiver in the league in Davante Adams. After signing Aaron Rodgers to a new deal and making it known he would not play under the team's franchise tag, Adams got traded to the Las Vegas Raiders. Now we'll see if Adams is a great receiver or was yet another wideout fortunate to play with Rodgers.

In the AFC, the big news was Deshaun Watson being traded to the Cleveland Browns in another quarterback mega deal. Giving up multiple #1 picks and then signing him to a huge contract that may leverage the future of the organization. They also signed the Cowboys top receiver in Amari Cooper earlier in the week. Late breaking news on Sunday afternoon indicate the Browns have now cut their top running back and second leading rusher in the NFL last season, Nick Chubb.

On the Minnesota Viking front, the new front office was very active but no real splashy events. Kirk Cousins extends his contract and helps the team lower his cap number. There had been speculation that Cousins may get traded but it now appears that new coach Kevin O'Connell would prefer to take the veteran to the next level and see if things can work out in year 5 with the Vikings.

The team did not move on Danielle Hunter as many people suspected and would like to keep the pro bowler lining up in their new 3-4 defense. They also added Buffalo Bills nose guard Harrison Phillips while letting Michael Pierce move on after playing in less than 50% of the games the past two seasons. The Vikings signed free agent linebacker Jordan Hicks while everyone is still waiting to see what happens with Anthony Barr. It would be nice to keep Barr, but it appears highly unlikely.

To help with the Vikings tight salary cap issues, Harrison Smith and Adam Thielen reworked their contracts to give the team some breathing room to sign a few additional players. They also let free agents Tyler Conklin and Xavier Woods move onto other teams. Conklin would have been a nice player to keep after a productive season in 2021 but it's time for Irv Smith, Jr. to take over the #1 slot at tight end.

In the coming weeks we'll start evaluating what the Vikings will be aiming for in the 2022 college draft. On the offensive side, the annual pursuit for another rookie offensive lineman would seem logical but after the past two seasons of defensive ineptitude, it may be time to make a big splash with either a shutdown cornerback or stud defensive lineman. Time will tell and no one is quite sure what the new Vikings brain trust will have in store for 2022.

An embarrassing story about community dialogue



Paula Jensen
Vice President of
Program Development



Quite simply, community dialogue is an exchange of ideas and experiences through listening, sharing, and questioning. At its best, community dialogue is created in a safe environment where a diverse group of people gather to talk and understand each other. Community dialogue at its worst looks something like the embarrassing story I am going to share about my own community members and town board.

A few years ago, there was a local issue flaring up in my community. Honestly, I can't even remember the topic of the issue, but it was important enough that community residents were rallying together to attend the monthly town board meeting so they could have a voice in the decision-making process. I decided to attend. About 15-20 residents filed into the fire hall taking a seat on a folding chair or standing against the wall as the meeting was called to order. The town board and staff sat at a rectangle table at the front of the building. They moved through the approval of their agenda never acknowledging the small crowd to their back. The crowd sat quietly and respectfully for the first 30 minutes, but then some chatter started in the back. After more than an hour the town board got to the issue at hand. The town board began discussion among themselves at the table, which was hard to hear because two of them had their backs to the group. Someone sitting toward the back of the room asked, "Could you speak up?" Again, the town board members never acknowledged the group but continued their discussion with each other about the issue at hand. Suddenly something was said by one of the town board members that was clearly heard but not popular with the group. The man behind me started booing loudly! Others started talking and heckling. One person was saying, "Be quiet! I can't hear." One of the town

board members then turned to ask the group to quiet down and show respect as they finish their discussion. Someone yelled, "Don't we get to speak?" There was no response. The town board made their motion, voted, approved their decision, and moved to the next agenda item. In the chaos, people started to realize the town board had moved past their issue, so they noisily filed out of the fire hall into the parking lot. The group was confused about what had just been decided and everyone was astonished that not one person was allowed to have a voice in the conversation. There was absolutely no dialogue allowed!

As I stood outside the fire hall, embarrassed and stunned by the behavior I had just witnessed in that meeting, it was obvious to me that my town leaders were frightened to engage the public and the public wasn't equipped to engage in healthy community dialogue!

As a community coach, I regularly hear local leaders verbalize their fear that the negative voices will just take over and chaos will ensue if they host a community conversation. I assure you community dialogue doesn't have to be frightening or end in chaos, instead it can create motivation and common vision.

When discovering how to fearlessly engage in good dialogue, it's helpful to recognize what dialogue IS NOT. Dialogue is not debate. In debate the goal is to be right. You believe your solution is the right solution, and your duty is to find flaws in the other solutions presented. Dialogue is also not about total agreement with others. People can be respectful to one another while not needing to agree with everything they believe and do.

On the other hand, dialogue IS a motivator of people and their communities. Dialogue helps people collectively work toward a common vision, understanding, or solution to an issue. People engaged in dialogue listen to understand perspectives, needs, expectations, or solutions. Dialogue is an opportunity for people to be heard and understood while displaying open-minded attitudes and a willingness to be wrong

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and accept change.

Creating healthy community dialogue starts with one...YOU. To get started, the next time you engage in dialogue with an individual or small group, practice listening to understand rather than listening to respond. Allow for two-way collaborative communication by asking a series of open-ended questions such as What's happening? What's your one biggest challenge? How can I help? What do you want in the end? or What are the possible solutions? Throughout your dialogue practice just remember it's about three simple behaviors: listening, sharing, and questioning. You can do it!

The Community Coach. Having a passion for community leadership and development is what drives Paula Jensen's personal and professional life. Paula lives in her hometown of Langford, South Dakota, population 348+. She serves as a Strategic Doing practitioner, grant writer and community coach with Dakota Resources based in Renner, South Dakota. Dakota Resources is a mission-driven 501c3 Community Development Financial Institution working to connect capital and capacity to empower rural communities. Contact her at paula@dakotaresources.org.

The 3M logo is displayed in a large, bold, red sans-serif font.A black and white stamp-style graphic with the words "NOW HIRING" in a bold, distressed, sans-serif font, tilted slightly upwards 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)

Gov. Noem Signs College CRT Bill and Education Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed HB 1012, which prohibits colleges from requiring students and teachers to attend trainings or orientations based on Critical Race Theory.

“No student or teacher should have to endorse Critical Race Theory in order to attend, graduate from, or teach at our public universities,” said Governor Noem. “College should remain a place where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged, not stifled by political agendas.”

“This session, we also made targeted investments in job training for key career fields like nursing and skilled manufacturing. We want our kids and grandkids to get the best training possible so that they can fill available jobs right here in South Dakota,” continued Governor Noem.

The Governor also signed the following 11 education bills into law:

SB 42 authorizes the Board of Regents to contract for the design and construction of an addition to the wellness center at the University of South Dakota and makes an appropriation therefor.

SB 43 authorizes the Board of Regents to contract for the design, renovation, and construction of an addition for a health sciences center at Black Hills State University–Rapid City and makes an appropriation therefor.

SB 61 makes an appropriation to the Board of Technical Education to support the purchase of simulation equipment for a health sciences clinical simulation center on the campus of Southeast Technical College.

SB 95 revises provisions regarding the Teacher Compensation Review Board.

SB 132 makes an appropriation for multi-media lab equipment at Black Hills State University.

SB 133 makes an appropriation to the Board of Regents to upgrade an education lab and purchase resources at Black Hills State University.

SB 154 revises criteria for the South Dakota Freedom Scholarship.

SB 167 clarifies the certification process for teachers and school administrators.

HB 1031 makes an appropriation to the Board of Technical Education to construct an advanced manufacturing laboratory space and classrooms on the campus of Lake Area Technical College.

HB 1032 makes an appropriation to the Board of Technical Education to construct an agriculture and diesel power laboratory and multi-purpose space on the campus of Mitchell Technical College.

HB 1119 revises the general state aid formula to provide adjustment for alternative education students participating in interscholastic activities.

Governor Noem has signed 192 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

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Gas Prices See First Significant Fall since January

South Dakota has the 12th lowest average gas price in America.

South Dakota		National
\$3.92	Today	\$4.25
\$3.96	Week Ago	\$3.32
\$3.37	Month Ago	\$3.53
\$2.85	Year Ago	\$2.88

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

National Overview:

After hitting a record \$4.33 on March 11, the national average for a gallon of gasoline has fallen to \$4.25, down seven cents in just the past week – the largest weekly drop since January. Better yet, South Dakota has the 12th lowest average gas price in the nation -- \$3.92/gallon for regular unleaded – after falling four cents over the past week.

The primary reason for the drop in gas prices is the falling price of crude oil. Crude peaked shortly after Russia launched its war in Ukraine, but has since fallen more than \$20, hovering near \$105/bbl. Another factor domestically may also be a slight drop in demand. Demand is defying what is typically an upward trend at this time of year, dipping slightly on the week, perhaps because of higher prices at the pump.

"With warmer weather and longer days, we typically see an uptick in gasoline demand at this time of year but last week we saw a drop in demand instead," said Shawn Steward, AAA South Dakota spokesman. "In a recent AAA survey, 59% of drivers said they would change their driving habits or lifestyle if the cost of gas hit \$4 per gallon, so the slight decrease makes sense."

While this is great news for motorists, there is no guarantee, at this moment that the worst is behind us.

"There is no telling, at this point, whether this downward trend will continue, or for how long, because of the unpredictable nature of the war in Ukraine and other geo-political influences," Steward added. "But, for the moment anyway, there is hope that the worst is behind us."

Perspective:

South Dakota's average gas price is 33 cents below the national average, ranking the Mount Rushmore State as the 12th lowest gas prices in the nation.

South Dakota's average gas price fell 4 cents in the past week. Today's state average price is 55 cents higher than a month ago and \$1.07 higher than one year ago.

At \$4.25, the national average decreased by 7 cents in the past week but is still 72 cents higher than one month ago.

National Extremes:

High – California – \$5.85/gallon

Low – Kansas – \$3.76/gallon

According to new data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), total domestic gasoline stocks fell by 3.6 million bbl to 241 million bbl last week. Gasoline demand also decreased slightly from 8.96 million b/d to 8.94 million b/d. The drop in gas demand is contributing to price decreases, but the recent reversal in oil prices is creating downward pressure on pump prices. If the oil price continues to decline, pump prices will likely follow suit. However, should oil prices start to climb again, pump prices will likely follow.

What Can Drivers Do?

There are things drivers can do to increase gas mileage and help save a little money when they go to

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fill up their tanks:

Shop around for the best prices. Drivers can use tools such as the free AAA mobile app to find and compare current gas prices closest to their location.

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

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

Properly inflate your tires

Stick to the speed limit and avoid fast, jackrabbit starts

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

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

Oil Market Dynamics:

At the close of Friday's formal trading session, WTI increased by \$1.72 to settle at \$104.70. After crude prices spiked in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, crude prices changed course in reaction to China announcing new lockdowns alongside rising COVID-19 infection rates last week. However, crude prices could increase further this week as E.U. foreign ministers, who will meet Monday in Brussels, decide whether the 27-nation bloc should join the United States in banning Russian energy imports, including crude oil. Additionally, EIA reported that total domestic crude stocks increased by 4.3 million bbl to 415.9 million bbl last week.

Additional Details:

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

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

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

About AAA

AAA provides automotive, travel, and insurance services to more than 62 million members nationwide and more than 100,000 members in South Dakota. AAA advocates for the safety and mobility of its members and has been committed to outstanding road service for more than 100 years. AAA is a non-stock, membership corporation working on behalf of motorists, who can map a route, access a COVID travel restriction map, find local gas prices and electric vehicle charging stations, discover discounts, book a hotel, and track their roadside assistance service with the AAA Mobile app (AAA.com/mobile) for iPhone, iPad and Android. For more information on joining or renewing a Membership, visit www.AAA.com.

The siren call of baseball

Well, I see seed potatoes are in at the store, wisps of green will soon dominate ditches, and winter has relaxed its icy grasp. It's spring, and with spring comes hope. The hope for good crops, healthy calves, and in my case, optimism about the coming baseball season.

I know. I can't help myself. Just about every spring for the 30-plus years I've been sending out these missives, I have to write about baseball.

I fell in love with the Baltimore Orioles as a kid—the Robinson Brothers, Brooks and Frank, mashers like Boog Powell, all-field, no-hit wonders like Mark Belanger at shortstop, and a banty rooster of a manager, Earl Weaver, scourge of all umpires. One year, they even had four 20-game winners, something you'll never see again in this Moneyball/Metrics Era. I'm okay with that. The game changes.

For all my affection for the hapless O's, my loyalties have slowly "slud," as Dizzy Dean used to say, toward the Minnesota Twins, and if you're a fan, you can't help feeling that this might be the year the Twins make some noise. After all, they picked up the top free agent, Houston shortstop Carlo Correa. The Twins big spenders? Indeed.

It doesn't have to be professional baseball for me to enjoy it, though. I wonder how many times I've pulled into an unfamiliar town to watch a Little League game while passing through. It's the sense of community in the stands as much as the action on the field that draws me in. Sunflowers get spat, balls and strikes are quietly debated, and parents cheer their kids even when they whiff. At every level of baseball, it's the same, knowledgeable fans at a picnic and all kinds of conversations with folks you'll never see again. But for the next two hours, you're old friends.

My dad took me to see the Aberdeen Pheasants play in 1971 and I distinctly remember the thoroughbred grace of outfielder Al Bumbry who went on to star with the Orioles. When I lived in Denver, I saw shortstop Barry Larkin play for the Bears (who became the Zephyrs). You know time has flown by when a player you saw in the minors is now in Cooperstown.

One of the perks of working for a radio station in Denver, if not big bucks, were free tickets, so I went to a lot of games at old Mile High Stadium. I took my Grandpa Bender one perfect afternoon, outfitted him with a new Denver Bears cap and a footlong as we sat in box seats. "I feel chust like a king," he said with a grin. I miss the king.

There are always sourpusses who frown upon these distractions, but like kittens and kids, we need to play. We need to celebrate. Life. Perhaps the drama and heroics on the field shouldn't matter, but somehow, they do. They produce memories, tales to tell.

In Ken Burns' epic series "Baseball," he recounts a story of Ty Cobb, as great a player as he was a miserable human being, and Honus Wagner, a stumpy infielder who could run like the wind. They were, at the time, the best players in the game, and when Cobb's Tigers met Wagner's Pirates in the World Series, legend has it that Cobb told the "Krauthead" that he was stealing second base, sharpened spikes flying. "Come on down," Wagner said, and when Cobb arrived, Wagner tagged him hard in the mouth.

That's the story. Did it really happen that way? Did Babe Ruth really call that homerun? Who knows for sure? Maybe it's better that we don't. There's something romantic about such stories, something to be said for misremembering or embellishing.

My brother Scott was the batboy for one of my games in Ellendale, ND, and the way he remembers it, I hit a towering homerun over the scoreboard, and I did, but it went foul. I've tried to correct the record from time to time, but not adamantly.

It's a great memory even if it isn't mine.



That's Life

by Tony Bender

2022 Groton Area Elementary

Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning

5 on or before September 1, 2022

Friday, April 1, 2022

If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten at Groton Area Elementary school, please DISREGARD this notice. Your teacher will be sending information if necessary.

Packets are being sent home this week with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for KG and JK this coming 2022-2023 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet. We do not have all children in our census. Thank you!!!



Mayor Candidate Profile: Scott Hanlon

Groton City residents will be going to the polls on April 12th to elect a mayor. There are two candidates, Aaron Grant and Incumbent Scott Hanlon.

Groton mayor Scott Hanlon is running for his 4th term in office. Hanlon, whose hometown is Verdon, SD, has been in the construction business his entire adult life.

"My mother took over the construction business following my father's untimely death," he explained. "Then my brother Guy and I took over when we graduated from Conde High School. Now I guess I'm in charge and have the valuable assistance from my sister-in-law who does the bookwork."

"I have two daughters, Brooke, who is an adult, and Ataiah, 13, who lives with her mother," Hanlon stated. "I also have five brothers and two sisters."

"Before becoming the mayor of this fine city, I served on the city council," he explained. "While serving on the city council, Mayor Roy Olson passed away, and the council members were asked if anyone wanted to take over as mayor and finish the remaining year of Roy's term in 2013."

"No one else volunteered, so I said I was willing to give it a try," Hanlon admitted. "After that year was finished, I decided to run again, but this time I had an opponent, Eddie Nehls. For subsequent elections, I have had no opponents."

"Even though I originally had no desire to become the mayor, I found that I really do enjoy the job," he smiled. "I meet a lot of nice people, enjoy the challenges that come with this position, and am very grateful that I can help others who come to me with their problems."

"I consider Groton to be an excellent small town with many good features that most of us take for granted," Hanlon said. "For example, we have good infrastructure, great water, sewer, and electrical systems, better snow removal, and excellent police protection than many other, even larger towns, and, best of all, we have people living here who care about each other!"

"Yet, even in Groton there are issues that cause some concern," he admitted. "For example, with the new water tower, water rates also had to be increased. Some people wish more and better snow removal could be done. Even though the city is trying to work on this, there are some areas in town that need to be cleaned up."

"Anyone who has an idea, a problem, or a concern, should contact me," Hanlon suggested. "I enjoy visiting with others and try to keep an open mind. When someone tells me there is a problem, I always listen first. Then I'll ask them what they think would be a good solution."

"I think that we have a very nice little town here in Groton with a great school, interested citizens, and willing workers," he listed. "This is a wonderful community to live and work in and to raise families."

- Dorene Nelson



Scott Hanlon

Mayor Candidate Profile: Aaron Grant

Groton City residents will be going to the polls on April 12th to elect a mayor. There are two candidates, Aaron Grant and Incumbent Scott Hanlon.



Aaron Grant

Aaron Grant, originally from Fairport, New York, is running for the position of Groton city mayor against incumbent Scott Hanlon. Grant is a teacher, author, and Certified Peer Supporter who counsels wounded veterans.

"I am a Staff-Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps," Grant stated. "It was an eight-year experience I wouldn't change for anything. Operation Iraqi Freedom was my only combat deployment."

"My wife Sarah and I have four children, ages 6 to 21," he smiled. "In 2020 we purchased our home that was built in 1903. Winter has been a challenge, with generations of plumbing freezing constantly, but I was able to fix the problems as they came."

"My family and I really love Groton. After moving every three years of my adult life, we very much want to stay and build a life here," he admitted, "but I am concerned about the drainage situation in the event of flooding. I am currently pouring over maps to become familiar with the situation."

"I have never been in a public election before this one for city mayor," Grant stated, "but I have served as an elected leader of several large veteran organizations."

"I am the founding Commandant of the Marine Corps League and the Past Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, both in Naples, NY. The Commander and the Commandant work with the mayor of the respective town for a variety of public functions," he explained. "One of the most difficult things I have had the honor to do was handing a folded flag to the bereaved."

"I believe taxes are one of the major issues in Groton right now," Grant said. "I realize that there are other forces at work when deciding upon property taxes and utility fees, such as federal policy and inflation, but it would be wonderful to have the tax burden on local citizens kept as low as possible."

"One of the most amazing things I've discovered about Groton is that there are many people who have lived here ten, twenty, even fifty years!" he exclaimed. "This is unusual; and absolutely outstanding and all because of peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice. This is the kind of town I want my children to grow up in."

"At the bi-monthly city council meetings I attend, I was informed that a food pantry is being organized by a city council member, and I would like to aid in this project," Grant added. "If I am elected, I would like to establish a 'Mayor's Reading Night,' where I read a short story to children once a month and answer any questions they might have."

