

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

Thursday, April 7

8:34 a.m. to 3 p.m.: FFA CDE in Groton

6 p.m.: FFA Banquet

Friday, April 8

11:30 a.m.: Track meet in Miller

Saturday, April 9

Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park

Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm

Monday, April 11

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Tuesday, April 12

ELECTION DAY IN GROTON

11 a.m.: Track meet in Groton

Wednesday, April 13

7 p.m.: "Way of the Cross" at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

Friday, April 15 - Good Friday

No School, Groton City & States offices closed

Monday, April 18 - Easter Monday

No School, Groton City & State offices closed

10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Whetstone Creek GC in Milbank

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



"Do things for people not because of who they are or what they do in return, but because of who you are."

-Harold S. Kushner

Tuesday, April 19

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

Wednesday, April 20

6 p.m.: FCCLA Banquet in GHS Arena Lobby

Thursday, April 21

Track Meet in Redfield

Truss Pros Help Wanted

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

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

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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The Life of Hilda Sippel

Memorial Services for Hilda Sippel, 99, of Groton will be 2:00 p.m., Saturday, April 16th at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Larry Johnson will officiate. Inurnment will follow in Groton Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the chapel on Friday from 4-6 p.m. with a prayer service at 5:30 p.m.

Hilda passed away March 30, 2022 at Good Samaritan Society, St. Martin Village in Rapid City.

On July 20th 1922 the world welcomed a tiny but mighty little girl into the world. Hilda Caroline Jahnke was born in a cabin on the family homestead to Frank and Anna Jahnke near Edgar Wisconsin. Weighing in at 2lbs, Hilda was baptized at birth by her father. She was placed in a cigar box & was kept warm in a bread warmer of the wood burning stove. From that day on Hilda's strength and determination sustained her throughout her life's journey on this earth. She even survived smallpox as a child. Hilda attributed her strong faith & love of her heavenly Lord for her long & healthy life. Hilda was never hospitalized except for the birth of her children.



While celebrating her 100th Christmas on earth, she recalled her happy times of her childhood of riding through the snow on a horse drawn sleigh & cutting down a Christmas tree. Hilda was raised on a dairy farm and that is where she developed a deep love for cows, horses and other animals—even a pet racoon.

Hilda attended grade school at Edgar Country School & graduated from Athens Wisconsin High School in 1940.

In 1941 Hilda married Richard Fliehs in Berwyn, Illinois. They lived in Chicago for a short time where Hilda was employed at American Phonobis & Richard worked at Union Asbestos. Both companies produced materials for the war. Chicago is where their first child "Duane" was born. Richard, a widower, brought 5 children into their marriage. In 1944, with their little boy & Richard's three younger children, they moved to a farm southwest of Groton, SD. Hilda was known for her speed of milking cows by hand. They had 4 more children before Richard died in 1960. True to her birthright & her strength, Hilda & her children weathered two more winters on the farm before moving into Groton. It was then that she started her employment at St Luke's Hospital working the night shift as a nurse's aid.

In 1967 she married Lester Sippel and moved with the 2 youngest children, Dale & Sharon, to Lester's farm near Houghton, South Dakota. Together Lester & Hilda raised Charolais cattle. In 1978 they were awarded SD Charolais Family of the Year. It was during this time that Hilda & Lester were able to travel & showed cattle at various farm shows in South Dakota, Colorado, and Texas.

In 1978, Lester retired and moved into Groton where Hilda worked part time as a nurse's aide at Colonial Manor. Lester passed away in 1997. Hilda continued to reside in Groton. In 2019, Hilda moved to Rapid City and lived with Mike and Sharon until March of 2021 until she moved into Good Samaritan nursing home. While living with Mike and Sharon, Hilda enjoyed daily visits from her grandchildren and regular tours of Bear Country and the Wildlife Loop near Custer. She loved going to all their various events and activities. She was thankful to be living in their home during the Covid Pandemic.

Hilda was happiest when surrounded by her family. She was well known for her sweet tooth and her love of baking. She was a member of St. John's Lutheran Church of Groton for 78 years. Her mission in life was to; teach her children and grandchildren to be honest and considerate of others and to put their trust in Jesus our Savior.

Hilda is survived by her children: Duane (Rhonda) Fliehs, Diane Hickenbotham (Ron Sieler), Dale (Claire) Fliehs, Sharon (Mike) Dell, and daughter-in-law Mary Kay Fliehs.

Stepchildren: Richard (Judy) Fliehs Jr., Doris Briggs.

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Grandchildren: Wendy Fliehs, Jeff (Sarah) Fliehs, Jordan (Ashley) Fliehs, Abby (Patrick) McCann, Rich (Heather) Fliehs, Becky (Eric) Larson, Scott (Gina) Hickenbotham, Christa Hickenbotham, Alisha Hickenbotham (Jay Wittenberg), Ryan Fliehs (Brittney Eide), Jesse (Krissi), Zak, Shannon Zak (Amy Dinger). Chad Dell, Jessica (Jamie) Higgins, Christopher (Lynlee) Dell.

Great Grandchildren: Karissa (Randy Nguyen) Fliehs, William Plummer, Tyler and Jacob Johnson, Harrison, Elinor and William McCann, Connor and Lauren Larson, Adam, Samuel and Anna Fliehs, Max, Ben, and Alexa Hickenbotham, Jayden, Jacob, and Karson Zak, Caysen and Suttan Eide, Kierstyn (Ethan) Parr, Isabell, Wesley, Charlotte, and Amelia Higgins.

Great Great Grandchild: Camden Nguyen.

Hilda is also survived by a nephew Neal (Ann) Jahnke and Aledith Tottschalk. She is also survived by many other beloved Fliehs and Sippel family members.

Hilda is preceded in death by her first husband Richard Fliehs Sr. and her second husband Lester Sippel, her son Darrel Fliehs, her grandson John Hickenbotham, her parents Frank, and Anna (Schwinge) Jahnke, an infant brother Frank, her sister Edith Ko-

epke. Stepchildren: Betty Ann Fliehs, Arvilla (Al) Goss, Harvey (Bernice) Fliehs, and step son-in-law Carlmon Briggs, grandson Daniel Fliehs. Her brothers-in-law; Emery, Ralph and Arnold Sippel, Robert, Emil & Edward Fliehs, her sisters-in-law Edith Hughes, Marlys Sippel; Frieda, Ida, Louise Fliehs, Art and Tillie Pecher and her special companion Tiger the cat.

The family would like to thank the Groton community for always making Hilda feel so loved as she always called Groton her home.

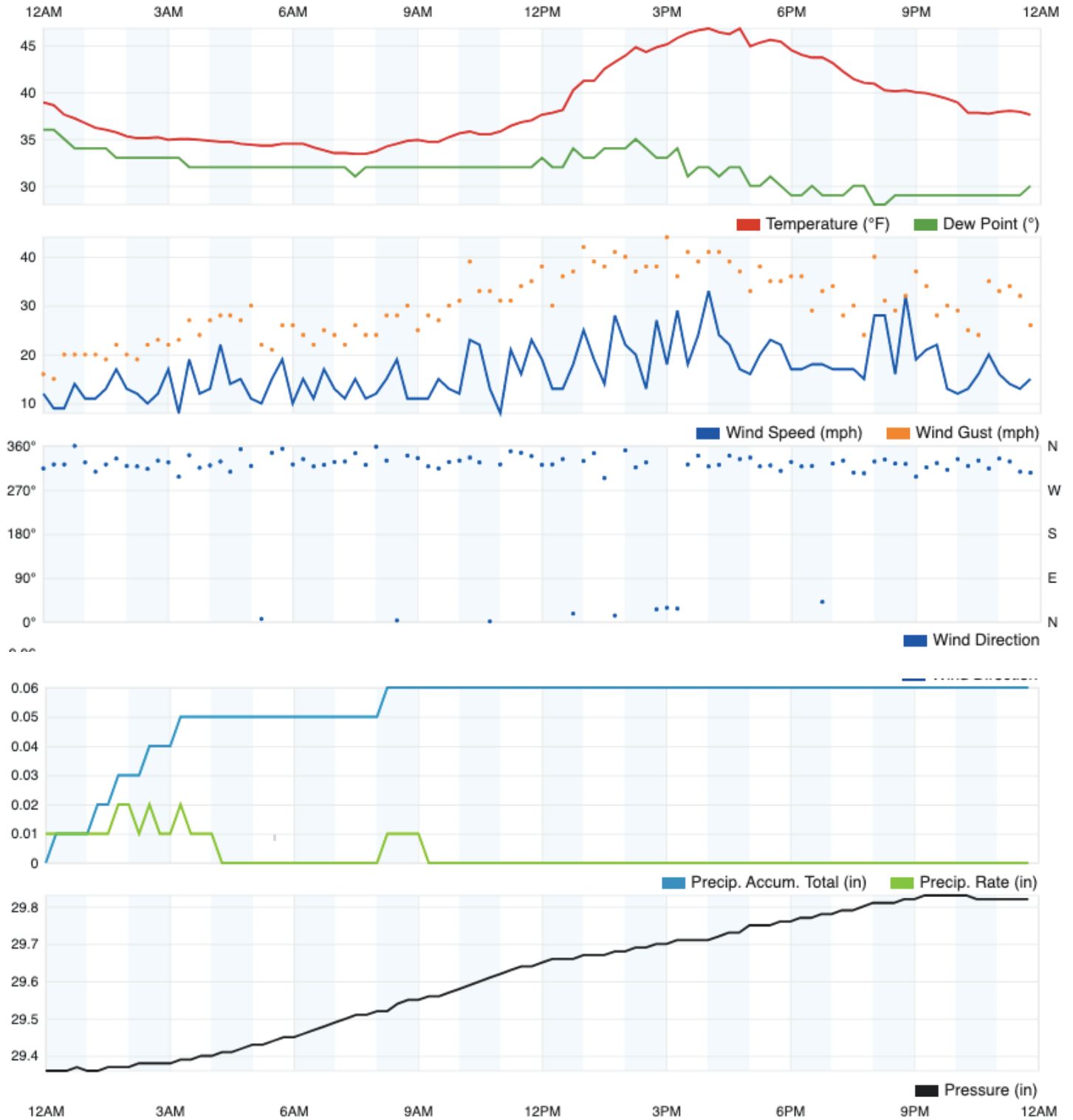
**HELP
WANTED!**

**Part time deli clerk and part
time cashier and stocker.
Apply at Ken's Food Fair, Groton**

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Warning

Thursday




60% | 60%

Windy. Snow Likely then Rain/Snow Likely

High: 42 °F


Thursday Night



Mostly Cloudy and Windy

Low: 27 °F


Friday



Sunny and Breezy

High: 48 °F


Friday Night



Clear

Low: 23 °F

Saturday



Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 54 °F



Wind Gust Forecast for a few Locations

April 7, 2022
3:27 AM

Winds will slowly subside later this evening and into the morning hours on Friday

	Thu											Fri							Maximum							
	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm		12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am
Aberdeen	53	53	54	55	55	55	56	56	56	56	56	53	46	41	40	39	38	37	37	36	35	33	32	31	30	56
Britton	47	48	49	52	54	55	55	54	53	52	53	49	43	39	38	37	37	37	36	36	33	32	32	31	31	55
Eagle Butte	49	51	55	58	59	59	56	55	55	54	52	48	45	43	41	39	37	36	35	35	32	30	29	28	26	59
Eureka	51	53	54	55	55	56	58	59	59	59	56	52	45	41	39	37	36	35	35	33	32	30	29	28	28	59
Gettysburg	53	54	55	56	58	59	60	60	59	58	56	53	47	45	43	41	40	38	37	36	33	32	32	31	31	60
Kennebec	48	49	52	53	54	55	55	56	56	56	55	52	47	43	40	38	37	36	35	35	32	31	30	29	29	56
McIntosh	49	51	52	52	52	53	54	55	55	55	54	52	48	46	41	38	37	36	35	33	31	29	28	25	24	55
Milbank	47	46	47	46	45	46	48	48	44	43	48	47	40	37	36	36	36	33	32	30	29	29	29	28	29	48
Miller	53	53	54	54	55	54	54	54	55	55	55	52	46	43	39	37	35	32	31	30	29	29	29	28	28	55
Mobridge	46	49	49	51	52	54	55	55	54	53	53	49	44	40	38	36	35	32	32	31	29	26	24	23	23	55
Murdo	49	53	55	58	60	60	60	59	59	58	56	52	47	44	43	40	39	37	35	33	32	31	31	30	29	60
Pierre	49	48	52	53	54	55	55	54	54	54	53	49	45	43	40	38	36	33	31	30	29	28	28	25	24	55
Redfield	53	54	54	54	55	55	56	56	56	56	56	53	47	43	40	38	36	35	33	33	32	31	31	30	29	56
Sisseton																										M
Watertown	51	49	51	51	51	52	52	52	51	51	53	51	43	39	37	36	36	35	33	33	32	32	32	31	31	53
Wheaton	44	43	43	45	47	48	48	48	46	45	47	44	39	37	36	33	32	31	31	31	30	29	29	28	28	48

*Table values in mph



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

High winds with gusts of 50 to 60 mph will continue today. The winds will slowly subside later this evening and into the morning hours on Friday.

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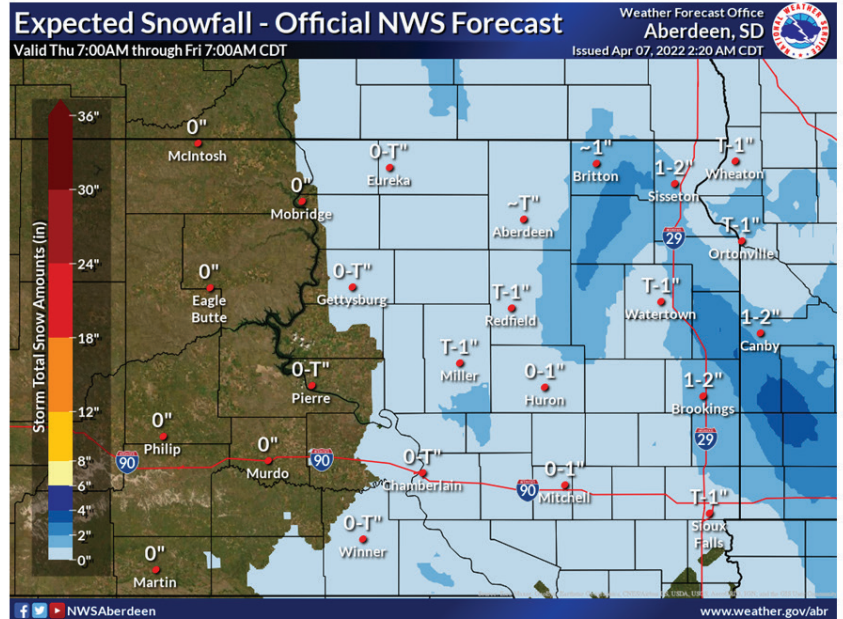


Light Snow/Blowing Snow Today

April 7, 2022
3:27 AM

Overview

- Accumulating snow Today
- The combo of strong winds and falling snow will promote occasional low to very low visibility, particularly over the Glacial Lakes region of northeast South Dakota
- Snow will taper off northwest to southeast this afternoon.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Accumulating snowfall today, especially in the Glacial Lakes region of northeast South Dakota. The combination of falling snow and high winds will promote occasional low to very low visibility.

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Today in Weather History

April 7, 2001: Ten inches to two feet of snow fell in central South Dakota in a five-day period, beginning April 8th. Many roads became impassable. Several businesses, government offices, and schools closed on the 11th. Twenty-four inches fell at Ree Heights and Gettysburg, 20.0 inches at Faulkton, 18.0 inches at Kennebec, 16.0 inches at Pierre, and 10.0 inches at Doland.

1857 - A late season freeze brought snow to every state in the Union. Even as far south as Houston TX the mercury plunged to 21 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1926: Lightning started a disastrous oil fire at San Luis Obispo, California, which lasted for five days, spread over 900 acres, and burned over six million barrels of oil. Flames reached 1000 feet, and the temperature of the fire was estimated at 2,500 degrees. The fire spawned thousands of whirlwinds with hundreds the size of small tornadoes. One vortex traveled one mile to the east-northeast of the blaze, destroying a small farmhouse and killing two people. Damage totaled \$15 million.

1929 - Record heat prevailed across New England. Hartford CT reported an afternoon high of 90 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1935 - Amarillo, TX, reported dust obscuring visibility for twenty hours. Blowing dust was reported twenty-seven of thirty days in the month. On several days the visibility was reduced to near zero by the dust. (The Weather Channel)

1948: Six tornadoes ripped through Northern Illinois and Indiana; mainly across the southern and eastern suburbs of Chicago. The hardest hit was from a tornado that moved east from near Manteno, IL to near Hebron, Indiana. This storm left four people dead; three in Grant Park, IL and one near Hebron, IN with 67 injuries and over a million dollars damage. Other strong tornadoes in the area moved from near Coal City, IL to Braidwood, IL and from Calumet City, IL into Indiana. Further south, two strong tornadoes occurred across the northern parts of Champaign and Vermilion Counties in Illinois.

1980: Severe thunderstorms spawned tornadoes that ripped through central Arkansas. The severe thunderstorms also produce high winds and baseball size hail. Five counties were declared disaster areas by President Carter. A tornado causing F3 damage also affected St. Louis and St. Charles counties in Missouri producing \$2.5 million in damage.

1987 - International Falls, MN, with record warm afternoon high of 71 degrees, was warmer than Miami FL, where the high was a record cool 66 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - High winds in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region gusted to 172 mph atop Grandfather Mountain NC. Twenty-nine cities in the southwest and north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Yankton SD with a reading of 91 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-seven cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 92 degrees in Downtown San Francisco and 104 degrees at Phoenix AZ established records for April. Highs of 78 degrees at Ely NV and 93 degrees at San Jose CA equalled April records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Low pressure brought strong winds to the Alaska peninsula and the Aleutian Islands. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Port Heiden two days in a row. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across central Alaska. Yakutat reported a record high of 54 degrees. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed over central sections of the Lower Forty-eight states. A dozen cities from Kansas to Indiana and Alabama reported record low temperatures for the date. Evansville IN equalled their record for April with a morning low of 23 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: The record heat that affected the region on April 6-7 included 93 degrees at the Washington-Dulles Airport on April 6, the earliest 90-degree reading on record. On April 7, Newark, New Jersey, shattered its daily record by seven degrees when the maximum temperature rose to 92 degrees. The Northeast ended up with its second warmest April in 116 years.

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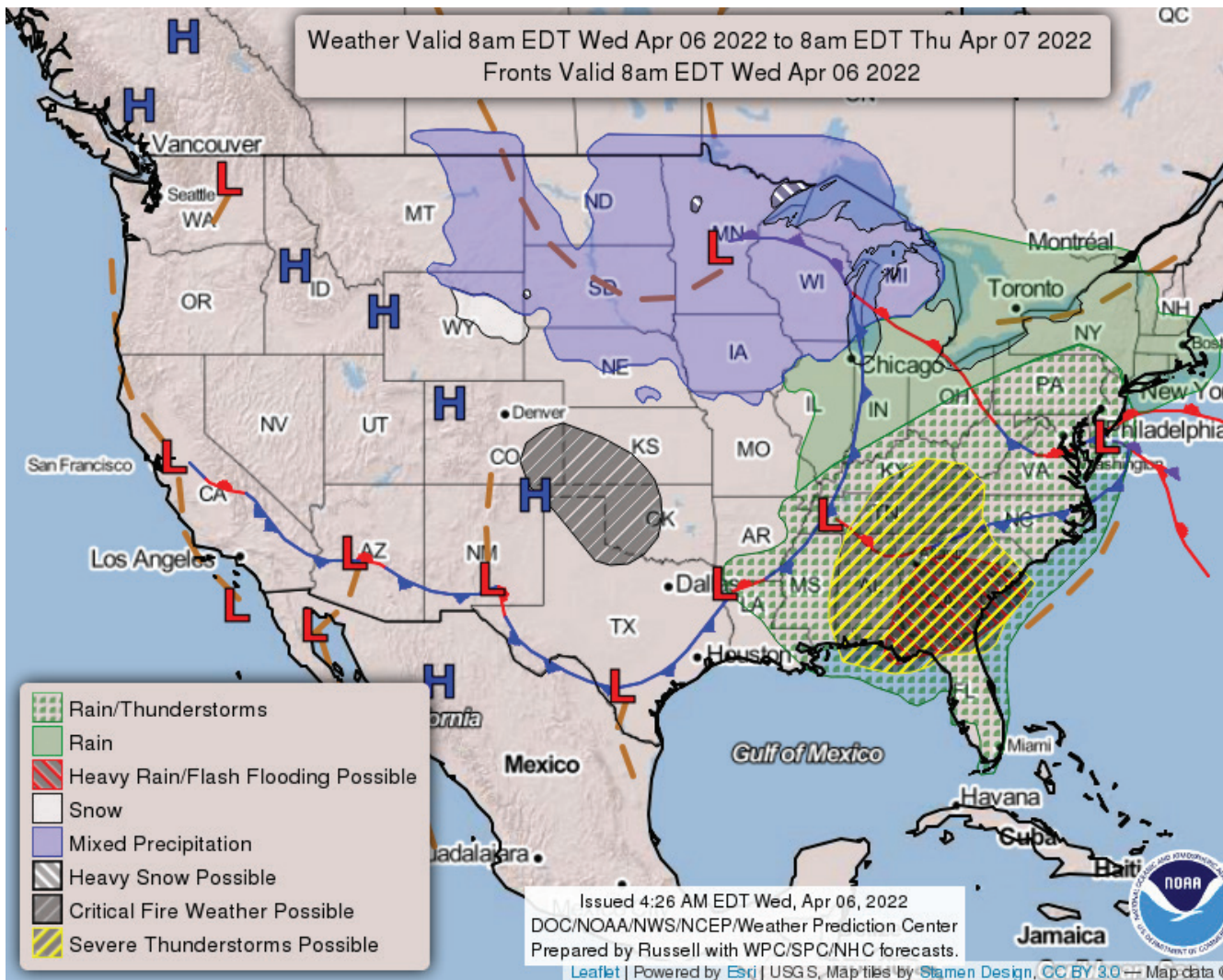
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 47 °F at 3:55 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 7:23 AM
Wind: 47 mph at 3:04 PM
Precip: 0.06

Day length: 13 hours, 10 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1988
Record Low: 2 in 2018
Average High: 54°F
Average Low: 28°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.31
Precip to date in April.: 0.30
Average Precip to date: 2.37
Precip Year to Date: 2.10
Sunset Tonight: 8:09:37 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:57:26 AM





A STRONG HEART

After walking for what seemed to be miles, he stopped at the corner of an apple orchard to admire the beautiful apples. The owner of the orchard noticed him and asked, "Son, are you trying to steal my apples?" "No, sir," he replied, "I'm trying not to. But my trying not to is losing to my wanting to."

