

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

Monday, March 28

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

FFA CDE at Tri-Valley

Tuesday, March 29

Indoor Track Meet at Northern State University

Friday, April 1

FFA CDE at SDSU, Brookings

School Breakfast: Stuffed Bagels

School Lunch: Fish Sandwich, Puzzle Tots

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, rice pilaf, California blend veggies, fruit crisp, whole wheat bread.

Saturday, April 2

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

Sunday, April 3

2 p.m. and 5 p.m., POPS Concert

3:30 p.m.: GHS FCA Meeting: "The Chosen" Watch

Party at Kim Weber's house, 501 E 16th Ave

Emmanuel: 9 a.m. Worship with communion, 10:15 a.m. Sunday school, 10:15 a.m. 1st Communion Class, 7 p.m., Choir

St. John's: 8 a.m. Bible Study, Worship with communion at 9 a.m. at St. John's and 11 a.m. at Zion, 10 a.m. Sunday School

Monday, April 4

Emmanuel: 6:30 a.m.. Bible Study

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

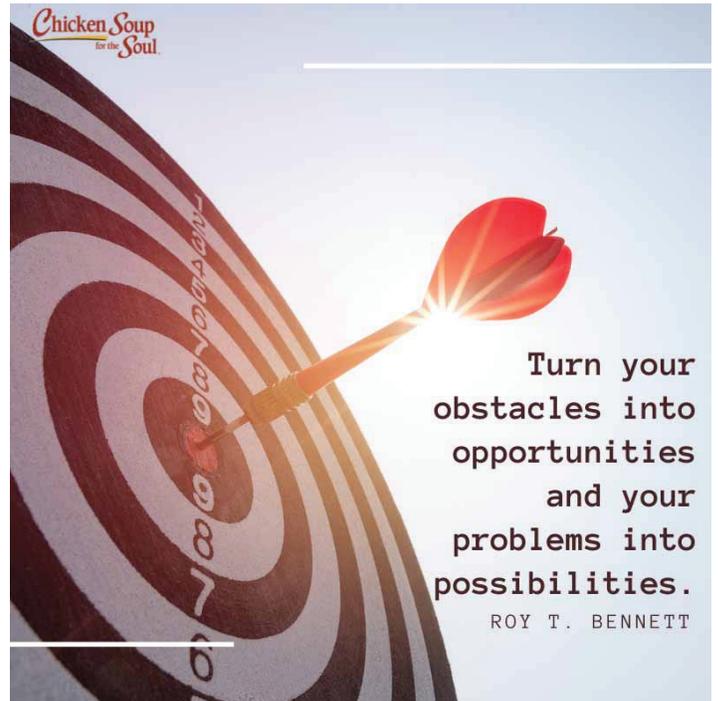
School Lunch: Cheese sticks, marinara sauce, corn.

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potato, squash, fruit, whole wheat bread.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Tuesday, April 5

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

St. John's: 1 p.m.: Ladies Aid LWML

School Breakfast: French toast sticks.

School Lunch: Tangereine chicken, rice.

Senior Menu: Hamburger with bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, ice cream sundae.

Wednesday, April 6

Emmanuel: 6 p.m. Soup Supper (Nigeria Circle is host), 7 p.m. Lenten Service

St. John's: Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, peas, sunset salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.

Truss Pros Help Wanted

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

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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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!!!



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The boys basketball awards banquet was held Sunday evening at the Olive Grove Golf Course. The varsity players receiving awards are Wyatt Hearnen, Best Effort Award and Most Improved Award; Jacob Zak, Defensive Player of the Year; Cade Larson, Best Attitude Award; Lane Tietz, Best Effort, Offensive Player of the Year and Most Valuable Player; Ryder Johnson, Andrew Periboom Award: (Scout Player of the Year); and Kaden Kurtz, Best Teammate and Most Valuable Player of the Year. Tietz was also named to the NEC All-Conference first team and was the second highest vote getter. Kaden Kurtz was named to the second team of the All-Conference Team. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Cade Larson was named junior varsity Best Attitude and Best Teammate. Not pictured is Cole Simon who won Best Effort, Offensive MVP and Defensive MVP awards. The awards are voted on by the teammates. The JV team finished 13-4 on the season. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The C team awards were presented which finished 3-3 on the season. Coach Brian Dolan said they may be a switch in the conference to have more double header games which may mean that the C team may have to have its own schedule. Those winning awards were Gage Sippel, Defensive Player Award; Keagan Tracy, Best Effort; Ryder Johnson, Offensive Player of the Year; and Blake Pauli, Best Attitude and Best Teammate; not pictured is Carter Simon, Teammate of the Year. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

What About Medical Cannabis?

Since ancient times, marijuana has been used for medicinal and recreational purposes in many cultures. In the United States, it became illegal during prohibition, like alcohol. Later, under the Controlled Substances Act in the 1970's, the federal government classified marijuana a Schedule 1 drug. This classification includes heroin, LSD, and ecstasy, all deemed to have no safe, effective medical use and a high potential for abuse.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

This Schedule 1 status imposes bureaucratic and legal barriers, making it difficult to conduct scientific research on the medical benefits from marijuana. Studies that have been conducted are small and limited. Thus, physicians are less confident recommending marijuana for patients. Not to mention, use or possession remains illegal federally and in many states.

The word cannabis refers to all products derived from the plant *cannabis sativa*. There are hundreds of compounds in this plant, called cannabinoids. Cannabidiol (CBD) is one of them, and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is another. The word marijuana often refers to products from the plant that contain large amounts of THC, which is psychoactive and can alter someone's mental state.

Cannabinoids can trigger receptors in the brain to release neurotransmitters to affect mood, sleep, pain, and memory. Drugs with cannabinoids may be helpful in treating nausea and vomiting from cancer treatments, loss of appetite and weight loss from AIDS, chronic pain syndrome, multiple sclerosis symptoms, glaucoma and children suffering from seizures. There may be other medical benefits we are not yet aware of. We need more research to determine safe treatments and establish confidence.

Marijuana use can cause harm. It can do more than dull the brain and give someone the munchies. It can increase the risk of motor vehicle crashes. In some individuals it can increase the risk of developing schizophrenia or other mental illnesses. Frequent use by adults and use in adolescence can decrease attention and memory, or cause cannabis use disorder, which has symptoms of craving, withdrawal, lack of control, and negative effects on personal and professional responsibilities. Sometimes people develop recurrent severe vomiting. Vaping products with THC have resulted in severe lung injury.

Marijuana has been used as a medicine for a very long time in various cultures. Yes, it can be addictive, and it can cause problems. Although, when you consider the harms from alcohol, tobacco, narcotic pain killers, and other medications, perhaps cannabis deserves a chance to be further studied and used when medically appropriate.

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

That's Life by Tony Bender Spring quiz

Hello again, friends. Before you start putting away your snow shovels and go galavanting off to the beach, it's time to take stock of recent and current events. Stop groaning. I just don't want you going out there unprepared and under-informed like some kind of voter. However, should you choose to do so, there's probably an opening at Fox News.

1. The hills are alive with the sound of:
 - a. It depends. Is this a Wes Craven picture?
 - b. Music
 - c. Artillery
 - d. The strangled cries of Lawyers in Love
2. President Biden said that Vladimir Putin should not remain in power, but the White House later walked it back saying there was no policy of regime change. (Except where we think we can get away with it.) What would the White House like to see changed?
 - a. A lightbulb. A bipartisan committee will look into it.
 - b. Biden's shorts
 - c. That stupid extra innings rule
 - d. An Oval Office with right angles to keep the president from going in circles
3. There's a plan to sequester CO2 underground in North Dakota because:
 - a. Landowner demand for carbonated wells
 - b. Landfills are a growth industry.
 - c. Big Energy hasn't done nearly enough damage.
 - d. We were almost out of bad ideas.
4. Virginia Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, sent Trump's Chief of Staff Mark Meadows 29 messages...
 - a. Urging him to overturn the election results
 - b. Professing her red hot monkey love
 - c. Containing twerking videos
 - d. Pretending to be a Nigerian prince
5. Billings, Montana airport personnel's response to Ted Cruz's tantrum, "Do you know who I am?!"
 - a. Yes, but we're willing to help you, anyway.
 - b. Aidy Bryant?
 - c. Sorry, the beard had everyone fooled.
 - d. No, but we recognize your sheep.
6. There have been reports of a distilled water shortage in North Dakota because:

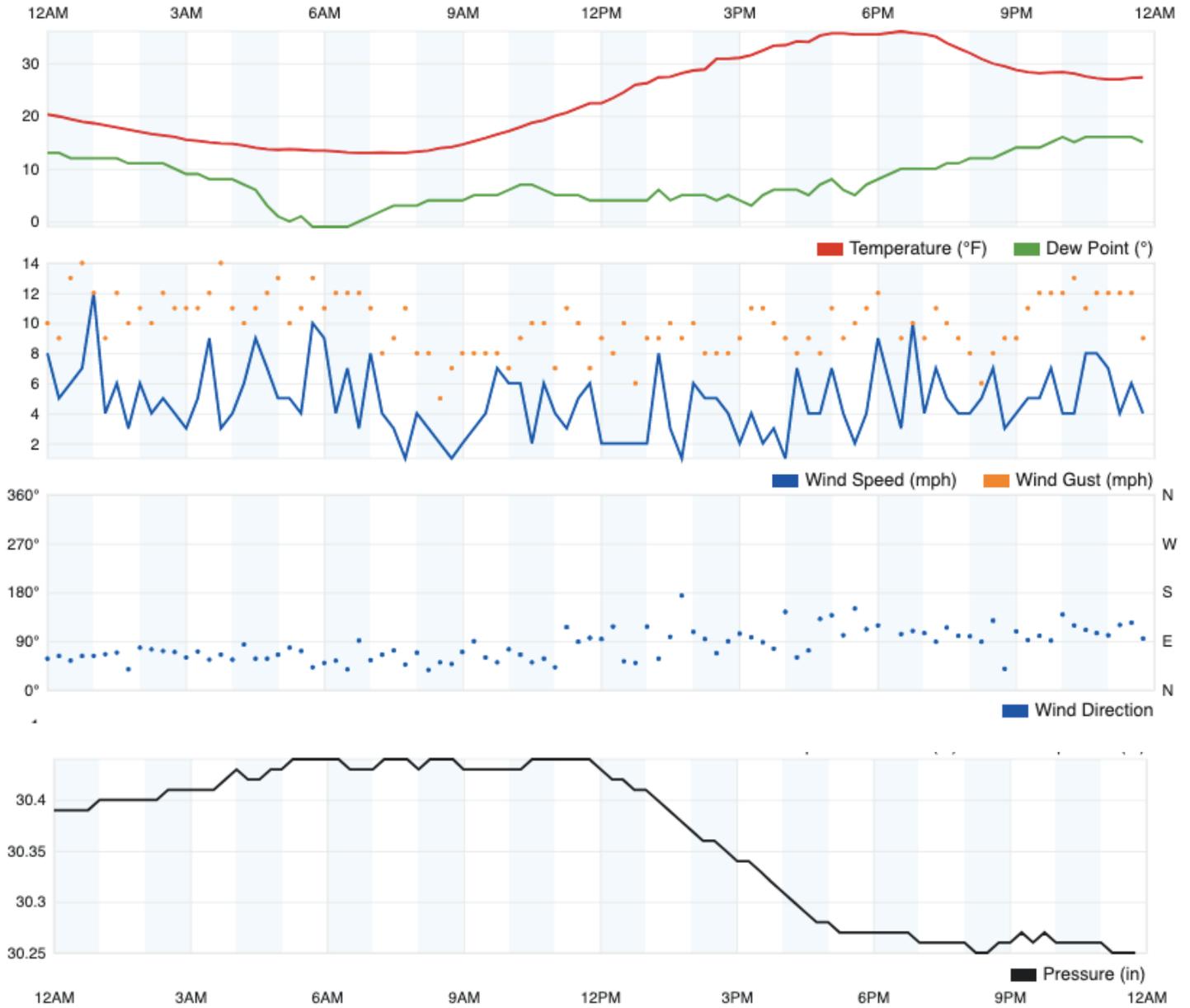
- a. It was a slow news day.
 - b. Diverted to Williston for fracking
 - c. Biden rejected new permits on public land
 - d. Is this even America anymore?
7. Ketanji Brown Jackson made the news last week for:
 - a. Scoring 60 against the Celtics
 - b. Refusing to say whether or not she likes beer during Supreme Court conformation hearings
 - c. Freeing all the pedophiles and releasing the Kraken
 - d. Bringing the Republic to its knees
 8. The Cleveland Browns signed quarterback Deshaun Watson because:
 - a. Mistook the number of sexual assault cases against him for touchdown passes
 - b. Well, you forgot about Ben Rothlisberger's assaults, didn't you?
 - c. Everyone deserves a 22nd chance
 - d. To upgrade the character in the quarterback room
 9. According to today's horoscope, if you are an Aries you:
 - a. Are 100% a serial killer.
 - b. Drive 55 in the passing lane.
 - c. Double dip your chips
 - d. Shot a man in Reno just to watch him die
 10. Gas prices are so gosh-darn high because:
 - a. It's a complex global market with many producers, refiners, and suppliers.
 - b. It's a fluster cuck.
 - c. Biden's fault.
 - d. The important thing is windmills are killing all the birds.
- Bonus: According to a new study, a fourth vaccine...
 - a. Reduces COVID deaths by 78%
 - b. Has a better tracking device
 - c. Turns you into Spiderman
 - d. Makes you swim faster

Answers: 1. C; 2. D; 3. A. 4. D; 5. D; 6. C; 7. B; 8. A; 9. A; 10. D; Bonus: D. Grading: 11-9 correct: We're on the same wavelength. You should get that checked. 6-8 correct: Another disappointing playoff performance. 3-5 correct: If this were baseball, those would be Hall of Fame numbers. 0-2 correct: Well, the lobotomy took.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today



Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 52 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy
and Breezy

Low: 35 °F

Tuesday



Breezy.
Mostly Cloudy
then Chance
Rain

High: 53 °F

Tuesday
Night



Rain then
Rain/Snow and
Blustery

Low: 29 °F

Wednesday

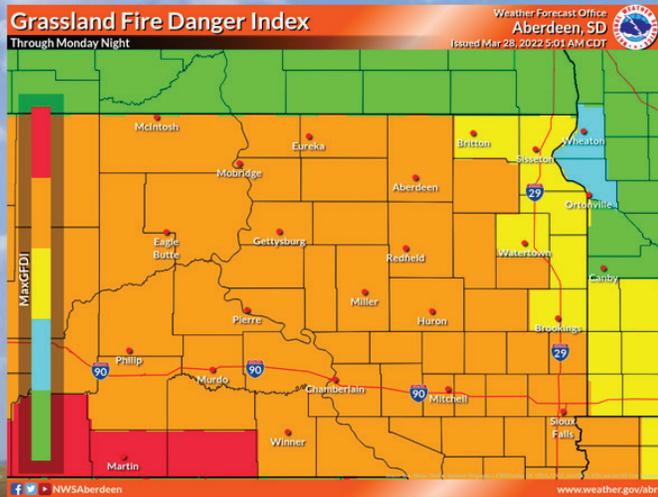


Breezy.
Chance Snow
then Chance
Rain/Snow

High: 37 °F

Very High Fire Danger For Today

Dry fuels along with gusty winds will lead to an increase in fire concern



	Maximum Wind Gust Forecast				Maximum
	3/28 Mon		3/29 Tue		
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	
Aberdeen	35	35	32	33	35
Britton	32	36	32	33	36
Eagle Butte	33	35	32	32	35
Eureka	36	37	35	36	37
Gettysburg	38	40	37	36	40
Kennebec	35	38	37	32	38
McIntosh	33	38	36	32	38
Milbank	25	30	31	30	31
Miller	36	37	33	35	37
Mobridge	32	33	31	28	33
Murdo	33	37	36	32	37
Pierre	31	36	35	31	36
Redfield	37	39	36	36	39
Sisseton	28	32	31	29	32
Watertown	29	32	32	32	32
Wheaton	25	28	31	30	31

What To Know About Wildfire Safety



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

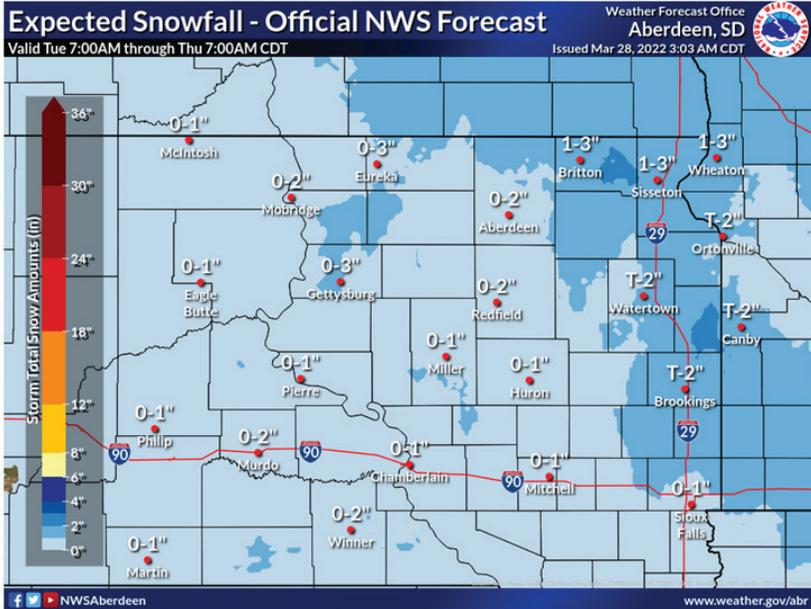
National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Continuing dry conditions today, along with gusty winds and lower relative humidity values this afternoon, will lead to an increase in fire concern. The Grassland Fire Danger Index indicates a very high threat risk (Orange) across most of our north-central, central, and southern counties.

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Storm System To Bring Rain Then Snow Starting Tuesday Night Through Wednesday



What

A system is expected to bring a rain/snow mix along with gusty winds. Light snow accumulations possible

Where

Trace to three inches of snow mainly in northeastern/eastern SD into western MN

When

Tuesday Evening: Rain

Tuesday Night/Overnight: Rain transitioning to a rain/snow mix as temperatures cool

*Could see areas of freezing rain/drizzle, mainly along and east of Interstate 29

Wednesday Morning: Rain/snow mix transitioning to all snow

Impacts

Reduced visibility at times due to falling snow and gusty winds

Winter does not want to go away just yet! A low moving across the Midwest will bring rain to the area starting Tuesday evening before transitioning to all snow by early Wednesday morning. As of now a trace to 3 inches of snow is possible, mainly across northeastern/eastern SD into western MN. Falling snow, along with gusty winds, could lead to lower visibilities at times.

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Today in Weather History

March 28, 1977: A slow-moving storm system affected South Dakota from March 28th through March 30th, 1977. The storm produced heavy snow in the west and thunderstorms in the east. Northerly winds gusting to 50 miles an hour in the West created blizzard conditions as the snow totals mounted. Some areas in western Butte, Pennington, northern Shannon, and Lawrence counties received over 20 inches of snow. With drifts exceeding 6 to 8 feet many people in western South Dakota thought it was the worst blizzard in a quarter century. A few locations in the northern Black Hills received over 4 feet of snow. Because of blocked roads, westbound traffic was halted on I-90, and many schools and businesses were forced to close for several days. Across the eastern portion of the state rains of over 1" fell in many areas. Milbank even reported walnut size hail.

1917 - Thane Creek, AK, reported a snow cover of 190 inches. (The Weather Channel)

1920: The worst tornado disaster of record occurred in Chicago, IL as a tornado killed 28 persons and caused three million dollars damage. This tornado was part of an outbreak which saw 38 tornadoes hit the Midwest and the Deep South states. Over 380 people died, and at least, 1,215 were injured during the Palm Sunday outbreak.

1935: On this date through March 31st, a great dust storm descended on Amarillo, Texas reducing visibility to zero for a six-hour period.

1963: A decision was handed down in the case of Whitney Bartie vs. the United States of America. Bartie sued the U.S. Weather Bureau for negligence in failing to provide a warning about Hurricane Audrey in 1957. Bartie's wife and five children were killed after the 12-foot storm surge struck Cameron Parish, LA on the morning of June 27, 1957. It was ruled that the evidence presented did not establish negligence on the part of the Weather Bureau.

1984 - A violent outbreak of tornadoes hit the Carolinas. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes during the late afternoon and evening hours which killed 57 persons and injured 1248 others. Nearly half the deaths occurred in mobile homes. A tornado from near Tatum SC to southern Cumberland County NC was 2.5 miles in width at times. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A blizzard raged from southern Nebraska to central Iowa. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at Blue Hill NE. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Carroll IA. High winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high in western Iowa, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero in Nebraska. The snowfall total of 9.4 inches at Omaha NE was a record for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in central Oklahoma produced hail up to four inches in diameter causing 35 million dollars in southern Oklahoma County. Baseball size hail and seven inches of rain caused another eighteen million dollars damage in Stephens County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Atlantic coast. Eighteen cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 81 degrees at Beckley WV was a record for March, and the high of 90 degrees in downtown Baltimore MD tied their March record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A storm system brought heavy snow to the west central and southern mountains of Wyoming, and high winds to the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to ten inches at the Snowy Ski Range Area, and the storm pushed the snowfall total for the month at Cheyenne above 37 inches, surpassing their previous record for March of 35 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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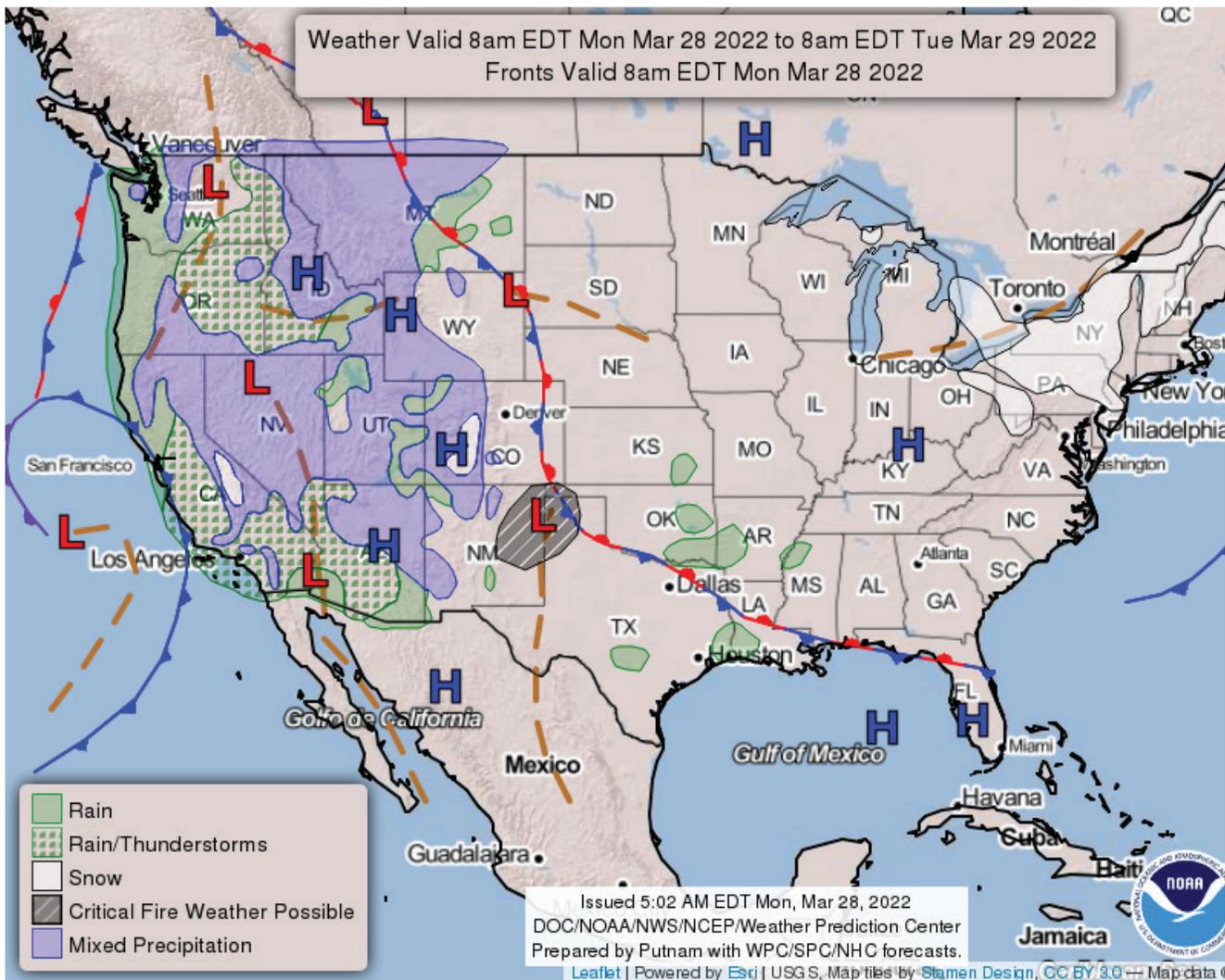
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 6:27 PM
Low Temp: 13 °F at 6:33 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 12:43 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 38 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 82 in 1946
Record Low: -10 in 1913
Average High: 48°F
Average Low: 25°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.77
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.02
Average Precip to date: 1.94
Precip Year to Date: 0.99
Sunset Tonight: 7:56:41 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16:09 AM



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"What Are You Looking At?"

