

Groton Daily Independent

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“Connecting with others is rewarding; it makes us feel like we're not alone in the world.”

-Jonah Berger

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

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.uslbm.com/careers and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

Vender Fair

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

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

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

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February Students of the Month



Pierce Kettering
Senior



Elliana Weismantel
Junior



Dillon Abeln
Sophomore



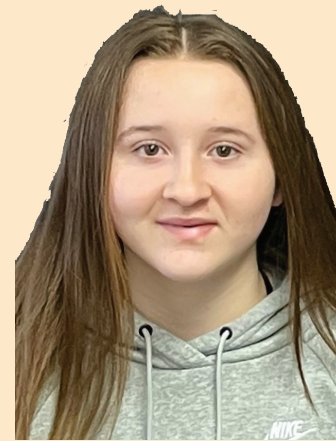
Blake Pauli
Freshman



London Bahr
Eighth Grade



Halee Harder
Seventh Grade



Sydney Locke
Sixth Grade

These students have been named the February Students of the Month.

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

Gov. Noem Signs Remaining Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem has signed all remaining bills into law.

SB 79 clarifies cross-references regarding powers of attorney.

SB 107 provides for the remote witnessing of certain legal instruments.

SB 152 provides for ticket-in, ticket-out video lottery.

HB 1096 revises provisions regarding livestock identification.

HB 1117 revises a certain provision regarding standard nonforfeiture amounts for individual deferred annuities.

HB 1152 establishes rights regarding the disposition of a person's remains.

HB 1156 revises provisions regarding weed removal along highways.

HB 1176 grants immunity from certain liabilities for camping activities.

HB 1289 updates provisions regarding self-service storage.

Governor Noem has signed 246 bills into law and vetoed four this legislative session. No further bills are awaiting executive action by the Governor.

Gov. Noem Vetoes Three Bills

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem vetoed three bills: Senate Bill 151, House Bill 1223, and House Bill 1281.

You can view Noem's response of these bills on the following pages.

Governor Noem has signed 237 bills into law and vetoed four this legislative session.

Gov. Noem Signs Housing Bill into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem has signed HB 1033, which makes an appropriation for the provision of housing infrastructure loans and grants, into law.

In signing the bill, Governor Noem sent a letter to the South Dakota State Legislature discussing her decision while outlining some points of consideration that the Legislature may address prior to when the bill is set to go into effect on June 27, 2022. You can find that letter to legislators on Page 10 and 11 of today's GDI.



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

March 25, 2022

Dear Mr. President and Members of the Senate,

I respectfully return to you Senate Bill 151 with my VETO. Senate Bill 151 is an Act to revise the automatic removal of certain convictions from a background check record.

This bill provides for the automatic removal from a public background check for Class 1 misdemeanors related to the use or possession of marijuana or any of its derivatives. It also essentially codifies a convicted person's ability to be dishonest about their previous arrest and conviction by not requiring disclosure of the prior drug conviction.

Current South Dakota law does allow for automatic removal for low-level Class 2 misdemeanors. However, Senate Bill 151 expands that policy for marijuana crimes, carving out special exceptions for marijuana, thereby making the use and possession of marijuana the only Class 1 misdemeanors to have an automatic removal in state law.

This bill is also retroactive, which is bad precedent for criminal justice issues where fairness is paramount. Further, even with the legalization of medical cannabis, there must remain consequences for using illegal drugs at a time when the use and possession of marijuana, even for alleged medical purposes, was illegal. Looking ahead, if this bill were to become law, the automatic removal of any future conviction for the use or possession of marijuana in South Dakota would be for the recreational use of this drug or for the use or possession not in accordance with our state's medical cannabis program.

I believe in second chances. Our current laws and criminal procedures already provide sufficient avenues for people who have earned that second chance. But those individuals must at least show good cause or a need for such relief, such as suspended imposition of sentence procedures, county youth diversion programs, or executive clemency that can be requested online at no cost.

For these reasons, I oppose Senate Bill 151 and ask that you sustain my veto.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kristi Noem".

Kristi Noem
Governor



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

March 25, 2022

Dear Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives,

I respectfully return to you House Bill 1223 with my VETO. House Bill 1223 is an act that modifies parental rights and revises certain informed consent provisions related to a pregnant minor's health care decisions.

The bill as drafted allows for a doctor to treat a pregnant minor even in the absence of any parental involvement. I appreciate the drafters' good intentions, and I agree that protecting the health of any mother and their child is critically important. But there are flaws in the language of the bill that require a veto.

First, House Bill 1223 states that if a parent withholds consent to treatment, then the minor may give consent instead. As a parent to three children and now a grandparent, I know that this bill erodes parental rights in a way that ultimately hurts families. Parents' constitutional rights include the right to care, custody, and control of their children. That includes the right to make healthcare decisions for their child.

There are limited exceptions to parental rights where the law allows the state to intercede and act in the best interests of the child, but House Bill 1223 does not recognize those well-established exceptions.

As originally drafted, the bill stated that a parent's decisions about their child's healthcare could be overridden if the parent *unreasonably* withheld consent for the child's care. But that word was stricken from the bill by the time it reached my desk. Under House Bill 1223, a parent could *reasonably* withhold their consent for a health procedure for their child, and the doctor could *ignore* the parent's reasonable objection. What if the parent simply wants a second opinion? After all, doctors often disagree. House Bill 1223 would wrongfully allow a doctor to ignore the parent's request for a second opinion for their child's health care.

Second, House Bill 1223 is not necessary. Physicians are currently able to treat minors without parental consent, pursuant to SDCL 20-9-4.2, when delaying care to obtain that consent would create risks to the life or health of the minor. That law has been on the books for nearly 40 years. While I know there were anecdotes shared during committee testimony that were troubling, in this case, there was no meaningful data provided to show that SDCL 20-9-4.2 is inadequate to protect the life and health of a pregnant minor.

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While I believe many who voted for this bill were well intentioned, these concerns require me to oppose it. South Dakota must stand as an example for the rest of the country that we respect both parental rights and the health of their children. This bill fails to properly account for both of those interests.

For these reasons, I oppose House Bill 1223 and ask that you sustain my veto.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kristi Noem", is written over the typed name and title.

Kristi Noem
Governor



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

March 25, 2022

Dear Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives,

I respectfully return to you House Bill 1281 with my VETO. House Bill 1281 is an act to clarify the contents of the general appropriations act for fiscal year 2023, pertaining to certain federal moneys and to declare an emergency.

South Dakota is one of the most financially sound states in the country. Our state is top-3 in the nation for fiscal stability, we have a AAA credit rating, we have passed a balanced budget for 133 consecutive years, and our state pension plan was 102% funded at the end of February 2022.

Financial success and stability of that magnitude and longevity is not an accident, and it is further enhanced by our sound budgeting and accounting principles. We do not use accounting gimmicks or tricks to balance our budget, we never use one-time money for ongoing expenses, and we have an annual appropriations process with a part-time, citizen Legislature.

South Dakota has built our firm financial standing over the decades through a partnership between the executive branch and the legislative branch, in particular through a close working relationship between the Bureau of Finance and Management, the Joint Appropriations committee, and the Legislative Research Council's fiscal staff.

Over the past two years, our state has received an unprecedented level of federal funding due to the passage of several COVID-19 pandemic relief bills. I share many of your concerns with the billions of dollars in taxpayer money being thrown around by the federal government. I believe strongly that the state should use those funds to strengthen our economy for the long term.

I do not want the unique federal activity over the last two years to upset our state's long-standing, commonsense approach to budgeting – an approach that has led to 133 consecutive years of balanced budgets. House Bill 1281 marks a stark departure from that process.

HB 1281 Veto Statement
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I recognize the desire of some legislators to have a greater level of involvement in the allocation of these federal relief funds. However, House Bill 1281 includes a number of logistical and technical deficiencies. While House Bill 1281 may seem simple in principle, it is unworkable in practice and would have many unintended consequences. For instance, House Bill 1281:

1. Lacks clarity on which agencies are impacted, when they are impacted, and the amount of budget impact;
2. Increases bureaucracy with unnecessary accounting and budget transfers;
3. Reduces transparency by forcing budget transfers that do not accurately reflect the true base budget;
4. Fails to recognize that because highway construction is continuously appropriated and not part of the base budget, construction projects could instead be considered a "new program" under this bill that requires approval by the Joint Committee on Appropriations. As of March 14, 2022, the Department of Transportation has over \$350 million of transportation projects under construction, contract, or advertised for letting. Expenditures for these nearly 300 projects will likely cross over the federal fiscal year, the state fiscal year, and the calendar year; and
5. Duplicates hearings adding additional Joint Appropriations Committee hearings where statutory directives already require existing public boards to hold such hearings.

The bottom line is this: House Bill 1281 creates a complicated, at times duplicative, new process that makes it more difficult to understand and account for the operations of state government. In doing so, it places unnecessary burdens on legislators, LRC staff, and agencies.

I am concerned about legal weaknesses that arise when a legislative proposal is not put through the usual public hearing process. Due process in the legislative session means South Dakota taxpayers are given advance notice of a hearing and a meaningful opportunity to be heard. That did not happen with House Bill 1281. The public will not be able to find even one recorded public hearing on the final language of House Bill 1281.

Within House Bill 1281, legal deficiencies are evident throughout. Section 10 of House Bill 1281 deserves special mention due to three significant legal defects:

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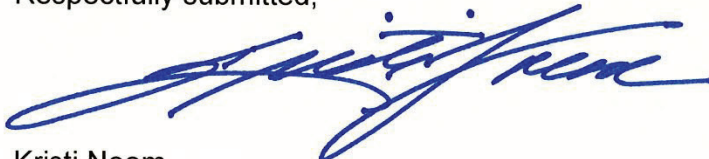
1. Improperly allows the Joint Interim Committee on Appropriations to undo the majority of the Legislature's vote on the Fiscal Year 2023 budget bill. The bill does so by granting that Committee the authority to appropriate (or refuse to appropriate) funds, even when the authority to spend was already addressed in the general appropriations bill passed by the entire Legislature;
2. Increases the scope and authority of the Joint Interim Appropriations Committee, even beyond what the Legislature has authorized it to do in Joint Rule 7-12. This unnecessarily complicates the process and weakens the authority of the other 87 Legislators who are not serving on the Joint Interim Appropriations Committee; and
3. Improperly seeks to give the Joint Interim Committee on Appropriations authority over the issuance of federal funds that are required, by state law, to be held in trust for airport sponsors and administered in accordance with the terms of federal mandates. See SDCL 50-4-4 through 50-4-6.

Given these practical implementation problems and legal impediments, I have chosen to veto House Bill 1281, and I ask you to sustain my veto. I commit to engage with the Legislature to create a system by which we can achieve the goals that motivate House Bill 1281. I want conversation and input to continue on these extraordinary federal relief funds before any new programs are rolled out.

As part of this commitment, I have asked incoming Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger to establish a new protocol to communicate with the Legislature as any new COVID grants or relief funds are received. I do not believe legislation is necessary to achieve these goals, so long as we are all willing to work together based on common trust and good faith.

That is my commitment to the Legislature, and I ask you to sustain my veto.

Respectfully submitted,



Kristi Noem
Governor



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

March 25, 2022

RE: 2022 House Bill 1033

Dear Senators and Representatives of the South Dakota Legislature,

South Dakota has the strongest economy in the nation, but one of our primary economic challenges is lack of available housing for those who wish to live and work in our state. As new businesses come to our state, generating more and better-paying jobs, we need more career housing for the resulting growth in our workforce.

In my December 2021 budget address, I proposed \$200 million for infrastructure grants to facilitate infrastructure for career housing across the state. The goal of my proposal was to make career housing more attainable by reducing infrastructure costs that otherwise would have been passed on to home buyers. The 2022 Legislature agreed with my request and appropriated \$150 million in general funds plus an additional \$50 million of federal funds to be used for housing infrastructure.

That appropriation is a major victory for South Dakota and a significant investment that could make a real difference. There is widespread desire for a career housing infrastructure plan that creates affordable career housing for South Dakotans who are enjoying the arrival of new and higher paying career opportunities.

However, the legislation was finalized in the last week of the 2022 Session with details different from what my administration thought was the best path forward. No legislation is perfect, and House Bill 1033 is certainly no exception.

In the form it was delivered to my desk, the funding in House Bill 1033 is allocated to the Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF) held by the South Dakota Housing Development Authority (SDHDA), which is an "independent public instrumentality" pursuant to SDCL 11-11-10. Under current law, HOF is "targeted toward low to moderate-income families and individuals" – meaning it could be used by those earning no more than 115 percent of the area median income (AMI) for a community. See SDCL 11-13-2 and SDCL 11-13-7.

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Housing infrastructure as described in Section 5 of House Bill 1033 is not targeted to a family or individual, so this apparent defect in the bill creates uncertainty because of the statutorily required "targeting" under current South Dakota law. That uncertainty creates risks for the SDHDA and those seeking grants or loans to consider, and that risk may result in red tape and delays.

Furthermore, there are two additional points for consideration:

1. While House Bill 1033 is a special appropriation that authorizes the expenditure of funds for "housing infrastructure," SDCL 11-13-5 was not amended to authorize the expenditure of the same by the SDHDA.
2. The ARPA funding referred to in Section 1(2) of House Bill 1033 is federal fund expenditure authority. The SDHDA will need to comply with federal law to obtain access to these funds, potentially as a sub-recipient, and expend those dollars in compliance with evolving federal guidance.

While the details of the infrastructure program in House Bill 1033 are not what I requested, I am hopeful the SDHDA can make the 2022 legislation work for South Dakota.

I have signed House Bill 1033, and by its own terms is set to go into effect on June 27, 2022. The Legislature may correct these drafting oversights, and I am hopeful that the Legislature will be able to deliver the needed statutory clarification before grants and loans will be made.

It's always a blessing to be able to call South Dakota home, and it's an exciting time to work and live in South Dakota. Thank you for your commitment and service to the State of South Dakota.

Sincerely,



Kristi Noem
Governor

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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!!!



Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Jackelopes 22, Coyotes 16 ½, Foxes 13, Chipmunks 12, Shih Tzus 11 ½, Cheetahs 9

Men's High Games: Mike Siegler 244, Brody Sombke 219, 201, TJ Sperry 211, Lance Frohling 202

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 170, Dar Larson 169, Nicole Kassube 166

Men's High Series: Brody Sombke 577, Mike Siegler 562, Brad Waage 550

Women's High Series: Nicole Kassube 472, Lori Wiley 455, Sue Stanley 448

POPS Concert set for April 3rd

The Groton Area High School music department will present its annual POPS Concert on Sunday, April 3, at 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. in the high school gym. Tickets will not be sold in advance. Admission is \$5.00 at the door.

The concert will feature performances from the award-winning Prismatic Sensations Show Choir and High School Flex Band, as well as many talented soloists. There will be no reserved seating, and seats do fill up quickly, so plan on arriving early to get a great view of the show! The doors will open one hour prior to show time. This concert is one of the highlights of the year for the music department, and you do not want to miss it!

Come on out, have some Coca-Cola and popcorn, and enjoy performances by many of our music department's students!

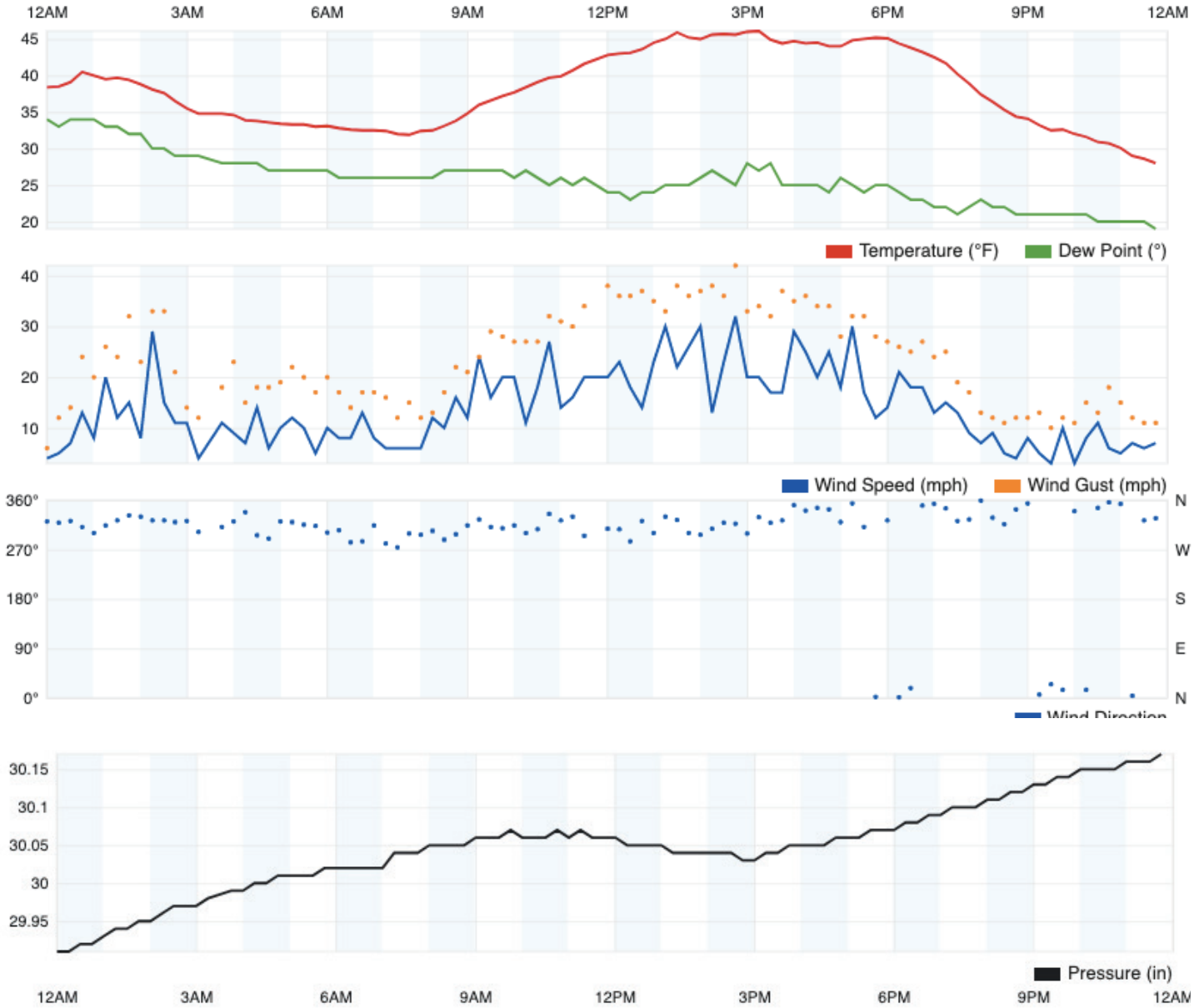
If you have card tables that the music department may borrow for the day, please label them with your name and drop them off at the high school or e-mail Mrs. Yeigh at desiree.yeigh@k12.sd.us to arrange a pick up.

The 2 p.m. POPS Concert will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 37 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 17 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 41 °F

Sunday
Night



Partly Cloudy


Low: 27 °F

Monday




Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 56 °F

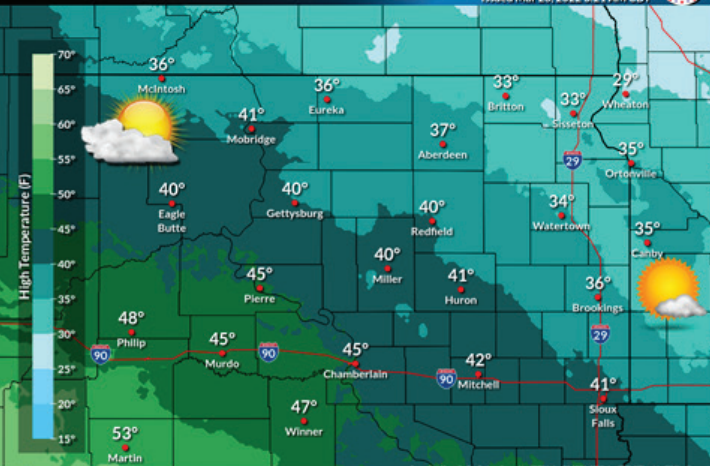


A Chilly Saturday and Saturday Night



High Temperatures for Today

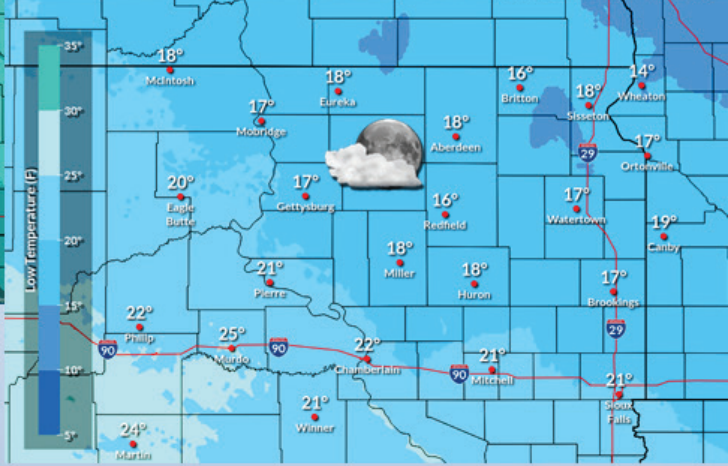
Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Mar 26, 2022 3:21 AM CDT



COOL

Overnight Lows


Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Mar 26, 2022 3:01 AM CDT




COLD

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

<http://weather.gov/Aberdeen>

 NWS Aberdeen

 @NWSAberdeen

It does not feel like the end of March! Northwest winds aloft and a high pressure system moving in from Canada will keep temperatures chilly through the day and into tonight. Otherwise, mostly sunny east of the James River with a mix of clouds and sun west of the James River. Partly to mostly cloudy skies tonight through early Sunday morning.

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Today in Weather History

March 26, 1977: During the early morning, severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 1 mile NE of Watertown in Codrington County. Also, hail up to 1.50 inches in diameter fell in Milbank, Grant County.

March 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell over most of central South Dakota, as well as in the northern Black Hills. Heavier accumulations included 14 inches at Murdo, 13 inches at Lead, and 12 inches at Eureka, and Leola. Only a few traffic accidents were reported, although many other vehicles slid into ditches. There was some damage to power lines and poles. Some livestock losses were feared, as the snow fell during the calving season, although this could not be assessed in the short term.

March 26, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across the Northern Plains brought heavy snow from 6 to 15 inches in a band across much of central and northeast South Dakota from the evening to the early morning hours. Schools were delayed or canceled and road travel was difficult, if not impossible. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Stephan, Willow Lake, Harrold, Miller, and near Hoven; 7 inches at Hayti, east of Hayes, and Eagle Butte; 8 inches at Highmore and Doland; 9 inches at Orient, Bryant, and near Onida; 10 inches at Gettysburg and Faulkton; 11 inches at Seneca and Redfield. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches 23 miles north of Highmore; 13 inches near Agar; 15 inches 24 miles north of Highmore.

1913 - The Ohio River Basin flood reached a peak. Ten inch rains over a wide area of the Ohio River Basin inundated cities in Ohio, drowning 467 persons, and causing 147 million dollars damage. The Miami River at Dayton reached a level eight feet higher than ever before. The flood, caused by warm weather and heavy rains, was the second mostly deadly of record for the nation. (David Ludlum)

1948: Good Friday tornadoes moved from Terre Haute to Redkey, Indiana killing 20 people. About 80% of the town of Coatesville was destroyed, and 16 people were killed. The Coatesville Carnegie Library was a total loss. The path was a half mile wide.

1954 - The temperature at Allaket, AK, plunged to 69 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1971 - Parts of northern and central Georgia experienced their worst snow and ice storm since 1935. Two day power outages ruined two million eggs at poultry hatches. Two persons were killed when a tree landed on their car. (25th-26th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front crossing the Plateau Region produced high winds in Utah causing some property damage. Winds gusted to 51 mph at Salt Lake City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 73 degrees at Flagstaff AZ, 90 degrees at Sacramento CA, 95 degrees at Santa Maria CA, 95 degrees at Los Angeles CA, 99 degrees at Tucson AZ, and 100 degrees at Phoenix AZ set records for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - The Easter Bunny brought record warm temperatures to the central U.S. while such records were still welcome. A dozen cities reported record warm readings, including Dodge City KS with an afternoon high of 88 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 51 mph at Dodge City, and reached 55 mph at Salina KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fair weather prevailed across the nation for the second day in a row. Freezing temperatures were reported in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region in the wake of an early spring snowstorm. Afternoon highs were again in the 70s and 80s in the southeastern U.S., and for the ninth day in a row, temperatures in the southwestern U.S. reached the 90s. (The National Weather Summary)

2009: The proof is in the pudding - A NOAA Weather Radio can save your life. Near Belk, AL, a family was alerted to a tornado by their weather radio; they went to their storm cellar. They heard the "jet roar" of the EF1 tornado as it damaged their home; they were unhurt.