It was that way with David. Deep in his heart, he wanted to do what was right. But one day he realized that his friendship with evil men was a strong force that was often more powerful than his desire to do the right things.

As his walk with the Lord grew stronger, he began to realize that there was a power beyond human power, And, if he wanted to, he could choose victory over defeat by depending on that power. He was able to move from being overcome by their power to overcoming temptation and sin by calling upon God's power.

So, he went to God in prayer and asked, "Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in evil deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies."

One of the most powerful thoughts that the devil places in our minds is that we are human, and that God realizes we may be overcome by temptation to sin. It's so easy to rationalize sin's power and our weakness to be tempted to sin.

Paul had an answer for this excuse. "There is no temptation that is more powerful than God's power. And He'll provide a way of escape if you want it," he added.

Prayer: Lord, help us to confront our excuse of being human as a reason to sin. Remind us that we can run to You for safety. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies. Psalm 141:4

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

04-11-15-20-33

(four, eleven, fifteen, twenty, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

22-27-38-42-43, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 3

(twenty-two, twenty-seven, thirty-eight, forty-two, forty-three; Star Ball: four; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$10.31 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$94 million

Powerball

06-42-45-47-64, Powerball: 18, Power Play: 3

(six, forty-two, forty-five, forty-seven, sixty-four; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$246 million

House impeachment committee nixed chance for live report

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A legislative committee looking into the impeachment of South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg over a fatal crash turned down the opportunity to hear a detailed account of events, state troopers said Wednesday.

“We weren’t allowed to give the presentation or the overview of what our investigation entailed,” Highway Patrol Sgt. Kevin Kinney told a group of about 30 lawmakers after walking them through the probe. Troopers were only allowed to answer questions from the committee, Kinney added.

The House committee concluded its monthslong inquiry by voting 6-2 on party lines to recommend that Ravnsborg, a Republican, face no impeachment charges for the 2020 crash that killed Joseph Boever. The issue will go before the full House on Tuesday, where at least one lawmaker plans to object to the committee’s findings.

Republican Rep. Tim Goodwin, who attended Wednesday’s hearing, said the committee’s decision to turn down a live presentation is “beyond the pale” and he wants the troopers to appear again before the full house.

“I think it’s an absolute crime the select committee refused to see this briefing,” said Goodwin, of Rapid City.

Ravnsborg, who has a history of driving violations and warnings, was driving home to Pierre from a political fundraiser on Sept. 12, 2020, when he struck Boever, who was walking on the side of a highway. Ravnsborg last year pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors and was required to pay fines.

Ravnsborg accused of delaying lawsuit on election measure

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two South Dakota men seeking to remove a proposed constitutional amendment from the primary ballot say the state is intentionally delaying the case so it can be decided in a sparsely held election, according to a lawsuit filed Wednesday.

David Owen and Jim Holbeck said the state is illegally refusing to accept service on their amendment complaint, a procedural move that allows the suit to move forward. They blame Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg, who is representing defendant Steve Barnett, the secretary of state who also serves as South

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Dakota's chief election officer.

The lawyer for Owen and Holbeck, Brendan Johnson, said Ravensborg has yet to accept service, which they provided by certified mail as allowed by law. Members of Ravensborg's office said they would only accept personal service — not by certified mail — and planned to outline their position further in a court filing, the Argus Leader reported.

Owen and Holbeck say the measure in question, Amendment C, violates a constitutional requirement that ballot issues only deal with a single subject. The amendment would require any ballot measure that raises taxes or spends \$10 million or more to be approved by 60% of the electorate. So it's a vote on both taxation and spending, the two men argue.

In addition to the constitutional question, Johnson said placing the measure on the primary rather than general election undermines the democratic process.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 4, 2022.

Editorial: United Way Sees A Hopeful Rebound

Yankton's United Way has something to celebrate, thanks to the people of Yankton itself.

The agency wrapped up its annual fundraising campaign last week after collecting more than \$680,000, which surpassed their campaign goal of \$650,000 by better than 4.5%.

But there was more to the accomplishment than surpassing a fundraising goal (which, make no mistake, is a big accomplishment in itself).

The final total stands as good news for United Way after it saw annual drops in its fundraising during the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lauren Hanson, Executive Director of the United Way and Volunteer Services of Greater Yankton, told the Press & Dakotan that, prior to the pandemic, the agency could expect to raise about \$725,000 a year, but when COVID moved in, donations fell off as overall uncertainty soared.

This year's campaign represented a welcome step toward normal, with the agency collecting 8% more than at this point last year.

And that's very good news not only for the United Way but for Yankton.

The money raised by this campaign is devoted to the United Way's Community Impact Fund, which is money available to local nonprofit human-services agencies through the Community Impact Grant Program. This program helps support more than 70 human service programs conducted and overseen by 30 local nonprofit agencies.

In other words, this money helps a broad spectrum of people through such organizations as The Center, Boys & Girls Club, River City Domestic Violence Center, River City Family Connections, Southeast CASA, Pathways Shelter for the Homeless, Yankton Special Olympics, the Yankton Contact Center and many more. It reaches out to all ages and to all needs. In a way, the United Way services the very spirit and soul of this community.

The additional funds will allow the United Way to spread its help a little further, and that's always a plus.

That's what the United Way does, and that's what the people who have contributed to this program have supported with their generosity.

Of course, it is hoped that the United Way can soon get back to its pre-pandemic levels of fundraising. This year was an excellent move in that direction, and it offers promise for the future.

Congratulations to the United Way for surpassing its goal, and congratulations to Yankton for helping to make that progress happen.

END

South Dakota lawmaker gave AG legal advice after fatal crash

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A lawmaker who will cast a vote next week on whether to impeach South Dakota

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Attorney General Jason Ravensborg says he gave him legal advice following Ravensborg's involvement in a fatal car crash.

Rep. Scott Odenbach, who at the time was running for the House seat he eventually won, says Ravensborg reached out to him for input on a public statement that was released two days after the attorney general struck and killed Joe Boever, a pedestrian who was walking along a rural highway in September 2020.

Odenbach, a Republican and Spearfish attorney, told North Dakota special agents that he gave Ravensborg advice on the wording of the statement, according to audio released recently with the file on the House impeachment committee's findings.

"On this thing he did call and I did give him some counsel on kind of the best way forward on that in a capacity that I would characterize as his attorney," Odenbach said to a special agent.

"OK," said North Dakota Special Agent Joe Arenz. "So, it was somewhat of a legal advice, there?"

"Yes, for sure, it was," Odenbach said.

Odenbach says he edited the statement and sent it back to Ravensborg, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

Odenbach says his friendship with Ravensborg and his informal legal advice do not preclude him from doing his job as a state representative, which includes considering impeachment.

Republican Speaker of the House Spencer Gosch says it's up to Odenbach to decide whether to abstain.

"If he gave any sort of legal counsel and there's some attorney-client privilege, that's something he'll have to deal with in terms of his client. I don't know much about it, nor did I look into it because it was irrelevant to the case," Gosch said.

The Legislature's code of conduct says lawmakers must avoid any conflict of interest which would interfere with their duties and responsibilities as legislators, or with the exercise of their best judgment in support of the state.

The Republican-controlled impeachment committee voted on party lines to issue a report that found his actions did not merit impeachment.

Lawmakers in the full House meet on Tuesday to consider whether to impeach Ravensborg.

The attorney general has cast Boever's death as a tragic accident and pleaded no contest last year to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash.

Ravensborg initially reported the crash as a collision with an animal and has said he did not realize he struck a man until he returned to the scene the next day and discovered his body. Criminal investigators doubted that account, but prosecutors said they were unable to prove that Ravensborg realized he killed a man the night of the crash.

First pope, now US churches face boarding-school reckoning

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

As Native Americans cautiously welcome Pope Francis' historic apology for abuses at Catholic-run boarding schools for Indigenous children in Canada, U.S. churches are bracing for an unprecedented reckoning with their own legacies of operating such schools.

Church schools are likely to feature prominently in a report from the U.S. Department of the Interior, led by the first-ever Native American cabinet secretary, Deb Haaland, due to be released later this month. The report, prompted by last year's discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada, will focus on the loss of life and the enduring traumas the U.S. system inflicted on Indigenous children from the 19th to mid-20th centuries.

From Episcopalians to Quakers to Catholic dioceses in Oklahoma, faith groups have either started or intensified efforts in the past year to research and atone for their prior roles in the boarding school system, which Native children were forced to attend — cutting them off from their families, tribes and traditions.

While the pontiff's April 1 apology was addressed to Indigenous groups from Canada, people were listening south of the border.

"An apology is the best way to start any conversation," said Roy Callison, a Catholic deacon and Cherokee

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Nation member helping coordinate the Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project, which includes listening sessions for those affected by the boarding school legacy. "That's the first step to trying to get healing."

In his meeting with Canada's Indigenous delegations, Francis asked forgiveness "for the role that a number of Catholics ... had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values."

Francis "did something really important, which is name the importance of being indignant at this history," said Maka Black Elk, executive director of truth and healing for Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

That history "is shameful, and it is not something we should accept," said Black Elk, who is Oglala Lakota.

Red Cloud, affiliated with the Catholic Jesuit order, was for generations a boarding school for Lakota children. It's now a day school incorporating Lakota leadership, language and traditions. Black Elk is guiding a reckoning process that includes archival research and hearing the stories of former students.

Canada underwent a much-publicized Truth and Reconciliation process in recent years. The issue gained unprecedented attention last year after a researcher using ground-penetrating radar reported finding about 200 unmarked probable burial sites at a former school in British Columbia.

That discovery, followed by others across Canada, prompted Haaland to commission her department's report.

"This history in the United States has not been addressed in the same way it has been addressed in Canada," Black Elk said. The Interior report "will be an important first step about the work that needs to happen in this country."

Church leaders are getting ready. The report "will likely bring to light some very troubling information," said a letter circulated last fall to members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from two colleagues who chaired committees related to the issue. The letter urged bishops to build relationships with local Indigenous communities and engage "in a real and honest dialogue about reactions to the report and what steps are needed to go forward together."

Conditions varied at boarding schools in the United States, with some described as unsafe, unsanitary and scenes of physical or sexual abuse. Other former students recall their school years as positive times of learning, friendship and extracurricular activities.

Indigenous groups note that even the better schools were part of a project to assimilate children into a predominately white, Christian society and break down their tribal identities, customs and languages — what many Indigenous groups call a cultural genocide.

"The very process of boarding schools is violent and damaging," said Bryan Rindfleisch, an expert in Native American history at Marquette University who is helping Catholics in Oklahoma research their school legacy.

There were at least 367 boarding schools across the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, a Minneapolis-based advocacy group.

Most were government-run; many others were run by Catholic and Protestant churches.

The national healing coalition called Pope Francis' comments a historic first step, but urged the Vatican to repatriate Indigenous artifacts in its museum collections and called on religious organizations to open their school archives.

In listening sessions held through the Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project, many participants told positive stories of school experiences, Callison said, though the church is committed to documenting the traumatic ones too. "You're going to hear things you don't want to hear," he said.

The project will also include archival research and individual interviews with those affected. At least 11 Catholic boarding schools operated in Oklahoma.

"We need to get to the truth before we can deal with whatever hurt or celebrate whatever success" the schools achieved, Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley said.

Several church groups — including Quakers, Methodists and some Catholic religious orders — are back-

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ing pending legislation in Congress that would go beyond the Interior report. It would create a truth and healing commission, modeled on Canada's, to investigate the boarding school legacy.

The New England Yearly Meeting of Friends — a regional group of congregations — issued an apology last year for Quakers' historic sponsorship of such schools, acknowledging they were undertaken with "spiritual and cultural arrogance."

"We are deeply sorry for our part in the vast suffering caused by this system and the continuing effects," the New England group said.

It's important for Quakers to accept such responsibility, said Paula Palmer, a Quaker from Colorado whose research has identified about 30 Native American boarding and day schools that were run by Quakers.

"The yearly meetings voted to support, operate and finance" the schools, she said. "So it's really the yearly meetings who have the responsibility to respond. They were the ones who also participated in the whole project of forced assimilation of Indigenous children."

The Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States has hired an archival researcher to document its own boarding school history.

The order is "committed to examining and sharing the truth of our history, even where that is difficult," said the Rev. Ted Penton, secretary of the Jesuit conference's Office of Justice and Ecology.

The Episcopal Church's General Convention in July is expected to vote on a statement that would "acknowledge the intergenerational trauma caused by genocide, colonialism" and the operation of boarding schools and "other systems based on white supremacy."

The convention will also consider authorizing a "comprehensive and complete investigation" of the church's operation of such schools. The proposals came from a group appointed by denominational leaders.

Such measures are strong, but local dioceses also need to research their own histories and advocate for Indigenous peoples, said the Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett, Washington. Taber-Hamilton, whose heritage includes the Shackan First Nation of Canada, is an Episcopal Church representative to the worldwide Anglican Indigenous Network.

"It's not enough to say, 'I'm sorry, and here's some money,'" she said. "We first have to do some very hard work of listening to the pain."

Twins' opener vs Mariners delayed to Friday due to weather

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Twins postponed their season opener against the Seattle Mariners by a day until Friday because of expected bad weather.

The forecast for Thursday at Target Field called for a mix of rain and snow.

Joe Ryan, a 25-year-old right-hander, is scheduled to be the first rookie to start for the Twins on opening day since Tom Hall in 1969. Acquired from Tampa Bay on July 22 in the Nelson Cruz trade, Ryan was a member of the U.S. team that won a silver medal at last summer's Olympics.

Robbie Ray is to start for the Mariners after agreeing to a \$115 million, five-year contract. The 30-year-old left-hander will be the 16th different pitcher to start on opening day for Seattle since the franchise started play in 1977. Marco Gonzales started the previous three after Félix Hernández started 10 in a row from 2009-18.

Friday had been a planned off day. The rescheduled opener is set for same 3:10 p.m. CDT start as Thursday.

Hoeven: North Dakotan jailed in Ukraine moved out of Kyiv

A North Dakota farmer jailed in Ukraine has been moved to a new facility away from the capital city of Kyiv, Sen. John Hoeven said.

Hoeven told KX News that Kurt Groszhans was moved to Lviv. Groszhans, of Ashley, has been jailed since November on charges that he plotted to assassinate Ukraine's then-agriculture minister, Roman Leschenko.

Groszhans' family has said the charges are false and aimed at silencing his claims of corruption in Ukraine.

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He is among a handful of Americans jailed in Ukraine or Russia whose paths home have been complicated by the war.

"He's still in Ukraine. But we have been able now to move him to a safer place. And, as we talked about earlier, our ultimate objective is to get him out of the country. So this is a really important step, moving him to Lviv, a safer location," Hoeven said.

Leschenko resigned as agriculture minister in March.

Groszhans, 50, decided in 2017 to move to Ukraine, where his ancestors are from. His family said he invested a large sum of money to get a farming operation up and running. After connecting with Leshchenko, then a law professor, Groszhans named him director of his company.

The pair's relationship soured and Groszhans alleged in a lawsuit and an internet post that Leshchenko embezzled money from him. Leshchenko declined to comment to the AP, but has denied the embezzlement claims in interviews with the Ukrainian media and has insisted that the men had agreed that Leshchenko's company would run the farming business.

Haunting Canada boarding school shot wins World Press Photo

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A haunting image of red dresses hung on crosses along a roadside, with a rainbow in the background, commemorating children who died at a residential school created to assimilate Indigenous children in Canada won the prestigious World Press Photo award Thursday.

The image was one of a series of the Kamloops Residential School shot by Canadian photographer Amber Bracken for The New York Times.

"It is a kind of image that sears itself into your memory. It inspires a kind of sensory reaction," Global jury chair Rena Effendi said in a statement. "I could almost hear the quietness in this photograph, a quiet moment of global reckoning for the history of colonization, not only in Canada but around the world."

It was not the first recognition for Bracken's work in the Amsterdam-based competition. She won first prize in the contest's Contemporary Issues category in 2017 for images of protesters at the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota.

Her latest win came less than a week after Pope Francis made a historic apology to Indigenous peoples for the "deplorable" abuses they suffered in Canada's Catholic-run residential schools and begged for forgiveness.

Last May, the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Nation announced the discovery of 215 gravesites near Kamloops, British Columbia. 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.

"So we started to have, I suppose, a personification of some of the children that went to these schools that didn't come home," Bracken said in comments released by contest organizers. "There's also these little crosses by the highway. And I knew right away that I wanted to photograph the line of these crosses with these little children's clothes hanging on them to commemorate and to honor those kids and to make them visible in a way that they hadn't been for a long time."

Indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world featured in two other of the annual competition's top prizes. The winners were chosen out of 64,823 photographs and open format entries by 4,066 photographers from 130 countries.

"Together the global winners pay tribute to the past, while inhabiting the present and looking towards the future," Effendi said.

Australian photographer Matthew Abbott won the Photo Story of the Year prize for a series of images for National Geographic/Panos Pictures that document how the Nwarddeken people of West Arnhem Land in northern Australia fight fire with fire by deliberately burning off undergrowth to remove fuel that could spark far larger wildfires.

The Long-Term Project award went to Lalo de Almeida of Brazil for a series of photos for Folha de São Paulo/Panos Pictures called "Amazonian Dystopia" that charts the effects of the exploitation of the Amazon

region, particularly on Indigenous communities forced to deal with environmental degradation.

In regional awards announced previously, Bram Janssen of The Associated Press won the Stories category in Asia with a series of photos from a Kabul cinema and AP photographer Dar Yasin earned an honorable mention for photos from Kashmir titled "Endless War."

Yasin, together with Mukhtar Khan and Channi Anand, won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in feature photography for their coverage of the war in Kashmir.

Turkey suspends trial of Saudi suspects in Khashoggi killing

By AYSE WIETING and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — A Turkish court ruled Thursday to suspend the trial in absentia of 26 Saudis accused in the gruesome killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and for the case to be transferred to Saudi Arabia.

Khashoggi, a United States resident who wrote critically about Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was killed on Oct. 2, 2018, at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. He had gone into the consulate for an appointment to collect documents required for him to marry his Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz. He never emerged from the building.

Turkish officials alleged that Khashoggi was killed and then dismembered with a bone saw inside the consulate by a team of Saudi agents sent to Istanbul. The group included a forensic doctor, intelligence and security officers and individuals who worked for the crown prince's office. His remains have not been found.

The Istanbul court's decision comes despite warnings from human rights groups that turning the case over to the kingdom would lead to a cover up of the killing, which has cast suspicion on the crown prince.

It also comes as Turkey, which is in the throes of a deep economic downturn, has been trying to repair its troubled relationship with Saudi Arabia and an array of other countries in its region. Some media reports have claimed that Riyadh has made improved relations conditional on Turkey dropping the case, which had inflamed tensions between two countries.

The move would pave the way to a resolution of disputes between the two regional heavyweights since the 2011 Arab Spring, including Turkey's support for Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, which Riyadh considers a terrorist group. Turkey also sided with Qatar in a diplomatic dispute that saw Doha boycotted by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Last week, the prosecutor in the case recommended that it be transferred to the kingdom, arguing that the trial in Turkey would remain inconclusive. Turkey's justice minister supported the recommendation, adding that the trial in Turkey would resume if the Turkish court is not satisfied with the outcome of proceedings in the kingdom. It was not clear, however, if Saudi Arabia, which has already put some of the defendants on trial behind closed doors, would open a new trial.

The court ruled to halt the trial in line with the Justice Ministry's "positive opinion," the private DHA news agency reported.

Human rights advocates had urged Turkey not to transfer the case to Saudi Arabia, arguing that justice for Khashoggi would not be delivered by Saudi courts.

"It's a scandalous decision," said Emma Sinclair-Webb, the Turkey director for the New York-based Human Rights Watch, asserting that the court had "rubber stamped" a political decision that would allow the government to repair its ties with Saudi Arabia.

"In the interest of realpolitik, Turkey is ready to sacrifice justice for an egregious crime on its own soil," she told The Associated Press. "(The decision) opens the way for other countries to commit assassinations on Turkish territory and get away with it."

Cengiz, Khashoggi's fiancée, said she would continue to seek justice.

"We will continue this (judicial) process with all the power given to me, as a Turkish citizen," she told reporters outside the courthouse.

"The two countries may be making an agreement, the two countries may be opening a new chapter ...

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but the crime is still the same crime," she said. "The people who committed the crime haven't changed. Governments and states must have a principled stance."

At the time of the crime, Turkey apparently had the Saudi Consulate bugged and shared audio of the killing with the CIA, among others.

The slaying sparked international outrage and condemnation. Western intelligence agencies, as well as the U.S. Congress, have said that an operation of such magnitude could not have happened without knowledge of the prince.

Turkey, which had vowed to shed light on the brutal killing, began prosecuting the defendants in absentia in 2020 after Saudi Arabia rejected requests for their extradition. The defendants included two former aides of the prince.

Some of the men were put on trial in Riyadh behind closed doors. A Saudi court issued a final verdict in 2020 that sentenced five mid-level officials and operatives to 20-year jail terms. The court had originally ordered the death penalty, but reduced the punishment after Khashoggi's son Salah, who lives in Saudi Arabia, announced that he forgave the defendants. Three others were sentenced to lesser jail terms.

EXPLAINER: Can war massacres sway China's support for Russia

BEIJING (AP) — China has described reports and images of civilian killings in Ukraine as disturbing, and urged that they be further investigated, even while declining to blame Russia. That's drawn questions about the resiliency of Beijing's support for Moscow, but speculation that it is weakening appears to be misplaced.

Here's a deeper look at where China stands at this stage of the conflict:

IS CHINA SERIOUS ABOUT PROBING ATROCITIES?