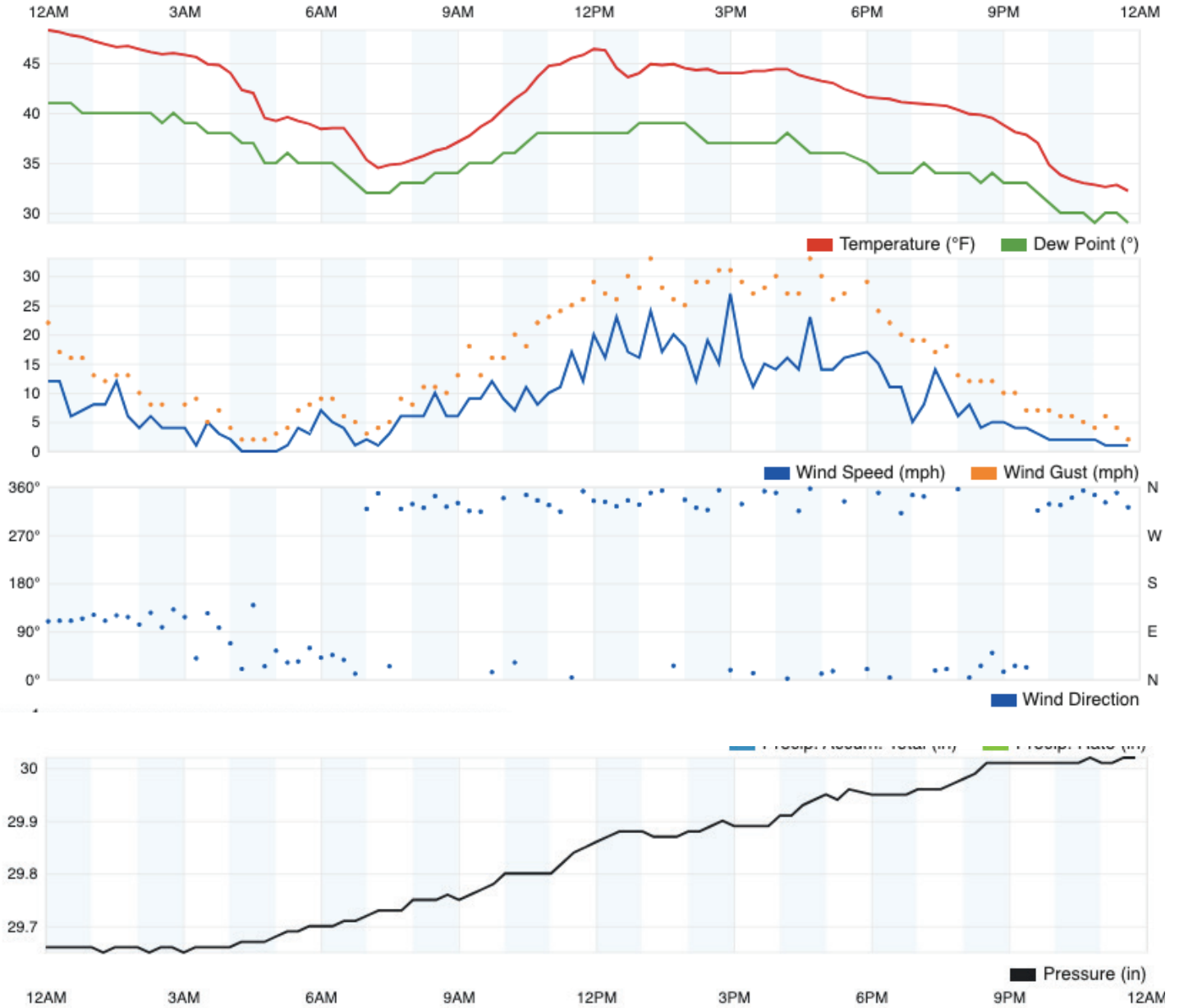
"I consider myself a true listener and, after careful consideration, will give a straight answer every time," Grant stated. "Being a Certified Peer Supporter for veterans requires an individual to be patient and accepting, open and non-judgmental. When a person confides in me, they can count on my integrity."

"I realize that I'm running for 'volunteer-in-chief.' You can count on me to be the first in the cold and willing to do all kinds of hard, even dirty work with energy and commitment. I am thirty-nine years old, and still have much to give," he said.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Cloudy
then Mostly
Cloudy and
Breezy

High: 53 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery

Low: 30 °F

Wednesday



Decreasing
Clouds and
Breezy

High: 46 °F

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Partly
Cloudy

Low: 27 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 56 °F

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Updated: 3/21/2022 3:34 PM Central



A Breezy Next Few Days

Tonight

LO: 26 to 32°



Light rain east of
the James Valley

Tuesday

HI: 45 to 55°



Breezy, elevated
fire danger

Wednesday

HI: 40 to 52°



Breezy, elevated
fire danger

Thursday

HI: 48 to 64°



Breezy west of the
Missouri River

An area of low pressure will bring wind, clouds and light precipitation tonight into tomorrow. While snow is possible across far northeastern South Dakota into west central Minnesota, little to no accumulation is expected. Dry but breezy and cloudy conditions continue through the middle of the week.

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Today in Weather History

March 22, 1966: The blizzard began on the 22nd in the west, moving southeastward into Nebraska and then moving northeastward across the southeastern part of South Dakota. Winds up to 50 mph caused blowing snow, which reduced visibility to near zero. Seven to 8 inches of snow fell on the plains of South Dakota with up to 2 feet in the Black Hills. Traffic was paralyzed due to snow-blocked roads. Schools and many businesses were closed. One death was attributed to the storm to exposure and exhaustion. A heart attack indirectly caused one death in Sioux Falls.

March 22, 1987: Snowmelt and rainfall caused some rivers and small streams to rise to very high levels in central South Dakota. Lowland flooding around the basins occurred, submerging some minor roads and streets. Also, high water levels and ice damaged some railroad bridges between Wakpala and Mahto in Corson County.

March 22, 2009: A stretch of warmer weather occurred from March 14th to 17th, which resulted in high temperatures in the 40s and low 50s. The snow depth in Fargo on the 14th was 15 inches, with a melted water equivalent of 3.10 inches. By the 17th, the snow depth in Fargo had dropped to 6 inches. The snow was followed by a couple of colder days, which temporarily slowed down any additional snowmelt. The second period of warmer weather began on March 20th and continued through the 24th. During this period, high temperatures again climbed into the 40s and low 50s. Most of the remaining snow in Fargo melted during this stretch of warm weather, with the Fargo snow depth falling from 2 inches to 0. Conditions were about the same in Grand Forks, with the snow depth dropping to 0 by the 24th. These two warm-ups resulted in the quick response in river levels, especially across the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. The Red River also rosed, especially in the southern part of the Red River Valley. With all the runoff moving into the river systems, water covered many roads and resulted in numerous road closures. The water covered entire sections of land as well and threatened many homes. A winter storm event on March 24th and 25th brought more snow to the region, along with a turn to colder temperatures. This resulted in the first crest for many rivers in the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. However, river levels at most points along the Red River continued to stay high. Another winter storm event hit much of the area March 30th to 31st, dropping up to 2 feet of snow in the southern Red River Valley. There was a lot of moisture in this new snow, with snow to liquid ratios of less than 10 to 1. This set the stage for continued flooding into April and early May. The North Dakota Governor issued a statewide disaster declaration on March 13 in anticipation of spring flooding. Most counties in eastern North Dakota later received a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

1888: Chicago's morning low dips to one degree below zero, the latest sub-zero Fahrenheit reading in the city's history. This record still stands today.

1893: The first tornado was recorded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on this date. It destroyed 14 buildings and injured four people as it passed through the center of town. There was minor damage to the Weather Bureau office, which was located at Grand and Robinson in south Oklahoma City.

1920: A spectacular display of the "Northern Lights" was visible as far south as Bradenton FL, El Paso, TX and Fresno, CA. At Detroit MI, the display was described "so brilliant as to blot out all-stars below the first magnitude."

1936 - A great flood crested on rivers from Ohio to Maine. The flood claimed 107 lives and caused 270 million dollars property damage. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Six to ten inch rains caused the Chicago River to overflow its banks. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An intense storm produced heavy snow in the southern and central Rockies, and high winds from southern California to West Texas. Wolf Creek Pass CO received 24 inches of snow, and winds gusted to 69 mph at Ruidoso NM. Blizzard conditions were reported in eastern Colorado. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A surge of arctic air kept temperatures in the teens and 20s during the day in the north central U.S., and heavy snow fell over parts of Montana. Record warmth was reported in the western U.S., and in Alaska. Phoenix AZ reported a record high of 94 degrees, and the town of Barrow, located along the arctic coast of Alaska, reported a record high of 20 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

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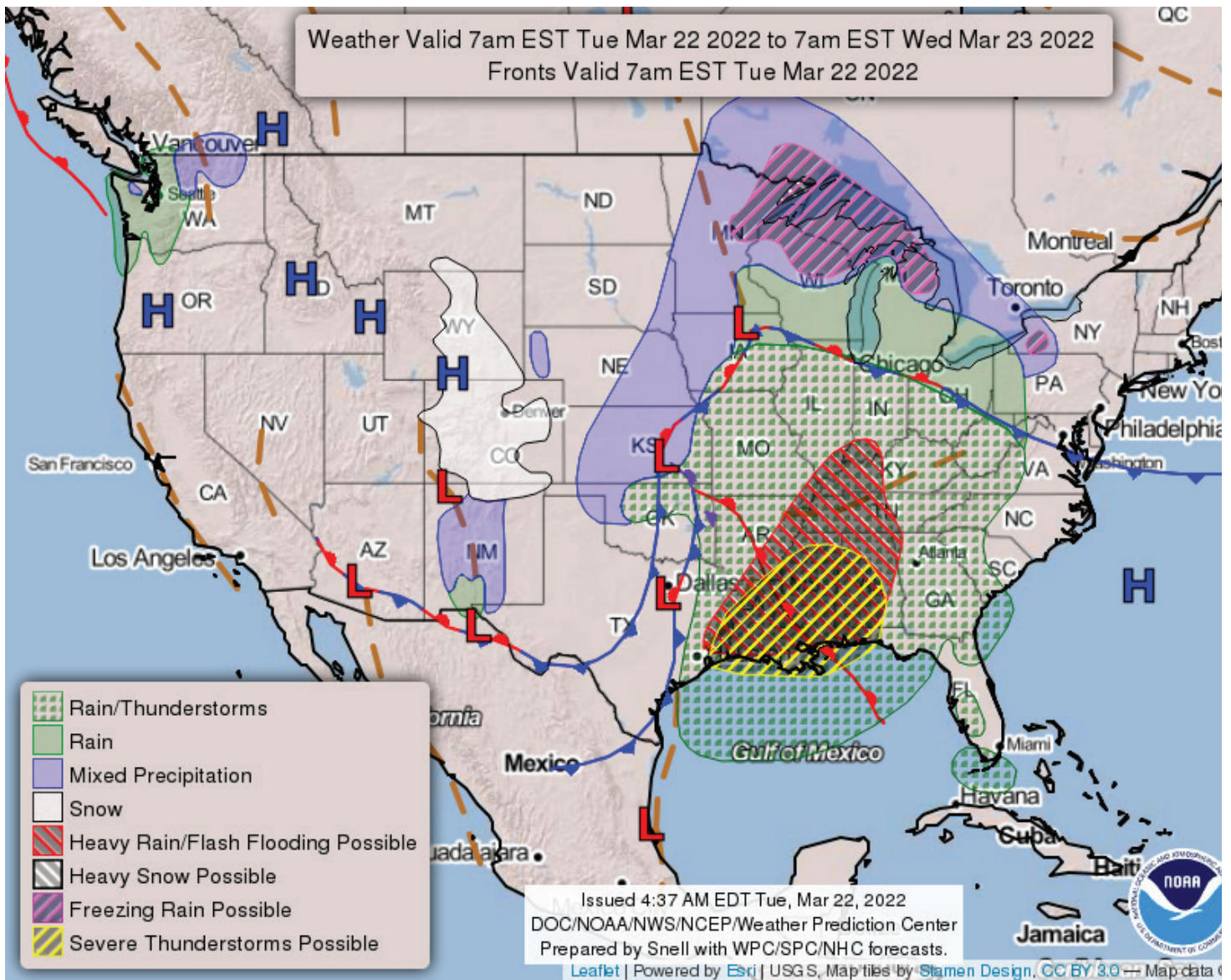
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 12:00
Low Temp: 31 °F at 11:58
Wind: 33 mph at 1:05 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 19 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 79 in 1907
Record Low: -16 in 1899
Average High: 45°F
Average Low: 22°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.58
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.75
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 7:48:53 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:34 AM



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THE PROMISE OF PEACE

Ask someone what the word "peace" means to them, and they will respond with very different answers. Some will include the "absence of war," or "an agreement to end hostilities" or "freedom from quarrels or disagreements" or "a nation at peace." Each of them has a certain sense of calmness among or between people in them. But peace in God's Word has a much different meaning to it.

In God's Word, it means something quite different. It often refers to a person's "completeness" or "well-being" or "soundness." So, even though the world may be engulfed in war, an individual may have a sense of security or well-being that the world cannot understand or enjoy.

The world has been in utter chaos through man's sin. Ever since Adam and Eve chose to disobey God there has been constant conflict - either personal, between people or nations - because of sin. And the world will be in conflict until Christ rules and reigns in the hearts of man.

"Great peace," wrote the Psalmist, "have those who love Your law, and nothing can make them stumble." For sinful man, there must first be peace with God that only comes from the removal of sin through the death of Christ. This peace will permeate the life of the Christian because God will guard and guide the believer every moment of every day. First, we must let go of the "things" of this world and let God have His way in us. Then we must follow the path He has designed for us. "Great peace" and no fear of "stumbling" will then be ours. When we have a lack of peace in our hearts, it is God alerting us to sin in our lives.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the peace that is ours when our hearts are correctly aligned with Your truth. Help us to love Your instruction so we will not stumble. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. Psalm 119:165

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$39 million

Powerball

01-15-26-63-65, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 2

(one, fifteen, twenty-six, sixty-three, sixty-five; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$156 million

Noem signs bill banning 'divisive' university race trainings

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem signed a bill Monday she has promoted as a rejection of so-called critical race theory, even though the legislation is limited in scope.

The law bans the state's public universities from using training and orientation material that compels people to feel "discomfort" based on their race. The bill passed the Senate earlier this month.

"No student or teacher should have to endorse Critical Race Theory in order to attend, graduate from, or teach at our public universities," Noem's release said. "College should remain a place where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged, not stifled by political agendas."

Noem has repeatedly criticized critical race theory, an academic framework that centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions. The initiative signed Monday does not prohibit professors in higher education from teaching such concepts in academic instruction.

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

It was one of a dozen education bills signed by Noem on Monday. She has inked 192 bills total into law and vetoed one this session.

Dirty snow and warm temps aid Red River Valley snowmelt

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Any fears of an extended spring flooding season in the Red River Valley have been virtually eliminated thanks in large part to the soil-stained snow that helped absorb warmth from the sun, the National Weather Service said Monday in an updated briefing.

It was a strange benefit of two unwelcome weather woes — a summer drought followed by a winter season of numerous blizzards. The lack of precipitation made the topsoil receptive to the spring thaw and the gales of winter picked up loose dirt to color the snow and make it absorb more heat than usual.

"We really think that the snow being dark with plenty of sun and warm temperatures in the last week or so caused the snowpack to disappear really, really quickly," weather service meteorologist Amanda Lee said. "As everybody knows, the melt is well underway and it's been fast and furious for the most part."

The weather service doesn't measure dirt in the snow but does note it in its reports, Lee said.

The Red River Basin technically begins in Lake Traverse, South Dakota, and ends at Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. At this point, Lee said, it appears that no areas of the flood-prone valley are facing major threats of high water and there a few signs of overland flooding. The amount of water in the southern part of the basin making its way to the northward-flowing river is slowing down, Lee said.

This week is trending toward continued favorable melting conditions, with limited precipitation and temperatures in the 40s and 50s during the day and below freezing at night.

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"Things are looking pretty nice right now," Lee said. "I don't know of anyone complaining on how this spring is going so far. It was a long, long winter."

In the Fargo and Moorhead, Minnesota, area, where years of battling floods persuaded area leaders to successfully lobby for a diversion project that's under construction, the weather service has predicted a crest of 29.5 feet in about a week. That's would be nearly 12 feet over flood stage, but unlikely to cause much disruption.

Fargo officials on Monday closed two blocks of Elm Street North, a low spot located within 70 feet of the river that is often shut down by heavy rain. The street also runs by one of the city's golf courses, which might open earlier than usual thanks to the benign snowmelt.

"That's what I thought when I went over to Elm Street today," said Paul Fiechtner, the city's public works services manager whose springs are generally more hectic. "We should go golfing."

Shooting outside Sioux Falls bowling alley injures 1 person

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police are investigating a shooting outside a bowling alley in Sioux Falls. According to authorities, the shooting happened about 1:30 a.m. Monday.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens says a 28-year-old man suffered a graze wound to his neck as he was walking from his car to Eastway Bowl. The gunfire also damaged the building, KELO-TV reported.

Clemens says witnesses heard between two and four gunshots and police recovered two shell casings from the parking lot.

Police investigators are still looking into what happened.

Officials trying to identify body found in Big Sioux River

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities in Sioux Falls are working to learn the identity of a man whose body was found in the Big Sioux River.

The body was found near the spillway just down the hill from the State Penitentiary about 6 p.m. Sunday, according to police spokesman Sam Clemens.

Passersby called police after realizing the clothing they spotted in the water was actually a body.

An autopsy will be conducted to determine the man's identity and his cause of death, officials said.

Ukraine retakes key Kyiv suburb; battle for Mariupol rages

By NEBI QENA and CARA ANNA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine said it retook a strategically important suburb of Kyiv early Tuesday, as Russian forces squeezed other areas near the capital and their attack on the embattled southern port of Mariupol raged unabated.

Explosions and bursts of gunfire shook Kyiv, and black smoke rose from a spot in the north. Intensified artillery fire could be heard from the northwest, where Russia has sought to encircle and capture several suburban areas of the capital, a crucial target.

Residents sheltered at home or underground under a 35-hour curfew imposed by authorities in the capital that runs to Wednesday morning.

Russian forces also pressed their siege of Mariupol after the southern port city's defenders refused demands to surrender, with fleeing civilians describing relentless bombardments and corpses lying in the streets. But the Kremlin's ground offensive in other parts of the country advanced slowly or not at all, knocked back by lethal hit-and-run attacks by the Ukrainians.

Early Tuesday, Ukrainian troops forced Russian forces out of the Kyiv suburb of Makariv after a fierce battle, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said. The regained territory allowed Ukrainian forces to retake control of a key highway and block Russian troops from surrounding Kyiv from the northwest.

Still, the Defense Ministry said Russian forces battling toward Kyiv were able to partially take other north-west suburbs, Bucha, Hostomel and Irpin, some of which had been under attack almost since Russia's

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military invaded almost a month ago.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces are increasingly concentrating their air power and artillery on Ukraine's cities and the civilians living there.

The invasion has driven more than 10 million people from their homes, a number similar to the population of Portugal and almost a quarter of Ukraine's pre-war population, according to the United Nations. The U.N. has confirmed over 900 civilian deaths while saying the real toll is probably much higher. Estimates of Russian military deaths vary, but even conservative figures are in the low thousands.

U.S. and British officials say Kyiv remains Russia's primary objective. The bulk of Moscow's forces remain miles from the center, but missiles and artillery have destroyed apartment buildings and a large shopping mall, which was left a smoking ruin after being hit late Sunday by strikes that killed eight people, according to emergency officials.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the military's assessment, said Russia had increased air sorties over the past two days, carrying out as many as 300 over a 24-hour period, and has fired more than 1,100 missiles into Ukraine since the invasion began.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who is heading to Europe later in the week to meet with allies, suggested Monday evening that worse may be still to come.

"Putin's back is against the wall," Biden said. "He wasn't anticipating the extent or the strength of our unity. And the more his back is against the wall, the greater the severity of the tactics he may employ."

Biden reiterated accusations that Putin is considering resorting to using chemical weapons.

As Russian forces try to squeeze Kyiv, talks to end the fighting have continued by video but failed to bridge the chasm between the two sides. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told Ukrainian television late Monday that he would be prepared to consider waiving any bid by Ukraine to join NATO — a key Russian demand — in exchange for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Russian troops and a guarantee of Ukraine's security.

Zelenskyy also suggested Kyiv would be open to future discussions on the status of Crimea, which Russia seized in 2014, and areas of the eastern Donbas region held by Russian-backed separatists. But he said that was a topic for another time.

As part of a series of addresses to foreign legislatures to drum up support for Ukraine, Zelenskyy spoke to Italian lawmakers on Tuesday, telling them that the besieged port of Mariupol had been utterly destroyed in the Russian onslaught. He also spoke to Pope Francis.

"Imagine a Genoa completely burned down," he said to rapt lawmakers, citing an Italian port city of a similar size. He said 117 children had been killed in the war so far.

Some people managed to flee Mariupol, where weeks of Russian bombardment has cut off electricity, water and food supplies and severed communication with the outside world. The city council said Tuesday that more than 1,100 people who had escaped the besieged city were on their way in a convoy of buses to another city to Mariupol's northwest.

But the Red Cross said a humanitarian aid convoy trying to reach the embattled city with desperately needed supplies still had not been able to enter.

Perched on the Sea of Azov, Mariupol is a crucial port for Ukraine and lies along a stretch of territory between Russia and Crimea. As such, it is a key target that has been besieged for more than three weeks and has seen some of the worst suffering of the war.

It is not clear how close its capture might be. Ukraine's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that their forces were still defending the city and had destroyed a Russian patrol boat and electronic warfare complex, and Britain's Defense Ministry said its intelligence showed that "Ukrainian forces continue to repulse Russian attempts to occupy" the city.

Mariupol had a prewar population of about 430,000. Around a quarter are believed to have left in the opening days of the war, and tens of thousands escaped over the past week by way of the humanitarian corridors. Other attempts have been thwarted by the fighting.

Mariupol officials said on March 15 that at least 2,300 people had died in the siege, with some buried in

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mass graves. There has been no official estimate since then, but the number is feared to be far higher.

Those who have made it out of Mariupol told of a devastated city.

"There are no buildings there anymore," said 77-year-old Maria Fiodorova, who crossed the border to Poland on Monday after five days of travel.

A long line of vehicles stood on a road in Bezimenne, east of Mariupol, as residents sought shelter at a temporary camp set up by Russian-backed separatists in the Donetsk region. An estimated 5,000 people from Mariupol have taken refuge in the camp. Many arrived in cars with signs that said "children" in Russian.