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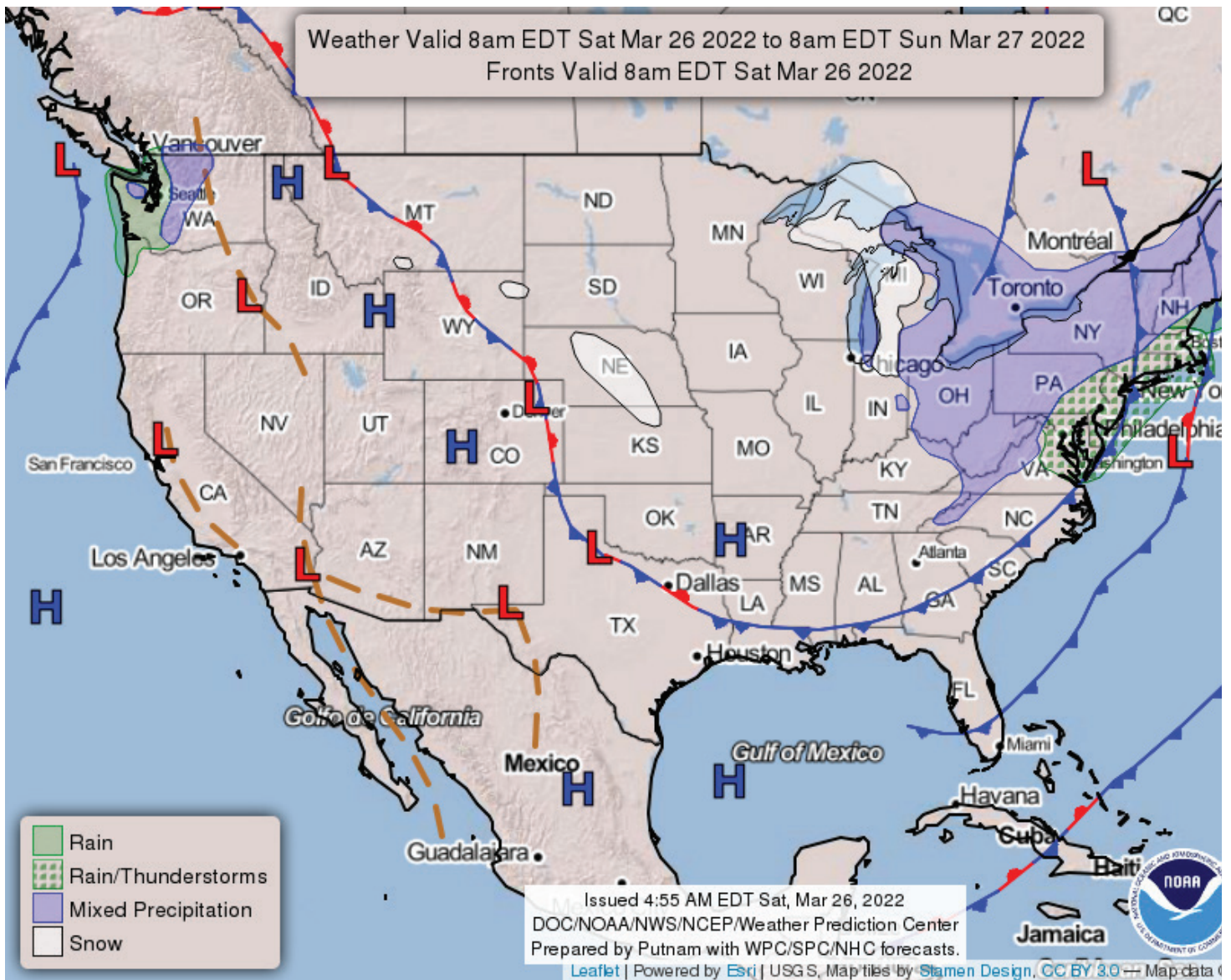
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 3:03 PM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 11:41 PM
Wind: 43 mph at 1:30 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 74 in 1905
Record Low: -13 in 1964
Average High: 47°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.70
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.02
Average Precip to date: 1.87
Precip Year to Date: 0.99
Sunset Tonight: 7:54:06 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19:57 AM



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WILL WE EVER FIND PEACE?

Our planet seems to be wrapped in wars, rumors of wars, and the fear that we will never be able to end the threats and actions of terrorists. Caution and fear are now a way of life, and the hope for a calm and peaceful life is gone forever. We are reminded that "the war to end all wars" really did not meet our expectations. We live from one day to the next expecting that a new war might begin at any moment. Then, there are the "wars" between people.

"I am for peace!" cried the Psalmist. He knew and had experienced the horror of war. He was, as we are, "war-weary" and wanted things to be different. Notice that just before he called for peace, he wrote, "Too long have I lived among those who hate peace." What did he mean when he said he lived among people who would choose war over peace? Do some people want a war-filled world?

War is the result of deception and deceit, greed and covetousness. It is a reflection of those who have not accepted the peace that comes from God through Christ. It had its beginning in the self-centeredness of Adam and Eve and has infected every individual since then. We see it not only among nations but between individuals: "If you have it and I don't, I'll take it and make it mine!"

All of this is a result of the infectious nature of sin. Whether the "war" is between individuals or nations, its effect will last until Christ returns. Then, we'll have peace.

What are we to do until then? Allow the peace of God to dwell in our hearts and control our lives. His peace will protect us from those who refuse His grace and mercy.

Prayer: Lord, we long for Your peace - in our hearts and in Your world. Help us to be peacemakers in a world that doesn't seem to want peace. Come quickly and calm our every fear. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war. Psalm 120:7

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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 Friday:

Mega Millions

03-13-42-51-58, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 2

(three, thirteen, forty-two, fifty-one, fifty-eight; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$181 million

Louisville, Lady Vols to battle for a spot in Elite Eight

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — The women's basketball program that Jeff Walz has built at Louisville over the past 15 years resembles in so many ways the juggernaut Pat Summitt built at Tennessee, with one important exception: winning a national championship.

The Lady Vols piled up eight of them. The Cardinals are 0 for 2 in title games.

The programs are set to meet in Saturday night's NCAA Tournament regional semifinals, where a resurgent bunch of Lady Vols led by Kellie Harper — one of Summitt's brightest stars — will be trying to return to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2016 and a plucky bunch of Cardinals will be trying to make it there for the fourth consecutive tournament.

"Expectations are good. I've learned if there's not expectations for your ballclub, you don't normally have a job very long," said Walz, who has led the Cardinals to the Final Four three times, with the last trip coming in 2018.

"But we're in a situation where I still think people wonder how we keep winning," Walz continued. "How do we keep doing it? How do we keep getting ourselves to a point where we can get a 1-seed, or we're competing in the Sweet 16 or the Elite Eight? Our players respond to that. They respond to the pressure."

They haven't been under too much pressure yet in the Wichita Region, where No. 3 seed Michigan faces No. 10 seed South Dakota in the other semifinal Saturday. The top-seeded Cardinals (27-4) blew out Albany before cruising past Creighton in the second round, setting up a date with the fourth-seeded Lady Vols at INTRUST Bank Arena.

"We're playing a program that's obviously got a ton of tradition," Walz said.

For its part, Tennessee (25-8) is trying to return to its rightful place atop the women's college basketball pecking order. The Lady Vols went to 18 Final Fours under Summitt (not including the old AIAW days), but have not been to a national semifinal since 2008 when they won her eighth and final national championship.

The program fell into a period of mediocrity under Holly Warlick, leading to her firing in March 2019 and Harper's return to Knoxville. COVID-19 short-circuited the 2020 postseason and the Lady Vols didn't make it past the second round last season, but Harper has them once again thinking about playing on the game's biggest stage.

"It's more of just embracing the opportunity that we have, making it to the Sweet 16," Lady Vols star Tamari Key said. "I know we are really excited for this opportunity — every opportunity — we get to play another basketball game."

UNDERDOG COYOTES

The Wolverines (24-6) breezed through American and No. 11 seed Villanova to reach the semifinals and a most unexpected opponent: South Dakota. The Coyotes (29-5) had never made it through the first round before knocking off Mississippi last week, then they did one better by dumping perennial powerhouse Baylor in the second round.

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SPEAKING OF NEWCOMERS ...

While the Coyotes may be the loveable underdogs, the Wolverines haven't had a whole lot more NCAA Tournament success. They lost to Baylor in overtime in last year's NCAA Tournament in their only other Sweet 16 trip.

"I think we've been the underdog. That started last year when we made our tournament run," Michigan guard Leigha Brown said. I think that's when we're the most successful. I think we're the best when we're playing with a chip on our shoulder."

STAR SEARCH

Louisville's Hailey Van Lith has one of the sweetest shots in the nation in the tournament, scoring 41 points through the first two rounds. She could go head to head with Rae Burrell, who had 19 points for the Lady Vols in their win over Buffalo.

The Wolverines feature Naz Hillmon, the Big Ten player of the year, who is averaging a near-double-double with 21.3 points and 9.6 boards. South Dakota will counter with Summit League player of the year Chloe Lamb.

INJURY OUTLOOK

It remains a longshot that Tennessee will have leading scorer Jordan Horston available this week. She dislocated her left elbow in February and doctors said at the time it could take up to eight weeks for the injury to properly heal.

FAMILY BUSINESS

To say that Louisville guard Kianna Smith was destined to play basketball would be an understatement. Her grandfather, Fred Smith, starred at Hawaii before playing for the Milwaukee Bucks. Her father, John, played at UNLV and now coaches at Cal Poly. Her uncle, Steve, was an assistant for the Connecticut Sun and older brother Jamal played at Fullerton.

"When I was young I didn't really like it. I brought coloring books to my dad's practices," she said Friday, "but as I got older and watched the game a lot more, I enjoyed the bond it created between me and my dad. I think it shaped me as a player."

Noem blocks bill giving lawmakers more control over funds

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem vetoed a bipartisan bill Friday that would have given legislators more control over spending federal aid.

Noem wrote in her veto message to lawmakers that giving them more oversight over the spending would create a complicated process that would be hard to understand and track. She also noted that the bill never got a public hearing and legislative control of the money could undo spending that's already been allocated in the state budget.

Noem had warned earlier that the bill would slow down delivery of money to people who need it and called the proposal "bad government" in a Youtube video.

The bill still passed the House and Senate earlier this month with more than two-thirds support in each chamber. Supporters said more oversight is needed as the Biden administration pumps billions of dollars for pandemic relief and infrastructure development.

If the two-thirds support in each chamber holds lawmakers would have enough votes to override the veto.

Noem vetoes bill removing pot charges from background checks

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem has vetoed a bill that would have removed old marijuana charges from South Dakotans' criminal background checks.

The Rapid City Journal reported Friday that Noem had vetoed the bill. The measure would have automatically removed simple marijuana charges and convictions from public background records if the violation was more than five years old. The person also would have had to fulfill sentencing and probation requirements and have no subsequent arrests.

The governor said in a letter to legislators that the bill would have allowed someone convicted of mari-

juana chares to hide their criminal history.

The bill's chief sponsor, Sen. Mike Rohl, said he doesn't think he can muster enough votes between the House and Senate to override the veto.

Boxer dies after needing medical aid at South Dakota bout

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A boxer died a day after he required medical attention following a bout in Rapid City, according to USA Boxing.

The boxer was a contender in the Elite Male Division at the South Dakota Golden Gloves boxing show on Saturday.

USA Boxing said that after his match, the "boxer required medical attention, which was provided by the ringside doctor and emergency medical personnel, who transported the boxer to a local hospital."

The organization did not identify the boxer, but later said that he died Sunday at a hospital.

The Rapid City Journal reported that the boxer is from North Dakota.

North Dakota Local Boxing Committee President Danny Pruneda ordered all affiliated gyms in North Dakota to close for one day in memory of the boxer, the newspaper reported.

Tom Griffiee, an organizer for South Dakota Golden Gloves, said the incident was being investigated.

South Dakota hires firm to track cannabis from seed to sales

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Health has hired a New York-based software company to help monitor the flow of marijuana in the state's legal medical marijuana market.

The Argus Leader reports the contract with Metrc was finalized this month. Metrc will use "radio-frequency identification" to track cannabis from seed to sale.

The company will monitor and record the life stages of all cannabis plants and the products they eventually end up in. The process was called for as a public safety precaution within the voter-approved initiated measure that legalized medical marijuana.

All licensed cannabis businesses in South Dakota, from dispensaries to cultivators, are required to participate in the health department's tracking program. They can use different software, but must interface with Metrc.

So far, the Department of Health has certified 32 dispensary licenses, one manufacturer license and 10 cultivator licenses.

Metrc's contract with the state runs through 2027. The company will be paid \$320,000.

South Dakota is the 20th governmental entity in the United States to partner with Metrc for seed-to-sale tracking. The company uses software to collect data from growers, testers and distributors. The data used by state regulators to ensure program rules are being followed.

Live updates: Ukrainian official: Russians enter Slavutych

By The Associated Press undefined

LVIV, Ukraine -- The governor of the Kyiv region says that Russian forces have entered the city of Slavutych and seized a hospital there.

Slavutych is located north of Kyiv and west of Chernihiv, outside the exclusion zone that was established around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant after the 1986 disaster. It is home to workers at the Chernobyl site.

Governor Oleksandr Pavlyuk said Saturday that the Russians also kidnapped the city's mayor, but some media reported later in the day that the mayor was released swiftly. Neither claim could be verified independently.

The governor said that residents of Slavutych took to the streets with Ukrainian flags to protest the Russian invasion.

"The Russians opened fire into the air. They threw flash-bang grenades into the crowd. But the residents

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did not disperse, on the contrary, more of them showed up," Pavlyuk said.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Shelled city of Chernihiv in northern Ukraine fears becoming 'next Mariupol'
 - The Associated Press has independently documented at least 34 assaults on Ukrainian medical facilities by Russian forces
 - Russian President Vladimir Putin faces stark choices in Ukraine invasion as armed forces stall
 - Ukrainian fashion brand in bombed city picks up and flees
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

LVIV, Ukraine — Authorities in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, have announced a new 35-hour curfew in the city.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said the curfew will run from 8 p.m. local time on Saturday to 7 a.m. on Monday, with local residents allowed to leave their homes only to get to a bomb shelter.

Klitschko said that shops, pharmacies, gas stations and public transport will not be operating during the curfew.

ISTANBUL — Turkey's defense ministry says a "mine-like" object has been "neutralized" at the northern entrance to the Bosphorus Strait.

The sighting on Saturday of a possible naval mine followed warnings that mines laid at the entrances to Ukrainian ports could break free in bad weather and cross the Black Sea.

Broadcaster NTV showed images of an object bobbing in the waves off Istanbul's Sariyer district, on the Bosphorus' European coast. A Coast Guard vessel was stationed nearby.

A Defense Ministry statement said divers were dispatched to deal with the object. According to Demiroren News Agency, it was noticed by fishermen.

On March 18, Turkey advised ships to keep a "sharp lookout" and report any possible mines that had drifted from Ukrainian ports.

Last year some 38,500 ships passed through the Bosphorus, which links the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ankara closed the strait to military vessels.

LONDON — Britain's Defense Ministry says Russia continues to besiege a number of major Ukrainian cities including Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Mariupol.

A daily update says Russian forces are proving reluctant to engage in large scale urban infantry operations, rather preferring to rely on the indiscriminate use of air and artillery bombardments in an attempt to demoralize defending forces.

The assessment says it is likely Russia will continue to use its heavy firepower on urban areas as it looks to limit its own already considerable losses, at the cost of further civilian casualties.

DOHA, Qatar — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has made a surprise video appearance at Qatar's Doha Forum.

Zelenskyy in his video address Saturday criticized Russia's ongoing war on his nation. He called on the United Nations and world powers to come to his aid. He compared Russia's destruction of the port city of Mariupol to the Syrian and Russian destruction wrought on the city of Aleppo in the Syrian war.

"They are destroying our ports," Zelenskyy said. "The absence of exports from Ukraine will deal a blow to countries worldwide."

He added: "The future of Europe rests with your efforts." He called on countries to increase their exports of energy — something particularly important as Qatar is a world leader in the export of natural gas.

He criticized Russia for what he described as threatening the world with its nuclear weapons.

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"Russia is deliberating bragging they can destroy with nuclear weapons, not only a certain country but the entire planet," Zelenskyy said.

He also noted Muslims in Ukraine would have to fight during the upcoming holy fasting month of Ramadan. "We have to ensure this sacred month of Ramadan is not overshadowed by the misery of people in Ukraine," he said.

ISTANBUL – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy by telephone, discussing the situation in Ukraine and negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv, Erdogan's office said late Friday.

Erdogan told his counterpart that he had raised Turkey's support for Ukrainian territorial integrity at a recent NATO summit, where he had relayed the diplomatic efforts made by Turkey in one-on-one meetings with other leaders, according to a statement from the Turkish presidency.

Ankara, which has close ties with both Russia and Ukraine, has positioned itself as a neutral party, seeking to facilitate negotiations between the warring sides.

Russian forces in Ukraine appear to have shifted their focus from a ground offensive aimed at Kyiv to instead prioritizing what Moscow calls the liberation of the contested Donbas region, suggesting a new phase of the war.

It appears too early to know whether this means President Vladimir Putin has scaled back his ambitions in Ukraine, but Russian military moves this week indicate a recognition of the surprisingly stout Ukrainian resistance. Russian-backed separatists have controlled part of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since 2014.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday again appealed to Russia to negotiate an end to the war, but he said Ukraine would not agree to give up any of its territory for the sake of peace.

Putin's forces are under great strain in many parts of the country, and the United States and other countries are accelerating their transfer of arms and supplies to Ukraine. In recent days, U.S. officials have said they see evidence of Ukrainian defenders going on the offensive in a limited way in some areas.

Putting a positive face on it all, the deputy chief of the Russian general staff said his forces had largely achieved the "main objectives" of the first phase of what Moscow calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

LVI, Ukraine — Even as the conflict rages, a vast apparatus is being built to gather and preserve evidence of potential war crimes.

Less than a month after Putin's order to drop the first bombs on his neighbor, the United States declared that Russian forces were violating international laws of war that were written after World War II. But it remains far from clear who will be held accountable and how.

Possible war crimes that have been reported in Ukraine include destroying homes, firing on civilians as they evacuate through safe corridors, targeting hospitals, using indiscriminate weapons like cluster bombs in civilian areas, attacking nuclear power plants and intentionally blocking access to humanitarian aid or food and water.

But intention matters. Destroying a hospital alone is not evidence of a war crime. Prosecutors would have to show that the attack was intentional or at least reckless.

LVI, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff is calling on the West to create a new lend-lease program for Ukraine, referring to the World War II effort that sent U.S. supplies to the Soviet Union to help it fight Nazi Germany.

"We need a full lend lease," Andriy Yermak said in an address late Friday. "Today Ukraine is the holy grail of Europe, and without exaggeration Ukraine is reviving those principles that gave life to current Western civilization."

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He said what Ukraine needs most is real-time intelligence and heavy weapons.

Yermak also repeated the Ukrainian president's calls for help in closing the skies over Ukraine to stop Russian bombing and missile attacks. The West has refused to impose a no-fly zone for fear of widening the war.

He said options include supplying Ukraine with air defense systems or fighter jets, or creating an "air police force to protect civilian infrastructure."

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has again appealed to Russia to negotiate an end to the war, but says Ukraine would not agree to give up any of its territory for the sake of peace.

In his nightly video address to the nation Friday, Zelenskyy appeared to be responding to Col. Gen Sergei Rudskoi, deputy chief of the Russian general staff, who said Russian forces would now focus on "the main goal, the liberation of Donbas."

Russian-backed separatists have controlled part of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since 2014, and Russian forces have been battling to seize more of the region from Ukraine, including the besieged city of Mariupol.

Rudskoi's statement also was a suggestion that Russia may be backing away from trying to take Kyiv and other major cities where its offensive has stalled. Zelenskyy noted that Russian forces have lost thousands of troops but still haven't been able to take Kyiv or Kharkiv, the second-largest city.

LVIV, Ukraine — The Associated Press has independently documented at least 34 assaults on Ukrainian medical facilities by Russian forces.

AP journalists in Ukraine have seen firsthand the deadly results of Russian strikes on civilian targets, including the final moments of children whose bodies were shredded by shrapnel and dozens of corpses heaped into mass graves.

AP journalists outside Ukraine have confirmed the details of other attacks by interviewing survivors and independently verifying war zone videos and photos posted online. The accounting is part of the War Crimes Watch Ukraine project, a broader effort by AP and PBS "Frontline."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights confirms at least 1,035 civilians, including 90 children, have died and another 1,650 civilians have been wounded since the war started a month ago. Those numbers are certainly an undercount.

Biden ending Europe trip with unity message that echoes past

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Twenty-five years ago, Joe Biden visited Warsaw, Poland, with a warning: Even though the Soviet Union had collapsed, some of NATO's original members weren't doing enough to ensure the alliance's collective defense.

"Now it is time for the people of Western Europe to invest in the security of their continent for the next century," said Biden, then a U.S. senator.

Biden, now president, speaks again here Saturday as European security faces its most precarious test since World War II. The bloody war in Ukraine has entered its second month, and Western leaders have spent the week consulting over contingency plans in case the conflict mutates or spreads. The invasion has shaken NATO out of any complacency it might have felt and cast a dark shadow over the continent.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the speech will outline the "urgency of the challenge that lies ahead" and "what the conflict in Ukraine means for the world, and why it is so important that the free world stay in unity and resolve in the face of Russian aggression."

Biden's remarks will end a four-day trip that included an earlier stop for a series of summits in Brussels. While in Warsaw, he dropped in Saturday morning on a meeting between U.S. and Ukrainian foreign policy and defense leaders. He also planned to visit with Polish President Andrzej Duda and meet with Ukrainian refugees and the aid workers who have been helping them.

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The president's hotel is across the street from Warsaw's central train station, a major arrival point for Ukrainian refugees. Some 3.5 million have fled the country; 2 million are in Poland. Aid workers in colorful vests circulated through the terminal, and signs pointed to tents outside where refugees could eat for free.

Biden previewed his closing speech during appearances Friday in Rzeszow.

"You're in the midst of a fight between democracies and oligarchs," the president told members of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division as he visited their temporary headquarters. "Is democracy going to prevail and the values we share, or are autocracies going to prevail?"

During a later briefing on the refugee response, Biden said "the single most important thing that we can do from the outset" to force Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop the war "is keep the democracies united in our opposition."

Biden praised the humanitarian effort as being of "such an enormous consequence" given the scope of the crisis, which adds up to the largest flow of refugees since World War II. He appeared to lament that security concerns "understandably" will keep him from visiting Ukraine.

Duda, who appeared with Biden on Friday, said the refugees are "guests."

"We do not want to call them refugees. They are our guests, our brothers, our neighbors from Ukraine, who today are in a very difficult situation," he said.

The U.S. has been sending money and supplies to aid the refugee effort. This week, Biden announced \$1 billion in additional aid and said the U.S. would accept up to 100,000 refugees.

The U.S. and many of its allies have imposed multiple rounds of economic and other sanctions on Russian individuals, banks and other entities in hopes that the cumulative effect over time will force Putin to withdraw his troops.

Biden was scheduled to return to Washington after his speech in Warsaw on Saturday.

Shelled city in north Ukraine fears becoming 'next Mariupol'

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Like many residents of Ukraine's besieged city of Chernihiv, linguistics scholar Ihar Kazmerchak spends his nights in a bomb shelter and starts his day lining up for the little potable water authorities have left to hand out.

Surrounded by Russian forces and under constant bombardment, the northern city known for its eclectic monasteries has no electricity, heating or running water. The lists at pharmacies of the medicines no longer available grow longer by the day.

"In basements at night, everyone is talking about one thing: Chernihiv becoming next Mariupol," Kazmerchak, 38, said, referring to the southern port city 845 kilometers (525 miles) away that has suffered some of the worst horrors since Russia invaded Ukraine.

The fear is not misplaced. Russian bombs destroyed Chernihiv's main bridge over the Desna River on the road leading to Kyiv on Wednesday; on Friday, artillery shells rendered the remaining pedestrian bridge impassable, cutting off the last possible route for people to get out or for food and medical supplies to get in.

Just over a month into the invasion, Russia's attack has slowed into a grinding war of attrition as its military tries to pound cities like Chernihiv into submission. Bombings of hospitals and other non-military sites, such as the Mariupol theater where Ukrainian officials said a Russian airstrike is believed to have killed some 300 people last week, have given rise to war crime allegations.