In his statement Wednesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian referred to reports of atrocities in the town of Bucha, saying, "The truth and the cause of the incident must be verified." He said that all parties should exercise restraint and avoid "unfounded accusations before a conclusion of the investigation."

Crucially, Zhao did not mention Russian forces and gave no indication of how evidence should be gathered or by whom.

China has a lengthy history of providing political cover for its friends after incidents such as the sinking of a South Korean navy ship in 2010. China called that "unfortunate," but refused to accept evidence North Korea was responsible.

Beijing also routinely turns accusations of war crimes back on the accusers, mainly the U.S., citing the Iraq invasion and incidents such as NATO's 1999 bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. China has never accepted NATO's claim that the attack was unintended.

WHERE DOES CHINA STAND ON RUSSIA'S INVASION?

Beijing early on committed itself to the position that Russia was provoked into attacking its neighbor by the eastward expansion of NATO under U.S. direction, even though Russian President Vladimir Putin has not listed that as his primary motive for invading.

China has abstained in votes at the United Nations condemning Russia's actions, and, in keeping with standard policy, has strongly opposed economic sanctions against Russia.

At the same time, China shows no signs of undermining those sanctions or rushing in to fill the void left by the departure of Western companies from Russia.

Beijing has of late focused its messages on calls for talks leading to a cease-fire and avoiding a major humanitarian catastrophe. It has also provided Ukraine with humanitarian assistance and kept a line open to Ukrainian officials. Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on Monday that China does not "have the mentality of watching the fire from a safe distance, still less to do anything that adds fuel to the fire."

WHAT'S BEHIND CHINA'S SUPPORT FOR RUSSIA?

China and Russia have grown increasingly close under Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, aligning their foreign policies in opposition to the Western liberal world order.

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China generally follows Russia's lead in voting at the U.N. and has helped stymie efforts to censure it over its military intervention in Syria. Together, the countries account for two of the five permanent veto-wielding seats on the U.N. Security Council, forming a bloc that can effectively frustrate Washington's initiatives.

The two are also closely linked economically, with China becoming Russia's largest trading partner and an important export market for its natural gas and oil.

Just weeks before the war began, Xi and Putin met in Beijing and issued a joint statement describing their relations as having "no limits." To criticize Putin would therefore implicitly criticize Xi, something China does not tolerate.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

By claiming to be an impartial observer, China has won Moscow's gratitude while largely shielding itself from obligations to take action against Russia. Beijing also points to the refusal of other countries including India and Brazil to condemn Moscow as evidence it doesn't stand alone.

Beijing has no desire to see the end of Putin's regime, but could benefit from a weakened Russia becoming even more of a junior partner in the relationship. That could give Beijing a stronger hand in obtaining Russian energy resources and cutting edge military technology.

At present, the risks are minimal. Beijing is long accustomed to being accused of enabling or perpetrating human rights abuses and has grown adept at ignoring or parrying them using its economic and political clout.

While its biggest city Shanghai is facing one of the country's largest outbreak since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with a key Communist Party congress coming up later in the year, China is on high alert for anything that might threaten domestic stability.

HOW IS CHINA KEEPING THE PUBLIC ON ITS SIDE?

Beijing's entirely Communist Party-controlled media have reported on the civilian killings in Bucha, but their coverage has a strong pro-Russian slant. The media have also amplified Russian disinformation, especially debunked claims that the U.S. and Ukraine have been collaborating on the production of biological weapons.

Beijing has sent instructions to teachers on how to "correctly" explain the conflict to students, with the U.S. cast as the "main culprit."

It's also shored up the official narrative with the circulation of a documentary film predating the Feb. 24 invasion that decries the fall of Russia's former communist system. "Historical Nihilism and the Soviet Collapse" heaps praise on Putin and Joseph Stalin, while accusing reformers such as Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev of aiding the U.S. and its allies in weakening the system from within.

Ukraine seeks arms from NATO as fight looms on eastern front

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine told residents of its industrial heartland to leave while they still can and urged Western nations to send "weapons, weapons, weapons" Thursday after Russian forces withdrew from the shattered outskirts of Kyiv to regroup for an offensive in the country's east.

Russia's six-week-old invasion failed to take Ukraine's capital quickly and achieve what Western countries say was President Vladimir Putin's initial aim to oust the Ukrainian government. Russia's focus is now on the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking region in eastern Ukraine.

In Brussels, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged NATO to provide more weapons for his war-torn country to help prevent further atrocities like those reported in Kyiv's northern suburbs. Ukrainian authorities are working to identify hundreds of bodies they say were found in Bucha and other towns after Russian troops withdrew and to document what they say were war crimes.

"My agenda is very simple... it's weapons, weapons and weapons," Kuleba said as he arrived at NATO headquarters for talks with the military organization's foreign ministers about Ukraine's fight to defend itself.

"The more weapons we get and the sooner they arrive in Ukraine, the more human lives will be saved,"

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he said.

Some NATO nations worry they may be Russia's next target, but the alliance is striving to avoid actions that might pull any of its 30 members directly into the war. Still, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged member nations to send Ukraine more weapons, and not just defensive arms.

"Ukraine is fighting a defensive war, so this distinction between offensive and defensive weapons doesn't actually have any real meaning," he said.

Western countries have provided Ukraine with portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, but they have been reluctant to supply aircraft or tanks plus any equipment that Ukrainian troops would have to be trained to use.

Asked what more his country was seeking, Kuleba listed planes, land-based missiles, armored vehicles and air defense systems.

A U.S. defense official speaking on condition of anonymity said Russia had pulled all of its estimated 24,000 or more troops from the Kyiv and Chernihiv areas in the north, sending them into Belarus or Russia to resupply, reorganize and likely prepare to return to fight in the east.

Growing numbers of Putin's troops, along with mercenaries, have been reported moving into the Donbas, where Russia-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces for eight years and control two areas.

Ahead of its Feb. 24 invasion, Moscow recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk areas as independent states. Military analysts have said Putin also could be seeking to expand into government-controlled parts of the Donbas.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said at least five civilians were killed and another eight were wounded by Russian shelling on Wednesday. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk urged civilians to evacuate to safer regions before it was too late.

"Later, people will come under fire, and we won't be able to do anything to help them," Vereshchuk said.

Another Western official, also speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence estimates, said it may take Russia's battle-damaged forces as much as a month to regroup for a major push on eastern Ukraine.

Oleksandr Shputun, spokesman for the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, reported Thursday that near Donbas, Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, remained blockaded. He said Russian forces also were carrying out "brutal measures" in the southern Kherson region, which they hold.

In his nightly address to the nation late Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine, too, was preparing for battle.

"We will fight and we will not retreat," he said. "We will seek all possible options to defend ourselves until Russia begins to seriously seek peace. This is our land. This is our future. And we won't give them up."

In areas north of the capital, Ukrainian officials gathered evidence of Russian atrocities amid signs Moscow's troops killed people indiscriminately before retreating.

Ukrainian authorities said the bodies of at least 410 civilians were found in towns around Kyiv, victims of what Zelenskyy has portrayed as a Russian campaign of murder, rape, dismemberment and torture. Some victims had apparently been shot at close range. Some were found with their hands bound.

Western officials warned that similar atrocities were likely to have taken place in other areas occupied by Russian troops. Zelenskyy accused Russian forces of trying to cover up war crimes in areas still under their control, "afraid that the global anger over what was seen in Bucha would be repeated."

"We have information that the Russian troops have changed tactics and are trying to remove the dead people, the dead Ukrainians, from the streets and cellars of territory they occupied," he said in a nighttime video address. "This is only an attempt to hide the evidence and nothing more."

Switching from speaking Ukrainian to Russian, Zelenskyy urged ordinary Russians "to somehow confront the Russian repressive machine" instead of being "equated with the Nazis for the rest of your life."

He called on Russians to demand an end to the war, "if you have even a little shame about what the Russian military is doing in Ukraine."

In reaction to the alleged atrocities outside Kyiv, the U.S. announced sanctions against Putin's two adult daughters and said it is toughening penalties against Russian banks. Britain banned investment in Russia

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and pledged to end its dependence on Russian coal and oil by the end of the year.

The U.S. Senate planned to take up legislation Thursday to end normal trade relations with Russia, paving the way for higher tariffs on some imports, and to codify President Joe Biden's executive action banning imports of Russian oil.

The European Union is also expected to take additional punitive measures, including an embargo on coal.

The Kremlin has insisted its troops have committed no war crimes and alleged the images out of Bucha were staged by the Ukrainians.

Bodies were still being collected in the city. On Wednesday, The Associated Press saw two in a house in a silent neighborhood. From time to time, the muffled boom of workers clearing the town of mines and other unexploded ordnance interrupted the silence.

Workers at a cemetery began to load more than 60 bodies into a grocery shipping truck for transport to a facility for further investigation.

Police said they found at least 20 bodies in the Makariv area west of Kyiv. In the village of Andriivka, residents said the Russians arrived in early March, taking locals' phones and detaining and then releasing some people. Others met unknown fates. Some described sheltering for weeks in cellars normally used for storing vegetables.

"First we were scared, now we are hysterical," said Valentyna Klymenko, 64. She said she, her husband and two neighbors weathered the siege by sleeping on stacks of potatoes covered with a mattress and blankets. "We didn't cry at first. Now we are crying."

In the southern port city of Mariupol, Mayor Vadym Boichenko said that of the more than 5,000 civilians killed during weeks of Russian bombardment and street fighting, 210 were children. Russian forces bombed hospitals, including one where 50 people burned to death, he said.

Boichenko said more than 90% of the city's infrastructure was destroyed. The attacks on the strategic city on the Sea of Azov have cut off food, water, fuel and medicine and pulverized homes and businesses.

British defense officials said 160,000 people remained trapped in the city, which had a prewar population of 430,000. A humanitarian relief convoy accompanied by the Red Cross has tried to get into the city for days, without success.

Capturing Mariupol would allow Russia to secure a continuous land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

For Tiger, a walk unlike any other awaits at the Masters

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Tiger Woods' 91st competitive round at the Masters will start like all the rest.

At around 10:34 a.m. on Thursday, the five-time champion will stick his tee into the ground at Tea Olive, the name of the first hole at Augusta National, take a couple of practice swings and continue a familiar walk that began over a quarter-century ago.

It's what happens when Woods sticks his driver back into his bag that will determine whether his surgically rebuilt right leg — or the rest of the 46-year-old Hall of Famer for that matter — is ready for a test unlike any other he's faced in his career.

The five-mile or so walk between the Georgia pines at Augusta National is 11,000-plus steps of up and down and up again. It requires hitting shots from uneven lies. Of digging into the pine straw when required. Of trying to peak over bunkers that can run so deep — as it does on the par-3 fourth hole — you need to jump if you're going to see the flag.

No one other than Jack Nicklaus has navigated the sprawling course as well as Woods. No active player is as well-versed in the contours of every inch of perfectly manicured Bermuda grass.

That's why Woods wasn't complaining when he said on Tuesday "walking is the hard part." He's merely stating a fact. And he's hardly the only one who knows how physically draining competing in the Masters can be.

Two-time U.S. Open champion Curtis Strange used to leave the tournament with shin splints. And Strange

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didn't have to do it while working with a leg crammed with rods and plates metal detectors shudder when they see you coming around the corner.

"You know, 72 holes is a long road, and it's going to be a tough challenge and a challenge that I'm up for," Woods said.

At least in theory. He hasn't played 18 holes at Augusta National on consecutive days since shredding his leg in a car accident in February 2021 that led doctors to consider amputation. Now he's asking the same leg that anchored 15 major championships and a PGA Tour record-tying 82 victories to hold up for four rounds in the span of 81 or so hours.

That doesn't even include the warm-up or recovery, routines that require far more time than they did when he fist-pumped his way to his first green jacket 25 years ago.

It's asking a lot. Yes, it's just walking. Only it's no ordinary walk. And it's no ordinary week. For Woods or anyone else.

"I think most of the stress that we have is probably more mental than physical," said world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler, who at 25 was born less than a year before Woods captured his first Masters title.

The stress is no longer between Woods' ears, but underneath his feet. The elevation changes are nearly constant from your opening shot. Down the hill to the first fairway, then back up toward the green. Down a hill again at No. 2. Rolling terrain on No. 3. An elevated tee at No. 4. Uphill nearly all the way at No. 7. Ditto No. 8. A climb to the turn at No. 9.

The back nine is a jumble. The 10th fairway could double as a ski slope. Another trek down the 11th into Amen Corner. The 12th and 13th offer a bit of a respite. Mounds and a slanted fairway on the 14th, where a flat lie is basically a myth. A gentle downhill to the 15th green. The 16th provides a respite, before the 17th tee begins one last climb back to the clubhouse.

Woods admits his mobility is so limited he ditched Nike cleats for FootJoys because it provided more comfort. He's hoping the jolt of adrenaline fueled by the first capacity crowd to come to Augusta since his titanic victory in 2019 will help him get by.

Still, golf is golf. Throw in the crucible that is the Masters and Woods knows adversity is unavoidable. He stressed he wouldn't come back just to be a field filler. That's simply not his way. He's not going to ask his leg to simply help him get around, but to stand on the 18th green late Sunday afternoon and have Hideki Matsuyama drape a sixth green jacket over his shoulders.

It sounds impossible. It very well may be impossible.

"When I decide to hang it up when I feel like I can't win anymore, then that will be it," he said. "But I feel like I can still do it, and I feel like I still have the hands to do it, the body's moving good enough. I've been in worse situations and played and won tournaments."

Yes and no. He won the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines basically on one leg. Yet he was just 32 then. He's closer to 60 now than that brilliant Father's Day weekend in the sun back home in California.

The spirit remains willing. It has since the first time he ducked inside the ropes at Augusta as an amateur in 1995.

It's the rest of him, particularly the right ankle that will have to bear the weight of so much — including internal and external expectations that come when your name happens to be Tiger Woods — that will determine whether this long walk will be spoiled.

"I don't have to worry about the ball striking or the game of golf, it's actually just the hills out here," he said. "That's going to be the challenge, and it's going to be a challenge of a major marathon."

Despite risk of death, Thailand sends Myanmar refugees back

By VICTORIA MILKO and KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The young woman from Myanmar and her family now live amid the tall grasses of a riverbank on the Thai border, trapped in limbo between a country that does not want them and a country whose military could kill them.

Like thousands of others fleeing mounting violence after a military takeover in Myanmar last February,

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Hay left her village for neighboring Thailand in search of a safe haven that does not exist. Returning to Myanmar would place her and her family at risk of death. And yet that is precisely what Thai authorities — wary of jeopardizing their relationship with Myanmar's ruling military — tell them to do at least once a week, she says.

"When they told us to go back, we cried and explained why we can't go back home," says Hay, who lives in a flimsy tent on the Moei River, which divides the two countries. The Associated Press is withholding Hay's full name, along with the full names of other refugees in this story, to protect them from retaliation by authorities. "Sometimes we cross back to the Myanmar side of the river. But I have not returned to the village at all."

Though international refugee laws forbid the return of people to countries where their lives may be in danger, Thailand has nonetheless sent thousands of people who fled escalating violence by Myanmar's military back home, according to interviews with refugees, aid groups and Thai authorities themselves. That has forced Hay and other Myanmar refugees to ricochet between both sides of the river as the fighting in their home villages rages and briefly recedes.

"It is this game of ping-pong," says Sally Thompson, executive director of The Border Consortium, which has long been the main provider of food, shelter and other support to Myanmar refugees in Thailand. "You can't keep going back and forth across the border. You've got to be somewhere where it's stable.....And there is absolutely no stability in Myanmar at the moment."

Since its takeover last year, Myanmar's military has killed more than 1,700 people, arrested more than 13,000 and systematically tortured children, women and men.

Thailand, which is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, insists Myanmar's refugees return to their embattled homeland voluntarily. Thailand also insists it has complied with all international non-refoulement laws, which dictate that people must not be returned to a country where they would face torture, punishment or harm.

"As the situation on the Myanmar side of the border improved, the Thai authorities facilitated their voluntary return to the Myanmar side," says Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Tanee Sangrat. "Thailand remains committed and will continue to uphold its long-held humanitarian tradition, including the principle of non-refoulement, in assisting those in need."

Somchai Kitcharoenrungraj, governor of Thailand's Tak province, where thousands of people from Myanmar have sought refuge, said many crossed illegally when there was no fighting.

"We had to send them back as the laws said," Somchai says. "When they faced the threats and crossed here, we never refused to help them. We provided them all basic needs according to the international human rights principle."

"For example," he added, "last week we also found some crossing here illegally and we sent them back."

More than half a million people have been displaced inside Myanmar and 48,000 have fled to neighboring countries since the military's takeover, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNHCR says Thai government sources estimate around 17,000 Myanmar refugees have sought safety in Thailand since the takeover. But only around 2,000 are currently living on the Thai side of the border, according to the Thai-Myanmar Border Command Center.

"UNHCR continues to strongly advocate that refugees fleeing conflict, generalized violence and persecution in Myanmar should not be forcibly returned to a place where their lives and freedoms could be in danger," the agency said.

Most of those fleeing clashes between the military and ethnic minority armed groups along the border must wade across the rivers dividing the two countries, belongings and babies balanced atop their shoulders. Those who reach Thailand are not allowed to settle in the decades-old refugee camps that dot the region and house 90,000 people who left Myanmar years before the takeover.

Instead, they have been relegated to crowded cattle sheds or rickety tents made of tarpaulin and bamboo. The moment there is a pause in fighting, refugees and aid groups say, Thai authorities send them back, despite Myanmar's military taking over villages, burning homes and setting land mines.

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"I have seen some of them being forced to get in a car, get off at the river, and cross over to the other side," says Phoe Thingyan, secretary of Thai aid group the Overseas Irrawaddy Association.

In Myanmar's border regions, ethnic minority armed groups have been fighting the central government for decades in a bid for greater autonomy, with more clashes after the military takeover. Despite some pauses, witnesses along the Thai border say the fighting there is now the worst it's been in decades. At times, the gunfire, bombing and fighter jets have been audible from Thailand, and even houses on the Thai side of the river shake with the blasts.

Life along the river is grim and frightening.

"It is not far from the war zone," says Naw Htoo Htoo, of the ethnic Karen Human Rights Group. "The elderly and children are not comfortable in the makeshift tents....There are illnesses not only caused by the weather, but also by COVID-19."

In December, 48-year-old Myint fled the Karen small town of Lay Kay Kaw, near the Thai border, with her husband and three children. Officials in Thailand sent them back. With few options, Myint and her family joined around 600 others living near the river on the Myanmar side.

In February, heavy rains flooded their camp, and Myint fears the looming monsoon season will make their already miserable situation even worse.

"I think the refugee camps will be in a lot of trouble," she says. "We can do nothing but make our temporary tents a little stronger."

On the Thai side of the river, Hay's tent offers virtually no protection from the sweltering sun, mosquitoes and drenching rains.

The family yearns for their home and their corn fields near Lay Kay Kaw. On Dec. 16, Hay and her husband grabbed their 3-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son and ran amid a cacophony of gunfire. When they reached the river, the fighting was still so close they knew they could not safely stay on the Myanmar side. And so they trudged through the water to Thailand.

"We want to go back but we have no house," she says.

There are no toilets, and no way to make money. Food and other supplies are scarce, yet the Thai authorities have refused to allow international NGOs and the UNHCR access to the refugees.

"The Thai authorities have said that they have resources to respond, and the INGOs and the UN will not get access," says Thompson of The Border Consortium. "The Thai authorities are very much keeping this a low visibility, very basic response."

Most of the aid has come from local Thai community groups. Phoe Thingyan, of the Overseas Irrawaddy Association, says his group sends 1,000 boxes of rice each morning and evening to the refugees, but that he has had to ask the Thai military for permission to accept donations.

The Thai military doesn't even want to acknowledge the existence of Myanmar refugees in Thailand because that alone could upset Myanmar's military leaders, says Patrick Phongsathorn, human rights specialist with the Asia-based group Fortify Rights.

"The Thai military is intent on controlling the situation, controlling the narrative, because obviously they have political skin in the game, in what's happening in Myanmar," he says. "They are very close with the Myanmar junta authorities."

Somchai, the Thai governor, seemed to hint at this: "When the fighting stopped, they had to go back," he said of the refugees Thailand returned. "Otherwise, it could be a sensitive issue for the relationship between both countries."

The Thai military declined to comment.

Those who remain in Thailand end up in not just physical but legal limbo, vulnerable to exploitation. One Myanmar refugee in Thailand who spoke to the AP said "police cards" – unofficial documents that allow displaced people to avoid arrest or deportation -- are purchased monthly through middlemen for an average cost of 350 Thai baht (\$10). Cards are marked with a photo or symbol showing that the holders have paid the latest monthly bribe.

Without the cards, refugees risk further harassment or possible arrest by Thai authorities.

"They will take you to the police station and they will check your documents, test your urine for drug

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use," says the refugee, whose name is being withheld by the AP for security reasons. "Police intimidate the people, and the cards are the easiest way to avoid that."

Tanee, the Foreign Affairs spokesperson, said the government "categorically denied" the existence of any extortion or bribery.

Though 23-year-old Win and his family initially pitched their tent on the Thai side of the river, Thai authorities soon sent them back. The chemistry student now regularly crosses the river through chest-deep water to retrieve food, clothes and other donated items from the Thai side. Then he turns around and wades back to his campsite in Myanmar, where he lives alongside around 300 other refugees, including children and the elderly.

They are surviving, but only just. What he wants more than anything, he says, is the one thing he cannot have.

"I just want to go home," he says. "I do not want anything else."

Ukrainian refugees find route to US goes through Mexico

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Hundreds of Ukrainian refugees arriving daily have a message for family and friends in Europe: the fastest route to settle in the United States is booking a flight to Mexico.

A loose volunteer coalition, largely from Slavic churches in the western United States, is guiding hundreds of refugees daily from the airport in the Mexican border city of Tijuana to hotels, churches and shelters, where they wait two to four days for U.S. officials to admit them on humanitarian parole. In less than two weeks, volunteers worked with U.S. and Mexican officials to build a remarkably efficient and expanding network to provide food, security, transportation, and shelter.