One day John Wesley was strolling with one of his dear friends through the farmlands of England. He was deeply troubled and having a difficult time talking about his problem.

Stopping in front of a cow that had separated herself from the herd, Wesley asked, "Do you know why that cow is looking over the fence?"

"No," said his friend.

"Because she can't look through it," he replied.

The Psalmist encourages us to "look over the fence." He wrote, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heavens and earth." As long as we look at our problem, the problem will look right back at us. But if we look over the problem and look to our Lord, the Psalmist promises us that He will come and help us.

Focusing on a problem, any problem, even a problem larger than life, gets us no peace. Often, we treat our problems as a cow treats her cud - we "roll" it up into the "worry area" of our mind and chew on it until there is nothing left in our minds but the problem. It consumes us because we refuse to "look over" it and ask the Person who brought it into our lives to solve it.

The Psalmist reminds us that the God Who wants to be our problem-solver is the same God who "is the Maker of heaven and earth." Imagine, if you will, the brilliance of God: Everywhere we look in His universe we are reminded of this fact. We must "look over" and "look to" Him.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to look to You whenever we need answers, solutions or decisions for things that threaten our faith. As the maker of heaven and earth, You know the answers. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I will lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heavens and earth. Psalm 121:1-2

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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News from the Associated Press

EXPLAINER: South Dakota House nears AG impeachment decision

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota House committee investigating whether the state's attorney general should be impeached for his conduct surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash is set to finish its work this week, wrapping up a monthslong investigation that has splintered the state's Republicans.

The House Select Committee on Investigation plans late Monday to issue a final report, which will include parts of the crash investigation that have not been redacted by the committee. Lawmakers will also discuss whether to recommend Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg's impeachment.

The report, as well as any recommendations, will assess the conduct of the state's top law enforcement officer and set the tone for House lawmakers as they prepare to vote on his impeachment.

A look at the impeachment investigation:

WHY IS RAVNSBORG FACING IMPEACHMENT?

Ravnsborg struck and killed a man walking near a rural highway in September 2020. He initially reported the nighttime crash as a collision with an animal and has insisted he did not realize he killed the man, 55-year-old Joseph Boever, until he returned to the scene the next day and found his body.

Criminal investigators told the impeachment committee that Ravnsborg was inconsistent with them in recounting the crash, they didn't believe his account and that he may have known he hit a man. But prosecutors said they couldn't prove that.

Ravnsborg in August pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors for making an illegal lane change and using a phone while driving about a minute before the crash.

HOW HAS THE INVESTIGATION SPLIT REPUBLICANS?

Gov. Kristi Noem has pushed hard for her fellow Republican's ouster, saying last year she was "outraged" at the result of the charges and suggesting that impeachment could hold Ravnsborg accountable.

"The public deserves the truth and this family, this poor family deserves some justice," she said in January.

One of the governor's top officials, Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price, laid out an argument for impeachment in a public letter to the committee this month. He noted that Ravnsborg was distracted when the crash happened, criminal investigators didn't believe his account, and that the attorney general consulted with a digital evidence expert in his office before turning his phone over to investigators.

Price also raised new allegations, pointing to "disparaging and offensive" text messages about state officials that were traded by Ravnsborg and top aides. Price further alleged that Ravnsborg had been pulled over for traffic offenses eight times in the roughly 18 months between taking office and the fatal crash, including five in which he either identified himself as the attorney general or displayed a badge.

But Noem's pressure campaign has irked lawmakers on the committee who see it as intrusive.

If he is removed from office, Noem would get to name a replacement for Ravnsborg, who since falling out with the governor after the crash has pushed a pair of ethics complaints against Noem to the state's Government Accountability Board.

Lawmakers have suggested that Noem inappropriately interfered by publicly releasing parts of the investigation, including videos of criminal investigators questioning Ravnsborg.

House Speaker Spencer Gosch, the Republican leading the impeachment committee, said its final report would include details on how Noem has tried to "influence the investigation."

In the latest round of acrimony, an organization formed to further Noem's agenda in the state, the Dakota Institute for Legislative Solutions, sponsored billboards accusing four Republicans and a Democrat of covering for the attorney general. Noem has denied any involvement, but some lawmakers have said they don't believe her.

WILL RAVNSBORG FACE A VOTE ON IMPEACHMENT?

Almost certainly. But it's not clear how much momentum there will be for impeachment, which requires

a simple majority, when the House convenes on April 12.

If the committee recommends impeachment, it would give those pressing for Ravensborg's ouster a boost.

Even if the committee doesn't recommend action, there will likely be a separate push to impeach him. Republican Rep. Will Mortenson, who introduced articles of impeachment last year, said his argument for doing so has only been confirmed by testimony from law enforcement officers who investigated the crash.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If the House impeaches Ravensborg, he would be removed from office at least temporarily.

The state constitution calls for an impeached official to take a leave from their duties while the impeachment trial plays out in the Senate. It also requires at least 20 days to pass between when the official is impeached and the start of the trial. It would take a two-thirds Senate majority to convict and permanently remove the attorney general from office.

Regardless, Ravensborg faces an unlikely political future. His GOP predecessor, Marty Jackley, has announced a bid to replace him.

The state Republican Party will decide its nominee at a convention in June, and Jackley has the support of the state's most powerful elected official — Noem.

Ukraine leader says he seeks peace 'without delay' in talks

By YURAS KARMAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine could declare neutrality and offer security guarantees to Russia to secure peace "without delay," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said ahead of another planned round of talks — though he said only a face-to-face meeting with Russia's leader could end the war.

In an interview with independent Russian media outlets, Zelenskyy stressed that Ukraine's priority is ensuring its sovereignty and its "territorial integrity" — preventing Russia from carving up the country, something Ukraine and the West say could now be Moscow's goal.

But, Zelenskyy added: "Security guarantees and neutrality, non-nuclear status of our state — we are ready to go for it."

The Ukrainian leader has suggested as much before, but rarely so forcefully and the latest remarks come as the two sides said talks would resume Tuesday.

Russia has long demanded that Ukraine drop any hope of joining the western NATO alliance, which Moscow sees as a threat. Zelenskyy said that the question of neutrality, which would keep Ukraine out of NATO or other military alliances, should be put to Ukrainian voters in a referendum after Russian troops withdraw.

Zelenskyy has also long stressed that Ukraine needs security guarantees of its own as part of any deal.

"We must come to an agreement with the president of the Russian Federation, and in order to reach an agreement, he needs to get out of there on his own feet ... and come to meet me," he also said in an interview that Russia barred its media from publishing.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Monday that the two presidents could meet, but only after the key elements of a potential deal are negotiated.

"The meeting is necessary once we have clarity regarding solutions on all key issues," Lavrov said in an interview with Serbian media. He accused Ukraine of only wanting to "imitate talks," but said Russia needed concrete results.

In an overnight video address to his nation, Zelenskyy said Ukraine sought peace "without delay" in talks due to get underway in Istanbul. That location was agreed after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday, the Turkish leader's office said. Negotiators are expected to arrive Monday.

Earlier talks, both by video and in person, have failed to make progress on ending a more than month-old war that has killed thousands and driven more than 10 million Ukrainians from their homes — including almost 4 million from their country.

With Russia's offensive stalled in many areas, its troops have resorted to pummeling Ukrainian towns and cities with rockets and artillery in a grinding war of attrition. Fierce fighting has raged on the outskirts of

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Kyiv, but Russian troops remain miles from the city center, their aim of quickly encircling the capital faltering. In Stoyanka village near Kyiv, Ukrainian soldier Serhiy Udod said Russian troops had taken up defensive positions and suffered heavy losses.

He said "probably they thought it would be like Crimea," which Russia annexed in 2014.

"But, here it's not like in Crimea. We are not happy to see them. Here they suffer and get killed."

A fiercer than expected Ukrainian resistance — bolstered by weapons from the U.S. and other Western allies — has been credited with bogging Russian forces down.

But Zelenskyy has made increasingly exasperated pleas for Western countries to do more, including sending fighter jets, accusing political leaders on Sunday of lacking courage. Countries from the NATO alliance have been hesitant to give Zelenskyy some of the more powerful equipment he's begged for, for fear of triggering a much wider war.

In fact, Russia's invasion has most Americans at least somewhat worried that the U.S. will be drawn directly into the conflict and could be targeted with nuclear weapons, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It shows a level of anxiety echoing the Cold War era.

Moscow now says its focus is on securing the entire eastern Donbas region, which has been partially controlled by Russia-backed separatists since 2014. A high-ranking Russian military official on Friday said that troops were being redirected to the east from other parts of the country.

Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, accused Russia of seeking to split Ukraine in two, making the comparison to North and South Korea.

"The occupiers will try to pull the occupied territories into a single quasi-state structure and pit it against independent Ukraine," Budanov said in a statement released by the Defense Ministry. He predicted that guerrilla warfare by Ukrainians would derail such plans.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has banned reporting on troop and equipment movements not announced or approved by the military. Journalists who violate the law could face three to eight years in prison. The law does not differentiate between Ukrainian and foreign reporters.

Oscar Moments: The night emotion won, for better and worse

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Did I miss anything?" quipped Oscars co-host Amy Schumer, returning to the Dolby Theatre stage after a break. "There's a different vibe in here."

Oh my, was there ever.

With a sudden, shocking outburst of anger from actor Will Smith, who bounded onstage to slap Chris Rock after the comedian joked about his wife's appearance, the theater was thrown into a state of deeply uncomfortable shock.

"Did we just see that?" people said to each other, as realization grew that the outburst was not pre-planned or meant as a joke. Phones buzzed, too, with many audience members saying they were getting texts from friends or family watching at home, asking if they had seen what they thought they did.

The discomfort continued through the end of the show, even as a tearful Smith, as expected, won the best actor prize for "King Richard" and apologized to the academy, though not to Rock.

Every Oscar show has its big moments, but this one overshadowed them all. Still, there were others: The heart-tugging "CODA" had a great night, winning best supporting actor, best adapted screenplay and the big kahuna, best picture, ending the ceremony on an ebullient note. It was emotion that won there, too, as voters went with the movie that so many said made them cry, rather than the cool sophistication of the earlier favorite, "The Power of the Dog."

There were other history-making wins, impassioned speeches, a smidgen of politics, and hardly a thought about the pandemic as revelers packed into the post-show Governor's Ball.

Some key Oscar moments, some you saw on TV and some you didn't:

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AN EARLY START

Remember when the most controversial thing about these Oscars was those awards they moved to the hour before the TV broadcast began? In the end, the theater was about two-thirds full and winners accepted their awards with nary a protest, and the most rabble-rousing speech of the relaxed (untelevised) proceedings was when a winner paid tribute to craftspeople on all movie sets. "Dune" took an early lead in those awards, ultimately taking six Oscars. And the team responsible for Jessica Chastain's metamorphosis in "The Eyes of Tammy Faye" won the Oscar for hairstyling and makeup.

KOTSUR'S GROUNDBREAKING WIN

It began on Oscar nomination day when Troy Kotsur, learning of his supporting actor nod for "CODA," literally fell off his chair in a video that went viral. He continued to charm Hollywood and by Oscar night Kotsur, who plays a randy father in the film about a deaf family with a hearing child, was a clear favorite. Still, his win was emotional — many in the audience, including Chastain, Javier Bardem and Nicole Kidman, responded with waving hands — what is known as a deaf clap. Even his interpreter choked up during Kotsur's speech. He joined "CODA" costar Marlee Matlin as the only deaf Oscar winners. "I just wanted to say this is dedicated to the Deaf community, the CODA community and the disabled community," Kotsur signed. "This is our moment."

TO BE IN AMERICA

Holding her Oscar in triumph, Ariana DeBose echoed the words of her famous character in "West Side Story," Anita. "Now you see why Anita says, 'I want to be in America,'" said DeBose, who won for best supporting actress, as expected. "Because even in this weary world that we live in, dreams do come true." There was much that was special about her win. DeBose won the trophy 60 years after Rita Moreno claimed the award in 1962 for the original film version of the Broadway musical. And she made history as well, becoming the first Afro-Latina and openly LGBTQ actor to win in the category. "To anybody who has ever questioned your identity," she said, echoing more lyrics from "West Side Story," "I promise you there is a place for us."

DO SAY GAY

One might have expected there to be more political references on this Oscar night. There actually weren't too many, but several presenters and winners did refer to Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill. Co-host Wanda Sykes — one of a trio with Schumer and Regina Hall — took a shot at the bill that passed a Republican-controlled state legislature earlier this month. "We're going to have a great night tonight," said Sykes, who is openly gay. "And for you people in Florida, we're going to have a gay night." Later, Chastain, best actress winner for "The Eyes of Tammy Faye," told the crowd: "We're faced with discriminatory and bigoted legislation that is sweeping our country with the only goal of further dividing us."

BEYONCÉ HOLDS (TENNIS) COURT

After an opening greeting from Venus and Serena Williams, whose tennis-playing youth and life with their father is the subject of "King Richard," the opening number was performed by none other than Beyoncé. The superstar sang her nominated song, "Be Alive," in a dance-heavy performance from an open-air stage in Compton, where the Williams sisters were raised. Even her star power didn't win the song an Oscar, though. It was Billie Eilish and her brother, Finneas, who won for their "No Time to Die" James Bond theme song. Finneas thanked the duo's parents with words that brought smiles to many, saying: "We love you as parents and we love you as real people, too."

BUT SPEAKING OF 'KING RICHARD' ...

(You knew we had to get back to this one.) "King Richard" may not have won best song but it took the prize for Smith himself, not long after the slap heard 'round the world. A hugely emotional Smith rose to accept his trophy and began with a clear reference to what had just happened, noting that "Richard Williams was a fierce defender of his family. In this time in my life, in this moment, I am overwhelmed by what God is calling on me to do and be in this world. ...," He also noted that Denzel Washington had told him that "At your highest moment, be careful. That's when the devil comes for you." He apologized to the academy and said he hoped he'd be invited back. And Hollywood clearly was expressing its love: A stream

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of celebrities came over to comfort Smith after his slap moment, including Washington, Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman, Tyler Perry and others.

CAMPION CELEBRATES

At the post-Oscar Governor's Ball, where stars and guests guzzled Champagne and munched on smoked salmon hors d'oeuvres shaped like Oscars (and many other things), it was a jolly mood but especially for Jane Campion, who impulsively broke out dancing in the packed room, surely an expression of joy at having won the best director Oscar for "The Power of the Dog." Her win was a moment for history, as it marked the first time the directing award went to women in back-to-back years, with Chloé Zhao's victory last year for "Nomadland." Campion is the third woman to win in the category. Her win was the only one for her reimagined Western despite 12 nominations. Campion lost out on best adapted screenplay to Sian Heder of "CODA."

AND SPEAKING OF 'CODA'....

It was just that kind of night. After the emotions of the previous few hours, it seemed appropriate that "CODA" would take the final prize. (And, luckily, it WAS the final award, reversing last year's reversal of the tradition.) Besides being a huge moment for the Deaf community, it was the first win for a streaming service; though a small movie, it had deep support in Apple TV+, which scored its first best picture prize. Later at the Governor's Ball, the entire cast walked in and was mobbed by photographers and well-wishers, with Kotsur clutching his Oscar in one hand and happy co-star Matlin in the other.

OH YES, PARTYING WAS BACK

After last year's distanced pandemic Oscars, partying was back with a vengeance. The audience — all vaccinated and COVID-tested, twice — packed into bars during the awards and then at the Governor's Ball, where hardly a mask was to be seen. The main subject of conversation at the Ball was, no surprise, the Will Smith developments. "At first everyone thought it was fake," said one guest, real estate broker Sara Roche from Charlotte, N.C. "Everyone was texting from home and saying, 'What is going on?'" But Roche also had thoughts about "CODA," whose win made her happy. "I'm not an emotional person and not a cryer," she said. "But I got a lump in my throat when 'CODA' won."

Scavino, Navarro face contempt vote from Jan. 6 committee

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol is pushing ahead with contempt charges against former Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino in response to their monthslong refusal to comply with subpoenas.

Navarro, Trump's trade adviser, and Scavino, a White House communications aide under Trump, have been uncooperative in the congressional probe into the deadly 2021 insurrection, according to a committee report released Sunday night.

The nine-member panel will meet Monday night to discuss whether to hold the two allies of the Republican former president in contempt of Congress. It is likely to be approved by the Democratic-majority committee.

The recommendation of criminal charges would then go to the full House. Approval there would send the charges to the Justice Department, which has final say on prosecution.

Pro-Trump rioters stormed the Capitol in hopes of blocking Congress from certifying election results showing Democrat Joe Biden defeated Trump.

The committee subpoenaed Navarro, 72, for his testimony in early February, seeking to question the Trump ally who promoted false claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election that the committee believes contributed to the attack.

"He hasn't been shy about his role in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election and has even discussed the former President's support for those plans," Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's Democratic chairman, said in a statement at the time.

Though Navarro sought to use executive privilege to avoid cooperation, the Biden administration this month denied claims from him and another Trump aide, former national security adviser Michael Flynn,

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saying an assertion of executive privilege was not justified or in the national interest.

On Thursday, Navarro called the committee vote "an unprecedented partisan assault on executive privilege," and said, "The committee knows full well that President Trump has invoked executive privilege and it is not my privilege to waive."

In a statement Sunday night, Navarro said the committee "should negotiate this matter with President Trump." He added, "If he waived the privilege, I will be happy to comply; but I see no effort by the Committee to clarify this matter with President Trump, which is bad faith and bad law."

In a subpoena issued to Scavino last fall, the committee cited reports that he was with Trump the day before the attack during a discussion about how to persuade members of Congress not to certify the election for Biden and with Trump again the day of the attack and may have "materials relevant to his videotaping and tweeting" messages that day.

In the recent report, committee said it also has reason to believe that due to the 46-year-old's online presence, Scavino may have had advance warning about the potential for violence on Jan. 6.

Scavino and his counsel have received at least half a dozen extensions to comply with the subpoena, according to the committee.

"Despite all these extensions, to date, Mr. Scavino has not produced a single document, nor has he appeared for testimony," the report stated.

A lawyer for Scavino did not return messages seeking comment.

The committee previously voted to recommend contempt charges against longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon after he defied a congressional subpoena, as well as against Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows after he ceased cooperating with the panel. The full House then approved both contempt referrals.

Bannon was later indicted by a federal grand jury and is awaiting prosecution by the Justice Department. The Justice Department has not taken any action against Meadows.

At a pugnacious Oscars, Apple's feel-good 'CODA' triumphs

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After a movie year often light on crowds, the Academy Awards named an unabashed crowd-pleaser, the deaf family drama "CODA," best picture Sunday, handing Hollywood's top award to a streaming service for the first time in a ceremony that saw the greatest drama when Will Smith strode onstage and slapped Chris Rock.

Sian Heder's "CODA," which first premiered at a virtual Sundance Film Festival in winter 2021, started out as an underdog but gradually emerged as the Oscars' feel-good favorite. It also had one very deep-pocketed backer in Apple TV+, which scored its first best picture Academy Award on Sunday, less than three years after launching the service.

It also handed another near-miss defeat to Netflix, the veteran streamer that for years has tried vainly to score best picture. Its best chance, Jane Campion's "The Power of the Dog," came in with a leading 12 nominations. It won one, for Campion's direction.

But "CODA" rode a wave of goodwill driven by its cast including Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur, Emilia Jones and Daniel Durant. It's the first film with a largely deaf cast to win best picture. "CODA" managed that despite being one of the least-nominated films with only three coming into Sunday. Not since 1932's "Grand Hotel" has a movie won best picture with fewer than four nods.

Kotsur also won best supporting actor to become the first male deaf actor to win an Oscar, and only the second deaf actor to do so, joining his castmate and "CODA" co-star Matlin.

"This is for the Deaf community, the CODA community and the disabled community," said Kotsur, signing from the stage. "This is our moment."

Many, though, were talking about another moment. After Rock, as a presenter, joked to Jada Pinkett Smith that he was looking forward to a sequel to "G.I. Jane," Will Smith stood up from his seat near the stage, strode up to Rock and smacked him. After sitting back down, Smith shouted at Rock to "keep my wife's name out of your (expletive) mouth." When Rock, who joked about Jada Pinkett Smith while hosting

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the Oscars in 2016, protested that it was just a "GI Jane" joke, Smith repeated the same line.

"That was the greatest night in the history of television," Rock said, before awkwardly returning to presenting best documentary, which went to Questlove's "Summer of Soul (...or When the Revolution Was Not Televised)."

The moment shocked the Dolby Theatre audience and viewers at home. At the commercial break, presenter Daniel Kaluuya came up to hug Smith, and Denzel Washington escorted him to the side of the stage. The two talked and hugged and Tyler Perry came over to talk as well.

Smith, who plays Venus and Serena Williams' father in "King Richard," later in the show won best actor, his first Oscar. So Smith again took the stage shortly after what seemed likely to be one of the most infamous moments in Academy Awards history. His acceptance speech vacillated between defense and apology.

"Richard Williams was a fierce defender of his family," Smith said in his first remarks. Smith then shared what Washington told him: "At your highest moment, be careful because that's when the devil comes for you."

Ultimately, Smith apologized to the academy and to his fellow nominees.

"Art imitates life. I look like the crazy father" said Smith, chuckling. "But love will make you do crazy things."

After the show, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences issued a statement saying it "does not condone violence of any form." The Los Angeles Police Department said it was aware of a slapping incident at the Oscars but said the person involved had declined to file a police report.

Up until then, the ceremony — fashioned as a revival for the Oscars and the movies — had been running fairly smoothly. Ariana DeBose became the first Afro-Latina and openly LBGQT actor to win an Academy Award for supporting actress. Jane Campion won the Oscar best director for "The Power of the Dog," her open-plains psychodrama that twisted and upended western conventions.

Campion, who had been the first woman ever twice nominated in the category (previously for 1993's "The Piano"), is only the third woman to win best director. It's also the first time the directing award has ever gone to women in back-to-back years, after "Nomadland" filmmaker Chloé Zhao won last year.

Best actress went to Jessica Chastain, who also won her first Oscar. Chastain won for her empathetic portrayal of the televangelist Tammy Faye in "The Eyes of Tammy Faye," a movie she also produced.

After record-low ratings and a pandemic-marred 2021 show, producers this year turned to one of the biggest stars around — Beyoncé — to kick off an Oscars intended to revive the awards' place in pop culture. After an introduction from Venus and Serena Williams, Beyoncé performed her "King Richard" nominated song, "Be Alive," in an elaborately choreographed performance from a lime-colored, open-air stage in Compton, where the Williams sisters grew up.

Hosts Wanda Sykes, Amy Schumer and Regina Hall then began the telecast from the Dolby Theatre.

Sykes, Schumer and Hall breezily joked through prominent Hollywood issues like pay equity — they said three female hosts were "cheaper than one man" — the Lady Gaga drama that Sykes called "House of Random Accents," the state of the Golden Globes (now relegated to the memoriam package, said Sykes) and Leonardo DiCaprio's girlfriends. Their most pointed political point came at the end of their routine, in which they promised a great night and then alluded to Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill.