Questions about the direction of Russia's offensive surfaced Friday when a high-ranking military official said the main objective of the first stage of the operation — reducing Ukraine's fighting capacity — had "generally been accomplished." Col.-Gen Sergei Rudskoi, deputy chief of the Russian general staff, said Russian forces could now focus on "the main goal, the liberation of Donbas."

Donbas is the largely Russian-speaking eastern region where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014 and where many residents desire close ties to Moscow. Mariupol is located there, although outside of the two territories controlled by the separatists.

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U.S. officials said Russian troops appeared to have halted for now their ground offensive aimed at capturing the capital, Kyiv, and were concentrating more on gaining control of the Donbas region in the country's southeast.

However, British defense officials reported Saturday that the Russian military continues to besiege a number of other major Ukrainian cities, including Chernihiv, which is located 146 kilometers (91 miles) from Kyiv.

"It is likely Russia will continue to use its heavy firepower on urban areas as it looks to limit its own already considerable losses, at the cost of further civilian casualties," the U.K. Ministry of Defense said in its latest intelligence briefing on the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, appearing by video-link at Qatar's Doha Forum, on Saturday compared the destruction of Mariupol to the Syrian and Russian destruction wrought on the city of Aleppo.

"They are destroying our ports," Zelenskyy said. "The absence of exports from Ukraine will deal a blow to countries worldwide."

He called on countries to increase their exports of energy to give European nations an alternative to Russian oil and gas.

"The future of Europe rests with your efforts," he said.

In Kyiv, ashes of the dead are piling up at the main crematorium because so many relatives have left, leaving urns unclaimed. For civilians who decided to stay or have been unable to leave under constant shelling, the misery is growing more severe.

In Yasnohorodka, a village some 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Kyiv that Russian troops who occupied earlier in the week, appeared to have been pushed out as part of a counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces. Houses on the main crossroads lay in ruins. The tower of the village church was damaged.

"You can see for yourself what happened here. People were killed here. Our soldiers were killed here," Yasnohorodka resident Valeriy Puzakov said.

In Chernihiv, hospitals are no longer operating, and residents cook over open fires in the street because the power is out.

Chernihiv Mayor Vladyslav Atroshenko has said that more than half of the city's 280,000 residents fled amid the unrelenting attack.

Russian forces, he told Ukrainian television, "are deliberately destroying civilian infrastructure – schools, kindergartens, churches, residential buildings and even the local football stadium."

It has been impossible to count the dead, but Atroshenko estimated the figure was "in the hundreds."

Located only about 70 kilometers (45 miles) from the border with Belarus on the road to Kyiv, Chernihiv was attacked in the early days of the war and encircled by Russian troops this month, but its defenders so far have prevented a takeover.

"Chernihiv has become a symbol of the Russian army's failed blitzkrieg, in which the plan was to take the city over in one day and advance towards Kyiv," Mykola Sunhurovskyi, a military analyst at the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank, said.

Kazmerchak started spending his night in a bomb shelter after a Russian bomb hit the Stalin-era movie theater next to the 12-story residential building where he lived. A Russian missile also destroyed the hotel not far from his house.

"The walls were shaking so much that I thought my house would collapse any minute and I would be left under the rubble," Kazmerchak said.

Dwindling supplies led to long lines out of the few grocery stores that still had food. Shelling killed 10 civilians on March 16 as they waited outside to buy bread. Residents hunkered down and stayed home, but as the siege endures, some have given up on trying to stay safe, Kazmerchak said.

"Ravaged houses, fires, corpses in the street, huge aircraft bombs that didn't explode in courtyards are not surprising anyone anymore," he said. "People are simply tired of being scared and don't even always go down to the basements."

Saudi airstrikes hit Yemen's Houthis after Jiddah attack

By AHMED AL-HAJ and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — A Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen unleashed a barrage of airstrikes on the capital and a strategic Red Sea city, officials said Saturday. At least seven people were killed.

The overnight airstrikes on Sanaa and Hodeida — both held by the Houthis — came a day after the rebels attacked an oil depot in the Saudi city of Jiddah, their highest-profile assault yet on the kingdom.

Brig. Gen. Turki al-Malki, a spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, said the strikes targeted “sources of threat” to Saudi Arabia, according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

He said the coalition intercepted and destroyed two explosives-laden drones early Saturday. He said the drones were launched from Houthi-held civilian oil facilities in Hodeida, urging civilians to stay away from oil facilities in the city.

Footage circulated online showed flames and plumes of smoke over Sanaa and Hodeida. Associated Press journalists in the Yemeni capital heard loud explosions that rattled residential buildings there.

The Houthis said the coalition airstrikes hit a power plant, a fuel supply station and the state-run social insurance office in the capital.

A Houthi media office claimed an airstrike hit houses for guards of the social insurance office, killing at least seven people and wounding three others, including women and children.

The office shared images it said showed the aftermath of the airstrike. It showed wreckage in the courtyard of a social insurance office with the shattered windows of a nearby multiple-story building.

In Hodeida, the Houthi media office said the coalition hit oil facilities in violation of a 2018 cease-fire deal that ended months of fighting in Hodeida, which handles about 70% of Yemen's commercial and humanitarian imports. The strikes also hit the nearby Port Salif, also on the Red Sea.

Al-Malki, the coalition spokesperson, was not immediately available for comment on the Houthi claims.

The escalation is likely to complicate efforts by the U.N. special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, to reach a humanitarian truce during the holy month of Ramadan” in early April.

It comes as the Gulf Cooperation Council plans to host the warring sides for talks late this month. The Houthis however have rejected Riyadh — the Saudi capital where the GCC is headquartered — as a venue for talks, which are expected to include an array of Yemeni factions.

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

The conflict has in recent years become a regional proxy war that has killed more than 150,000 people, including over 14,500 civilians. It also created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

The Houthis' Friday attack came ahead of a Formula One race in the kingdom on Sunday, raising concerns about Saudi Arabia's ability to defend itself against the Iranian-backed rebels.

Friday's attack targeted the same fuel depot that the Houthis had attacked in recent days — the North Jiddah Bulk Plant that sits just southeast of the city's international airport and is a crucial hub for Muslim pilgrims heading to Mecca.

In Egypt, hundreds of passengers were stranded at Cairo International Airport after their Jiddah-bound flights were canceled because of the Houthi attack, according to airport officials.

The kingdom's flagship carrier Saudia announced the cancellation of two flights on its website. The two had 456 passengers booked. A third canceled flight with 146 passengers was operated by the low-cost Saudi airline Flynas.

Some passengers found seats on other Saudi Arabia-bound flights and others were booked into hotels close to the Cairo airport, according to Egyptian officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because there were not authorized to brief media.

Ukrainian fashion brand in bombarded city picks up and flees

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Just days ago, Artem Gorelov was trying to survive in one of the most brutal parts of Ukraine, the Russian-occupied Kyiv suburb of Bucha. Now he stands in a quiet room in the late afternoon sunlight, hand-making hats for a local fashion brand worn by Madonna and Ukraine's first lady.

Gorelov has joined Ukrainians' massive migration west to the city of Lviv, near Poland. And, unusually, the 100-employee company he works for arrived with him. Searching for safety but determined not to leave Ukraine, the brand Ruslan Baginskiy is among the businesses that are uprooting amid war.

Two months ago, first lady Olena Zelenska was in the hat-maker's showroom in Kyiv. Now the company operates in two borrowed classrooms of a school, its workers delicately piecing together materials near students' decades-old sewing machines.

It is a slower process, but clients like Nieman Marcus and Bloomingdale's have expressed support, said co-owner Victoria Semerei, 29.

She was among the Ukrainians who didn't believe Russia would invade. She recalled being in Italy the day before the invasion and telling partners that war wasn't possible.

Two hours after her plane landed back in Kyiv, the bombardment began.

Daily bombings led the company's three co-founders to make the decision to flee. While some employees scattered to other parts of Ukraine or to other countries, about a third moved the company's essentials to Lviv two weeks ago.

"Normal life will resume one day," Semerei said. "We need to be prepared."

The company threw itself into the national wartime effort that has seized Ukraine, donating money to the army and turning its Instagram feed from brand promotion to updates on the war.

"This is not the time to be shy. Not anymore," co-founder and creative director Ruslan Baginskiy said. The company once had Russian clients, but that stopped long before the invasion as regional tensions grew. "It's not possible to have any connections," he said. "It's all political now."

As part of that spirit, Semerei rejected the idea of moving the company to a safer location outside Ukraine. "We have our team here, the most precious team we have," she said. "Talented, all of them."

Past brand campaigns for the company have identified closely with Ukraine, photographed in places like Kherson, now under Russian occupation. Cities that the hat-maker's employees once called home have been torn apart.

"So many Russian troops," said Gorelov, who fled Bucha near the capital. "It was not even possible to defend."

His arrival in Lviv, where life goes on and fashionable shops remain open, was surreal. It took days to adjust. Now "I feel relaxed doing this," he said, a new hat under construction on the table before him.

In another corner of the makeshift workspace, Svetlana Podgainova worried about her family back in the separatist-held territory of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Moscow separatists have been fighting for control for nearly eight years. It was already difficult to visit with family even before the invasion. Now her brother can't leave the region.

She feels horrible seeing her colleagues from other parts of Ukraine pulled into the war and wishes that normal life would return for them all. Until then, "I wanted to come back to work so much," she said. It occupies her mind and makes her feel less alone in a new city, and she calls her colleagues a "big family."

The hat-maker's employees are among the estimated 200,000 displaced people now living in Lviv, with the co-founders now sharing an apartment with several other people.

Considering the challenges, this year probably will be the worst in the company's six-year history, Semerei said. But "this is something we'll go through and hopefully be even stronger."

Oscars celebrate May, Jackson, Ullmann and Glover

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Elaine May was the last to arrive and the first to leave at the Governors Awards

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on Friday in Los Angeles.

Her fellow honorees, Samuel L. Jackson, Liv Ullmann and Danny Glover, all arrived hours earlier, each holding court at the Ray Dolby Ballroom, posing for photos and enjoying their moment amid the lead-up to the 94th Academy Awards.

It was a celebration, after all. They were about to get something for the first time in their long Hollywood careers: An Oscar statuette of their own.

Jackson, whose right foot was in a walking cast boot and his left in a black velvet slipper, sat at the base of an oversized Oscar statuette as everyone from Quentin Tarantino to Magic Johnson came over to congratulate him.

But May, the 89-year-old writer, filmmaker and comedy legend, walked into the Ray Dolby Ballroom arm in arm with Bill Murray long after attendees had finished their chicken pot pies, accepted her honorary Oscar with grace and wit, then departed soon after — still linked to Murray.

Yes, it's the kind of move that could upend a live broadcast. But at the Governors Awards, there are no television cameras. Everyone is simply delighted to be celebrating living legends who are long overdue for their Oscar moment. With beautiful clip montages and emotional tributes — from the likes of Denzel Washington for Jackson, John Lithgow for Ullmann, and Alfre Woodard for Glover — it's the kind of show that reminds you why you love movies and the people who make them.

The Governors Awards is often a stop for Oscar hopefuls on the campaign trail, but this year's ceremony was delayed because of the pandemic. Though less star-studded than usual, there was also a silver lining to holding the event after Oscars voting had ended: The focus stayed squarely on the honorees and their legacies.

Murray, of course, was there to fete May, a two-time Oscar nominee for writing "Heaven Can Wait" and "Primary Colors." He ignored the teleprompter speech and praised, "The most attractive, intelligent woman I've ever had the pleasure to work with."

A highlight reel of her work was played, including her comedy act with Mike Nichols and the films she directed, acted in, wrote and ghost wrote (like "Tootsie").

Lily Tomlin, Kenneth Lonergan, Billy Crystal and Nathan Lane praised her confidence of tone and how her films, from "A New Leaf" to "Mikey and Nicky," were all so important and so different from one another.

May — who Lonergan teased, saying she "Gives the best tribute speeches of all time" — kept her moment on stage brief.

"They told me Zelenskyy would introduce me tonight, but thank God they got Bill instead," May said, referring to Ukraine's president. She also quipped about the event being held in-person, saying, "I'm afraid of COVID but I think this is very nice."

It was Jackson's turn next, and Washington, the only current Oscar nominee in the room, was there to tout his friend's 152 movie titles, his \$27 billion at the box office, his "11 times Nick Fury and one time the 'Django,'" and his and his wife's charitable efforts.

"This thing is going to be cherished," said Jackson, 73, proudly holding his Oscar and marveling that a little kid with a stutter from Chattanooga, Tennessee, made it this far.

"I got out there to entertain audiences the way Hollywood entertained me," he said. "It's truly been an honor and privilege to entertain you."

Lithgow, in toasting the great Norwegian actor Ullmann, said people often say she had Swedish director Ingmar Bergman to thank for her career. But, he said, "Bergman would have never been called one of our greatest filmmakers without Liv Ullmann."

The two worked together on Broadway in a production of Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie."

"I've seen a lot of great acting in my day but I've never seen anything like that," Lithgow said.

On stage, Ullmann, who was nominated twice for best actress, for Jan Troell's "The Emigrants," from 1971, and Bergman's "Face to Face," from 1976, recalled her disastrous first audition for a Norwegian theater school in which she was cut off in the middle of a scene from "Romeo and Juliet" — and the comfort she got afterwards from her grandmother, who nurtured her creative spirit.

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In Norway, she said, people aren't supposed to brag or show off.

"That's why I brought 20 people here from Norway so they can say, 'It is true she did get an Oscar,'" Ullmann said.

Glover also kept family and heritage at the forefront while accepting the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award. The 75-year-old known for his roles in "Lethal Weapon" and "The Color Purple" has been a progressive activist for many years, advocating for civil rights, working as a United Nations goodwill ambassador and a U.N. children's agency ambassador.

His mother grew up in Jim Crow-era Georgia and his father served in World War II before coming to San Francisco, where they both worked for the postal service and instilled civic responsibility in their young son.

"I'm amazingly grateful for this moment," Glover said, speaking at length about his grandparents' decision to send their kids to school instead of work.

"I haven't referred to the teleprompter at all. Sometimes we as actors get a little lost without a script," he said. "But I'm proud to be part of this space and place."

Trump returns to Georgia confronting test of his grip on GOP

By WILL WEISSERT and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — In Donald Trump's push to fundamentally reshape the Republican Party, few places are a higher priority than Georgia.

The former president has issued highly-coveted endorsements in races ranging from governor to state insurance commissioner. His backing of football legend Herschel Walker essentially cleared a path to the party's nomination for a critical U.S. Senate seat.

Trump has taken a particularly active role in shaping the governor's race, recruiting former Sen. David Perdue to challenge incumbent Brian Kemp as retribution for his not going along with lies about the 2020 election being stolen. And in an effort to clear a path for Perdue, Trump pressed another Republican in the race — Vernon Jones — to run for Congress instead.

Trump returns to Georgia on Saturday night for a rally with Walker, Perdue, Jones and other Republicans he's backed ahead of the state's May 24 primary. The campaign is emerging as an early, critical test of whether the former president can live up to his professed role as a kingmaker in the GOP.

"I think it could be the start of, I don't want to use the word downfall, but it could be the start of his influence waning," said Eric Tanenblatt, former chief of staff to ex-Georgia Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue and a former fundraiser for David Perdue who is backing Kemp in the primary.

There are warning signs for Trump. While Walker is marching to the primary with minimal opposition, other races are more complicated. Jones, for instance, is now competing in a crowded congressional primary in which no one may clear the 50% threshold needed to avoid a runoff.

Perdue, meanwhile, may pose an even higher-profile challenge for the former president. He has struggled to raise money and, in a Fox News poll released this month, trailed Kemp 50% to 39%. If that dynamic holds, Kemp would be within striking distance of winning the primary outright, averting a runoff.

Trump has been obsessed with this once Republican stronghold since the aftermath of the 2020 campaign, when he became the first GOP presidential candidate to lose the state in 28 years. It could again be central to his political future if he decides to run for the White House in 2024.

That's why his activity in the state is especially notable as Trump is essentially rallying voters behind candidates who could go on to play critical roles in certifying future elections in which he's a participant. He's already shown an extraordinary willingness to press officials to overturn results he doesn't like. During his waning days in office, Trump pressured Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to overturn Joe Biden's victory, a conversation that is now the subject of a grand jury probe in Atlanta.

The results in Georgia were certified after a trio of recounts, including one partially done by hand. They all affirmed Biden's victory.

Elsewhere, federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no

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credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges whom Trump appointed.

Given the former president's particular focus on Georgia, a stumble here could weaken his efforts elsewhere to champion candidates who have pledged loyalty to his vision of the GOP, which is dominated by election lies and culture clashes over issues related to race and gender. Some of those candidates are already struggling.

Trump rescinded his endorsement of struggling Alabama Republican Senate primary candidate Mo Brooks on Wednesday. He will travel to North Carolina next month to try to boost his pick in North Carolina's contentious Senate primary, Republican U.S. Rep. Ted Budd, who has lagged in polling and fundraising behind former Gov. Pat McCrory. Trump's choice in Pennsylvania's Senate GOP primary dropped out, and Trump has so far not sided with a candidate in key but bruising party Senate primaries in Ohio and Missouri.

A Trump spokesman didn't respond to questions, but the former president, allies say, has been frustrated by Perdue's failure to gain traction. While Trump has put great stock in his endorsement record, he has so far refused to open his checkbook — despite his PAC opening the year with \$120 million.

Meanwhile, some top national Trump antagonists, including Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, have not backed away from seeking reelection despite Trump promising for more than a year that he'd make sure they were defeated.

Kemp, who is holding his own Saturday meeting with the Columbia County Republican Party in suburban Augusta, reported having \$12.7 million in his main campaign account as of Jan. 31. That far outpaced Perdue, who had less than \$1 million in cash on hand through January.

The incumbent governor has vowed to provide an initial investment of at least \$4.2 million on TV ads ahead of Georgia's primary. Other Trump detractors are stepping up spending, including GOP 2.0, a super PAC founded by Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, who isn't seeking reelection but has been staunchly criticized by the former president for his defense of Georgia's 2020 election results.

Duncan, a Republican, said Trump's endorsement isn't the "golden ticket" it once was, and his group is launching its first 30-second television spot timed to coincide with the former president's rally. In it, Duncan decries politicians "who would rather talk about conspiracy theories and past losses, letting liberal extremists take us in the wrong direction."

"You almost feel bad for David Perdue. That (he's) walking off the plank that Donald Trump has put out there for him here in Georgia," Duncan said in an interview. "We're going to see a rally show up that's once again going to confuse Georgians and who knows what Donald Trump's gonna say," Duncan said.

"He's out to settle a score," Duncan added, referring to Trump, "and that's no way to keep conservative leadership in power."

Despite such concerns, Trump isn't backing down. Just this week, he threw his support behind the virtually unknown John Gordon to challenge Attorney General Chris Carr. He's also endorsed Patrick Witt to go up against Insurance Commissioner John King. The Republican incumbents are the statewide officials most closely aligned with Kemp, the leading target of Trump's ire.

Randy Evans, Trump's former ambassador to Luxembourg, said the former president making so many endorsements up and down the Georgia ballot will allow Trump's preferred candidates to reinforce each other.

Evans said Saturday's event could lift that group: "The earned media from Trump just changes every dynamic."

But Tanenblatt countered that Trump trying to influence so many races — including obscure down-ballot ones — just to antagonize Kemp over a 2020 election that is long since settled "almost trivializes the president's endorsement."

"I don't think because he's the former president, and someone who Republicans would prefer over President Biden, that if he endorses someone, it automatically means that they're the heir apparent to win," he said.

Albright acted as model, mentor for generations of women

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Dissatisfied with the temporary job she accepted after graduating from the University of Chicago, Sahana Dharmapuri felt the pressure to find work using her studies of the Middle East and public policy.

Scanning a newspaper on her lunch break, she found a full-page ad featuring a portion of a speech by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on the effort to negotiate peace between Israel and Palestine. Dharmapuri tore the page out and took it with her when she moved to Washington, D.C., to hunt for a meaningful job.

It was the start of a career shaped by Albright's example, from her history-making appointment as the first female Secretary of State to the decades she spent mentoring, teaching and speaking to women. Albright's death from cancer this week sparked American women to reflect on the 84-year-old diplomat's sweeping influence on their lives, 25 years after Bill Clinton made her the United States' representative to the world.

"Not only did she break the ceiling, she brought people along with her, whether they were close to her or like me who saw her from a distance and said, 'I can do that too,'" said Dharmapuri, director of Our Secure Future, a foundation that seeks to increase women's participation in international affairs.

Albright's path and her identities as a child refugee, wife and mother who carved out a career in a male-dominated field gave women a new vision for their lives, said Hannah Riley Bowles, co-director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School.

"Her whole story, we should tell it over and over again," Bowles said. "She broke down stereotypes that still interrupt women's career potential today."

Albright also was known for bringing countless women into politics or policy work, often without ever meeting them face-to-face.

"One of my earliest memories really was seeing this woman, who was small in stature but a heavyweight regardless," said Virginia Kase Solomon, CEO of the League of Women Voters. "She had this gravitas and she could go toe-to-toe with any man in the room."

When Albright became secretary of state, Candace Waterman was working as a healthcare executive and she looked to Albright as a model of a woman "functioning in a man's world without losing herself."

Waterman, now president and CEO of Women Impacting Public Policy, said Albright and, years later, Condoleezza Rice showed women that their voice could affect public policy.

"At each juncture, more and more barriers come down," Waterman said. "Sometimes it's brick by brick, not by a bulldozer."

Of course, some women said Albright shouldn't be reflexively deemed an icon for her "first" status without considering her decisions as secretary of state or her continued presence in party politics.

Albright has been sometimes criticized for her support of severe sanctions on Iraq during Saddam Hussein's rule and her staunch backing of Western intervention in Kosovo. Others remain offended by Albright's implication that all women had a duty to support Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary.

On the eve of that year's New Hampshire primary, Albright appeared at a rally for Clinton supporters and quipped, "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other."

Albright routinely used the phrase during her career, but usually framed it as a criticism of women failing to support one another's professional goals. She apologized for applying it to politics in a column for The New York Times. But she still argued that a woman in the Oval Office would prioritize gender equality and asked younger generations to consider advice from "this aging feminist."

"When women are empowered to make decisions, society benefits," she wrote. "They will raise issues, pass bills and put money into projects that men might overlook or oppose."

That goal also fueled Albright's continued involvement in a program focused on leadership skills for students at her alma mater, the all-female Wellesley College, said Stacie Goddard, director of the school's Albright Institute.

Again and again, Albright urged the young women participating to get comfortable interrupting and speaking their mind, particularly in rooms dominated by men. Women with their own impressive careers in international policy or politics who were invited to address students also spoke of Albright's influence, Goddard said.

"Even now, this is not a field that's populated by a lot of women," Goddard said. "I've gotten to meet women who talk about how intentional she was in making sure she was working with women in those positions and helping them and mentoring them."

Justices decide for themselves when to step aside from cases

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Reports that the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas implored Donald Trump's White House chief of staff to act to overturn the 2020 election results have put a spotlight on how justices decide whether to step aside from a case.

Individual justices make their own unreviewable calls on a court that lacks a code of ethics. And the issue is not always clear, particularly when spouses also have prominent careers.

While the Supreme Court did not step into any election cases brought by Trump and other Republicans, Justice Thomas took part in the consideration of whether to hear those cases. He also was the lone vote to keep House lawmakers investigating the Jan. 6. Capitol riot from obtaining contested White House documents.

Thomas did not immediately respond Friday to a request for comment made through the court's spokeswoman. Earlier in the day the court announced he had been discharged from the hospital after a stay of nearly a week while he was treated for an infection.

Thomas' wife, Virginia, whom he married in 1987, is a longtime conservative activist who ardently backed Trump's reelection as president in 2020. In the weeks leading up to the election, Thomas used her Facebook page to amplify unsubstantiated claims of corruption by Joe Biden, Trump's opponent.

Once it was over, Thomas, known as Ginni, sent weeks of text messages imploring White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, furthering Trump's lies that the free and fair vote was marred by nonexistent fraud, according to copies of the messages obtained by The Washington Post and CBS News.

"The majority knows Biden and the Left is attempting the greatest Heist of our History," Thomas wrote.

She also urged lawyer Sidney Powell, who promoted false claims about the election, to be "the lead and the face" of the Trump legal team.

In the same period, Powell brought cases to the Supreme Court, which were denied without any noted recusals or dissent.

The court, with Thomas participating, also threw out a challenge from Texas calling on the justices to temporarily set aside electoral votes from four states Biden won — enough votes to potentially undo the outcome. Trump sought to join Texas' side in the case.

Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon said Thomas should not take part in any future cases about the Jan. 6 investigation or the 2024 election, should Trump decide to run again.

"Judges are obligated to recuse themselves when their participation in a case would create even the appearance of a conflict of interest. A person with an ounce of commonsense could see that bar is met here," Wyden said in a statement.

But Arthur Hellman, a University of Pittsburgh ethics expert, said the Thomas situation reflects the progress women have made in pursuing their own careers and not living in the shadow of their husbands. Judges should distinguish between cases in which their spouses take part and issues on which they have been active, Hellman said. Only the first category requires recusal, he said.

"It's not absolute. There may be some cases in which the issue is so directly involved in the case that the judge ought to recuse," Hellman said. "I don't think I see that in the Ginni Thomas situation."

Ginni Thomas, for her part, downplayed any potential conflict in an interview with the conservative Washington Free Beacon earlier this month, before the text messages' publication. "Like so many married

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couples, we share many of the same ideals, principles and aspirations for America," Thomas said. "But we have our own separate careers, and our own ideas and opinions too. Clarence doesn't discuss his work with me, and I don't involve him in my work."

The revelations about Thomas' texts come at a time when groups have already been calling for ethics guidelines for justices. Congress has also been looking at the issue.

Under federal law, federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, are supposed to recuse themselves when they previously participated in a case or have a financial interest in it or when a close relative is involved. A judge is also supposed to do so "in any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned." But that's open to interpretation.

Gabe Roth, of the court transparency group Fix The Court, said an ethics code would help the justices make consistent decisions about recusals. "Every justice sees their own ethical obligations different from one another. There should be some hard and fast rules that everyone follows," Roth said.

Three years ago, Justice Elena Kagan told a congressional committee that Chief Justice John Roberts was considering whether the court needed its own ethics guide. Nothing has happened since.

Roberts noted in 2011 that the Supreme Court is different from lower courts because no one can step in if a justice recuses. In his year-end report, Roberts wrote that means a justice "cannot withdraw from a case as a matter of convenience or simply to avoid controversy."

Of course, justices and other judges decide from time to time that they cannot participate in a case because a close relative is involved. Early in his Supreme Court tenure, Thomas sat out a case in which the court ended the Virginia Military Institute's exclusion of women. His son from his first marriage, Jamal, was a VMI student at the time.

Justice Stephen Breyer routinely doesn't take part in cases decided in the lower court by his brother, U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer. Last year, Justice Brett Kavanaugh recused himself from a case when the court left in place a \$2 billion verdict in favor of women who claim they developed ovarian cancer from using Johnson & Johnson talc products. Kavanaugh offered no explanation, but his father, E. Edward Kavanaugh, had earlier headed the trade association that lobbied against labeling talc a carcinogen and including a warning label on talc products.

Roberts and his wife dealt with a potential controversy in a different way. Jane Roberts stopped practicing law and left her position as the unpaid legal counsel to an anti-abortion group, Feminists for Life of America, after her husband became chief justice.

Elite Pete! Saint Peter's tops Purdue, makes 15 seed history

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Doug Edert hopped on the press table and punched his fist in the air toward a delirious section of Saint Peter's fans — aren't they all? -- as his teammates thumped their chests and flashed eight fingers as the mayhem became a perfect Peacock party.

Edert's giant leap toward the roaring crowd might have been his only mistake of the night.

"You jumped on a table?" coach Shaheen Holloway asked later, then paused for some serious side-eye for comedic effect.

C'mon, Coach. Let the Peacocks strut their stuff.

The upsets aren't over yet and the tiny commuter college in Jersey City, New Jersey, is still outperforming all March expectations. Next stop: the Elite Eight, a first-time destination for a No. 15 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

"We're making history," Edert said. "We're looking forward to making more history."

Daryl Banks III scored the tying and go-ahead baskets that pushed Saint Peter's to the brink of the Final Four, the suddenly popular Peacocks thriving off a home-court edge to beat third-seeded Purdue 67-64 on Friday night.

The Peacocks (22-11) added the Boilermakers to their string of upsets and will face North Carolina in the East Region final on Sunday.

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Saint Peter's had the fans inside the packed Wells Fargo Center on its side from the opening tip and the arena erupted when Banks tied the game 57-all on a turnaround jumper. He hit a driving layup with 2:17 left that made it 59-57.

The Peacocks kept their composure — hey, they're used to these wins by now after knocking off No. 2 seed Kentucky and seventh-seeded Murray State — and held off a Purdue team that gamely tried to bully them inside.

"What they going to say now?" Holloway said about his team's doubters, a group whose numbers are dwindling.

The Boilermakers (29-8), 12 1/2-point favorites according to FanDuel Sportsbook, never led by more than six.

Almost 30 years to the day that Duke's Christian Laettner stunned Kentucky with an overtime buzzer-beater to win a regional final at the since-raised Spectrum, Purdue and Saint Peter's pulled off their own Philly classic.

Saint Peter's fans made the 93-mile ride south to help pack the arena and give the Peacocks more of an edge than they usually have at their bandbox known as Run Baby Run Arena. Consider, just 434 fans were listed as the total attendance for Saint Peter's home opener this season against LIU.

More than that turned out to give the team a Sweet 16 sendoff from campus this week.

"Everybody wanted tickets. I can't get tickets for everybody," Holloway said. "I'll tell you what, man, I can't believe the support that we're having. This is unbelievable. Jersey City has been unbelievable for us."

Even more basketball fans — yes, even those whose brackets the Peacocks helped bust — were suddenly rooting for Saint Peter's, an unassuming campus just across the Hudson River from Lower Manhattan.

Jaden Ivey buried an NBA-distance 3 with 8 seconds left that pulled Purdue within 65-64 and momentarily shushed the crowd.

No worries. Edert, whose wispy mustache and goofy persona earned him a fast-food chicken endorsement deal, sank two free throws to seal the win.

Edert then led the madness on the court and took it to the table. He saluted fans in the first few rows as the rest of the Peacocks mobbed each other and hugged before they gathered at the basket to celebrate — one more time — the biggest win in program history.

"Yeah. I found a little opening and started moving stuff," Edert said of his table hop. "I don't know, I was so excited."

The Peacocks dropped and made snowmen on the court and soon there was a huge celebration of fans jamming the concourse chanting "S-P-U! S-P-U!" The Saint Peter's students and fans celebrated like they won a championship. Saint Peter's had never won an NCAA Tournament game and now, they'll just keep on dancing for at least one more game.

The school is tiny. The players are small. It makes no sense. Yet this is what March is about, right?

The Peacocks were the third No. 15 seed ever to reach the Sweet 16. Florida Gulf Coast in 2013 and Oral Roberts last year both failed to reach the regional final. Only two 12 seeds have made it to a regional final.

Meanwhile, a Final Four berth remains elusive for Boilermakers coach Matt Painter and his perennial Big Ten contender.

"I wish I could have coached better, wish we could have played a little bit better," Painter said. "But that's part of competition."

Banks led the Peacocks with 14 points, Clarence Rupert scored 11 and Edert had 10. Trevion Williams had 16 points and eight rebounds for Purdue.

The Boilermakers missed 16 of 21 3-pointers and made 15 turnovers. Ivey was only 4 of 12 for nine points.

"I'm still in shock, honestly," Williams said.

Join the club.

Before the game, Saint Peter's players lay on their backs at half court as they did their stretching routine, most looking up at the big screen that replayed highlights from last weekend's wins that got the team to Philadelphia.

By now, the Peacocks' run is etched as the story of the tournament. Beating Kentucky and coach John

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Calipari was shocking enough. Eight days later, they're still in the bracket.

The Peacocks lived by Holloway's mantra: "I got guys from New Jersey and New York City. You think we're scared of anything?"

They certainly weren't scared of the Boilermakers.

Purdue used its massive size advantage and dumped the ball inside to 7-foot-4 Zach Edey for easy dunks and Sasha Stefanovic hit three 3s to offset nine turnovers.

When Holloway talked about his players as New York and New Jersey tough, he should have thrown Philly into the mix. Rupert grew up in Philly and heard the loudest ovation of all the Peacocks during lineup introductions. He scored all of his points in the first half and kept the Peacocks within four at the break.

"I feel like there's no pressure," Edert said.

MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION

Notre Dame coach Niele Ivey traveled from Connecticut after her team practiced Friday to watch her son Jaden play in his first Sweet 16. She had a car waiting for her after the Irish's practice to make the 2 1/2-hour trip. Notre Dame faces North Carolina State in the women's Sweet 16 on Saturday morning.

UP NEXT

The No. 8 seed Tar Heels beat fourth-seeded UCLA 73-66 and will seek to end the Peacocks' unforgettable March.

Russians shift focus from Kyiv — scaling back goals in war?

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian forces in Ukraine seem to have shifted their focus from a ground offensive aimed at Kyiv, the capital, to instead prioritizing what Moscow calls liberation of the contested Donbas region in the country's industrial east, officials said Friday, suggesting a new phase of the war.

It appears too early to know where this will lead. Has President Vladimir Putin scaled back his ambitions in search of a way out of the war? The dug-in defensive positions taken recently by some Russian forces near Kyiv indicate a recognition of the surprisingly stout Ukrainian resistance.

On the other hand, Russian forces might be aiming to continue the war with a narrower focus, not necessarily as an endgame but as a way of regrouping from early failures and using the Donbas as a new starting point, one U.S. analyst said.

Putin's forces are under great strain in many parts of the country, and the United States and other countries are accelerating their transfer of arms and supplies to Ukraine. In recent days, U.S. officials have said they see evidence of Ukrainian defenders going on the offensive in a limited way in some areas. Earlier this week they managed to attack a large Russian ship in port on the Black Sea coast.

Putting a positive face on it all, the deputy chief of the Russian general staff said his forces had largely achieved the "main objectives" of the first phase of what Moscow calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine. Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi said Russian forces had "considerably reduced" the combat power of the Ukrainian military, and as a result Russian troops could "focus on the main efforts to achieve the main goal, liberation of Donbas."

In apparent response to Rudskoi, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed anew to Russia to negotiate an end to the war but pointedly said Ukraine would not agree to give up any of its territory for the sake of peace.

"The territorial integrity of Ukraine should be guaranteed," he said in his nighttime video address to the nation. "That is, the conditions must be fair, for the Ukrainian people will not accept them otherwise."

A month of fighting has left Russian forces stalled in much of the country, including on their paths toward Kyiv. A senior U.S. defense official said Russian ground forces in the past few days have shown little interest in moving on Kyiv, though they are keeping up airstrikes on the capital.

"At least for the moment, they don't appear to want to pursue Kyiv as aggressively, or frankly at all. They are focused on the Donbas," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments of the war.

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From the start of the invasion Feb. 24, Putin has been vague in publicly describing his military goals in Ukraine. He said the purpose was to "demilitarize" and "denazify" the government as well as "liberate" the Donbas, a portion of which has been under Russian-backed separatist control since 2014. Putin arrayed more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders and then pushed them on numerous approaches toward diverse objectives, rather than concentrating on a single strategic goal like Kyiv or the Donbas.

In the four weeks since, Ukrainians have put up a far tougher resistance than Putin likely expected, and Russian forces have been slowed by numerous problems, including weak logistics and perhaps flagging morale.

French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking in Brussels, said "it's too soon to say" whether the Russians have changed their approach. "It shows very clearly that in any case, a (Russian) operation led simultaneously on all sides was thwarted by the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people. That's what we see for several days."

Stephen Biddle, a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University who has studied U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, said it's difficult to decipher Moscow's intent from Friday's statement.

"It's plausible that they're basically trying to ratchet their perceived war aims down to something they've already accomplished," he said, referring to their existing hold on parts of the Donbas. It's also possible, he said, that they've decided they began the war with the wrong approach, with combat forces spread too thin across too many parts of the country. In that case, they might now try to regroup with a central focus on the Donbas and make that the new starting point for an offensive they could later broaden.

Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute, a Washington think tank, said Putin might be recalibrating.

"Moscow may be looking for a way out of its Ukraine quagmire," he said in an email. "Focusing its military goals on control of the Donbas could be a way of scaling back without admitting defeat."

Denied the quick victory he apparently had expected before launching the invasion, Putin is left with stark choices — how and where to replenish his spent ground forces and whether to attack the flow of Western arms to Ukrainian defenders. A big question concerning that second choice: at what cost if he should escalate or widen the war?

The senior U.S. official said it appears Putin intends to draw on Russian forces in Georgia as reinforcements in Ukraine. The official said it was unclear where and in what numbers they might enter Ukraine.

Russian shortcomings in Ukraine might be the biggest shock of the war so far. After two decades of modernization and professionalization, Putin's forces have proved to be ill-prepared, poorly coordinated and surprisingly stoppable. The extent of Russian troop losses is not known in detail, although NATO estimates that 7,000 to 15,000 have died in the first four weeks — potentially as many as Russia lost in a decade of war in Afghanistan.

Robert Gates, the former CIA director and defense secretary, said Putin "has got to be stunningly disappointed" in his military's performance.

"Here we are in Ukraine seeing conscripts not knowing why they're there, not being very well trained, and just huge problems with command and control, and incredibly lousy tactics," Gates said Wednesday at a forum sponsored by The OSS Society, a group honoring the World War II-era intelligence agency known as the Office of Strategic Services.

Battlefield trends are difficult to reliably discern from the outside, but some Western officials say they see potentially significant shifts. Air Vice-Marshal Mick Smeath, London's defense attaché in Washington, says British intelligence assesses that Ukrainian forces probably have retaken two towns west of Kyiv.

"It is likely that successful counterattacks by Ukraine will disrupt the ability of Russian forces to reorganize and resume their own offensive towards Kyiv," Smeath said in a brief statement Wednesday.

Not long before Putin kicked off his war, some U.S. military officials believed that he could capture Kyiv in short order — perhaps just a few days — and that he might break the Ukrainian military within a couple of weeks.

War Crimes Watch: Russia's onslaught on Ukrainian hospitals

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, ERIKA KINETZ and BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — For a month now, Russian forces have repeatedly attacked Ukrainian medical facilities, striking at hospitals, ambulances, medics, patients and even newborns — with at least 34 assaults independently documented by The Associated Press.

With every new attack, the public outcry for war crimes prosecutions against Russian President Vladimir Putin, his generals and top Kremlin advisers grows louder.

To convict, prosecutors will need to show that the attacks are not merely accidents or collateral damage. The emerging pattern, tracked day by day by the AP, shows evidence of a consistent and relentless onslaught against the very civilian infrastructure designed to save lives and provide safe haven to Ukraine's most vulnerable.

AP journalists in Ukraine have seen the deadly results of Russian strikes on civilian targets firsthand: the final moments of children whose tiny bodies were shredded by shrapnel or had limbs blown off; dozens of corpses, including those of children, heaped into mass graves.

"The pattern of attacks will help prosecutors build the case that these are deliberate attacks," said Ryan Goodman, professor of law at New York University and former special counsel at the U.S. Department of Defense. "Prosecutors will draw inferences from how many medical facilities were targeted, how many times individual facilities were repeatedly struck and in what span of time."

Deliberate attacks on hospitals will likely be a top priority for war crimes prosecutors.

This accounting of attacks on medical facilities is part of a larger effort by the AP and the PBS series Frontline to track evidence of potential war crimes committed during one of the largest conflicts in Europe since the end of World War II.

The War Crimes Watch Ukraine project launched by AP and Frontline includes details of apparent targeted attacks as well as indiscriminate destruction of civilian buildings and infrastructure. The AP/Frontline online database will continue to be updated as long as the conflict lasts. The goal is to provide an independent accounting of events, apart from potentially inflated claims by advocates or misinformation spread by state-backed propaganda.

This story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and Frontline that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine interactive experience and an upcoming documentary.

The AP's own reports include strong visual evidence such as photos and videos, along with witness accounts of alleged atrocities. AP journalists outside Ukraine have confirmed the details of other attacks by interviewing survivors and independently verifying the authenticity of videos and photos from the war zone posted online by local officials and residents.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights confirms at least 1,035 civilians, including 90 children, have died in the four weeks since the start of the war. An additional 1,650 civilians have been wounded. Those numbers are certainly an undercount since scores of bodies now lie under the rubble of demolished buildings or were hurriedly buried in mass graves, or the deaths occurred in areas now under Russian control.

Still, Russian officials have denied hitting civilian targets, deriding the mounting documentation of atrocities as "Fake News" and claiming without evidence that dead and wounded civilians photographed were "crisis actors."

Speaking at talks in Turkey about a potential cease-fire, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed concerns about civilian casualties as "pathetic shrieks" from Russia's enemies and denied Ukraine has even been invaded.

Military attacks on civilian populations and their property are generally forbidden under international laws governing armed conflicts going back more than a century. Efforts are already underway by the In-

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ternational Criminal Court in the Hague and Ukrainian prosecutors to compile evidence for future criminal indictments.

Chief ICC prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan announced last month that his agency had opened an investigation after receiving referrals from 39 nations over potential evidence of war crimes committed in Ukraine. President Joe Biden has said he believes Putin is a war criminal, and the U.S. government has assessed that members of Russia's armed forces have committed war crimes.

Attacks on medical facilities and staff are considered particularly heinous under international law, which stipulates they must be protected. Still, bombing a hospital is not necessarily a war crime. Prosecutors must show that the destruction is intentional or reckless.

But the evidence of such attacks in Ukraine verified by AP and Frontline is both mounting and horrendous, and belies Russian claims that they were staged, self-inflicted or militarily justified.

Russia is bombing "medical infrastructure on purpose, fighting sick people as if they were military," said Pavlo Kovtoniuk, a former deputy minister of health and WHO consultant who co-founded the Ukrainian Healthcare Center, a think tank based in Kyiv that has been documenting attacks on hospitals.

"Bombing hospitals is especially cruel because it shows civilian people that there is no safe place for them on earth," he said.

Among the most thoroughly documented strikes was the March 9 bombing of a children's and maternity hospital in Mariupol. Two AP journalists, the last international media to remain in the city after it was encircled by Russian forces, arrived at the hospital minutes after the explosion.

They saw a smoldering two-story-deep crater in the interior courtyard, surrounded by the twisted and burned remains of several cars. The force of the explosion tore the facades off three surrounding buildings, blowing out the windows and wrecking rooms inside.

The AP journalists took photos and video of stunned survivors coming out of the hospital. A pregnant woman being carried on a stretcher held her belly, blood staining her sweatpants, her face pale. She later died following an emergency cesarean section at another nearby hospital, according to Dr. Timur Marin, one of the surgeons who tried to save her. The woman's baby also did not survive.

Another pregnant woman, Mariana Vishegirska, her face bloodied, clutched her belongings in a plastic bag and made her way down a set of debris-strewn stairs and out of the ruined hospital.

Vishegirska was taken to another nearby hospital, Mariupol Regional Intensive Care, where she gave birth the following day to a baby girl she named Veronika.

"We were lying in wards when glass, frames, windows and walls flew apart," she told AP, lying next to her newborn.

Ukrainian authorities say three were killed by the airstrike, including a child, while 17 were wounded.

Kremlin officials admitted Russian aircraft had struck the hospital but insisted all patients and staff had been evacuated prior to the bombing. Russian state media claimed without providing any evidence that the hospital was being used as a base for the Azov Battalion, a small far-right nationalist group often used as *casus belli* by Putin for false claims that the Ukrainian government is rife with Nazis.

At a U.N. Security Council meeting the day after the strike, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia claimed the wounded pregnant women documented by AP journalists were "crisis actors," playing the part of victims in an elaborate plot to frame Russia.

On Twitter, the Russian Embassy in London posted two AP photos side-by-side, one depicting Vishegirska and another of the pregnant woman who died. Each was branded in red as "FAKE." Twitter removed the tweet for violating its rules against denying violent events.

Vishegirska is a blogger in Mariupol who before the war posted about skin care, makeup and cosmetics; there is no evidence that she was anything but a patient at the hospital. She posted multiple photos and videos on Instagram documenting her pregnancy in the past few months.

The AP journalists also saw no evidence that the facility was being used as anything other than a hospital. They saw no military hardware or vehicles among the burned-out wrecks in the courtyard. Hospital rooms were filled with beds and medical equipment.

The contention that the victims were actors and the hospitals were military targets "is preposterous,

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and no court of law would give it any credence," said David Scheffer, who served as U.S. ambassador at large for war crimes issues during the Clinton administration. "Imagine them trying to say it in front of a seasoned panel of judges as if it can be credibly believed."

Scheffer and Goodman both said prosecutors in any future trial are likely to argue multiple strikes against medical facilities are evidence of an intentional strategy to break the morale of the enemy population.

Russian commanders used similar airstrikes during the Syrian war. Physicians for Human Rights, an advocacy group that tracked attacks on medical workers in Syria, documented more than 250 attacks on medical facilities and staff after Russia intervened in the conflict in 2015.

The assaults on medical facilities in Ukraine began with at least two attacks on the very first day of the war.

On Feb. 24, a local media organization posted a photo on Twitter of City Children's Hospital No. 1 in Donetsk, struck by an artillery shell that damaged its top floor. AP found that the photo matches the pictures of the hospital from before the war; the building is clearly marked as a medical facility on maps of the area.

Another photo posted on Twitter showed a large explosion and fire at Central City Hospital in Vuhledar. AP matched the building in the photo to pre-war images of the hospital in Vuhledar, which is clearly marked as a medical facility on maps.

The advocacy group Human Rights Watch obtained additional photos from the hospital's chief doctor, Natalia Sosyura, who provided the names of the four civilians who died in the strike. Ten others were reported to have been wounded.

Additional photos published by a Ukrainian media organization showed two burned out vehicles in the hospital's driveway with two bodies covered by blue sheets. Another photo showed the crumpled nose cone of a rocket.

Chris Weakley, a former U.S. Army explosive ordnance disposal technician and private intelligence analyst, identified the cone as coming from a Russian Tochka ballistic missile, used to carry cluster munitions. As a former Soviet republic, Ukraine also has access to some Russian weapons systems, but there is no evidence Ukraine has been attacking its own hospitals.

In a statement issued March 12, a spokesperson for the U.N. high commissioner for human rights in Geneva, Liz Throssell, said the agency had received "credible reports of several cases of Russian forces using cluster munitions" and specifically cited the attack in Vuhledar.

The stockpiling and use of cluster munitions is banned under an international convention signed by 110 countries, but Russia and Ukraine are not among them. However, their use in civilian areas is by definition indiscriminate — a violation of international humanitarian law — since the munition scatters small grenade-sized bomblets over a wide area.

On the second day of the war, three more Ukrainian medical facilities were reported to have been hit, including a children's hospital and cancer center.

Kharkiv Regional Children's Clinical Hospital No. 1 also was struck by a cluster bomb munition, wounding one staff member. Photos posted on the hospital's social media accounts show numerous impact craters on the hospital campus, including one in a playground. One of the photos shows an unexploded bomblet about the size of a soda bottle on the ground near the front entrance. Weakley identified it as a Russian-made 9N235 cluster submunition.

A different video verified by AP shows a series of explosions in a building identified on maps as the oncology department of Melitopol City Hospital No. 1. The building in the video matches pre-war imagery of the hospital, which features a large red cross on the facade.

Statistics for the number of Ukrainian medical facilities damaged since Russia invaded vary widely. The Ukrainian Health Ministry says 248 medical facilities have been damaged, with 13 completely destroyed. The World Health Organization, by contrast, said 58 Ukrainian medical facilities have been damaged, some more than once. The AP and Frontline have only counted those they could independently confirm.

Russian shelling in Lysychansk caused extensive damage to Luhansk Regional Children's Clinical Hospital in early March. Sergei Haidai, a local government official, said the hospital was hit by at least 10 shells over a two-day period, wounding a surgeon.

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AP video from March 11 shows damage to ambulances and buildings at Dergachi Central Hospital, which Mayor Vyacheslav Zadorenko says resulted from a Russian attack on his town. That video also shows expended cluster rocket canisters impaled in the ground. Weakley identified them as Russian-made 9M27K cargo rockets, which carry the same bomblets found at the children's hospital in Kharkiv.

Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in Kyiv, which houses Ukraine's primary pediatric cancer center, has repeatedly been rocked by explosions since the war began. Dr. Serhii Chernyshuk, the hospital's medical director, said the blasts and shrapnel from Russian missiles and rockets landing nearby have blown out windows and doors.

To try to keep their patients safe from the ongoing bombardment, Ohmatdyt's staff moved them into the basement. An AP journalist who visited the facility on Feb. 28 photographed three young cancer patients, their heads bald from chemotherapy. Two held up sheets of notebook paper with a handwritten message in English: "Stop War."