The volunteers, who wear blue and yellow badges to represent the Ukrainian flag but have no group name or leader, started a waiting list on notepads and later switched to a mobile app normally used to track church attendance. Ukrainians are told to report to a U.S. border crossing as their numbers approach, a system that organizers liken to waiting for a restaurant table.

"We feel so lucky, so blessed," said Tatiana Bondarenko, who traveled through Moldova, Romania, Austria and Mexico before arriving Tuesday in San Diego with her husband and children, ages 8, 12, and 15. Her final destination was Sacramento, California, to live with her mother, who she hadn't seen in 15 years.

Another Ukrainian family posed nearby for photos under a U.S. Customs and Border Protection sign at San Diego's San Ysidro port of entry, the busiest crossing between the U.S. and Mexico. Volunteers under a blue canopy offered snacks while refugees waited for family to pick them up or for buses to take them to a nearby church.

At the Tijuana airport, weary travelers who enter Mexico as tourists in Mexico City or Cancun are directed to a makeshift lounge in the terminal with a sign in black marker that reads, "Only for Ukrainian Refugees." It is the only place to register to enter the U.S.

About 200 to 300 Ukrainians were being admitted daily at the San Ysidro crossing this week, with hundreds more arriving in Tijuana, according to volunteers who manage the waiting list. There were 973 families or single adults waiting on Tuesday.

U.S. officials told volunteers they aim to admit about 550 Ukrainians daily as processing moves to a nearby crossing that is temporarily closed to the public. CBP didn't provide numbers in response to questions about operations and plans, saying only that it has expanded facilities in San Diego to deal with humanitarian cases.

"We realized we had a problem that the government wasn't going to solve, so we solved it," said Phil Metzger, pastor of Calvary Church in the San Diego suburb of Chula Vista, where about 75 members host Ukrainian families and another 100 refugees sleep on air mattresses and pews.

Metzger, whose pastoral work has taken him to Ukraine and Hungary, calls the operation "duct tape and glue" but refugees prefer it to overwhelmed European countries, where millions of Ukrainians have settled.

The Biden administration has said it will accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians but Mexico is the only route

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producing big numbers. Appointments at U.S. consulates in Europe are scarce, and refugee resettlement takes time.

The administration set a refugee resettlement cap of 125,000 in the 12-month period that ends Sept. 30 but accepted only 8,758 by March 31, including 704 Ukrainians. In the previous year, it capped refugee resettlement at 62,500 but took only 11,411, including 803 Ukrainians.

The administration paroled more than 76,000 Afghans through U.S. airports in response to the departure of American troops last year, but nothing similar is afoot for Ukrainians.

Oksana Dugnyk, 36, hesitated to leave her home in Bucha but acquiesced to her husband's wishes before Russian troops invaded the town and left behind streets strewn with corpses. The couple worried about violence in Mexico with three young children but the robust presence of volunteers in Tijuana reassured them and a friend in Ohio agreed to host them.

"So far, so good," Dugnyk said a day after arriving at a Tijuana gymnasium that the city government opened for about 400 Ukrainians to sleep on a basketball court. "We have food. We have a place to stay. We hope everything will be fine."

Alerted by text message or social media, Ukrainians are summoned to a grassy hill and bus shelter near the border crossing hours before their numbers are called. The city government opened the bus shelter to protect Ukrainians from torrential rain.

Angelina Mykyta, a college student in Kyiv, acknowledged nerves as her number neared. She fled to Warsaw after the invasion but decided to take a chance on the United States because she wanted to settle with a pastor she knows in Kalispell, Montana.

"I think we'll be OK," she said while waiting to be escorted from the camp of hundreds of Ukrainians to their final stop in Mexico — a small area with a few dozen folding chairs within earshot of U.S. officials. Some refuse to drink at the final stop, fearing they will have to go to the bathroom and miss their turn.

Lulls end when CBP officers approach: "We need a family." "Give me three more." "Singles, we need singles." A volunteer ensures orderly movement.

The arrival of Ukrainians comes as the Biden administration prepares for much larger numbers when pandemic-related asylum limits for all nationalities end May 23. Since March 2020, the U.S. has used Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law, to suspend rights to seek asylum under U.S. law and international treaty.

Metzger, the Chula Vista pastor, said his church cannot long continue its 24-hour-a-day pace helping refugees, and suspects U.S. authorities will not adopt what volunteers have done.

"If you make something go smooth, then everybody's going to come," he said. "We're making it so easy. Eventually I'm sure they'll say, 'No, we're done.'"

Dolphins' playful social habits form bonds, but spread virus

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

REEDVILLE, Virginia (AP) — Three young male dolphins simultaneously break the water's surface to breathe — first exhaling, then inhaling — before slipping back under the waves of the Chesapeake Bay.

"A perfect sync," said Janet Mann, a dolphin researcher watching from a small skiff.

Synchronized breathing is something dolphins often do with close pals, like these males, or that mothers and calves do together, said Mann. It's a way of affirming the relationships that are so important to these highly intelligent and social mammals, like a handshake or a hug among humans.

"It says, 'We're together,'" said Mann, who is based at Georgetown University.

While such close contact is essential to dolphin social bonds, sharing space and air can also quickly spread disease.

Mann and other scientists are trying to understand how a highly contagious and lethal disease called cetacean morbillivirus — related to measles in humans and first detected in Virginia and Maryland waters — can spread rapidly among dolphins along the Atlantic Coast, as it did from 2013 to 2015.

During that outbreak, more than 1,600 dolphins washed ashore on beaches from New York to Florida,

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according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Altogether, an estimated 20,000 dolphins died from the virus, and the region's population of coastal dolphins shrank by about 50%.

"It's much like COVID — it's respiratory" in how it spreads, said Mann. "When dolphins breathe together at the surface, they're sharing respiratory droplets just like we do when we're talking or coughing on each other."

She realized that the key to understanding swift virus transmission was tracing dolphin social networks, much as public health authorities have tracked the COVID-19 pandemic.

To understand how diseases circulate in social animals — such as humans, dolphins or chimpanzees — scientists must scrutinize not only the biology of a virus, but also how vulnerable populations interact, said Jacob Negrey, a researcher who studies animal viruses at Wake Forest School of Medicine.

"Contact networks represent a double-edged sword," he said. "Your friends that you need are also the individuals most likely to get you sick."

Dolphins are extremely playful animals and often swim close together, sometimes even touching fins. "We call it holding hands," said Mann, who also directs the nonprofit Potomac-Chesapeake Dolphin Project.

Although many people casually refer to a "pod" of dolphins, Mann dislikes the term, because it implies a stable group, like a pack of wolves. What she's observed over 35 years of studying dolphins in the U.S. and Australia is that while dolphins have close buddies, they come and go regularly to check on others.

In the Chesapeake Bay area, tracking how dolphins mingle has required the scientists to distinguish more than 2,000 dolphins, mostly by distinctive shapes and markings of their dorsal fins.

"To me it's like a face," said Mann. "I joke with my students that if they wore dorsal fin hats, I would remember all their names."

On mornings with light wind, the scientists set out in an 18-foot (5.5-meter) skiff to look for dolphins near where the Potomac River empties into the bay.

A trained eye can notice slight splashing on the water a mile (1.6 kilometers) away, or catch the glint of sunlight on a fin or tail.

"I'm looking for dark objects breaking the surface of the water," said Georgetown biologist Melissa Collier, scanning the horizon through binoculars.

Suddenly, she shouted for the boat to slow down and pointed with one hand. "Dolphins by the pier, close to shore."

Ann-Marie Jacoby, a Duke University marine and conservation scientist, peered through binoculars, then smiled in recognition. "We have Abe Lincoln and his buddy Andrew Jackson," she cried.

Because the Potomac runs through Washington, the researchers have named many dolphins for American historical figures.

"It's so nice to find dolphins that we know," said Jacoby. "These males have been seen together regularly together over the past year."

The scientists easily recognize a few hundred dolphin fins by sight.

To identify less familiar dolphins, they photograph their dorsal fins, then compare them to a catalog of fins created since 2015 — essentially a Facebook for dolphins.

"Andrew and Abe just synced," said Collier, scribbling notes as another dolphin approached.

James Buchanan was now less than 16 feet (5 meters) from the other dolphins, which Collier said was close enough for disease spread. "The droplets from their breathing may be shared."

All three dolphins surfaced and breathed together, then disappeared under the waves.

"This is typical male behavior," said Mann. "The males stay pretty coordinated with each other. The females sync, but not as regularly. They sync mostly with their offspring."

That difference in behavior may help explain why males died in greater numbers during the most recent cetacean morbillivirus outbreak — a hypothesis the researchers are examining.

While Atlantic bottlenose dolphins are not endangered, NOAA considers their coastal populations to be "depleted," meaning "below optimum sustainable population."

Outbreaks of the virus emerge here every 25 years or so. And they strike dolphins and their close marine relatives elsewhere, including some endangered whale species.

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University of Hawaii researcher Kristi West called the disease — which causes skin lesions, pneumonia, brain infections and a suppressed immune system — “the most significant threat to dolphins and whales on a worldwide scale.”

While viruses naturally occur in the wild, human disruption of marine habitats has made animals more vulnerable. “The disease becomes an even more significant threat when we combine it with other stressors that dolphins and whales throughout the world are facing,” said West.

From the boat on the Chesapeake, the water looks clear and calm.

“We don’t see what’s under the surface,” said Mann, casting a doleful glance down. “But carbon and plastics and prey depletion — these are all things that threaten the animals,” along with warming oceans from climate change.

Such stresses weaken dolphins’ immune systems. “So they are extremely vulnerable to virus outbreaks,” she said.

Collier hopes their research can be used to help forecast when epidemics might occur, then use that information “to try to enact policies in areas where human disturbance is really high.”

Perhaps that could mean limiting noisy boat traffic or run-off pollution when outbreaks are ongoing or likely, she said.

It’s hard to be dour for long on the boat, as the scientists keep scanning for dolphins.

“A baby!” Mann suddenly shouted with glee, as a pair of dolphins approached.

In their first few months after birth, dolphin calves have visible lines on their sides from being folded inside the womb.

Jacoby recognized this particular mother’s fin then, referring to the dolphin — not the former U.S. senator from Texas — let out a cheer: “Kay Bailey Hutchison has a baby with fetal lines!”

Senate poised to confirm Jackson to Supreme Court

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is expected to confirm Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson on Thursday, securing her place as the first Black woman on the high court and giving President Joe Biden a bipartisan endorsement for his historic pick.

Three Republican senators have said they will support Jackson, who would replace Justice Stephen Breyer when he retires this summer. While the vote will be far from the overwhelming bipartisan confirmations for Breyer and other justices in decades past, it will still be a significant bipartisan accomplishment for Biden in the narrow 50-50 Senate after GOP senators aggressively worked to paint Jackson as too liberal and soft on crime.

“It will be a joyous day,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer as he announced Thursday’s vote late Wednesday evening. “Joyous for the senate, joyous for the Supreme Court, joyous for America.”

Jackson, a 51 year-old federal appeals court judge, would be just the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She would join two other women, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, on the liberal side of a 6-3 conservative court. With Justice Amy Coney Barrett sitting at the other end of the bench, four of the nine justices would be women for the first time in history.

After a bruising hearing in which Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee aggressively interrogated Jackson on her sentencing record, three GOP senators came out and said they would support her. The statements from Maine Sen. Susan Collins, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Utah Sen. Mitt Romney all said the same thing — they might not always agree with Jackson, but they found her to be enormously well qualified for the job.

Collins and Murkowski both decried the increasingly partisan confirmation process, which Collins called “broken” and Murkowski called “corrosive” and “more detached from reality by the year.”

Biden, a veteran of a more bipartisan Senate, said from the beginning that he wanted support from both parties for his history-making nominee, and he invited Republicans to the White House as he made his decision. It was an attempted reset from three brutal Supreme Court battles during President Donald

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Trump's presidency, when Democrats vociferously opposed the nominees, and from the end of President Barack Obama's, when Republicans blocked Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland from getting a vote.

Before the Senate Judiciary Committee last month, the Jackson said her life was shaped by her parents' experiences with lawful racial segregation and civil rights laws that were enacted a decade before she was born.

With her parents and family sitting behind her, she told the panel that her "path was clearer" than theirs as a Black American. Jackson attended Harvard University, served as a public defender, worked at a private law firm and was appointed as a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission in addition to her nine years on the federal bench.

"I have been a judge for nearly a decade now, and I take that responsibility and my duty to be independent very seriously," Jackson said. "I decide cases from a neutral posture. I evaluate the facts, and I interpret and apply the law to the facts of the case before me, without fear or favor, consistent with my judicial oath."

Once sworn in, Jackson would be the second youngest member of the court after Barrett, 50. She would join a court on which no one is yet 75, the first time that has happened in nearly 30 years.

Jackson's first term will be marked by cases involving race, both in college admissions and voting rights. She has pledged to sit out the court's consideration of Harvard's admissions program since she is a member of its board of overseers. But the court could split off a second case involving a challenge to the University of North Carolina's admissions process, which might allow her to weigh in on the issue.

Republicans spent the hearings interrogating her sentencing record on the federal bench, including the sentences she handed down in child pornography cases, which they argued were too light. Jackson pushed back on the GOP narrative, declaring that "nothing could be further from the truth" and explaining her reasoning in detail. Democrats said she was in line with other judges in her decisions.

The GOP questioning in the Judiciary committee stuck for many Republicans, though, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who said in a floor speech Wednesday that Jackson "never got tough once in this area."

Democrats criticized the Republicans' questioning.

"You could try and create a straw man here, but it does not hold," said New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker at the committee's vote earlier this week. The panel deadlocked on the nomination 11-11, but the Senate voted to discharge it from committee and moved ahead with her confirmation.

In an impassioned moment during the hearings last month, Booker, who is also Black, told Jackson that he felt emotional watching her testify. He said he saw "my ancestors and yours" in her image.

"But don't worry, my sister," Booker said. "Don't worry. God has got you. And how do I know that? Because you're here, and I know what it's taken for you to sit in that seat."

Scavino, Navarro held in contempt of Congress in 1/6 probe

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino were held in contempt of Congress for their monthlong refusal to comply with subpoenas rendered by the House committee's investigation into the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The two men on Wednesday became the latest members of former President Donald Trump's inner circle to face legal jeopardy as the select committee continues its more than nine-month-long probe into the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years.

The near-party-line 220-203 vote will send the criminal referrals for Navarro and Scavino to the Justice Department for possible prosecution.

The contempt action followed hours of raw debate on the House floor as Republicans stood by Trump and charged that Democrats were trying to politicize the attack on the Capitol by his supporters.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy accused the Jan. 6 committee of "criminalizing dissent," defended Scavino as a "good man" and lobbed harsh criticism at members of the committee, some by name. "Let's

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be honest, this is a political show trial," McCarthy said.

Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, among the nine members of the Jan. 6 panel, noted that the committee has two Republicans, including Liz Cheney of Wyoming. He added that the purpose of the floor vote was to make clear that "open contempt and mockery for this process, and for the rule of law" will not be allowed by the chamber.

"I mean, it is just amazing that they think they can get away with this," the three-term lawmaker told reporters about Scavino and Navarro as the debate raged on Wednesday.

Cheney and Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, who is also on the select committee, were the only Republicans who voted in favor of the contempt charges.

While pursuing contempt charges may not yield any new information for the Jan. 6 committee — any prosecutions could drag for months or years — the vote Wednesday was the latest attempt to show that witnesses will suffer consequences if they don't cooperate or at least appear for questioning. It's all part of an effort to claw back legislative authority that eroded during the Trump era when congressional subpoenas were often flouted and ignored.

"This vote will reveal to us who is willing to show tolerance for the intolerable," Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland said on the floor, directing his comments to Republicans across the aisle.

Raskin and other Democrats made their case that Scavino and Navarro are among just a handful of individuals who have rebuffed the committee's requests and subpoenas for information. The panel has interviewed more than 800 witnesses so far.

In the last week alone, the committee scored two of those interviews from Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner. Their virtual testimonies are the closest lawmakers have gotten to the former president.

Members of the panel said Kushner's testimony last Thursday was helpful. Ivanka Trump, who was with her father in the White House on Jan. 6, was questioned for eight hours Tuesday as congressional investigators tried to piece together her father's failed effort to delay the certification of the 2020 election results.

The main focus of the committee's outreach to the former first daughter surrounds a telephone call they say she witnessed from her father to pressure then-Vice President Mike Pence to reject Biden's 2020 election win as part of his ceremonial role overseeing the electoral count. Pence rejected those efforts.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., the chairman of the committee, highlighted Ivanka Trump's voluntary cooperation with the committee as opposed to Scavino and Navarro's defiance. Raskin said Scavino has "refused to testify before Congress about what he knows about the most dangerous and sweeping assault on the United States Congress since the War of 1812."

The committee says Scavino helped promote Trump's false claims of a stolen election and was with him the day of the attack on the Capitol. As a result, he may have "materials relevant to his videotaping and tweeting" messages that day.

A lawyer for Scavino did not return multiple messages from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Navarro, 72, a former White House trade adviser, was subpoenaed in early February over his promotion of false claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election that the committee believes contributed to the attack.

Navarro cited executive privilege when declining to testify, saying the committee "should negotiate this matter with President Trump." He added, "If he waived the privilege, I will be happy to comply."

But the Biden administration has already waived executive privilege for Navarro, Scavino and former national security adviser Michael Flynn, saying it was not justified or in the national interest for them to withhold their testimony.

Executive privilege was developed to protect a president's ability to obtain candid counsel from his advisers without fear of immediate public disclosure, but it has limits. Courts have traditionally left questions of whether to invoke executive privilege up to the current White House occupant. The Supreme Court earlier this year rejected a bid by Trump to withhold documents from the committee.

The vote Wednesday will be the third time the panel has sent contempt charges to the House floor. The first two referrals, sent late last year, were for former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and

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former Trump ally Steve Bannon.

The contempt referral against Bannon resulted in an indictment, with a trial set to start in July. The Justice Department has been slower to decide whether to prosecute Meadows, much to the frustration of the committee.

"It's the committee's hope that they will present it to a grand jury," Thompson told reporters Tuesday. "Obviously, the Meadows case is still outstanding. We don't really know where that is, other than we've done our work."

He added, "The firewall goes up from our standpoint, and DOJ uses its systems to take it from there." Thompson suggested more witnesses could still be held in contempt in the weeks ahead even as the committee looks to wrap up the investigative portion of their work in the next two months.

A conviction for contempt of Congress carries a fine of up to \$100,000 and up to a year in prison.

COVID spending bill stalls in Senate as GOP, Dems stalemate

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A compromise \$10 billion measure buttressing the government's COVID-19 defenses has stalled in the Senate and seemed all but certainly sidetracked for weeks, victim of a campaign-season fight over the incendiary issue of immigration.

There was abundant finger-pointing Wednesday but no signs the two parties were near resolving their stalemate over a bipartisan pandemic bill that President Joe Biden and top Democrats wanted Congress to approve this week. With Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., prioritizing the confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson by week's end — quite possibly Thursday — the COVID-19 bill seemed sure to slip at least until Congress returns after a two-week recess.

A day earlier, the GOP blocked the Senate from even beginning debate on the bill, which would increase funding for COVID-19 treatments, vaccines and testing. Republicans were demanding that Democrats allow a vote on an amendment preserving immigration curbs imposed by President Donald Trump that the Biden administration is slated to end on May 23.

"Why did Republicans say no? Because they wanted to cripple COVID funding legislation with poison pills that they knew would derail this bill," Schumer said Wednesday.

Schumer and a team of GOP negotiators led by Utah Sen. Mitt Romney struck a deal Monday on the pandemic bill. Democrats say Republicans are walking away from that agreement.

"The question we have is whether Republicans are acting in good faith to provide the resources we need to save American lives, or if they're just playing politics," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. "The virus is not waiting for Republicans in Congress to get their act together."

While there would likely be at least the 10 GOP votes needed to push the pandemic bill through the 50-50 Senate, overall Republican support for it is tepid. And the GOP's effort to refocus the fight to immigration — an issue that polls show hurts Biden — has clearly put Democrats on the defensive.

A vote on extending the immigration restrictions would expose Democratic senators, especially those facing tight reelections in November, to dangerous fissures. Liberal immigration advocates want Biden to erase the curbs, but doing that is expected to prompt an explosion of migrants entering the U.S. from Mexico that could trigger a voter backlash.

"We can win it," No. 2 Senate GOP leader John Thune of South Dakota said about a potential immigration vote. "They've got a number of Democrats who are for it. But their leadership is adamantly opposed, I would say hostile to the idea" of a vote.

When the pandemic was full-blown in 2020, Trump began letting authorities immediately expel asylum seekers and other migrants, citing the threat to public health. COVID-19's intensity has since waned in the U.S., though BA.2, a new omicron variant, is beginning to spread widely here.

Even GOP supporters of the pandemic bill say Democrats must resolve the legislative roadblock.

"They're in the majority. And the administration says they need this money. And I actually agree with the administration," said Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., who helped negotiate the package. "And the majority has

to figure out how to get this done.”

Among Democrats who favor retaining the immigration restrictions for now is Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, who is facing reelection. He and several others cite a need for federal officials to gear up staffing and facilities to handle the expected influx of migrants.

“I have not seen a plan for how the administration will deal with what I think is a pretty predictable surge on the border,” he said Wednesday in a brief interview.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., declined to discuss what she would do if the Senate sent her chamber a pandemic measure that also extended Trump’s immigration strictures.

“Is that even something that the Senate would do?” she told a reporter. “When they send something, I’ll let you know what we would do with it.”

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., bristled when asked why Democrats wouldn’t simply accept the immigration restrictions as the price for winning the pandemic spending Biden says is needed.

“Your premise is whatever they put in there, take,” Hoyer said. “Uh uh, we’re not going to play that game.”

That reflects a Democratic view that the Republican effort to force an immigration vote is all about setting a political trap.

“Trust me, this is one of the pillars of their reelection campaign, immigration,” said No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois. “The numbers appearing at our border are a real challenge, and I’m sure they’re going to make an issue of it.”

Seeing Bucha atrocities is turning point for media, viewers

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CBS News reporter Debora Patta has covered conflicts in Africa and the Middle East, and the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Europe. She has seen violence and death at close range before. But the atrocities she witnessed in Bucha, Ukraine this week stood out, and overwhelmed her.