A woman who gave her name as Yulia said she and her family sought shelter in Bezimenne after a bombing destroyed six houses behind her home.

"That's why we got in the car, at our own risk, and left in 15 minutes because everything is destroyed there, dead bodies are lying around," she said.

In all, more than 8,000 people escaped to safer areas Monday through humanitarian corridors, including about 3,000 from Mariupol, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

Overall, more than 3.5 million people have fled Ukraine, while another 6.5 million have been displaced inside the country.

Matthew Saltmarsh, a spokesperson for the U.N. refugee agency, called the speed and scale of people fleeing danger in Ukraine "unprecedented in recent memory."

Live updates: Ukraine president wants more Russia sanctions

By The Associated Press undefined

ROME — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is urging Italy to beef up sanctions against Russia and seize more assets from President Vladimir Putin and his allies as a way of pressuring Moscow into negotiating an end to the war.

Zelenskyy spoke to the Italian parliament Tuesday via video from Kyiv, as he has done with other foreign parliaments. Wearing a collared shirt and speaking through an Italian translator, Zelenskyy told Italian lawmakers that he had just spoken by phone to Pope Francis and that the pontiff had endorsed Ukraine's right to defend itself.

He said that 117 children have been killed in the war with Russia and that the city of Mariupol has been flattened by the Russian onslaught.

He warned that Europe's security is at risk if Russia advances and that grain deliveries to the developing world are being jeopardized because Ukraine's farmers can't plant crops.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi praised the "heroic" resistance of the Ukrainian people.

MOSCOW — Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has rejected U.S. President Joe Biden's warning that Russia may be planning a cyberattack against the United States.

Asked about Biden's comments, Peskov said Tuesday that "the Russian Federation, unlike many Western countries including the United States, does not engage in banditry on the state level."

Biden told a meeting of corporate CEOs on Monday that "evolving intelligence" indicated a cyberattack may be planned. He urged private companies to invest in their own security to counter cyberattacks.

Biden has suggested a cyberattack could be Russia's response to economic sanctions imposed by the U.S.

GENEVA — The U.N. refugee agency says more than 3.5 million people have fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion, passing another milestone in an exodus that has led to Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II.

UNHCR reported Tuesday that 3.56 million people have left Ukraine, with Poland taking in the lion's share — more than 2.1 million — followed by Romania with more than 540,000 and Moldova with more than 367,000.

Shortly after the invasion on Feb. 24, UNHCR predicted that some 4 million refugees might leave Ukraine, though it has been re-assessing that prediction. The outflows have been slowing in recent days after peak-

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ing at more than 200,000 each on two straight days in early March.

The International Organization for Migration estimates that nearly 6.5 million people are internally displaced within Ukraine, suggesting that some if not most of them might to flee abroad if the war continues.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, says it has confirmed 62 attacks on health care assets in Ukraine since the conflict began and through last Friday. The attacks caused 15 deaths and 37 injuries. The assets include hospitals and medical facilities, transport of medical supplies, warehouses, and health care workers.

MOSCOW — Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov says he wants to auction off his 2021 Nobel Peace Prize medal to raise funds for Ukrainian refugees.

Muratov called Tuesday in the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper, which he edits, for people to “share with refugees, the wounded and children who need urgent treatment what is dear to you and has a value for others.”

Muratov is asking auction houses about the possibility of organizing a sale.

Muratov said last year he was giving away his share of the Nobel prize money to causes including independent media, a Moscow hospice, and care for children with spinal problems. He said he wouldn’t keep any himself.

LONDON — Two Russian pranksters are claiming credit for tricking Britain’s defense secretary into a hoax call with a man purporting to be Ukraine’s prime minister.

A video of the prank circulated on YouTube on Tuesday. It appeared after the U.K. accused Russian President Vladimir Putin’s government of backing efforts to secure sensitive or embarrassing information through hoax calls.

Defense Secretary Ben Wallace last week had a video call with someone he thought was Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal. Instead, he was speaking to “Vovan and Lexus,” a pair of hoaxers who had previously targeted Britain’s Prince Harry.

The video shows Wallace speaking from Poland to a caller who says Ukraine wants to advance its “nuclear program” to protect itself from Moscow, something Russian state media has baselessly claimed in the past.

The Ministry of Defense said the video had been “doctored.” Wallace said last week that he ended the call after it strayed into sensitive subjects over a non-secure line.

MADRID — Authorities in Gibraltar have detained a superyacht linked to a Russian tycoon who is the target of British sanctions over Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Gibraltar is a tiny British overseas territory on the southernmost tip of the European mainland, bordering Spain.

According to Gibraltar’s public broadcaster, GBC, the yacht is called Axioma and is believed to be owned by Dmitrievich Pumpyansky. He is chairman of the board of directors of PJSC, a main steel pipe supplier for Russia’s oil and gas industry.

Pumpyansky was also included earlier this month in a European Union list of Russian sanctioned individuals.

The Gibraltar government said late Monday it would not have normally granted the vessel permission to enter its waters given its “ultimate beneficial ownership,” but that port authorities allowed it in after “it was confirmed to be the subject of an arrest action by a leading international bank in the Supreme Court of Gibraltar.” The statement didn’t specify the legal claims from creditors.

Yachts owned or linked to super-rich Russian oligarchs have been among the first assets seized or frozen by Western governments as part of their response to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.

Authorities in Italy, France and Spain have impounded several luxury vessels in the crackdown.

ANKARA, Turkey — A second superyacht belonging to Chelsea soccer club owner and sanctioned oligarch Roman Abramovich reportedly has docked in a resort in southwestern Turkey.

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Turkey has not imposed economic sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine last month, nor has it frozen assets belonging to top Russian businessmen linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The private DHA news agency said Tuesday the Bermuda-registered Eclipse docked in the resort of Marmaris.

A day earlier, Abramovich's Bermuda-flagged luxury yacht My Solaris arrived in the nearby resort of Bodrum, triggering a protest by a group of Ukrainians who boarded a small motorboat and tried to prevent the yacht from docking.

NATO member Turkey has close ties to both Russia and Ukraine. It has criticized Moscow's invasion of Ukraine but has also positioned itself as a neutral party trying to mediate between the two.

LONDON — Britain's defense ministry says Russian forces have not managed to take over the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol despite weeks of bombardment and days of street fighting.

In an update posted on social media, U.K. officials say that "despite heavy fighting, Ukrainian forces continue to repulse Russian attempts to occupy" the city.

It says Russian forces have made "limited progress" elsewhere in Ukraine in the last day, and remain "largely stalled in place."

The Ukrainian military said Tuesday that Ukrainian forces were still defending Mariupol and destroyed a Russian patrol boat and electronic warfare complex. But the defense ministry said Russia for now controls the land corridor from Crimea, the peninsula it annexed in 2014, and is blocking Ukraine's access to the Sea of Azov.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Mariupol residents described fleeing through street-to-street gun battles
 - U.S. President Joe Biden will thank Poland's president for the country's efforts to shelter Ukrainian refugees
 - The U.N. is divided over mention Russia's invasion in a resolution on the worsening humanitarian situation in Ukraine
 - The extent of the horror is not yet known as Mariupol holds out against Russian demands for surrender
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

PARIS — France's foreign ministry has announced that the country sent 55 metric tons (60 tons) of humanitarian aid to Ukraine via Poland, including computers, medical equipment, baby formula and generators.

The 2.4 million euros (\$2.6 million) in emergency aid was sent on an A330 cargo plane from Paris to Warsaw, the Polish capital, France said in a statement late Monday. It said that "in liaison with the Polish authorities, the material will be handed over to the Ukrainian authorities without delay."

The medical equipment — which weighs some 10 metric tons (11 tons) — is said to include 10 oxygen generators designated for intensive care units in addition to 9 metric tons (10 tons) of medicines.

The aid includes 31 generators, six of which are high-capacity generators "aimed at strengthening the electrical safety of Ukrainian health facilities."

Eight metric tons (9 tons) of computer and internet access material — such as smartphones, computers, routers and 60 kilometers (37 miles) of optical fiber — was also included in the package.

TOKYO — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is set to virtually deliver his address to the Japanese parliament on Wednesday to rally international support for his country's fight against Russian invasion.

Japan, unlike in the past, has been acting tough against Russia, in line with other Group of Seven countries, though Tokyo's steps have triggered Moscow's retaliation. A compromise could set a bad precedence in East Asia, where China is increasingly making assertive military actions.

Zelenskyy's speech, expected to be about 10 minutes, will be shown in a meeting room at the lower house — the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament which Prime Minister Fumio Kishida be-

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longs to. Zelenskyy has made virtual addresses to the U.S. Congress, as well as parliaments in Europe, Canada, and Israel.

Foreign dignitaries, including former U.S. President George W. Bush and former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, have delivered their addresses in person during visits to Japan as state guests, but an online speech by a foreign leader is unprecedented.

On Monday, Russia announced a decision to discontinue peace treaty talks with Japan over the disputed Kuril islands and withdraw from joint economic projects there, citing Tokyo's sanctions against Russian invasion of Ukraine.

TOKYO — Japan denounced Russia on Tuesday over its decision to discontinue peace treaty talks over the disputed Kuril islands and withdraw from joint economic projects in retaliation for Tokyo's sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The two countries never signed a peace treaty formally ending World War II hostilities because of their dispute over the Russian-held islands north of Hokkaido, which Moscow took at the end of the war.

"The latest situation has been all caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters Tuesday. He called Russia's response "extremely unjustifiable and absolutely unacceptable."

Japan has imposed a series of sanctions on Russia in recent weeks, including freezing some individual assets, banning exports of luxury goods and high-technology equipment to the country and revoking Russia's most favored nation trade status.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian army said it forced Russian troops out of Makariv, a strategically important Kyiv suburb, after a fierce battle. That prevents Russian forces from encircling the capital from the northwest, the Defense Ministry said.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Monday he was prepared to discuss a commitment from Ukraine not to seek NATO membership in exchange for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Russian troops and a guarantee of Ukraine's security.

"It's a compromise for everyone: for the West, which doesn't know what to do with us with regard to NATO, for Ukraine, which wants security guarantees, and for Russia, which doesn't want further NATO expansion," Zelenskyy said late Monday in an interview with Ukrainian television channels.

He also repeated his call for direct talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Unless he meets with Putin, it is impossible to understand whether Russia even wants to stop the war, Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy said that Kyiv will be ready to discuss the status of Crimea and the eastern Donbas region held by Russian-backed separatists after a cease-fire and steps toward providing security guarantees.

Wallets, IDs but no survivors found in China Eastern crash

By DAKE KANG and NG HAN GUAN Associated Press

WUZHOU, China (AP) — Mud-stained wallets. Bank cards. Official identity cards. Poignant reminders of 132 lives presumed lost were lined up by rescue workers scouring a remote Chinese mountainside Tuesday for the wreckage of a China Eastern flight that one day earlier inexplicably fell from the sky and burst into a huge fireball.

No survivors have been found among the 123 passengers and nine crew members. Video clips posted by China's state media show small pieces of the Boeing 737-800 plane scattered over a wide forested area, some in green fields, others in burnt-out patches with raw earth exposed after fires burned in the trees. Each piece of debris has a number next to it, the larger ones marked off by police tape.

As family members gathered at the destination and departure airports, what caused the plane to drop out of the sky shortly before it would have begun its descent to the southern China metropolis of Guangzhou remained a mystery. The search for the black boxes, which hold the flight data and cockpit voice record-

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ers, would be difficult, the official Xinhua News Agency said, and involve drones and manual searching.

The crash left a deep pit in the mountainside, Xinhua said, citing rescuers. Chen Weihao, who saw the falling plane while working on a farm, told the news agency it hit a gap in the mountain where nobody lived. "The plane looked to be in one piece when it nosedived. Within seconds, it crashed," Chen said.

China Eastern flight 5735 crashed outside the city of Wuzhou in the Guangxi region while flying from Kunming, the capital of the southwestern province of Yunnan, to Guangzhou, an industrial center not far from Hong Kong on China's southeastern coast. It ignited a fire big enough to be seen on NASA satellite images before firefighters could extinguish it.

No foreigners were on board the lost flight, the Foreign Ministry said, citing a preliminary review.

Dinglong Culture, a Guangzhou company in both mining and TV and movie production, said in a statement to the Shenzhen stock exchange that its CFO, Fang Fang, was a passenger. Zhongxinghua, an accounting firm used by Dinglong, said that two of its employees were also on the flight.

The crash site is surrounded on three sides by mountains and accessible only by foot and motorcycle on a steep dirt road in the semitropical Guangxi region, famed for some of China's most spectacular scenery.

Rain fell Tuesday afternoon as excavators dug out a path to make access easier, state broadcaster CCTV said. The steepness of the slope made the positioning of heavy equipment difficult.

A base of operations was set up near the crash site with rescue vehicles, ambulances and an emergency power supply truck parked in the narrow space. Soldiers and rescue workers combed the charred crash site and surrounding heavily dense vegetation.

Police restricted access, checking each vehicle entering Molang, a village near the crash site. Five people with swollen eyes walked out of the village, got into a car and left. Onlookers said they were relatives of the passengers.

Family members gathered at Kunming and Guangzhou airports. People draped in pink blankets and slumped in massage chairs could be seen in a traveler rest area in the basement of the one in Kunming. Workers wheeled in mattresses and brought bagged meals. A security guard blocked an AP journalist from entering, saying that "interviews aren't being accepted."

In Guangzhou, relatives were escorted to a reception center staffed by employees wearing full protective gear to guard against the coronavirus.

At least five hotels with more than 700 rooms had been requisitioned in Wuzhou's Teng county for family members, Chinese media reported.

Workers in hazmat suits set up a registration desk and administered COVID-19 tests at the entrance to one hotel, outside of Molang. A sign read, "The hotel is requisitioned for March 21 plane accident emergency use." At another hotel, a group of women, some wearing vests with Red Cross markings, registered at a hotel desk set up outside.

The nation's first fatal plane crash in more than a decade dominated China's news and social media. World leaders including Great Britain's Boris Johnson, India's Narendra Modi and Canada's Justin Trudeau posted condolences on Twitter.

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said that the company was deeply saddened by the news and had offered the full support of its technical experts to assist in the investigation.

"The thoughts of all of us at Boeing are with the passengers and crew members ... as well as their families and loved ones," he wrote in a message to Boeing employees.

The plane was about an hour into its flight, at an altitude of 29,000 feet (8,840 meters), when it entered a steep, fast dive around 2:20 p.m., according to data from FlightRadar24.com. The plane plunged to 7,400 feet before briefly regaining about 1,200 feet in altitude, then dove again. The plane stopped transmitting data 96 seconds after starting to dive.

The aircraft was delivered to the airline in June 2015 and had been flying for more than six years.

Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, where the flight was headed, is one of China's main aviation hubs. It is the home base for China Southern Airlines. As the pandemic upended air travel, it rocketed past Beijing and Atlanta to claim the title of world's busiest airport in 2020 — the most recent year for which annual data is available — handling more than 43 million passengers.

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Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province, home to export-driven factories making smartphones, toys, furniture and other goods. Its Auto City district has joint ventures operated by Toyota, Nissan and others. Kunming, the departure city which is 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) west, is the capital of Yunnan province, an agricultural, mining and tourism center that borders Southeast Asia.

China Eastern, which is headquartered in Shanghai, has grounded all of its 737-800s, China's Transport Ministry said. Aviation experts said it is unusual to ground an entire fleet of planes unless there is evidence of a problem with the model.

The airline is one of China's three largest carriers with more than 600 planes, including 109 Boeing 737-800s. The grounding could further disrupt domestic air travel already curtailed because of the largest COVID-19 outbreak in China since the initial peak in early 2020.

The Boeing 737-800 has been flying since 1998 and has an excellent safety record, said Hassan Shahidi, president of the Flight Safety Foundation. It is an earlier model than the 737 Max, which was grounded worldwide for nearly two years after deadly crashes in 2018 and 2019.

Before Monday, the last fatal crash of a Chinese airliner occurred in August 2010, when an Embraer ERJ 190-100 operated by Henan Airlines hit the ground short of the runway in the northeastern city of Yichun and caught fire. It carried 96 people and 44 of them died. Investigators blamed pilot error.

EXPLAINER: What is known about the China Eastern plane crash

BEIJING (AP) — The crash of a Boeing 737-800 passenger jet in China's southwest started a fire big enough to be seen from space and forced rescuers to search a rugged, remote mountainside.

One day after the China Eastern Airlines flight plunged from the sky, there are more questions than answers.

WHAT CAUSED THE CRASH?

The cause is unknown. Flight 5735 was at 29,000 feet (8,800 meters) on Monday afternoon when it went into a dive about an hour into its flight, according to flight-tracking website FlightRadar24.com.

The plane plunged to 7,400 feet (2,200 meters) before regaining about 1,200 feet (360 meters), then dived again. It crashed into the side of a mountain in a remote, forested area outside the city of Wuzhou.

State media and Chinese regulators gave no indication the pilot reported trouble or other information that might shed light on the cause of the disaster. The plane stopped transmitting data 96 seconds after it started to fall.

Rescue workers planned to use drones in the search for the plane's black boxes, which should contain information from instruments and sound from the cockpit.

Confirming the cause of a plane crash sometimes takes months or years due to the need to gather badly damaged debris and examine specialized technical factors.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE ABOARD? DID ANY SURVIVE?

The plane was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members from the city of Kunming in China's southwest to Guangzhou, an export hub in the southeast.

No survivors have been found as rescuers search the rugged, charred mountainside in the semitropical Guangxi region.

No foreigners are believed to have been on board. Two Chinese companies said their employees were on the flight, including the CFO of Guangzhou-based Dinglong Culture Co. whose interests range from mining to TV and movie production.

Family members gathered in closed-off waiting areas at the airports in both Guangzhou and Kunming. Chinese news reports said five hotels with 700 rooms had been requisitioned closer to the crash site for family members.

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IS THIS THE SAME BOEING MODEL INVOLVED IN EARLIER CRASHES THAT RESULTED IN ITS GROUNDING?

No. The plane that crashed was a Boeing 737-800, not the Boeing 737 Max, a newer model that was temporarily grounded worldwide following two deadly crashes in Indonesia in 2018 and Ethiopia in 2019.

The widely used Boeing 737-800 has been flying since 1998 and has an excellent safety record, said Hassan Shahidi, president of the Flight Safety Foundation. They have been involved in 22 accidents that damaged the planes beyond repair and killed 612 people.

China Eastern grounded all of its 737-800s after the crash, China's Transport Ministry said.

The Boeing 737 Max, which entered service in 2017, was grounded by regulators following the two crashes. They were blamed on a computer system that pushed the nose downward in flight and couldn't be overridden by pilots.

Airlines were allowed to resume using the 737 Max after Boeing redesigned the system in a process overseen by regulators from the United States, Europe, China and the Middle East.

Germany honors survivor of Nazi camps, 96, killed in Ukraine

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's parliament on Tuesday paid tribute to Boris Romanchenko, who survived several Nazi concentration camps during World War II but was killed last week during an attack in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. He was 96.

The Buchenwald concentration camp memorial said on Monday that Romanchenko, who survived Buchenwald as well as camps at Peenemuende, Dora and Bergen-Belsen, was killed on Friday. It said that, according to his granddaughter, the multistory building where he lived was hit by a projectile.

Romanchenko was dedicated to keeping alive the memory of Nazi crimes and was vice president of the International Buchenwald-Dora Committee, the memorial said.

Opening a session of Germany's parliament on Tuesday, deputy speaker Katrin Goering-Eckardt paid tribute to Romanchenko.

She said Romanchenko was taken to Dortmund, Germany as a forced laborer in 1942 and was sent to the concentration camps after an escape attempt in 1943. Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

"His death reminds us that Germany has a special historical responsibility toward Ukraine," Goering-Eckardt said. "Boris Romanchenko is one of thousands of dead in Ukraine. Every single life that has been taken reminds us to do everything we can to stop this cruel war that violates international law and to help people in and from Ukraine."

Lawmakers held a moment of silence in memory of Romanchenko and other victims of the war.

Romanchenko "survived four concentration camps and was now killed in the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine," Finance Minister Christian Lindner said. "His fate shows both the criminal character of Russian policy and why Germany is showing solidarity with Ukraine, why we must show solidarity."

9 million children to be vaccinated against polio in Africa

Associated Press undefined

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A drive to vaccinate more than 9 million children against polio has been launched this week in four countries in southern and eastern Africa after an outbreak was confirmed in Malawi.

The urgent vaccination campaign has started in Malawi where drops of the inoculation are being placed in the mouths of children across the country, including in the capital, Lilongwe, and the country's largest city, Blantyre.

The vaccination campaign will be expanded on Thursday to include the neighboring countries of Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, according to UNICEF which is working with the governments and other partners.

Three more rounds of vaccinations will follow in the coming months with a goal of reaching more than 20 million children.

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"This is the first case of wild polio detected in Africa for more than five years and UNICEF is working closely with governments and partners to do everything possible to stop the virus in its tracks," says Mohamed M. Fall, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa.