Chernyshuk said he and his staff have been largely living at the hospital, working long hours on little sleep. "We must support our patients because, in Kyiv and Ukraine, it's terrible for everybody," he said. "But our patients have a different problem, they cannot help themselves. We must do it."

Yulia Ablamskaya was one of 17 employees inside the Mediland Clinic Kyiv when she says a loud "boom" rocked the building in the early morning hours of March 16. As the chaos unfolded, she hurried to get the three remaining patients at the center to a safer place. The patients, she said, are all awaiting operations and unable to travel.

"We felt the walls of the building shivering," Ablamskaya, an administrator at the clinic, recounted. "So, we of course jumped up and went to take the patients."

Once they were safe, she returned to take photos and videos of the damage, which she provided to AP. They show cracked walls and shattered windows.

There's also evidence Russian forces have intentionally targeted ambulances and medics, including multiple photos posted by Ukrainian health officials showing ambulances riddled with bullet holes.

Video posted online Feb. 26 shows an ambulance is engulfed in flames on a rural road outside Kherson after Ukrainian officials say it was struck by Russian heavy weapons fire. Medics from a second ambulance work feverishly to save a wounded man wearing a red paramedic's uniform who is on the ground, bleeding from his head. Ukrainian media and government authorities reported the ambulance's driver, Volodymyr Vasyliovych Kovalchuk, and a patient died in the attack, which appears to match a confirmed incident in the WHO database.

Ukrainian Health Minister Viktor Liashko said in a Facebook post on Wednesday that Russian forces have hit 58 emergency vehicles and killed six medics, forcing the government to outfit emergency medical workers with body armor.

David Crane is a former senior inspector general in the Department of Defense who served as chief prosecutor of a United Nations-sponsored war crimes tribunal over atrocities committed during Sierra Leone's civil war. What is happening in Ukraine, he said, is worthy of prosecution.

"The bottom line is this is medieval warfare in the Ukraine," Crane said. "It's precisely the sort of warfare that the laws of armed conflict were designed to prevent."

For more on the Russian attacks on medical facilities, including information on each attack, go to <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interactive/ap-russia-war-crimes-ukraine/>

AP Investigative Reporter Michael Biesecker reported from Washington and News Verification Reporter Beatrice Dupuy from New York. AP reporters Mstyslav Chernov and Evgeny Maloletka in Mariupol, Ukraine; Sarah El Deeb in Beirut, Lebanon; Jason Dearen and Larry Fenn in New York; Juliet Linderman in Baltimore; Joshua Goodman in Miami; Richard Lardner and Helen Wieffering in Washington; Lori Hinnant in Paris; and James LaPorta in Wilmington, North Carolina, contributed.

Ukraine reports 300 dead in airstrike on Mariupol theater

By NEBI QENA and ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — About 300 people were killed in the Russian airstrike last week on a Mariupol theater that was being used as a shelter, Ukrainian authorities said Friday in what would make it the war's deadliest known attack on civilians yet.

The bloodshed at the theater fueled allegations Moscow is committing war crimes by killing civilians, whether deliberately or by indiscriminate fire.

Meanwhile, in what could signal an important narrowing of Moscow's war aims, the U.S. said Russian forces appear to have halted, at least for now, their ground offensive aimed at capturing the capital, Kyiv, and are concentrating more on gaining control of the Donbas region in the country's southeast — a shift the Kremlin seemed to confirm.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again appealed to Russia to negotiate an end to the war, but pointedly said Ukraine would not agree to give up any of its territory for the sake of peace.

"The territorial integrity of Ukraine should be guaranteed," he said in a nightly video address to the nation. "That is, the conditions must be fair, for the Ukrainian people will not accept them otherwise."

For days, the Mariupol government was unable to give a casualty count for the March 16 bombardment of the grand, columned Mariupol Drama Theater, where hundreds of people were said to be taking cover, the word "CHILDREN" printed in Russian in huge white letters on the ground outside to ward off aerial attack.

In announcing the death toll on its Telegram channel Friday, the city government cited eyewitnesses. But it was not immediately clear how witnesses arrived at the figure or whether emergency workers had finished excavating the ruins.

U.S. President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said the theater bombing was an "absolute shock, particularly given the fact that it was so clearly a civilian target." He said it showed "a brazen disregard for the lives of innocent people" in the besieged port city.

The Ukrainian Parliament's human rights commissioner said soon after the attack that more than 1,300 people had taken shelter in the theater, many of them because their homes were destroyed. The building had a basement bomb shelter, and some survivors did emerge from the rubble after the attack.

"This is a barbaric war, and according to international conventions, deliberate attacks on civilians are war crimes," said Mircea Geoana, NATO's deputy-secretary general.

He said Putin's efforts to break Ukraine's will to resist are having the opposite effect: "What he's getting in response is an even more determined Ukrainian army and an ever more united West in supporting Ukraine."

While the Russians continue to pound the capital from the air, they appear to have gone into a "defensive crouch" outside Kyiv and are focused more on the Donbas, a senior U.S. defense official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the Pentagon's assessment.

"They don't show any signs of being willing to move on Kyiv from the ground," the official said.

In comments that seemed to corroborate a change in Moscow's military goals, Col.-Gen Sergei Rudskoi, deputy chief of the Russian general staff, said the main objective of the first stage of the operation — reducing Ukraine's fighting capacity — has "generally been accomplished," allowing Russian forces to focus on "the main goal, liberation of Donbas."

The Donbas is the largely Russian-speaking eastern part of the country where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014 and where many residents desire close ties to Moscow. Its coal-mining and industrial Donetsk and Luhansk regions are recognized by Russia as independent.

Britain's Ministry of Defense said Ukrainian forces have been counterattacking and have been able to reoccupy towns and defensive positions up to 35 kilometers (22 miles) east of Kyiv as Russian troops fall back on their overextended supply lines. In the south, logistical problems and Ukrainian resistance are slowing the Russians as they look to drive west toward the port of Odesa, the ministry said.

In fact, the Russians are no longer in full control of Kherson, the first major city to fall to Moscow's forces, the senior U.S. defense official said. The official said the southern city is being contested by the Ukrainians in heavy fighting. The Kremlin denied it had lost full control.

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The Russian military said 1,351 of its soldiers have died in Ukraine and 3,825 have been wounded, though it was not immediately clear if that included the separatists in the east or others not part of the Defense Ministry, such as the National Guard. Earlier this week, NATO estimated that 7,000 to 15,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in four weeks of fighting.

For civilians, the misery is growing more severe in Ukrainian towns and cities, which increasingly resemble the ruins that Russian forces left behind in their campaigns in Syria and Chechnya.

In the village of Yasnohorodka, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Kyiv, Russian troops who were there earlier in the week appeared to have been pushed out as part of a counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces.

The tower of the village church was damaged by a blast, and houses on the main crossroads lay in ruins. "You can see for yourself what happened here. People were killed here. Our soldiers were killed here," said Yasnohorodka resident Valeriy Puzakov.

As for Mariupol, "nothing remains of Mariupol," said Evgeniy Sokyрко, who was among those waiting for an evacuation train in Zaporizhzhia, a way station for refugees from the shattered port city. "In the last week, there have been explosions like I've never heard before."

Oksana Abramova, 42, said she ached for those left behind in the city, who have been cut off from communication with the shelling of cell, radio and TV towers and do not have the means to escape.

"All the time I think about how they are, where they are. Are still hiding, are they alive? Or maybe they are no longer there," she said.

In Kyiv, ashes of the dead are piling up at the main crematorium because so many relatives have left, leaving urns unclaimed. And the northern city of Chernihiv is all but cut off after Russian forces destroyed bridges, leaving people without power, water and heat, authorities said.

For the vulnerable — the elderly, children and others unable to join millions heading westward — food shortages are mounting in a country once known as the breadbasket for the world.

In relentlessly shelled Kharkiv, hundreds of panicked people took shelter in the subway, and a hospital emergency room filled with wounded soldiers and civilians.

Mostly elderly women lined up stoically to collect food and other urgent supplies this week, as explosions thudded in the distance. Fidgeting with anticipation, a young girl watched as a volunteer's knife cut through a giant slab of cheese, carving out thick slices, one for each hungry person.

"Among those who stayed, there are people who can walk on their own, but many who cannot walk, the elderly," Hanna Spitsyna said. "All these people need diapers, swaddle blankets and food."

AP Explains: Why the 14th Amendment has surfaced in midterms

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — An 1868 amendment to the U.S. Constitution best known for protecting the due process rights of previously enslaved Americans has resurfaced in certain congressional races this year.

Some attorneys and voters believe a rarely cited section of the 14th Amendment dealing with insurrection can disqualify a handful of U.S. House members from seeking reelection for events surrounding the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol.

First-term Republican firebrands Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina and Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia are among those targeted. Both are strong supporters of former President Donald Trump who have pushed his unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election.

It's a largely untested argument working its way through election agencies in at least three states, with little success so far. But court cases and appeals could address the extent to which state officials can scrutinize the minimum qualifications for candidates for federal office.

WHAT DOES THE 14TH AMENDMENT SAY?

There are five sections to the amendment. The best-known declares that no state can "deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Section 3 of the amendment also declares that no one can serve in Congress "who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress ... to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have

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engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same." This section was designed to keep representatives who had fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War from returning to Congress. The amendment, however, allows Congress to pass laws that can remove such restrictions.

HOW COULD IT APPLY TO LAWMAKERS TODAY?

Voters from congressional districts where Cawthorn and Greene are seeking reelection this fall allege in legal filings that evidence shows they helped facilitate the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection that attempted to thwart the certification of President Joe Biden's Electoral College victory. The voters want state officials to investigate Greene and Cawthorn and disqualify them from appearing on ballots this year, based on the amendment's language.

Greene, according to a challenge filed Thursday with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, either helped plan the riot or helped plan the demonstration held beforehand, knowing that it was "substantially likely to lead to the attack, and otherwise voluntarily aided the insurrection."

In a video posted on social media, Greene said: "You can't allow it to just transfer power 'peacefully' like Joe Biden wants and allow him to become our president because he did not win this election."

Somewhat similar allegations have been lodged with the North Carolina Board of Elections by voters challenging Cawthorn. Cawthorn spoke at the "Save America Rally" before the riot, days after he was sworn in to office, saying the "crowd has some fight in it."

A longshot Democrat candidate seeking to unseat Indiana Republican Rep. Jim Banks filed similar allegations against Banks with the state elections commission.

HOW HAVE THE REPRESENTATIVES RESPONDED?

Greene and Cawthorn have said they did nothing unlawful such as encouraging political violence or participating in an insurrection.

Cawthorn, who was the first representative subjected to the challenge in January, said activists are going after "America First patriots" who backed Trump. Greene said she was targeted because she is "effective and will not bow to the DC machine."

Cawthorn proceeded to sue the State Board of Elections in federal court, saying that North Carolina's candidate challenge process violated his constitutional rights and should be overturned. His lawyers also said Section 3 didn't apply to Cawthorn because of congressional action in 1872.

Free Speech for People, a national election and campaign finance reform group, is helping represent the voters in both challenges. The group has said more challenges could be filed against other members of Congress who are seeking reelection.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE CHALLENGES?

Indiana's state elections commission voted unanimously last month to reject the challenge against Banks. The commission's chairman, a Republican, called the Capitol riot a "regrettable mark in history" but said there was no evidence that Banks was guilty of taking part in an insurrection.

As for Cawthorn, U.S. District Judge Richard Myers ruled earlier this month that the State Board of Elections could not hear the voters' challenges on Section 3 claims.

Myers wrote that the 1872 law that removed office-holding disqualifications "from all persons whomsoever" — save for those who served in two specific legislative sessions among others — "demonstrates that the disability set forth in Section 3 can apply to no current member of Congress."

The North Carolina Board of Elections hasn't appealed so far. Myers previously rebuffed efforts by voters who filed challenges to participate in the litigation, but the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals told him last week to reconsider their entry. Myers' ruling could come as soon as next week.

COULD VOTERS ULTIMATELY HAVE THEIR SAY?

Free Speech for People argues that the 1872 law applied only to former members of the Confederacy: "The right of voters to bring this challenge to Cawthorn's eligibility must be preserved," group legal director Ron Fein said this month.

Michael Gerhardt, a constitutional expert at the University of North Carolina law school, said he believes the 1872 law could be construed more broadly than how Myers ruled. But he also said the chances that

candidate challenges will go forward under insurrection claims are “probably not good.”

“It’s really a novel theory and there’s no consensus on what the actual procedure should be, and that does pose a problem,” Gerhardt said.

He said it’s unclear, for example, whether a declaration that someone participated in an insurrection should come from a judge hearing evidence, state officials or Congress.

If the challenges are unsuccessful or delayed, voters still will get to decide whether the subjects of the challenges should return to Congress. Greene and Cawthorn have GOP primaries in May.

Cawthorn may have the more difficult road, with seven GOP opponents. He also has taken criticism for a video in which he called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a “thug” even as his country resists a Russian invasion.

How would those accused of Ukraine war crimes be prosecuted?

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Each day searing stories pour out of Ukraine: A maternity hospital bombed in Mariupol. A mother and her children killed as they fled Irpin in a humanitarian corridor. Burning apartment blocks. Mass graves. A child dead of dehydration in a city under siege, denied humanitarian aid.

Such images have contributed to a growing global consensus that Russia should be held accountable for war crimes in Ukraine.

“The world’s strongmen are watching like crocodiles ... We have to show tyrants around the world that rule of law is stronger than rule of gun,” said David Crane, a veteran of numerous international war crime investigations.

Even as the conflict rages, a vast apparatus is being built to gather and preserve evidence of potential violations of international laws of war that were written after World War II. Less than a month after Vladimir Putin’s order to drop the first bombs on his neighbor, the United States declared that Russian forces were committing war crimes in Ukraine. But it remains far from clear who will be held accountable and how.

Here’s a look at what war crimes are and what options exist for bringing those responsible to justice.

WHAT ARE WAR CRIMES?

A war crime is a violation of the laws of war. While the architecture of international criminal law has been built over decades, the concept is straightforward.

“If there’s no military necessary reason to target something, it’s a war crime. If you’re just shooting like ‘Mad Max Thunderdome’ then it’s a war crime,” said Crane.

The core principles of international humanitarian law are enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, the bulk of which came into force after World War II, and the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in 1998.

They provide protections for civilians in times of war, as well as for prisoners of war and the wounded. Possible war crimes that have been reported in Ukraine: widespread destruction of people’s homes, firing on civilians as they evacuate through safe corridors, targeting hospitals, using indiscriminate weapons like cluster bombs in civilian areas, attacks on nuclear power plants, intentionally blocking access to humanitarian aid or basic needs like food and water.

But intention matters. Destroying a hospital alone is not evidence of a war crime. Prosecutors would have to show that the attack was intentional or at least reckless.

Crimes against humanity, which have been codified in the statutes of a number of international criminal tribunals, occur when a state launches a widespread or systematic attack against civilians involving murder, deportation, torture, disappearances or other inhumane acts.

The mass mobilization of Ukrainian citizens to fight off Russian invaders may complicate the case against Putin. Russia could try to use the blurred distinction between civilian and combatant as a justification for attacks on civilian areas.

Some examples of recent convictions:

—In 2012, the International Criminal Court convicted warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of drafting and

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enlisting children under 15 years old to fight in an ethnic conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is serving a 14-year sentence.

—Radovan Karadžić, president of the Republika Srpska, a self-proclaimed Serb republic within Bosnia, was convicted of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide -- most notoriously, the murders of more than 7,000 people in Srebrenica in 1995. He is serving a life sentence imposed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

—Jean-Paul Akayesu, a mayor convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity -- including rape -- and incitement to commit genocide in the 1994 Rwandan ethnic bloodbath. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sentenced him to life in prison.

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT?

The International Criminal Court, located in the Hague, can prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

The court holds sway over its 123 member countries. Ukraine is not among them but has granted the ICC jurisdiction. On Feb. 28, the ICC's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, announced that he would investigate suspected atrocities in Ukraine after an unprecedented 39 member states asked him to do so. Since then, more states have signed on to that request.

"There is a reasonable basis to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed in Ukraine," Khan said at the time.

There are important limitations to what the ICC can do. It doesn't have the power to investigate Russia for what judges at the Nuremberg tribunal after World War II called the "supreme international crime," the crime of aggression -- that is, the decision to wage a ruthless, unprovoked war against another country, which international lawyers say would be the easiest way to hold Putin accountable.

That's because Russia, like the United States, isn't a party to the ICC.

When the ICC statute was amended to include the crime of aggression, the United States, Russia and China pushed for -- and got -- a carveout to protect citizens of countries that have not signed on to the court from being prosecuted on that charge. The U.N. Security Council can override that by voting to refer a matter to the ICC, but Russia has a seat on the Security Council and could easily torpedo any such initiative.

Another limitation of the ICC is that the court cannot try people in absentia.

"There would be no trial at the ICC of Putin until he is physically present in the courtroom," said David Scheffer, who was the first ever U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues and led the U.S. delegation at talks establishing the International Criminal Court.

But the ICC could indict Putin even if he stays put in Moscow and issue an international warrant for his arrest, Scheffer said. That would seriously curtail Putin's overseas travel and damage his standing both at home and abroad.

HAVE ANY COURTS ALREADY MOVED AGAINST RUSSIA FOR ITS ACTIONS IN UKRAINE?

Yes. On March 1, the European Court of Human Rights, in Strasbourg, told Russia to stop attacking civilians and bombing people's homes, hospitals and schools and start ensuring civilians safe evacuation routes and access to humanitarian aid. Then, on Mar. 16, the U.N.'s highest court, the International Court of Justice, ordered Russia to suspend military operations in Ukraine. Both courts consider violations by states, rather than individuals.

Russia simply ignored them.

"There is no international police or international military force that can support any international court judgment," said Ivan Lishchyna, an adviser to Ukraine's Ministry of Justice who helped Ukraine make its case at the European Court of Human Rights. "It's not like you receive a judgment and everything gets peaceful and quiet and everyone is punished for violating international law. It's much more complicated."

Many Ukrainians, including Lishchyna, would like to see Russia pay for its transgressions and cover the massive cost of repairing damage wreaked by its bombs. "If compensation were paid, I would consider that I did something good in my life," Lishchyna said.

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The ECHR could order Russia to pay compensation. But the only leverage the ECHR would have if Russia didn't pay up would be to exclude it from the Council of Europe – which already happened on March 16. The ICJ could also order Russia to pay reparations, but the U.N. Security Council – where Russia holds a permanent seat and veto power – would have to enforce the judgment.

Scholars, prosecutors and politicians have started discussing whether Russian assets frozen under global sanctions could be used in the future to pay reparations to Ukraine.

CAN OTHER COUNTRIES PROSECUTE RUSSIAN OFFICIALS FOR WAR CRIMES, EVEN IF THEY'RE NOT DIRECTLY IMPACTED?

Yes. Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, France, Slovakia, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland all opened independent investigations into Russia's activity in Ukraine within the first month of the conflict. They can do so under the legal concept of "universal jurisdiction," which allows countries to use domestic courts to prosecute individuals for grave violations of international law, like crimes against humanity, torture and war crimes – even if they are committed abroad by foreign perpetrators against foreign victims.

This approach has produced results in the past. So far, the only convictions of Syrian government officials for atrocities committed during the country's long-running civil war have been handed down by German courts. Courts in other European countries also have convicted members of armed groups in Syria, including Islamic State militants, for crimes committed during the war.

Within the first month of Russia's war against Ukraine, Polish prosecutors said they had collected some 300 witness testimonies from refugees pouring over the border. In March, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine agreed to set up a joint international investigative team on Russian war crimes in Ukraine. Efforts have been ongoing to expand the scope of that collaboration.

While the ICC typically only tries a handful of high-profile cases, prosecutions in national courts can cast a wider net and hold more people accountable. But they too have a limitation: Sitting heads of state, like Putin, and senior officials, like Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, generally have immunity from prosecution in other countries, said Ryan Goodman, professor of law at New York University and former special counsel at the Department of Defense.

"This probably knocks out of contention the independent national jurisdictions of Germany, Poland etc. in getting Putin, Lavrov and maybe others," Goodman said. "But they'd be able to go after a lot of other senior Russian officials."

IS UKRAINE PROSECUTING RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES CASES?

Yes. Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said that in the first month of the war, Ukraine launched investigations into more than 2,500 war crimes cases and identified 186 suspects, including Russian government officials, military leaders and propagandists.

But as top government officials, Putin and Lavrov would likely be immune from prosecution in Ukrainian courts.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS?

Yes. The Nuremberg Tribunal, set up after WWII to try Nazi war criminals, looms large as an example of how Putin could be held accountable by a court set up specifically for that purpose. And special tribunals were established to investigate crimes in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, among other places.

In theory, such a court could do what the ICC cannot: Prosecute Putin for the crime of aggression, even if he stays in Russia.

In early March, a campaign to create a special tribunal to investigate the crime of aggression against Ukraine, dubbed Justice for Ukraine, kicked off and quickly gained momentum. More than 140 prominent lawyers, scholars, writers and political figures, including Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and a former prosecutor for the Nuremberg tribunal, have signed on. A public petition in support of the effort got over 1.3 million signatures within weeks.

Criticisms of this approach include that it could take too long to set up, cost too much money, lack legitimacy and create the appearance of selective justice. Why, some argue, should there be a special tribunal for Russian aggression in Ukraine when there wasn't one against the U.S. and its allies for invading Iraq?

But others say Putin's attack on Ukraine has shown just how inadequate existing legal options are and that a new approach is urgently required.

"Since World War II we haven't had a case of brazen, large-scale aggression by one sovereign European nation against another," said Mykola Gnatovsky, a prominent Ukrainian lawyer and professor who has been tapped by Ukraine's foreign ministry to help craft a new Nuremberg-style tribunal for Russian aggression. "Accountability is important because accountability is a way to prevent this in the future."

Justices decide for themselves when to step aside from cases

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Reports that the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas implored Donald Trump's White House chief of staff to act to overturn the 2020 election results have put a spotlight on how justices decide whether to step aside from a case.

Individual justices make their own unreviewable calls on a court that lacks a code of ethics. And the issue is not always clear, particularly when spouses also have prominent careers.

While the Supreme Court did not step into any election cases brought by Trump and other Republicans, Justice Thomas took part in the consideration of whether to hear those cases. He also was the lone vote to keep House lawmakers investigating the Jan. 6. Capitol riot from obtaining contested White House documents.

Thomas did not immediately respond Friday to a request for comment made through the court's spokeswoman. Earlier in the day the court announced he had been discharged from the hospital after a stay of nearly a week while he was treated for an infection.

Thomas' wife, Virginia, whom he married in 1987, is a longtime conservative activist who ardently backed Trump's reelection as president in 2020. In the weeks leading up to the election, Thomas used her Facebook page to amplify unsubstantiated claims of corruption by Joe Biden, Trump's opponent.

Once it was over, Thomas, known as Ginni, sent weeks of text messages imploring White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, furthering Trump's lies that the free and fair vote was marred by nonexistent fraud, according to copies of the messages obtained by The Washington Post and CBS News.

"The majority knows Biden and the Left is attempting the greatest Heist of our History," Thomas wrote.

She also urged lawyer Sidney Powell, who promoted false claims about the election, to be "the lead and the face" of the Trump legal team.

In the same period, Powell brought cases to the Supreme Court, which were denied without any noted recusals or dissent.

The court, with Thomas participating, also threw out a challenge from Texas calling on the justices to temporarily set aside electoral votes from four states Biden won — enough votes to potentially undo the outcome. Trump sought to join Texas' side in the case.

Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon said Thomas should not take part in any future cases about the Jan. 6 investigation or the 2024 election, should Trump decide to run again.

"Judges are obligated to recuse themselves when their participation in a case would create even the appearance of a conflict of interest. A person with an ounce of commonsense could see that bar is met here," Wyden said in a statement.

But Arthur Hellman, a University of Pittsburgh ethics expert, said the Thomas situation reflects the progress women have made in pursuing their own careers and not living in the shadow of their husbands. Judges should distinguish between cases in which their spouses take part and issues on which they have been active, Hellman said. Only the first category requires recusal, he said.

"It's not absolute. There may be some cases in which the issue is so directly involved in the case that the judge ought to recuse," Hellman said. "I don't think see that in the Ginni Thomas situation."

Ginni Thomas, for her part, downplayed any potential conflict in an interview with the conservative Washington Free Beacon earlier this month, before the text messages' publication. "Like so many married couples, we share many of the same ideals, principles and aspirations for America," Thomas said. "But we

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have our own separate careers, and our own ideas and opinions too. Clarence doesn't discuss his work with me, and I don't involve him in my work."

The revelations about Thomas' texts come at a time when groups have already been calling for ethics guidelines for justices. Congress has also been looking at the issue.