“We need to be disturbed by these pictures,” Patta said on “CBS Mornings,” after describing what she and other journalists witnessed in the outskirts of Kyiv.

The war changed this week from a media perspective, which is how most people outside of Ukraine experience it.

Before, events had been seen primarily from a slight distance — fiery explosions caught on camera or drone-eyed views of burned-out buildings. Now, with the Ukrainian army retaking control of villages near Kyiv that had been brutalized by Russian soldiers, journalists are capturing the aftermath of horrific violence at close range — of dead bodies bound, tortured and burned.

While there’s a sense that images like these might change public opinion or have an impact on how a war plays out, historically that hasn’t often been the case, said Rebecca Adelman, a communications professor at the University of Maryland who specializes in war and the media.

Still, several countries, including the United States and Britain, imposed additional sanctions on Russia this week, and they cited the brutality in Bucha as compelling them to do more.

Whatever the impact, Adelman said it is critical to have journalists on hand to document what is going on. “Bearing witness is crucially important, particularly in cases of catastrophic loss,” she said. “Sometimes the photograph is all you have left.”

Photographs and video from Bucha showed body bags piled in trenches, lifeless limbs protruding from hastily dug graves, and corpses scattered in streets where they fell, including one man blown off a bicycle.

Journalists from around the world also interviewed Ukrainians emerging from their hiding places to tell stories about the barbarism they witnessed from Russian soldiers.

TV anchors and correspondents warned viewers that they were about to see graphic and disturbing pictures — a warning that came four times in one episode of “World News Tonight” on ABC. “I’m sorry I have to show you this,” CNN’s Frederik Pleitgen apologized, before motioning a camera to show body bags piled in a van.

“While we may want to look away, it is becoming harder and harder to close our eyes to what’s happen-

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ing," NBC "Nightly News" anchor Lester Holt said in his warning to viewers.

Veteran television news producer Rick Kaplan said that, from what he's seen, news organizations have been careful in what they've shown without flinching from the story.

"Every day we have these images it brings (the war) home more and more," said Kaplan, a former president of both CNN and MSNBC. "It's a good thing that this horrifies us. Can you imagine if we were blasé about it?"

The gruesome images from Bucha, in particular, have dominated news reports around the world.

The BBC reported on the continued "world revulsion." Italian state TV gave no warning before showing bodies with bound hands, half-buried in sandy terrain. "What you see from here, unfortunately, are signs of torture on the face," journalist Stefania Battistini said. "All are wearing civilian clothes."

Narrating a story on Fakty, Poland's most-watched evening news program, anchor Grzegorz Kajdanowicz said "it is our duty to warn you, but also to show you what the Russians did in Bucha and several other places."

It was different in Russia, where state television falsely claimed Ukraine was responsible for either killing civilians themselves or perpetrating a hoax. Russian TV has also run images of dead bodies in Bucha, some taken from CNN, with the word "fake" stamped on the screen, according to Internet Archive, a company that monitors Web and television content.

The Russian propaganda prompted many Western news organizations to debunk those claims by using satellite imagery to show that many dead bodies that were documented on the ground this week by journalists had been in the same spots when Russia controlled the town.

Some of the most graphic images were compiled in a short video made by Ukraine to accompany President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech to the United Nations on Tuesday. To a soundtrack of somber music and the cries of children, the video showed close-ups of corpses and body parts.

Technical difficulties delayed its airing until well after Zelenskyy talked, giving networks like CNN and Fox News Channel that had aired the speech time to present it later in edited form. But MSNBC appeared to show it in full, leaving anchor Andrea Mitchell visibly shaken.

"That's just horrific," she said. "I don't think the world has seen anything like it."

Ukraine has a clear motivation to show the world what is happening, and journalists accompanied Zelenskyy on a visit to Bucha on Monday.

While television and the Internet give greater immediacy to war coverage, heart-wrenching images — and their potential to shape public opinion — are hardly new.

Harvard historian Drew Faust, author of "This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War," noted that when Matthew Brady had an exhibit of his Civil War photographs in 1862, The New York Times wrote, "if he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it."

When a memorable photo was circulated of a 5-year-old boy sitting dazed and bloodied after being rescued from a bombing in Aleppo, Syria in 2016, NPR asked in a headline, "Can one photo help end a war?"

It hasn't yet.

A danger, too, is that in a world not easily shocked people will become numb to the pictures. That's Faust's fear, particularly as she expressed surprise that many people became strangely disconnected to the news of so many people dying of COVID-19.

As more communities are liberated from Russian rule, the number of ghastly images will almost certainly multiply.

"A little caution will be needed going forward so every news program doesn't become a parade of horrible images," said news consultant and retired NBC News executive Bill Wheatley.

Yet one of the surprises of this war, along with Ukraine's ability to stave off a quick defeat, is the way Zelenskyy has been able to win the information battle and unite opposition in a way that was not anticipated. In that context, the images may help make a difference.

Police: Sacramento shooting was gunfight among gang rivals

By ADAM BEAM and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The mass killing that left six people dead and 12 wounded outside bars just blocks from California's Capitol last weekend was a gunfight involving at least five shooters from rival gangs, Sacramento police said Wednesday.

Police said they identified at least five gunmen but there may have been more. Only two suspects — both brothers wounded by gunfire — have been arrested in connection with the shooting and, so far, only face firearms charges.

"We're still working through ... who the actual shooters are in the case," Sgt. Zach Eaton said.

Until Wednesday's announcement, police had been silent on what led to the shooting that erupted early Sunday as bars were letting out. Rapid-fire bursts of over 100 gunshots echoed through the streets as terrified patrons ran for their lives and others were hit by bullets.

Police said at least two gangs were involved. They declined to provide more details or name the gangs involved or the affiliation of any suspects.

Experts said that if gangs were to blame, it would mark an unusually bloody feud.

In 20 years of researching gangs in Los Angeles, Alex Alonso said he can't remember a gang-related shooting with such a high body count.

"It's extremely rare that a gang shooting happened as the way this one is being characterized," Alonso said. "It's extremely rare to have that happen in a public place with so many victims."

Gregory Chris Brown, a criminal justice professor at California State University, Fullerton, said gangs often target rivals in drive-by shootings with fewer victims, though innocent bystanders are sometimes also struck.

The location of the Sacramento shooting — in a bustling area of watering holes near the entertainment district — was incidental to whatever fueled the fight.

"If rival gang members see each other it doesn't matter if they're in the Capitol of the United States of America," Brown said. "If you see a rival gang member and you're going to attack them, it doesn't matter where they are."

The large number of casualties was the result of high-capacity weapons in a crowded area, he said.

Berry Accius, founder of Voice of the Youth who leads gun intervention and prevention programs and offered his services to counsel families who lost loved ones in the shooting, criticized police for characterizing the crime as gang-related, which he said will lead some to "think Black people."

He said people will see the photos of the Black women and men who were shot, assume they were in a gang and wonder why gang members are downtown.

"That's the narrative we don't need at this particular time," Accius said. "This idea that we're going to put blame to one demographic of folks and blame them for the violence that ensued."

Bill Sanders, a criminologist at Cal State LA, said he wanted to see more evidence the shooting was gang-related, a term police often use to drum up support. He said gang shootings are more mundane and most occur in what are considered gang neighborhoods.

"If you looked at a map of gang homicides in the city — or any city — over time, you'd see the same areas lighting up — meaning that's where they occur. If these guys were white, this wouldn't be considered gang related — not even for a minute."

Authorities credited witnesses who contributed nearly 200 videos, photos and other tips with helping the investigation.

Police were trying to determine if a stolen handgun found at the crime scene was used in the massacre. It had been converted to a weapon capable of automatic gunfire.

They are also investigating whether a gun one of the brothers, Smiley Martin, 27, brandished in a video was used in the shooting, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official was briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to publicly discuss details and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Martin and his brother were among those wounded in the gunfire that erupted about 2 a.m. Sunday as bars closed and patrons filled the streets.

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The Sacramento County coroner identified the three women killed as Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; and Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21. The three men killed were Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; and De'vazia Turner, 29.

Ten people were wounded in addition to the Martin brothers. At least two remained hospitalized with gunshot wounds.

Smiley Martin faces charges of possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun. He remained hospitalized and it wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could speak for him.

His brother, Dandrae Martin, 26, was arrested as a "related suspect" and appeared briefly Tuesday in Sacramento Superior Court on a charge of being a convict carrying a loaded gun.

He did not enter a plea and his attorney said she would wait to see if prosecutors brought more serious charges before deciding whether to seek his release.

Both men have criminal records. Smiley Martin was released from prison in February after serving about half of a 10-year prison sentence for beating a girlfriend. He was denied parole last year after prosecutors said he "clearly has little regard for human life," documents show.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg questioned why the brothers were on the streets.

"Those questions need to be answered and they will be answered over the days ahead," Steinberg said.

A 31-year-old man seen carrying a handgun immediately after the shooting was arrested Tuesday on a weapons charge. Police said they don't believe his gun was used in the shooting.

UN Assembly to vote on suspending Russia from rights council

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. General Assembly is voting Thursday on a U.S.-initiated resolution to suspend Russia from the world organization's leading human rights body over allegations that Russian soldiers killed civilians while retreating from the region around Ukraine's capital.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield made the call for Russia to be stripped of its seat on the 47-member Human Rights Council in the wake of videos and photos of streets in the town of Bucha strewn with corpses of what appeared to be civilians. The deaths have sparked global revulsion and calls for tougher sanctions on Russia, which has vehemently denied its troops were responsible.

"We believe that the members of the Russian forces committed war crimes in Ukraine, and we believe that Russia needs to be held accountable," Thomas-Greenfield said Monday. "Russia's participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce."

General Assembly spokeswoman Paulina Kubiak said the assembly's emergency special session on Ukraine would resume Thursday morning, when the resolution "to suspend the rights of membership in the Human Rights Council of the Russian Federation" will be put to a vote.

While the Human Rights Council is based in Geneva, its members are elected by the 193-nation General Assembly for three-year terms. The March 2006 resolution that established the rights council says the assembly may suspend membership rights of a country "that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights."

The brief resolution to be voted on expresses "grave concern at the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, particularly at the reports of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation, including gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights."

Approval would require a two-thirds majority of the assembly members that vote "yes" or "no," with abstentions not counting in the calculation.

The General Assembly voted 140-5 with 38 abstentions on March 24 on a resolution blaming Russia for the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and urging an immediate cease-fire and protection for millions of civilians and the homes, schools and hospitals critical to their survival.

The vote was almost exactly the same as for a March 2 resolution that the assembly adopted demanding an immediate Russian cease-fire, withdrawal of all its forces and protection for all civilians. That vote was 141-5 with 35 abstentions.

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Thomas-Greenfield urged the 140 members who voted in favor of those two resolutions to support Russia's suspension from the Human Rights Council.

She issue is simple, she said: "The images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine require us now to match our words with action."

"We cannot let a member state that is subverting every principle we hold dear to continue to sit on the U.N. Human Rights Council," she said.

Supporters of the resolution were optimistic about its approval, though not necessarily with the support of 140 countries.

Russia called on an unspecified number of countries to vote "no," saying an abstention or not voting would be considered an unfriendly act and would affect bilateral relations.

In its so-called "non-paper" obtained by The Associated Press, Russia said the attempt to expel it from the Human Rights Council is political and being supported by countries that want to preserve their dominant position and control over the world.

Those nations want to continue "the politics of neo-colonialism of human rights" in international relations, it said, saying that Russia's priority is to promote and defend human rights, including multilaterally in the Human Rights Council.

Russia's ambassador in Geneva, Gennady Gatilov, called the U.S. action "unfounded and purely emotional bravado that looks good on camera -- just how the U.S. likes it."

"Washington exploits the Ukrainian crisis for its own benefit in an attempt either to exclude or suspend Russia from international organizations," Gatilov said, in comments relayed by a Russian diplomatic mission spokesman.

Russia and the other four veto-wielding permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — Britain, China, France, and the United States — all currently have seats on the Human Rights Council, which the U.S. rejoined this year.

The only country to have its membership rights stripped at the council was Libya in 2011, when upheaval in the North African country brought down longtime leader Moammar Gadhafi, said council spokesman Rolando Gomez.

No permanent member of the Security Council has ever had its membership revoked from any U.N. body.

US experts wrestle with how to update COVID-19 vaccines

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. health officials are beginning to grapple with how to keep the vaccines updated to best protect Americans from the ever-changing coronavirus.

On Wednesday, a panel of vaccine advisers to the Food and Drug Administration spent hours debating key questions for revamping the shots and conducting future booster campaigns. They didn't reach any firm conclusions.

The questions facing the experts included: How often to update the vaccines against new strains, how effective they should be to warrant approval and whether updates should be coordinated with global health authorities.

Last week, the FDA authorized a fourth dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines for anyone 50 or older and for some younger people with severely weakened immune systems. It's an effort to get ahead of another possible surge.

But the FDA's vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks acknowledged at the meeting "we simply can't be boosting people as frequently as we are." He called the latest booster update a "stopgap" measure to protect vulnerable Americans while regulators decide whether and how to tweak the current vaccines.

Marks cautioned that waning vaccine protection, new variants and colder weather in the fall could raise the risk of more surges.

"Our goal here is to stay ahead of future variants and outbreaks and ensure we do our best to reduce

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the toll of disease and death due to COVID-19," said Marks, adding that he expects more meetings of the vaccine panel in coming months.

Some of the key questions the panel discussed:

HOW SHOULD THE U.S. DECIDE WHEN TO LAUNCH FUTURE ROUNDS OF BOOSTER SHOTS?

One area where experts appeared to agree is that vaccines should be judged on their ability to prevent severe disease that leads to hospitalization and death.

"We need to focus on the worst case, which is severe disease, and we need to change strains when we're losing that battle," said Dr. Mark Sawyer of the University of California, San Diego.

By that measure, the current vaccines have held up remarkably well.

During the last omicron-driven surge, two vaccine doses were nearly 80% effective against needing a breathing machine or death — and a booster pushed that protection to 94%, federal scientists recently reported.

But only about half of Americans eligible for a third shot have gotten one. And many experts said it was unsustainable to continue asking Americans to get boosted every few months.

A panelist from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggested that the 80% protection from severe disease could become the standard for evaluating the vaccines.

"I think we may have to accept that level of protection and then use other alternative ways to protect individuals with therapeutics and other measures," said Dr. Amanda Cohn, CDC's chief medical officer.

Presentations at the meeting by government health officials and independent researchers underscored the challenges of predicting when the next major COVID-19 variant might appear.

Trevor Bedford, a disease modeler with the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, said a major new strain like omicron could emerge anywhere from every 1.5 years to once a decade, based on currently available data. Given that unpredictability, researchers will need methods to quickly determine whether current vaccines work against emerging variants.

WHAT'S THE PROCESS FOR UPDATING VACCINES TO ADDRESS NEW VARIANTS?

All three COVID-19 vaccines now used in the U.S. are based on the original coronavirus version that emerged in late 2019. Updating the vaccines will be a complex task, likely requiring coordination between the FDA, manufacturers and global health authorities.

To speed the vaccines to market, the FDA relied on research shortcuts to judge effectiveness, mainly looking at their early impact on the immune system's antibody levels. A number of panelists said Wednesday they wanted more rigorous data from studies that track patients over time to see who gets sick or dies.

But that approach would likely be too time consuming.

"We're looking at a conundrum here in that it's going to be hard to generate all the data we want in short order when a new variant emerges," said Dr. Ofer Levy of Harvard Medical School.

A representative for the U.S. Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority laid out the narrow window that manufacturers could face to reformulate, study and mass produce an updated vaccine by September.

"If you're not on your way to a clinical trial by the beginning of May, I think it's going to be very difficult to have enough product across manufacturers to meet demand," said Robert Johnson, deputy assistant secretary of BARDA.

The process for updating annual flu vaccines offers one possible model, as laid out by a representative from the World Health Organization.

Twice a year, WHO experts recommend updates to flu vaccines to target emerging strains. The FDA then brings those recommendations to its own vaccine panel, which votes on whether they make sense for the U.S., setting the stage for manufacturers to tweak their shots and begin mass production.

But COVID-19 hasn't yet fallen into a predictable pattern like the flu. And as the coronavirus evolves, different strains may become dominant in different regions of the world.

Several experts said they would need more meetings with more data and proposals from the FDA to decide on a strategy.

"We've never been here before. We're all working together to do the best we can and it's very complex," said Oveta Fuller of the University of Michigan's Medical School.

Mariupol's dead put at 5,000 as Ukraine braces in the east

By ADAM SCHRECK and ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

ANDRIIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — The mayor of the besieged port city of Mariupol put the number of civilians killed there at more than 5,000 Wednesday, as Ukraine collected evidence of Russian atrocities on the ruined outskirts of Kyiv and braced for what could become a climactic battle for control of the country's industrial east.

Ukrainian authorities continued gathering up the dead in shattered towns outside the capital amid telltale signs Moscow's troops killed civilians indiscriminately before retreating over the past several days.

In other developments, the U.S. and its Western allies moved to impose new sanctions against the Kremlin over what they branded war crimes.

And Russia completed the pullout of all of its estimated 24,000 or more troops from the Kyiv and Chernihiv areas in the north, sending them into Belarus or Russia to resupply and reorganize, probably to return to the fight in the east, a U.S. defense official speaking on condition of anonymity said.

In his nightly address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that the Russian military continues to build up its forces in preparation for the new offensive in the east, where the Kremlin has said its goal is to "liberate" the Donbas, Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland. He said Ukraine, too, was preparing for battle.

"We will fight and we will not retreat," he said. "We will seek all possible options to defend ourselves until Russia begins to seriously seek peace. This is our land. This is our future. And we won't give them up."

Ukrainian authorities urged people living in the Donbas to evacuate now, ahead of an impending Russian offensive, while there is still time.

"Later, people will come under fire," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, "and we won't be able to do anything to help them."

A Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence estimates, said it will take Russia's battle-damaged forces as much as a month to regroup for a major push on eastern Ukraine.

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko said that of the more than 5,000 civilians killed during weeks of Russian bombardment and street fighting, 210 were children. He said Russian forces bombed hospitals, including one where 50 people burned to death.

Boichenko said more than 90% of the city's infrastructure has been destroyed. The attacks on the strategic southern city on the Sea of Azov have cut off food, water, fuel and medicine and pulverized homes and businesses.

British defense officials said 160,000 people remained trapped in the city, which had a prewar population of 430,000. A humanitarian relief convoy accompanied by the Red Cross has been trying for days without success to get into the city.

Capturing Mariupol would allow Russia to secure a continuous land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

In the north, Ukrainian authorities said the bodies of at least 410 civilians have been found in towns around Kyiv, victims of what Zelenskyy has portrayed as a Russian campaign of murder, rape, dismemberment and torture. Some victims had apparently been shot at close range. Some were found with their hands bound.

At a cemetery in the town of Bucha, northeast of Kyiv, workers began to load more than 60 bodies apparently collected over the past few days into a grocery shipping truck for transport to a facility for further investigation.

Zelenskyy accused Russia of interfering with an international investigation into possible war crimes by removing corpses and trying to hide other evidence in Bucha.

"We have information that the Russian troops have changed tactics and are trying to remove the dead people, the dead Ukrainians, from the streets and cellars of territory they occupied," he said in his address.

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"This is only an attempt to hide the evidence and nothing more."

Switching from Ukrainian into Russian, Zelenskyy urged ordinary Russians "to somehow confront the Russian repressive machine" instead of being "equated with the Nazis for the rest of your life."

He called on Russians to demand an end to the war, "if you have even a little shame about what the Russian military is doing in Ukraine."

More bodies were yet to be collected in Bucha. The Associated Press saw two in a house in a silent neighborhood. From time to time there was the muffled boom of workers clearing the town of mines and other unexploded ordnance.

Police said they found at least 20 bodies in the Makariv area west of Kyiv. In the village of Andriivka, residents said the Russians arrived in early March and took locals' phones. Some people were detained, then released. Others met unknown fates. Some described sheltering for weeks in cellars normally used for storing vegetables for winter.

The soldiers were gone, and Russian armored personnel carriers, a tank and other vehicles sat destroyed on both ends of the road running through the village. Several buildings were reduced to mounds of bricks and corrugated metal. Residents struggled without heat, electricity or cooking gas.

"First we were scared, now we are hysterical," said Valentyna Klymenko, 64. She said she, her husband and two neighbors weathered the siege by sleeping on stacks of potatoes covered with a mattress and blankets. "We didn't cry at first. Now we are crying."

To the north of the village, in the town of Borodyanka, rescue workers combed through the rubble of apartment blocks, looking for bodies. Mine-disposal units worked nearby.

The Kremlin has insisted its troops have committed no war crimes, charging that the images out of Bucha were staged by the Ukrainians.

Thwarted in their efforts to swiftly take the capital, increasing numbers of President Vladimir Putin's troops, along with mercenaries, have been reported moving into the Donbas.

At least five people were killed by Russian shelling Wednesday in the Donbas' Donetsk region, according to Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko, who urged civilians to leave for safer areas.

In the Luhansk region of the Donbas, Russian bombardment set fire to at least 10 multi-story buildings and a mall in the town of Sievierodonetsk, the regional governor reported. There was no immediate word on deaths or injuries.

Russian forces also attacked a fuel depot and a factory in the Dnipropetrovsk region, just west of the Donbas, authorities said.

Ukrainian forces have been fighting Russia-backed separatists in the Donbas since 2014. Ahead of its Feb. 24 invasion, Moscow recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk regions as independent states.

In reaction to the alleged atrocities outside Kyiv, the U.S. announced sanctions against Putin's two adult daughters and said it is toughening penalties against Russian banks. Britain banned investment in Russia and pledged to end its dependence on Russian coal and oil by the end of the year.

The European Union is also expected to take additional punitive measures, including an embargo on coal.

Meanwhile, the United States and the United Kingdom boycotted an informal meeting of the Security Council called by Russia to press its baseless claims that the U.S. has biological warfare laboratories in Ukraine.

The meeting was the latest of several moves by Russia that have led Western countries to accuse Moscow of using the U.N. as a platform for disinformation to divert attention from the war.