"Polio spreads fast and can kill or cause permanent paralysis," he said.

UNICEF, the World Health Organization and other partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative are supporting governments with the vaccination drive after it was confirmed in February that a three-year-old girl was paralyzed by wild poliovirus in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe.

People most commonly contract polio when they drink water contaminated by the feces of someone who carries the virus. Children under the age of five and those living in areas with poor sanitation are most at risk.

"A regional response is vital as polio is extremely contagious and can spread easily as people move across borders," says Mohamed M. Fall.

"There is no cure for polio, but the vaccine protects children for life. We are working with the World Health Organization and other partners to make sure parents, as well as community and religious leaders, know how important it is that every child receives their vaccine."

UNICEF has procured more than 36 million doses of the polio vaccine for the first two rounds of the immunizations of children in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

In Malawi, UNICEF is installing 270 new vaccine refrigerators, repairing other refrigerators and distributing 800 remote temperature monitoring devices, vaccine carriers and cold boxes. In partnership with the World Health Organization, UNICEF has trained 13,500 health workers and volunteers, 34 district health promotion officers and 50 faith leaders.

In Mozambique, UNICEF has procured 2,500 vaccine carriers and has delivered 100 cold boxes and is assisting with the swift delivery of vaccines from national to provincial stores. UNICEF is also supporting the training of 33,000 supervisors and health workers on vaccine management and social and behavioral change, as well as training of journalists, distribution of communication materials and broadcasting radio and TV spots to support the polio campaign.

In Tanzania, UNICEF has trained more than 2,000 health workers, 5,128 social mobilizers and 538 town criers, and facilitated the procurement of 3,000 vaccine carriers and 360 cold boxes, expected to be delivered in April 2022 for use in the upcoming rounds of campaigns.

In Zambia, more than 200 trainers are coaching healthcare workers at the provincial and district level, with support from UNICEF and partners. District officials have been trained on polio surveillance, in partnership with the World Health Organization.

Jackson faces initial round of questioning during hearings

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson will face senators' questions for the first time Tuesday as Democrats push to quickly confirm the only Black female justice in the court's 233-year history.

Jackson, a federal appeals court judge, sat and silently listened to more than four hours of senators' opening statements on Monday, the first of four days of Judiciary Committee hearings on her nomination. As senators begin 30-minute rounds of grilling on Tuesday, she will respond to their specific points, including charges by some Republicans that she has been too lenient in sentencing on criminal matters.

In her own 12-minute statement, Jackson didn't mention specific cases but told the committee that she would "apply the laws to the facts of the case before me, without fear or favor, consistent with my judicial oath," if she were to be confirmed.

Jackson, 51, thanked God and professed love for "our country and the Constitution." She stressed that she has been independent, deciding cases "from a neutral posture" in her nine years as a federal judge.

While Republicans promised pointed questions, Democrats were full of praise for President Joe Biden's Supreme Court nominee. Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said that to be first, "often, you have

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to be the best, in some ways the bravest.”

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 after 28 years on the court.

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., spoke emotionally about the “joy” he felt about her historic nomination and acknowledged her family’s pride. Booker, who is Black, said the white men who have sat on the Supreme Court for two centuries were “extraordinary patriots who helped shape this country” but that many people could have never dreamed of sitting on the court.

Jackson would be the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman.

“When the next generation behind us looks at the highest courts in the land, this ideal will be made more real,” Booker said.

Barring unexpected developments, Democrats who control the Senate by the slimmest of margins hope to wrap up Jackson’s confirmation before Easter, even though Breyer is not leaving the court until after the current session ends this summer. Democratic leaders are hoping for some Republican support, but can confirm her with the support of only Democrats in the 50-50 Senate as Vice President Kamala Harris can cast a tie-breaking vote.

In the opening statements, Democrats on the Judiciary panel sought to preemptively rebut Republican criticism of Jackson’s record on criminal matters as a judge and before that as a federal public defender and a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, an independent agency created by Congress to reduce disparity in federal prison sentences.

Jackson “is not anti-law enforcement” and is not “soft on crime,” Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said, noting that members of Jackson’s family have worked in law enforcement and that she has support from some national police organizations. “Judge Jackson is no judicial activist.”

The committee’s senior Republican, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, promised Republicans would “ask tough questions about Jackson’s judicial philosophy,” without turning the hearings into a “spectacle.”

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., noted that Democrats had opposed some past Republican judicial nominees who were Black or Hispanic, and he said that he and his GOP colleagues wouldn’t be deterred by Jackson’s race from asking probing questions.

Graham said of some criticism from the left: “It’s about, ‘We’re all racist if we ask hard questions.’ That’s not going to fly with us.”

Graham was one of three Republicans to support Jackson’s confirmation, 53-44, as an appellate judge last year. But he has indicated over the past several weeks that he is unlikely to vote for her again.

Even though few Republicans are likely to vote for her, most GOP senators did not aggressively criticize Jackson, whose confirmation would not change the court’s 6-3 conservative majority. Several Republicans used their time to denounce Senate Democrats instead of Jackson’s record.

Republicans are trying to use her nomination 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.

With Jackson taking notes, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said in his opening statement that his research showed that she had a pattern of issuing lower sentences in child pornography cases, repeating comments he wrote in a Twitter thread last week. The Republican National Committee echoed his claims in blast messages to supporters.

The White House, along with several Democrats at the hearing, has rejected Hawley’s criticism as “toxic and weakly presented misinformation.” Former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, who is guiding Jackson through the Senate process, told reporters afterward that “she will be the one to counter many of those questions” on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Hawley is one of several committee Republicans, along with Ted Cruz of Texas and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, who are potential 2024 presidential candidates, and their aspirations may collide with other

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Republicans who would prefer not to pursue a scorched-earth approach to Jackson's nomination.

Members of the Judiciary panel are already familiar with Jackson, who appeared before them last year after Biden chose her to fill an opening on the federal appeals court in Washington. She was also vetted by the committee and confirmed by the Senate as a district court judge under President Barack Obama and to her post on the sentencing commission.

Jackson expressed her thanks and love to her husband, Patrick Jackson, a surgeon in Washington who wore socks with an image of George Washington and occasionally wiped away tears. Their two daughters, one in college and the other in high school, also attended, as did Jackson's parents and in-laws.

While the focus was on the Senate hearings, the Supreme Court itself was in session Monday, but one chair was empty. Thomas, 73, the longest-serving justice now on the court, was in the hospital being treated for an infection. He does not have COVID-19, the court said in a statement.

Detroit schools aim to catch up, and then some, with US aid

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — For years, Laela Bullock moved to her own rhythm when it came to schoolwork. The switch to remote learning, if anything, brought a welcome break from fights in the hallways of the 15-year-old's Detroit school, but her grades still lagged.

Things started turning around with one-on-one tutoring this year — paid for with \$1.3 billion the Detroit Public Schools Community District is receiving in federal COVID-19 relief aid.

At last, Laela is reading above her grade level, and on track to graduate on time, said her mother, Alicia Bullock.

"I'm so proud," Bullock said.

The Detroit school system is putting much of its relief money toward tutoring, after-school programs and other efforts to shore up student achievement. District leaders hope the money will not only help students catch up on what they missed during the coronavirus pandemic, but also fix some of what has been broken for decades.

"This is the first time ... I actually feel we have equitable funding," Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said in an interview. "Unfortunately, it had to come during a pandemic."

The district, which emerged from state control a few years ago, chronically has been among the lowest-scoring in the U.S. on standardized tests. In the last school year, less than 6% of Detroit eighth graders who took a state standardized test scored as proficient in math.

Nationally, pandemic relief to schools totals \$190 billion. High-poverty areas received the most per student, with Detroit getting the highest rate among big districts at more than \$25,000 per student, followed by Philadelphia at \$13,000 and Cleveland at more than \$12,000.

The aid invested in academics includes millions for reducing class sizes, expanding internet access, and tutoring programs like the one attended by Laela. About 1,500 Detroit students participate in that literacy program, which is run by Detroit-area nonprofit Beyond Basics.

Participants include Quandallis Perry-Fisher, a 15-year-old schoolmate of Laela's at Denby High. He said he was not a fan of reading and struggled to navigate virtual learning when schools went remote in March 2020.

"I was doing very, very bad," Quandallis said. With Beyond Basics "you have to read to the instructors," he said. "Now, with the vocabulary words ... I read it myself without asking for help."

In 2009, then-U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan called Detroit "ground zero" for problems facing American schools. Enrollment has plummeted from 164,000 students in 2003 to about 51,000 as the city's population dwindled. But district officials said test scores and graduation rates were on the rise before the pandemic.

For Detroit and other districts, it's "really important to get it right" as they decide how to spend the windfall of federal money, said Phyllis Jordan, associate director of FutureEd, an independent think tank in Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy.

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"I don't see this opportunity really coming around again. This is an opportunity for schools to get things right to address some of the long-standing issues that keep kids from succeeding," she said.

A challenge for Detroit is how to simultaneously address other, overlapping obstacles that have limited students' ability to learn.

Alicia Bullock said a top priority at her daughter's school should be better security and programs that help students avoid fighting. Her daughter complains students have to be patted down for weapons, and classmates smoke and do whatever they want in the school building. The district's needs are so deep, she said, pandemic funding may not be enough.

"The schools don't have toiletries. They don't have resources," she said. "Anytime you don't have (bathroom) tissue, that's terrible."

Vitti has announced a proposal that includes spending \$700 million in pandemic funding by 2027 on new schools and revamping existing schools to address overcrowding. A final recommendation on how to spend the money will go before the Detroit Board of Education by June.

The district also plans to spend \$189 million to reduce class sizes; \$169 million for more after-school and summer programs, electronic devices and internet access; \$169 million in raises for teachers and other employees; and \$34 million on programs to provide for the social and emotional needs — and mental health — of students rocked by the pandemic.

One parent, Aliya Moore, thinks more of the money should go toward technology improvements and student mental health.

Moore, a PTA president at her 12-year-old daughter's school, said many students suffered during distance learning.

"You don't know what the home has looked like, how the schools have been safe havens for these kids," she said.

Vitt has blamed some of the district's performance on low expectations and limited professional development when it was under state control, most recently from 2009 to 2017. Before the pandemic, he said, the district was making progress, including a grade-level literacy curriculum.

He said it will take time, but the district is ready to make up several years of lost learning.

"Right now, for 10th-12th graders, 60% are off-track on graduating in four years," Vitti said. "We are rebuilding schedules to make sure course recovery is happening. We're paying teachers more to give up a prep period to offer more course recovery. It's highly daunting and troubling, but we will get students back on track."

Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama warned as storm approaches

DALLAS (AP) — A storm system that left widespread damage and some injuries in its wake in Texas drifted into Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama on Tuesday, possibly triggering "a regional severe weather outbreak," the Storm Prediction Center said.

The affected areas, including the cities of Baton Rouge and Jackson, Mississippi, could see strong tornadoes, forecasters said.

Louisiana's federal and state authorities reminded thousands of hurricane survivors living in government-provided mobile homes and recreational vehicle trailers to have an evacuation plan because the structures might not withstand the expected weather.

More than 8,000 households live in such temporary quarters, Bob Howard, spokesman for a joint information center for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, said Monday.

In a joint statement, the agencies said floods might cause the most damage.

"Repeated bouts of heavy rainfall can occur over the same areas, increasing the risk for flooding," the statement said. "Move to higher ground if you hear of flood warnings."

Nearly 1,800 households in trailers provided directly by FEMA are unable to return yet to homes damaged or destroyed by hurricanes Laura and Delta in 2020, according to a news release last week. Another

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1,600 trailers were deployed for Hurricane Ida's displaced households, Howard said, and Louisiana has set out more than 4,400 RV trailers for Ida's victims under a test program paid for by FEMA.

Anyone living in state or FEMA temporary housing needs to keep cellphones on and fully charged, with the volume high and severe weather alerts enabled, the agencies said.

"The danger is expected to be highest at night," they added.

The release noted that the mobile homes and RV trailers are government property that cannot be moved.

The storm already left misery in its wake in Texas, injuring at least four people, officials said.

Officials reported damage throughout Jacksboro, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) northwest of Fort Worth. There, photographs posted on social media showed a storm ripped the wall and roof from parts of Jacksboro High School, especially its gym.

"It brought tears to my eyes," school principal Starla Sanders told WFAA-TV in Dallas.

The storm also struck the city's animal shelter, but the amount of damage wasn't immediately clear.

Thirty miles (50 kilometers) northeast of Jacksboro, near Bowie, the damage was reportedly widespread, with reports of some people trapped in collapsed structures. City manager Bert Cunningham said the worst damage was east of the town, with as many as four entrapments reported. Four people suffered minor injuries, said Emergency Manager Kelly McNabb.

Parts of central and east Texas, especially the Austin and College Station areas, also saw severe storms reported as tornadoes, the National Weather Service said. Photographs posted on social media showed damage to buildings in the Austin suburbs Round Rock and Elgin. No injuries were immediately reported.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said during a news conference Monday night in suburban Austin's Williamson County that the "devastating" storms caused significant damage but the state would stand "shoulder to shoulder" with those affected, and he was thankful that there no reports of fatalities.

"We know there are many people whose lives have been completely disrupted and people who've lost their homes," Abbott said. "At the very same time... it may be a miracle also, because even though there's been some devastating physical damage, to my knowledge, as of right now, there is no report of loss of life, which is just stunning."

Ukraine war imperils wheat, but farmers in no rush to pivot

By AYA BATRAWY, STEVE KARNOWSKI and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Russia's war in Ukraine could mean changes for Ed Kessel's farm along a quiet stretch of western North Dakota.

Worldwide, farmers like Kessel are weighing whether to change their planting patterns and grow more wheat this spring as the war has choked off or thrown into question grain supplies from a region known as "the breadbasket of the world."

Ukraine and Russia account for a third of global wheat and barley exports, which countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa rely on to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles. They are also top exporters of other grains and sunflower seed oil used for cooking and food processing.

Kessel said he may plant some more wheat and ride the tide of high prices that have spiked by a third since the invasion, helping offset losses from drought and the increasing cost of fuel, but not a lot more.

"Honestly, it probably will help us plant a few more wheat acres. We'll put a few more acres into wheat and a few more into sunflowers," said Kessel, also first vice president of the North Dakota Grain Growers Association.

Major grain producers like the United States, Canada, France, Australia and Argentina are being closely watched to see if they can quickly ramp up production to fill in the gaps from lost Ukrainian and Russian supplies. But farmers are facing the prospect of another year of drought, climbing fuel and fertilizer costs, and supply chain disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Major producers also are hamstrung by factors like legal limits on exports and farming patterns.

That means uncertainty for countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iran, Ethiopia and others that cannot grow enough wheat, barley, corn or other grains to meet their needs. The war has raised the specter of

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food shortages and political instability in countries that rely on affordable grain imports.

Any extra grain exports from anywhere in the world "will likely only partially offset lower Black Sea shipments over the remainder of the current season," the International Grains Council said in its March report.

About half of the grain the World Food Program buys to feed 125 million people worldwide comes from Ukraine. The double blow of rising food prices and depressed wheat exports from the war is a recipe for "catastrophe not just in Ukraine, but potentially globally," the head of the U.N. food assistance agency warned.

"It will impact millions and millions of people, particularly in the poorest countries of the world," WFP Executive Director David Beasley told The Associated Press in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv last week as he visited a refugee center where food aid was distributed.

There are unanswered questions about how Western sanctions on Russia, the world's top wheat exporter, could affect its grain exports and distribution networks. Russia is also the biggest exporter of fertilizer, while Ukraine ships huge amounts of corn, rye, oats and millet. The Black Sea region is a top producer of the grains used to feed livestock worldwide.

Australia and India have responded with increased grain exports, but there's little room for others to immediately do the same. That's mainly due to recurrent drought, said Arnaud Petit, executive director of the International Grains Council.

The U.S. produced around 44 million tons of wheat for the 2021-2022 season. Just two to three years ago, it was over 50 million tons. Petit pointed to drought and farmers switching to more profitable crops.

Canada, Argentina and Australia could try to ramp up wheat production for the coming season that ends in mid-2023, but it's too early to tell if farmers are changing their planting patterns to focus more on grains like wheat.

Doug Martin said it's too late for his family farm in Manitoba, Canada, to make significant changes to what's being planted now. Plus, growing a range of crops spreads out risks.

"Most producers have a set idea of what they are seeding and will probably stick to that," Martin said.

Although higher wheat prices will reap earnings for farmers, that isn't enough incentive to expand production because prices are also climbing for crops like oats, canola and barely.

"There are other crops that are going to get good returns," Martin added.

Any increased production is running up against surging costs for supplies. The price of fuel has skyrocketed, and the cost of fertilizer was already high because of a crunch in natural gas acutely felt in Europe.

"With cheaper fertilizers, it could have been possible to grow our way out of a global food security problem — possibly — but nutrients are anything but affordable or even accessible right now," said Sylvain Charlebois, a professor in food distribution and policy at Dalhousie University in Canada.

Philippe Dutertre grows wheat in Chemiré-le-Gaudin, in the Sarthe agricultural region about 210 kilometers (130 miles) southwest of Paris. He hasn't decided whether to expand his wheat patch given soaring energy and electricity costs.

"We might be able to act a little bit on the crop rotation, but today, France produces wheat, corn, rapeseed for oils and other cereals," he said. "We don't have the certainty anymore to say that we will be able to guarantee the food security of France and Europe tomorrow."

Australian farmers experienced a bountiful wheat season. Still, the agriculture department says Australia will not be able to respond to lower Ukrainian supplies right away because it's already sold its exports through September.

The situation is similar in Argentina, another major grain exporter. A whopping 95% of its current wheat crop has already been sold.

Jorge Josifovich owns farmland in Pergamino, one of the richest agricultural areas in Argentina, where he grows wheat, corn and soybeans. Despite higher wheat prices, he said Argentine farmers might not be motivated to plant more because of high fertilizer and fuel costs, coupled with "a rigorous price control imposed by the government that is unfavorable to producers who sell their production to exporters."

The calculus leaves the world's biggest wheat importers vulnerable, including Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan

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and Bangladesh as well as war-torn Yemen and cash-strapped Lebanon. They are countries with huge populations in poverty, relying on affordable wheat for their diets.

Drought in the Middle East is at its highest level in at least 20 years, according to the Gro Drought Index, hindering any efforts to ramp up domestic wheat production.

There is potential for unrest if prices continue to rise, particularly in nations without sufficient stocks of wheat. They may be forced to wait to purchase it from the market, switch to rice or draw from their wheat reserves.

In Egypt, the world's biggest wheat importer, the government recently announced price caps for unsubsidized bread and fines for violators in response to soaring prices.

The world has 278 million tons of wheat stock to help buffer shortfalls from Ukraine, said Petit of the International Grains Council. Half of that stock, however, is in China, which holds more than a year's worth of supply to ensure food security for its 1.4 billion people.

Meanwhile, farmers a world away are making their own hard decisions. Tom Bernhardt, who operates a fifth-generation crop and cattle ranch near Linton in North Dakota, said no-till farmers like himself won't deviate too much from their normal rotation and plant more wheat because it can lead to problems with soil health and weeds.

Plus, there's no guarantee wheat prices will remain high.

"I have never planted additional acres just to chase a price," the the 61-year-old American farmer said.

Ukrainian theater's new drama? Making dumplings for soldiers

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

DROHOBYCH, Ukraine (AP) — The theater was empty. The seats were covered against dust. But it was a moment of drama that Alla Shkondina had prepared for all her life.

"There is a saying that when the guns sound, the muses are silent," the Ukrainian actress said, standing on the bare stage with a shawl wrapped around her to protect against the chill. "But we are not silent."

She has retreated from the spotlight and now makes dumplings to send to soldiers, working alongside fellow artists in the Drohobych repertory theater's cafe. It's one small part of a massive war effort by defiant volunteers across the country who often find themselves playing unexpected roles.

In the theater's warmly lit cafe, where snack bar popcorn has gone stale in the nearly month since Russia's invasion, artists in this community near the foot of the Carpathian Mountains in southwestern Ukraine were rolling and filling dough to add to the thousands of dumplings they've sent to the front, or to displaced people in need.

"We did more than 3,000 pounds of meatballs," said theater director Mykola Hnatenko. "One hundred fifty kilograms of stewed cabbage with meat. More than 10,000 verenyky (dumplings) with potato. Seventy kilograms of filling for borscht. Eighty kilograms of fried fish. Two thousand pancakes with meat, and 500 sweet pancakes. Now we've decided to do more food with proteins like meat."

In the courtyard, men, their hands blackened with soot, chopped wood for the cooking fires, overseen by the theater's deputy director, Sergei Havdjak, dressed in military-style drab.

Hnatenko seemed especially proud of the borscht the volunteers were sending to soldiers in places like the capital, Kyiv, where some areas have collapsed into brutal street-to-street fighting in near-freezing weather. He showed a cellphone video of a distribution of food in Kyiv, with a smiling soldier flashing a "V" for victory sign.

The food-making effort began on the second day of Russia's invasion. It takes about 150 volunteers, including artists who have been displaced from other parts of Ukraine and now live at the theater, Hnatenko said.