Under federal law, federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, are supposed to recuse themselves when they previously participated in a case or have a financial interest in it or when a close relative is involved. A judge is also supposed to do so "in any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned." But that's open to interpretation.

Gabe Roth, of the court transparency group Fix The Court, said an ethics code would help the justices make consistent decisions about recusals. "Every justice sees their own ethical obligations different from one another. There should be some hard and fast rules that everyone follows," Roth said.

Three years ago, Justice Elena Kagan told a congressional committee that Chief Justice John Roberts was considering whether the court needed its own ethics guide. Nothing has happened since.

Roberts noted in 2011 that the Supreme Court is different from lower courts because no one can step in if a justice recuses. In his year-end report, Roberts wrote that means a justice "cannot withdraw from a case as a matter of convenience or simply to avoid controversy."

Of course, justices and other judges decide from time to time that they cannot participate in a case because a close relative is involved. Early in his Supreme Court tenure, Thomas sat out a case in which the court ended the Virginia Military Institute's exclusion of women. His son from his first marriage, Jamal, was a VMI student at the time.

Justice Stephen Breyer routinely doesn't take part in cases decided in the lower court by his brother, U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer. Last year, Justice Brett Kavanaugh recused himself from a case when the court left in place a \$2 billion verdict in favor of women who claim they developed ovarian cancer from using Johnson & Johnson talc products. Kavanaugh offered no explanation, but his father, E. Edward Kavanaugh, had earlier headed the trade association that lobbied against labeling talc a carcinogen and including a warning label on talc products.

Roberts and his wife dealt with a potential controversy in a different way. Jane Roberts stopped practicing law and left her position as the unpaid legal counsel to an anti-abortion group, Feminists for Life of America, after her husband became chief justice.

Column: Baseball & Oscars fight losing battle for relevancy

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Columnist

Yes, folks, dinosaurs do still roam the Earth.

Come Sunday night, an increasingly irrelevant Hollywood elite — look, kids, Dame Judi Dench got another nomination! — will gather for their annual fete to an astonishing lack of self-awareness, a.k.a. the Academy Awards.

In less than two weeks, Major League Baseball will throw out the first pitch on another fun-filled season of jockstrap adjustments and dallying even longer than usual between pitches so every fielder, plus a couple of hot dog vendors, have time to shift to one side of the field.

Baseball & the Oscars.

Two relics of a bygone era, both fighting a desperate but ultimately losing battle to avoid relegation — sorry, a soccer term seemed appropriate here — to Nicheville U.S.A.

Each seems to think it can somehow become must-see viewing again, despite plunging ratings that confirm they've already been written off by a sizable chunk of the population.

For the Oscars, that means going to increasingly desperate lengths to honor films that people have actually seen, even though we all know snooty Academy members favor flicks attended by 14 people — all of them movie critics — at an art house on the Upper East Side.

A few years ago, they proposed an "Academy Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Film" — in other words, whichever superhero movie sold the most tickets — but that plan quickly fell apart and was

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shuffled off to purgatory to gather the dreaded "additional input."

With nothing more heard about whatever additional input was received, the 2022 Oscars have turned to that bastion of rationale thought and respectful debate — Twitter! — to give the fans a say on their favorite film and best movie moment.

Granted, the Twittersverse can't do much worse than Academy voters who selected "Green Book" as the best film of 2018 solely for making white people feel better about racism, but we don't have high hopes for anything emanating from the cesspool of social media.

Baseball, meanwhile, is looking to build on a blockbuster of an offseason in which billionaire owners duked it out with millionaire players in "Lock-Out 5: No Way Home Unless We Can Figure Out A Luxury Tax Threshold."

Spider-Man vs. Green Goblin was compelling cinema, to be sure, but it had nothing on MLB Commish Rob Manfred ducking out of negotiations to work on his golf swing.

What a twist!

Sadly, the ending was anticlimactic. With time a-wasting, enormously wealthy people on both sides said "What the heck are we doing?" and furiously hammered out a new labor agreement that basically just prints up more money for all of them.

With champagne faucets now installed in all clubhouse showers, baseball is ready to "tackle" a far more challenging conundrum: How to attract new fans who aren't already collecting Social Security? (Full disclosure: The football term used in the previous sentence is not an Easter egg that leads to some inside scoop on the NFL draft. Unless that's the only way you'll keep reading. Then, yes, it is an Easter egg related to the 12th overall pick.)

After careful consideration, the big leagues are now leaning toward pitch clocks, banning shifts and installing larger bases as ways to turn their game into a blisteringly paced action flick that sends ratings into the stratosphere.

Spoiler alert: They won't.

We're not saying those changes won't improve the game. Maybe they will. We're certainly pumped that all teams will be using the designated hitter this season, eliminating the silliest spectacle in all of sports: a pitcher attempting to swing a bat.

But baseball would need a time machine to regain its standing as the true national pastime.

The same applies to the Oscars and the sway it once held over the entertainment world, but the Academy just can't seem to let go of that pipe dream. They're trying to cram something for everyone into a three-hour show, including a performance of the hit "Encanto" song "We Don't Talk About Bruno," even though it wasn't nominated for any awards.

"We're going to make sure that everybody has their moment," said Will Packer, who is producing the show.

Good luck with that. These are fragmented times we're living in, with far more options available in our spare time and far more ways to consume both games and movies.

Sure, baseball and the Oscars are apples to oranges in many ways, but they share many of the same issues when it comes to remaining relevant in a fast-changing world.

Maybe, instead of trying to play catch-up, they should listen to the fans they do have. Those numbers may be dwindling, but they're not insignificant.

A few tweaks here and there, rather than a massive overhaul, is likely all that is needed to keep those folks tuning in.

Focus on those who actually prefer dinosaurs. Forget about those who have moved on.

They're gone.

Extinct, you might say.

Arizona Republicans fight culture war in battleground state

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona has long been fertile ground for a social conservative agenda, with some of

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the nation's toughest laws against abortion and a history of restricting LGBTQ rights.

That hasn't changed even as Republican dominance has waned over the past five years, a fact made plain this week when GOP lawmakers passed strict measures targeting abortion and the rights of transgender young people.

"It's just become this political wedge issue that our legislators use to get more votes, and it's not fair," said Andi Young, the parent of a transgender teenager and co-chair of the board of directors for GLSEN Phoenix, an advocacy group promoting inclusive education.

GOP lawmakers thrust Arizona into the national culture wars Thursday when they passed three bills in party-line votes banning abortion after 15 weeks, prohibiting transgender girls from playing on girls sports teams and restricting gender-affirming health care for minors.

The measures have been popular with the conservative base in states where Republicans dominate but could be politically risky in a battleground state where Democrats have made significant inroads.

Arizona Republicans have not aggressively promoted the bills as they've moved through the Legislature. Few GOP lawmakers explained their support during sometimes emotional debates in the House.

That doesn't surprise Mike Noble, a former Republican political consultant who now does nonpartisan polling in the Southwest from his base in Phoenix.

"Those are clearly issues to really get the base fired up. However, the base is already fired up," Noble said. "I think what you're doing is giving the other side, who doesn't have much of a reason to turn out, a reason to now come out and vote in these midterm elections."

Democrats have grown increasingly successful in Arizona since Donald Trump's election as president in 2016. Democrats Kyrsten Sinema and Mark Kelly were elected to the Senate in 2018 and 2020, respectively, and President Joe Biden became only the second Democrat since Harry Truman to win the state's electoral votes. Democrats control a majority of the state's U.S. House seats and two of the top five state offices. Republican legislative majorities have dwindled to the bare minimum.

With that backdrop, Kelly's reelection race this year could be pivotal to the GOP's hopes of winning a majority in the U.S. Senate.

The decision on whether to sign the bills lies with Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, who has been mum. Advocates on both sides of the issues moved swiftly to pressure him to sign or veto the bills.

Ducey opposes abortion rights and is widely expected to sign that bill. He has less of a track record on transgender issues, but has occasionally bucked the social conservatives in his party on issues affecting the LGBTQ community.

Last year, he vetoed a bill barring all classroom discussions about gender identity, sexual orientation or HIV/AIDS without parental permission. He later signed a scaled back version.

"Governor Ducey needs to veto these hateful bills; lives are in the balance," Kell Olson, a staff attorney in Tucson for the LGBTQ rights group Lambda Legal, said in a statement.

Likewise, Cathi Herrod, the influential head of the social conservative group Center for Arizona Policy, blasted an email alert to the group's supporters urging them to contact Ducey and press him to sign the sports participation bill.

"LET'S STAND UP FOR WOMENS SPORTS IN ARIZONA!" Herrod wrote.

Arizona and Florida could join Mississippi and Louisiana in adopting a 15-week abortion ban, and nearly a dozen have limited participation in girls sports. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ordered state officials to investigate gender-affirming care as child abuse, and Arkansas banned it in a bill similar to Arizona's. Both directives were put on hold by courts. A Florida bill awaiting the governor's action would bar classroom instruction about gender identity and sexual orientation before fourth grade, which critics have dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" bill.

The Republican governors of Utah and Indiana this week vetoed bills banning transgender girls from girls sports, calling the issue virtually nonexistent in their states. Utah's Republican lawmakers overrode the governor's veto Friday, and Indiana lawmakers were considering doing the same.

In Arizona, about 16 high school athletes have receive waivers to play on the team that aligns with their

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gender identity, according to the Arizona Interscholastic Association.

"I will not stop fighting for women. I will not stop standing for women. I will not stop speaking for women. Especially my daughters, who wanted to win," House Speaker Rusty Bowers said in explaining his support for the bill.

It's adults who are hung up on the gender of kids playing sports, said Democratic Rep. Cesar Chavez. "This is not a problem for these kids," Chavez said. "Yet it's a problem for these individuals who feel like they're losing their antiquated political system."

60 miles from Ukraine, Biden sees refugee crisis in Poland

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

RZESZOW, Poland (AP) — Just 60 miles from Ukraine, President Joe Biden saluted Poland on Friday for welcoming more than 2 million refugees who have fled Russia's invasion. Then he met with humanitarian experts on the ground about what will be needed to mitigate the growing suffering.

Biden said he had hoped to get even closer to the border but was prevented because of security concerns. Still, he said he wanted to visit Poland to underscore that the assistance it is providing is of "enormous consequence" as Europe experiences the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

"It's not stopping," Biden said of the devastation in Ukraine. "It's like something out of a science fiction movie."

Biden also visited with some of the thousands of U.S. troops who have been sent near Poland's border to assist with the humanitarian emergency and to bolster the U.S. military presence on the eastern flank of NATO. More than 3.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country since the Feb. 24 invasion, including about 2.2 million to Poland, according to the United Nations.

Within a few days, the number of refugees displaced from Ukraine since last month will exceed the number of Syrians routed from their homes over years of conflict after a 2011 uprising turned into a full-scale war, said Samantha Power, the U.S. Agency for International Development administrator.

The American military commitment in Poland was apparent as soon as Air Force One touched down, rolling past Patriot missile batteries. More hardware, including heavy trucks and other equipment painted with dark green and brown camouflage, was present at the airport. A nearby convention center serves as a base for the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division.

Polish President Andrzej Duda joined Biden for a briefing with humanitarian experts.

Duda, through an interpreter, thanked Biden for his support. He said the Poles see the Ukrainians they are receiving as their "guests."

"This is the name we want to apply to them," Duda said. "We do not want to call them refugees. They are our guests, our brothers, our neighbors from Ukraine, who today are in a very difficult situation."

Biden's first stop was with 82nd Airborne troops, at a barber shop and dining facility where he invited himself to sit down and share some pizza. The Americans are serving alongside Polish troops.

With the troops, he shared an anecdote about visiting his late son, Beau Biden, while he was deployed in Baghdad and going by his mother's maiden name so as not to draw attention to himself. The president jokingly razzed one service member about his standard-issue short haircut and seriously praised the troops, too.

"You are the finest fighting force in the world and that's not hyperbole," Biden said.

He later addressed a group of soldiers in more formal remarks, telling them the nation "owes you big." He also borrowed the words of the late Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to underscore their place in a fragile moment for the U.S. and its European allies.

"The secretary of state used to have an expression. She said, 'We are the essential nation,'" Biden told the troops. "I don't want to sound philosophical here, but you are in midst of a fight between democracy and an oligarch."

Biden will be in Warsaw on Saturday for further talks with Duda and others. The Polish leader had planned to welcome him at the airport on Friday, but his plane was delayed by a technical problem.

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White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden was looking to hear directly from the American troops and humanitarian experts about the situation on the ground and "what further steps need to be taken to make sure that we're investing" U.S. dollars in the right place.

Biden, who spent Thursday lobbying U.S. allies to stay united against Russia, speculated that what he sees in Poland "will reinforce my commitment to have the United States make sure we are a major piece of dealing with the relocation of all those folks, as well as humanitarian assistance needed both inside Ukraine and outside Ukraine."

Speaking in Brussels after meetings with other world leaders, Biden said he had visited many war zones and refugee camps during his political career and "it's devastating" to see young children without parents or men and women with blank looks on their faces wondering, "My God, where am I? What's going to happen to me?"

He said Poland, Romania and Germany shouldn't be left on their own to deal with the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

"This is an international responsibility," Biden said shortly after he announced \$1 billion in additional assistance to help Ukrainian refugees. He also announced that the United States would take in up to 100,000 of those refugees. The White House has said most Ukrainian refugees eventually want to return home.

Biden said the United States is obligated to be "engaged and do all we can to ease the suffering and pain of innocent women and children and men" who make it across the border.

He said, "I plan on attempting to see those folks ... I hope I get to see a lot of people."

Some refugees interviewed Friday at the train station in Przemysl, Poland, said they hoped to eventually return to Ukraine. They also weren't very hopeful about Biden's visit.

"For sure I do not have any expectations" about Biden, said a tearful Ira Satula, 32, from Kremenchug. Satula was grateful for all the support and Poland's warm reception.

"But home is home, and I hope we'll be there soon," Satula said.

Olga Antonovna, 68, from Chernigov, said "it's really 50-50" that Biden will help enough.

"I think that we needed help a long time ago, long before," she said.

Sullivan said Biden will give a speech Saturday on "the stakes of this moment, the urgency of the challenge that lies ahead, what the conflict in Ukraine means for the world."

House Republicans, bullish on midterms, plot return to power

By FARNOUSH AMIRI The Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — The House majority seemingly within their grasp, Republican lawmakers huddling at a retreat in Florida this week turned to the architect of the "Republican Revolution" nearly three decades ago — former House Speaker Newt Gingrich — for ideas on starting their own political revolt come November.

Needing only a handful of seats to recapture the House, Republicans are exceedingly confident of their chances. With incumbent Democrats retiring in droves, and President Joe Biden's poll numbers slumping amid deep voter pessimism about the economy, many in the party — including their leader Kevin McCarthy — are treating the Republican victory as a *fait accompli*.

They see Gingrich, the man who swept away four decades of Democratic House rule with the "Contract With America" in 1994, as a model. He spoke to House Republicans Wednesday night as they gathered in Jacksonville, Fla., to prepare for the campaigning ahead. His message was simple: offer a contrast to what he called the failing Democratic agenda and then deliver to the American people.

"He saw the chance in Republicans when no one thought we could win," McCarthy said on Wednesday. "If we're successful, in which we win 18 seats, that's the same number of Republicans after the 1994 election."

He added, "But it's different than just recruiting candidates and raising money. It's what you do with it. You make a commitment to the American public."

But while Republicans have numbers on their side in the election, what they would do with a majority is very much a work in progress. And it remained unclear at the three-day retreat what, if any, lessons

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Republicans have learned from the tumultuous eras of Gingrich, Dennis Hastert, John Boehner and Paul Ryan — the past four Republican House speakers, all of whom found it is easier to win power in the House than to control it.

Much of Gingrich's "contract" never became law as the triumph of the '94 elections gave way to intra-party strife, a damaging budget standoff that ended in a government shutdown and an ethics tangle that contributed to Gingrich leaving office. Boehner, like Gingrich, relinquished the gavel and resigned amid divisions between the party's ideological factions.

McCarthy, 57, is charting his own delicate course as he works to become speaker in what would be a divided Washington, with President Joe Biden still in the White House. Last summer McCarthy tasked several groups of Republican lawmakers with drafting proposals on the party's core legislative priorities, including lowering costs in the economy, securing the Southern border and countering China, in hopes of making a fast start in 2023.

But creating a governing majority is a daunting challenge. Hard-right members of the conference are ascendant, creating headaches with their inflammatory actions and statements. Many in the party are likely to welcome new rounds of brinkmanship over government spending and the debt. And some Republicans are already agitating for partisan investigations of figures like Dr. Anthony Fauci and President Joe Biden's son, Hunter, that could easily overshadow their legislation.

Meanwhile, former President Donald Trump continues to hold enormous sway over the GOP despite his attempts to overturn the 2020 election and his lies about election fraud that fueled the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. McCarthy has kept close to Trump, jetting to his private club to secure his support earlier this year, as the party relies on his brand and his fundraising prowess to motivate Republican voters.

North Carolina Rep. Patrick McHenry, who is the top Republican of the Financial Services Committee and close to GOP leadership, said what comes after the election is what will determine whether a new GOP majority endures.

"I think right now, not being the Democrats is a sufficient answer to win the election," Rep. Patrick McHenry, the top Republican of the Financial Services Committee, told The Associated Press in an interview. "But that doesn't make us worth a damn as a governing majority. That doesn't electrify our electorate. That doesn't bring over folks that are in the middle."

Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, in line to take over the powerful House Oversight committee, said the way for the conference to move forward is to focus on what they can realistically deliver to the American people.

"We've got plenty of things that I think the base and the American people will appreciate that we can do," he said. "So let's commit to things that are achievable, not just talking points that will get you on Fox News for four and a half minutes."

Members spent the damp and rainy days of the retreat reiterating that while there are loud voices on the fringe of party lines, including a few who have called for Biden's impeachment, the majority are united behind McCarthy's vision.

"I call it a 50-year election," McCarthy told reporters. "It won't come around like this in the House" for a long time.

Gingrich gave McCarthy a vote of confidence, saying he's capable of leading them to victory.

"I think (Kevin) proved that in the last election," Gingrich told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "If you look at who won and what their recruiting has been like."

Spring break crackdown puts focus on future of South Beach

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Miami Beach officials have spent recent years trying to control the raucous crowds, public drinking and growing violence associated with the city's world-famous South Beach neighborhood during spring break.

Business owners claim they're being unfairly targeted by regulations, and civil rights advocates say the

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city is trying to scare away Black tourists who make up many of the visitors.

Two shootings that wounded five people last weekend, prompting the city to impose an emergency midnight curfew this weekend, have refocused attention on the glamorous waterfront's future — as an entertainment district or something else entirely. The city's mayor, a Democrat, insists the crackdown is about bad behavior, not race.

The 10-block stretch of Ocean Drive known for art deco hotels, restaurants and bars lies between areas that cater to more affluent tourists, as well as locals. Many longtime residents have learned to treat spring break like a hurricane: Stay inside and hunker down until it's over.

Resident Pedro Herrera, 40, said spring break is great for business at the hotel where he works, but he stays away from tourist areas when he's off the clock.

"Before spring break, you can go walk on Ocean Drive," Herrera said. "Right now, I prefer to stay home, because I know if I go there, something is going to happen."

Mayor Dan Gelber said spring break and several holiday weekends throughout the year have been a problem for the city since before he took office in 2017. He sees the long-term solution as a fundamental change in the area around Ocean Drive from an entertainment district to a cultural district, replacing all-night bars and clubs with residential development and boutique offices.

"We don't need an entertainment-only district," Gelber said.

Developed in the 1920s and 1930s, Ocean Drive serves as the center of the Miami Art Deco District, including hundreds of buildings featuring the style's signature bold geometry and intense colors. The area fell into disrepair but enjoyed a cultural and economic renaissance thanks to television shows like "Miami Vice" in the 1980s and fashion designer Gianni Versace moving into an oceanfront mansion in the 1990s. Bars and nightclubs flourished as South Beach became a destination for supermodels, musicians and other entertainers.

"Now, we have this business model of big drinks and large volumes all night long with tens of thousands of people," Gelber said. "Which really just doesn't work for our city."

Gelber said he is still pursuing a 2 a.m. South Beach alcohol ban, which was blocked by a circuit court judge earlier this month. Last call is 5 a.m. throughout most of Miami Beach, and South Beach businesses have been pushing back against the proposed rule that targets only their part of town.

The legendary Clevelander hotel and bar on Ocean Drive sued the city over the alcohol rollback last spring. Though not part of the lawsuit, Joshua Wallack, chief operating officer of nearby Mango's Tropical Café, said the proposed rules give bars and clubs outside the target area an unfair advantage and threaten businesses inside the area with possible closure.

"They are pushing for a 2 a.m. ban but with exemptions," Wallack said. "Do you really think they want to shut down the Fontainebleau?"

The Fontainebleau Miami Beach is an iconic luxury hotel more than a mile north of the South Beach area. The hotel's nightclub, LIV, regularly stays open until 5 a.m.

Some civil rights advocates believe city officials are concerned about the demographics of the visitors. South Beach started to become a popular destination for Black tourists about two decades ago as promoters organized Urban Beach Week during the Memorial Day weekend. Many locals have complained about violence and other crime associated with the event, which led to an increased police presence. But the event's continued popularity correlates to a bump in Black tourism throughout the year, including spring break.

Stephen Hunter Johnson, an attorney and member of Miami-Dade's Black Affairs Advisory Board, said the emergency curfew was an overreaction to last weekend's shootings. He argued that if two nonfatal shootings in two days was enough to warrant a state of emergency, then the entire county should be under a state of emergency indefinitely.

"The only emergency in Miami Beach is that there were Black people there," Johnson said.

More than 1,000 people were arrested last March, when the city imposed an 8 p.m. curfew. At the time, authorities sent military style vehicles to disperse predominantly Black crowds with rubber bullets, prompting criticism from Black activists. In an attempt to discourage large crowds, the city had canceled all

programs amid the pandemic, leaving a void for tens of thousands of people gathered with nothing to do. Johnson said this year's Miami Beach Live concert series, the city's attempt to return programming to spring break, completely ignored the young urban demographic by booking artists like 1990s alt-rocker Alanis Morissette and Broadway performer Bernadette Peters.

Miami Beach's mayor rejects the idea that the city is somehow trying to discourage Black visitors. "The issue this weekend was obviously related to behavior and not race," Gelber said. "We had spring break for three weeks without asking for a curfew, without invoking the emergency powers. We did it the morning after two shootings."

Many visitors feel it's unfair to be surprised with restrictions after making their spring break plans weeks or months in advance, but most are still determined to have a good time.

Anwar Hassan, 21, visiting from Washington, D.C., said he'll just find something else to do after the curfew. "I'm not going to let this limit my trip," Hassan said. "I'll just go do something else somewhere else. It doesn't have to be at the beach. This place is huge. We'll find something."

Affordable housing, long overlooked, getting federal boost

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — After her home flooded five times in the past year, Tilicia Owens was on edge with every impending storm and ready to leave her Detroit neighborhood behind.

But then the 40-year-old quality engineer heard the city had a program that could prevent heavy rains from inundating her basement and damaging her furniture, photos and exercise equipment. The city is tapping \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money as part of a \$15 million effort to provide pumps and other equipment to help prevent flooding in 11 neighborhoods.

"That would mean the world to me," said Owens, who has applied to the city's Basement Backup Protection Program, which would provide homeowners a pump to remove floodwaters or a valve outside the home to prevent water from entering.

"I have invested so much into my home," she added. "I want to protect that and I want to protect my investment. It would take away all my anxiety."

Detroit has turned to the \$350 billion in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to partly finance the project. Part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan approved last year, the money is meant to help communities recover from the pandemic and can be used for everything from job creation to child care to housing.

More than 60 states, counties and cities, including Detroit, are tapping the funds for housing programs.

With President Joe Biden's Build Back Better bill floundering and federal Emergency Rental Assistance running out in some places, the funds have become a critical source of money to address a shortage of affordable housing and a growing homelessness crisis. Prioritizing housing is also a reminder that the long-running shortage of affordable housing, especially in communities of color, has worsened during the pandemic, a time when a looming eviction crisis and rising housing prices threatened millions of families.

"There was already growing awareness before the pandemic in states and cities around the country that affordable housing problems that always existed were reaching an all time level and just had to be addressed," said Stockton Williams, the executive director of the National Council of State Housing Agencies. "The pandemic has shown a brighter light on that, especially as they relate to the most vulnerable renters and homeowners."

For many communities, the amount of money available in the state and local fiscal recovery funds is also historic and more than many have spent on housing in a year or even a decade.