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky, who presided over the meeting, asserted that Ukraine, supported by the U.S., was implementing what he claimed were dangerous projects and experiments as part of a military biological program.

The allegations have previously been debunked. Ukraine does own and operate a network of biological labs that have received funding and research support from the U.S. and are not a secret. The labs are part of a program that aims to reduce the likelihood of deadly outbreaks, whether natural or man-made.

The U.S. efforts date back to work in the 1990s to dismantle the former Soviet Union's program for

weapons of mass destruction.

China's security deal with Solomons raises alarm in Pacific

By NICK PERRY and DAVID RISING Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A security alliance between China and the Solomon Islands has sent shudders throughout the South Pacific, with many worried it could set off a large-scale military buildup or that Western animosity to the deal could play into China's hands.

What remains most unclear is the extent of China's ambitions.

A Chinese military presence in the Solomons would put it not only on the doorstep of Australia and New Zealand but also in close proximity to Guam, with its massive U.S. military bases.

China so far operates just one acknowledged foreign military base, in the impoverished but strategically important Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti. Many believe that China's People's Liberation Army is busy establishing an overseas military network, even if they don't use the term "base."

The Solomon Islands government says a draft of its agreement with China was initialed last week and will be "cleaned up" and signed soon.

The draft, which was leaked online, says that Chinese warships could stop in the Solomons for "logistical replenishment" and that China could send police, military personnel and other armed forces to the Solomons "to assist in maintaining social order."

The draft agreement specifies China must approve what information is disclosed about joint security arrangements, including at media briefings.

The Solomon Islands, home to about 700,000 people, switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019 — a move rejected by the most populous province and a contributing factor to riots last November.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded in February by saying that Washington would reopen its embassy in the capital, Honiara, which has been closed since 1993, to increase its influence in the Solomons before China becomes "strongly embedded."

Both China and the Solomons have strongly denied the new pact will lead to the establishment of a Chinese military base. The Solomon Islands government said the pact is necessary because of its limited ability to deal with violent uprisings like the one in November.

"The country has been ruined by recurring internal violence for years," the government said this week.

But Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. have all expressed alarm about the deal, with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern describing it as "gravely concerning."

David Panuelo, the president of nearby Micronesia, which has close ties to the U.S., wrote an impassioned letter to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare asking him to rethink the agreement.

He noted that both Micronesia and the Solomon Islands were battlegrounds during World War II, caught up in the clash of great powers.

"I am confident that neither of us wishes to see a conflict of that scope or scale ever again, and most particularly in our own backyards," Panuelo wrote.

But the Solomon Islands police minister mocked Panuelo's concerns on social media, saying he should be more worried about his own atoll being swallowed by the ocean due to climate change.

Sogavare has likewise dismissed foreign criticism of the security agreement as insulting, while labeling those who leaked the draft as "lunatics."

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the agreement aims to maintain the safety of people's lives and property, and "does not have any military overtones," saying media speculation on the potential development of a base was groundless.

Euan Graham, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies based in Singapore, said China has been pursuing such a port facility for some five years as it aims to expand its naval presence in the South Pacific as part of Beijing's long-game of seeking to become the dominant regional power.

"If they want to break out into the Pacific, at some point they will need the logistics capability to sup-

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port that presence," Graham said. "We're not talking about war plans here; this is really about extending their presence and influence."

Unlike the base built in Djibouti, where China has commercial interests in the region to protect, Graham said any operation in the Solomon Islands would likely be less substantial.

"It's quite a subtle and interesting geopolitical game that's emerged in the South Pacific," he added. "And I think the Chinese have been very successful, if you like, in outflanking the United States and Australia in an influence competition, not a military competition."

China's base in Djibouti was opened in 2017. China doesn't call it a base, but rather a support facility for its naval operations fending off piracy in the Gulf of Aden and for its African peacekeeping operations. It boasts a 400-meter (1,300-foot) runway and a pier big enough to dock either of China's two operating aircraft carriers.

The base, with 2,000 personnel, allows China to position supplies, troops and equipment in a strategically crucial region, while also keeping an eye on U.S. forces that are stationed nearby.

Chief among other potential base candidates is Cambodia, whose authoritarian leader Hun Sen has long been a trusted Chinese ally and which reportedly signed a secret 2019 agreement permitting the establishment of a Chinese base.

China is dredging the harbor at Ream Naval Base to allow ships larger than any Cambodia possesses to dock, and is building new infrastructure to replace a U.S.-built naval tactical headquarters. A Chinese base in Cambodia would establish a chokepoint in the Gulf of Thailand close to the crucial Malacca Strait.

China has also funded projects at Gwadar in Pakistan, another close ally, and in Sri Lanka, where Chinese infrastructure lending has forced the government to hand over control of the southern port of Hambantota.

Especially intriguing has been an alleged Chinese push to establish a base in the West African nation of Equatorial Guinea. That would give China a presence on the Atlantic opposite the east coast of the continental United States as well as in an important African oil-producing region.

"China has seized opportunities to expand its influence at a time when the U.S. and other countries have not been as engaged economically in the Pacific islands," said Elizabeth Wishnick, an expert on Chinese foreign policy at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

About 80 years ago in the Solomon Islands, the U.S. military began its famous "island hopping" campaign of World War II to take back Pacific islands from Imperial Japanese forces one-by-one. It successfully won back the main island of Guadalcanal in February 1943 after some six months of fierce fighting.

Today, the Solomon Islands would give China the potential ability to interfere with U.S. naval operations in the region that could be crucial in the event of a conflict over Taiwan or in the South and East China seas.

Lt. Gen. Greg Bilton, Australia's chief of joint operations, said that if Chinese naval ships were able to operate from the Solomon Islands it would "change the calculus."

"They're in much closer proximity to the Australian mainland, obviously, and that would change the way that we would undertake day-to-day operations, particularly in the air and at sea," he told reporters.

But Jonathan Pryke, the director of the Pacific Islands Program at the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank, said he thinks that leaders have overreacted to the agreement, perhaps in Australia's case because there is an election looming.

"It's clearly getting everyone very animated in the West and very alarmed," Pryke said. "But I don't think it markedly changes things on the ground."

He said the pact could be seen as the first step toward China establishing a base, but there would need to be many more steps taken before that could happen.

"I think the alarmism has strengthened China's hand by pushing the Solomon Islands into a corner," Pryke said. "And they've reacted the way I imagine many countries would react from getting this outside pressure — by pushing back, and digging their heels in."

Texas takes new border action; ex-Trump officials want more

By ACACIA CORONADO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

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SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday delivered new orders along the U.S.-Mexico border and promised more to come as former Trump administration officials press him to declare an “invasion” and give state troopers and National Guard members authority to turn back migrants.

The two-term Republican governor did not say whether he supports such a concept, which constitutional scholars say is legally dubious, nearly unprecedented and would almost certainly face swift court challenges.

But for now, Abbott said state troopers would begin stopping and inspecting commercial vehicles that come across the border, which he acknowledged would “dramatically slow” vehicle traffic near U.S. ports of entry. He also said bus charters to Washington, D.C., would be offered to migrants who volunteer for them, in a dig at President Joe Biden and Congress, who Abbott has criticized for not doing enough.

Abbott said the inspection stops would occur on Texas roadways and follow the law. “But of course, everyone always files a lawsuit,” he said.

The new directives amount to the “unprecedented actions” that Abbott promised in response to the Biden administration winding down a public health law – now set to expire in May – that has limited asylum-seekers in the name of preventing the spread of COVID-19. When that happens, it is expected to draw more migrants to the southern border.

Texas officials also said they would begin “increased military activity” on the border and install razor wire at some low-water along the river to deter migrants from crossing.

The orders further expand a multibillion-dollar Texas border security mission that Abbott, who is running for reelection in November, has made the cornerstone of his administration. Already, Texas has deployed thousands of troopers and National Guard members, installed new border barrier and jailed migrants on trespassing charges.

Still, the efforts do not go far enough for some former Trump administration officials, who want Abbott to essentially bestow on troopers and Guard members enforcement powers that have been a federal responsibility.

Border Patrol officials say they are planning for as many as 18,000 arrivals daily once the health policy, known as the Title 42 authority, expires in May. Last week, about 7,100 migrants were coming a day to the southern U.S. border.

But the way former Trump immigration officials see it, Texas and Arizona can pick up where the federal government leaves off. Their plan involves a novel interpretation of the U.S. Constitution to have the National Guard or state police forcibly send migrants to Mexico, without regard to immigration laws and law enforcement procedures. Border enforcement has always been a federal responsibility, and in Texas, state leaders have not been pushing for such a move.

Tom Homan, the former acting director for Immigration and Customs Enforcement under Trump, told an audience in San Antonio last week that he had spoken with Abbott about the idea.

“We’ve had discussions with his attorneys in his office, ‘Is there a way to use this clause within the Constitution where it talks about invasion?’” Homan said during the Border Security Expo.

Homan said those talks took place about three months ago and described the governor’s office as “non-committal but willing to listen.”

In Arizona, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has also been under pressure within his party to declare that the state is being invaded and use extraordinary powers normally reserved for war. But Ducey, who is term-limited and not on the ballot in 2022, has not embraced the theory and has avoided commenting directly on it.

Driving the effort on the right is the Center for Renewing America, a conservative policy think tank led by former Trump administration officials. It includes Ken Cuccinelli, an immigration hard-liner and former Homeland Security official under Trump. He argued states are entitled to defend themselves from immediate danger or invasion, as it is defined by the “invasion clause,” under the “states self-defense clause.”

Cuccinelli said in practice, he envisions the plan would look similar to the enforcement of Title 42, which circumvented U.S. obligations under American law and international treaty to provide asylum. He said he has not spoken with Abbott and said the current Texas border mission, known as Operation Lone Star, has

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put little dent in migration. The mission has also drawn criticism from Guard members over long deployments and little to do, and some arrests have appeared to have no connection to border security.

"Until you are actually returning people to Mexico, what you are doing will have no effect," Cuccinelli said.

Emily Berman, who teaches constitutional law at the University of Houston, said the "invasion clause" cited by proponents is tucked into a broader constitutional assurance that the U.S. must defend states from invasion and domestic violence. Additionally, she said, the "state self-defense clause" says states cannot engage in warlike actions or foreign policy unless invaded.

Berman said she hasn't seen the constitutional clauses used since the 1990s, when the courts ruled that they did not have jurisdiction to decide what qualified an invasion, but believed that one could only be done by another governmental entity.

For example, Berman said, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia can be qualified as one because it is an outside government breaching another country's boundaries with the use of military force.

"Just because the state says that it is an invasion that doesn't necessarily make it so, it is not clear to me what additional legal authority that conveys on them," Berman said, adding that state officials can enforce state laws, but the line is drawn at what the federal law allows.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Democrat whose district includes the Texas border, has criticized the Biden administration over border security and ending Title 42. But he does not support states trying to use new powers that would let them "do whatever they want."

"I think it should be more of a partnership instead of saying, 'Federal government, we don't think you're doing enough, and why don't we go ahead and do our own border security?'" he said.

Dad who lived in dorm convicted of abusing daughter's pals

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man who moved into his daughter's college dorm and charmed her schoolmates with claims of influence and wisdom was convicted Wednesday of charges that he exploited the close-knit group, using threats and violence to enrich himself with millions of dollars as he ruined their lives.

Lawrence Ray, 62, was convicted at a trial where weeks of testimony chronicled his psychologically manipulative relationship with young people he met in fall 2010 at Sarah Lawrence College, a small New York liberal arts school. Ray moved into his daughter's dorm after finishing a prison stint for a securities fraud conviction.

Sentencing was set for Sept. 16 on charges including racketeering, conspiracy, forced labor, sex trafficking and obstruction of justice. Ray, who stood with his arms at his side and faced the Manhattan jury as guilty verdicts were returned on 15 counts, could face up to life in prison. One charge carries a mandatory minimum 15-year term.

After the verdict was read, Ray was returned to custody, where he had been since his early 2020 arrest.

His lawyers declined comment outside court and did not return email messages seeking comment.

In a statement, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Ray had changed "a group of friends who had their whole lives ahead of them."

"For the next decade, he used violence, threats, and psychological abuse to try to control and destroy their lives," Williams said. "He exploited them. He terrorized them. He tortured them. Let me be very clear. Larry Ray is a predator. An evil man who did evil things. Today's verdict finally brings him to justice."

Jurors concluded deliberations less than a day after receiving the case following a monthlong trial that featured testimony from numerous victims who usually referred to Ray just as "Larry." Some testified that Ray had made them believe they had poisoned or otherwise harmed him and they needed to pay him back.

One woman testified that she became a sex worker to try to pay reparations to Ray after becoming convinced that she had poisoned him. She said that, over four years, she gave Ray \$2.5 million in installments that averaged between \$10,000 and \$50,000 per week.

Another woman who was educated at Harvard and Columbia and was about to become a medical doctor in 2012 testified that her career and life were derailed when she met Ray and became romantically

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involved with him. She said he sometimes demanded that she have sex with strangers and film it for him.

Ray's lawyers maintained he was victimized by former friends who fabricated their stories.

Ray did not testify. Twice, the trial was interrupted as he was taken to the hospital in an ambulance for undisclosed illnesses.

Several students testified that they were drawn into Ray's world as he told them stories of his past influence in New York City politics, including his role in ruining the career of former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik after serving as the best man at his wedding years earlier. Ray had, in fact, been a figure in the corruption investigation that derailed Kerik's nomination to lead the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Some of the students agreed to live with Ray in the summer of 2011 at his Manhattan one-bedroom apartment, where his sinister side emerged as he started to claim that the students had poisoned and harmed him or his property.

To make amends, they testified, they did what he asked, including turning over money. One man said he gave Ray over \$100,000.

Prosecutors said the money was never enough. Through threats and violence and videotaped "confessions," Ray tightened his hold on the young people, including forcing them to do landscaping and other work at the Pinehurst, North Carolina home of his stepfather for weeks in 2013, they said.

The abuse culminated in October 2018 when Ray for hours repeatedly abused the woman who gave him her proceeds from sex work, forcing her to be tied naked to a chair while he berated her, choked her with a leash and made her fear for her life by putting a bag over her head, prosecutors said.

Ray carried out his crimes with help from his daughter and Isabella Pollok, a woman who has pleaded not guilty to criminal charges, prosecutors said. Her trial is set for later this year. The daughter has not been charged.

No charges filed in no-knock warrant killing of Amir Locke

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minnesota prosecutors declined to file charges Wednesday against a Minneapolis police SWAT team officer who fatally shot Amir Locke while executing an early morning no-knock search warrant in a downtown apartment in February.

Locke, 22, who was Black, was staying on a couch in his cousin's apartment when authorities entered it on Feb. 2 without knocking as part of an investigation into a homicide in neighboring St. Paul.

Prosecutors said body camera video showed that Locke pointed a gun at Officer Mark Hanneman, justifying his use of deadly force. Locke's family has disputed that, arguing that the footage suggests Locke was startled awake and that he grabbed for a gun he was licensed to carry.

Locke's mother, Karen Wells, said she was disgusted by the decision. At a news conference in New York with attorney Ben Crump and civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton, she vowed to keep up pressure on Minneapolis city leaders and spoke directly to Hanneman.

"This is not over. You may have been found not guilty, but in the eyes of me, being the mother who I am, you are guilty," Wells said. "And I'm not going to give up. Continue to have your restless nights, because I know you do."

Locke was shot seconds after officers entered the apartment. The body camera footage shows that Locke was holding a gun before he was shot.

Attorney General Keith Ellison and Hennepin County Attorney Michael Freeman, whose offices reviewed the case, said Locke might never have been shot if not for the no-knock warrant. But they said there was insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Hanneman violated the state statute governing when police can use deadly force.

"It would be unethical for us to file charges in a case in which we know that we will not be able to prevail because the law does not support the charges," Ellison said.

Locke's death came as three former Minneapolis police officers were on trial in federal court in St. Paul in

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George Floyd's killing. It sparked protests and a reexamination of no-knock search warrants. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey announced an immediate moratorium on such warrants, and on Tuesday, he formalized a new policy requiring officers to knock and wait before entering a residence, with limited exceptions. Some lawmakers have been pushing for a statewide ban on no-knock warrants, except in rare circumstances.

The department issued a statement from Interim Chief Amelia Huffman saying that Hanneman returned to active duty on Feb. 28 but is no longer on a SWAT team. She did not comment directly on Hanneman's actions but said, "Officers never want to face split-second decisions that end in the loss of life."

Locke's family was angry that police initially described him as a suspect, which police later said was a mistake.

"Our investigation found no evidence that he had any role in the homicide investigation that brought the police to his door at 6:48 on Feb. 2," Ellison said. "Amir was a victim. He never should have been called a suspect."

In their applications for search warrants of the Minneapolis apartment and other locations, authorities said a no-knock warrant was necessary to protect the public and officers as they looked for guns, drugs and clothing worn by people suspected in a violent killing. Authorities asked that officers be allowed to conduct the search without knocking, and outside the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., because the suspects being sought in the Jan. 10 killing of Otis Elder had a history of violence.

Locke was killed seconds after the SWAT team entered the apartment at 6:48 a.m. Body camera video shows an officer using a key to unlock the door and enter, followed by at least four officers in uniform and protective vests. As they enter, they repeatedly shout, "Police, search warrant!" They also shout "Hands!" and "Get on the ground!"

The video shows an officer kicking a sectional sofa, and Locke is seen wrapped in a comforter, holding a pistol. Three shots are heard and the video ends.

"I was convinced that the individual was going to fire their handgun and that I would suffer great bodily harm or death," Hanneman wrote in his statement to investigators. "I felt in this moment that if I did not use deadly force myself, I would likely be killed."

Ellison and Freeman said they spoke with Locke's parents on Wednesday before announcing they wouldn't file charges.

"They, like us, are very frustrated with no-knock warrants. They, like us, believe that if a no-knock warrant hadn't been used Amir Locke might well be here today," Freeman said, declining to give further details about their conversation.

Sharpton said the family will demand that the U.S. Justice Department review the case. Crump faulted police for creating a life-or-death situation, and said gun rights groups should join with the family in demanding an end to no-knock warrants.

He connected Locke's death with that of Breonna Taylor, who was killed in a botched police raid in Kentucky in 2020 in which her boyfriend shot at officers first as they broke into her apartment.

"Because if it can happen to Amir, it can happen to Breonna Taylor, it could happen to your children, too," Crump said.

Although Locke was not named in the warrant, his then-17-year-old cousin, Mekhi Camden Speed, was named and has been charged with two counts of second-degree murder in Elder's killing.

Elder, a 38-year-old father, was found shot and laying in the street in what police believe was an apparent robbery. Drugs and money were found in Elder's SUV, according to court documents.

The police department hired Hanneman in 2015. City records show there were three complaints made about him and that all were closed without him being disciplined, but they give no details. Data on the website of the citizen group Communities United Against Police Brutality shows a fourth complaint, in 2018, that remains open. No details were given.

Tiger Woods overshadows Masters with so many scenarios

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

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AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Five players can go to No. 1 in the world by winning the Masters. Another can complete the career Grand Slam with a green jacket. Such is the depth of talent these days in golf on the eve of the first major of the year.

And such is the power of five words at 10:34 a.m. Thursday that are sure to overshadow everything else on the opening day of the 86th Masters.

“Fore, please. Tiger Woods driving.”

Those words from the first tee at Augusta National haven’t been uttered since Nov. 15, 2020, the last time Woods played — and walked — in a tournament.

For all its youth — the top seven players in the world are 30 or younger — golf still isn’t ready to let go of its past, especially when that past is Woods and there was every reason to wonder if he would ever compete at this level again.

Along with images of Woods slipping on any of his five green jackets are those of his crumpled SUV at the bottom of a hill in suburban Los Angeles from his harrowing crash 14 months ago that left him confined to a hospital bed for three months.

In December, when he rode a cart to compete in a 36-hole event with his son, and Matt Kuchar suggested his swing was PGA Tour-ready, Woods smiled and said, “No, no, no, no. I totally disagree. I’m not at that level. I can’t compete against these guys right now. No.”

And then on Tuesday, he said he was going to play and added a short time later, “I don’t show up to an event unless I think I can win it.”

“It’s just truly amazing. I don’t even know how else to say it,” Masters Chairman Fred Ridley said Wednesday. “I would have probably taken some pretty high odds a few months ago, even a few weeks ago, whether or not he would be here.

“But when you think about it, it really shouldn’t surprise us. He is one of the most determined, dedicated athletes that I have ever seen in my life.”

Woods is back — again — and the 90 other players at Augusta National feel like nothing more than an afterthought until scores are posted.

“Tiger takes a lot of attention away from all of us, which I think is a good thing for us,” said Scottie Scheffler, making his debut as the No. 1 player in the world. “He’s used to being in the spotlight. Tiger is the needle for professional golf.”

Tigermania has been in full force ever since the gates opened Monday morning, and the gallery filled every inch behind the ropes for the nine holes he played with Justin Thomas and Fred Couples. It was like that again Wednesday, when the trio played the back nine, beating the rain.

On the par-5 second hole, Louis Oosthuizen had a fairway metal in hand as he tried to reach the green. Only about 150 people lingered behind to watch. On the third fairway, the caddie for Joaquin Niemann was walking the course to check yardages when someone suggested he should enjoy such a quiet day. Gary Matthews turned and smile.

Woods is grouped with Oosthuizen and Niemann for the opening two rounds. On the other side of the course, both sides of the 15th fairway were lined with spectators to watch Woods take two shots with his fairway metal to reach the green. They followed him in. Practice tickets are only for one day. Catch him while you can.

“Tiger is Tiger,” Couples said. “He’s not like a lot of us, where I’ve been injured even at age 35 and I go play just to play. He’s not going to do that. He’s won so many times, and he’s just not a guy to go do something mediocre. He’ll compete, and he’ll be ready to roll.”

Rain interrupted the final day of practice after about three hours and cleared up in time for the start of the Par 3 Tournament, the first time that was held since 2019 because of the pandemic. Storms halted this edition of the Par 3.

And then the curtain rises on the Masters which has rarely held so much intrigue.

Scheffler is the new No. 1 in a world of golf so balanced at the top that Jon Rahm, Collin Morikawa, Viktor Hovland, Patrick Cantlay and Cameron Smith have a mathematical chance to replace him.