"And for you people in Florida, we're going to have a gay night," said Sykes.

The first broadcast award went, fittingly, to Ariana DeBose, whose win came 60 years after Rita Moreno won for the same role in the 1961 original "West Side Story." DeBose thanked Moreno for leading the way for "tons of Anitas like me."

"Imagine this little girl in the back seat of a white Ford Focus, look into her eyes: You see a queer, openly queer woman of color, an Afro Latina who found her strength in life through art. And that is, I think, what we're here to celebrate," said DeBose. "So if anyone has ever questioned your identity or you find yourself living in the gray spaces, I promise you this — there is indeed a place for us."

"Encanto," the Disney hit propelled by its chart-topping soundtrack, won best animated film. Lin-Manuel Miranda, who penned the film's hit songs, missed the ceremony after his wife tested positive for COVID-19.

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Ryusuke Hamaguchi's three-hour Japanese drama "Drive My Car," one of the year's most acclaimed films, won for best international film.

After two years of pandemic, and beneath a warm California sun Sunday, the Hollywood rite of glamour again got into swing, with a flush red carpet and a COVID-tested audience. Before the exchange with Smith, Rock commented, with relish: "No one's wearing a mask. Just breathing raw dog tonight."

To help regain the cultural spotlight, the Oscars leaned heavily on musical performances (Billie Eilish, Reba McEntire), film anniversaries ("The Godfather," "Pulp Fiction," "White Men Can't Jump") and as many mentions of the "Encanto" breakout song, "We Don't Talk About Bruno," as possible. The Ukrainian-born Mila Kunis led a 30-second moment of silence for Ukraine. Some stars, like Sean Penn, had lobbied the academy to have Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speak at the ceremony

But aside from a few blue ribbons spotted on the red carpet, politics were seldom center stage. The Oscars instead doubled down on razzle dazzle, and the movies as an escape. Producers brought in the likes of BTS and Tony Hawk to rope in more viewers. Some things worked better than others. Fan favorite prizes, as voted on by Twitter users were overrun by Zack Snyder fans, who voted up Snyder's version of "Justice League" and his "Army of the Dead."

Feel-good movies also fared well. "CODA" also won for best adapted screenplay. Kenneth Branagh's autobiographical "Belfast," an affectionate family drama bathed in nostalgia and shot in black-and-white, took best original screenplay.

Eilish and her brother Finneas, won for their Bond theme to "No Time to Die," a song that was released before the pandemic began.

The Academy Awards got underway Sunday off-camera, with the first eight awards on the night being handed out at the Dolby Theatre before the start of the ABC telecast. The Dolby was largely full in time for the 7 p.m. EDT pre-show, dubbed the "golden hour" by the academy. Speeches were later edited into the broadcast.

"Dune" got out to an early lead in those early awards, and it kept it through the night. The biggest blockbusters of this year's 10 best-picture nominees, "Dune" won a leading six awards, for production design, cinematography, editing, visual effects, sound and Hans Zimmer's score.

Greig Fraser's cinematography win denied one chance for Oscar history. Some had been rooting for Ari Wenger, who lensed Jane Campion's "The Power of the Dog," to become the first woman to win best cinematography, the sole Oscar category that has never been won by a woman in the Academy Awards' nine decade-plus history

Best makeup and hairstyling went to Linda Dowds, Stephanie Ingram and Justin Raleigh for "The Eyes of Tammy Faye." Chastain had been among the many academy members who thought all the awards should have been handed out live during the broadcast. Chastain hugged each winner as they took the stage.

Behind this year's telecast changes was alarm over the Oscars fast-falling ratings. While drops have been common to all major network award shows, last year's show attracted only about 10 million viewers, less than half of the 23.6 million the year before. A decade ago, it was closer to 40 million. Will the slap heard 'round the world help lift ratings?

"Welp," tweeted Oscar producer Will Packer after the show. "I said it wouldn't be boring."

Shanghai starts China's biggest COVID-19 lockdown in 2 years

BEIJING (AP) — China began its most extensive lockdown in two years Monday to conduct mass testing and control a growing outbreak in Shanghai as questions are raised about the economic toll of the nation's "zero-COVID" strategy.

China's financial capital and largest city with 26 million people, Shanghai had managed its smaller, past outbreaks with limited lockdowns of housing compounds and workplaces where the virus was spreading.

But the citywide lockdown that will be conducted in two phases will be China's most extensive since the central city of Wuhan, where the virus was first detected in late 2019, first confined its 11 million people to their homes for 76 days in early 2020. Millions more have been kept in lockdown since then.

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Shanghai's Pudong financial district and nearby areas will be locked down from Monday to Friday as mass testing gets underway, the local government said. In the second phase of the lockdown, the vast downtown area west of the Huangpu River that divides the city will start its own five-day lockdown Friday.

Residents will be required to stay home and deliveries will be left at checkpoints to ensure there is no contact with the outside world. Offices and all businesses not considered essential will be closed and public transport suspended.

Already, many communities within Shanghai have been locked down for the past week, with their housing compounds blocked off with blue and yellow plastic barriers and residents required to submit to multiple tests for COVID-19. Shanghai's Disneyland theme park is among the businesses that closed earlier. Auto-maker Tesla is also suspending production at its Shanghai plant, according to media reports.

Panic-buying was reported on Sunday, with supermarket shelves cleared of food, beverages and household items. Additional barriers were being erected in neighborhoods Monday, with workers in hazmat suits staffing checkpoints.

In-person observations of the April 5 Tomb Sweeping Festival have been canceled and memorials will instead be held online.

Some workers, including traders at the city's stock market, were preparing to stay within a COVID-19 "bubble" for the duration of the lockdown.

Li Jiamin, 31, who works in the finance industry, said she had packed several days of clothing and supplies, and her company was sorting out sleeping and eating arrangements.

"The overall impact is still great," Li told The Associated Press, pointing especially to losses suffered by workers in the informal sector who have no such support.

Huang Qi, 35, who works at a local university, said he had undergone a lockdown at home before and prepared for the new round by stocking up.

"I think if the closure continues like this, our school workers will not be affected much, but what about those who work in the real economy? How can their business be maintained?" Huang said.

"I still hope that our society can find a better balance between ensuring normal life and epidemic prevention and control," Huang added.

Shanghai detected another 3,500 cases of infection on Sunday, though all but 50 were people who tested positive for the coronavirus but were not showing symptoms of COVID-19. While people who are asymptomatic can still infect others, China categorizes such cases separately from "confirmed cases" — those in people who are sick — leading to much lower totals in daily reports.

Nationwide, 1,219 new confirmed cases of domestic infection were detected on Sunday, more than 1,000 of them in the northeastern province of Jilin, along with 4,996 asymptomatic cases, the National Health Commission reported on Monday.

China has reported more than 56,000 confirmed cases nationwide this month, with the surge in Jilin accounting for most of them.

Jilin province is enforcing travel bans and partial lockdowns in several cities, including Changchun, one of the centers of the Chinese auto industry. Although the province has seen more than 1,000 new confirmed cases per day, prevention and control measures taken there do not appear to have been as extreme as in other places.

As has become customary, Jilin has been building pre-fabricated temporary wards to house COVID-19 patients and those under observation as suspected cases. The city of Suzhou, about an hour from Shanghai, as well as Changsha in the country's center and Shenyang in the northeast are also erecting such structures capable of housing more than 6,000 people.

Shanghai itself has converted two gymnasiums, an exhibition hall and other facilities to house potential infected patients.

China has called its long-standing "zero-tolerance" approach the most economical and effective prevention strategy against COVID-19.

The new measures being enforced in Shanghai aim to "curb the virus spread, protect people's life and

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health, and achieve the dynamic zero-COVID target as soon as possible," the city's COVID-19 prevention and control office stated in an announcement Sunday evening.

That requires lockdowns and mass testing, with close contacts often being quarantined at home or in a central government facility. The strategy focuses on eradicating community transmission of the virus as quickly as possible.

While officials, including Communist Party leader Xi Jinping have encouraged more targeted measures, local officials tend to take a more extreme approach, concerned with being fired or otherwise punished over accusations of failing to prevent outbreaks.

Most recently, Hunan province, which has seen relatively few cases, ordered punishments against 19 officials for "failure to vigorously consolidate anti-pandemic policies," state broadcaster CCTV reported Monday.

With China's economic growth already slowing, the extreme measures are seen as worsening difficulties hitting employment, consumption and even global supply chains. With a 21-day curfew in place for all foreigners arriving from abroad, travel between China and other countries has fallen dramatically.

On Friday, the International Air Transport Association announced it was moving its annual general meeting from Shanghai to Doha, citing "continuing COVID-19 related restrictions on travel to China."

"It is deeply disappointing that we are not able to meet in Shanghai as planned," IATA Director General Willie Walsh said in a news release.

Still, Shanghai's announcement of the dates when the two lockdowns would be lifted appeared to show a further refinement in China's approach. Previous citywide lockdowns had been open-ended.

Although China's vaccination rate is around 87%, it is considerably lower among older people who are more likely to become seriously ill if they contract the virus.

In Hong Kong, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the government was still considering next steps in what has been criticized as a halting response to a recent fifth wave of COVID-19 infections that has led to tens of thousands of cases and more than 7,000 deaths.

Lam said no decision has been made on whether or when to test all 7.4 million residents of the southern Chinese semi-autonomous region.

"I don't have a timetable yet. It's not easy to predetermine a timetable, in the same way that I don't know how quickly the cases will come down," Lam told reporters at a daily briefing.

Will Smith confronts Chris Rock, then wins best actor Oscar

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. and TIM REYNOLDS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When Will Smith marched onto the Oscars stage and smacked Chris Rock, the unpredictable moment served as a jarring interruption to Hollywood's feel-good celebration.

But once Smith returned moments later to accept his first-ever Academy Award, he delivered a tearful apology for an act sure to overshadow his milestone achievement. He seized the opportunity during Sunday night's awards to speak on being a fierce defender just like his tennis dad character Richard Williams from "King Richard."

Smith felt like the protector of many including his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, after Rock made a joke about her appearance that didn't sit right with him.

"Richard Williams was a fierce defender of his family," Smith said as he began his acceptance speech after winning best actor honors. He apologized afterward to many people — including tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams, Richard Williams' daughters — but did not mention Rock in his apology.

Smith then spoke about being a protector for those who worked with him on the film such as Aunjanue Ellis along with Saniyya Sidney and Demi Singleton, the two actors who played Venus and Serena.

"I'm being called on in my life to love people and to protect people and to be a river to my people," said Smith during his acceptance speech after winning his first-ever Oscar. "I know to do what we do you've got to be able to take abuse. You've got to be able to have people talk crazy about you. In this business, you've got to be able to have people disrespecting you. And you've got to smile and pretend like that's OK."

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The exchange began when Rock took aim at Pinkett Smith's shaved head, saying, "Jada, I love you. 'G.I. Jane 2,' can't wait to see it, all right?" Rock's reference was made from the 1997 film "G.I. Jane," starring Demi Moore, who shaved her head to portray a fictional Navy Seal candidate.

Pinkett Smith revealed in 2018 that she was diagnosed with alopecia. She has often discussed the challenges of hair loss on Instagram and other social media platforms.

The joke missed, badly.

Smith walked onto the stage from his front-row seat and took a swing at Rock with an open palm, generating a loud smack. Smith walked back to his seat and shouted for Rock to leave Pinkett Smith alone. Rock replied that he was just making a "G.I. Jane" joke — and Smith yelled back at him a second time.

Smith shouted at Rock to "keep my wife's name out of your (expletive) mouth," and the crowd hushed as it became clear this was no act.

The moment shocked the Dolby Theatre audience and viewers at home. At the commercial break, presenter Daniel Kaluuya came up to hug Smith, and Denzel Washington escorted him to the side of the stage. The two talked and hugged and Tyler Perry came over to talk as well.

Smith shared what Washington told him: "At your highest moment, be careful because that's when the devil comes for you.

"I'm hoping the Academy invites me back," Will Smith said, as he concluded his on-stage remarks.

A representative for Rock didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

After the show, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences issued a statement saying it "does not condone violence of any form."

The Los Angeles Police Department said in a statement that it was aware of the incident.

"The incident involved one individual slapping another," the statement read. "The individual involved has declined to file a police report. If the involved party desires a police report at a later date, LAPD will be available to complete an investigative report."

"That was the greatest night in the history of television," Rock said before resuming his role as presenter.

A few minutes later, rapper Sean Combs — on stage to introduce a tribute to "The Godfather" — tried to play peacemaker and suggested Smith and Rock settle their differences at an Oscars afterparty.

"Will and Chris, we're going to solve that like family at the Gold party," Combs said.

The reverberations did not stop there. Several people approached Smith and Pinkett Smith in the commercial breaks that followed; Keith Urban hugged Smith during one stoppage in the show, and Nicole Kidman also went over to say a few words as well.

Backstage, during interview sessions with winners, the Rock-Smith incident seemed like something few — if anyone — wanted to discuss.

"I'm not talking about that," said Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, the director of "Summer of Soul," which won an Oscar for best documentary.

The confrontation overshadowed Smith's milestone accomplishment. He was previously nominated twice for best actor, for his role in "Ali" in 2002 and "The Pursuit of Happyness" in 2007. In those films, he portrayed real-life characters: Boxing legend Muhammad Ali and Chris Garner, a homeless salesman.

This time, Smith won against formidable competition including Andrew Garfield, Javier Bardem, Benedict Cumberbatch and Denzel Washington — who won his first and only best actor Oscar award in 2002 over Smith for "Training Day."

Pinkett Smith was also the subject of jokes from Rock when he hosted the Oscars in 2016. She did not attend the Oscars that year, saying at the time her decision stemmed from a lack of diversity among award nominees and how Black artists were not properly represented.

"I think we have to sometimes remember, like at a certain point, everyone breaks," said TV personality Karamo Brown. "But I think these are two men that will actually come together, figure it out and like say 'OK, enough is enough, I'm sorry.' ... I haven't been in that situation. I never condone violence or anything of that nature, but I also could understand protecting those you love."

Canadian Indigenous meet with pope in hopes of apology

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Indigenous leaders from Canada and survivors of the country's notorious residential schools meet with Pope Francis starting Monday in hopes of securing a papal apology for abuses committed against them by Catholic priests and school workers.

The meetings, postponed from December because of the pandemic, are part of the Canadian church and government's efforts to respond to Indigenous demands for justice and reparations — long-standing demands that gained traction last year after the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves outside some of the schools.

In interviews with The Associated Press as they arrived in Rome on Sunday, Indigenous leaders expressed hope that Francis would indeed apologize, though they said their key aim this week is to tell the pope the stories of their people and the abuses they suffered, and for Francis to listen.

"Most of our meeting is going to be elevating the voices of our survivors," said Cassidy Caron, president of the Métis National Council, who was given a traditional handmade beaded jacket to wear Monday morning for the first audience as well as a pair of red, beaded moccasins to give to the pope.

The moccasins were being presented "as a sign of the willingness of the Métis people to forgive if there is meaningful action from the church," the group explained in a note. The red dye "represents that even though Pope Francis does not wear the traditional red papal shoes, he walks with the legacy of those who came before him, the good, the great and the terrible."

Francis has set aside several hours this week to meet privately with the delegations from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, with a mental health counselor in the room for each session. The delegates then gather Friday as a group for a more formal audience, with Francis delivering an address.

More than 150,000 native children were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools from the 19th century until the 1970s in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes and culture, Christianize and assimilate them into mainstream society, which previous governments considered superior.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse was rampant, with students beaten for speaking their native languages. That legacy of abuse and isolation has been cited by Indigenous leaders as a root cause of epidemic rates of alcohol and drug addiction on reservations.

Nearly three-quarters of the 130 residential schools were run by Catholic missionary congregations.

Last May the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation announced the discovery of some 215 gravesites near Kamloops, British Columbia, found using ground-penetrating radar. It was Canada's largest Indigenous residential school, and the discovery of the graves was the first of numerous, similar grim sites across the country.

Even before the sites were discovered, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission specifically called for a papal apology to be delivered on Canadian soil for the church's role in the "spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools."

Francis has committed to traveling to Canada, though no date for a visit has been announced.

"Primarily the reconciliation requires action. And we still are in need of very specific actions from the Catholic Church," said Natan Obed, president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, who is leading the Inuit delegation. He cited the reparations the Canadian church has been ordered to pay, as well as its willingness to find the truth about the scope of abuses at the schools.

"It goes beyond just opening the doors to records, it also goes towards a general willingness to use church resources to help in any way possible," he told AP.

As part of a settlement of a lawsuit involving the government, churches and the approximately 90,000 surviving students, Canada paid reparations that amounted to billions of dollars being transferred to Indigenous communities.

The Catholic Church, for its part, has paid over \$50 million and now intends to add \$30 million more over the next five years.

The Argentine pope is no stranger to offering apologies for his own errors and what he himself has

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termed the "crimes" of the institutional Catholic Church.

During a 2015 visit to Bolivia, he apologized for the sins, crimes and offenses committed by the church against Indigenous peoples during the colonial-era conquest of the Americas. In Dublin, Ireland, in 2018, he offered a sweeping apology to Irish children and women who were sexually and physically abused over generations by church officials.

That same year, he met privately with three Chilean sex abuse survivors whom he had discredited by backing a bishop they accused of covering up sexual abuse. In a series of meetings over the course of a week that echo those scheduled for the Canadian delegates, Francis listened, and apologized.

Phil Fontaine was national chief of the Assembly of First Nations in 2009 when he led an Indigenous delegation to meet with Pope Benedict XVI. At the time, Benedict only expressed his "sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the church." But he did not apologize.

Standing outside St. Peter's Square, Fontaine said a full papal apology, "would be a tremendous boost to these efforts by thousands of survivors that are still looking for healing. They're definitely anxious to see true reconciliation come about, but reconciliation will not be achieved without the truth."

Final Four has a blue tint with power programs

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

Coach K's final chapter will have a distinctly blue tint.

Two weeks of upsets and underdogs in the books, the Final Four is down to four blue blood programs: Kansas, Duke, North Carolina and Villanova.

Kansas faces Villanova, then it's Duke-Carolina for the first time in the NCAA Tournament in New Orleans.

This is going to be good, so here's a quick rundown of the last four teams left standing:

KANSAS

Final Four road: The Jayhawks (32-6) looked vulnerable after consecutive late-season losses, but rounded into form at just the right time. While the other No. 1 seeds dropped off in the NCAA Tournament, the Big 12 champions beat Texas Southern, Creighton and Providence to reach the Elite Eight. Kansas rolled into its 16th Final Four by crushing Miami 76-50 to win the Midwest Region.

Strengths: Ochai Agbaji and Christian Braun can both score in bunches, shoot from the perimeter and beat defenders off the dribble. Remy Martin is an immediate adrenaline boost off the bench.

Weaknesses: The Jayhawks overwhelmed Miami in the paint in the Elite Eight, but have been mediocre in the post at times.

Star: Agbaji. The 6-foot-5 senior is explosive and coming off his best game of the NCAA Tournament, scoring 18 points on 8-of-12 shooting against Miami.

Key contributor: Martin. The Arizona State transfer enters the game like he's shot off a launching pad, changing the complexion with his quickness and fearlessness.

VILLANOVA

Final Four road: The Wildcats (30-7) had some shaky stretches earlier in the season, but have won 14 of 15, including the Big East Tournament. Villanova has been its efficient best at both ends in the NCAA Tournament, beating Delaware, Ohio State and Michigan to reach the Elite Eight. The Wildcats smothered Houston in San Antonio, winning 50-44 to reach the Final Four for the third time in six seasons.

Strengths: The buffed-up Wildcats often bully teams around the floor on offense and defense. Villanova also shoots 83% from the free-throw line, on pace to break Harvard's NCAA record of 82.2% set in 1994.

Weaknesses: The Wildcats were already thin and lost second-leading scorer Justin Moore to a torn Achilles tendon against Houston in the Elite Eight.

Star: Collin Gillespie. The senior guard tore his ACL late last season, but has been a huge reason Villanova is back in the Final Four with his steady leadership and clutch shooting.

Key contributor: Jermaine Samuels. The 6-7 senior plays bigger than his size and is a difference maker at both ends of the court

DUKE

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Final Four road: Coach Mike Krzyzewski's final of 42 seasons in Durham suffered a few bumps in the road, including a blowout to North Carolina in his final game at Cameron Indoor Stadium. The Blue Devils (32-6) have seemed determined to send Coach K out on top since the NCAA bracket began, blowing out Cal State Fullerton, then grinding out wins over Michigan State, Texas Tech and Arkansas to reach the Final Four for a record 13th time under Krzyzewski.

Strengths: The Blue Devils have multiple scoring options and are No. 1 in KenPom's offensive efficiency ratings. Krzyzewski has shown the game hasn't left him behind as he heads for the exit, making key adjustments that propelled Duke to the Final Four.

Weaknesses: Duke has been good on the defensive end lately, but had some rough moments earlier in the season, particularly in the loss to North Carolina. The Blue Devils have good 3-point shooters in A.J. Griffin and Wendell Moore, but have been inconsistent from the arc.

Star: Paolo Banchero. A likely top-3 pick in this year's NBA draft, the 6-10 freshman is a matchup nightmare for opponents. Banchero has the size to post up smaller players, can shoot from the perimeter and beat defenders off the dribble.

Key contributor: Mark Williams. Duke's 7-1 sophomore center is a dominating force on the defensive end, blocking and altering shots. He's also got a good post game and finishes with authority.

NORTH CAROLINA

Final Four road: The Tar Heels (28-9) got their first season under Hubert Davis off to a shaky start, looking like they'd miss the NCAA Tournament. Davis has since pulled the right strings, leading North Carolina to wins over Marquette, No. 1 seed Baylor and UCLA to reach the Elite Eight. The Tar Heels ensured a blue blood Final Four by crushing upstart Saint Peter's 69-49.

Strengths: Armando Bacot is one of the best big men in the country, freshman Caleb Love is a dynamic scorer and R.J. Davis a steady floor leader who also can score in bunches.

Weaknesses: Davis' rotation doesn't go much beyond the starting five, which nearly cost the Tar Heels against Baylor. North Carolina has been better defensively late in the season, but had some real clunkers on that end earlier.

Star: Bacot. North Carolina's big man can be dominating, as he was with 20 points and 22 rebounds against Saint Peter's.

Key contributor: Brady Manek. The Oklahoma transfer proved to be the piece North Carolina was missing, providing perimeter shooting and scoring while doing all the little things the Tar Heels need.

Holocaust survivors flee from Ukraine to Germany for safety

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — When the bombs started falling on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, last month, Tatyana Zhuravliova had a horrible déjà vu: the 83-year-old Ukrainian Jew felt the same panic she suffered as a little girl when the Nazis were flying air attacks on her hometown of Odesa.

"My whole body was shaking, and those fears crept up again through my entire body — fears which I didn't even know were still hidden inside me," Zhuravliova said.

Her eyes welled up with tears as she remembered how she hid under the table from the bombs during World War II, and eventually fled with her mother to Kazakhstan when the Nazis and their henchmen started massacring ten of thousands of Jews in Odesa.

"Now I'm too old to run to the bunker. So I just stayed inside my apartment and prayed that the bombs would not kill me," Zhuravliova, a retired doctor, told The Associated Press on Sunday.

But as Russia's military attacks on Ukraine become even more brutal and demolished residential apartment blocks, she realized that she had to flee again if she didn't want to die. So Zhuravliova accepted an offer from a Jewish organization to bring her out of Ukraine to safety.

In an unexpected twist of history, some of the 10,000 Holocaust survivors who had been living in Ukraine have now been taken to safety in Germany — the country that unleashed World War II and organized the murder of 6 million Jews across Europe.

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Zhuravliova was part of the first group of four Jewish Holocaust survivors evacuated from Ukraine by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also referred to as the Claims Conference. The group represents the world's Jews in negotiating for compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs, and provides welfare for Holocaust survivors around the globe.

A second group of 14 Holocaust survivors, many of them ill and bed-ridden, were brought out of Ukraine on Sunday. The Claims Conference is working with its partners, among them the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, or JDC, to get as many Holocaust survivors out of Ukraine as possible.