"This is certainly transformational funding," Jacqueline Edwards, the director of the Maricopa County Human Services Department in Arizona, said of the nearly \$85 million it has to spend on everything from new housing to additional shelter beds to helping homeowners repair their air conditioning and stay in their homes when temperatures heat up. Typically, the county has a few million dollars to spend each year on these services.

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"We'll be able to make significant changes, not just that will impact today, but will impact lives for years to come," she added.

But advocates say it still is only a start and significant federal investment — much of it in the Build Back Better bill, passed by the House but currently held up in the Senate — is necessary to fix the problem.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1 in 4 families eligible for federal rental assistance received it before the pandemic. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that \$86 billion annually is needed over the next decade for universal housing vouchers and housing funds. Another \$70 billion is needed for public housing repairs.

So far, more than \$11 billion from the state and local fiscal recovery funds have been committed to housing-related programs, according to the Center, which is tracking spending.

States in the West, Midwest and East have already made significant commitments, according to a February report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Southern states, long known for having among the weakest tenant protections, have committed very little.

Among the biggest areas of investment is a promise to build more affordable housing.

Massachusetts has allotted nearly \$600 million to affordable housing, including \$150 million for new housing and \$150 million to maintain public housing. Colorado lawmakers have proposed spending \$400 million and Washington, D.C., has set aside \$323 million, including \$17 million for community groups to provide housing for victims of domestic violence. Clark County, Nevada, home to Las Vegas, whose tourist economy was hammered by the pandemic, plans to spend more than a third of its funds, or \$157 million, on housing.

Others states, led by Washington, Oregon and New Jersey, are working to shore up their eviction protections — something the U.S. Treasury Department has encouraged.

Washington is spending \$403 million to bolster its emergency rental assistance program and \$174 million for homeowner assistance. New York City plans to spend nearly \$329 million to increase access to rental assistance vouchers. New Jersey is spending \$750 million in rental and utility assistance and creating a statewide eviction prevention program.

"A lot of people who never thought they would be housing unstable ... are in this situation. And so it is scary and people don't know quite where to turn," said Janel Winter, the director of New Jersey's Division of Housing and Community Resources.

"This provides them with that assistance. ... So everybody who is in that court understands their rights, understands their responsibilities, is able to take advantage of whatever protections are there for them."

Several communities are using the funds to help the homeless.

North Carolina has set aside \$15 million to rapidly rehouse people at risk of homelessness because of the pandemic. Clark County, Washington, is spending \$4.4 million to fund homeless outreach teams while Burlington, Vermont, plans to use \$1.4 million on 30 shelter pods for people to sleep in and store their belongings.

Austin, Texas, which has hundreds of homeless encampments and upwards of 2,500 people sleeping on the street most nights, is putting more than \$106 million towards homelessness. That is in addition to the \$110 million that Travis County, home to Austin, is putting towards the problem.

The funds will help move the homeless into temporary housing and eventually into permanent units that offer services like counseling and rental assistance. There is also funding for 1,300 new housing units set aside for the homeless and the city has acquired several hotels with the money.

"We are focused on building a system that doesn't just move people off the streets into shelters but is focused on resolving their housing crisis," said Dianna Grey, the city's homeless strategy officer.

Several cities are using the funds to save homes battered by years of neglect and to ensure impoverished families can remain housed. Milwaukee wants to spend \$15 million to rehabilitate up to 150 city-owned, foreclosed houses.

Detroit has set aside more than \$83 million for housing-related spending, including \$27.5 million to repair 1,000 roofs — tripling the amount it spends on its low-income home-repair program. It's also spending

\$14.2 million to renovate vacant homes and \$6.4 million to set up an online system allowing residents to find and apply for low-income housing.

Deputy Mayor Conrad Mallett said the spending priorities are aimed at preventing further declines in the city's population, which has dropped dramatically since the 1950s.

"If we are going to maintain population and attract new people to the city, it is going to be because of the housing opportunities that we can provide," he said, adding that the city also has to help those who have remained in Detroit.

"We are going to deliver service to the people who stayed," he said. "We are not simply going to say to the people who endured, that you have no place. We want you to stay. We want you to succeed."

Ice shelf collapses in previously stable East Antarctica

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

An ice shelf the size of New York City has collapsed in East Antarctica, an area long thought to be stable and not hit much by climate change, concerned scientists said Friday.

The collapse, captured by satellite images, marked the first time in human history that the frigid region had an ice shelf collapse. It happened at the beginning of a freakish warm spell last week when temperatures soared more than 70 degrees (40 Celsius) warmer than normal in some spots of East Antarctica. Satellite photos show the area had been shrinking rapidly the last couple of years, and now scientists wonder if they have been overestimating East Antarctica's stability and resistance to global warming that has been melting ice rapidly on the smaller western side and the vulnerable peninsula.

The ice shelf, about 460 square miles wide (1200 square kilometers) holding in the Conger and Glenzer glaciers from the warmer water, collapsed between March 14 and 16, said ice scientist Catherine Walker of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. She said scientists have never seen this happen in this part of the continent, making it worrisome.

"The Glenzer Conger ice shelf presumably had been there for thousands of years and it's not ever going to be there again," said University of Minnesota ice scientist Peter Neff.

The issue isn't the amount of ice lost in this collapse, Neff and Walker said. That is negligible. It's more about the where it happened.

Neff said he worries that previous assumptions about East Antarctica's stability may not be correct. And that's important because if the water frozen in East Antarctica melted — and that's a millennia-long process if not longer — it would raise seas across the globe more than 160 feet (50 meters). It's more than five times the ice in the more vulnerable West Antarctic Ice Sheet, where scientists have concentrated much of their research.

Helen Amanda Fricker, co-director of the Scripps Polar Center at the University of California San Diego, said researchers have to spend more time looking at that part of the continent.

"East Antarctica is starting to change. There is mass loss starting to happen," Fricker said. "We need to know how stable each one of the ice shelves are because once one disappears" it means glaciers melt into the warming water and "some of that water will come to San Diego and elsewhere."

Scientists had been seeing this particular ice shelf — closest to Australia — shrink a bit since the 1970s, Neff said. Then in 2020, the shelf's ice loss sped up to losing about half of itself every month or so, Walker said.

"We probably are seeing the result of a lot of long time increased ocean warming there," Walker said. "it's just been melting and melting."

Still, one expert thinks that only part of East Antarctica is a concern.

"Most of East Antarctica is relatively secure, relatively invulnerable and there are sectors in it that are vulnerable," said British Antarctic Survey geophysicist Rob Larer. "The overall effect of climate change around East Antarctica is it's chipping away at the edges of the ice sheets in some places, but it's actually adding more snow to the middle."

Last week, what's called an atmospheric river dumped a lot of warm air — and even rain instead of

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snow — on parts of East Antarctica, getting temperatures so far above normal that scientists have spent the last week discussing it. The closest station to the collapsed ice shelf is Australia's Casey station, about 180 miles (300 kilometers) away and it hit 42 degrees (5.6 degrees Celsius), which was about 18 degrees (10 degrees Celsius) warmer than normal.

And that, Walker said, "probably is something like, you know, the last straw on the camel's back."

Fricker, who has explored a different more stable East Antarctic ice shelf, said an ice shelf there "is the quietest most serene place you can imagine."

New Orleans school board reverses little known ban on jazz

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — With its president saying it had racist origins, the New Orleans school board has unanimously reversed a little known but century-old ban on jazz in schools in a city which played a huge role in developing jazz and where it is still played nightly at various venues.

"I'm very glad that we can rescind this policy. I want to acknowledge it. It was rooted in racism," Orleans Parish School Board President Olin Parker said during the meeting Thursday night. "And I also want to acknowledge the tremendous contributions of our students and especially of our band directors, whose legacy continues from 1922 through present day."

The board's resolution said it wanted "to correct the previous action of the School Board and to encourage jazz music and jazz dance in schools."

Board minutes from March 24, 1922, said "it was decided that jazz music and jazz dancing would be abolished in the public schools." One member — who walked out on a special meeting called at the end of the session because reporters were not allowed to cover it — abstained from voting on jazz.

Officials told The Times Picayune / The New Orleans Advocate that the 1922 board members were trying to distance students from a genre with African American origins.

A copy of a news clipping from 1922, posted on the newspaper's website, did not mention race. It quoted the resolution's sponsor, "Mrs. A. Baumgartner," as saying she had seen "a lot of rough dancing" at after-school events. "This cheek-to-cheek dancing is terrible," she said.

Ken Ducote, executive director of the Greater New Orleans Collaborative of Charter Schools, brought the policy to the board's attention after reading about it in Al Kennedy's book "Chord Changes on the Chalkboard: How Public School Teachers Shaped Jazz and the Music of New Orleans."

"It was just one of those things that was buried in the books," board member Carlos Zervigon said Friday. "Obviously it was ridiculous and never really applied. But what an opportunity to be able to go back and reverse it on the 100th anniversary of its passage and acknowledge what our schools played in the formation and development of music in our classrooms."

The earlier board's vote on March 24, 1922, was passed without "prior policy development, analysis, or debate," and the proposal had not been on the agenda, the current board noted.

"We're glad that the policy was ignored by our schools, because our schools played a major role in the development of jazz," said member Katherine Baudouin.

Pope's peace prayer for Ukraine recalls Fatima prophecy

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis prayed for peace in Ukraine in a ceremony Friday that harked back to a century-old apocalyptic prophecy about peace and Russia that was sparked by purported visions of the Virgin Mary to three peasant children in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917.

Francis invited bishops, priests and ordinary faithful around the world to join him in the consecration prayer, which opened with Francis entering St. Peter's Basilica before an estimated 3,500 people and concluded with Francis sitting alone before a statue of the Madonna. There, he solemnly asked forgiveness that humanity had "forgotten the lessons learned from the tragedies of the last century, the sacrifice of the millions who fell in two World Wars."

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"Free us from war, protect our world from the menace of nuclear weapons," he prayed.

The service was Francis' latest effort to rally prayers for an end to the war while keeping open options for dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and its influential leader, Patriarch Kirill. Francis has yet to publicly condemn Russia by name for its invasion, though his denunciations of the war in Ukraine have grown increasingly outraged.

The prayer ritual was of deep spiritual importance to many Catholics and a source of fascination to others. It deals with some of the more controversial aspects of the Catholic faith: purported visions of the Madonna, revelations of hell, Soviet communism and the death of a pope, and questions about whether the prophecies contained in the so-called "secrets of Fatima" have already been fulfilled or not.

To hammer home the universal nature of the event, the Vatican translated the text of the prayer into three dozen languages. Retired Pope Benedict XVI participated from his home in the Vatican gardens. A papal envoy celebrated a simultaneous service at the shrine in Fatima.

The Fatima story dates to 1917, when according to tradition, Portuguese siblings Francisco and Jacinta Marto and their cousin Lucia said the Virgin Mary appeared to them six times and confided to them three secrets. The first two described an apocalyptic image of hell, foretold the end of World War I and the start of World War II, and portended the rise and fall of Soviet communism. The children were between 7 and 10 years old at the time.

In 2000, the Vatican disclosed the long-awaited third secret, describing it as foretelling the May 13, 1981, assassination attempt against St. John Paul II in St. Peter's Square.

According to later writings by Lucia, who became a nun and died in 2005, Russia would be converted and peace would reign if the pope and all the bishops of the world consecrated Russia to the "Immaculate Heart of Mary." Lucia later claimed that John Paul fulfilled that prophecy during a Mass on March 25, 1984, exactly 38 years ago Friday, even though he never specified Russia in the prayer.

The text of Francis' prayer corrected that 1984 omission. It reads: "Therefore, Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine." It adds: "Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world."

In his homily Friday, Francis said the act of consecration of Russia and Ukraine to Mary's immaculate heart was "not a magic formula, but a spiritual act" that was taking place "even as bombs are destroying the homes of many of our defenseless Ukrainian brothers and sisters."

The Ukrainian ambassador to the Holy See, Andrii Yurash, tweeted from inside the basilica his appreciation of the service, which he said was "another attempt to defend (Ukraine) from devil's war."

Russia's ambassador to Italy, Sergey Razov, earlier in the day defended Russia's "special military action" in Ukraine and said Moscow's references to its nuclear arsenal in the past month were not a threat but "only a reflection on potential scenarios if Russian national security was put at risk."

For some traditionalist Catholics, Francis' pronouncement of Russia in the prayer, as well as his invitation for all the world's bishops to join him, fulfills the original Fatima prophecy. Some quibbled over his inclusion of Ukraine, while others said the original call for Russia's "conversion" — presumably to Catholicism — might well have been a priority for the Catholic Church in 1917 but was not a focus of the Vatican's evangelization project now.

Soon after Francis announced his plans to hold the consecration prayer, Patriarch Kirill said he was inviting the Russian Orthodox to direct prayers to the Mother of God, too. Kirill has called for peace, but he has also seemingly justified the invasion by invoking Russia and Ukraine as "one people" and describing the conflict as a "metaphysical" battle.

The Rev. Stefano Caprio, a former Catholic missionary in Russia and a professor of Russian history and culture at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, said Kirill is hardly the most hawkish of Russian patriarchs and is presumably under pressure to toe the Kremlin's official line.

But in comments to reporters this week, Caprio noted that the Catholic and Orthodox prayers being offered up Friday carry some significant ambiguities.

"The problem is that these are two different interpretations: the Madonna who favors peace, and the

Madonna who supports the war," he said.

Scientists figure out how vampire bats got a taste for blood

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have figured out why vampire bats are the only mammals that can survive on a diet of just blood.

They compared the genome of common vampire bats to 26 other bat species and identified 13 genes that are missing or no longer work in vampire bats. Over the years, those gene tweaks helped them adapt to a blood diet rich in iron and protein but with minimal fats or carbohydrates, the researchers reported Friday in the journal *Science Advances*.

The bats live in South and Central America and are basically "living Draculas," said co-author Michael Hiller of Germany's Max Planck Institute. About 3 inches (8 centimeters) long with a wingspan of 7 inches (18 centimeters), the bats bite and then lap up blood from livestock or other animals at night.

Most mammals couldn't survive on a low-calorie liquid diet of blood. Only three vampire species of the 1,400 kinds of bats can do that — the others eat mostly insects, fruit, nectar, pollen or meat, such as small frogs and fish.

"Blood is a terrible food source," said Hannah Kim Frank, a bat researcher at Tulane University, who was not involved in the study. "It's totally bizarre and amazing that vampire bats can survive on blood — they are really weird, even among bats."

Some other creatures also have a taste for blood, including mosquitoes, bedbugs, leeches and fleas.

The latest work expands upon research by another team that pinpointed three of the 13 gene losses.

"The new paper shows how different vampire bats are from even other closely related bats, which eat nectar and fruit," said Kate Langwig, a bat researcher at Virginia Tech, who had no role in the study.

With such a low-calorie diet, vampire bats can't go long without a meal. In a pinch, well-fed ones will regurgitate their food to share with a starving neighbor. They seem to keep track of who has helped them in the past, said Hiller, noting that vampire bats have complex social relationships.

"It's not a kin thing," said Tulane's Frank. "They just notice and remember: You're a good sharer, I will reward you."

Experts worry about how US will see next COVID surge coming

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As coronavirus infections rise in some parts of the world, experts are watching for a potential new COVID-19 surge in the U.S. — and wondering how long it will take to detect.

Despite disease monitoring improvements over the last two years, they say, some recent developments don't bode well:

—As more people take rapid COVID-19 tests at home, fewer people are getting the gold-standard tests that the government relies on for case counts.

—The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will soon use fewer labs to look for new variants.

—Health officials are increasingly focusing on hospital admissions, which rise only after a surge has arrived.

—A wastewater surveillance program remains a patchwork that cannot yet be counted on for the data needed to understand coming surges.

—White House officials say the government is running out of funds for vaccines, treatments and testing.

"We're not in a great situation," said Jennifer Nuzzo, a Brown University pandemic researcher.

Scientists acknowledge that the wide availability of vaccines and treatments puts the nation in a better place than when the pandemic began, and that monitoring has come a long way.

For example, scientists this week touted a 6-month-old program that tests international travelers flying into four U.S. airports. Genetic testing of a sample on Dec. 14 turned up a coronavirus variant — the descendant of omicron known as BA.2 — seven days earlier than any other reported detection in the U.S.

More good news: U.S. cases, hospitalizations and deaths have been falling for weeks.

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But it's different elsewhere. The World Health Organization this week reported that the number of new coronavirus cases increased two weeks in a row globally, likely because COVID-19 prevention measures have been halted in numerous countries and because BA.2 spreads more easily.

Some public health experts aren't certain what that means for the U.S.

BA.2 accounts for a growing share of U.S. cases, the CDC said — more than one-third nationally and more than half in the Northeast. Small increases in overall case rates have been noted in New York, and in hospital admissions in New England.

Some of the northern U.S. states with the highest rates of BA.2, however, have some of the lowest case rates, noted Katriona Shea of Penn State University.

Dr. James Musser, an infectious disease specialist at Houston Methodist, called the national case data on BA.2 "murky." He added: "What we really need is as much real-time data as possible ... to inform decisions."

Here's what COVID-19 trackers are looking at and what worries scientists about them.

TEST RESULTS

Tallies of test results have been at the core of understanding coronavirus spread from the start, but they have always been flawed.

Initially, only sick people got tested, meaning case counts missed people who had no symptoms or were unable to get swabbed.

Home test kits became widely available last year, and demand took off when the omicron wave hit. But many people who take home tests don't report results to anyone. Nor do health agencies attempt to gather them.

Mara Aspinall is managing director of an Arizona-based consulting company that tracks COVID-19 testing trends. She estimates that in January and February, about 8 million to 9 million rapid home tests were being done each day on average — four to six times the number of PCR tests.

Nuzzo said: "The case numbers are not as much a reflection of reality as they once were."

HUNTING FOR VARIANTS

In early 2021, the U.S. was far behind other countries in using genetic tests to look for worrisome virus mutations.

A year ago, the agency signed deals with 10 large labs to do that genomic sequencing. The CDC will be reducing that program to three labs over the next two months.

The weekly volume of sequences performed through the contracts was much higher during the omicron wave in December and January, when more people were getting tested, and already has fallen to about 35,000. By late spring, it will be down to 10,000, although CDC officials say the contracts allow the volume to increase to more than 20,000 if necessary.

The agency also says turnaround time and quality standards have been improved in the new contracts, and that it does not expect the change will hurt its ability to find new variants.

Outside experts expressed concern.

"It's really quite a substantial reduction in our baseline surveillance and intelligence system for tracking what's out there," said Bronwyn MacInnis, director of pathogen genomic surveillance at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.

SEWAGE SURVEILLANCE

An evolving monitoring system is looking for signs of coronavirus in sewage, which could potentially capture brewing infections.

Researchers have linked wastewater samples to the number of positive COVID-19 tests a week later, suggesting health officials could get an early glimpse at infection trends.

Some health departments also have used sewage to look for variants. New York City, for example, detected signals of the omicron variant in a sample taken on Nov. 21 — about 10 days before the first case was reported in the U.S.

But experts note the system doesn't cover the entire country. It also doesn't distinguish who is infected.

"It's a really important and promising strategy, no doubt. But the ultimate value is still probably yet to be understood," said Dr. Jeff Duchin, the health officer for Seattle/King County, Washington.

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HOSPITAL DATA

Last month, the CDC outlined a new set of measures for deciding whether to lift mask-wearing rules, focusing less on positive test results and more on hospitals.

Hospital admissions are a lagging indicator, given that a week or more can pass between infection and hospitalization. But a number of researchers believe the change is appropriate. They say hospital data is more reliable and more easily interpreted than case counts.

The lag also is not as long as one might think. Some studies have suggested many people wait to get tested. And when they finally do, the results aren't always immediate.

Spencer Fox, a University of Texas data scientist who is part of a group that uses hospital and cellphone data to forecast COVID-19 for Austin, said "hospital admissions were the better signal" for a surge than test results.

There are concerns, however, about future hospital data.

If the federal government lifts its public health emergency declaration, officials will lose the ability to compel hospitals to report COVID-19 data, a group of former CDC directors recently wrote. They urged Congress to pass a law that will provide enduring authorities "so we will not risk flying blind as health threats emerge."

Ukraine war drives US, EU deal to undercut Russian energy

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — With stunning speed, Russia's war in Ukraine is driving Western Europe into the outstretched arms of the United States again, especially apparent when President Joe Biden offered a major expansion of natural gas shipments to his European Union counterpart Friday.

Talking to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Biden said the core issue was "helping Europe reduce its dependency on Russian gas as quickly as possible." And Europe, which relies on Moscow for 40% of the natural gas used to heat homes, generate electricity and drive industry, needs the help.

An economic miscalculation with massive geopolitical consequences, many European Union nations let themselves become ever more reliant on Russian fossil fuels over the years, vainly hoping trade would overcome Cold War enmity on a continent too often riven by conflict.

That longstanding practice meant the 27-nation bloc could not simply stop Russian energy imports as part of Western sanctions to punish Moscow for the invasion a month ago.

And changing energy policy is about as cumbersome as turning around a liquefied natural gas carrier on a rough sea. In reality, it will take years.

This is where Biden stepped in Friday. Under the plan, the United States and a few like-minded partners will increase exports of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, to Europe by 15 billion cubic meters this year. Those exports would triple in the years afterward, a necessary move if the EU can back up its claim to be rid of Russian imports in five years.

"We are right on track now to diversify away from Russian gas and towards our friends' and partners' reliable and trustworthy suppliers," von der Leyen said.

It will take huge investments, and getting more liquefied natural gas to Europe could be difficult. U.S. export facilities are already operating at capacity, and most new terminals are still only in the planning stages. Most U.S. shipments already go to Europe.

Even if more gas can be shipped to Europe, the continent may struggle to receive it. Import terminals are in coastal areas, and Europe's pipeline system doesn't have all the connections needed to send the natural gas throughout the continent.

But Europe is looking anywhere it can for solutions. Some countries — Germany, Italy and Bulgaria among them — are more heavily dependent on Russian gas than others, complicating efforts to agree on either a faster exit or a complete boycott now.

Germany Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said an immediate embargo through energy sanctions would cost thousands of jobs and leave schools and homes unheated. Meanwhile, Europe must still replenish gas reserves that were heavily depleted during the past winter.

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Yet, LNG can't simply be conjured out of thin air. It requires export terminals that turn the gas into super-chilled liquid, then a reception terminal on the other end to turn it back into gas form to go into Europe's pipeline system. The terminals cost billions and take years to build. With gas prices high from an energy crunch and the war's jolt to volatile energy markets, terminals and tankers around the globe are fully booked already, leaving customers competing for available shipments.

Although the U.S.-EU initiative will likely require new facilities for importing liquefied natural gas, the White House said it is also geared toward reducing reliance on fossil fuels in the long run through energy efficiency and alternative sources of energy.

But climate campaigners criticized the agreement and called instead for the U.S. and EU to focus on renewable energy and reducing fossil fuel demand.

That "is a more affordable and sustainable solution that does not lock Europe into infrastructure or deals it does not need," said Raphael Hanoteaux, senior policy adviser at the Brussels-based environmental group E3G.

The U.S. has been dramatically increasing its LNG exports in recent years, and most already go to Europe, according to the Center for Liquefied Natural Gas, an industry lobbying group. Although much of the supply is already contracted out to buyers, there are still opportunities to shift its destination.

"The U.S. is in a unique position because it has flexible LNG that can be rerouted to Europe or to Asia, depending on who's willing to pay that price," said Emily McClain, gas markets analyst at Rystad.

Under the deal, a senior U.S. administration official said the government will continue existing efforts to supply LNG, while over time, Europe will be committing to stable demand of some 50 billion cubic meters.

Germany, Europe's industrial juggernaut, has already started making major efforts to bring that gas in from coastal terminals, especially after it suspended approval of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline from Russia last month.

The government's plan to shut down Germany's last nuclear plants this year and phase out coal-fired power by 2030 relies heavily on natural gas as a "bridge" until sufficient renewable energy can be produced for Europe's biggest economy.

Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said Germany now expects to be able to become almost entirely independent of Russian gas by mid-2024. To do this, the government has secured the use of three "floating" terminals capable of turning LNG brought in by ship back in gas form and is working hard to build permanent LNG terminals for long-term imports.

"By the time the terminals could help us, we could already have achieved the transition" to renewable energy, youth activist Clara Duvigneau said at a climate rally in Berlin.

Democrats appear united on Jackson; GOP votes may be elusive

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Joe Manchin announced Friday that he plans to vote for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to serve on the Supreme Court, likely clearing the path for President Joe Biden's historic nominee to be confirmed. But Democratic hopes of securing significant Republican support for Jackson's nomination appear to be fading.

The West Virginia Democrat was a key vote to watch because he has bucked his party on some of its top domestic priorities. But he has yet to vote against any of Biden's judicial nominees, and he said he will also support Jackson, who would become the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court.