This is different from other years in which only a few of golf’s best players have anything to show for it.

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Scheffler is the only player who has won this year while ranked among the top 10. Dustin Johnson and Justin Thomas have gone more than a year without winning,

Rory McIlroy is not on that list, though he can claim something far greater. The Masters is all that keeps him from becoming the sixth player to have won all four majors.

"I know if I play well, I'll give myself chances to win this golf tournament," McIlroy said. He gets off to a late start, the final tee time of the opening round at 2:03 p.m.

Woods will be long gone by then, and that's when everyone will have a sense of how he can perform, walking and playing and keeping score for the first time in 508 days.

His concern is more about walking on a right leg that still has plates and rods and screws than making solid contact and holing a few putts.

"It's up to me to endure the pain and all that, but I felt like I could still do this," Woods said. "I don't know how many more years I can do this."

However many, everyone will be watching, now more than ever.

Interest in MLB season tops ire over lockout: AP-NORC poll

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and RONALD BLUM Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — About 1 in 4 fans of Major League Baseball feel at least some anger toward the sport after its first work stoppage in a generation, according to a new poll, but the vast majority are still excited about the new season.

Only 27% of Americans say they are currently a fan of MLB, according to the poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll also finds 32% of Americans 45 and older say they currently are fans, but only 22% of younger adults say they are, a trend MLB management says it is working to reverse.

Even among fans, few were very attuned to the 99-day lockout that delayed the start of the season from March 31 until Thursday or say that it had a major impact on their views of MLB.

Jason Timmons grew up watching the Chicago Cubs and was following closely when they won the World Series in 2016, but he said he didn't know they would be starting their season Thursday because "the whole labor thing kind of turned me off."

"I think it's petty," said Timmons, a 43-year-old from St. Marys, West Virginia. "I just don't think it's right — billionaires fighting with billionaires over just little stuff."

The poll shows three-quarters of fans say they're at least somewhat excited about the upcoming season, and even more say they're at least somewhat interested. Still, 28% of fans are at least somewhat angry and 39% are at least somewhat frustrated following the dispute, in which management and players vented their criticism of each other during weeks when the start of spring training was delayed.

"They're always bickering about their labor," Timmons said. "And it's like, you're just playing baseball. I mean, there's other things going on in the world that's more important than bickering about what they're bickering about."

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred apologized to fans when the labor agreement was reached on March 10. Union head Tony Clark said several times during the dispute that management chose to institute the work stoppage as a strategy.

For some, the lockout was only further evidence of what they were already feeling. The poll shows 22% of Americans say they used to be MLB baseball fans but are not anymore. Donald Joy is among them.

"I used to play baseball, I used to be a fan of it, but I've gotten away from it because of all of the nonsense," said Joy, a 70-year-old from Bailey, Colorado. "People claiming to be slaves when they're making \$20 million a year."

Joy lamented the growing costs for fans, from the price of a ticket to go to a game to the cost of a hot dog at the stadium.

"You get to a point where it's not about the fans anymore," Joy said. "It's become a rich man's sport. It is not for the masses."

But some fans were sympathetic to the players, especially those competing at levels below the major

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league level.

While Timmons was frustrated by what he saw as bickering amongst billionaires, he also focused in on the owners' role in the months-long negotiations.

"I didn't like them locking them out for no reason at the end of last year and doing what they did," he said. "I thought the owners were being petty, and then you know they don't want to negotiate with the players. I mean, it's just ridiculous."

"I don't begrudge the players more money at all," said Mary O'Connell, a 67-year-old Yankees fan from Las Cruces, New Mexico. "The owners have got tons. I have no concerns about management's poor sob story now."

Major league players were angry that big league payrolls fell from \$4.2 billion to \$4.05 billion during the five-year labor deal that expired after the 2021 season. The new agreement lifted the major league minimum from \$570,500 to \$700,000 and devotes a new \$50 million bonus pool each year to younger players at the lower range of salaries.

The contract also raised salaries for players on 40-man rosters assigned to the minor leagues, from \$46,600 to \$57,200 for a first-time contract, but other minor league players aren't represented by the union.

Only 13% of current baseball fans say they followed lockout news "extremely" or "very" closely. Thirty percent said they followed somewhat closely, but 57% said they did not closely follow lockout developments.

Only 8% of baseball fans said the lockout had a major impact of their views of the sport, though another 39% said it had a minor impact. Baseball fans who followed news about the lockout were especially likely to say it had an impact on them, compared with those who didn't, 64% to 34%.

Despite some frustration, the vast majority of baseball fans say they feel at least somewhat excited about and interested in the upcoming season. Fans that followed the lockout closely are especially excited.

"I enjoy just watching the game and don't really focus on the political side of it, management, all that," said Ronald Ellis, a 60-year-old Houston fan from Lake Charles, Louisiana. "I'm excited to see how the Astros will do this year."

Fed signals more aggressive steps to fight inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials are signaling that they will take an aggressive approach to fighting high inflation in the coming months — actions that will make borrowing sharply more expensive for consumers and businesses and heighten risks to the economy.

In minutes from their March policy meeting, released Wednesday, Fed officials said that half-point interest rate hikes, rather than traditional quarter-point increases, "could be appropriate" multiple times this year.

At last month's meeting, many of the Fed's policymakers favored a half-point increase, the minutes said, but held off then because of the uncertainties created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Instead, the Fed raised its key short-term rate by a quarter-point and signaled that it planned to continue raising rates well into next year.

The minutes said the Fed is also moving toward rapidly shrinking its huge \$9 trillion stockpile of bonds in the coming months, a move that would contribute to higher borrowing costs. The policymakers said they would likely cut those holdings by about \$95 billion a month — nearly double the pace they implemented five years ago, when they last shrank their balance sheet.

The plan to quickly draw down their bond holdings marks the latest move by Fed officials to accelerate their inflation-fighting efforts. Prices are surging at the fastest pace in four decades, and officials have expressed increasing concern about inflation.

The Fed's plans "reflect their great discomfort with the rapid pace of inflation," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics.

The Fed is "increasingly worried" that consumers and businesses will start expecting price surges to persist, Bostjancic added, a trend that can itself prolong high inflation.

Many economists have said they worry the Fed has waited too long to start raising rates and could be

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forced to respond so aggressively as to trigger a recession. Indeed, economists at Deutsche Bank predict that the economy will tumble into a recession late next year, noting that the Fed, "finding itself now well behind the curve, has given clear signals that it is shifting to a more aggressive tightening mode."

The stock market sold off when the minutes were released but later rebounded from its worst levels. Still, the S&P 500 index closed down nearly 1% after a sharp drop on Tuesday.

Markets now expect much steeper rate hikes this year than Fed officials had signaled as recently as their meeting in mid-March. At that meeting, the policymakers projected that their benchmark rate would remain below 2% by the end of this year and 2.8% at the end of 2023, up from its current level below 0.5%. But Wall Street now foresees the Fed's rate reaching 2.6% by year's end, with further hikes next year.

Higher Fed rates will, in turn, heighten costs for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and corporate loans. In this way, the Fed hopes to cool economic growth and rising wages enough to tame high inflation, which has caused hardships for millions of households and poses a severe political threat to President Joe Biden.

Chair Jerome Powell opened the door two weeks ago to increasing rates by as much as a half-point. Lael Brainard, a key member of the Fed's Board of Governors, and other officials have also made clear they envision such sharp increases. Most economists now expect the Fed to raise rates by a half-point at both its May and June meetings.

In a speech Tuesday, Brainard underscored the Fed's increasing aggressiveness by saying its bond holdings will "shrink considerably more rapidly" over "a much shorter period" than the last time it reduced its balance sheet, from 2017-2019. At that time, the balance sheet was about \$4.5 trillion. Now, it's twice as large.

After the pandemic hammered the economy two years ago, the Fed bought trillions in Treasury and mortgage bonds, with the goal of lowering longer-term loan rates. It also cut its short-term benchmark rate to near zero.

As a sign of how fast the Fed is reversing course, the last time the Fed bought bonds, there was a three-year gap between when it stopped its purchases, in 2014, and when it began reducing the balance sheet, in 2017. Now, that shift is likely to happen in as few three months or less, with the reduction in the balance sheet likely to be announced as early as May.

Brainard's remarks caused a sharp rise in the rate on the 10-year Treasury note, which influences mortgage rates, business loans and other borrowing costs. On Wednesday, that rate reached 2.6%, up from 2.3% a week earlier and 1.7% a month ago. Average mortgage rates have leapt higher, reaching 4.67% last week, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac, the highest since 2018.

Shorter-term bond yields have jumped more, in some cases to above the 10-year yield, a pattern that has often been taken as a sign of an impending recession. Fed officials say, however, that shorter-term bond market trends aren't flashing the same warning signals.

Gennadiy Goldberg, senior U.S. rates strategist at TD Securities, said the narrow gap between longer- and shorter-term bond yields indicates that investors think the economy will slow enough in the next two years to force the Fed to scale back its rate hikes.

To shrink its balance sheet, the Fed will let some of its bonds mature without reinvesting the proceeds. What impact this might have is uncertain. Powell said last month that the reduction in bond holdings would be equivalent to another rate hike. Economists estimate that reducing the balance sheet by \$1 trillion a year would be equal to anywhere from one to three additional quarter-point increases in the Fed's benchmark short-term rate each year.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who preceded Powell as Fed chair, suggested at a congressional hearing Wednesday that Russia's invasion of Ukraine would likely keep escalating inflation in the coming months.

"The sanctions we've placed on Russia are pushing up the price of energy," Yellen said. "When energy prices are going up, the price of wheat and corn that Russia and Ukraine produce are going up, and metals that play an important industrial role are going up."

Nursing home care, funding system need overhaul, report says

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By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Nursing home residents are subjected to ineffective care and poor staffing, while facility finances are shrouded in secrecy and regulatory lapses go unenforced, according to a report Wednesday that called for wholesale changes in an industry whose failures have been spotlighted by the pandemic.

To anyone who saw the scourge of COVID-19 on the country's most vulnerable, the findings of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine might seem sobering but unsurprising, as the long-term care system's inadequacies were made plain by more than 150,000 resident deaths. The authors of the 605-page report insist it could be an impetus to address issues that have gotten little more than lip service for decades.

"The public is so concerned about the quality of care that most people really fear their family having to be in a nursing home," said Betty Ferrell, a nurse who chaired the report committee. "We're very optimistic that our government officials will respond to what has really been a travesty."

The report covers a vast cross-section of long-term care, from granular details such as the way facilities are designed to foundational issues that would require massive political capital and investment to address. Among them: the authors advocate for creating a new national long-term care system that would exist outside of Medicaid, the program that is at the center of most long-term care financing.

The likelihood of such a proposal successfully winding its way through Congress seems low in the current political climate. The most recent federal attempt to reform long-term care financing was a voluntary long-term care insurance program known as the CLASS Act. It was included in the Affordable Care Act but later repealed when the Obama administration found it unworkable.

"It has been a long time since we as a country have been wanting to dig in and reform how we finance, pay, regulate and delivery nursing home services," said David Grabowski, a nursing home expert and Harvard Medical School professor who served on the report committee.

The industry's biggest lobbying groups insisted reforms must be met by increased government funding.

The American Health Care Association said "what we cannot support are unfunded mandates."

Katie Smith Sloan, who leads LeadingAge, which represents nonprofit nursing homes, called the report "a piercing wake-up call" about an industry "in desperate need of an overhaul," but likewise said the success of remaking the system would depend on how funding issues are addressed.

"As policymakers consider how to enact the report's recommendations, they must back their actions with sufficient funding to make changes a reality," she said. "Without that, the committee's work will be for naught."

On the issue of nursing home staffing, which advocates have repeatedly said is too low, too untrained and too underpaid, the report's authors called for facilities to have at least one registered nurse on duty at all times and for an infection prevention and control specialist and social worker to also be on staff.

More broadly, across all staffing in homes, including nurse aides who make up the bulk of front-line caregivers, the authors called for additional study on optimal staffing.

Industry lobbyists have fiercely fought against more stringent staffing requirements. Federal law only requires nursing homes to have sufficient staff to meet residents' needs, but nearly all interpretation of what that means is left to states. President Joe Biden, too, has called for establishing national staffing minimums.

Among the more routine subjects in the report, but one that nonetheless impacts residents' everyday lives, the authors call for homes to prioritize private rooms and bathrooms instead of the communal ones that can fuel infections and underscore the institutional setting. And in a blunt reminder of how bleak life in nursing homes can be, the report notes most residents spend "little if any time outdoors," calling for facilities to make outside access more accessible.

The proposals, Grabowski said, have the potential to improve the days of residents who, even when they are having their basic medical needs met, are frequently lacking in other areas of their lives.

"I think the average nursing home resident has an OK quality of care but a poor quality of life," Grabowski said.

Advocates for nursing home residents have long pleaded for attention on homes' shortcomings, and

the pandemic gave them a media spotlight. But decades of inaction by politicians and resistance by the industry are difficult to overcome, and what the report might spark remains unclear.

A forerunner to the study, 1986's "Improving the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes," was also a product of the National Academies. Some issues of that report were taken on in the sweeping 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act, which created the regulatory framework homes are still under today. Others remain undressed 36 years later.

Dude Perfect trades irons for irreverence at the Masters

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Bryson DeChambeau stood on the tee box, studied the 500ish yards between himself and the green on the 11th hole at the outer reaches of Augusta National, picked his club of choice from his blue golf bag and let loose.

The shot went maybe 40 yards. Even worse, it sailed almost directly left and out of bounds.

"Fore!" DeChambeau said with a laugh, because what else is there to do when you take on Amen Corner with a tennis racket? Or a Frisbee. Or a croquet mallet. Or a pool cue. Or a foam football. Or whatever that mesh thing with a weighted ball in it is called. (It's official name is a foxtail.)

DeChambeau's tour around one of the most famed stretches of one of the most famed courses on the planet last month didn't include a golf club. Sorry, that's against the rules in All Sports Golf, the game invented by Texas-based YouTube stars Dude Perfect.

The quintet — who started goofing around making trick shot videos over a decade ago — now boast 57 million YouTube subscribers. Their channel is an irreverent mix of sports and comedy aimed at kids who might only know the Masters as that golf thing with the guys in green jackets their parents watch on warm early spring afternoons.

Or, exactly the kind of audience the powers that be at a place fiercely protective of its ageless traditions knows it needs to meet in the middle if it wants to grow the game, and the tournament's brand in the process.

The 11-minute video the group released last weekend ahead of the 86th Masters looks nothing like what you'll see when the traditional broadcast begins on Thursday. An unorthodox putting stroke with a croquet mallet. A volleyball smashed into Rae's Creek. A Nerf football toss from short of the green on the par-5 13th that settled 3 feet from the hole. Players laying on their stomach for tap-ins with a pool stick.

All of which was entirely the point when Augusta National OK'd the project, a decision that came as a shock to everyone, DeChambeau included.

"Everybody was (surprised)," the world's 19th-ranked player said. "And I think that's a pretty cool attribute of what Augusta is doing now, and I see it changing in a very cool way for a younger audience, new generation."

Don't get DeChambeau wrong. The rules are still the rules: No cell phones on the property. No shorts for the players. Access in some ways is more limited than ever.

"I still walk on my toes around here," said Collin Morikawa. The 25-year-old two-time major champion had to remind himself not to run during a practice round earlier in the week when he spotted a fan along the first fairway.

Yet the members of one of the world's most exclusive clubs are making an attempt — outwardly anyway — to connect with the next wave somewhat on their terms. The Masters — yes, the Masters — has a TikTok account.

Augusta National chairman Fred Ridley quickly grew to embrace the idea of having Dude Perfect turn the 11th, 12th and 13th holes at the club into a content creator's paradise. Well, at least after the 69-year-old Ridley figured out who Dude Perfect was.

Ridley admitted Wednesday he'd never heard of the group but was won over by their reverence for the course and the game. And yes, that 57-million-plus subscriber number caught his attention, too.

The clip has more than 6.2 million views and counting as of Wednesday afternoon. The final round of

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Hideki Matsuyama's historic Masters victory last spring drew an audience of 9.45 million, most of them likely only familiar with Dude Perfect as those guys who yell a lot when they do things like stand on the back of a four-wheeler and throw a football through a basketball hoop in the stands at the Super Bowl.

"I think it accomplished what we wanted to," Ridley said. "I've heard from a number of my law partners who have teenage children who said, 'This is great. My kids want to go out and play golf.' That's sort of the idea."

It has to be if the tournament wants to expand its footprint. Anna Davis, just 16, captured the Women's Amateur last weekend with her ponytails spilling out from under her white bucket hat.

Davis freely admitted she typically doesn't pay much attention to the Masters and said "did they really?" when told Dude Perfect did its thing at a place where the way things are done hasn't changed much through the years.

"They let things slide around here," Davis said. "It's kind of cool that they let stuff like that happen."

Well, within reason. The video ends with DeChambeau and the Dude Perfect crew skipping balls — golf balls this time — over the pond at the par-3 16th, an activity once considered taboo that has become a tradition of its own over the last 30 years.

Maybe Dude Perfect turning portions of Augusta into their own personal playground will become A Thing. Maybe not.

"We'll look at more things like that but always through a lens of our culture and respect for the game and respect for the institution in this place," Ridley said.

A place constantly trying to thread the delicate needle between timeliness and timelessness.

US hits Russia with 'war crimes' sanctions, Europe following

By AAMER MADHANI, SAMUEL PETREQUIN and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. rolled out a new wave of financial sanctions on Wednesday against Russia that President Joe Biden said would place a lasting penalty on the country's economy.

The United Kingdom quickly followed suit, and more pain was coming from the European Union as the allies pressed forward with an escalating campaign to tighten the economic screws on Russian President Vladimir Putin for "war crimes" in Ukraine.

Making it personal, the U.S. sanctions singled out the Putin's family, targeting his two adult daughters in addition to blocking two key Russian banks.

Biden said that "Russia has already failed in its initial war" after the country's forces were turned back from the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. He cautioned, however, that "this fight is far from over."

"This war could continue for a long time," but the United States will continue to stand with Ukraine and Ukrainians in the fight for freedom, Biden said. "We're going to stifle Russia's ability to grow for years to come."

The latest sanctions underscore the financial pain that Russia faces, as evidence that its troops killed Ukrainian civilians has led to ever harsher penalties by the U.S. and its Western allies that are eroding Putin's ability to fight.

While rounds of increased sanctions have not forced Putin out of the war, they have put Russia in increasingly desperate economic circumstances as Ukrainian forces withstand his barrages. Key to the effectiveness of the sanctions has been the unity between the U.S. and European nations. And the atrocities revealed in Ukraine have intensified pressure on Germany and other countries to go further and join the U.S. and Lithuania in blocking all Russian energy exports.

The U.K. piled on Wednesday with asset freezes against major banks, a ban on British investment in Russia and a pledge to end dependency on Russian coal and oil by yearend.

The European Union was also expected to soon take additional steps, including a ban on new investment in Russia and an embargo on coal, after the recent evidence of atrocities emerging in the wake of the retreat by Russian forces from the town of Bucha.

The U.S. acted against two of Russia's largest banks, Sberbank and Alfa Bank, prohibiting assets from going

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through the U.S. financial system and barring Americans from doing business with those two institutions.

In addition to sanctions aimed at Putin's adult daughters, Mariya Putina and Katerina Tikhonova, the U.S. is targeting Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin; the wife and children of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov; and members of Russia's Security Council, including Dmitry Medvedev, a former president and prime minister.

The penalties cut off all of Putin's close family members from the U.S. financial system and freeze any assets they hold in the United States.

Biden was expected to sign an executive order that would ban new investment in Russia by Americans no matter where they are living. The U.S. Treasury Department was preparing more sanctions against Russian state-owned enterprises, according to the White House.

Britain announced asset freezes targeting Sberbank and the Credit Bank of Moscow and designated eight Russian oligarchs whom it says Putin "uses to prop up his war economy."

"Together with our allies, we are showing the Russian elite that they cannot wash their hands of the atrocities committed on Putin's orders," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said.

Britain had already announced a plan to phase out Russian oil, which accounts for 8% of the U.K. supply. Russia is the top supplier of imported coal to the U.K., though British demand for the polluting fuel has plummeted in the past decade.

Britain has not ended imports of Russian natural gas, which accounts for 4% of its supply, saying only that it will do so "as soon as possible."

Videos and images of bodies in the streets of Bucha after it was recaptured from Russian forces have unleashed a wave of indignation among Western allies, who have drawn up new sanctions as a response.

The European Commission's proposed ban on coal imports would be the first EU sanctions targeting Russia's lucrative energy industry over its war in Ukraine.

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said energy was key to Putin's war coffers. And because the war has pushed prices higher, Russia has benefitted from being able to sell its natural gas and oil to the rest of the world.

"A billion euro is what we pay Putin every day for the energy he provides us since the beginning of the war. We have given him 35 billion euro. Compare that to the one billion that we have given to the Ukraine in arms and weapons," Borrell said.

The steady intensifying in sanctions is less a sign of their shortcomings than the building pressure against Russia as it seeks foreign investment and basic goods, Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters at a Wednesday breakfast. "We need to have patience and perspective when it comes to the impacts on Russia of this unprecedented and crippling sanctions regime," Deese said at the event sponsored by The Christian Science Monitor.

Deese noted that Russian inflation is running at 2% weekly, which would compound to annual inflation above 200% annually. He noted that the Biden administration expects Russian prices will not ultimately rise more than 200% this year.

While the White House has said Russia should not attend the G-20 meeting in Indonesia this November, he noted that it may drop out of the organization anyway because its economy has shrunk in size so dramatically.

After several European countries announced the expulsion of Russian diplomats, the European Commission proposed a fifth package of sanctions including a ban on coal imports that could be adopted once unanimously approved by the 27-nation bloc's ambassadors.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the coal ban is worth 4 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) per year and that the EU has already started working on additional sanctions, including on oil imports.

She didn't mention natural gas, with consensus among the 27 EU countries on targeting the fuel used to generate electricity and heat homes difficult to secure amid opposition from gas-dependent members like Germany, the bloc's largest economy.

But European Council President Charles Michel said the bloc should keep up the pressure on the Kremlin, suggesting that an embargo on gas imports should also be required at some point in the future.