Around 500 Holocaust survivors in Ukraine are especially in need of help because of their ailing health — their evacuation is a top priority, says the JDC.

It's a highly difficult and complex operation to transport such frail people out of Ukraine, where constant shelling and artillery fire make any evacuation very dangerous. It involves finding medical staff and ambulances in numerous war zones, crossing international borders and even convincing survivors, who are ill and unable to leave their homes without help, to flee into uncertainty again, this time without the vigor of youth.

However, the risks of staying behind are also very high. This month, 96-year-old Boris Romanchenko, who survived several Nazi concentration camps during World War II, was killed during an attack in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

It is not known if any other survivors have been killed in the war in Ukraine, but several have had their homes hit by shelling, says Amos Lev-Ran from the JDC.

"No one can imagine the nightmare survivors have lived through during the Holocaust," said Ruediger Mahlo, who works for the Claims Conference in Germany. "Now they need to evacuate again — their security, all things familiar are again being stripped from them and they are forced to live with uncertainty and fear."

Mahlo began coordinating the evacuations less than two weeks ago — speaking to government officials, diplomats, NGOs and border personnel to make it all happen.

"Getting them to a secure place of comfort and providing all we can is a top priority for us," Mahlo said, adding that he cried with relief after the first group made it out. "Everybody was working like crazy, but still it is a miracle that we got them out successfully."

Upon their arrival in Germany, the elderly refugees are taken to Jewish or interfaith nursing homes across the country.

As of last week, around 3,500 Ukrainian Jews — young and old — had arrived in Germany, and the government has already offered them a special path to permanent immigration as part of Germany's ongoing efforts to compensate Jews since the Holocaust.

Overall, German authorities have registered more than 250,000 refugees from Ukraine, although the real numbers are expected to be much higher since they don't need a visa to enter.

On Friday, Zhuravliova and two other 83-year-old survivors from Kyiv — Larisa Dzenko and Galina Ulyanova — arrived on the outskirts of Frankfurt after a 26-hour-long trip and were put up at a nursing home. A fourth woman was put up at a different nursing home in the city.

Ulyanova, who is so ill that she hadn't left her eighth-floor apartment for seven years, had to be carried down the stairs by two men to get on the ambulance in Kyiv. Dzenko, a retired engineer, suffers from severe diabetes and had to be given intravenous infusions during the long ambulance ride.

Both Ulyanova and Dzenko were also traumatized as children when they had to escape with their parents from the Nazis. Ulyanova fled to Kyrgyzstan, and Dzenko to Uzbekistan, before they eventually settled back in Kyiv.

Sitting around a table with red-and-yellow tulips in a sunlit, spacious room in their nursing home on Sunday, the three women seemed relieved to be in Germany.

"Everyone is treating us so nicely here. The food is good, we are safe, and the staff so welcoming," said Ulyanova, a former nurse.

"When I was a little girl, I had to flee from the Germans with my mom to Uzbekistan, where we had

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nothing to eat and I was so scared of all those big rats there," remembered Dzuenko, a woman with a quick smile and big eyes. "All my life I thought the Germans were evil, but now they were the first ones to reach out to us and rescue us."

Zhuravliova said she was more than grateful to be in Germany now, despite the country's cruel treatment of Jews in the past.

"To me, it looks like this country has learned from the past and is trying to do something good for us now," she said.

Ukrainian welders turn donated vehicles into army transport

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — A strawberry-scented air freshener dangled from the Ukrainian military's latest vehicle to head to war.

In a welding shop in Ukraine's western city of Lviv, workers were adding steel plates to a donated pickup truck so a volunteer could drive it to the front.

"Our victory depends on us," said Ostap Datsenko, a welder who is part of a huge volunteer effort playing a role in Ukraine's resistance, with support from the diaspora.

But he hadn't expected to see so much of the war, or its shrapnel, so soon.

He had been standing on the truck hurrying to finish the job before sunset Saturday when he heard a noise, looked up and saw an object whizzing through the air.

"It was pretty large, but I've never seen rockets before," he said. "Then I heard a huge explosion."

The Russian airstrike hit a factory connected to the military, and the blast sent Datsenko tumbling. Dazed, he hurried into the garage's makeshift bunker in the grease pit.

The following day, he was back at work for the finishing touches on the truck before it's driven on Monday to eastern Ukraine, along with three other vehicles.

The truck's camouflage paint job was complete. The welders put bars in the back to help support a machine gun.

The 31-year-old Datsenko, his clothes streaked with oil, said he was ready like all Ukrainian men to be called up to fight. But he had no combat experience, meaning his time is yet to come.

Until then, he said, "I'm doing what I can."

Ukraine's military appears to have fought Russia's much larger army into a stalemate on some fronts, which has surprised many observers. One of Ukraine's weapons is a parallel army of volunteers who are busy mobilizing funding and supplies ranging from body armor to cigarettes. Others make the military connections.

In Lviv, which had been relatively far from the war until the airstrikes on Saturday, the welding shop looked for ways to help. It started off making "hedgehogs," or the metal barriers placed at checkpoints and around some sensitive facilities. Then they heard the call for cars.

"Any vehicles are very much in demand on the front line" by commanders, said Artem Pastushyna, a 27-year-old welder with metal nuts glinting in his earlobes.

Only a small number of the vehicles have been adapted with steel plates and camouflage, he said. The need is too big and there's little time.

"Many cars from Europe are driven directly to the front line," Pastushyna said.

The truck was the first vehicle that the welding shop has adapted, he said, and he hopes they'll do many more.

Until then, the welding shop is paying new attention to its grease pit after Saturday's airstrikes. They had expected an attack sometime but not one so big, Datsenko said.

In the pit-turned-bunker, accessed by a wooden ladder, an empty pizza box indicated that the workers had spent more time there than usual.

"Until yesterday, it was only a basement," Datsenko said. "Now we realize it would be wise to have more stuff there."

Ukraine war threatens food supplies in fragile Arab world

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Loyal Aswad was already exhausted by Lebanon's devastating two-year economic collapse. Now, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sends food and energy prices soaring even further, she finds herself struggling to put food on the table for her family of four.

"Even bread is not something we take for granted anymore," said the 48-year-old housewife, standing recently in a supermarket aisle in front of gallons of cooking oil whose prices had risen to an all-time high.

From Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to Sudan and Yemen, millions of people in the Middle East whose lives were already upended by conflict, displacement and poverty are now wondering where their next meals will come from. Ukraine and Russia account for a third of global wheat and barley exports, which countries in the Middle East rely on to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles. They are also top exporters of other grains and the sunflower seed oil that is used for cooking.

Even before the war in Ukraine, people in countries across the Middle East and North Africa were not getting enough food to eat. Now with trade disruptions spurred by the conflict, more commodities are becoming either unaffordable or unavailable.

"Put simply, people cannot afford food of the quality or quantity that they need, with those in conflict- and crisis-affected countries ... at greatest risk," said Lama Fakhri, Middle East and North Africa Director at Human Rights Watch.

A similar set of circumstances led to a series of uprisings starting in late 2010 known as the Arab Spring, when skyrocketing bread prices fueled anti-government protests across the Middle East, noted Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

"When prices jump, and poor people cannot feed their families, they will be on the streets," Georgieva remarked Sunday at the Doha Forum, a policy conference in Qatar.

In Iraq and Sudan, public frustration at food prices and a lack of government services erupted in street protests on several occasions over the past several weeks.

"People have a right to food, and governments should do everything in their power to protect that right, otherwise we risk not only food insecurity but the insecurity and instability that gross deprivation on this scale could trigger," Fakhri said.

The war also has sparked concern that much of the international aid upon which so many in the Arab world depend will be diverted to Ukraine, where more than 3.7 million people have fled the war, Europe's largest exodus since World War II.

"For the millions of Palestinians, Lebanese, Yemenis, Syrians, and others who live in countries experiencing conflict, catastrophic economic meltdowns, and increasing humanitarian needs, this would be equivalent to shutting down critical life support," states an analysis released by Carnegie Middle East experts last week.

In Syria, 14.6 million people will depend on assistance this year, 9% more than in 2021 and 32% more than in 2020, Joyce Msuya, the United Nations' assistant secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and deputy emergency relief coordinator, told the U.N. Security Council in February.

In Yemen, basic needs are becoming even harder to meet for millions of impoverished people after seven years of war. A recent report by the U.N. and international aid groups estimated that more than 160,000 people in Yemen were likely to experience famine-like conditions in 2022. That number could climb much higher still because of the war in Ukraine. A U.N. appeal for the country earlier this month raised \$1.3 billion, less than a third of what was sought.

"I have nothing," said Ghalib al-Najjar, a 48-year-old Yemeni father of seven whose family has lived in a refugee camp outside the rebel-held capital of Sanaa since fleeing fighting in their middle-class neighborhood more than four years ago. "I need flour, a package of flour. I need rice. I need sugar. I need what people need (to survive)."

In Lebanon, which has been in the throes of economic collapse for the past two years, panic has set in among a population worn down by shortages of electricity, medicine and gasoline.

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The country's main grain silos were destroyed by a massive explosion at a Beirut port in 2020. Now, with just six weeks of wheat reserves, many fear even darker days ahead. Several large supermarkets were out of flour and corn oil this week.

"Whatever is put on shelves is being bought," said Hani Bohsali, head of the food importers syndicate. He said 60% of the cooking oil consumed in Lebanon comes from Ukraine and the rest comes mostly from Russia.

"This is not a small problem," he said. Bohsali noted that a search is underway for alternative places from which to import needed products, but he said other countries have either banned food exports or significantly raised prices.

Meanwhile, 5 liters (1 gallon) of cooking oil in Lebanon now costs around the same as the monthly minimum wage, which is still fixed at 675,000 Lebanese pounds, or \$29, despite the currency having lost around 90% of its value since October 2019. Families, including Aswad's, also are spending ever larger portions of their monthly income on neighborhood generators that light up their homes for most of the day in the absence of state-supplied electricity. Even those are threatening to shut down now, saying they can no longer afford to buy fuel on the market.

"We are back to the Stone Age, stocking up on candles and things like toast and Picon (a processed cheese brand) in case we run out of everything," Aswad said.

In Syria, where more than 11 years of brutal war has left more than 90% of the country's population living in poverty, products such as cooking oil — when they can be found — have doubled in price in the month since the war began in Ukraine. On a recent day at one government cooperative in the capital of Damascus, shelves were almost empty except for sugar and napkins.

Egypt, the world's top importer of wheat, is among the most vulnerable. Economic pressures, including rising inflation, are mounting in the country, where about a third of the population of more than 103 million lives below the poverty line, according to official figures.

An Associated Press journalist who toured markets in three different middle-class neighborhoods in Cairo earlier this month found that the price of food staples such as bread — items that Egyptians refer to as "eish," or life — have increased by up to 50%. Inflation is likely to swell further due to the upcoming Muslim holy month of Ramadan, typically a time of increased demand.

Consumers have accused merchants of exploiting the war in Ukraine to raise prices even though they have not yet been affected.

"They make profits from our pain," lamented Doaa el-Sayed, an Egyptian elementary school teacher and mother of three. "I have to reduce the amount of everything I used to buy," she said.

In Libya, a country wracked by a yearslong civil war, the latest spike in the price of food staples has people worried that tough times are ahead. And in Gaza, prices that had already started to rise skyrocketed after the war in Ukraine erupted, adding an extra challenge to the 2 million residents of the impoverished Palestinian enclave who have endured years of blockade and conflict.

Fayeq Abu Aker, a Gaza businessman, imports staples such as cooking oil, lentils, and pasta from a Turkish company. When the company canceled the cooking oil contract after the war began, Aker turned to Egypt. But despite the country's proximity to Gaza, prices there were even higher. A box of four bottles of cooking oil now costs \$26, double the price before the war.

"In 40 years of my business, I have never seen a crisis like this," he said.

Russia shifts focus to try to grind Ukraine's army in east

By NEBI QENA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — With its aspirations for a quick victory dashed by a stiff Ukrainian resistance, Russia has increasingly focused on grinding down Ukraine's military in the east in the hope of forcing Kyiv into surrendering part of the country's territory to possibly end the war.

The bulk of the Ukrainian army is concentrated in eastern Ukraine, where it has been locked up in fighting with Moscow-backed separatists in a nearly eight-year conflict. If Russia succeeds in encircling and

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destroying the Ukrainian forces in the country's industrial heartland called Donbas, it could try to dictate its terms to Kyiv and, possibly, attempt to split the country in two.

The Russian military declared Friday that the "first stage of the operation" had been largely accomplished, allowing Russian troops to concentrate on their "top goal — the liberation of Donbas."

Many observers say the shift in strategy could reflect President Vladimir Putin's acknowledgment that his plan for a blitz in Ukraine has failed, forcing him to narrow his goals and change tactics amid a disastrous war that has turned Russia into a pariah and decimated its economy.

U.S. and British officials also have noted that Moscow has increasingly focused on fighting the Ukrainian forces in the east while digging in around Kyiv and other big cities and pummeling them with rockets and artillery.

The chief of Ukrainian military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, said Sunday the change of focus could reflect Putin's hope to break Ukraine in two, like North and South Korea, and enforce "a line of separation between the occupied and unoccupied regions."

"He can't swallow the entire country," Budanov said, adding that Russia appears to be trying "to pull the occupied territories into a single quasi-state structure and pit it against independent Ukraine."

Putin and his generals haven't revealed specific military goals or a planned timeline, but the Kremlin clearly expected a quick victory when Russian troops rolled into Ukraine from the north, east and south on Feb. 24.

But the Russian attempts to swiftly capture the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the country's second-largest city, Kharkiv, and other big cities in the northeast have been thwarted by well-organized Ukrainian defenses and logistical challenges that stalled the Russian offensive.

Russian forces have pounded the outskirts of Kyiv with artillery and air raids from a distance while putting their ground offensive on hold, tactics they also have used in attacking Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Sumy in the northeast.

In some sectors, including the city of Makariv that sits near a strategic highway west of Kyiv, Ukrainian troops have pushed the Russians back.

Associated Press reporters saw the carcass of a Russian rocket launcher, a burned Russian truck, the body of a Russian soldier and a destroyed Ukrainian tank after the fighting there a few days ago. In the nearby village of Yasnohorodka, the AP witnessed positions abandoned by Ukrainian soldiers, who moved farther west, but no sign of Russian troops' presence.

Mykola Sunhurovskyi, a military analyst at the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank, said Russia has abandoned attempts to storm Kyiv and other big Ukrainian cities for now and is laying siege to them to try to weaken Ukraine and win time.

"Russia has shifted tactics ... to redistribute its forces and prepare for the next active stage of the war," Sunhurovskyi said.

The Russian forces encircled the key strategic port of Mariupol and besieged it for weeks, hammering it with rockets and artillery in a carnage that killed thousands of civilians. The fall of Mariupol would free up Russian forces there and allow them to engage in a potential pincer movement together with another group of troops moving from Kharkiv in the northeast to try to encircle the Ukrainian military in the east.

"Russian forces appear to be concentrating their effort to attempt the encirclement of Ukrainian forces directly facing the separatist regions in the east of the country, advancing from the direction of Kharkiv in the north and Mariupol in the south," the British Ministry of Defense said Sunday.

A senior U.S. defense official also noted the latest Russian focus on Donbas. The official said Putin may now hope to take full control of the east while keeping other Ukrainian forces occupied with the defense of Kyiv and other areas and then try to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to formally surrender control over Donbas and recognize Russia's ownership of Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014.

An analysis published Saturday by the Institute for the Study of War in Washington said the degree to which the Russians can push an accelerated move to cut off Donbas will depend in part on how soon their forces can gain full control of Mariupol and how badly damaged they emerge from that fight. It also noted

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that a halt in the Russian offensive on Kyiv could reflect “the incapacity of Russian forces rather than any shift in Russian objectives or efforts at this time.”

While the Russian military has focused increasingly on bleeding the Ukrainian troops in the east, it has continued to use its arsenal of air- and sea-launched cruise missiles to methodically target fuel depots, military arsenals and weapons plants across the country.

Philips P. O'Brien, a professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews, described Saturday's cruise missile strikes on Lviv near the border with Poland as part of the Russian strategy to cut off supplies to the Ukrainian forces fighting in the east.

“They will still want to disrupt as much as possible the flow of goods and supplies from west to east, much of which starts their journey around Lviv,” O'Brien observed.

On the Black Sea coast, the Russians quickly took the port of Kherson and advanced to the outskirts of the key shipbuilding center of Mykolaiv where their offensive stalled.

If the Russian forces succeed in encircling Mykolaiv, Odesa and several other Black Sea ports, it will have completely cut Ukraine's access to its coast in a devastating blow to its economy. The seizure of Odesa will also allow Moscow to establish a link to the separatist Trans-Dniester region of Moldova that hosts a Russian military base.

Despite Ukrainian and Western fears, the Russian army so far hasn't pursued efforts to bypass Mykolaiv and march on Odesa. Ukrainian authorities have noted that Russia's failure to press its offensive along the coast could be explained by the fact that most of its troops in the south have remained locked in the battle for Mariupol where they have suffered heavy losses.

On Friday, the Russian military reported it had lost 1,351 soldiers killed and 3,825 wounded since the start of the campaign, but NATO estimates 7,000 to 15,000 have been killed — potentially as many as the Soviet Union lost in the entire 10-year war in Afghanistan.

The big losses and slow pace of the Russian offensive could be a factor that forced Putin to lower his ambitions and take a more realistic approach.

Volodymyr Fesenko, the head of the independent Kyiv-based Penta Center, said Russia's declared shift to the east could be an attempt to put a good face on its failed blitz and regroup before the next stage of fighting.

“Both sides need a break now for various reasons, and the Kremlin is using it to regroup its forces and search for new tactics without changing its strategic goal of subduing Ukraine,” Fesenko told the AP.

“Tactics could change from a blitz to laying siege to cities, destroying the economy and the infrastructure with bombardment, blockading ports and doing other things. Putin has a broad arsenal of means of pressure.”

“The stiff Ukrainian resistance could turn the war into a protracted conflict, and then the issue of financial and military resources, including warplanes and tanks Zelenskyy is urging the West to provide will be of primary importance,” he said.

Nuclear fears in US amid Russia-Ukraine war: AP-NORC poll

By BEN FOX and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia's war on Ukraine has most Americans at least somewhat worried that the U.S. will be drawn directly into the conflict and could be targeted with nuclear weapons, with a new poll reflecting a level of anxiety that has echoes of the Cold War era.

Close to half of Americans say they are very concerned that Russia would directly target the U.S. with nuclear weapons, and an additional 3 in 10 are somewhat concerned about that, according to the new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Russian President Vladimir Putin placed his country's nuclear forces on high alert shortly after the Feb. 24 invasion.

Roughly 9 in 10 Americans are at least somewhat concerned that Putin might use a nuclear weapon against Ukraine, including about 6 in 10 who are very concerned.

“He is out of control, and I don't think he really has concern for much of anything but what he wants,”

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said Robin Thompson, a retired researcher from Amherst, Massachusetts. "And he has nuclear weapons." Seventy-one percent of Americans say the invasion has increased the possibility of nuclear weapons being used anywhere in the world.

The poll was conducted before North Korea test-fired its biggest intercontinental ballistic missile on Friday but also shows 51% of Americans saying they are very concerned about the threat to the U.S. posed by North Korea's nuclear program. An additional 29% expressed moderate concern.

Fear of nuclear war has been a fact of life for decades. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has published its "Doomsday Clock" since 1947, showing a theoretical countdown to nuclear annihilation. The latest update, in January, put the time at 100 seconds to midnight — unchanged since 2020, but still closer than ever to Armageddon.

It's difficult to measure the public's degree of fear over time because polls use different methodologies or pose questions in different ways. Alex Wellerstein, a nuclear historian at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey, said people often won't bring it up on their own but list it among concerns if given the choice.

The fear, naturally enough, also tends to rise and fall depending on what is happening around the world. "We have these moments that are sort of high crisis periods," Wellerstein said. "And then they come and go, and people forget that we had them."

One particularly high point, he said, was in 1983, a time of tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and the year that a highly watched movie about nuclear war, "The Day After," first aired on TV in the United States.

In the recent AP-NORC poll, close to half of Americans say they are "extremely" or "very" concerned that the U.S. might be drawn into a war with Russia. Roughly 4 in 10 Americans said they are "somewhat" concerned.

The findings reflect not just anxiety about what seems like a proxy war with Russia, even if the U.S. isn't directly involved in the conflict, but also the unprecedented saturation coverage of the war through traditional news outlets and social media.

"We are seeing almost moment by moment what's happening to these poor people," said Linda Woodward, a retired phone company technician from Hot Springs Village, Arkansas.

The concern about nuclear war cuts across party lines and even resonates with some young adults who were born after the Cold War.

Caleb Pack, a 21-year-old Republican from Ardmore, Oklahoma, was among those who said that they were "somewhat concerned" that the U.S. would be drawn into the war and that Russia would target the United States with nuclear weapons.

"If Russia's end goal is to reclaim Soviet Union territory, that means they're going to push into NATO countries, which obviously I think could escalate very quickly," said Pack, who works in information systems.

Certainly, Russia hasn't taken steps to alleviate concerns. Putin issued what appeared to be an ominous threat when he reminded the world in a speech the day he launched the invasion that his country is "one of the most powerful nuclear states."

In that context, concern is justified, said Tara Drozdenko, director of the global security program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "Whenever you have nuclear-armed nations getting closer to conflict, there's always a risk of nuclear escalation," she said.

So far, NATO and the Biden administration have been careful not to escalate the situation, Drozdenko said. But she believes the public should use this time to push for changes to limit the risk. That would include adopting a formal policy that the U.S. would not strike first with nuclear weapons, to reduce the risk of an accidental strike by an adversary, and taking the final authority for a launch out of the hands of the president alone.

Historian Wellerstein also sees a possible upside to the heightened state of concern. He cited research showing that a crisis can have the long-term effect of getting people more engaged with an issue.

"This thing with Ukraine will inevitably end, hopefully sooner rather than later," he said. "This could be an opportunity for getting a lot more people, especially younger people, invested in this as a political issue."

Ukraine pleads for help, says Russia wants to split nation

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the West of cowardice Sunday while another top official said Russia was trying to split the nation in two, like North and South Korea.

Zelenskyy made an exasperated plea for fighter jets and tanks to help defend his country from Russia's invading troops. Russia now says its main focus is on taking control of the eastern Donbas region, an apparent pullback from its earlier, more expansive goals, but one which is raising fears of a divided Ukraine.

Speaking after U.S. President Joe Biden said in a lacerating speech that Russian President Vladimir Putin could not stay in power — words the White House immediately sought to downplay — Zelenskyy lashed out at the West's "ping-pong about who and how should hand over jets" and other weapons while Russian missile attacks kill and trap civilians.

"I've talked to the defenders of Mariupol today. I'm in constant contact with them. Their determination, heroism and firmness are astonishing," Zelenskyy said in a video address, referring to the besieged southern city that has suffered some of the war's greatest deprivations and horrors. "If only those who have been thinking for 31 days on how to hand over dozens of jets and tanks had 1% of their courage."

Zelenskyy also told independent Russian journalists Sunday that his government would consider declaring neutrality and offering security guarantees to Russia, repeating earlier statements. That would include keeping Ukraine nuclear-free, he said.

He told the reporters that the issue of neutrality — and agreeing to stay out of NATO — should be put to Ukrainian voters in a referendum after Russian troops withdraw. He said a vote could take place within a few months of the troops leaving.

Russia quickly banned the interview from being published. Roskomnadzor, which regulates communications for Moscow, issued the ban, saying there could be action taken against the Russian media outlets that took part, which included "those that are foreign media outlets acting as foreign agents."

Russia-based outlets appeared to comply with the ban although the interview was published abroad.

Zelenskyy responded by saying Moscow was afraid of a relatively short conversation with journalists. "It would be funny if it weren't so tragic," he said, according to the Ukrainian news agency RBK Ukraina.