"It inspires us that we also contribute somehow to the victory of the country," he said.

The theater workers have been shaken by the war and the accounts of people joining them after fleeing from other parts of Ukraine. Shkondina, the actress, described the children arriving with "adult eyes" full of terror, needing time to feel normal again.

"This is like the war I read about in books, or heard about from my grandparents," she said.

While Shkondina was not used to making dumplings — "Because we are actors, we do not have time to do such things," she said — she and others gladly put on performances for the displaced children whose families have fled to Drohobych, to help distract them from the war.

The performances drew from the nostalgia for life before Russia invaded.

On a gold-colored sofa by a piano, in a pool of quiet near the bustle of food preparation, Vasil Nevolov sat alone and contemplated the past. After 50 years of living in Kyiv as an arts critic and professor, he abruptly had to flee.

"Everything around my house is destroyed," he said. "There is no more supermarket. There is no more school." So much of his life's work now seemed to make little sense.

He worried about his grandchildren, who remained in Kyiv. They cannot leave. Their mother is a medical worker, their father a new member of the territorial defense. He is proud of their work, and proud of the work of the volunteers around him.

"Despite my age, which is already quite respectable, 74 years, I want to be useful to the theater," Nevolov said of his new community.

Amid the chaos he is finding optimism. He repeated the saying that has become a rallying cry and reassurance for millions of people: "Everything will be Ukraine" — everything will be fine.

Ukrainian children find a welcoming classroom in Berlin

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Ukrainian refugee Mariia Kerashchenko tightly clasped the hands of her two children as she walked them through the courtyard of a seedy Berlin building, up a graffiti-covered stairway, and into a modern, sunlit classroom.

Her 7-year-old son, Myroslav, is one of 40 children who started their first day of school Monday, only weeks after joining the millions flooding into Europe to flee the war in Ukraine.

Daughter Zoriana, who is 3, is still too young for the class, which is being taught by two Ukrainians who also fled to the German capital. The lessons, part of a volunteer initiative, will prepare the children for entering Berlin's regular school system.

"It gets me emotional when I see all the help and solidarity here," the 30-year-old Kerashchenko, from Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, told The Associated Press, her eyes welling with tears.

"Every day, I hope that we can go back to Ukraine, but it is too dangerous for now, so in the meantime it is wonderful that my son can go to school in Germany," she added.

The classes for the refugees were put together by Burcak Sevilgen and Faina Karlitski, who in only two weeks raised the funds, organized the rent-free classrooms and advertised their program on the messaging service Telegram.

The children nervously clutched their new exercise books, sharpened pencils and erasers as their new teachers welcomed them in Ukrainian on the third floor of the former factory. They will follow their curriculum from back home and also take German language classes. The three hours of school each weekday will be followed by activities such as playacting, painting or handicrafts.

Natalia Khalil, 33, from Rivne in western Ukraine, is teaching the third and fourth graders, while Tatjana Gubskaya, 56, will be in charge of the first and second graders. Gubskaya fled Ukraine with her daughter and a 7-year-old grandson, who is in her classroom.

"The kids are grateful to have some kind of routine again and meet other children from Ukraine — they and their mothers have all been very stressed lately," said Gubskaya, who also taught second grade classes before the Feb. 24 Russian invasion.

The teachers will be paid 500 euros per month in donations until they have work permits and can be officially hired.

Sevilgen, 36, one of the two people behind the refugee classes, is a Berlin teacher herself. She and her 31-year-old friend Karlitski, a management consultant, decided to do what they could to get at least some

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of the refugee children back into school quickly.

"We both have always had an eye for social issues and wanted to help here as well," Sevilgen said, explaining why they have spent every free minute to organize the classes.

They started raising funds and arranged with the Berlin youth support program Arche — "ark" in English — to take over the sponsorship for the classes. They got an offer from online search engine Ecosia to use the rent-free rooms in Berlin's immigrant neighborhood of Wedding and quickly connected via Telegram with Ukrainian mothers who had recently arrived in Berlin.

More than 3 million Ukrainians have fled abroad, most of them to Poland. The majority are mothers and their children, with men of military age not allowed to leave Ukraine. Inside the country, over 6 million have been displaced, according to the United Nations.

Germany has registered 225,357 Ukrainian refugees as of Monday, although the real numbers are expected to be much higher, since they don't need a visa to enter the country, and federal police only keep records of refugees arriving by train or bus. Those Ukrainians entering Germany from Poland by car usually are not registered.

Up to 10,000 refugees have been arriving by train daily in Berlin since the start of the war, and thousands more have come by car. Many are staying at shelters in the city's convention center and at a former airport, while others are with relatives who immigrated years ago and belong to a 300,000-member Ukrainian diaspora.

The government estimates that about half of the refugees are children and teenagers who will need to attend schools and kindergartens. It has established a task force to coordinate their school attendance in Germany's 16 states.

Several Berlin schools, including some private institutions, already have taken in a few refugees, and city officials are in the process of establishing up to 50 special welcome classes to bring them up to speed in language skills. The authorities can draw from their experience from 2015-16, when about 1 million people fled conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Those children eventually entered the school system.

Until the welcome classes are up and running, the two classes organized by Sevilgen and Karlitski will help ease the children's transition to their new lives, teach them German and enable them to make new friends.

"A new routine and other children — those are the most important things for them right now," Sevilgen said. "And if we get more donations, we hope that we will be able to keep this project running as long as it takes to get the kids into the regular Berlin schools."

With walkout threat, Disney finds itself in balancing act

By MIKE SCHNEIDER and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — With some workers across the U.S. threatening a walkout Tuesday, The Walt Disney Co. finds itself in a balancing act between the expectations of a diverse workforce and demands from an increasingly polarized, politicized marketplace.

On the one side are LGBTQ advocates and Disney employees calling for a walkout in protest of CEO Bob Chapek's slow response in publicly criticizing Florida legislation that critics have dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" bill. The legislation bars instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

On the other are politicians like Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who accuse the entertainment conglomerate of bending to cancel culture after a Disney decision to temporarily suspend political contributions in the state. According to Disney's conservative critics, the company should be in the business of making profits instead of pushing an agenda.

Evan Power, chairman of the Leon County Republican Party, said he believes a strident minority of Disney employees are pushing the issue and DeSantis has more to gain by taking the side of parents who want more control over education and "sexual conversations" in early grades at school. DeSantis is viewed as a likely Republican presidential candidate in 2024.

"I think it pays dividends with parents across the state of Florida regardless of political divisions," Power

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said.

Officials for the unions that represent tens of thousands of workers at Disney theme parks in Florida and Anaheim, California — including the hundreds of costumed performers who portray Mickey Mouse, Cinderella and Stitch at Walt Disney World — said there didn't appear to be any momentum for a walkout.

"We are not in support of that," Romualdas Dulskis, a Teamsters official in Orlando whose local represents costumed characters, bus drivers and other Disney workers, said Monday. "That's just not the way we are going to go about this."

Union leaders said they had advised their members not to participate because their contract prohibits work stoppages or disruptions.

"I don't want to downplay anyone's efforts, if someone feels what they are doing is the right way to make an impact," said Eric Clinton, president of Unite Here! Local 362, which represents custodians, housekeepers and other Disney World theme park workers. "We aren't part of that. It would violate our contract if members of our union participated, though we are concerned about the issue, of course."

One of the organizers of the walkout, a New York-based employee, said they were expecting more participation from Disney workers in production, marketing, IT and other desk jobs than those in hourly, union jobs. The worker spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of being targeted online and because organizers didn't want a single organizer taking the spotlight.

Part of the goal of the walkout is for those workers with the "privilege" to be able to protest to stand up for those who can't, the New York employee said.

Workers participating in the walkout plan to meet up with each other at locations in Orlando, New York City, Anaheim and Burbank, California, where the company is headquartered. A Disney spokesman didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

Disney, whose movies and properties shaped generations of children around the world, has spoken out several times in recent years about contentious social and political situations.

It was one of a slew of U.S. companies that in January 2021 said it would suspend political donations to lawmakers who voted against certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory. It also spoke out early against a 2016 anti-gay bill in Georgia, threatening to pull its business from the state, which has become a favorite of movie and TV studios. The bill was vetoed by Georgia's then-governor.

And the company has not been immune to changing societal expectations. It has said it would revamp the Jungle Cruise, Pirates of the Caribbean and Splash Mountain rides at its theme parks to remove racist and sexist elements and put short warnings in front of some of its classic movies on its streaming service, Disney+, warning of "outdated cultural depictions."

This time, company CEO Chapek has drawn fire for speaking out about the gender identity bill only after it passed the Florida Legislature.

Republican lawmakers pushing the Florida legislation had argued that parents, not teachers, should be the ones talking to their children about gender issues during their early formative years.

The legislation attracted scrutiny from Biden, who called it "hateful," as well as other Democrats who argue it demonizes LGBTQ people. It has been sent to DeSantis, who was expected to sign it into law.

Earlier this month, Chapek apologized for not coming out more forcibly and publicly against the bill, saying Disney officials had been working behind the scenes to stop it. Chapek, who became CEO in 2020, also announced it was pausing all political donations in Florida and increasing support for advocacy groups fighting similar legislation in other states. Chapek reiterated those points during a company-wide discussion with employees on Monday.

Disney has long been influential in Florida politics, tending to be conservative and supporting Republicans who have been in control of Tallahassee, the state capital, for two decades, but also being more open on social issues, said Patricia Campos-Medina, co-director of the Worker Institute at Cornell University. "That's why people felt surprised that they wanted to say quiet on this issue," she said.

Organizers of the walkout maintain that withholding political contributions isn't enough.

On a website calling for the walkout, the group says that until the legislation is repealed, Disney leaders

need to stop investments in Florida, including the relocation of 2,000 mostly professional jobs from its California headquarters to Orlando. They also say Disney needs to develop an LGBTQ brand similar to the Onyx Collective, an initiative aimed at developing content by and for people of color.

Power, the GOP official in Tallahassee, said he was confident that Disney and Florida Republicans would get past this flashpoint and restore their relationship, eventually.

"It's good that we're pushing back, because the purpose of a publicly traded company is not to push an agenda," Power said. "The people at Disney know they need to work with the Legislature and the governor, and they'll come back around."

Ex-wife accuses top Missouri GOP Senate candidate of abuse

By BRIAN SLODYSKO, JIM SALTER and SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Former Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens, now a leading Republican Senate candidate, was physically abusive and demonstrated such "unstable and coercive behavior" that steps were taken to limit his access to firearms, according to new allegations from his ex-wife revealed in court records.

A sworn affidavit from Sheena Greitens and filed Monday is part of an ongoing child custody dispute in Missouri. A public affairs professor at the University of Texas, she sought divorce from Eric Greitens after a sex scandal which led to his resignation as governor in June 2018. She's now asking the court to move the custody case to the Austin area, in part to spare her children from renewed public attention as Eric Greitens tries to mount a political comeback.

Eric Greitens called the allegations "completely fabricated" and "baseless."

"I am seeking full custody of my sons, and for their sake, I will continue to pray for their mother and hope that she gets the help that she needs," he said in a statement issued from his Twitter account.

His attorney on Monday asked a judge to block the affidavit from public view, saying open access could cause "irreparable harm to his reputation and his candidacy."

An attorney for Sheena Greitens did not respond to a message seeking comment.

The allegations could complicate his bid to emerge from Missouri's Aug. 2 primary as the GOP nominee and potentially jeopardize his party's chance to hold onto a key Senate seat in the general election.

In the affidavit, Sheena Greitens casts her ex-husband as someone who threatened to use his political connections and influence in order to destroy her reputation to win custody of the children.

"Prior to our divorce, during an argument in late April 2018, Eric knocked me down and confiscated my cell phone, wallet and keys so that I was unable to call for help or extricate myself and our children from our home," Sheena Greitens wrote in the filing. "I became afraid for my safety and that of our children at our home," later adding that his "behavior included physical violence toward our children, such as cuffing our then-3-year-old son across the face at the dinner table in front of me and yanking him around by his hair."

In 2019, one of her sons came home from a visit with his dad "with a swollen face, bleeding gums and loose tooth," she said.

"He said Dad had hit him; however, Eric said they were roughhousing and it had been an accident," Sheena Greitens wrote, adding that the tooth eventually had to be removed.

Once a swing state, Missouri has become more reliably Republican in recent years. But the race to succeed retiring Sen. Roy Blunt is nonetheless receiving national attention because some in the GOP establishment are anxious that, with the allegations released on Monday and previous scandals, Greitens would face vulnerabilities against a Democrat. And with the Senate evenly divided, the GOP can't afford to lose what would otherwise be a safe seat.

Other candidates in the race on Monday called for Greitens to end his campaign.

"Real men never abuse women and children. Period, end of story," GOP U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler said in a recorded statement posted on Twitter. "It's time for Eric to get out of the Senate race and to get professional help."

Missouri's Republican Attorney General Eric Schmitt, who is also running, tweeted: "The behavior described in this affidavit is cause for Eric Greitens to be in prison, not on the ballot for U.S. Senate."

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Sen. Josh Hawley, a Republican who will become Missouri's senior senator when Blunt steps down, also said it was "time for Eric Greitens to leave this race."

"If you hit a woman or a child, you belong in handcuffs, not the United States Senate," he tweeted.

Greitens was a rising GOP star after his 2016 election, a charismatic former Navy SEAL officer and Rhodes Scholar who founded a nonprofit benefiting veterans. He didn't hide his ambition, either, reserving the website EricGreitensForPresident.com.

But that all seemed to fade after he was indicted on an invasion-of-privacy charge in February 2018 in St. Louis, accused of taking a compromising photo of his hairstylist without her consent during a 2015 extramarital affair. In short order, a Missouri House committee began investigating campaign finance issues, and Greitens faced a second felony charge in St. Louis.

Eric Greitens mostly kept a low profile after his resignation in 2018. That changed last year after the Missouri Ethics Commission found probable cause that Greitens' campaign broke campaign finance law, but also "found no evidence of any wrongdoing on the part of Eric Greitens, individually."

Greitens said the ruling "fully exonerated" him.

Sheena Greitens' affidavit, however, offers a bleak picture of his waning days as governor. At one point, she said, Eric Greitens purchased a gun but refused to tell her where it was. He also threatened to kill himself "unless I provided specific public political support," she wrote.

The behavior was so alarming, she wrote, that on three separate occasions in February, April and May 2018, "multiple people other than myself were worried enough to intervene to limit Eric's access to firearms."

"I started sleeping in my children's room simply to try to keep them safe," she wrote.

At one point, Eric Greitens made a reference to the fact that he had the children — and she didn't — while trying to persuade Sheena Greitens to delete emails she had sent to the family therapist seeking help, according to the affidavit.

"Eric threatened to accuse me of child abuse if I did not delete the emails and convince the therapist to delete them," she wrote.

She also said that during the same phone call, Eric Greitens berated her as a "hateful, disgusting, nasty, vicious ... lying b - - - h" while accusing her of providing information about him to prosecutors and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch newspaper.

A few weeks later, he grew angry and confronted her when she tried to fly with the children to her parents' house, she said.

He "threatened to come to the airport and have me arrested for kidnapping and child abuse, saying that because of his authority as a former governor who had supported law enforcement, the police would support him and not believe me."

In 2020, after informing Eric Greitens that she accepted a job at the University of Texas, she said he threatened "to use his political influence to get my job offer revoked."

Her ex-husband's reemergence in politics has been taxing, Sheena Greitens said in the affidavit. Meanwhile, his past ability to influence law enforcement and appoint judges, as well as the even greater power he would obtain as a senator are "extremely intimidating," she wrote.

"Now that Eric is a candidate for federal office, public interest in my life, my relationship with Eric and the breakdown thereof, and the existence of issues of custody between Eric and me are being re-kindled and brought back into central public discussion," Sheena Greitens wrote.

"The weight of these facts and the intimidation they cause" justifies moving the case to Texas, she wrote, where "the reach of his power and influence is significantly less."

Takeaways: Jackson makes history, GOP vows no 'spectacle'

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — History was made the instant Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the first Black woman nominated to the Supreme Court.

President Joe Biden promised he would choose a Black woman for the job and the 51-year-old Harvard-

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trained Jackson emerged as an early favorite, having won support from the Senate several times before, including a year ago to be an appellate court judge. Democrats have the potential votes in the 50-50 Senate to confirm Jackson, to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer, even if all Republicans line up opposed.

Some takeaways from Monday's session, the first day of Jackson's confirmation hearing:

HISTORY IS MADE

"Today is a proud day for America," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the committee chairman, as he opened the historic hearing.

It's taken 233 years to arrive at this moment, the first Black woman nominated to be a justice on the Supreme Court, which once upheld racial segregation in America.

Yet as history is being made, it is also carrying echoes of an earlier ground-breaking era.

Senators on the Republican side are criticizing Jackson's record as too soft on crime, much the way Southern senators in 1967 linked race and crime during a time of riots in cities nationwide when Thurgood Marshall, the storied civil rights lawyer, was nominated by President Lyndon B. Johnson to be the first Black justice.

Jackson would be the first federal public defender on the court, and Marshall as a civil rights lawyer worked around the country defending Black Americans often facing trumped up charges.

DEFENDING 'GRAND EXPERIMENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY'

Jackson told the senators that if confirmed to the court, she would work "to support and defend the Constitution and this grand experiment of American democracy."

The judge's own life story is part of that history. She told senators that she stands before them on the shoulders of giants — including her own parents, public school teachers, who left segregated Florida for a better life in Washington, D.C.

She was born in the aftermath of the civil rights era, and her parents gave her an African name — "Ketanji Onyika," which they were told means "lovely one," she explained. They taught her that unlike the barriers they faced, that if she worked hard, "I could do anything or be anything I wanted to be."

The judge is no stranger to the committee, having been confirmed three times before. Senators have said over and over again what a pleasure it has been meeting one-on-one with Jackson, who is open and engaging. Her family and friends sat behind her, including her husband of 25 years, surgeon Patrick Jackson, and two daughters. One of her daughters once drafted a letter to Barack Obama, saying her mom should be nominated for the court.

The audience also was filled with the nation's leading civil rights leaders and representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus.

A judge now for the past 10 years, Jackson told the senators she decides cases from a "neutral posture" after evaluating the facts applying the law "without fear or favor."

SENATORS CAN'T QUIT KAVANAUGH

The top Republican, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, insisted his side of the aisle won't turn the weeklong-hearing into the "spectacle" of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination in 2018, which exploded over allegations of sexual assault from high school. Kavanaugh denied the allegations.

Yet, senators on the Republican side kept referencing the Kavanaugh hearings, which blew up as Democrats brought forward the assault allegations and he delivered a blustery defense of beer-drinking and high school.

"This will not be a political circus," assured Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

"No one is going to inquire into your teenage dating habits," he said. "No one is going to ask you with mock severity, 'Do you like beer?'"

Republican who don't have the votes to stop Jackson's confirmation want to at least remind voters of that politically charged chapter, which many believe cost the Democrats Senate seats in that year's election.

But as Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said to Jackson, "This hearing really should be about you, not about us."

IT'S NOT ABOUT RACE, UNTIL IT IS

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Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said during opening remarks that while he believes “the court should look like America” — giving a nod to Jackson’s historic nomination — he also signaled he won’t shy from asking hard questions of the nominee.

“We’re all racist if we ask hard questions.’ That’s not going to fly with us,” he said.

But the imagery is stark on the all-white, largely Southern Republican side of the aisle, as the mostly male senators question and criticize Jackson’s record, and demand a fuller accounting of her judicial philosophy.

“This is not about race,” Cruz said.

Durbin opened the hearing reminding the senators that Jackson isn’t the only one facing this moment in history.

“Consider how history will judge each senator as we face our constitutional responsibility to advise and consent,” he said.

JUDGING THE JUDGE, AND THE SENATORS

While Jackson is the one appearing before the Judiciary Committee, the senators are also being judged in how they handle her historic nomination — particularly those potentially running for president in 2024.

Potential presidential hopeful Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., set the tone even before the hearings began, raising concerns that Jackson gave child pornography defendants lighter sentences than required.

“I’m not interested in trying to play gotcha,” Hawley said as he laid out his concerns Monday, “I’m interested in her answers.”

Fact checkers have said Hawley is selectively choosing the cases, including many in which prosecutors in fact also sought more lenient sentences than federal sentencing guidelines.

“There have been some accusations that we cherry-picked some of Judge Jackson’s criminal cases,” Grassley said. “Don’t worry. We’re going to talk about the other ones too.”

While Hawley jumped out in front with his questions, Cruz, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark. and others are not ready to cede the spotlight during the hearings.

Asian shares rise, eyeing Ukraine, inflation, energy costs

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares were mostly higher Tuesday as investors eyed the war in Ukraine, inflationary risks and surging energy prices.

Benchmarks rose in morning trading in Japan, South Korea, Australia and Hong Kong, but edged lower in Shanghai.

The Russian war on Ukraine and Western sanctions on Russia are adding to worries over energy supplies for Europe, surging prices and progress toward economic recoveries from the pandemic.