"I am confident Judge Jackson is supremely qualified and has the disposition necessary to serve as our nation's next Supreme Court Justice," Manchin said in a statement, which came after four days of hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

He also noted that her family has spent time in West Virginia, and "her deep love of our state and commitment to public service were abundantly clear."

Manchin's announcement indicates that Jackson will likely have the support of all 50 Senate Democrats. Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, who has joined Manchin in voting against large swaths of Biden's domestic

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agenda, hasn't yet said whether she will support her. But she too has supported all of the president's judicial picks, including Jackson for the federal appeals court last year.

A united Democratic caucus would guarantee Jackson's confirmation in the 50-50 Senate, as Vice President Kamala Harris could break a tie. Still, Democrats seem unlikely to confirm her with a robust bipartisan vote, dashing Biden's hopes for a grand reset after partisan battles over other high court nominees.

On Thursday, just hours after the hearings came to a close, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said in a Senate floor speech that he "cannot and will not" support Jackson for a lifetime appointment.

McConnell slammed the liberal groups that have supported Jackson, and he criticized her for refusing to take a position on the size of the nine-member court, even though that decision is ultimately up to Congress. Some advocacy groups have pushed for enlarging the court after three justices nominated by former President Donald Trump cemented a 6-3 conservative majority.

He also cited concerns about Jackson's sentencing of criminal defendants, a subject that dominated much of the four days of hearings and was part of a coordinated GOP effort to portray her as soft on crime.

McConnell's position was expected, but the leader's quick declaration could prompt many of his fellow Republicans to follow suit, thwarting Biden's efforts to bring back the overwhelming bipartisan votes that were commonplace for Supreme Court nominees when he first came to the Senate five decades ago.

"I think whomever I pick will get a vote from the Republican side," Biden said after Justice Stephen Breyer announced he would step down from the court this summer. As he started his search for a replacement, the president made a point of inviting Republican senators to the White House to hear their advice.

While many GOP senators have praised Jackson's vast experience and qualifications, it was clear at the hearings that Biden's outreach had little effect.

Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee interrogated Jackson about her nine-year record as a federal judge, frequently interrupting her answers. Jackson, supported by committee Democrats, pushed back aggressively on Republicans who said she gave light sentences to sex offenders, explaining her sentencing process in detail and telling them "nothing could be further from the truth."

One or more Republican could still cast a vote for Jackson's confirmation, but the focus on crime dovetails with an emerging GOP theme for this year's midterm elections and is likely to be decisive for many of them.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, who has been privately lobbying GOP colleagues to support Jackson, said after McConnell's announcement that it will be "sad for our country and sad as a commentary on where the parties are today."

In the final day of hearings on Thursday, a top lawyers' group said its review of more than 250 judges and lawyers found Jackson has a "sterling" reputation and "exceptional" competence and is well qualified to sit on the Supreme Court.

Jackson would be the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She would also be the first former public defender on the court, and the first justice with experience representing indigent criminal defendants since Marshall.

During questioning Tuesday and Wednesday, GOP senators aggressively queried Jackson on the sentences she handed down to child pornography offenders in her nine years as a federal judge, her legal advocacy on behalf of suspected terrorists held at Guantanamo Bay, her thoughts on critical race theory and even her religious views.

Many of the hours of questioning were spent on the specifics of the child pornography cases, with the discussion led by several GOP senators who are eyeing the presidency.

Pushing back, Jackson said she bases sentences on many factors, not just federal guidelines. Sentencing is not a "numbers game," she said, noting that there are no mandatory sentences for sex offenders and that there has been significant debate on the subject.

Some of those cases have given her nightmares, Jackson said, and were "among the worst that I have seen."

The GOP criticism was countered by effusive praise from Democrats, and by reflections on the historic nature of her nomination.

New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, who is Black, said he sees "my ancestors and yours" when he looks at

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Jackson.

"I know what it's taken for you to sit here in this seat," Booker said, as Jackson wiped away tears. "You have earned this spot."

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Tweet falsely attributed to Virginia Tech swimmer

CLAIM: Reka Gyorgy, a Virginia Tech swimmer, posted from her personal Twitter account a statement saying her finals spot was "stolen" by transgender swimmer Lia Thomas, and she encouraged other swimmers to refuse to compete.

THE FACTS: The tweet did not come from Gyorgy's account. A Twitter spokesperson confirmed to The Associated Press that the user responsible for the tweet was suspended for violating the platform's policy on the "creation of fake accounts," and multiple representatives from Virginia Tech's athletics department also said the account was not authentic. The tweet gained more than 28,000 retweets and 101,000 likes before the account was suspended Monday, about a day after the post was made. The critical message came after Thomas, a University of Pennsylvania senior, made history on March 17 as the first transgender woman to win an NCAA swimming championship. Gyorgy had criticized the NCAA rules that allowed Thomas to compete in the women's division on other platforms, and called for them to be changed in a letter posted publicly to her Facebook account on Sunday afternoon. But the tweet posted hours later under a profile using Gyorgy's name and photo did not come from an account belonging to her, according to Twitter. "The account referenced has been permanently suspended for violating our platform manipulation and spam policy, specifically the creation of fake accounts," Twitter wrote in a statement to the AP. Pete Moris, Virginia Tech's associate athletics director for strategic communications, and Sergio Lopez Miro, women's swimming and diving head coach, also confirmed that the tweet did not come from Gyorgy. "The account was fake," Lopez Miro wrote in an email to the AP. The earliest available record of the now-suspended page was captured on March 20 by the internet archive the WayBack Machine. At that time, the account had posted several retweets supporting Republican politicians dating back to December 2021. The account had not posted any content about swimming or Gyorgy until March 17, when the NCAA women's swimming championships were underway. Additionally, the same account previously used the handle "@Amanda191923" before changing it to "RekaGyorgy_." Searches on Twitter for the Amanda username reveal older tweets now linked to the fake Gyorgy account. Before it was deleted, several conservative news outlets and social media users with large followings had retweeted or shared screenshots of the tweet about Thomas, representing it as a genuine post from Gyorgy. Thomas has followed NCAA and Ivy League rules since she began her transition in 2019 by starting hormone replacement therapy, the AP has reported. Gyorgy did not respond to a request for comment via Facebook Messenger.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

Posts inflate Libyan civilian deaths caused by NATO in 2011

CLAIM: NATO killed tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of civilians during a 2011 military intervention in Libya.

THE FACTS: Estimates for how many civilians were killed during the NATO campaign in Libya vary, but experts told The Associated Press that figures placing civilian casualties in the tens of thousands are dramatically inflated. Nongovernmental organizations have also said that far fewer civilians were killed by the NATO airstrikes, with estimates ranging from 72 to 403. After former Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's regime violently cracked down on anti-government protesters, NATO, with U.N.-backing, conducted a

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campaign of airstrikes against the regime between March and October of 2011, the AP reported. NATO warplanes conducted more than 9,600 strike missions, and the campaign ended after Gadhafi was ousted and killed. In recent days, widely-circulating social media posts have claimed that NATO forces killed tens of thousands of civilians during the 2011 military intervention. "The most air strikes ever launched in Africa by NATO was more than 10,000 on Libya in 2011 with over 500,000 Civilian Casualties," said one tweet. Another Twitter user claimed that tens of thousands of civilians were killed by NATO forces in Libya while comparing the allegation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "NATO+USA+France killed 55k+ civilians in Libya because they wouldn't accept the jihadist rule that NATO+Obama admin eventually bombed into power there," the user wrote on Sunday. "The Russian people are correct to be terrified of NATO." No credible estimates support the assertions that tens of thousands of civilians were killed by the 2011 NATO airstrikes in Libya. "Those numbers strike me as wildly off. Wildly exaggerated," said Daniel Serwer, a professor and senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Alan Kuperman, a University of Texas professor whose research focuses include ethnic conflict and military intervention, also told the AP that the claims are "exaggerated by a factor of 100 times or more." The U.N.-appointed Commission of Inquiry on Libya investigated some of the airstrikes and found that while NATO did not intentionally target civilians, 60 civilians were killed and 55 were wounded, the AP reported in March 2012. Separately, Human Rights Watch concluded in a May 2012 report that at least 72 civilians were killed by NATO airstrikes. In March 2021, Airwars, a group that tracks civilian harm in conflict zones, estimated that NATO strikes caused 223 to 403 likely civilian deaths. Chris Woods, director of Airwars, wrote in an email to the AP that the claims that tens of thousands of civilians were killed by NATO airstrikes is "not supported by any public claim we are aware of," adding that: "The great majority of civilians killed in Libya in 2011 also died as a result of Gaddafi forces actions." In an emailed statement to the AP, NATO Deputy Spokesperson Piers Cazalet declined to confirm the number of Libyan civilians killed by NATO actions in 2011. "Everything possible was done to minimise the risk to civilians, but in a complex military campaign, that risk cannot be reduced to zero," Cazalet said, adding: "It is likely some have been affected in the seven months-long campaign. We deeply regret any instance of civilian casualties."

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report.

Space Foundation did not strip Russian cosmonaut of honors

CLAIM: Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet cosmonaut who became the first person to go to space 61 years ago, has been stripped of his honors by the Space Foundation because he is Russian.

THE FACTS: The Space Foundation changed the name of an annual fundraiser that was previously known as "Yuri's Night," but it didn't strip Gagarin of any honors. The nonprofit, which advocates for the global space industry, continues to celebrate Gagarin's accomplishments at events and with a display at its Discovery Center, a spokesman told The Associated Press. The Space Foundation's decision to rename an annual fundraiser amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine was distorted by social media users who falsely claimed the organization stripped Gagarin of official honors. "Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first person in space, has been stripped of his honours by the Space Foundation 'in light of current events,'" read a tweet, which was shared across platforms in a screenshot. "Imagine pretending Neil Armstrong never walked on the moon because the US invaded Iraq decades later," another post commented. But the Space Foundation isn't pretending Gagarin wasn't the first man in space. Instead, it changed the name of an annual fundraiser from "Yuri's Night" to "A Celebration of Space: Discover What's Next" after its initial social media posts about the April 3 fundraiser elicited negative responses about Russia on social media. "Almost four weeks ago, we posted about Yuri's Night and our social media feeds started to feed into a lot of anti-Russian anger," Rich Cooper, vice president of strategic communications and outreach at the Space Foundation, said in a phone interview with the AP. "We wanted to not have our social media platforms become any type of venue for hate or animosity against anyone. We changed the name out of respect for that situation." Cooper said the narrative that the Space Foundation was stripping Gagarin of any honors is "totally false" and added that "no one can strip away" the honor of being the first person to go to space. The Space Foundation has not conferred specific honors to Gagarin but it has a display

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for the cosmonaut at its Discovery Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The nonprofit has no plans to stop celebrating Gagarin's accomplishments in any capacity, Cooper said. In a public statement issued on its website, the Space Foundation said this year's annual fundraiser will still "highlight Yuri's flight," as well as other "space milestones."

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

Video shows flight simulator game, not Chinese airliner crash

CLAIM: Video shows Boeing 737 crash in southern China.

THE FACTS: The footage is computer generated, and was created using a flight simulator game. A China Eastern Boeing 737-800 with 132 people on board crashed in a remote mountainous area of southern China on Monday, setting off a forest fire, according to the country's aviation officials. Following the crash, Twitter users began sharing a video game clip of a plane plummeting from the sky, falsely claiming it showed the China Eastern crash. The footage takes the point of view from a window seat, from which a red, yellow and green Ethiopian Airlines logo can be seen on the plane's wing. Screams can be heard in the background. "A Boeing 737 just crashed in southern China. This was one of the last moment recorded on the plane. maybe the only moment. Viewers' discretion advised," stated one widely-shared Twitter post with the video. The video circulating on social media is identical to a portion of a longer clip posted to YouTube on March 10, 2019. That post states that the footage was made from the flight simulator game X-Plane 11, as an attempt to recreate how an Ethiopian Airlines jet crashed after takeoff in March 2019. "This is only a simulated flight crash for Ethiopian Airlines flight ET302," the video's caption states. In the longer clip, graphics such as the clouds and landscape are clearly computer generated. The plane's interior also matches video and screenshots of the Boeing 737-800 simulation from X-Plane 11's website. The 10-minute clip on YouTube shows the aircraft taking off and ends with the plane falling from the sky. The video notes that the screams were edited into the flight simulator footage: "This sound is added while editing, so this is not implemented from the simulator," an on-screen caption states. The creator of X-Plane 11 did not immediately return a request for comment.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

Twitter is not placing sex offender notices on profiles

CLAIM: Twitter has a feature that notifies users if a profile belongs to a registered sex offender.

THE FACTS: Twitter does not have any such feature. The false claim that the site had implemented a feature warning users when they visit an account created by a registered sex offender spread after a Twitter user created a hoax warning on their profile page to make it seem like Twitter was notifying people about a sex offender on the platform. On Tuesday, a Twitter user posted a screenshot of a different user's profile page with the caption: "When did Twitter start showing that you're a sex offender ??" A notice on that user's page featured a man's photo next to a warning symbol and the text "This user is a registered sex offender, to learn more visit twitter's safety policy." The tweet suggesting this was an authentic notice received more than 20,000 retweets and 101,000 likes. While some people pointed out that the feature was not legitimate, many others shared the tweet as if the warning was real. But the banner did not show an official notice. A Twitter spokesperson confirmed in a phone call to The Associated Press that the platform has no such feature. The person who posted the false notice used Twitter's newsletter feature to make a fake warning label. Twitter allows users to create newsletters through its tool Revue, and pin them prominently to their profiles to get people to subscribe. Since a person can type anything to create such a newsletter, this person wrote "this user is a registered sex offender" and pinned it to their profile. Twitter's help center states that: "creators can control the display of the newsletter feature on their Twitter profiles," but warns, "We do not permit this feature to be used as 'clickbait' or for promoting external products or services, distributing offers or promotions, or similar activity." The hoax banner has since been removed from the user's profile, and the link to Revue now directs to a message saying the newsletter has been suspended. A Twitter spokesperson told the AP on Wednesday that the account that posted the hoax notice was also later permanently suspended for violating a spam policy. The photo of

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the man that was used has appeared online dozens of times over the years, usually as a meme.

— Sophia Tulp

All states can fly their flags as high as Old Glory, not just Texas

CLAIM: Texas is the only state whose flag can fly at the same height as the U.S. flag.

THE FACTS: All state flags can be flown at the same height as the U.S. flag, contrary to a long-running myth that some social media users are sharing. "Texas is the only state whose flag can fly at the same height as US flag," says one Facebook post, misspelling height, and featuring images of the Texas and U.S. flags side by side. But no such distinction exists. "All state flags can be flown at the same height as the US flag, and are routinely flown that way," Peter Ansoff, president of the North American Vexillological Association, wrote in an email to The Associated Press. The U.S. Flag Code states: "When flags of States, cities, or localities, or pennants of societies are flown on the same halyard with the flag of the United States, the latter should always be at the peak." "When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of the United States should be hoisted first and lowered last," it continues. "No such flag or pennant may be placed above the flag of the United States or to the United States flag's right." Texas code also indicates that if the state and U.S. flag are displayed on the same flagpole, "the United States flag should be above the state flag." When displayed at the same location on separate poles, the code says, they "should be displayed on flagpoles or flagstaves of the same height" and "the flags should be of approximately equal size."

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Supreme Court Justice Thomas released from hospital

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Clarence Thomas was discharged from the hospital Friday after a stay of nearly a week, the Supreme Court said.

Thomas, 73, had entered the hospital last Friday evening after experiencing "flu-like symptoms." He was treated for an infection with intravenous antibiotics, the court said Sunday in announcing his hospitalization. He had been expected to be released from the hospital Monday or Tuesday.

The court did not say why he remained in the hospital longer than initially thought or what kind of infection he was treated for.

Thomas did not have COVID-19, the court said. He has been vaccinated and boosted, like the rest of the court.

The justice missed arguments at the high court on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but Chief Justice John Roberts said he would participate in the cases using briefs the parties filed and the transcript of the arguments.

Thomas, a conservative and appointee of former President George H.W. Bush, has been on the court since 1991.

EXPLAINER: What made North Korea test giant new ICBM?

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — In firing an almost cartoonishly massive intercontinental ballistic missile into space, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has turned back the clock to the "fire and fury" days of 2017 as he revives nuclear brinkmanship aimed at pressuring the United States to accept his country as a nuclear power and remove crippling sanctions.

Thursday's launch of the Hwasong-17 was North Korea's most provocative weapons test since U.S. President Joe Biden took office and underscores Kim's determination to continue building his military while diplomacy remains frozen.

This experimental launch is worrying because the weapon is being developed to be armed with nuclear bombs and to threaten Washington, D.C., New York and much of the rest of the world. The North, however, may need more tests — including of nuclear bombs — in coming months as Kim tries to both perfect his

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technology and get a response from the Biden administration, which is distracted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an intensifying rivalry with China.

Here's a closer look at Kim's new missile and what he may be planning next:

IS THIS MISSILE A BIG ADVANCE?

At around 25 meters (82 feet) long, the Hwasong-17 is by some estimates the world's largest road-mobile ballistic missile system. North Korea revealed the missile during a military parade in October 2020, and Thursday's launch from an airport near the capital Pyongyang was its first full-range test.

Kim could be seen in images released by his state media relishing the test's success as he walks past the missile wearing sunglasses and a black leather motorcycle jacket. He leads military officials along the airport's runway in a scene reminiscent of a Hollywood action movie, at one point whipping his shades off to stare at the camera.

North Korea last flew an ICBM in November 2017 when it tested the Hwasong-15. That was during a run of nuclear and missile tests that led to an exchange of insults and threats between Kim and then-U.S. President Donald Trump, who said the North's threats against the United States would be "met with fire and fury like the world has never seen."

While Hwasong-15 demonstrated the potential to reach targets in the American homeland, the latest test displayed a missile that could possibly travel even farther.

The Hwasong-17, which was fired at a high angle to avoid the territorial waters of neighbors, reached a maximum altitude of 6,248 kilometers (3,880 miles) and traveled 1,090 kilometers (680 miles) during a 67-minute flight before landing in waters between North Korea and Japan, according to North Korea's state media.

The flight details were similar to assessments by the South Korean and Japanese militaries and suggested that the missile could reach 15,000 kilometers (9,320 miles) when fired on a normal trajectory. That would effectively place the entire U.S. mainland within striking distance.

Extending its ICBM range is crucial for North Korea as it tries to build a more credible nuclear threat to target the United States, said Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

To strike the U.S. mainland, North Korea's previous ICBMs would have had to pass Alaska, where the United States deploys a larger number of missile interception systems. Hwasong-17's extra range could theoretically allow the North to avoid Alaska by traveling westward so that it reaches the U.S. mainland by way of the Atlantic Ocean, Lee said.

WILL THE WARHEAD SURVIVE?

Analyst Shin Jong-woo at South Korea's Defense and Security Forum says the North's development of a larger ICBM likely has much less to do with range than an ambition to eventually arm the missile with multiple warheads. That would improve the weapon's chances of defeating missile defenses, regardless of whether it goes through Alaska.

While North Korea could be years and major technology advancements away from building a multiwarhead ICBM, it's becoming more difficult for Washington to ignore Pyongyang's pursuit of an arsenal that poses a viable threat to the U.S. mainland, Shin said.

It remains unclear after Thursday's launch whether the North has solved the problem of ensuring that its ICBM warheads can withstand the harsh conditions of atmospheric reentry. While extensively reporting other details of the launch, the North's state media made no mention of whether any warhead survived.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said that Japan may try to retrieve missile debris to analyze the North's technology.

Both Shin and Lee expect North Korea to conduct more Hwasong-17 tests, including launches over Japan to put further pressure on Washington and allow North Korean scientists to see how the missile operates at a more normal trajectory.

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The North in 2017 conducted two launches over Japan of an intermediate range missile potentially capable of reaching Guam, a major U.S. military hub in the Pacific.

IS A NUKE TEST COMING?

North Korea is showing signs that it may be restoring tunnels at its nuclear testing ground that it detonated in 2018, as Kim tried to leverage his nukes for badly needed economic benefits from the United States.

Kim held his first summit with Trump weeks later. The diplomacy derailed after their second meeting in February 2019, when the Americans rejected the North's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a limited surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

The site in Punggye-ri in the country's northeast was used for its sixth and most recent nuclear test in 2017. After declaring the site's closure, Kim invited foreign journalists to observe the destruction of tunnels in May 2018. But North Korea didn't invite outside experts to certify what had been destroyed.

Some South Korean analysts say the North may feel the need to resume nuclear tests in coming months to get the attention of the Biden administration, which has offered open-ended talks but showed no willingness to concede on sanctions.

The missiles the North tested this year included a purported hypersonic weapon and short-range solid-fuel missiles targeting South Korea. Analysts say the North may use another nuclear test to claim it has acquired the ability to produce a nuclear warhead small enough to fit on those missiles.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 26, the 85th day of 2022. There are 280 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 26, 2010, the U.S. and Russia sealed the first major nuclear weapons treaty in nearly two decades, agreeing to slash the former Cold War rivals' warhead arsenals by nearly one-third.

On this date:

In 1812, an earthquake devastated Caracas, Venezuela, causing an estimated 26,000 deaths, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1827, composer Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna.

In 1945, during World War II, Iwo Jima was fully secured by U.S. forces following a final, desperate attack by Japanese soldiers.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Baker v. Carr*, gave federal courts the power to order reapportionment of states' legislative districts.

In 1973, the soap opera "The Young and the Restless" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1979, a peace treaty was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter at the White House.

In 1982, groundbreaking ceremonies took place in Washington, D.C., for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

In 1988, Jesse Jackson stunned fellow Democrats by soundly defeating Michael S. Dukakis in Michigan's Democratic presidential caucuses.

In 1992, a judge in Indianapolis sentenced former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson to six years in prison for raping a Miss Black America contestant. (Tyson ended up serving three years.)

In 1997, the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate techno-religious cult who committed suicide were found inside a rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

In 2014, Osama bin Laden's son-in-law, Sulaiman Abu Ghaith (SOO'-lay-mahn AH'-boo gayth), was convicted in New York for his role as al-Qaida's fiery chief spokesman after 9/11. (He was later sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2020, the U.S. surpassed official Chinese government numbers to become the country with the most reported coronavirus infections.

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Ten years ago: As demonstrations swirled outside, Supreme Court justices began hearing arguments on challenges to President Barack Obama's historic health care overhaul. (In June 2012, the court would uphold almost all of the law, including the most disputed part: the mandate that virtually all Americans have health insurance or pay a penalty.) Pope Benedict XVI arrived in Cuba in the footsteps of his immediate predecessor, Pope John Paul II, expressing great affection for Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits and heartfelt hopes for reconciliation.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump took to Twitter to attack conservative lawmakers for the failure of the Republican bill to replace former President Barack Obama's health care law.

One year ago: Dominion Voting Systems filed a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News, saying the cable news giant falsely claimed that the voting company rigged the 2020 election. Maj. Gen. William Walker, commanding general of the District of Columbia National Guard, was tapped to become the House's first African American sergeant-at-arms. Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee signed a law banning transgender athletes from participating in girls' sports, making Tennessee the third state to approve such a measure in 2021.

Today's Birthdays: Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is 92. Actor Alan Arkin is 88. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is 87. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is 82. Actor James Caan is 82. Author Erica Jong is 80. Journalist Bob Woodward is 79. Singer Diana Ross is 78. Rock singer Steven Tyler (Aerosmith) is 74. Singer and TV personality Vicki Lawrence is 73. Actor Ernest Thomas is 73. Comedian Martin Short is 72. Country singer Ronnie McDowell is 72. Movie composer Alan Silvestri is 72. Rock musician Monte Yoho is 70. Former Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao is 69. Radio talk show host Curtis Sliwa is 68. Country singer Dean Dillon is 67. Country singer Charly McClain is 66. TV personality Leeza Gibbons is 65. Actor Ellia English is 63. Actor Jennifer Grey is 62. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Marcus Allen is 62. Actor Billy Warlock is 61. Actor Eric Allan Kramer is 60. Basketball and College Basketball Hall of Famer John Stockton is 60. Actor Michael Imperioli is 56. Rock musician James Iha (EE'-hah) is 54. Country singer Kenny Chesney is 54. Movie director Martin McDonagh (Film: "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri") is 52. Actor Leslie Mann is 50. Actor T.R. Knight is 49. Rapper Juvenile is 47. Actor Amy Smart is 46. Actor Bianca Kajlich (KY'-lihk) is 45. Moderator Margaret Brennan (TV: "Face the Nation") is 42. Actor Sterling Sulieman is 38. Actor Keira Knightley is 37. Rapper J-Kwon is 36. Actor Carly Chaikin is 32.