At the Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles, attendees expressed support for Ukraine by falling silent for 30 seconds. Some arrived wearing blue-and-gold ribbons, the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Actor Sean Penn had unsuccessfully campaigned for Zelenskyy — a former actor — to speak at the ceremony.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has stalled in many areas. Its aim to quickly encircle the capital, Kyiv, and force its surrender has faltered against staunch Ukrainian resistance — bolstered by weapons from the U.S. and other Western allies.

Moscow claims its focus is on wresting the entire eastern Donbas region, which has been partially controlled by Russia-backed separatists since 2014. A high-ranking Russian military official on Friday said that troops were being redirected to the east from other parts of the country.

Russia has supported the separatist rebels in Luhansk and neighboring Donetsk since the insurgency erupted there shortly after Moscow annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine. In talks with Ukraine, Moscow has demanded Kyiv acknowledge the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, accused Russia of seeking to split Ukraine in two, making the comparison to North and South Korea.

"The occupiers will try to pull the occupied territories into a single quasi-state structure and pit it against independent Ukraine," Budanov said in a statement released by the Defense Ministry. He predicted that guerrilla warfare by Ukrainians would derail such plans.

A Ukrainian delegate in talks with Russia on ending the war, Davyd Arakhamia, said in a Facebook post the countries would meet in Turkey beginning Monday. However, the Russians then announced the talks would start Tuesday. The sides have met previously with no deal reached.

Ukraine's priorities at the talks will be "sovereignty and territorial integrity," Zelenskyy told his nation in

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his nightly address.

"We are looking for peace, really, without delay," he said. "There is an opportunity and a need for a face-to-face meeting in Turkey."

Zelenskyy also signed a law that bans reporting on troop and equipment movements that haven't been announced or approved by the military. Journalists who violate the law could face three to eight years in prison. The law does not differentiate between Ukrainian and foreign reporters.

Ukraine says that to defeat Russia, the West must provide fighter jets and not just missiles and other military equipment. A proposal to transfer Polish planes to Ukraine via the United States was scrapped amid NATO concerns about being drawn into direct fighting.

In his pointed remarks, Zelenskyy accused Western governments of being "afraid to prevent this tragedy. Afraid to simply make a decision."

His plea was echoed by a priest in the western city of Lviv, which was struck by rockets a day earlier. The aerial assault illustrated that Moscow, despite assertions that it intends to shift the war eastward, is willing to strike anywhere in Ukraine.

"When diplomacy doesn't work, we need military support," said the Rev. Yuri Vaskiv, who said fearful parishioners were staying away from his Greek Catholic church.

On the road to Kyiv, residents of a village combed through the wreckage of Russia's ongoing attacks. Locals in Byshiv, about 22 miles (35 kilometers) from Kyiv, walked through buildings torn open and destroyed by shelling to salvage what they could, including books, shelving and framed pictures.

Standing in what used to be a kindergarten classroom, teacher Svetlana Grybovska said too many children have fallen victim.

"It's not right" Grybovska told British broadcaster Sky News. "Children are not guilty of anything."

Russia confirmed it used air-launched cruise missiles to hit a fuel depot and a defense plant in Lviv, near the Polish border. Another strike with sea-launched missiles destroyed a depot in Plesetske just west of Kyiv, where Ukraine stored air defense missiles, said Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, a spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry.

Russia's back-to-back airstrikes shook the city that has become a haven for an estimated 200,000 people who have fled bombarded towns and cities. Lviv, which has largely been spared bombardment, also has been a waystation for most of the 3.8 million refugees who have left Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

In Kharkiv, Ukrainian firefighters used axes and chainsaws to dig through concrete and other debris Sunday searching for victims of a Russian military strike on the regional administration building. One body was found Saturday, a firefighter said. At least six people died in the March 1 attack — the first time Russian forces hit the center of Kharkiv, once home to 1.5 million people.

On Sunday night, a rocket attack hit an oil base in the far northwestern region of Volyn.

Along with the millions of people who have fled Ukraine, the invasion has driven more than 10 million people from their homes, almost one-quarter of Ukraine's population. Thousands of civilians are believed to have been killed.

Zelenskyy also said Sunday in the interview with the Russian journalists that he speaks regularly with his troops and their families and had offered his troops in Mariupol the option of leaving the city.

"They said, 'We can't. There are wounded people, we will not leave the wounded,'" Zelenskyy said. "Moreover, they said, 'We will not leave the dead.'"

Zelenskyy said corpses of Ukrainians and Russians alike lie uncollected on Mariupol's roads and sidewalks.

Oscars live: Coming-of-age film 'CODA' wins best picture

By The Associated Press undefined

"CODA" has won best picture at the Oscars.

The small, coming-of-age film about the only hearing member in a family of deaf adults written and directed by Siân Heder took the top prize over bigger-budget contenders at the Academy Awards on Sunday night.

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The win might have been considered a major upset when the nominations were announced on Feb. 22, but "CODA" gained momentum and buzz throughout awards season, and took top awards at the Screen Actors Guild and Producers Guild awards.

The Oscar is also a big victory for Apple, which becomes the first streaming service to win the best picture crown after several years of vying for the prize alongside Netflix and Amazon.

"CODA" beat out bigger nominees that included "Belfast," "Dune," "The Power of the Dog" and "West Side Story."

THE BACK-TO-NORMAL ACADEMY AWARDS

- Troy Kotsur, Ariana DeBose make history at Academy Awards
- Jessica Chastain, Saniyya Sidney beam on Oscars red carpet
- Winners at the Oscars include 'Tammy Faye,' 'Dune'
- Troy Kotsur wins best supporting actor Oscar for 'CODA'
- Shaq, Curry win Oscars for 'Queen of Basketball' documentary
- Billie Eilish and Finneas bond and win Oscar for best song
- 'Drive My Car' wins Oscar award for best international film
- At Oscars, Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill target of joke

For complete coverage of this year's Oscars, visit: <https://apnews.com/hub/academy-awards>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

8:25 p.m.

The Oscars looked kindly on Jessica Chastain.

Chastain won the Academy Award for best actress on Sunday night for playing televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker in "The Eyes of Tammy Faye."

It's the first Oscar for Chastain in three nominations. She was previously nominated for "Zero Dark Thirty" in 2013 and "The Help" in 2012.

She beat out fellow nominees Olivia Colman, Penélope Cruz, Nicole Kidman and Kristen Stewart. Chastain thanked each of her nominees, her co-tsar Andrew Garfield and her makeup team.

Chastain noted that suicide was a leading cause of death for the LGBTQ community and violence against minorities, saying she was inspired by Bakker's compassion.

8:15 p.m.

The Fresh Prince became a king and finally won his first Oscar.

Will Smith took home his first Academy Award on Sunday night for playing Richard Williams — father and tennis mentor to Venus and Serena Williams — in "King Richard."

Smith spoke shortly after an onstage confrontation with comedian Chris Rock, who made a crack at his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. Smith noted, in tears, that Richard Williams was also fiercely protective of his family. "I want to be a vessel for love," he said.

He also apologized to the academy and his fellow nominees. "This is a beautiful moment," he said. "Art imitates life. I look like the crazy father. But love will make you do crazy things."

The win comes for his third nomination. He was previously nominated for "Ali" in 2002 and "The Pursuit of Happyness" in 2007.

Smith beat out fellow nominees Javier Bardem, Andrew Garfield, Benedict Cumberbatch and Denzel Washington, who trumped Smith for the 2002 best actor Oscar with his win for "Training Day."

8:00 p.m.

Jane Campion has won the best director Oscar for "The Power of the Dog."

The 67-year-old filmmaker won the Academy Award on Sunday night for the unconventional Western starring Benedict Cumberbatch that was shot in her native New Zealand.

It's her first best director Oscar. She won a best original screenplay Oscar in 1994 for her film "The

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Piano," which also earned her a directing nomination.

Campion, the first woman ever nominated twice for best director, beat out fellow nominees Paul Thomas Anderson, Kenneth Branagh, Ryusuke Hamaguchi and Steven Spielberg.

7:50 p.m.

Billie Eilish has an Oscar.

The 20-year-old pop star and her 24-year-old producer brother, Finneas O'Connell, won the Academy Award for best original song for writing "No Time to Die" from the James Bond film of the same name.

Eilish also performs the song, and her brother co-produced it. She is slated to sing it live earlier in the show.

Two other songs from Bond films have won the best original song Oscar, Adele's "Skyfall" from the 2012 film of the same name, and Sam Smith's "Writing's on the Wall" from 2015's "Spectre."

Eilish and O'Connell won over a group of nominees that included Beyoncé, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Van Morrison.

7:45 p.m.

The Oscars were a reunion for "The Godfather."

Three of the film's principals -- director Francis Ford Coppola and actors Al Pacino and Robert DeNiro -- took the stage at the Academy Awards on Sunday night, doing so almost exactly 50 years to the day after the first movie in the trilogy was released.

They were introduced by rapper Sean Combs.

"I feel moments like this should be sincere and brief, and I'm so grateful to my two wonderful friends, to come here to help me celebrate with you this project that we began 50 years ago with really the most extraordinary collaborators," Coppola said.

He thanked Mario Puzo, who co-wrote the screenplay with Coppola, and Robert Evans -- with whom he famously clashed on decisions regarding the making of the movie.

"The Godfather" -- which won best picture -- was released March 24, 1972. The other movies in the trilogy were released in 1974 and 1990.

— Associated Press' Tim Reynolds

7:30 p.m.

"Summer of Soul" has won best documentary at the Oscars.

Director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's chronicle of the music of the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival took the trophy as expected at Sunday's Academy Awards.

"I'm so happy right now, I could cry," he said.

Questlove, drummer and bandleader of the Roots, crafted the film from new interviews and unseen footage of the widely forgotten festival that featured Stevie Wonder, Sly and the Family Stone, Nina Simone and many other greats of gospel, R&B, rock 'n' roll and soul music.

He teared up when thinking of his dad, Lee Andrews, who passed in 2016.

7:10 p.m.

Siân Heder has won the best adapted screenplay Oscar for her script for "CODA."

It's the first Oscar for Heder, who adapted the script from the 2014 French film "La Famille Bélier."

Heder also directed the small coming-of-age film about the only hearing member in a family of deaf adults. It's also nominated for best picture.

For adapted screenplay, "CODA" beat out "The Power of the Dog," "The Lost Daughter," "Dune" and "Drive My Car."

Best-film nominee "CODA" is having an impact backstage at the Oscars.

Winners who visit the interview room to talk to the international media are having their comments interpreted in American Sign Language.

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A man and woman are alternating signing the comments while standing next to the winners clutching their golden statues.

"CODA," which stands for child of deaf adult, earned Troy Kotsur an Oscar win as supporting actor.

— Associated Press' Beth Harris

7:00 p.m.

Kenneth Branagh has won the best original screenplay Oscar for writing "Belfast."

It's the first career Oscar for the 61-year-old, who is also nominated Sunday for best director and, as a producer, for best picture.

Branagh's script about a working class family in 1970s Northern Ireland is based in part on his own youth in Belfast.

"This is an enormous honor for my family and a great tribute to an amazing city and fantastic people," said Branagh. "This is the search for joy and hope in the face of violence and loss."

6:20 p.m.

Troy Kotsur has won the best supporting actor Oscar for his role in "CODA."

Kotsur on Sunday night became the second actor who is deaf to win an Academy Award. His "CODA" co-star Marlee Matlin was the first when she won best actress for "Children of a Lesser God" in 1987.

He dedicated the film to the Deaf community. "This is our moment."

Kotsur was barely known as an actor before "CODA," but was considered a heavy favorite for the Oscar after the acclaimed performance and wins earlier in awards season.

He beat out fellow nominees Ciarán Hinds, Jesse Plemons, J.K. Simmons and Kodi Smit-McPhee. He thanked his dad, paralyzed in a car accident: "You are my hero."

6:10 p.m.

"Encanto" has won the Oscar for best animated feature.

The film about a magical family in the mountains of Colombia won the Academy Award for Walt Disney Animation Studios on Sunday night.

Not counting films from its Pixar subsidiary, Disney has won the animation Oscar four times since it was first handed out in 2002.

Disney previously won the award for 2013's "Frozen," 2014's "Big Hero 6" and 2016's "Zootopia."

The film beat out fellow animated nominees "Flee," "Luca," "The Mitchells vs. the Machines" and "Raya and the Last Dragon."

6:00 p.m.

In sports, GOAT is an acronym that's short for "Greatest Of All-Time."

And the Oscars brought three such athletes together to help pay tribute to 60 years of James Bond films. Surfing's Kelly Slater, snowboarding's Shaun White and skateboarding's Tony Hawk — all widely considered as the best in the history of their various sports — took the stage in Los Angeles on Sunday.

"Of course, over the years, we've all had our favorite Bonds," White said.

Added Hawk: "Some people are Sean Connery fans, others Roger Moore."

Continued Slater: "Or Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan or Daniel Craig."

White then picked up where they left off: "As great as they all are, it's impossible to ever be certain that just one star was clearly the GOAT."

But when Hawk disagreed with that sentiment -- "really, dude?" White asked -- the crowd broke up into laughter. And more laughs came when Hawk said he intended to say Slater and White are the best in their sports.

"At least, you used to be," Hawk said.

— Associated Press' Tim Reynolds

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5:25p.m.

The Oscar for best supporting actress goes to Ariana DeBose for "West Side Story."

DeBose won the Academy Award on Sunday night for her acting, singing and dancing as Anita in her breakthrough role in the Steven Spielberg reimagining of the classic musical.

She becomes the first Afro-Latina and openly LGBTQ actor win in the category. "To anybody who has ever questioned your identity," she said, "I promise you there is a place for us."

Largely unknown in film circles before landing the coveted role, the 31-year-old North Carolina native became the clear Oscar favorite after an awards season full of victories.

She was previously primarily known as a stage actress, with Broadway roles in "Bring It On: The Musical," "Motown: The Musical" and "Hamilton." She glided off stage gazing at her Oscar, which she then pulled close to her heart for a hug.

DeBose beat out fellow nominees Jessie Buckley, Judi Dench, Kirsten Dunst and Aunjanue Ellis. She thanked Rita Moreno, who starred in both 1961 and 2021 film adaptations.

5:15 p.m.

Amy Schumer, Wanda Sykes and Regina Hall welcomed the Oscars back to the Dolby Theatre — a trio that Schumer joked was there "because it's cheaper than hiring one man."

The three appeared on stage following a brief intro from Serena and Venus Williams, along with a musical number from Beyoncé filmed in Compton.

"We are here at the Oscars" began Hall.

"Where movie lovers unite to watch TV," added Sykes.

They ran through a short monologue that included jabs at "Being the Ricardos" nominee J.K. Simmons, "House of Gucci" stars Lady Gaga and Jared Leto — or "House of Random Accents," as Sykes called it — and U.S. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell.

Among the jokes that landed best was one aimed at another awards show:

"You know what's in the In Memoriam this year?" Schumer asked. "The Golden Globes."

— Associated Press' Jake Seiner

5:10 p.m.

Serena Williams and Venus Williams opened the Oscars by paying tribute to their hometown — and introducing Beyoncé.

It was the start of what might be a very big night for the Williams family.

"King Richard" — the story of how the Williams sisters father, Richard Williams, devised a plan that saw his daughters rise from Compton, California, to the top of the tennis world — was nominated for six Academy Awards.

Among those: Will Smith was nominated for best actor for his portrayal of Richard Williams.

Beyoncé performed "Be Alive" — also Oscar-nominated — from tennis courts in Compton, a most fitting tribute to where the Williams sisters began their tribute to stardom.

"I want you to tell these people where we are," Beyoncé asked the performers with her.

"City of Compton," they responded.

Serena Williams is the highest-earning women's tennis player of all time, winning more than \$94 million on the court. Venus Williams is second on that list, at around \$42 million.

And among the lyrics: "The path was never paved with gold. We fought and built this on our own."

— Associated Press' Tim Reynolds

4:40p.m.

Jessica Chastain got to the Oscars early, for good reason. And she got to celebrate a win.

"The Eyes of Tammy Faye" — the story of Tammy Faye Bakker — won the Oscar for best hair and

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makeup, one of the eight awards given during the pre-show while many top celebrities were still making their way down the red carpet.

Chastain, though, was a notable exception by taking her seat for the pre-show. And she got to give congratulatory and celebratory hugs to the three winners — Linda Dowds, Stephanie Ingram and Justin Raleigh — as they took the stage.

"It was an incredible hair, makeup, prosthetic team that helped me," Chastain later said on the ABC broadcast, appearing there after the Oscar was awarded. "Tammy Faye in our film goes through three different decades and she changed a lot throughout those decades, so they really helped me with that."

Chastain is a best actress nominee for her portrayal of Bakker.

— Associated Press' Tim Reynolds

4:25 p.m.

Hans Zimmer has won his second Oscar, nearly 30 years after his first.

Zimmer won the Academy Award for best original score on Sunday night for his music from "Dune."

He won his first Oscar in 1995 for the score of "The Lion King."

The 64-year-old German had been nominated without a win nine times since.

He was not at the awards on Sunday. "Dune" has also won for best editing and sound.

The editing award went to Joe Walker, who joked about his kids and how it's sometimes hard for them with his work. "You may not know this but the word 'Oscar nominated' can be used by a skilled 17 year old as an insult," he said.

4 p.m.

"Dune" has won the first Oscar of this year's ceremony, taking home the sound award in a pre-telecast ceremony.

Inside the Dolby Theatre the ceremony is unfolding virtually indistinguishable from the live broadcast. The winners of eight Oscars bestowed in the first hour will be weaved into the main broadcast that begins at 8 p.m. Eastern on ABC.

But the unedited ceremony is only visible to those inside the theater. Not even reporters in a nearby media center are able to watch the early Oscars being handed out.

Josh Brolin and Jason Momoa joked about the early winners not getting Billy Crystal or Chris Rock as hosts. "They're getting us."

Brolin walked out onto the stage and exclaimed "It's full!" to start the show.

3:40 p.m.

"The Eyes of Tammy Faye" nominee Jessica Chastain arrived early to Sunday's Oscars to ensure she didn't miss the presentation of some less-celebrated award.

The academy is experimenting with a staggered start this year, naming victors in eight categories during the hour before the show formally begins at 5 p.m. Those presentations will then be edited down and woven into the broadcast, an effort to keep the show tight and boost declining ratings.

The new approach is rubbing many the wrong way. Some stars, including Chastain, have said they won't do red carpet interviews if it means missing the presentation of awards like best hair and makeup, for which the artists of "Tammy Faye" are nominated.

"I'm here to see all the early categories because so often a lot of attention goes to the actors because people see our faces on screen," Chastain said on the red carpet. "But the reality is there's so many people that are involved in creating a performance and creating a film, and I need to acknowledge and admire each one of them."

The other pre-show categories are: film editing, sound, original score, production design, live-action short, animated short and documentary short.

— Associated Press' Jake Seiner

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3:30 p.m.

"West Side Story" was representing. Supporting actress front runner Ariana DeBose walked the carpet quickly in her bright red Valentino dress. "I'm coming back!" She told reporters and blew kisses to the fans in the bleachers.

Not far behind her was "West Side Story" director Steven Spielberg holding hands with with Kate Capshaw. Spielberg shook hands with Oscar show director Glenn Weiss, wishing him luck.

Rita Moreno, who starred in both 1961 and 2021 film adaptations, arrived in black one shoulder Carolina Herrera and a feather hat, that she wore before on the cover of Town and Country. Fans in the bleacher shouted "Rita! Rita! Rita!"

— Film Writer Lindsay Bahr

3 p.m.

The young star of "Belfast" brought a special date to the Oscars — his mom.

Eleven-year-old Jude Hill arrived with his mom Shauneen, posing for photos before the ceremony. He flashed two thumbs up as his mother, her arm around him, looked at him.

Hill plays Buddy in "Belfast," a semi-autobiographical film by Kenneth Branagh. It tells the story of 1969 Belfast from Buddy's perspective during The Troubles, when neighborhoods were turned into war zones and children had to navigate how they were supposed to tell whether someone was Catholic or Protestant.

"Belfast" has earned seven Oscar nominations, including for Judi Dench and Ciarán Hinds, who play Buddy's grandparents.

— Film Writer Lindsay Bahr

2:30 p.m.

The producer of the Academy Awards says Sunday's show will strike a balance between being upbeat and fun, while also acknowledging the war in Ukraine.

Producer Will Packer says it's difficult to put on a show while serious world events are unfolding, but he's also trying to give people a diversion.

"In the midst of the revelry and the fun, we will acknowledge it and then we're going to try to make sure that we give people who are in tough situations there and around the world something to look at, a release, something that's upbeat and fun," Packer told The Associated Press ahead of Sunday's ceremony.

Packer also addressed the film academy's controversial decision to award eight Oscars ahead of the live telecast and weave them into the broadcast.

"We're going to treat all the honorees with an amazing amount of respect. That's what we do," Packer said.

Dozens of nominees are already on the Oscars red carpet ahead of the ceremony, which begins at 4 p.m. Pacific with an hourlong ceremony bestowing eight awards.

Best original song nominee Diane Warren wore a ribbon supporting Ukrainian refugees as part of her outfit.

— Associated Press' Amanda Lee Myers

3 a.m.

For the first time in two years, the Academy Awards are rolling out the red carpet at Los Angeles' Dolby Theatre for what the film academy hopes will be a back-to-normal Oscars. Except for all the stuff that's changed.

The telecast for the 94th Academy Awards will begin, as usual, at 8 p.m. EDT on ABC. But little else about how this year's Oscars will get underway is traditional. An hour before the broadcast begins, attendees will assemble in the Dolby for the presentation of eight awards and acceptance speeches that will be edited into a broadcast that producer Will Packer has promised will be a tight three hours.

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It's one of many shifts, both slight and tectonic, around this year's ceremony. After two years of pandemic — and a socially distanced 2021 edition with record-low ratings — the Academy Awards will try to recapture their exalted place in pop culture with a revamped telecast that's expected to see a streaming service win best picture for the first time.

N. Korea's Kim vows to develop more powerful means of attack

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Monday leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to develop more powerful means of attack, days after the country's first intercontinental ballistic missile launch in more than four years.

The statement suggests North Korea might perform additional launches or even test a nuclear device soon as it pushes to modernize its arsenal and increase pressure on the Biden administration while nuclear diplomacy remains stalled. Last Thursday, the North performed its 12th round of weapons tests this year, launching the newly developed, long-range Hwasong-17, which analysts say was designed to reach anywhere in the U.S. mainland.

During a photo session with scientists and others involved in the Hwasong-17 test, Kim expressed a resolve to build up the country's attack capability to cope with threats, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Only when one is equipped with the formidable striking capabilities, overwhelming military power that cannot be stopped by anyone, one can prevent a war, guarantee the security of the country and contain and put under control all threats and blackmails by the imperialists," KCNA quoted Kim as saying.

Kim said North Korea will develop more "powerful strike means" and also expressed his conviction and expectation that his country will "more vigorously perfect the nuclear war deterrence of the country," KCNA said.

North Korea said the Hwasong-17 flew to 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 the Korean Peninsula and Japan. Outside experts said if the missile is fired on a standard trajectory, flatter than the steep test angle, it could fly as far as 15,000 kilometers (9,320 miles), enough to reach anywhere in the U.S. mainland and beyond.

Believed to be about 25 meters (82 feet) long, the Hwasong-17 is the North's longest-range weapon and, by some estimates, the world's biggest road-mobile ballistic missile system. Its size suggests the missile is meant to carry multiple nuclear warheads, given the North already has single-warhead ICBMs that could also hit most of the U.S.

U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to denuclearize in return for economic and political benefits largely has stalled since 2019. The Biden administration has urged North Korea to return to talks without any preconditions, but Pyongyang has responded Washington must drop its hostility first and has taken steps to expand his weapons arsenals.

Some experts say Kim could soon conduct another ICBM launch, a launch of a satellite-carrying rocket or a test of a nuclear device as he works to perfect his weapons technology, dial up pressure on the United States and secure stronger internal royalty.

On Monday, South Korea reiterated a previous assessment that there are signs that North Korea is restoring previously demolished tunnels at its underground nuclear testing site. Lee Jong-joo, a spokesperson at Seoul's Unification Ministry, said that a nuclear test by North Korea would pose "a serious threat" to international security and that the North must halt any related acts immediately and return to talks.