“With no progress on peace talks, reports are circulating that the EU is setting the table for a Russian oil embargo. Higher energy prices will hugely harm the EU economy,” said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

Shares ended modestly lower on Wall Street after bouncing around for much of the day and bond yields rose sharply after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said the central bank was prepared to move more aggressively if need be to contain inflation.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury jumped to 2.30% from 2.14% late Friday.

Japan’s benchmark Nikkei 225 surged 1.5% to 27,215.65 in morning trading. Australia’s S&P/ASX 200 gained 1.1% to 7,357.90. South Korea’s Kospi edged 0.5% higher to 2,698.49. Hong Kong’s Hang Seng rose 0.5% to 21,319.19, while the Shanghai Composite fell 0.1% to 3,249.54.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 fell 1.94 points to 4,461.18, snapping a four-day winning streak for the benchmark index. The Dow dropped 0.6% to 34,552.99 and the Nasdaq slid 0.4% to 13,838.46.

Smaller company stocks fared worse than the broader market. The Russell 2000 index lost 1% to 2,065.94.

In remarks at the National Association of Business Economists, Powell said the Fed would raise its benchmark short-term interest rate by a half-point at multiple Fed meetings, if necessary, to slow inflation. The Fed hasn’t raised its benchmark rate by a half-point since May 2000.

On Wednesday, the central bank announced a quarter-point rate hike, its first interest rate increase since

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2018. Stocks rallied after the announcement and went on to have their best week in more than a year. The central bank is expected to raise rates several more times this year.

Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine added a new wave of global economic uncertainty to the mix, some Fed officials had said the central bank would do better to begin raising rates by a half-point in March.

Given rising risks of a recession, Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities, said he believes the Fed should act cautiously.

"Europe will likely enter recession and with the world experiencing ongoing high energy and food prices, the poor will be disproportionately impacted. And raising interest rates will have zero impact on this war-driven inflation wave," he said.

Retailers and other companies that rely on consumer spending, and communication and technology stocks, were the biggest drag on the S&P 500 Monday. Home Depot slid 3.3%, Facebook parent, Meta Platforms, fell 2.3%, and Microsoft fell 0.4%.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added \$2.68 to \$112.65 a barrel. Overnight, energy stocks made solid gains as oil prices gained ground. U.S. benchmark crude oil jumped 7.1% to settle at \$109.97 per barrel on Monday. Brent, the international standard, surged \$2.92 to \$118.54.

This week, there isn't much U.S. economic data to give investors a better sense of how companies and investors are dealing with rising inflation.

The Fed's move to raise interest rates had been expected for months as supply chain

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added to concerns that inflation could worsen by pushing energy and commodity prices higher. Oil prices are up more than 45% this year and prices for wheat and corn have also surged.

Outside of those broader concerns, several stocks made big moves on company-specific news. Alleghany, a reinsurance company, soared about 25% after agreeing to be bought by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway. Media ratings agency Nielsen slid 6.9% after rejecting an acquisition offer.

Boeing fell 3.6% after a 737-800 aircraft operated by China Eastern Airlines crashed in China with 132 people on board. Reports Tuesday said there were no survivors.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar surged to six-year highs against the Japanese yen, at one point hitting 120 Japanese yen. It was later trading at 119.90 yen, up from 119.47 yen. The euro cost \$1.1002, down from \$1.1016.

Thunderstorms, high winds pound North Texas; at least 4 hurt

DALLAS (AP) — Severe thunderstorms with reports of possible tornadoes spread damage across parts of North Texas on Monday, injuring at least four people, officials said.

Officials reported damage throughout Jacksboro, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) northwest of Fort Worth. There, photographs posted on social media showed a storm ripped the wall and roof from parts of Jacksboro High School, especially its gym.

"It brought tears to my eyes," school principal Starla Sanders told WFAA-TV in Dallas.

The storm also struck the city's animal shelter, but the amount of damage wasn't immediately clear.

Thirty miles (50 kilometers) northeast of Jacksboro, near Bowie, damage also was reportedly widespread with reports of some people trapped in collapsed structures. City manager Bert Cunningham said the worst damage was east of the town, with as many as four entrapments reported. Four people suffered minor injuries, said Emergency Manager Kelly McNabb.

A storm system had been predicted to bring strong tornadoes and large hail to parts of Texas on Monday, then move toward the Deep South, where forecasters warned a severe weather outbreak was possible Tuesday.

Parts of central and east Texas, especially the Austin and College Station areas, also saw severe storms reported as tornadoes, the National Weather Service said. Photographs posted on social media showed damage to buildings in the Austin suburbs Round Rock and Elgin. No injuries were immediately reported.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said during a news conference Monday night in suburban Austin's Williamson County that the "devastating" storms caused significant damage but the state would stand "shoulder to

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shoulder” with those affected, and he was thankful that there no reports of fatalities.

“We know there are many people whose lives have been completely disrupted and people who’ve lost their homes,” Abbott said. “At the very same time... it may be a miracle also, because even though there’s been some devastating physical damage, to my knowledge, as of right now, there is no report of loss of life, which is just stunning.”

Abbott credited local residents with taking shelter early, and local media who helped report approaching storms.

The rain was expected to bring relief to some areas of Texas hit by wildfires, but windy weather was expected to follow.

On Tuesday, areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama could see “a regional severe weather outbreak,” the Storm Prediction Center said. That area, including the cities of Baton Rouge and Jackson, Mississippi, could see strong tornadoes Tuesday, forecasters said.

Federal and state authorities in Louisiana reminded thousands of hurricane survivors living in government-provided mobile homes and recreational vehicle trailers to have an evacuation plan because the structures might not withstand the expected weather.

More than 8,000 households are living in such temporary quarters, Bob Howard, spokesman for a joint information center for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Louisiana Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, said Monday.

In a joint statement, the agencies said floods may cause the most damage.

“Repeated bouts of heavy rainfall can occur over the same areas, increasing the risk for flooding,” the statement said. “Move to higher ground if you hear of flood warnings.”

Nearly 1,800 households in trailers provided directly by FEMA are unable to return yet to homes damaged or destroyed by hurricanes Laura and Delta in 2020, according to a news release last week. Another 1,600 trailers were deployed for Hurricane Ida’s displaced households, Howard said, and Louisiana has set out more than 4,400 RV trailers for Ida’s victims under a test program paid for by FEMA.

Anyone living in state or FEMA temporary housing needs to keep cellphones on and fully charged, with the volume high and severe weather alerts enabled, the agencies said.

“The danger is expected to be highest at night,” they added.

And, the release noted, the mobile homes and RV trailers are government property that cannot be moved.

As Mariupol hangs on, the extent of the horror not yet known

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — As Mariupol’s defenders held out Monday against Russian demands that they surrender, the number of bodies in the rubble of the bombarded and encircled Ukrainian city remained shrouded in uncertainty, the full extent of the horror not yet known.

With communications crippled, movement restricted and many residents in hiding, the fate of those inside an art school flattened on Sunday and a theater that was blown apart four days earlier was unclear.

More than 1,300 people were believed to be sheltering in the theater, and 400 were estimated to have been in the art school.

Perched on the Sea of Azov, Mariupol has been a key target that has been relentlessly pounded for more than three weeks and has seen some of the worst suffering of the war. The fall of the southern port city would help Russia establish a land bridge to Crimea, seized from Ukraine in 2014.

But no clear picture emerged of how close its capture might be.

“Nobody can tell from the outside if it really is on the verge of being taken,” said Keir Giles, a Russia expert at the British think tank Chatham House.

Over the weekend, Moscow had offered safe passage out of Mariupol — one corridor leading east to Russia, another going west to other parts of Ukraine — in return for the city’s surrender before daybreak Monday. Ukraine flatly rejected the offer well before the deadline.

Mariupol officials said on March 15 that at least 2,300 people had died in the siege, with some buried

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in mass graves. There has been no official estimate since then, but the number is feared to be far higher after six more days of bombardment.

For those who remain, conditions have become brutal. The assault has cut off Mariupol's electricity, water and food supplies and severed communication with the outside world, plunging residents into a fight for survival. Fresh commercial satellite images showed smoke rising from buildings newly hit by Russian artillery.

"What's happening in Mariupol is a massive war crime," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

Mariupol had a prewar population of about 430,000. Around a quarter were believed to have left in the opening days of the war, and tens of thousands escaped over the past week by way of a humanitarian corridor. Other attempts have been thwarted by the fighting.

Those who have made it out of Mariupol told of a devastated city.

"There are no buildings there anymore," said 77-year-old Maria Fiodorova, who crossed the border to Poland on Monday after five days of travel.

Olga Nikitina, who fled Mariupol for the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, where she arrived Sunday, said gunfire blew out her windows, and her apartment dropped below freezing.

"Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target," she said.

A long line of vehicles lined a road in Bezimenne, Ukraine, as Mariupol residents sought shelter at a temporary camp set up by Russian-backed separatists in the Donetsk region. An estimated 5,000 people from Mariupol have taken refuge in the camp. Many arrived in cars with signs that said "children" in Russian.

A woman who gave her name as Yulia said she and her family sought shelter in Bezimenne after a bombing destroyed six houses behind her home.

"That's why we got in the car, at our own risk, and left in 15 minutes because everything is destroyed there, dead bodies are lying around," she said. "They don't let us pass through everywhere — there are shootings."

Francesco Rocca, president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, urged Russia to abide by the Geneva Convention and allow humanitarian aid into the city.

In all, more than 8,000 people escaped to safer areas Monday through humanitarian corridors, including about 3,000 from Mariupol, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

Russian shelling of a corridor wounded four children on a route leading out of Mariupol, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

As Russia intensifies its effort to pound Mariupol into submission, its ground offensive in other parts of the country has become bogged down, slowed by lethal hit-and-run attacks by the Ukrainians. Western officials and analysts say the conflict is turning into a grinding war of attrition, with Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces using air power and artillery to pulverize cities from a distance.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the military's assessment, said Russia had increased air sorties over the past two days, carrying out as many as 300 in the past 24 hours, and has fired more than 1,100 missiles into Ukraine since the invasion began.

In a video address Monday night, Zelenskyy hailed those who have fought back against Russia.

"There is no need to organize resistance," he said. "Resistance for Ukrainians is part of their soul."

In the Russian-occupied southern city of Kherson on Monday, Russian forces shot into the air and fired stun grenades at protestors who were chanting "Go home!" Kherson early this month became the first major city to fall to Russia's offensive.

In the capital, Kyiv, a shopping center in the densely populated Podil district near the city center was a smoking ruin after being hit late Sunday by shelling that killed eight people, according to emergency officials. The attack shattered every window in a neighboring high-rise.

Russian military spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov charged that Ukrainian forces had been using the shopping mall to store rockets and reload launchers. That claim could not be independently verified.

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

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Amid the continuing shelling, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced a curfew extending from Monday evening through Wednesday morning.

Ukrainian authorities also said Russia shelled a chemical plant outside the eastern city of Sumy, sending toxic ammonia leaking from a 50-ton tank, and hit a military training base in the Rivne region of western Ukraine with cruise missiles.

In the Black Sea port city of Odesa, authorities said Russian forces damaged civilian houses in a strike Monday. The city council said no one was killed.

Russia's invasion has driven nearly 3.5 million people from Ukraine, according to the United Nations. The U.N. has confirmed over 900 civilian deaths but said the real toll is probably much higher. Estimates of Russian deaths vary, but even conservative figures are in the low thousands.

Talks between Russia and Ukraine have continued by video but failed to bridge the chasm between the two sides. The Kremlin has demanded that Ukraine disarm and declare itself neutral. Zelenskyy told Ukrainian television late Monday that he would be prepared to consider waiving any NATO bid by Ukraine in exchange for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Russian troops and a guarantee of Ukraine's security.

Zelenskyy also suggested Kyiv would be open to future discussions on the status of Crimea, which Russia seized in 2014, and the regions of the eastern Donbas region held by Russian-backed separatists. But he said that was a topic for another time, after a cease-fire and steps toward security guarantees.

Russia's Foreign Ministry warned that relations with the U.S. are "on the verge of a breach," citing "unacceptable statements" by U.S. President Joe Biden about Putin. Biden last week branded the Russian leader a war criminal.

In another worrying development, Ukraine's nuclear regulatory agency said radiation monitors around the decommissioned Chernobyl power plant, the site in 1986 of the world's worst nuclear meltdown, have stopped working.

The agency said that problem, and a lack of firefighters to protect the area's radiation-tainted forests as the weather warms, could mean a "significant deterioration" in the ability to control the spread of radiation in Ukraine and beyond.

Jackson pledges to decide cases 'without fear or favor'

By MARK SHERMAN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson pledged Monday to decide cases "without fear or favor" if the Senate confirms her historic nomination as the first Black woman on the high court.

Jackson, 51, thanked God and professed love for "our country and the Constitution" in a 12-minute statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee at the end of her first day of confirmation hearings, nearly four hours almost entirely consumed by remarks from the panel's 22 members.

Republicans promised pointed questions over the coming two days, with a special focus on her record on criminal matters. Democrats were full of praise for President Joe Biden's Supreme Court nominee.

With her family sitting behind her, her husband in socks bearing George Washington's likeness, Jackson stressed that she has been independent, deciding cases "from a neutral posture" in her nine years as a judge, and that she is ever mindful of the importance of that role.

"I have dedicated my career to ensuring that the words engraved on the front of the Supreme Court building — equal justice under law — are a reality and not just an ideal," she declared.

Barring a significant misstep, Democrats who control the Senate by the slimmest of margins intend to wrap up her confirmation before Easter. She would be the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, as well as the first Black woman on the high court.

Jackson's sternest Republican critics as well as her Democratic defenders all acknowledged the historic, barrier-breaking nature of her presence. There were frequent reminders that no Black woman had been nominated to the high court before her and repeated references to another unique aspect of her nomination: Jackson is the first former public defender nominated to be a justice.

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"It's not easy being the first. Often, you have to be the best, in some ways the bravest," Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the committee chairman, said in support.

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., spoke of the "joy" in the room and acknowledged her family's pride as Jackson's parents beamed behind her. Booker repeated a story Jackson has frequently told about a letter her youngest daughter wrote to President Barack Obama several years ago touting her mother's experience.

"We are going to see a new generation of children talking about their mamas and daring to write the president of the United States that my mom should be on the Supreme Court," Booker said. "I want to tell your daughter right now, that dream of hers is so close to being a reality."

In their opening statements, Democrats sought to preemptively rebut Republican criticism of her record on criminal matters as a judge and before that as a federal public defender and a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

Jackson "is not anti-law enforcement," and is not "soft on crime," Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said, noting that members of Jackson's family have worked in law enforcement and that she has support from some national law enforcement organizations. "Judge Jackson is no judicial activist."

The committee's senior Republican, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, promised Republicans would "ask tough questions about Jackson's judicial philosophy," without turning the hearings into a "spectacle."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., noted that Democrats had opposed some past Republican judicial nominees who were Black or Hispanic, and he said that he and his GOP colleagues wouldn't be deterred by Jackson's race from asking probing questions.

He said of some criticism from the left: "It's about, 'We're all racist if we ask hard questions.' That's not going to fly with us."

Graham was one of three Republicans to support Jackson's confirmation, 53-44, as an appellate judge last year. But he has indicated over the past several weeks that he is unlikely to vote for her again.

While few Republicans are likely to vote for her, most GOP senators did not aggressively criticize Jackson, whose confirmation would not change the court's 6-3 conservative majority. Several Republicans used their time to denounce Senate Democrats instead of Jackson's record.

The Republicans are trying to use her nomination 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.

With Jackson silently taking notes, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said in his opening statement that his research showed that she had a pattern of issuing lower sentences in child pornography cases, repeating comments he wrote in a Twitter thread last week. The Republican National Committee echoed his claims, which Hawley did not raise when he questioned Jackson last year before voting against her appeals court confirmation.

The White House, along with several Democrats at the hearing, has rejected Hawley's criticism as "toxic and weakly presented misinformation."

Former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, who is guiding Jackson as she navigates the Senate process, told reporters afterward that "she will be the one to counter many of those questions" from Hawley and others on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Hawley is one of several committee Republicans, along with 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 prefer not to pursue a scorched-earth approach to Jackson's nomination.

Her testimony will give most Americans, as well as the Senate, their most extensive look yet at the Harvard-trained lawyer with a broader resume than many nominees. She would be the first justice with significant criminal defense experience since Marshall.

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

The American Bar Association, which evaluates judicial nominees, has given her its highest rating, "well

qualified.”

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 after 28 years on the court.

Jackson once worked as a law clerk to Breyer early in her legal career. She had special praise for her former boss, saying she could never fill his shoes. “But if confirmed, I would hope to carry on his spirit,” Jackson said.

She also expressed her thanks and love to her husband, Patrick Jackson, a surgeon in Washington who wiped away tears. Their two daughters, one in college and the other in high school, sat in the audience beside him.

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.

While the focus was on the Senate hearings, the court was in session Monday, but one chair was empty. The 73-year-old Thomas, the longest-serving justice, was in the hospital being treated for an infection, but he does not have COVID-19, the court said.

20 days in Mariupol: The team that documented city’s agony

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 were the only international journalists left in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, and we had been documenting its siege by Russian troops for more than two weeks. 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 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,

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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 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 gunfire. 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

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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.

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.

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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 furiously, 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.

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 a remote mountainous area of southern China on Monday, officials said, setting off a forest fire visible from space in the country's worst air disaster in nearly a decade.

More than 18 hours after communication was lost with the plane, there was still no word about the fate of passengers and crew members, leaving families waiting to learn whether anyone survived.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China said the crash occurred near the city of Wuzhou in the Guangxi region. The plane was flying from Kunming in the southwestern province of Yunnan to the industrial center

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of Guangzhou along the east coast.

China Eastern Flight 5735 was traveling 455 knots (523 mph, 842 kph) at around 29,000 feet when it entered a steep and fast dive around 2:20 p.m. local time, according to data from flight-tracking website FlightRadar24.com. The plane plunged to 7,400 feet before briefly regaining about 1,200 feet in altitude, then dove again. The plane stopped transmitting data 96 seconds after starting to fall.

Local villagers were first to arrive at the forested area where the plane went down and sparked a blaze big enough to be seen on NASA satellite images. Hundreds of rescue workers were swiftly dispatched from Guangxi and neighboring Guangdong province.

The plane was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members, the CAAC said, correcting earlier reports that 133 people had been on board. It was about an hour into the flight, and nearing the point at which it would begin descending into Guangzhou, when it pitched downward.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an "all-out effort" by the rescue operation, as well as for an investigation into the crash and to ensure complete civil aviation safety.

Relatives of crew members arrived at a China Eastern office near the Kunming airport where the plane took off, state broadcaster CCTV reported. On Monday night, an Associated Press journalist saw police officers and security guards patrolling outside the office with flashlights, ordering journalists to leave.

At a hotel near the airport, about a dozen people, some in jackets identifying them as members of China's aviation agency, huddled around tables and read documents.

State media reported all 737-800s in China Eastern's fleet were ordered grounded. Aviation experts said it is unusual to ground an entire fleet of planes unless there is evidence of a problem with the model. China has more 737-800s than any other country — nearly 1,200 — and if identical planes at other Chinese airlines are grounded, it "could have a significant impact on domestic travel," said aviation consultant IBA.

Boeing 737-800s have been flying since 1998, and Boeing has sold more than 5,100 of them. They have been involved in 22 accidents that damaged the planes beyond repair and killed 612 people, according to data compiled by the Aviation Safety Network, an arm of the Flight Safety Foundation.

"There are thousands of them around the world. It's certainly had an excellent safety record," the foundation's president, Hassan Shahidi, said of the 737-800.

The plane was not a Boeing 737 Max, the planes that were grounded worldwide for nearly two years after deadly crashes in 2018 and 2019.

China's air-safety record has improved since the 1990s as air travel has grown dramatically with the rise of a burgeoning middle class. Before Monday, the last fatal crash of a Chinese airliner occurred in August 2010, when an Embraer ERJ 190-100 operated by Henan Airlines hit the ground short of the runway in the northeastern city of Yichun and caught fire. It carried 96 people and 44 of them died. Investigators blamed pilot error.

The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board tweeted Monday that it had picked a senior investigator to help with the crash investigation. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, which certified the 737-800 in the 1990s, said it was ready to help in the investigation if asked.

Chicago-based Boeing Co. said it was in contact with the U.S. safety board "and our technical experts are prepared to assist with the investigation led by the Civil Aviation Administration of China." Boeing shares fell 3.6% during trading in New York. The safety board said engine maker CFM, a joint venture between General Electric and France's Safran, would provide technical help on engine issues.

Crash investigations are usually led by officials in the country where the crash occurred, but they typically include the airplane's manufacturer and the investigator or regulator in the manufacturer's home country.

Shahidi said he expects investigators to comb through the maintenance history of the plane and its engines, the training and records of the pilots, air traffic control discussions and other topics.

Headquartered in Shanghai, China Eastern is one of the country's top three airlines, operating scores of domestic and international routes serving 248 destinations.

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

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Broadcaster CCTV said China Eastern set up nine teams to deal with aircraft disposal, accident investigation, family assistance and other pressing matters.