The Hwasong-17 liftoff was the North's most serious weapons launch since it tested a previously developed ICBM in November 2017. Its last nuclear test, its sixth overall, was in September 2017.

Saniyya Sidney, Jessica Chastain beam on Oscars red carpet

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

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NEW YORK (AP) — Jessica Chastain hit the Oscars red carpet in a purple and copper sparkle gown, while the 15-year-old Saniyya Sidney twirled and beamed in a floral-adorned princess look and her “King Richard” castmate Demi Singleton lit up in soft purple Sunday.

Chastain’s Gucci ombre gown included a ruffle hem. The color of her hair, in a high ponytail, matched the burnished bodice of her gown perfectly. Nicole Kidman smooched with her husband, Keith Urban, in a subdued blue gray Armani Prive strapless column gown with a waist ruffle and train.

“This dress, they actually made this color,” Kidman told E!. “I was, like, I really want to wear blue. I love the color.”

Nominee Kristen Stewart, her platinum hair swept to one side, posed quickly for cameras in tiny, rock star black shorts from Chanel. The buttons on her white top opened down to her bellybutton. Penelope Cruise in Chanel went for black in a classic silhouette with a bow sparkling at her neck.

“Instead of a parade of the usual suspects wearing variations on the same theme, the red carpet was filled with individualism, personal style and a sense of play,” said fashion director Zoey Washington, who works with a range of luxury brands.

“There was something downright refreshing about seeing how young Hollywood brought a sense of whimsy, from Kristen Stewart’s bespoke Chanel and Zendaya’s bare midriff to Lupita Nyong’o’s kinetic, gold Prada that made her look like a living Oscar,” she said.

Sidney wore a light teal, strapless Armani Prive gown as one of the early arrivals to the 94th Academy Awards. It wasn’t her first Oscars. She attended at age 10 for “Fences” and “Hidden Figures.” Singleton portrayed Serena Williams to Sidney’s Venus.

As the film industry’s glamorous return to the Dolby Theatre unfolded, touches of the real world seeped in.

Jamie Lee Curtis wore a ribbon as a ring in Ukrainian blue, dressed in a midnight blue look by Stella McCartney. Nicholas Britell, nominated for his “Don’t Look Up” score, wore a blue ribbon on one lapel in support of Ukraine, and Diane Warren in an Emerald green tuxedo suit, wore a blue lapel ribbon of her own on behalf of Ukraine refugees. Others donned Ukraine blue ribbons as well.

Presenter Lily James, meanwhile, went with baby pink Versace with a high side slit and Piaget jewels as she posed for selfies with a few fans on the red carpet. Soft pastels like her outfit mixed with metallic looks (Lupita Nyong’o in gold Prada) and black statements (Billie Eilish in a huge tiered custom Gucci gown) in a year still struggling with the pandemic and the horrors of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

The reds took it in the trend department.

Fashion icon Tracee Ellis Ross went with Carolina Herrera: a bright tea-length strapless red gown with a daring bodice and a single diamond choker. Rosie Perez wore a classic Hollywood Christian Siriano custom gown in red with a dainty cape. Sonia Yuan of “Drive My Car,” Marlee Matlin of “CODA” and Ariana DeBose of “West Side Story” also chose bright red, DeBose in trousers and a cropped top. Kirsten Dunst got the red memo as well.

Aunjanue Ellis, in a more subtle red, had “Jack’s Baby” sewn into her Donatella Versace gown in honor of her mother. Jennifer Garner went classic in a Brandon Maxwell red off-shoulder gown.

As for the men, fashion lover and nominee Kodi Smit-McPhee of “The Power of the Dog” chose a tone-on-tone baby blue suit from Bottega Veneta, an 18-carat Cartier diamond choker over his collared (no-tie) dress shirt. He showed off his Cartier watch, which included cascading diamonds on its face.

“I’m gonna miss that when it’s not on my wrist,” he joked.

Erik Maza, executive style director for Town & Country magazine, praised Smit-McPhee’s fashion risks. “He’s run away with Timothée Chalamet’s title for best dressed young actor this season,” Maza told The Associated Press.

Side note: Chalamet went with no shirt and a cropped sequin and fringe jacket in black from Louis Vuitton.

Wesley Snipes sported a shorts suit in dark purple. Sebastian Yatra, chosen to perform, wore a pink tuxedo with tails from Moschino, designed by Jeremy Scott. He wore Cartier diamonds. Jason Momoa, a presenter, kept cool with a long braid tied with a small pink scrunchie. He wore a black Henry Poole suit as he towered over the rest of the red carpet.

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Naomi Scott was all-the-way covered in an edgy high-neck, deep purple look. Anna Dzieduszycka of the nominated short film "The Dress" wore an emerald green gown with spare feather embellishment. Jada Pinkett Smith also went with green, a deeper shade with a huge ruched train done by Glenn Martens for Gaultier.

Jewels made the statement for some. Vanessa Hudgens, in a black form-hugging sequin gown, had more than 23 carats of Bulgari emeralds around her neck.

"Licorice Pizza" Star Alana Haim and her sisters wore custom Louis Vuitton in a scallop design. Haim posed for a photo with Denis Villeneuve.

"It's for the Hanukkah card," Haim said.

Lots of skin, color and jewelry took the night.

"The unofficial theme of the night was more is more, with bold colors, over-the-top glam and in-your-face details dominating the red carpet," said Irina Grechko, fashion director for the millennial-focused Refinery29.com style site. "It's nice to see celebrities embrace color after playing it safe in neutrals for far too long."

There were some standout moments in hair and beauty as well: Regina Hall's "magical switch from long Hollywood waves on the red carpet to a short chic bob on stage," said Cosmopolitan beauty director Julee Wilson. "I'm obsessed with Lupita's faux loc beehive hairstyle. It's regal with a twist, quite literally."

Given the news climate, it wasn't surprising that some attendees kept it low key and low wattage in black.

"I'm especially proud of Rita Moreno's look tonight because she wore her Adrienne Landau hat for the first time for the cover story I wrote for Town & Country's March issue," Maza said. "The first Latina to win an Oscar for acting honored her heritage with a dress bearing the name of another Latina OG, Carolina Herrera. Has 90 ever looked this good?"

Maza also lauded James' powdery pink Atelier Versace look and Chastain's Gucci gown "that telegraphed her confidence going into the ceremony."

Andrea Lavinthal, style and beauty director for People, was a fan of Zendaya's two-piece beaded silver Valentino skirt paired with a white cropped button down that was reminiscent of Sharon Stone's long skirt and white Gap shirt at the 1996 Oscars.

"It's very young and very modern but also appropriate for the Oscars," she said. "It was a real show stopper. There was a lot of really daring fashion. You don't usually see this much skin and risks at the Oscars."

While Zendaya channeled Stone, Zoe Kravitz evoked Audrey Hepburn in a pale pink Saint Laurent Anthony Vaccarello strapless look with a simple bodice half bow, her bangs worn well above her eyebrows as Hepburn did.

An abundance of stars put their décolletage front and center, said Blake Newby, style and beauty editor for Essence.

"Stars embraced plunging necklines more than ever before this year. From Serena and Venus Williams in Gucci and Elie Saab, to Jessica Chastain, also in Gucci, to Niecy Nash in Monsoori, the ladies played with different silhouettes to show off their busts," she said.

Lavinthal noted the hottest topics on social media when it came to Oscars fashion were Stewart and Chalmet.

"If you're going to do shorts at the Oscars it's got to be Chanel," she said. "It's not for everyone but it's very much her. People are loving both of them or not loving both of them."

Melissa Rivers, a red carpet veteran and co-creator of the old "Fashion Police" starring her late mother, Joan, wasn't a fan.

"It's the Oscars. It's like going to the house of your grandparents, who are rich and you're not sure if you're in the will yet," she joked. "It's just, stop. We get who you are, but this is the Oscars."

No. 1 South Carolina women beat Creighton, reach Final Four

By PETE IACOBELLI AP Sports Writer

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — South Carolina and Aliyah Boston gained what they'd pointed toward all season — a shot at redemption at the Final Four.

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Boston scored 19 points to lead the top-seeded Gamecocks to their second straight Final Four with an 80-50 win over Creighton, ending the Bluejays surprise run through the NCAA Tournament on Sunday night.

The Gamecocks (33-2) took control early and rarely gave Creighton a chance to get back into the game, which ended with South Carolina getting its fourth Final Four appearance in the past seven tournaments.

Boston lost her streak of 27 double-doubles in a row, as she had seven rebounds in the blowout. She's happy, though, to have another chance to compete for a national crown and wipe away the disappointment from last season.

That's when Boston missed a short putback in the closing moments of the Gamecocks' 66-65 loss to eventual NCAA champion Stanford in the national semifinals. She collapsed in tears on the court and has been almost single-minded in wanting to finish what the team missed out on then.

"It's exciting," Boston said of the Final Four return. "We said in the locker room, we've got unfinished business."

The Gamecocks will face either Louisville or Michigan on Friday in the Final Four. The top-seeded Cardinals play the No. 3 seed Wolverines for the Wichita Region title on Monday night.

South Carolina danced and celebrated the win on Sunday as Boston held up two fingers for its back-to-back Final Fours. Boston was named the Greensboro Region MVP for her dominance through four games with 67 points and 57 boards combined.

Her signature moment, though, came Friday night against North Carolina when Boston posted 28 points, 22 rebounds and scored all 13 of South Carolina's fourth-quarter points in the 69-61 victory.

"It was pressure-packed the entire season and it's a relief to know that we're back" in the Final Four, South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said.

It was a disheartening end for the feel-good Bluejays (23-10), who had burst through the Greensboro Region to reach the Elite Eight. Lauren Jensen had 12 points to lead the Bluejays.

"Really frustrated and angry that we lost," Creighton's Tatum Rembao said. "But really joyful for all we got to experience these last 10 days."

South Carolina had struggled on offense down the stretch this season, especially in the past four games — shooting less than 36% in the SEC Tournament final loss to Kentucky and in NCAA wins against Howard, Miami and North Carolina.

This time, the Gamecocks were efficient, free-flowing and on target. They made six of their first seven shots to take a 13-5 lead four minutes in. When Creighton closed to 13-10, South Carolina took off on a game-changing 31-10 surge to take control for good.

Boston was her unstoppable self against an opponent without a player taller than 6-foot-1. She made six of seven shots the first two quarters for 14 points. Destanni Henderson had 10 points on 4-of-5 shooting including a pair of 3-pointers.

The Gamecocks led 46-25 at the break and built the lead to 32 points late in the fourth quarter.

Brea Beal and Henderson finished with 12 points apiece while Victaria Saxton had 11, giving South Carolina four starters in double figures. Saxton also led the team with 11 rebounds.

"It's been well deserved," Henderson said of the season. "Everyone has stepped up to the plate."

Creighton had hoped its unconventional, fire-away-from-3 attack might take the Gamecocks by surprise as it did to seventh-seeded Colorado, second-seeded Iowa and third-seeded Iowa State.

But much like No. 15 seed St. Peter's on the men's side in its lopsided loss to North Carolina earlier Sunday, the grind against Power Five programs proved too much to keep Cinderella dancing. Creighton could not match up sizewise with South Carolina and were outrebounded 43-23.

"There were times we had all five blue jerseys going after the board and they still came out with it," Jensen said.

THE BIG PICTURE

Creighton: Bluejays coach Jim Flanery said it Saturday — he had a bunch of sophomores running around out there and overachieving. Next year, they'll be back with more experience and a clear direction of how good they can be. That could mean another successful NCAA run for the Big East Conference's Bluejays.

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"A lot of good things ahead for Creighton," Flanery said.

South Carolina: The Gamecocks have discussed a singular expectation — to win it all — since they lost to Stanford in the Final Four last year. South Carolina has arrived at that watershed moment, and are eager to collect the team's second national title in five years.

EXPECTATIONS MET

Staley entered the season with a high bar to reach after the school gave her a \$22.4 million megadeal last October. Interim President Harris Pastides said at the time they expected a lot from Staley. She certainly delivered this year, as her team was No. 1 the entire season and finished with the latest trip to the Final Four. The Gamecocks will seek their second tournament title after winning it all in 2017.

"She's done so much for the game of basketball," Boston said. "She deserves everything's she's getting and she deserves more."

ALL-REGION

Along with Boston, Henderson also made the all-Greensboro Region team. The other three were Jensen from Creighton, Deja Kelly from North Carolina and Emily Ryan from Iowa State. Kelly scored 23 points in the loss to South Carolina while Ryan had 22 points in the Cyclones defeat to Creighton.

A moment of silence, and a plea, for Ukraine at Oscars

By TIM REYNOLDS Associated Press

For 30 seconds, the Oscars went silent for Ukraine.

A tribute that started with words from the Ukrainian-born Mila Kunis ended with the Academy Awards fading to black about midway through Sunday's show from Los Angeles, with a plea for anyone watching to do whatever possible to send help to those in the war-torn nation.

"Recent global events have left many of us feeling gutted," Kunis said as she took the stage, part of her remarks to introduce Reba McIntyre's performance of the Oscar-nominated song "Somehow You Do" from "Four Good Days."

"Yet when you witness the strength and dignity of those facing such devastation, it's impossible to not be moved by their resilience," Kunis continued. "One cannot help but be in awe of those who find strength to keep fighting through unimaginable darkness."

That's when McIntyre took the stage, dressed in a black gown, for her performance.

The balance between celebrating art while Russia's invasion of Ukraine rages on has been a delicate one for the Oscars. Sean Penn has openly campaigned for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — a former actor — to speak at the ceremony. Some arrived for the Oscars wearing blue-and-gold ribbons, an obvious show of support since those are the colors of the Ukrainian flag.

When McIntyre's song ended, a large video screen hovering over the stage displayed a tribute and a plea as the 30-second moment of silence began.

"We'd like to have a moment of silence to show our support for the people of Ukraine currently facing invasion, conflict and prejudice within their own borders," read the screen. "While film is an important avenue for us to express our humanity in times of conflict, the reality is millions of families in Ukraine need food, medical care, clean water and emergency services. Resources are scarce and we — collectively as a global community — can do more."

It then ended with a display of the following: "We ask you to support Ukraine in any way you are able. #StandWithUkraine."

Carolina crushes Saint Peter's, will meet Duke in Final Four

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — America's favorite underdog, Saint Peter's, shouldn't feel all that bad. North Carolina has crushed lots of dreams over the decades.

The Tar Heels ended all hope of a March Madness miracle in the early going Sunday, getting 20 points and 22 rebounds from Armando Bacot in a wire-to-wire 69-49 runaway over 15th-seeded Saint Peter's.

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No. 8 seed Carolina (28-9) made its record 21st Final Four, and this one will be a scene like no other. Next Saturday in New Orleans, it's North Carolina vs. archrival Duke and its soon-to-be-retiring coach, Mike Krzyzewski. Three short weeks ago, the Tar Heels fractured a different sort of fairy tale — Coach K's final home game — in a 94-81 beatdown of the Blue Devils at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"We want Duke! We want Duke! We want Duke!" the Tar Heels fans shouted as the team cut down the nets in Philly, the same city where Carolina won the East region back in 2016.

"I don't think anything can be as crazy as the leadup to that game over in Cameron," coach Hubert Davis said. "We just keep our eyes straight ahead and we ignore all the noise."

While Coach K's winding road to retirement has been a beauty to watch this March, nothing has captured more imaginations during this NCAA Tournament than the run put on by Saint Peter's.

The entire basketball budget for this scrappy group from Jersey City, New Jersey, is \$1.6 million — or around \$400,000 less than what Davis makes in a year. The first-year coach was sobbing as his players enveloped him after the buzzer.

"It was something that I just desperately wanted for them," Davis said. "This is probably the most nervous I was before a game, because I just really wanted them to go to the Final Four."

Two nights earlier, the Peacocks (21-12) looked like Final Four material. They beat Purdue to become the first 15 seed to advance to an Elite Eight.

Their hopes ended quickly in this one. They are hardly the first team to see grand plans undone by one of the country's top-line power programs.

"I didn't really recognize my team for the first 10 minutes of the game," Peacocks coach Shaheen Holloway said.

After Carolina's Leaky Black missed a free throw 2 1/2 minutes in, Bacot edged in for the offensive rebound and an easy putback. It gave Carolina a 7-0 lead. In its three tournament wins over Kentucky, Murray State and Purdue, Saint Peter's hadn't trailed by more than six.

The Peacocks, whose 10-game win streak ended, moved the ball well and did get some looks over the first 10 minutes. Some shots went halfway down and rimmed out. Others rattled around the iron but wouldn't fall. They trailed 21-7 after missing their first six shots, and 16 of their first 19.

Late in the first half, Daryl Banks III swooped in for what looked like a windmill jam. It got rejected — by the front of the rim. It made the Peacocks 5 for 27 on the night, and when Bacot dunked on the next possession, North Carolina led 36-15.

Fousseyni Drame led Saint Peter's with 12 points and KC Ndefo had 10.

The weekend before, North Carolina had taken a 25-point lead against Baylor only to see it all melt away before pulling the game out in overtime. The turning point there came when Brady Manek got ejected for throwing an inadvertent elbow. No such drama this time, though Manek finished this game on the sideline, too — watching garbage time from the bench after scoring 19 points.

It was an emotional evening for Davis, who replaced Roy Williams, the coach who took the Tar Heels to five Final Fours over 18 years and was cheering from the stands for this one. Now the 51-year-old Davis joins the likes of Ray Meyer, Steve Fisher, Denny Crum and another Tar Heel, Bill Guthridge, as coaches who have reached the sport's biggest stage in their rookie year.

"It's hard to believe or understand, but it really isn't about me at all," Davis said. "I've been to the Final Four as a coach. I played at Carolina. I played in the NBA. It's not my time, it's their time."

Were it not for Saint Peter's, maybe North Carolina would be the underdog story of this tournament. Way back when, in 1985, another 8 seed shocked the world. It was Rollie Massimino's 1985 Villanova team.

Then again, these are the Tar Heels. They've been playing as well as anyone for more than a month.

When they won at Duke on March 5, it threw a wet towel over what was supposed to be a celebration of Coach K's final home game. On Sunday, they wrecked another of those so-called "perfect" story lines.

But this is more than a consolation prize for college hoops: Next, UNC and Duke meet for the 258th time — and never with the stakes so high.

"It's a good question, but I can't answer it right now," Bacot said when asked to put the upcoming game

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in perspective. "Coach will get mad at me."

MONSTER GAME

Bacot was named the region's Most Outstanding Player. His 22 rebounds matched a career high, and also a Carolina tournament record held by Tyler Zeller against Ohio in 2012. Over the two games, Bacot had 34 points and 37 rebounds.

HISTORY

Davis joins Dick Harp of Kansas as the only people to play for their alma mater, then lead them to the Final Four in their first year as a head coach. Harp also served on Dean Smith's staff when Davis and the Tar Heels made the Final Four in 1991.

Biden finds no respite at home after returning from Europe

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the last nine, unscripted words of an impassioned speech about Russia's aggression in Ukraine, President Joe Biden created a troubling distraction, undermining his effectiveness as he returned home to face restive Americans who strongly disapprove of his performance on issues that matter most to them.

His comment that Russia's Vladimir Putin "cannot remain in power" — an assertion that his aides were forced to quickly clean up — overshadowed his larger message of solidifying the Western coalition that's confronting Moscow.

It punctuated another frustrating moment for an administration that's struggled to regain its footing — and the American electorate's support — in the face of an ongoing pandemic, escalating inflation and an increasingly complicated foreign policy crisis that raises the specter of nuclear conflict.

Although he's forged a united front to punish Russia with sanctions for the invasion of Ukraine, polls show Americans feel no better about his leadership as the bloody war continues. Meanwhile, Democrats are in danger of losing control of Congress in November's midterm elections, leaving Biden with limited opportunities to advance a progressive domestic agenda that remains stalled.

The president is on the verge of securing the confirmation of the first Black woman, Ketanji Brown Jackson, on the U.S. Supreme Court, yet there's no clear path forward for him to fulfill other campaign promises around voting rights, criminal justice reform and fighting climate change. While polls show that Jackson is broadly supported by Americans, it hasn't helped improve Biden's standing with voters less than eight months before the midterms, which Republicans hope to frame as a referendum on the president.

The war in Russia has consumed much of the White House's messaging bandwidth, but Biden is looking to turn the spotlight onto some his domestic priorities this week.

He is expected to unveil a new budget proposal on Monday, which includes a renewed focus on cutting the federal deficit and a populist proposal to increase taxes on the wealthiest Americans.

If approved by Congress — far from a certainty — households worth more than \$100 million — a measurement of wealth, not income — would have to pay a minimum tax of 20% on their earnings.

The added revenue could help keep the deficit in check and finance some of Biden's domestic priorities, including expanded safety net programs. There are few if any signs of Republican support for the proposal so far, and even some Democrats have been lukewarm to the idea.

Biden's case isn't helped by his approval ratings. A slim 34% of Americans think Biden is doing a good job handling the economy, which is normally the top issue for voters in an election year, according to a poll released Thursday by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

His contentious assertion about Putin in his Warsaw speech did little to help things. The White House rushed to clarify that Biden wasn't actually calling for "regime change," but by the next day it became clear that the dramatic statement had produced some of the first overt cracks in unity among NATO nations that had just convened in Brussels for an emergency meeting.

Some leading Western European allies, including France and Germany, tend to be more cautious than the U.S. about how to confront Russia. Until Saturday night, Biden had calibrated his words carefully.

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French President Emanuel Macron said Biden's remarks could make it harder to resolve the conflict. "I wouldn't use those terms, because I continue to speak to President Putin, because what do we want to do collectively?" he said. "We want to stop the war that Russia launched in Ukraine, without waging war and without escalation."

In Berlin, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Sunday that neither NATO nor Biden seek regime change in Russia. Asked about Biden's remarks during an appearance on ARD television, Scholz also said Biden had not made a dangerous mistake. "We both agree completely that regime change is not an object and aim of policy that we pursue together," the chancellor said.

Biden has enjoyed some rare bipartisan support for his handling of the Ukraine crisis. But some Republicans who have been generally supportive of his approach to the crisis chided him for his comments. Sen. James Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, dryly noted on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday, "Please, Mr. President, stay on script."

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, told NBC's "Meet the Press" that Biden's final comment "plays into the hands of the Russian propagandists and plays into the hands of Vladimir Putin."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken was forced to continue clarifying Biden's speech during a trip through the Middle East, where he had intended to focus on solidifying American partnerships as the administration seeks a renewed nuclear agreement with Iran.

Speaking at a news conference in Jerusalem, Blinken said Biden meant that "Putin cannot be empowered to wage war or engage in aggression against Ukraine or anyone else."

In case there was any doubt, Biden gave an emphatic "No!" when asked by a reporter outside of church Sunday if he was calling for regime change with the remark.

Even as Biden seemed to go too far for some allies with his speech, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy seemed to draw little comfort from it. He accused Western nations of lacking courage to confront Russia, and he said criticized their "ping-pong about who and how should hand over jets" and other weapons to the Ukrainian military.

The speech in Warsaw was the third, and by far most consequential, of instances from the trip where Biden's aides needed to clean up his comments.

During a news conference in Brussels on Thursday, he said the U.S. would respond "in kind" if Putin used chemical weapons in Ukraine. The next day, national security advisor Jake Sullivan said the president meant that "we'll respond accordingly," not that the U.S. would use chemical weapons of its own.

And then, while speaking to members of the 82nd Airborne Division soldiers recently deployed to Poland, Biden seemed to suggest they would be going to Ukraine. Speaking about the bravery of Ukrainians, Biden said: "Look at how they're stepping up. And you're going to see when you're there."

Afterward, the White House reiterated that Biden had no intention of sending troops into Ukraine, something the president has insisted since the beginning of the conflict.

While running for office two years ago, Biden repeatedly told voters that "the words of a president matter," and he promised that his foreign policy experience would serve the country well on the international stage.

There's little doubt that Biden has been able to maintain unusual unity among allies during this war. But by speaking with more passion than caution — particularly in his speech in Warsaw — Biden has also reminded Americans of his proclivity for misstatements at a precarious time for his presidency.

Just 26% of Americans have faith that Biden can manage a crisis or the military, according to last week's AP-NORC poll. There's also been a mixed response to Biden's approach to Russia. Although Americans have been skeptical of getting involved in another foreign crisis, they've also watched with horror as Putin continues to raze Ukrainian cities despite an array of punishing sanctions.

Only 36% said his approach has been "about right," while 56% said Biden has not been tough enough on Russia.

Kansas races past Miami in 2nd half, reaches 16th Final Four

By JAY COHEN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Ochai Agbaji was all over the court. David McCormack dominated inside, and Christian

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Braun connected from deep.

With one dazzling finish, Kansas roared into the Final Four.

Agbaji, McCormack and Braun led the top-seeded Jayhawks to a brilliant second half in a 76-50 victory over Miami on Sunday, sending one of college basketball's top programs to the national semifinals for the 16th time.

"That was about as well as we can play, the second half," coach Bill Self said. "These guys earned it."

They sure did.

After trailing by six at halftime, Kansas outscored Miami 47-15. The Jayhawks shot 59.3% (16 for 27) after the break, compared to 21.4% (6 for 28) for the Hurricanes. They also outrebounded Miami 25-11 in the final 20 minutes.

Once the Jayhawks started flashing their superior speed and athleticism, the Hurricanes couldn't keep up.

"We started to play the score, not the game," Miami forward Sam Waardenburg said.

Agbaji scored 12 of his 18 points in the second half. McCormack opened the half with his own 5-0 run and finished with 15 points on 6-for-7 shooting. Braun made Kansas' first 3-pointer with 15:27 left to snap a 40-40 tie.

"We just needed some energy," said Braun, who finished with 12 points. "I thought we were flat in the first half."

Kansas (32-6), the only No. 1 seed left in the NCAA Tournament, won the Midwest Region for the 13th time with its ninth consecutive victory overall. Next up is a Final Four matchup with Villanova on Saturday in New Orleans.

Remy Martin, the region's most outstanding player, had nine points and six rebounds for the Jayhawks. Jalen Wilson grabbed 11 boards, making up for a tough shooting day.

It's the fourth Final Four for Self in his 19 seasons at Kansas. He also had one of the best teams in the country when the tourney was canceled in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last time the Jayhawks made it to the semis, they lost 95-79 to coach Jay Wright and the Wildcats in 2018.

"I've thought all along that this was a possibility," Self said. "But I've also thought all along that the margin for error wasn't such where we could get loose and have it be a probability."

Kameron McGusty scored 18 points and Isaiah Wong had 15 for No. 10 seed Miami in the program's first appearance in the Elite Eight. The Hurricanes (26-11) were bidding to get coach Jim Larrañaga back to the Final Four for the first time since he led 11th-seeded George Mason on a memorable run in 2006.

"Just being able to accomplish what we accomplished this year, now teams coming in or new teams, two, three years down the line, that Elite Eight is going to be the goal," McGusty said. "That's what we were able to do this year, and I'm so happy for us. I love these guys."

McGusty spent two seasons at Oklahoma, averaging 13.5 points in four games against Kansas before he transferred to Miami. And he looked comfortable playing against the Jayhawks again.

The redshirt senior guard scored 14 points to help the Hurricanes to a 35-29 halftime lead. But everything changed after the break.

With McCormack asserting himself inside and Braun and Ogbai picking up their play on the perimeter, Kansas outscored Miami 25-7 over the first 10 minutes of the second half.

"Kansas came out in the second half and really hit us with like a knockout punch," Larrañaga said.

Wilson made two foul shots and Agbaji connected from 3 to lift the Jayhawks to a 54-42 lead with 10:14 left. And they just kept rolling.

A dunk by Agbaji capped a 10-0 run and made it 67-46 with 4:35 left, delighting the pro-Kansas crowd at the United Center. A 3 by Agbaji extended the lead to 23 points with 1:58 remaining.

"At halftime it was basically a matter of kind of a challenge against us," Agbaji said. "We didn't come this far to lay down or give up at this point. So just going out there and playing our style of basketball."

SWEET HOME CHICAGO

Kansas improved to 6-0 in NCAA Tournament games played in the Windy City.

ROUGH DAY

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Playing in his hometown, Miami guard Charlie Moore had five points on 2-for-9 shooting. The 24-year-old Moore also spent two years with Kansas, sitting out during the 2017-18 season before appearing in 35 games in 2018-19.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: One of the Hurricanes' biggest strengths in the tourney was their ability to generate turnovers, but they were unable to rattle the experienced Jayhawks. Miami finished with 14 turnovers, compared to 11 for Kansas.

Kansas: The Jayhawks improved to 44-16 in the NCAA Tournament under Self, but they are focused on winning the national title for the first time since 2008.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump distorts Obama-Biden aid to Ukraine

By ROBERT BURNS, AAMER MADHANI and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Casting himself as tough on Russia, former President Donald Trump lowballed the amount of U.S. military aid provided to Ukraine during the Obama-Biden administration and claimed that only he himself in recent history didn't face a Russian invasion of another country. Not true.

Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, meanwhile, made a suspect claim that all of Ukraine's weapons now in use came from the Trump administration.

A look at the weekend claims and reality:

TRUMP, comparing military aid in his administration to that under President Barack Obama: "I was the one that sent the Javelins, not Obama. Obama sent blankets." — rally Saturday in Commerce, Georgia.

PENCE: "The Obama-Biden administration only sent them meals and blankets." — interview Friday on Fox News Channel.

THE FACTS: Trump and Pence are misrepresenting the amount of aid under Obama and Biden and glossing over their own delays in helping Ukraine.

While the Obama administration refused to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons in 2014 to fight Russian-backed separatists, it offered a range of other military and security aid — not just "blankets." The administration's concern was that providing lethal weapons like Javelin anti-tank missiles might provoke Russian President Vladimir Putin to escalate the conflict in the separatist Donbas area of Ukraine near Russia's border.

By March 2015, the Obama administration had provided more than \$120 million in security aid for Ukraine and promised \$75 million worth of equipment, including counter-mortar radars, night vision devices and medical supplies, according to the Defense Department. The U.S. also pledged 230 Humvee vehicles.

The U.S. aid offer came after Putin in 2014 annexed Crimea and provided support for separatists in eastern cities.

Ultimately between 2014 and 2016, the Obama administration committed more than \$600 million in security aid to Ukraine.

In the last year of the Obama administration, the U.S. established the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which provided U.S. military equipment and training to help defend Ukraine against Russian aggression. From 2016 to 2019, Congress appropriated \$850 million for this initiative.

The Trump administration in 2017 agreed to provide lethal aid to Ukraine, later committing to sell \$47 million in Javelins.

But two years later, Trump delayed the release of congressionally approved security assistance for Ukraine as part of an effort to pressure Ukraine to announce an investigation of his political rival, Joe Biden. The matter was part of Trump's 2020 impeachment trial.

TRUMP: "In fact, I stand as the only president of the 21st century on whose watch Russia and Putin did not invade any other country." — Saturday rally.

THE FACTS: Trump is not the only one.

Putin, who served as Russia's president from 2000 to 2008, and then as prime minister before return-

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ing to the presidency in 2012, did in fact invade Georgia in 2008 during George W. Bush's second term. He also moved in on Ukraine in 2014 on Obama's watch. It's also true that Putin did not invade a country during Trump's term.

But Bill Clinton, who finished his second term in January 2001, also never saw an invasion by Putin into another country. Russia did attack Chechnya twice in the 1990s, but Chechnya is a region of Russia, not a country.

PENCE: "The Ukrainian soldiers are using the arms that our administration provided to them, and they were suspended by the Biden administration." — Fox interview.

THE FACTS: That's a stretch. With both sides going through weapons and ammunition very quickly in the brutal Ukraine-Russia war, it's dubious that the Javelins Ukraine received from the U.S. during the Trump years would be still on the shelf. Trump did not provide Stinger anti-aircraft systems to the Ukrainians.

Including the \$800 million package announced by Biden on March 16, the total designated military aid for Ukraine since Biden took office is about \$2 billion. The assistance, some of it drawn from \$13.6 billion in military and humanitarian assistance recently approved by Congress to help Ukraine and its neighbors, has included a number of lethal weapons such as Stingers, Javelin anti-armor systems, Mi-17 helicopters, grenade launchers, Humvees, body armor and helmets.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has urged the West to provide his country with warplanes and air defense missiles, stressing on Sunday that "it's necessary not just for Ukraine's freedom, but for the freedom of Europe."

El Salvador declares state of emergency amid killings

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — El Salvador's congress granted President Nayib Bukele's request to declare a state of emergency early Sunday amid a wave of gang-related killings over the weekend.

Fourteen people were killed Friday and 62 people died Saturday, a scale of violence that has not been seen for years. By comparison, there were 79 homicides in the entire month of February.

Bukele announced the request Saturday in his social media accounts, and congress approved it early Sunday. The decree would suspend constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly and loosen arrest rules for as much as thirty days, but could be extended.

The homicides appeared linked to the country's notorious street gangs, who effectively control many neighborhoods in the capital. The National Police reported they have captured five leaders of the Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13, who they claimed ordered the weekend killings.

Bukele wrote in his social media accounts that he was ordering the head of the country's prisons to carry out an immediate 24/7 lockdown of gang inmates in their cells.

"They are not to go out even to the patio" of prisons, Bukele wrote, adding "a message to the gangs: because of your actions, now your homeboys will not see even one ray of sunlight."

While Bukele has tried to project a tough attitude on crime, the country's enormously powerful street gangs have proved a double-edged sword for him.

"We must remind the people of El Salvador that what is happening now is due to the negligence of those who protected criminals," the conservative Arena party said in a statement.

That was an apparent reference to a December report by the U.S. Treasury Department that said Bukele's government secretly negotiated a truce with leaders of the gangs. That contradicted Bukele's denials and raised tensions between the two nations.

The U.S. government alleges Bukele's government bought the gangs' support with financial benefits and privileges for their imprisoned leaders including prostitutes and cellphones.

The explosive accusations cuts to the heart of one of Bukele's most highly touted successes in office: a plunge in the country's homicide rate.

The president responded sarcastically via Twitter to the accusations. "Cell phones and prostitutes in the prisons? Money to the gangs? When did that happen? Didn't they even check the date? How can they put

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out a such an obvious lie without anyone questioning them?"

Bukele vehemently denied the accusation when it was reported in August 2020 by the local news site El Faro.

In 2020, Bukele's administration "provided financial incentives to Salvadoran gangs MS-13 and 18th Street Gang (Barrio 18) to ensure that incidents of gang violence and the number of confirmed homicides remained low," the Treasury statement said. "Over the course of these negotiations with Luna and Marroquin, gang leadership also agreed to provide political support to the Nuevas Ideas political party in upcoming elections."

Bukele's New Ideas party has a majority in El Salvador's congress.

The revelations raised tensions between Bukele and the Biden administration. After the new congress removed the attorney general and the justices of the constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court in May, the U.S. government expressed concern over the direction of the country.

The U.S. Agency for International Development announced it would shift aid from government agencies in El Salvador to non-governmental organizations.

El Salvador's new attorney general in June announced the government was canceling the Organization of American States' anti-corruption mission in the Central American country.

Bukele enjoys extremely high popularity. He stepped into a political vacuum left by discredited traditional parties from the left and right.

Carried by star power, 'The Lost City' dethrones 'Batman'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sandra Bullock and Channing Tatum led the action-adventure comedy throwback "The Lost City" to a \$31 million debut in U.S. and Canadian theaters over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, dethroning "The Batman" from the No. 1 spot the superhero film had held for most of March.

"The Lost City" relied on the now relatively old-fashioned concept of star power to propel the Paramount Pictures release above expectations at the box office. Bullock has long been a singular top draw, but her great appeal had in recent years been felt most on Netflix, where 2018's "Bird Box" became one of the streamer's most-watched releases. And Tatum, after a hiatus from lead roles, recently proved his popularity with the still-playing hit "Dog" (now up to \$57.9 million in six weeks), which he co-directed.

Bullock and Tatum's chemistry together helped make "The Lost City," directed by the brothers Adam and Aaron Nee, an appealing romantic-comedy diversion with shades of 1984's "Romancing the Stone." It also notably attracted a majority female audience. During the pandemic, male moviegoers have been quicker to return.

And theaters are hoping "The Lost City" kicks off a new period of stability. The first three months of 2022 have belonged overwhelmingly to "Spider-Man: No Way Home" (which crossed \$800 million this week), "Uncharted" (\$133.6 million) and "The Batman," which fell to second in its fourth week of release and added \$20.5 million to its domestic total of \$332 million.

But for the first time this year, the release calendar is about to get consistently busy. The coming weeks will see the releases of "Morbius," "Sonic the Hedgehog 2," "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore," "The Bad Guys" and "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent." All are opening exclusively in theaters.

The specialty box office also got a lift from A24's "Everything Everywhere All at Once," which opened with \$50,965 from 10 locations. The film, an existential sci-fi comedy starring Michelle Yeoh, first premiered — like "The Lost City" — at South by Southwest in Austin, Texas, earlier this month.

Meanwhile, the Indian epic "RRR" ("Rise Roar Revolt") opened with \$9.5 million in 1,200 North American theaters, one of the largest releases ever for a movie from India. S.S. Rajamouli's period film about two revolutionaries debuted the same time in India. There's no centralized box-office reporting there, but "RRR" was expected to be one of the country's biggest blockbusters.

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

1. "The Lost City," \$31 million
2. "The Batman," \$20.5 million.
3. "RRR," \$9.5 million.
4. "Uncharted," \$5 million.
5. "Jujutsu Kaisen 0," \$4.6 million.
6. "X," \$2.2 million.
7. "Dog," \$2.1 million.
8. "Spider-Man: No Way Home," \$2 million.
9. "Sing 2," \$1.3 million.
10. "Infinite Storm," \$751,000.

Blinken reassures allies ahead of possible Iran deal

By MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday sought to reassure a wary Israel and its Gulf Arab allies that the Biden administration is committed to their security ahead of the possible renewal of global powers' international nuclear deal with Iran.

Blinken made the comments shortly before joining his counterparts from Israel and four Arab countries at a special gathering where the Iranian nuclear deal was expected to top the agenda. Israel and many of its neighbors are fiercely opposed to the deal, which they believe will embolden and enrich Iran.

"When it comes to the most important element, we see eye-to-eye," Blinken told reporters at a news conference with Israel's foreign minister. "We are both committed, both determined that Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon."

The Biden administration has been working to renew the 2015 nuclear deal, which placed curbs on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for billions of dollars in sanctions relief. With support from Israel, the Trump administration withdrew from the deal in 2018, causing it to unravel.

Although Iran has since raced ahead with its nuclear program, Israel and Gulf Arab countries are deeply concerned about restoring the original deal. Israel fears it does not include enough safeguards to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Both Israel and its Gulf allies also believe that relief from economic sanctions will allow Iran to step up its military activities across the region, including support for hostile militant groups.

Blinken said the U.S. believes that restoring the nuclear deal "is the best way to put Iran's program back in the box it was in." He added: "Our commitment to the core principle of Iran never acquiring a nuclear weapon is unwavering."

He also vowed to cooperate with Israel to counter Iran's "aggressive behavior" across the region.

It remains unclear if or when the nuclear deal will be renewed, but there are indications it could be soon despite several last-minute snags, one of which involves Iran's demand for the U.S. to lift its designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps as a "foreign terrorist organization."

Israel is deeply opposed to such a step and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told Blinken that he hoped "the United States will hear the concerned voices from the region — Israel's and others — on this very important issue."

Israel and its neighbors believe any easing of sanctions and the delisting of the IRGC would embolden Iranian-backed militant groups from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis in Yemen, who have recently launched several rocket attacks on the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, a senior European official was in Tehran on Sunday to try to unplug the talks a day after Iran's top diplomat publicly signaled flexibility over the IRGC designation.

If a deal is reached, Israel has repeatedly noted that it is not a party to the agreement and reserves the right to take action, including a potential military strike, against Iran.

"Israel and the United States will continue to work together to prevent a nuclear Iran. At the same time, Israel will do anything we believe is needed to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Anything," Israeli Foreign

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Minister Yair Lapid said.

Underscoring regional anxieties, Israel's government hastily arranged a meeting of top diplomats from Arab countries that have normalized relations with Israel. The two-day gathering, with Blinken, was beginning late Sunday at a kibbutz in the Negev Desert.

In addition to Blinken and Lapid, their counterparts from Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt were attending. All four countries are considered moderate Sunni Muslim nations. Jordan, another pro-Western Arab country that has a peace agreement with Israel, declined an invitation, apparently in solidarity with the Palestinians.

The U.S. preoccupation with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and bolstering NATO's presence in Eastern Europe has fueled concerns throughout the Middle East that America's attention may be stretched thin.

It remained unclear whether any decisions would emerge from the diplomatic gathering. But for Israel, hosting such a gathering itself is a significant accomplishment. Egypt is the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, while the other three nations normalized relations with Israel in 2020 in the so-called Abraham Accords brokered by the Trump administration.

Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, said the meeting was "quite remarkable" simply by bringing together four Arab four ministers to Israel for a public, high-level gathering for the first time.

He said discussions would likely focus on the aftermath of a nuclear deal, with each country looking for different things, whether it be security guarantees, weapons systems, intelligence or diplomatic support. "Each country has its own wish list, but the common denominator is Iran," he said.

While Iran may be the issue of most immediate concern to Israel and its neighbors, the war in Ukraine looms large.

That conflict has roiled world energy markets, leading the U.S. and Europe to appeal to Arab and other major oil suppliers to step up production. The war may also soon result in major food security challenges, particularly across the Middle East, which imports vast quantities of wheat from Ukraine.

Bennett has presented himself as a mediator between Putin, Ukraine and the West but his discussions with the Russian leader have yet to bear fruit.

Blinken later traveled to Ramallah in the occupied West Bank to meet with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and stress to him the U.S. commitment to help the Palestinian people and encourage a resumption in long-stalled peace talks with Israel.

Abbas thanked the U.S. for restoring financial assistance to the Palestinians cut off by the Trump administration, and urged the Biden administration to do more to promote the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip — lands captured by Israel in 1967.

"The priority should always be a political solution that ends the Israeli occupation of the land of the state of Palestine on the 1967 borders with east Jerusalem as its capital," he said.

Ahead of his meetings with the Palestinians, Blinken called on both sides to avoid taking actions that could raise tensions ahead of the sensitive holiday period around Passover, Easter and Ramadan. "It's a message that I'll be underscoring in all of my meetings on this trip," he said.

Last year, violence between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in Jerusalem spilled over into an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas.

Bennett announced that Israel was raising the number of Gazans allowed to work in Israel to 20,000 people as part of a broader effort to ease tensions.

"While we can't solve everything, we can improve the lives of people on the ground," he said.

EU envoy in Tehran amid hopes to restore nuclear agreement

By AMIR VAHDAT and LUJAIN JO Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A leading European Union diplomat held talks in Tehran on Sunday, Iran's state-run media reported, amid hopes that an agreement to restore Iran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers could be completed.

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The meetings between the EU's envoy, Enrique Mora, and top Iranian officials come at a sensitive moment for talks to revive the deal, as the glimmers of a resolution to some of the thorniest issues in the negotiations have emerged.

The report on the talks in Tehran gave scant detail, saying only that the diplomats discussed the latest on the nuclear agreement, with Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani repeating that Iran believed a deal was within reach if America was "realistic" in its demands. After meeting Mora, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian also cast blame on the U.S. for the delay in reaching an agreement.

Former President Donald Trump abandoned the nuclear deal in 2018 and re-imposed crushing sanctions. Iran gradually breached the agreement with a massive expansion of its nuclear work.

Nuclear talks broke off earlier this month as last-minute wrangles in Vienna coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and financial sanctions imposed by the West on Moscow.

But officials have since made encouraging noises. Russia appeared to back down from its earlier demand that its trade with Iran be exempted from Western sanctions.

And for the first time, Iran's top diplomat on Saturday publicly signaled flexibility over Tehran's demand that Washington stop designating the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard, its powerful paramilitary force, as a foreign terrorist organization.

The prospect of the designation's removal had alarmed America's Mideast allies, such as Israel, which fiercely opposed the original nuclear deal and argued that easing sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard would embolden Iranian-backed militant groups from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis in Yemen.

In a visible sign that shared regional anxiety over a renewed nuclear deal was growing, the Israeli government hastily arranged an unprecedented summit of top diplomats from Arab countries that have normalized ties with Israel along with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"We are both committed, both determined that Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon," Blinken said alongside Israel's foreign minister, seeking to reassure his jittery counterparts before the gathering.

Remarks on Sunday by the U.S. special envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, underscored the U.S. limitations that have frustrated allies. He declined to discuss details of the nuclear negotiations, but reiterated that America had failed to secure a broader deal with Iran that would restrict its ballistic missiles program and curb its regional military policies.

"It would have been better, but (the nuclear deal) was not intended to, it wasn't able to address the other issues," Malley told the Doha Forum, a Middle East policy conference in Qatar. "Many in the region view the IRGC in the same way we do. ... But we know this is not a deal that's going to address that."

However, Malley was quick to stress that no matter what happens to the Guard's terrorism designation, separate sanctions over its ballistic missile development and alleged human rights violations would remain.

Anxieties over a restored deal also were on stark display in Tehran, laying bare deep fissures in Iran's divided political system.

Hard-liners opposing any hint of rapprochement with the West appeared to fret about possible Iranian compromises after Amirabdollahian told state TV that the Revolutionary Guard had accepted that the terrorist designation would stay in place so that Iran could pursue "whatever is necessary for the interests of the country."

Hossein Shariatmadari, appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as editor-in-chief of hard-line Kayhan daily, rebuked Amirabdollahian's remarks as "unexpected and strange."

In an interview late Saturday with the semiofficial Fars news agency, Shariatmadari insisted that the foreign minister had misunderstood the Revolutionary Guard when he spoke on the force's behalf.

"Attributing this statement to Guard commanders does not correspond to any of the well-known characteristics of Guard commanders," he said, adding that Amirabdollahian had falsely given the impression of the Guard's "surrender."

From the Doha Forum, Sayyid Kamal Kharrazi, a foreign policy advisor to Iran's supreme leader, also struck a tough line, rejecting the United States' continued sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard.

"A national army cannot be listed as a terrorist group," Kharrazi told the audience. "That is very important for Iranians to have the IRGC removed from the list. ... They are not going to compromise on that."

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In an Instagram post, Amirabdollahian expressed regret that his comments had been “misinterpreted” and tried to assuage domestic unease by promising he had not backed down from any Iranian “red lines.”

Still, ambiguity prevailed as Malley and Kharrazi offered starkly different assessments from Doha about the chances of the deal’s looming revival.

“It’s imminent,” said Kharrazi.

Malley appeared more skeptical.

“I can’t be confident it’s imminent,” he said. “It’s not just around the corner and it’s not inevitable.”

From Doha, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian thanked Qatar for its diplomatic support of negotiations to revive the nuclear deal, of which France is a signatory.

“I know that we talked about it,” he said. “It’s now truly on the table.”

Earlier in the day, Le Drian held telephone calls with his Emirati and Saudi counterparts about the atomic accord, among other security issues.

EXPLAINER: South Dakota House nears AG impeachment decision

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota House committee investigating whether the state’s attorney general should be impeached for his conduct surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash is set to finish its work this week, wrapping up a monthslong investigation that has splintered the state’s Republicans.

The House Select Committee on Investigation plans late Monday to issue a final report, which will include parts of the crash investigation that have not been redacted by the committee. Lawmakers will also discuss whether to recommend Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg’s impeachment.

The report, as well as any recommendations, will assess the conduct of the state’s top law enforcement officer and set the tone for House lawmakers as they prepare to vote on his impeachment.

A look at the impeachment investigation:

WHY IS RAVNSBORG FACING IMPEACHMENT?

Ravnsborg struck and killed a man walking near a rural highway in September 2020. He initially reported the nighttime crash as a collision with an animal and has insisted he did not realize he killed the man, 55-year-old Joseph Boever, until he returned to the scene the next day and found his body.

Criminal investigators told the impeachment committee that Ravnsborg was inconsistent with them in recounting the crash, they didn’t believe his account and that he may have known he hit a man. But prosecutors said they couldn’t prove that.

Ravnsborg in August pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors for making an illegal lane change and using a phone while driving about a minute before the crash.