The CAAC and China Eastern both said they had sent officials to the crash site in accordance with emergency measures.

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

The accident quickly became a leading topic on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, with 1.34 billion views and 690,000 discussions. Many posts expressed condolences to the families of victims, while others questioned the planes' safety.

The twin-engine, single-aisle Boeing 737 in various versions has been flying for more than 50 years and is one of the world's most popular planes for short and medium-haul flights.

The 737 Max, a later version, was grounded for about 20 months after crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia killed 346 people. In December, China's aviation regulator cleared the Max to return to service, making the country the last major market to do so, although Chinese airlines have not yet resumed flying the 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.

Ukrainian refugees speak of bombs, half-empty cities, hunger

By SRDJAN NEDELJKOVIC and DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

MEDYKA, Poland (AP) — Yulia Bondarieva spent 10 days in a basement as Russian planes flew over and bombs were falling on the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. Having reached safety in Poland, Bondarieva's only wish now is for her twin sister in the besieged city of Mariupol to get out, too.

"They have been in the basement since Feb. 24, they have not been out at all," Bondarieva said. "They are running out of food and water."

Bondarieva, 24, managed to speak to her sister on the phone recently. The fear of what will happen to her in the encircled and bombed-out city that is going through some of the worst fighting in the war has been overwhelming.

"She does not know how to leave the city," Bondarieva said after arriving in the Polish border town of Medyka.

Before the war, Mariupol had a population of about 430,000, and about a quarter got out shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Leaving the besieged city later became nearly impossible. Tens of thousands escaped over the past week by way of a humanitarian corridor, including 3,000 on Monday, but other attempts have been thwarted by the fighting. The Mariupol City Council has asserted that several thousand residents were taken into Russia against their will.

Bondarieva said her sister told her of "Russian soldiers walking around the city" in Mariupol, and people not being allowed out.

"Civilians cannot leave," she said. "They don't give them anything."

In a sign of the dangers for civilians trying to flee, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Monday that Russian shelling along a humanitarian corridor had wounded four children who were among those being evacuated. He said the shelling took place in the Zaporizhzhia region, the initial destination of those fleeing Mariupol.

The battle for the strategic port on the Azov Sea raged on Monday, with Russian and Ukrainian soldiers fighting block-by-block. It's not known how many have died so far in Mariupol. City officials on March 15 said at least 2,300 people had been killed, with some buried in mass graves. There has been no official estimate since then, but the number is feared to be much higher after six more days of bombardment.

Maria Fiodorova, a 77-year-old refugee from Mariupol who arrived Monday in Medyka, said 90% of the city has been destroyed. "There are no buildings there (in Mariupol) any more," she said.

For Maryna Galla, just listening to birds singing as she arrived in Poland was blissful after the sound of shelling and death in Mariupol. Galla took a stroll in the park in Przemysl with her 13-year-old son, Danil. She hopes to reach Germany next.

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"It's finally getting better," Galla said.

The United Nations says nearly 3.5 million people have left Ukraine since the start of the Russian invasion, the largest exodus of refugees in Europe since World War II.

Valentina Ketchena arrived by train at Przemysl on Monday. She never thought that at the age of 70 she would be forced to leave her home in Kriviy Rig, and see the town in southern Ukraine almost deserted as people flee the Russian invasion for safety.

Kriviy Rig is now "half empty," said Ketchena. She will stay now with friends in Poland, hoping to return home soon. "It (is a) very difficult time for everyone."

Zoryana Maksimovich is from the western city of Lviv, near the Polish border. Though the city has seen less destruction than others, Maksimovich said her children are frightened and cried every night when they had to go to the basement for protection.

"I told my children that we are going to visit friends," the 40-year-old said. "They don't understand clearly what is going on but in a few days they are going to ask me about where their father is."

Like most refugees, Maksimovich had to flee without her husband — men aged 18 to 60 are forbidden from leaving the country and have stayed to fight. "I don't know how I will explain," she said.

Once in Poland, refugees can apply for a local ID number that enables them to work and access health, social and other services. Irina Cherkas, 31, from the Poltava region, said she was afraid her children could be targeted in Russian attacks.

"For our children's safety we decided to leave Ukraine," she said. "When the war ends we will go back home immediately."

Poland has taken in most of the Ukrainian refugees, more than 2 million so far. On Sunday evening, Ukrainian artists joined their Polish hosts in a charity event that raised more than \$380,000.

The star of the evening was a 7-year-old Ukrainian girl, whose video singing a song from the movie "Frozen" in a Kyiv bomb shelter has gone viral and drawn international sympathy.

Wearing a white, embroidered folk dress, Amellia Anisovych, who escaped to Poland with her grandmother and brother, sang the Ukrainian anthem in a clear, sweet voice as thousands of people in the audience waved their cellphone lights in response.

Biden warns US companies of potential Russian cyberattacks

By ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday urged U.S. companies to make sure their digital doors are locked tight because of "evolving intelligence" that Russia is considering launching cyberattacks against critical infrastructure targets as the war in Ukraine continues.

Addressing corporate CEOs at their quarterly meeting, Biden told the business leaders they have a "patriotic obligation" to harden their systems against such attacks. He said federal assistance is available, should they want it, but that the decision is theirs alone.

Biden said the administration has issued "new warnings that, based on evolving intelligence, Russia may be planning a cyberattack against us. ... The magnitude of Russia's cyber capacity is fairly consequential, and it's coming."

The president said the federal government is "doing its part" to prepare for an attack and warned the private-sector CEOs that it also is in the national interest that they do the same.

"I would respectfully suggest it's a patriotic obligation for you to invest as much as you can" in technology to counter cyberattacks, Biden told members of the Business Roundtable. "We're prepared to help you, as I said, with any tools and expertise we possess, if you're ready to do that. But it's your decision as to the steps you'll take and your responsibility to take them, not ours."

Biden's top cybersecurity aide, Anne Neuberger, expressed frustration at a White House press briefing earlier Monday that some critical infrastructure entities have ignored alerts from federal agencies to fix known problems in software that could be exploited by Russian hackers.

"Notwithstanding these repeated warnings, we continue to see adversaries compromising systems that

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use known vulnerabilities for which there are patches," said Neuberger, who is the president's deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technologies. "That makes it far easier for attackers than it needs to be."

The federal government has been providing warnings to U.S. companies of the threats posed by Russian state hackers since long before the country invaded Ukraine last month. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has launched a "Shields Up" campaign aimed at helping companies strengthen their defenses and has urged companies to back up their data, turn on multifactor authentication and take other steps to improve cyber hygiene.

Neuberger said there's no intelligence suggesting a specific Russian cyberattack against U.S. targets, but she did add that there has been increase in "preparatory activity," like scanning websites and hunting for vulnerabilities, that is common among nation-state hackers.

In a written statement earlier Monday, Biden said Russia could launch a cyberattack against U.S. targets as retaliation for "the unprecedented economic costs we've imposed" on Russia through sanctions. "It's part of Russia's playbook," Biden said.

The United States and its allies have put a slew of sanctions in place aimed at crippling the Russian economy, and Biden recently announced the U.S. is sending more anti-aircraft, anti-armor weapons and drones to help Ukraine.

John Hultquist, a vice president of intelligence analysis at the cybersecurity firm Mandiant, said cyberattacks gives Russia the ability to punch back.

"Cyberattacks are a means for them to exact costs without crossing a major red line," he said.

Russia is considered a hacking powerhouse but its offensive cyberattacks since it invaded Ukraine have been muted compared to what some feared. Russia has carried out significant cyberattacks against Ukraine in years past, including the devastating NotPetya attack in 2017 that spread far and wide and caused more than \$10 billion in damage globally.

Neuberger said Russia cyberattacks against Ukraine are ongoing, though she did not provide specifics. She said the Biden administration has made clear there will be consequences if Russia engages with the U.S. in cyberspace.

"We're not looking for a conflict with Russia. If Russia initiates a cyberattack against the United States, we will respond," she said.

The Russian Embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Biden aides to Congress: Fund COVID aid, don't cut budget

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress should provide the \$22.5 billion President Joe Biden wants for continuing the battle against COVID-19 without cutting other programs to pay for it, senior administration officials said Monday.

And if Republicans continue to insist that additional federal efforts to combat the pandemic must be paid for by culling spending elsewhere, the GOP should specify what it wants to cut, the officials said.

The remarks came nearly two weeks after a new round of COVID-19 funding was pulled out of a \$1.5 trillion government-wide measure after rank-and-file Democrats rejected cuts that party leaders had negotiated with Republicans to pay for it. Though Biden signed the overall bill into law, the deletion of the COVID-19 funds was a major setback for Biden and Democrats.

"Our concern right now is that we are going to run out of money to provide the types of vaccines, boosters, treatments to the immunocompromised, and others free of charge that will help to continue to battle" the pandemic, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday.

Top House Democrats have said they believe they will have to find savings to pay for the additional spending to move legislation through Congress. The biggest hurdle would be in the Senate, where Democrats will need at least 10 GOP votes to reach the 60 votes needed to move most significant bills to passage.

The White House has said the government is running out of funds for vaccines, testing and treatments, even as Omicron variant BA.2, which is fueling a virus resurgence in Europe and Asia, is appearing in-

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creasingly in the U.S.

The senior administration officials said the government has bought the doses it would need to vaccinate children up to age 5. But they said they only have enough vaccines to administer a fourth shot — which drug makers are recommending for many people — to those with compromised immune systems.

The officials spoke only on condition of anonymity as a requirement for reporters to participate in the telephone briefing.

Republicans say savings to pay for the new expenditures should be found from the trillions that Congress has already provided since the pandemic began two years ago. That includes a \$1.9 trillion measure Democrats pushed through Congress over unanimous GOP opposition a year ago.

Asked about the administration officials' comments, a spokesperson for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., referred a reporter to comments McConnell made on CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday.

McConnell said Republicans would consider the administration's request but said they should use "some of this massive amount that was spent last year that's not out the door yet. So let's take a look at how to pay for it, and then we'll be happy to decide whether or not to support it."

GOP leaders say the administration has not provided figures they've sought on how much money remains unspent. The administration officials in Monday's call said they've repeatedly provided plentiful data on the subject, and said Republicans have agreed to not require savings to pay for past emergencies.

Only around \$300 billion of last year's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief measure remains unspent and not legally committed to a specific program or recipient, the administration officials said.

But around \$240 billion of that has been promised to specific recipients like states and cities, who have built the amounts into their budgets, the administration officials said. The administration has held back some of the rest for emergencies, they said.

More than \$100 billion of the money that's so far unspent is for pandemic aid to state and local governments, and nearly that amount is for assistance to some pension plans, according to administration documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Biden's pandemic spending request had been pared down to \$15.6 billion as part of the compromise House bill. It would have been partly paid for by cutting billions in COVID-19 aid that last year's bill had provided to 30 state governments but had not yet been sent to them.

Many Democrats refused to vote for the overall package until the cuts in state aid were removed, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., ultimately agreed to do. Top Republicans had demanded the savings in exchange for supporting the legislation, and Pelosi dropped all the COVID-19 spending after substitute cuts were not found.

Takeaways: Jackson makes history, GOP vows no 'spectacle'

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — History was made Monday the instant Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the first Black woman nominated to the Supreme Court.

President Joe Biden promised he would choose a Black woman for the job and the 51-year-old Harvard-trained Jackson emerged as an early favorite, having won support from the Senate several times before, including a year ago to be an appellate court judge. Democrats have the potential votes in the 50-50 Senate to confirm Jackson, to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer, even if all Republicans line up opposed.

Some takeaways from the first day of Jackson's confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HISTORY IS MADE

"Today is a proud day for America," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the committee chairman, as he opened the historic hearing.

It's taken 233 years to arrive at this moment, the first Black woman nominated to be a justice on the Supreme Court, which once upheld racial segregation in America.

Yet as history is being made, it is also carrying echoes of an earlier ground-breaking era.

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Senators on the Republican side are criticizing Jackson's record as too soft on crime, much the way Southern senators in 1967 linked race and crime during a time of riots in cities nationwide when Thurgood Marshall, the storied civil rights lawyer, was nominated by President Lyndon B. Johnson to be the first Black justice.

Jackson would be the first federal public defender on the court, and Marshall as a civil rights lawyer worked around the country defending Black Americans often facing trumped up charges.

DEFENDING 'GRAND EXPERIMENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY'

Jackson told the senators that if confirmed to the court, she would work "to support and defend the Constitution and this grand experiment of American democracy."

The judge's own life story is part of that history. She told senators that she stands before them on the shoulders of giants — including her own parents, public school teachers, who left segregated Florida for a better life in Washington, D.C.

She was born in the aftermath of the civil rights era, and her parents gave her an African name — "Ketanji Onyika," which they were told means "lovely one," she explained. They taught her that unlike the barriers they faced, that if she worked hard, "I could do anything or be anything I wanted to be."

The judge is no stranger to the committee, having been confirmed three times before. Senators have said over and over again what a pleasure it has been meeting one-on-one with Jackson, who is open and engaging. Her family and friends sat behind her, including her husband of 25 years, surgeon Patrick Jackson, and two daughters. One of her daughters once drafted a letter to Barack Obama, saying her mom should be nominated for the court.

The audience also was filled with the nation's leading civil rights leaders and representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus.

A judge now for the past 10 years, Jackson told the senators she decides cases from a "neutral posture" after evaluating the facts applying the law "without fear or favor."

SENATORS CAN'T QUIT KAVANAUGH

The top Republican, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, insisted his side of the aisle won't turn the weeklong-hearing into the "spectacle" of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination in 2018, which exploded over allegations of sexual assault from high school. Kavanaugh denied the allegations.

Yet, senators on the Republican side kept referencing the Kavanaugh hearings, which blew up as Democrats brought forward the assault allegations and he delivered a blustery defense of beer-drinking and high school.

"This will not be a political circus," assured Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

"No one is going to inquire into your teenage dating habits," he said. "No one is going to ask you with mock severity 'Do you like beer?'"

Republican who don't have the votes to stop Jackson's confirmation want to at least remind voters of that politically charged chapter, which many believe cost the Democrats Senate seats in that year's election.

But as Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said to Jackson Monday, "This hearing really should be about you, not about us."

IT'S NOT ABOUT RACE, UNTIL IT IS

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said during opening remarks that while he believes "the court should look like America" — giving a nod to Jackson's historic nomination — he also signaled he won't shy from asking hard questions of the nominee.

"We're all racist if we ask hard questions.' That's not going to fly with us," he said.

But the imagery is stark on the all-white, largely Southern Republican side of the aisle, as the mostly male senators question and criticize Jackson's record, and demand a fuller accounting of her judicial philosophy.

"This is not about race," Cruz said.

Durbin opened the hearing reminding the senators that Jackson isn't the only one facing this moment in history.

"Consider how history will judge each senator as we face our constitutional responsibility to advise and

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consent," he said.

JUDGING THE JUDGE, AND THE SENATORS

While Jackson is the one appearing before the Judiciary committee, the senators are also being judged in how they handle her historic nomination — particularly those potentially running for president in 2024.

Potential presidential hopeful Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., set the tone even before the hearings began, raising concerns that Jackson gave child pornography defendants lighter sentences than required.

"I'm not interested in trying to play gotcha," Hawley said as he laid out his concerns Monday, "I'm interested in her answers."

Fact checkers have said Hawley is selectively choosing the cases, including many in which prosecutors in fact also sought more lenient sentences than federal sentencing guidelines.

"There have been some accusations that we cherry-picked some of Judge Jackson's criminal cases," Grassley said. "Don't worry. We're going to talk about the other ones too."

While Hawley jumped out in front with his questions, Cruz, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark. and others are not ready to cede the spotlight during the hearings.

Spring break shootings: Miami Beach emergency brings curfew

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — City of Miami Beach officials declared a state of emergency on Monday and an upcoming curfew, bidding to curb violent incidents at spring break that saw five people wounded in two separate shootings.

Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber and City Manager Alina Hudak announced the emergency order at an afternoon news conference. It includes a curfew for the South Beach area that starts early Thursday after midnight and runs through the weekend.

The city commission will hold an emergency meeting Tuesday to discuss the declaration, and Hudak said she plans to recommend the curfew be extended through the next weekend.

Thousands of college students and other young people gather annually in Miami Beach for spring break, and this is the second year in a row that officials for the South Florida city have declared a state of emergency in this famed partying spot.

The mayor said about 100 guns have been seized over the past four weeks, and several police officers have been injured while controlling the crowds.

"We can't endure this anymore. We just simply can't," Gelber said. "This isn't your father or your mother's spring break. This is something wholly different."

Gelber noted that the five people were shot over the weekend despite 371 police officers being deployed.

Three people were wounded early Sunday on a street crowded with spring breakers in the city's South Beach neighborhood, police said. Two victims wounded at the scene were taken to a hospital, while doctors at another hospital reported a third person arrived there with a gunshot wound. All were expected to survive.

Early Monday, officers were patrolling about a block from the Sunday morning shooting site when they heard gunshots, police said. The officers found two women with gunshot wounds. Police said their wounds weren't life-threatening.

At the urging of some residents, city officials have been working in recent years to crack down on unruly behavior in South Beach. But efforts to curb the excessive drinking and violence have raised complaints about racism, classism and business practices.

More than 1,000 people were arrested last March, when the city imposed an 8 p.m. curfew. Authorities at the time sent military style vehicles to disperse predominantly Black crowds with rubber bullets, prompting criticism from Black activists.

New corporate climate change disclosures proposed by SEC

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Companies would be required to disclose the greenhouse gas emissions they produce and how climate risk affects their business under new rules proposed Monday by the Securities and Exchange Commission as part of a drive across the government to address climate change.

Under the proposals adopted on a 3-1 SEC vote, public companies would have to report on their climate risks, including the costs of moving away from fossil fuels, as well as risks related to the physical impact of storms, drought and higher temperatures caused by global warming. They would be required to lay out their transition plans for managing climate risk, how they intend to meet climate goals and progress made, and the impact of severe weather events on their finances.

The number of investors seeking more information on risk related to global warming has grown dramatically in recent years. Many companies already provide climate-risk information voluntarily. The idea is that, with uniform required information, investors would be able to compare companies within industries and sectors.

"Companies and investors alike would benefit from the clear rules of the road" in the proposal, SEC Chairman Gary Gensler said.

The required disclosures would include greenhouse gas emissions produced by companies directly or indirectly — such as from consumption of the company's products, vehicles used to transport products, employee business travel and energy used to grow raw materials.

The SEC issued voluntary guidance in 2010, but this is the first time mandatory disclosure rules were put forward. The rules were opened to a public comment period of around 60 days and they could be modified before any final adoption.

Climate activists and investor groups have clamored for mandatory disclosure of information that would be uniformly required of all companies. The advocates estimate that excluding companies' indirect emissions would leave out some 75% of greenhouse gas emissions.

"Investors can only assess risks if they know they exist," Mike Litt, consumer campaigns director of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, said in a prepared statement. "Americans' retirement accounts and other savings could be endangered if we don't acknowledge potential liabilities caused by climate change and take them seriously."

"Climate risks and harms are growing across our communities with threats to our economy," said Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Fla., chair of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. "Investors, pension fund managers and the public need better information about the physical and transition-related risks that climate change poses to hard-earned investments,"

On the other hand, major business interests and Republican officials — reaching down to the state level — began mobilizing against the climate disclosures long before the SEC unveiled the proposed rules Monday, exposing the sharply divided political dynamic of the climate issue.

Hester Peirce, the sole Republican among the four SEC commissioners, voted against the proposal. "We cannot make such fundamental changes without harming" companies, investors and the SEC, she said. "The results won't be reliable, let alone comparable."

The SEC action is part of a governmentwide effort to identify climate risks, with new regulations planned from various agencies touching on the financial industry, housing and agriculture, among other areas. President Joe Biden issued an executive order last May calling for concrete steps to blunt climate risks, while spurring job creation and helping the U.S. reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Biden has made slowing climate change a top priority and has set a target to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 52% below 2005 levels by 2030. He also has said he expects to adopt a clean-energy standard that would make electric power carbon-free by 2035, along with the wider goal of net-zero carbon emissions through the economy by 2050.

"This is a huge step forward to protect our economy and boost transparency for investors and the public," White House national climate adviser Gina McCarthy tweeted as the SEC acted.

The premier business lobby, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the American Petroleum Institute, the

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oil industry's top trade group, expressed objections in letters to the SEC last year.

Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs at API, said Monday the group is concerned that the SEC's proposal could require disclosure of information that isn't significant for investors' decisions, "and create confusion for investors and capital markets."

"As the (SEC) pursues a final rule, we encourage them to collaborate with our industry and build on private-sector efforts that are already underway to improve consistency and comparability of climate-related reporting," Macchiarola said in a statement.

The threat that opponents could take the SEC to court over the regulations has loomed.

Last June, a group of 16 Republican state attorneys general, led by Patrick Morrissey of West Virginia, raised objections in a letter to SEC Chairman Gensler. "Companies are well positioned to decide whether and how to satisfy the market's evolving demands, for both customers and investors," they said. "If the (SEC) were to move forward in this area, however, it would be delving into an inherently political morass for which it is ill-suited."

Morrissey previously threatened to sue the SEC over expanded disclosures from companies of environmental, social and governance information.

Alaska Rep. Don Young to lie in state at US Capitol

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Don Young, the longest-serving Republican in House history, will lie in state in the U.S. Capitol on March 29, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Monday.

Young's office announced the congressman's death in a statement Friday night. He was 88.

Young, who was first elected to the House in 1973, was known for his brusque style and for bringing federal investment to the state. He was elected in 2020 to serve his 25th term as Alaska's only member.

Pelosi's office said a formal ceremony will be held with the Young family, which will be open to invited guests. Following the memorial service, there will be viewing open to members of Congress. Lying in state is an honor traditionally bestowed upon American political and military leaders. Young will lie in state in National Statuary Hall.

Pelosi had said after Young's passing that he was an "institution" in Congress.

"The photographs of him with ten presidents of both parties who signed his bills into law that proudly cover the walls of his Rayburn office are a testament to his longevity and his legislative mastery," she said.

President Joe Biden said few legislators left a greater mark on their state than Young.

"Don's legacy lives on in the infrastructure projects he delighted in steering across Alaska," Biden said.

Most recently, Young won \$23.7 million for Alaska for water, road and other projects in the government-wide \$1.5 trillion spending bill Biden signed into law this week, according to an analysis of that bill by The Associated Press. It is one of the highest amounts for home-district projects that any House member had in the legislation.

Earlier, he was one of only 13 Republicans who voted for a roughly \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects, which he described as perhaps the country's "last best chance" to make the federal investments necessary to strengthen the country's infrastructure needs for the next century and beyond.

Young came to Alaska in 1959, the same year Alaska became a state, and credited Jack London's "Call of the Wild," which his father used to read to him, for drawing him north.

Young served as chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee from 1995 to 2001 and then as the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee from 2001-2007.

As gas prices rise, towns add electric car charging stations

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

ASBURY PARK, N.J. (AP) — A wave of new electric vehicle charging stations across the country is coming as interest in alternatives to gasoline-powered vehicles is on the rise and could heighten further due to a global spike in gasoline prices.

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Though most of the plans were in the works before already high gas prices surged because of the war in Ukraine, the timing may work in favor of electric vehicle makers and other proponents of ditching fossil fuels.

From coast to coast, cities big and small are adding charging stations for electric vehicles. Strong demand is forecast for the vehicles, despite their higher prices and limited availability, meaning even more communities will feel pressure to add charging stations or risk having motorists pass them by in favor of plug-in-friendly places.

The publicly funded investments come as gasoline prices in most of the country are above \$4 a gallon and significantly more in some spots.

On Monday, New Jersey officials awarded \$1 million in grants to install electric vehicle charging stations in 24 tourist areas around the state. The idea was to help spur tourism by reassuring visitors who own electric vehicles that they can come to a vacation spot in New Jersey and not run out of power to get back home.

"Don't worry about it," said Joseph Fiordaliso, president of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. "We have the equipment here so that you don't have to have range anxiety."

Spots getting money for new charging stations include Asbury Park, Atlantic City, Ocean City and several state parks and forests.

The money comes from the state budget. On Tuesday, NJ Transit, the state's public transportation agency, will unveil electric charging stations at a bus depot in Camden, outside Philadelphia.

There are now about 625 vehicle charging stations in New Jersey

On the federal side, the city of Hoboken, just outside New York City, is getting up to six new charging stations in a deal also announced Monday. U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez said the money from a federal spending bill "will help ease our transition to electric vehicles, reduce emissions, and create a cleaner environment for our children."

Governments across the country are doing likewise. Bellingham, Washington will add 90 charging stations over the next two years. Portland, Maine, recently entered into a 10-year agreement with a company that will install, operate and maintain more than 40 electric vehicle charging stations on publicly owned property.

Charleston, West Virginia, just added two charging stations at a public parking garage. Charlotte, North Carolina, Cleveland and Saginaw, Michigan, are among cities adding charging stations.

It's happening in other countries, too. Glasgow, Scotland, is adding 164 new stations this year.

Almost half a million electric vehicles were sold in the U.S. last year, according to Kelly Blue Book.

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 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

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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. 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.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, speaking Monday at Saint Anselm College's New Hampshire Institute of Politics, a frequent stop for presidential candidates, continued to offer his own criticism of Trump, slamming those who have spoken admiringly of Russian President Vladimir Putin and calling Trump "dead wrong about the election."

"It's over, everybody. You know the reason I know? Joe Biden is sleeping in Donald Trump's bed,"

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Christie said. "And we need as a party to move forward. We can't look backwards. We can't be a party of vindictiveness and vendettas. We cannot be a party of settling scores 'for me.' We have to be a party of creating opportunity and inspiration 'for us.'"

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.

"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.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe seeks freedom for remaining Iran hostages

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Former Iranian captive Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe said Monday that brushing her young daughter's hair was one of her greatest joys upon returning home after almost six years of detention, and appealed for all of Iran's remaining hostages to be reunited with their families as well.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a dual British-Iranian citizen who went to Tehran in 2016 to visit her parents when her daughter was a toddler, was released last week after Britain settled a decades-old debt to Iran. She said she was grateful to be free but her journey wouldn't be complete until the others return home. In particular, she cited the case of Morad Tahbaz, a U.K.-born environmentalist who was left out of the deal that secured her freedom.

"I believe that the meaning of freedom is never going to be complete until such time that all of us who are unjustly detained in Iran are reunited with our families," Zaghari-Ratcliffe said at a news conference that included Tahbaz's daughter.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe and retired civil engineer Anoosheh Ashoori were released Wednesday amid efforts by Britain, the U.S. and other countries to secure freedom for dozens of dual nationals who they say have been held in Iran on trumped-up charges to squeeze concessions out of Western nations. Iran, which doesn't recognize dual citizenship, has charged the detainees with crimes such as espionage and sentenced them to long prison terms under harsh conditions.

The breakthrough came as world leaders try to negotiate the return of both Iran and the U.S. to an international agreement limiting Tehran's nuclear enrichment program — talks that have been complicated by the prisoner issue.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe said Monday that people like her shouldn't be used as pawns in international disputes. She also criticized the U.K. government, and the five foreign secretaries who directed British foreign policy during her captivity, for failing to win her release sooner.

"I was told many, many times, 'Oh, we're going to get you home.' But that never happened," she said. "What's happened now should have happened six years ago."

Prior to Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release, the British government agreed to pay an almost 400 million-pound debt that stemmed from an arms deal canceled after the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979. Lawmaker Tulip Siddiq, who campaigned for Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release, has asked a House of Commons committee to investigate why it took so long to pay the debt and bring the U.K. citizens home.

When Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Ashoori were freed, the British government said it had also negotiated Tahbaz's release on furlough, though he would remain in Iran while additional details were worked out.

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Tahbaz's case is complicated by the fact that he holds U.S citizenship as well as British and Iranian ones. His attorney in Iran, Hojjat Kermani, said Monday that Tahbaz was never released on furlough. Instead, he was only allowed to see his family in Tehran for 48 hours under the supervision of armed guards, then was returned to custody.

In another twist, Tahbaz was taken to a hotel on Sunday but then returned to Evin Prison on Monday. "From the outset, we were always assured by the (Foreign Office) that my father would be included in any deal that was made to release all of the hostages, so we're truly devastated knowing now that this was not the case," said his daughter, Roxanne Tahbaz.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe refused to discuss any details about her time in captivity, declining to answer questions such as how she found the strength to persevere through months of solitary confinement or whether there were any acts of kindness shown by her prison guards.

She was more comfortable talking about the elation she felt walking off the airplane that reunited her with her husband and 7-year-old daughter early Thursday morning.

"That moment was precious," she said. "I have been waiting for that moment for such a long time, and I was overwhelmed, specifically to get to know Gabriella and Richard after such a long time."

During the press conference, Zaghari-Ratcliffe repeatedly looked into the audience and smiled as she made eye contact with Gabriella. Richard would occasionally reach over to hold her hand. The man who campaigned tirelessly to bring her home pronounced himself ready to step back from public life and help the family heal.

Not that this will be easy.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe seemed to be craving normality — the chance to braid her daughter's hair or take on the school run so she could meet her child's friends. After the press conference, she said, the family hopes for privacy.

"Gabriella told me on the phone one day I was in Iran, 'Mummy, you do realize that you are very famous — and then it's me, and then it's daddy,'" Zaghari-Ratcliffe said, drawing laughter from the reporters. "And then I said, 'It's not good to be famous because you won't have a normal life.' ... And she was like, 'Oh, you're not going to be famous forever. Maximum a week.'"

"So we're bracing ourselves for a week of fame, then we're just going to have a normal family."

NCAAs: Coach K's farewell tour extended through next weekend

By JIM LITKE AP Sports Columnist

Mike Krzyzewski's farewell tour was this close to over.

Duke trailed Michigan State 70-65 with 5:10 left to play Sunday and there was next to nothing he could do about it.

"I'm an Army guy," recalled Krzyzewski, who played for Bobby Knight at West Point and started his coaching career there. "But it looked like our ship was sinking."

From the moment in June when Krzyzewski announced his 42nd season would be his last, it was bound to be all about him. And really, how could it be otherwise? Coaches have always been the enduring stars of the college game and no one since John Wooden lit up the firmament like Coach K.

Now imagine being a kid in a Blue Devils uniform and watching that light flicker.

"We can either lay down," freshman Paolo Banchero recalled thinking, "or turn it up."

Duke responded with a 20-6 run the rest of the way. The 6-foot-10 Banchero steamrolled Michigan State's Joey Hauser on a drive to the biggest bucket of the night for a 75-74 lead. Jeremy Roach followed with a 3-pointer to stretch the lead to four with 1:16 left. Krzyzewski won't officially become a spectator until this one last run through the NCAA Tournament ends with a loss, but he's already learning to enjoy the view.

"You guys were terrific, man," Krzyzewski told the players sitting alongside him after Duke notched an 85-76 win over the Spartans to advance to the Sweet 16 and a matchup with Texas Tech. "I'm so — I'm really proud to be your coach."

Coach K has been hoarse since the tournament started, but he insisted on making a point. "It had

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nothing to do with coaching in those last four or five minutes," he said. "It all had to do with heart and togetherness."

That might be overstating the case, since talent is a more reliable measure of success than emotion. But not in every case.

Just ask 10th-seeded Miami, which handcuffed Auburn's Jabari Smith and Walker Kessler — both likely NBA lottery picks — en route to the day's biggest upset, a 79-61 beatdown of the No. 2 Tigers.

"It's the first time that we got it handed to us," Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said. "We didn't know how to respond."

Or for that matter, 11th-seeded Iowa State, which tipped No. 3 Wisconsin 54-49 in Milwaukee, just a fast hour's drive from the Badgers' campus in Madison. Wisconsin had Johnny Davis, the Big Ten player of the year, a hard-earned reputation for taking care of the ball — a nation-low average of 8.4 turnovers per game — and a frenzied crowd behind it.

But the Badgers ominously gave the ball away eight times in the first half alone and didn't shoot much better. Davis was 0 for 7 from 3-point range and his teammates weren't much better, just 2 for 15.

"Shot the ball uncharacteristically poor today. Turned the ball over. We're No. 1 in the country in fewest turnovers. Today," coach Greg Gard summed up, "we were not."

If it's any consolation, two more Big Ten teams joined the Badgers in heading for the exit.

Seventh-seeded Ohio State pulled within 60-58 of No. 2 Villanova with just under six minutes left and then went colder than cold. Instead of panicking, the Wildcats got two turnovers and cranked up the defense, pulling away to a 71-61 victory as the Buckeyes missed six of their final seven shots from the floor.

Coach Jay Wright has been quietly building a Coach K-caliber program, having won national championships in both 2016 and 2018. That kind of continuity pays dividends.

"This is what happens when you play great teams and it's happened to you before, and you can fight through it. If you haven't done it, it's hard, you can panic," Wright said. "But all these guys have been there."

Houston, a Final Four team last season, should have been able to rely on experience. Instead, the fifth-seeded Cougars lost their two best players, guards Marcus Sasser and Tramon Mark, to season-ending injuries and were forced to retool with three transfers. But Taze Moore stepped up with 21 points and Jamal Sheard added 18 in what turned out to be a comfortable 68-53 win Sunday over Illinois.

"We got a brand-new bunch," Houston coach Kelvin Sampson said afterward. "But the culture never changes."

Kofi Cockburn, the Illini's All-American center, knows that feeling only too well. He passed up a shot at the NBA last year in search of some redemption. Instead, Illinois got bounced on the tournament's opening weekend for the second straight year.

"We always want to leave with with a good feeling, you know?" Cockburn said. "We fell short. Can't really put it into words."

Doctors finding hurdles to using pills to treat COVID-19

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

High-risk COVID-19 patients now have new treatments they can take at home to stay out of the hospital — if doctors get the pills to them fast enough.

Health systems around the country are rushing out same-day prescription deliveries. Some clinics have started testing and treating patients in one visit, an initiative that President Joe Biden's administration recently touted.

The goal is to get patients started on either Pfizer's Paxlovid tablets or Merck's molnupiravir capsules within five days of symptoms appearing. That can prevent people with big health risks from growing sicker and filling up hospitals if another surge develops.

But the tight deadline has highlighted several challenges. Some patients are delaying testing, thinking they just had a cold. Others have been unwilling or unable to try the new drugs.

With vaccines and treatments available, "we can make this much more manageable in the future, if people are willing to take care of themselves," said Dr. Bryan Jarabek, who helps lead COVID-19 treatment

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and vaccination efforts for the Minnesota health system M Health Fairview.

The Food and Drug Administration authorized the drugs last year. Doctors hailed the pills as a huge advance in the fight against COVID-19 partly because of their convenience compared to other treatments that require infusions or injections.

But patients can miss the pills' short window if they dismiss symptoms like a headache or sniffles and wait to see if they go away before seeking help.

Stanford's Dr. Thomas Lew said he's seen high-risk and unvaccinated people who have waited more than a week. Some hospitalized patients on oxygen have told him they thought nothing of their first symptoms.

"They say everyone in the family decided it was a cold or allergy season is coming up, but it was COVID all along," he said.

People delay seeking help for many health problems, not just COVID-19, Lew noted. But when it comes to the virus, the doctor believes patients may not be aware of the tight deadline.

Even those who get tested quickly, however, sometimes refuse the pills, doctors say.

Jarabek estimates that 30% to half of the patients who qualified for the antiviral pills turned down the treatments in his health system earlier this year.

He said some people didn't consider themselves high risk or didn't think they were sick enough to need the pills, which are free to patients. They also worried about side effects or how the drugs would interact with other medications.

Jeff Carlson couldn't try Paxlovid when COVID-19 hit him in January because it might interfere with his heart medications. The 61-year-old suburban St. Paul, Minnesota, resident has Type 1 diabetes and heart disease.

A doctor asked him to try molnupiravir about three days after he started feeling symptoms. By then, Carlson couldn't get off his couch. His fever had soared and he was struggling to breathe.

His wife picked up the prescription and a few days later, Carlson felt well enough to shovel snow.

"It turned me around basically in a matter of ... pretty much 18 hours after I took the first dose," he said.

Some health care providers have started free delivery services for Paxlovid or molnupiravir.

New York City has established a hotline patients can call if they test positive for the coronavirus. They can talk to a care provider if they don't have a doctor and have pills sent to them if they are a good candidate.

The Mass General Brigham health system in Boston started a similar program that ships pills to some patients via FedEx.

Raymond Kelly received a package of Paxlovid about three hours after a doctor cleared him for the prescription last month. The 75-year-old Needham, Massachusetts, resident said he caught the virus despite being vaccinated and receiving a booster shot.

His doctor was on the phone with him minutes after the health system notified him that he had tested positive.

"It was all sort of blur because it was going on so quickly," Kelly said.

Mass General Brigham aims to treat patients quickly and solve transportation problems with its program. Dr. Scott Dryden-Peterson noted that some COVID-19 patients may not be able to pick up pills, especially since they should be staying off buses and ride-sharing services.

"Transportation is not equally distributed in our society," he said.

For patients with transportation, the drugstore chain CVS Health has started "test to treat" programs at its nearly 1,200 stores with MinuteClinic locations. Pharmacists cannot test and treat, so that program won't happen at all stores.

Other retailers like the grocer Kroger also plan to test and treat at some locations. The Biden administration has called for federally qualified community health centers to do the same, but Health Secretary Xavier Becerra recently told The Associated Press that the "test to treat" initiative could be hampered by a funding impasse with Congress.

Chicago's Cook County Health has run drive-through COVID-19 testing since the beginning of the pandemic. It is planning to pilot a program that adds treatments. Patients will be able to drive to one of the tents, get tested, wait about 15 minutes for the result and then talk to a doctor through telemedicine,

said Dr. Greg Huhn.

With options for quick care growing, doctors and public health officials say now is the time for people to stock up on at-home tests.

Testing supplies that ran short during the omicron surge have since rebounded, said Neil J. Sehgal, a University of Maryland health policy expert. But he noted that future supplies also will depend on federal funding.

Doctors say people at high risk of developing health problems from COVID-19 need to remain vigilant for symptoms and seek help quickly, especially if another surge develops.

"It may not be the time to let your guard down," Huhn said.

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 clench 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

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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.

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 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.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 22, the 81st day of 2022. There are 284 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On March 22, 1894, hockey's first Stanley Cup championship game was played; home team Montreal defeated Ottawa, 3-1.

On this date:

In 1765, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act to raise money from the American colonies, which fiercely resisted the tax. (The Stamp Act was repealed a year later.)

In 1882, President Chester Alan Arthur signed a measure outlawing polygamy.

In 1941, the Grand Coulee hydroelectric dam in Washington state officially went into operation.

In 1945, the Arab League was formed with the adoption of a charter in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1963, The Beatles' debut album, "Please Please Me," was released in the United Kingdom by Parlophone.

In 1978, Karl Wallenda, the 73-year-old patriarch of "The Flying Wallendas" high-wire act, fell to his death while attempting to walk a cable strung between two hotel towers in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In 1988, both houses of Congress overrode President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

In 1993, Intel Corp. unveiled the original Pentium computer chip.

In 1997, Tara Lipinski, at age 14 years and 10 months, became the youngest ladies' world figure skating champion in Lausanne, Switzerland.

In 2010, Google Inc. stopped censoring the internet for China by shifting its search engine off the mainland to Hong Kong.

In 2019, special counsel Robert Mueller closed his Russia investigation with no new charges, delivering his final report to Justice Department officials. Former President Jimmy Carter became the longest-living chief executive in American history; at 94 years and 172 days, he exceeded the lifespan of the late former President George H.W. Bush.

In 2020, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered all nonessential businesses in the state to close and nonessential workers to stay home. Kentucky Republican Rand Paul became the first member of the U.S. Senate to report testing positive for the coronavirus; his announcement led Utah senators Mike Lee and Mitt Romney to place themselves in quarantine.

Ten years ago: Coroner's officials ruled singer Whitney Houston died by drowning the previous February, but that heart disease and cocaine use were contributing factors. In a dramatic end to a 32-hour standoff, a French SWAT team slipped into the Toulouse apartment of an Islamic extremist suspected of seven killings, sparking a firefight that ended with the suspect jumping out the window and being fatally shot in the head.

Five years ago: A knife-wielding man plowed a car into pedestrians on London's Westminster Bridge, killing four people, then stabbed an armed police officer to death inside the gates of Parliament before being shot dead by authorities. A northern Wisconsin man went on a shooting rampage, killing two of his wife's co-workers, her divorce attorney and a police officer before being shot by police; he died 10 days later in the hospital. Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch wrapped up two days of Senate questioning to glowing GOP reviews but complaints from frustrated Democrats that he had concealed his views from the American public.

One year ago: A man opened fire at a crowded supermarket in Boulder, Colorado, killing 10 people, including one of the first police officers to respond. (The suspect, Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, has so far been found mentally incompetent to stand trial.) Former Los Angeles Lakers star Elgin Baylor, an 11-time NBA All-Star, died at the age of 86.

Today's Birthdays: Evangelist broadcaster Pat Robertson is 92. Actor William Shatner is 91. Former Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, is 88. Actor M. Emmet Walsh is 87. Actor-singer Jeremy Clyde is 81. Singer-guitarist

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George Benson is 79. Writer James Patterson is 75. CNN newscaster Wolf Blitzer is 74. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber is 74. Actor Fanny Ardant is 73. Sportscaster Bob Costas is 70. Country singer James House is 67. Actor Lena Olin is 67. Singer-actor Stephanie Mills is 65. Actor Matthew Modine is 63. Actor-comedian Keegan-Michael Key is 51. Actor Will Yun Lee is 51. Olympic silver medal figure skater Elvis Stojko is 50. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., is 49. Actor Guillermo Diaz is 47. Actor Anne Dudek is 47. Actor Cole Hauser is 47. Actor Kellie Williams is 46. Actor Reese Witherspoon is 46. Rock musician John Otto (Limp Bizkit) is 45. Actor Tiffany Dupont is 41. Rapper Mims is 41. Actor Constance Wu is 40. Actor James Wolk is 37.