HOW HAS THE INVESTIGATION SPLIT REPUBLICANS?

Gov. Kristi Noem has pushed hard for her fellow Republican’s ouster, saying last year she was “outraged” at the result of the charges and suggesting that impeachment could hold Ravnsborg accountable.

“The public deserves the truth and this family, this poor family deserves some justice,” she said in January.

One of the governor’s top officials, Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price, laid out an argument for impeachment in a public letter to the committee this month. He noted that Ravnsborg was distracted when the crash happened, criminal investigators didn’t believe his account, and that the attorney general consulted with a digital evidence expert in his office before turning his phone over to investigators.

Price also raised new allegations, pointing to “disparaging and offensive” text messages about state officials that were traded by Ravnsborg and top aides. Price further alleged that Ravnsborg had been pulled over for traffic offenses eight times in the roughly 18 months between taking office and the fatal crash, including five in which he either identified himself as the attorney general or displayed a badge.

But Noem’s pressure campaign has irked lawmakers on the committee who see it as intrusive.

If he is removed from office, Noem would get to name a replacement for Ravnsborg, who since falling out with the governor after the crash has pushed a pair of ethics complaints against Noem to the state’s Government Accountability Board.

Lawmakers have suggested that Noem inappropriately interfered by publicly releasing parts of the in-

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vestigation, including videos of criminal investigators questioning Ravensborg.

House Speaker Spencer Gosch, the Republican leading the impeachment committee, said its final report would include details on how Noem has tried to "influence the investigation."

In the latest round of acrimony, an organization formed to further Noem's agenda in the state, the Dakota Institute for Legislative Solutions, sponsored billboards accusing four Republicans and a Democrat of covering for the attorney general. Noem has denied any involvement, but some lawmakers have said they don't believe her.

WILL RAVNSBORG FACE A VOTE ON IMPEACHMENT?

Almost certainly. But it's not clear how much momentum there will be for impeachment, which requires a simple majority, when the House convenes on April 12.

If the committee recommends impeachment, it would give those pressing for Ravensborg's ouster a boost.

Even if the committee doesn't recommend action, there will likely be a separate push to impeach him. Republican Rep. Will Mortenson, who introduced articles of impeachment last year, said his argument for doing so has only been confirmed by testimony from law enforcement officers who investigated the crash.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If the House impeaches Ravensborg, he would be removed from office at least temporarily.

The state constitution calls for an impeached official to take a leave from their duties while the impeachment trial plays out in the Senate. It also requires at least 20 days to pass between when the official is impeached and the start of the trial. It would take a two-thirds Senate majority to convict and permanently remove the attorney general from office.

Regardless, Ravensborg faces an unlikely political future. His GOP predecessor, Marty Jackley, has announced a bid to replace him.

The state Republican Party will decide its nominee at a convention in June, and Jackley has the support of the state's most powerful elected official — Noem.

Second 'black box' found in China Eastern plane crash

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The second "black box" from a China Eastern Boeing 737-800 was found Sunday, raising hopes that it might shed light on why the passenger plane nosedived into a remote mountainous area in southern China last week, killing all 132 people on board.

Firefighters taking part in the search found the flight data recorder on a mountain slope about 40 meters (130 feet) from the point of impact and 1.5 meters (5 feet) underground, state media said. Experts confirmed it was the second black box. The impact of the crash created a 20-meter- (65-foot-) deep pit in the side of the mountain and scattered debris widely.

Searchers had been looking for the data recorder after finding the cockpit voice recorder four days ago. The two black boxes should help investigators determine what caused the plane to plummet from 29,000 feet (8,800 meters) about one hour into the flight and shortly before it would have begun its descent.

The remote setting and rainy and muddy conditions have complicated the search for the black boxes and wreckage. Images posted by CGTN, the international arm of CCTV, showed an official holding an orange cylindrical object on site with the words "FLIGHT RECORDER" and "DO NOT OPEN" written on it. It appeared slightly dented but intact.

The search was paused Sunday afternoon for a three-minute moment of silence for the 123 passengers and nine crew members. Emergency workers took off their helmets and police and soldiers their caps. Standing in groups in formation, they bowed their heads as sirens blared.

Flight MU5735 crashed Monday en route from the city of Kunming in southeastern China to Guangzhou, a major city and export manufacturing hub near Hong Kong. An air traffic controller tried to contact the pilots several times after seeing the plane's altitude drop sharply but got no reply, officials have said.

The cockpit voice recorder, also an orange cylinder, was found two days later on Wednesday. It has been sent to a Beijing lab for examination and analysis, and the flight data recorder was also being sent

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to the Chinese capital for decoding.

Search teams have been combing the site outside the city of Wuzhou for days with shovels and other hand tools. Construction excavators have been brought in to remove earth and clear wider passageways to the site, and pumps are being used to drain collected water from the rain. Officials said monitors have been installed to detect possible landslides from the rain and search activity that could endanger the workers.

Officials announced late Saturday that there were no survivors. DNA analysis has confirmed the identities of 120 of the people on board, they said. Searchers have found ID and bank cards belonging to the victims.

The Boeing Co. said in a statement that a Boeing technical team is supporting the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and the Civil Aviation Administration of China, which will lead the investigation into the crash.

China Eastern, one of China's four major airlines, and its subsidiaries have grounded all of their Boeing 737-800s, a total of 223 aircraft. The carrier said the grounding was a precaution, not a sign of any problem with the planes.

With eye to China investment, Taliban now preserve Buddhas

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

MES AYNAK, Afghanistan (AP) — The ancient Buddha statues sit in serene meditation in the caves carved into the russet cliffs of rural Afghanistan. Hundreds of meters below lies what is believed to be the world's largest deposit of copper.

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are pinning their hopes on Beijing to turn that rich vein into revenue to salvage the cash-starved country amid crippling international sanctions.

The fighters standing guard by the rocky hillside may once have considered destroying the terracotta Buddhas. Two decades ago when the Islamic hard-line Taliban were first in power, they sparked world outrage by blowing up gigantic Buddha statues in another part of the country, calling them pagan symbols that must be purged.

But now they are intent on preserving the relics of the Mes Aynak copper mine. Doing so is key to unlocking billions in Chinese investment, said Hakumullah Mubariz, the Taliban head of security at the site, peering into the remnants of a monastery built by first-century Buddhist monks.

"Protecting them is very important to us and the Chinese," he said.

Previously, Mubariz commanded a Taliban combat unit in the surrounding mountains battling with U.S.-backed Afghan forces. When those troops capitulated last year, his men rushed to secure the site. "We knew it would be important for the country," he said.

The Taliban's spectacular reversal illustrates the powerful allure of Afghanistan's untapped mining sector. Successive authorities have seen the country's mineral riches, estimated to be worth \$1 trillion, as the key to a prosperous future, but none have been able to develop them amid the continual war and violence. Now, multiple countries, including Iran, Russia and Turkey are looking to invest, filling the vacuum left in the wake of the chaotic U.S. withdrawal.

But Beijing is the most assertive. At Mes Aynak, it could become the first major power to take on a large-scale project in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, potentially redrawing Asia's geopolitical map.

TOP PRIORITY

In 2008, the administration of Hamid Karzai signed a 30-year contract with a Chinese joint venture called MCC to extract high-grade copper from Mes Aynak. Studies show the site holds up to 12 million tons of the mineral.

But the project got tied up in logistical and contract problems, and it never got past some initial test shafts before it ground to a halt when Chinese staff left in 2014 because of continued violence.

Mere months after the Taliban seized Kabul in August, consolidating power over the country, the group's newly installed acting Minister for Mining and Petroleum Shahbuddin Dilawar urged his staff to re-engage Chinese state-run companies.

Ziad Rashidi, the ministry's director of foreign relations, approached the consortium made up by MCC, China Metallurgical Group Corporation and Jiangxi Copper Ltd. Dilawar has had two virtual meetings with

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MCC in the last six months, according to company and ministry officials. He urged them to return to the mine, terms unchanged from the 2008 contract.

A technical committee from MCC is due in Kabul in the coming weeks to address the remaining obstacles. Relocating the artifacts is key. But MCC is also seeking to renegotiate terms, particularly to reduce taxes and slash the 19.5% royalty rate by nearly half, the percentage owed to the government per ton of copper sold.

"Chinese companies see the current situation as ideal for them. There is a lack of international competitors and a lot of support from the government side," Rashidi said.

China's ambassador to Afghanistan has said talks are ongoing, but nothing more.

Acquiring rare minerals is key for Beijing to maintain its standing as a global manufacturing powerhouse. While stopping short of recognizing the Taliban government, China has stood out from the international community by calling for the unfreezing of Afghan assets and has kept its diplomatic mission running in Kabul.

For Afghanistan, the contract at Mes Aynak could bring in \$250-300 million per year to state revenues, a 17% increase, as well as \$800 million in fees over the contract's length, according to government and company officials. That's a significant sum as the country grapples with widespread poverty, exacerbated by financial shortfalls after the Biden administration froze Afghan assets and international organizations halted donor funds. Some has since resumed.

GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES

At Mes Aynak, a 2,000-year-old Buddhist city sits uncomfortably alongside a potential economic engine. Afghanistan's tumultuous modern history has gotten in the way of both exploring the archaeology and developing the mines.

Discovered in the 1960s by French geologists, the site was believed to have been an important stop along the Silk Road from the early centuries AD.

After the Soviet invasion in the late 1970s, Russians dug tunnels to investigate the copper deposit; the cavernous bore holes are still visible. These were later used as an al-Qaida hideout, and at least one was bombed by the U.S. in 2001.

Looters then pillaged many antiquities from the site. Still, archaeologists who came in 2004 managed a partial excavation, uncovering remnants of a vast complex, including four monasteries, ancient copper workshops and a citadel. It became clear the area had been a major Buddhist settlement, a crossroads for traders coming from the west, and pilgrims from afar, even China.

To the shock of the non-Taliban technocrats in his own ministry, Dilawar is committed to saving the site and told MCC's director in Beijing it was an important part of Afghanistan's history, according to two officials present in one virtual meeting.

He dismissed open-pit mining schemes that would raze the site entirely. The alternative option of underground mining was judged too pricey by MCC. The Culture Ministry has been tasked with presenting a plan to relocate the relics, most likely to the Kabul Museum.

"We have already transferred some (artifacts) to the capital, and we are working to transfer the rest, so the mining work can begin," Dilawar told The Associated Press.

While the ministry is optimistic a deal can be reached, MCC officials are cautious and pragmatic.

They did not speak to the AP on record, citing sensitivities around the talks happening while international sanctions still prohibit dealings with the Taliban.

They expressed concerns over the feasibility of other contractual obligations, including building a railway to the Pakistan border at Torkham, a coal-fired power plant, and community amenities such as a hospital and schools.

Another issue is how to compensate residents of three villages near Mes Aynak cleared out a decade ago.

Mullah Mera Jan, a 70-year-old local elder, said he is still waiting for funds promised to him by ministry officials after being forced out of his village of Wali Baba.

Still, he too hopes mining will start soon. Villagers were promised 3,000-4,000 direct and 35,000 indirect jobs. The men from his village are on top of the hiring list.

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OPEN FOR BUSINESS

In the ministry's labyrinthine halls, hopeful investors stand in line, documents ready to stake their claim of Afghanistan's untapped mineral riches, including large iron deposits, precious stones and -- potentially -- lithium.

Knocking on Rashidi's office door these days are Russians, Iranians, Turks and of course, the Chinese.

All are "in a great hurry to invest," he said. Chinese interest is "extraordinary," he said. Rashidi has also reached out to China's CNPCI to revamp an oil contract to explore blocks in Amu Darya near the Turkmenistan border, terminated in 2018.

Dozens of small-scale contracts have been handed out local investors, many of whom have joint ventures with international companies, mainly Chinese and Iranian.

Ministry revenues have increased exponentially, from 110 million afghanis (\$1.2 million) in the year preceding the Taliban takeover, to \$6 billion afghanis (\$67 million) in the six months since the Taliban assumed power, according to documents seen by the AP. Most of that, however, appears to be from more aggressive taxing, as the Taliban merged their informal tax economy with that of the government. Apart from coal, it not clear if actual mining production has increased.

Ironically, it was the Taliban that hindered work in Mes Aynak for over a decade.

An MCC official recalled how the road leading to the mine was laden with IEDs targeting Afghan forces and NATO allies. An entire Afghan regiment guarded Chinese engineers at the site compound. Mubariz, now the security chief, said he remembered watching them from the mountains where he plotted attacks.

The MCC official said that when his Taliban hosts told him they had restored safety so work could resume, he replied in jest, "Wasn't it you who was attacking us?"

The men, machine-guns slung around their necks, laughed too.

US-backed group gets lifesaving meds to Ukrainians amid war

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of patients in Ukraine are receiving lifesaving medicines to treat HIV and opioid addiction through a U.S.-funded group still operating despite the Russian invasion. Supplies are running short and making deliveries is a complicated calculus with unpredictable risks.

Officials say the quiet work of the Alliance for Public Health shows how American assistance is reaching individuals in the besieged nation, on a different wavelength from U.S. diplomatic and military support for the Ukrainian government.

The Ukraine-based humanitarian organization has operated for more than 20 years. It has received millions of dollars from the U.S. Agency for International Development as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other federal programs to counter HIV globally.

Executive director Andriy Klepikov said shutting down was not an option during the invasion. Ukraine has one of the most serious HIV epidemics in Western Europe, and patients need their medications daily.

He said his group made a "risk management plan" to continue its work if fighting broke out. But it did not envision the scale of the onslaught unleashed by Russian forces, and that has forced the group to adapt.

In areas of Ukraine that have escaped the worst, the organization is still able to deliver medications via postal and parcel services. For refugees who have left the country, caseworkers are making connections with aid groups that can restock medications. In places under attack but still in Ukrainian control, medical vans are bringing in supplies via convoys. The group has even been able to get some deliveries into Russian-controlled areas, with the help of intermediaries. It also is distributing medicines for tuberculosis.

Asked how long it can keep going, Klepikov responded:

"We Ukrainians are quite resilient. I am not the best soldier. But in the area of medicine, humanitarian work, public health, human rights __ that's my area, and I will do the maximum possible." He was interviewed by telephone several times recently.

"We are still serving thousands of people" with medications, Klepikov said. "It's more than five thousand."

The group's fleet of medical vans has been pressed into service to transport injured civilians to hospitals

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that can treat complex cases, and to deliver essential supplies for daily living.

U.S. officials say they have been impressed with the attitude of the Ukrainians, which evokes the tenacity of Britons during the London Blitz in World War II.

"Going into the war, I think we assumed the services would probably not be working anymore, and we completely understood," said Ryan Keating, a CDC epidemiologist overseeing AIDS prevention and treatment assistance for Ukraine. But "in most cases throughout the country our partners have continued to work every day."

Keating tells of a nurse at a clinic in one hard-hit city, who when the air raid siren sounded, scooped up the HIV medicines first and then hustled to the bomb shelter. Health care staff continued to communicate with clients from the bomb shelter.

For the Alliance, every day turns into a test. The group has lost contact with clients in Mariupol, which has a large population of HIV patients. That coastal city has been relentlessly pummeled by the Russians, and reports indicate much of it is reduced to rubble. An Alliance medical van was destroyed during a bombardment, Klepikov said.

Normal patterns of communication between clients and their caseworkers and clinicians have been severely disrupted. A clinic or office may be closed. Patients may have moved to safer areas. Messaging apps and online forums have filled some of the gaps, much as telehealth became the fallback in the United States during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

A website supported by the Alliance has become a place for patients to seek counseling for the trauma of war. According to one of the group's periodic situation reports, the top concerns of patients are acute stress, strong anxiety mixed with sadness, fear of death, guilt after evacuating to a safer area, and guilt about not doing enough.

"The importance of this work increases substantially in the context of war," said Klepikov, who holds a doctorate in philosophy.

The U.S. has a long-standing relationship with the Ukrainian group through a program called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Efforts are underway to restock Ukraine's supply of medicines, said Dr. Ezra Barzilay, CDC's country director for Ukraine. Antiretroviral drugs are used to treat HIV, and medicines such as buprenorphine and methadone are used for opioid addiction. Two Ukrainian factories that made drugs to treat opioid addiction have been attacked.

HIV and opioid addiction are related medical problems because the virus that causes AIDS can be transmitted by infected needles used to inject drugs. The Alliance estimates that 100,000 Ukrainians living with HIV are in cities and districts impacted by the Russian invasion. At the time the war started, more than 17,000 patients with opioid addiction were receiving treatment.

"Having the drugs in country doesn't necessarily make it work," Barzilay said. "You could have thousands of pills in one city and the city next door may not have access. They're moving drugs by car from location to location."

Program director Klepikov said he remembers a long-ago event with the U.S. ambassador to kick off American support for his organization. "I'm worried that what we've achieved in 21 years can be destroyed in days because of the Russian aggression in Ukraine."

President Joe Biden's health secretary, Xavier Becerra, said the Health and Human Services Department is coordinating with the State Department to deliver medical supplies to Ukraine, and is preparing to help resettle Ukrainian refugees. "We want to be there," Becerra told The Associated Press. "At HHS, we have a role to play as well."

Ukrainian students overseas fret about relatives, the future

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press / Report for America

MONTEZUMA, N.M. (AP) — At a boarding school in the Rocky Mountains, a group of Eastern European teenagers made crepes to raise money for the millions of people whose lives have been uprooted by

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Russia's war on Ukraine.

The students, studying at a pine-dotted campus in northern New Mexico, worry from a world away about their relatives in the war-torn region.

Masha Novikova, a 19-year-old student from central Ukraine, spent the night before on the phone with NGOs trying to get her mother and three younger siblings to Germany, and arguing with her mother about which would be more dangerous: staying put or hitting the road.

Novikova said she was dealing with a lot of tasks "teenagers do not usually face," as she grapples with the reality that her family's home might not exist in the way it once did.

"It ruins you from the inside," she said.

At the United World College campus, teenagers from 95 countries study as part of a network of schools dedicated to fostering understanding between cultures. The Russian-speaking students, including some from overseas as well as the sons and daughters of immigrants, have been united in horror over the invasion of Ukraine.

On a recent Saturday, a half-dozen of them gathered in a dormitory kitchen to make blini — the Eastern European-style crepes — to sell to fellow students.

"It's so hard to focus on (school) with exams approaching. We're still high school students. We're still trying to live our lives and we have a bunch of high school level issues and suddenly, like, war intervenes," said Alexandra Maria Gomberg Shkolnikova, 18, of Mexico City, whose family is from Russia and Ukraine.

United World College officials are exploring options for students from Russia and Ukraine to stay on campus or with alumni families if it's not safe to travel after graduation, said Victoria Mora, president of UWC in the U.S.

Students at the school are selected in part on their interest in world affairs, desire to share their cultures and empathy for others. UWC operates 18 schools across four continents, including the one in the U.S. Novikova learned about the program while on a volunteer trip in Irpin, Ukraine, where she met a student from the United World College of India.

The morning after her night on the phone, Novikova's eyes were heavy as she walked to the dorm from a cafeteria building known as "the castle" — once a Gilded Age hotel. Along the way she met one of her closest friends, a student from Russia.

The Russian student declined to be interviewed, citing censorship laws implemented by her country at the war's start.

"My Russian friend, she understands my mentality and she understands how I feel," said Novikova, adding that the war has brought them closer. "Of course, there are many conversations we hold these days about politics and about the future of our countries."

The pair joined their fellow Russian speakers in the kitchen of the female dorm where they snacked, helped cook, and bantered in between texting with their parents and checking the news. Some boys from other dorms trickled in, an Italian and a Spaniard. Girls from Texas and France also lined up for the snacks as the cooking continued in a mix of Russian and English.

By late afternoon, dozens of students had bought blini, with toppings like jam and chocolate spread. A plastic container of cash piled up to more than \$300, a humble contribution to humanitarian relief to be split between three hospitals in Ukraine, including the one where Novikova's father works as a surgeon.

Novikova was afraid of her family being bombed or shelled if they stayed in the country, where her father has been operating on soldiers wounded on the eastern front of the war. Her mother was worried about the family getting shot on the road to Poland if they left.

The blini session is hardly an escape for Novikova, whose phone kept buzzing with messages. But for a few hours she was stressed out with her friends, instead of being stressed out alone in her room.

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," said Sophia Pavlenko, a 19-year-old Russian citizen, as she led the blini cooking.

"What doesn't kill you gives you trauma," Novikova said.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, March 28, the 87th day of 2022. There are 278 days left in the year.

On March 28, 1979, America's worst commercial nuclear accident occurred with a partial meltdown inside the Unit 2 reactor at the Three Mile Island plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania.

In 1797, Nathaniel Briggs of New Hampshire received a patent for a washing machine.

In 1854, during the Crimean War, Britain and France declared war on Russia.

In 1898, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, ruled 6-2 that Wong, who was born in the United States to Chinese immigrants, was an American citizen.

In 1935, the notorious Nazi propaganda film "Triumph des Willens" (Triumph of the Will), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, premiered in Berlin with Adolf Hitler present.

In 1939, the Spanish Civil War neared its end as Madrid fell to the forces of Francisco Franco.

In 1941, novelist and critic Virginia Woolf, 59, drowned herself near her home in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

In 1942, during World War II, British naval forces staged a successful raid on the Nazi-occupied French port of St. Nazaire in Operation Chariot, destroying the only dry dock on the Atlantic coast capable of repairing the German battleship *Tirpitz*.

In 1969, the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, died in Washington, D.C., at age 78.

In 1977, "Rocky" won best picture at the 49th Academy Awards; Peter Finch was honored posthumously as best actor for "Network" while his co-star, Faye Dunaway, was recognized as best actress.

In 1987, Maria von Trapp, whose life story inspired the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The Sound of Music," died in Morrisville, Vermont, at age 82.

In 1999, NATO broadened its attacks on Yugoslavia to target Serb military forces in Kosovo in the fifth straight night of airstrikes; thousands of refugees flooded into Albania and Macedonia from Kosovo.

In 2000, in a unanimous ruling, the Supreme Court, in *Florida v. J.L.*, sharply curtailed police power in relying on anonymous tips to stop and search people.

Ten years ago: The U.S. Supreme Court wrapped up three days of public arguments on President Barack Obama's historic health care law. (In June 2012, the court would uphold almost all of the law, including the mandate that virtually all Americans have health insurance or pay a penalty.) On the last day of his visit, Pope Benedict XVI demanded more freedom for the Roman Catholic Church in communist-run Cuba and preached against "fanaticism" in an unusually political sermon before hundreds of thousands at Revolution Plaza. Bluegrass legend and banjo pioneer Earl Scruggs, 88, died in Nashville, Tennessee.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump proposed immediate budget cuts of \$18 billion from programs like medical research, infrastructure and community grants so that U.S. taxpayers, not Mexico, could cover the down payment on the border wall. Wells Fargo said it would pay \$110 million to settle a class-action lawsuit over up to 2 million accounts its employees opened for customers without getting their permission.

One year ago: Local media in Myanmar reported that security forces opened fire on a crowd attending the funeral of a student who was killed along with more than 100 others a day earlier in a crackdown on protests against the February coup there. Four bodies were found in Tennessee in the aftermath of flooding caused by heavy rains. Two additional tugboats were deployed to Egypt's Suez Canal to help free a giant container ship that had been wedged for days across the crucial waterway.

Today's Birthdays: Author Mario Vargas Llosa is 86. Country musician Charlie McCoy is 81. Movie director Mike Newell is 80. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is 77. Actor Dianne Wiest (weest) is 76. Country singer Reba McEntire is 67. Olympic gold medal gymnast Bart Conner is 64. Actor Alexandra Billings (TV: "Transparent") is 60. Rapper Salt (Salt-N-Pepa) is 56. Actor Tracey Needham is 55. Actor Max Perlich is 54. Movie director Brett Ratner is 53. Country singer Rodney Atkins is 53. Actor Vince Vaughn is 52. Rapper Mr. Cheeks (Lost Boyz) is 51. Singer-songwriter Matt Nathanson is 49. Rock musician Dave Keuning is 46. Actor Annie Wersching is 45. Actor Julia Stiles is 41. Singer Lady Gaga is 36. Electronic musician Clayton Knight (Odesza) is 34.