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"The new package includes a ban on coal imports," Michel said on Wednesday. "I think that measures on oil, and even gas, will also be needed, sooner or later."

EXPLAINER: A look at West's escalating sanctions on Russia

By The Associated Press Associated Press

The United States and European allies are again escalating sanctions on Russia after the discovery of evidence that Russian troops executed civilians in a town near Kyiv.

New penalties moved even closer to Russian President Vladimir Putin, targeting two of his adult daughters. The U.S., United Kingdom and the European Union prepared other steps including an embargo against Russian coal.

Pressure in the West for new sanctions rose in recent days after videos and photographs emerged of bodies laying in the streets of Bucha after Ukrainian forces regained control from retreating Russians. Some of the victims had their hands bound and were shot in the head, and satellite images indicated they had been in the streets since mid-March, when the Russian military still occupied the town.

"I made clear that Russia would pay a severe and immediate price for its atrocities in Bucha," President Joe Biden said in a tweet after the White House said he will sign an executive order banning all new investment in Russia.

Sanctions imposed since Russia invaded Ukraine in February have damaged Russia's economy but failed to stop the war.

Here's a look at some of the sanctions now in place. Combined, they add up to some of the toughest penalties imposed on any nation short of military action.

LATEST MOVES

The United States on Wednesday announced sanctions targeting Putin's two adult daughters — cutting off all of his close family members from the U.S. financial system and freezing any assets they might hold in the U.S. The same measures were taken against Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, the wife and children of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, former President Dmitry Medvedev and others.

Washington also acted against two of Russia's largest banks, Sberbank and Alfa Bank, and the U.S. and its allies plan to ban all new investment in Russia. Earlier this week, the U.S. Treasury Department moved to block any Russian government debt payments with U.S. dollars from accounts at American financial institutions — a step designed to make it difficult for Russia to meet financial obligations.

NEXT STEPS?

In Brussels, the European Commission proposed a ban on coal imports from Russia. If adopted, it would be the first EU sanctions to target Russia's critical energy industry.

The United States has already banned Russian oil and natural gas, but Europe has hesitated — it is far more dependent than the U.S. on Russian energy, and sanctions are likely to drive up costs on European consumers and businesses. Germany has long opposed a ban on Russian natural gas. So has Hungary and its president, a Putin ally who is bending to Russian demands to pay for gas imports with rubles.

The EU's foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, said Europe is paying Russia a billion euros (\$1.09 billion) a day for energy, helping finance Russia's war effort and dwarfing the aid that Europe is giving Ukraine.

Europe is also considering banning Russian ships from EU ports — Russian aircraft are already barred from European airspace — and banning the export to Russia of quantum computers, advanced semiconductors and other machinery and high-tech equipment.

Some European leaders say the proposals don't go far enough. Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, tweeted that a coal ban, sanctions against a few banks, and barring Russian ships "is not really an adequate sanctions package to the massacres that are being uncovered. A feeble response is just an invitation for more atrocities."

OLIGARCHS

Also Wednesday, the Biden administration charged a Russian oligarch with violating earlier sanctions that the U.S. imposed after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, which included barring U.S. citizens from working

for or doing business with Russian media baron Konstantin Malofeyev. Officials said that Malofeyev used co-conspirators to secretly acquire media organizations across Europe in hopes of spreading pro-Russia propaganda.

A former CNBC and Fox News employee was arrested last month in London for working as a television producer for Malofeyev.

Previous sanctions had targeted other people close to Putin, including Alisher Usmanov, one of the wealthiest people in Russia, and Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov.

The Justice Department recently announced the creation of a team of federal agents and prosecutors to pursue wealthy Russians or anyone else who aids Russia's invasion of Ukraine or uses cryptocurrency to help Russia evade sanctions. The team, called Task Force Kleptocapture, was set up to seize assets belonging to oligarchs.

On Monday, in the Mediterranean port of Palma de Mallorca, U.S. agents and Spain's Civil Guard seized a 254-foot (78-meter) yacht owned by an oligarch and Putin ally whom the Justice Department accuses of violating laws on bank fraud, money laundering and sanctions. A boating website called Superyachtfan.com valued the ship, called Tango, at \$120 million.

Zoos hiding birds as avian flu spreads in North America

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Zoos across North America are moving their birds indoors and away from people and wildlife as they try to protect them from the highly contagious and potentially deadly avian influenza.

Penguins may be the only birds visitors to many zoos can see right now, because they already are kept inside and usually protected behind glass in their exhibits, making it harder for the bird flu to reach them.

Nearly 23 million chickens and turkeys have already been killed across the United States to limit the spread of the virus, and zoos are working hard to prevent any of their birds from meeting the same fate. It would be especially upsetting for zoos to have to kill any of the endangered or threatened species in their care.

"It would be extremely devastating," said Maria Franke, who is the manager of welfare science at Toronto Zoo, which has less than two dozen Loggerhead Shrike songbirds that it's breeding with the hope of reintroducing them into the wild. "We take amazing care and the welfare and well being of our animals is the utmost importance. There's a lot of staff that has close connections with the animals that they care for here at the zoo."

Toronto Zoo workers are adding roofs to some outdoor bird exhibits and double-checking the mesh surrounding enclosures to ensure it will keep wild birds out.

Birds shed the virus through their droppings and nasal discharge. Experts say it can be spread through contaminated equipment, clothing, boots and vehicles carrying supplies. Research has shown that small birds that squeeze into zoo exhibits or buildings can also spread the flu, and that mice can even track it inside.

So far, no outbreaks have been reported at zoos, but there have been wild birds found dead that had the flu. For example, a wild duck that died in a behind-the-scenes area of the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines, Iowa, after tornadoes last month tested positive, zoo spokesman Ryan Bickel said.

Most of the steps zoos are taking are designed to prevent contact between wild birds and zoo animals. In some places, officials are requiring employees to change into clean boots and don protective gear before entering bird areas.

When bird flu cases are found in poultry, officials order the entire flock to be killed because the virus is so contagious. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has indicated that zoos might be able to avoid that by isolating infected birds and possibly euthanizing a small number of them.

Sarah Woodhouse, director of animal health at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, said she is optimistic after talking with state and federal regulators.

"They all agree that ordering us to depopulate a large part of our collection would be the absolute last-ditch effort. So they're really interested in working with us to see what we can do to make sure that we're not going to spread the disease while also being able to take care of our birds and not have to euthanize,"

Woodhouse said.

Among the precautions zoos are taking is to keep birds in smaller groups so that if a case is found, only a few would be affected. The USDA and state veterinarians would make the final decision about which birds had to be killed.

"Euthanasia is really the only way to keep it from spreading," said Luis Padilla, who is vice president of animal collections at the Saint Louis Zoo. "That's why we have so many of these very proactive measures in place."

The National Aviary in Pittsburgh — the nation's largest — is providing individual health checks for each of its roughly 500 birds. Many already live in large glass enclosures or outdoor habitats where they don't have direct exposure to wildlife, said Dr. Pilar Fish, the aviary's senior director of veterinary medicine and zoological advancement.

Kansas City Zoo CEO Sean Putney said he's heard a few complaints from visitors, but most people seem OK with not getting to see some birds. "I think our guests understand that we have what's in the best interests of the animals in mind when we make these decisions even though they can't get to see them," Putney said.

Officials emphasize that bird flu doesn't jeopardize the safety of meat or eggs or represent a significant risk to human health. No infected birds are allowed into the food supply, and properly cooking poultry and eggs kills bacteria and viruses. No human cases have been found in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Attorneys General warn NFL to improve treatment of women

NEW YORK (AP) — The attorneys general of six states have written to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, expressing concern over the league's treatment of female employees and admonishing him for a lack of improvement to the league's workplace culture.

Without improvement, the attorneys general warned of potential legal action.

The letter outlines concerns of gender discrimination ranging from the NFL's treatment of women who have experienced domestic violence to the hiring and promotion of women in NFL offices. It comes as Congress investigates how the league has handled claims of sexual harassment in the front office of the Washington Commanders.

The letter was signed by Letitia James, the attorney general of New York, where the league is headquartered, as well as the attorneys general of Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington State. The New York Times first reported the letter being sent.

That letter also cited a Times article that included allegations from more than 30 former NFL employees who said they experienced problems, including unwanted touching from male bosses; attending parties where prostitutes were hired; being passed over for promotions based on their gender; and being pushed out for complaining about discrimination.

"The NFL must do better—pink jerseys are not a replacement for equal treatment and full inclusion of women in the workplace," the attorneys general wrote. "Our offices will use the full weight of our authority to investigate and prosecute allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation by employers throughout our states, including at the National Football League."

In an email response to The Associated Press, NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said:

"We share the commitment of the attorneys general to ensuring that all of our workplaces - including the league office and 32 clubs - are diverse, inclusive and free from discrimination and harassment. We have made great strides over the years in support of that commitment, but acknowledge that we, like many organizations, have more work to do. We look forward to sharing with the attorneys general the policies, practices, protocols, education programs and partnerships we have implemented to act on this commitment and confirm that the league office and our clubs maintain a respectful workplace where all our employees, including women, have an opportunity to thrive."

McCarthy pointed out such ongoing league programs as a comprehensive employee training initiative

through partnerships with organizations such as RISE, GLAAD, Paradigm, and The Winters Group; and Internal Affinity Groups, in which employees can interact, learn and support each other within smaller communities like BEN (Black Engagement Network), PIN (Parents Initiative Network) and WIN (Women's Interactive Network).

Last month, the NFL changed what is known as the "Rooney Rule," designed to ensure more opportunities for women and racial minorities. Beginning this season, all 32 clubs must employ a female or a member of an ethnic or racial minority to serve as an offensive assistant coach. The person will receive a one-year contract and work closely with the head coach and offensive staff to gain experience.

Rights groups charge 'ethnic cleansing' in Ethiopia's Tigray

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Widespread abuses against civilians in the western part of Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have charged in a new report.

The crimes were perpetrated by security officials and civilian authorities from the neighboring Amhara region, sometimes "with the acquiescence and possible participation of Ethiopian federal forces," the rights groups say in the report released Wednesday.

The abuses are "part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan civilian population that amount to crimes against humanity as well as war crimes," the report says.

Ethiopian federal authorities strongly refute allegations they have deliberately targeted Tigrayans for violent attacks. They said at the outbreak of the war in Nov. 2020 that their objective was to disarm the rebellious leaders of Tigray.

Ethiopian authorities said Wednesday that they are "carefully examining" allegations in the rights groups' report. While the report has "ideas that are not useful for any peace effort, the government will reaffirm its determination to investigate all human rights violations and make public the results," said a statement from the Government Communication Service.

The report, the result of a months-long investigation including more than 400 interviews, charges that hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans have been forced to leave their homes in a violent campaign of unlawful killings, sexual assaults, mass arbitrary detentions, livestock pillaging, and the denial of humanitarian assistance.

Widespread atrocities have been reported in the Tigray war, with Ethiopian government troops and their allies, including troops from neighboring Eritrea, facing most of the charges.

Fighters loyal to the party of Tigray's leaders — the Tigray People's Liberation Front, or TPLF — also have been accused of committing abuses as the war spread into neighboring regions. Fighters affiliated with the TPLF deliberately killed dozens of people, gang-raped dozens of women and pillaged property for a period of several weeks last year in Amhara region, Amnesty said in a report released in February.

The new report by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International focuses on attacks targeting Tigrayans in western Tigray and describes them as "ethnic cleansing," a term that refers to forcing a population from a region through expulsions and other violence, often including killings and rapes.

Publicly displayed signs in several towns across western Tigray urged Tigrayans to leave, and local officials in meetings discussed plans to remove Tigrayans, according to the report. Pamphlets appeared to give Tigrayans urgent ultimatums to leave or be killed, the report says.

"They kept saying every night, 'We will kill you ... Go out of the area,'" said one woman from the town of Baeker, speaking of threats she faced from an Amhara militia group, according to the report.

Western Tigray has long been contested territory. Amhara authorities say the area was under their control until the 1990s when the TPLF-led federal government redrew internal boundaries that put the territory within Tigray's borders. Amhara officials moved swiftly to take over the region when the war broke out.

The outbreak of the war "brought these longstanding and unaddressed grievances to the fore: Amhara regional forces, along with Ethiopian federal forces, seized these territories and displaced Tigrayan civilians in a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign," the report says.

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted in March 2021 that ethnic cleansing had taken place in western Tigray, marking the first time a top official in the international community openly described the situation as such. That allegation was dismissed by Ethiopian authorities as "a completely unfounded and spurious verdict against the Ethiopian government."

The new report corroborates reporting by The Associated Press on atrocities in the war, which affects 6 million people in Tigray alone.

In June Ethiopia's government cut off almost all access to food aid, medical supplies, cash and fuel in Tigray. The war has spilled into Amhara and Afar regions, with Tigrayan leaders saying they are fighting to ease the blockade and to protect themselves from further attacks.

Facing growing international pressure, Ethiopian authorities on March 24 announced a humanitarian truce for Tigray, saying the action was necessary to allow unimpeded relief supplies into the area. Trucks bearing food supplies have since arrived in the region.

The AP last year confirmed the first starvation deaths under the blockade along with the government's ban on humanitarian workers bringing medicines into Tigray.

Estimated tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war. But there is little hope for peace talks as Ethiopian authorities have outlawed the TPLF, effectively making its leaders fugitives on the run.

Among their recommendations, the rights groups call for a "neutral protection force" in western Tigray, possibly with the deployment of an African Union-backed peacekeeping mission, "with a robust civilian protection mandate."

Their report also urges the U.N. Security Council to impose an arms embargo targeting all the warring parties.

Macron leads polls but turnout a big question in French vote

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — President Emmanuel Macron is the clear favorite in France's presidential race, yet a big unknown factor may prove decisive: an unprecedented proportion of people say they are unsure who to vote for or don't intend to vote at all, bringing a large dose of uncertainty to the election.

The pro-European centrist is still comfortably leading 11 other candidates in the polls ahead of Sunday's first-round vote. His main challenger, far-right leader Marine Le Pen, appears on the rise in recent days. Both are in good position to reach the runoff on April 24, which would make them replay the 2017 election that Macron won handily.

There's "no certainty," Macron warned during his first big rally on Saturday near Paris.

"Don't believe in polls or commentators who would sound definitive and tell you that ... the election is already done, that everything is going to be all right," he told his supporters. "From Brexit to so many elections, what seems unlikely can happen!"

Scenarios for the this year's second-round vote show that Le Pen has significantly narrowed the gap with Macron compared to 2017 — when she lost with 34% support to his 66%.

Polls still place her behind Macron, but much closer, apparently showing the wisdom of her longstanding strategy to soften her rhetoric and image — allowing her to capture the anti-Macron vote as well as far-right support.

In recent days, Macron's campaign has also hit a speed bump dubbed "the McKinsey Affair," named after an American consulting company hired to advise the French government on its COVID-19 vaccination campaign and other policies. A new French Senate report questions the government's use of private consultants and accuses McKinsey of tax dodging. Financial prosecutors announced Wednesday that a preliminary investigation has been opened into suspected tax fraud.

The issue is energizing Macron's rivals and dogging him at campaign stops.

Many in Macron's camp fear that his supporters may not go to polling stations because they already think he will win, while those angry at his policies will make sure to vote.

"Of course I have concerns," said Julien Descamps, a 28-year-old member of Macron's party, stressing

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that some people in his circle “don’t know what to do.”

“They are not fully convinced by Macron, but if they reject the extremes, they should vote for him,” he said.

Macron called on voters to get mobilized against both France’s far-right and the far-left. “Don’t boo them, fight their ideas,” he said.

In third position according to the polls is far-left figure Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has increased his support but still is a distance behind Le Pen. Another far-right candidate, Eric Zemmour, and conservative contender Valérie Pécresse are amid other key challengers. Sunday’s first round will qualify the two top candidates for the runoff.

The presidential election is the one that attracts French voters the most.

Yet the turnout has decreased from 84% in 2007 to about 78% in 2017, and studies show that abstention may be higher than five years ago. In particular, young and working-class people appear less certain to go to the polls than retirees and upper-class voters.

A low turnout could have a major impact on the vote, pollsters say. They note that a greater proportion of people don’t know yet for whom they will vote — or whether they will vote at all.

That’s the situation of managing assistant Liza Garnier, 45, who lives in the wealthy suburb of Montmoyency, north of Paris.

“I don’t believe in what politicians say anymore. They make a lot of promises, they say candidates’ words, and once in power, we are disappointed,” she said. “I get the impression that more and more people think it’s useless: voting for who? For what?”

Garnier feels politicians are too far away from the reality of French daily life. She said she may just pick a blank vote, even in the second round if Macron is facing Le Pen.

“I want to show I’m not happy with it,” she said.

The sinking purchasing power of French families is one of voters’ top concerns amid rising food and energy prices, along with social payments, security, immigration and the environment. But many feel these issues have not been addressed as much as they should in this year’s campaign, partly because the war in Ukraine is overshadowing all other issues.

Kevin, a 26-year-old history and geography teacher in a public middle school who has worked in an impoverished suburb north of Paris, deplored a lack of political debate in this campaign. Describing himself as a “leftist,” he said he feels “very disillusioned” by the current French political scene.

Kevin, who cannot be identified by his last name because state employees are required to be neutral ahead of elections, said he is still hesitating. But in any case, he won’t vote for Macron or Le Pen, and considers a blank vote an option.

Macron, who has dedicated most of his time recently to diplomatic talks trying to end the war in Ukraine, is seeking to boost his short campaign ahead of Sunday’s vote, giving several interviews in the French media and putting campaign activities on his agenda almost each day.

“Friends, you got it: It’s now time for mobilization. It’s now time to fight,” he told supporters Saturday.

Al-Qaida leader circulates video, dispels rumor of his death

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A rare video has appeared of al-Qaida’s chief praising an Indian Muslim woman who in February defied a ban on wearing the traditional headscarf, or hijab. The footage is the first proof in months that the man who was once Osama bin Laden’s No. 2 is still alive.

Rumors of the death of Ayman al-Zawahri have persistently circulated, but in a video released Tuesday and translated by the SITE Intelligence Group, the reclusive al-Qaida chief praises Muskan Khan who defied a ban on the wearing of the hijab in schools in India’s southwestern state of Karnataka.

Two months ago, Khan garnered attention when she publicly shouted “God Is Great” as Hindu radical students jeered at her over the Islamic headscarf. In March, the court in India’s Karnataka state upheld the ban, outraging civil activists and Muslim groups in India and elsewhere.

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A previous video of al-Zawahri, which circulated on the anniversary last year of 9/11, did not reference the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in mid-August. It did mention the Jan. 1, 2021 attack that targeted Russian troops on the edge of the northern Syrian city of Raqqa.

"He could still be dead, though if so, it would have been at some point in or after Jan 2021," SITE director Rita Katz tweeted following al-Zawahri's 9/11 anniversary video.

There was no clear indication from Tuesday's video of the location of al-Zawahri. He is shown in a traditional white headscarf beside a poster praising "the noble woman of India."

However, it raises the specter of al-Qaida having a presence in Afghanistan, and highlights concerns over the commitment of the ruling Taliban to fight terror groups and deny them space in Afghanistan.

Al-Zawahri took over as al-Qaida leader after the 2011 killing of bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs during a daring nighttime raid deep inside Pakistan where he was hiding. Bin Laden, who masterminded the 9/11 attacks in the United States, was found in the Pakistani garrison town of Abbottabad, barely 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the capital of Islamabad.

Al-Zawahri has been rumored to be in Afghanistan's northwestern Kunar and Badakhshan provinces on the border with Pakistan. The border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan is lined with inhospitable mountain ranges that have served as redoubts for a number of militant groups.

Amir Rana, executive director of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies think tank said that al-Zawahri was also rumored to be in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi, where many Taliban leaders long maintained homes during Afghanistan's 20-year war.

"He was even rumored to have died in Karachi," said Rana, adding that regardless of his location, al-Zawahri's video is certain to cause headaches for Afghanistan's ruling Taliban with the international community.

The Taliban were ousted by a U.S.-led coalition in 2001 for harboring bin Laden. They captured power again in mid-August, during the chaotic last weeks of the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Taliban say they are adhering to an agreement they signed with the United States in 2020 — before taking power — in which they promised to fight terrorists. And since their takeover, they have repeatedly said Afghanistan would not be used as a launching pad for attacks against other countries.

Russian media campaign falsely claims Bucha deaths are fakes

By AMANDA SEITZ and ARIJETA LAJKA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As gruesome videos and photos of bodies emerge from the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, Kremlin-backed media are denouncing them as an elaborate hoax — a narrative that journalists in Ukraine have shown to be false.

Denouncing news as fake or spreading false reports to sow confusion and undermine its adversaries are tactics that Moscow has used for years and refined with the advent of social media in places like Syria.

In detailed broadcasts to millions of viewers, correspondents and hosts of Russian state TV channels said Tuesday that some photo and video evidence of the killings were fake while others showed that Ukrainians were responsible for the bloodshed.

"Among the first to appear were these Ukrainian shots, which show how a soulless body suddenly moves its hand," a report Monday on Russia-1's evening news broadcast declared. "And in the rearview mirror it is noticeable that the dead seem to be starting to rise even."

But high-resolution satellite images show some of the dead bodies have been lying on the residential streets of Bucha since early March, days after the Russian occupation began. On April 2, a video taken from a moving car was posted online by a Ukrainian lawyer showing those same bodies still scattered along Yablonska Street in Bucha. The Associated Press independently matched the location bodies in the satellite images of Bucha from commercial provider Maxar Technology to separate videos from the scene. Other Western media had similar reports.

AP journalists have seen the bodies of dozens of people, many of them shot at close range and some with their hands tied behind them, left on the streets of Bucha since Russian troops retreated last week.

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On Tuesday, AP journalists saw a pile of six burned bodies, with a child's blackened foot amid the tangled corpses.

Yet Russian officials and state-media have continued to promote their own narrative, parroting it in newspapers and on radio and television. A top story on the website of a popular pro-Kremlin newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda, pinned the mass killings on Ukraine, with a story that claimed "one more irrefutable proof that 'the genocide in Bucha' was carried out by Ukrainian forces."

An opinion column published Tuesday by the state-run news agency RIA Novosti surmised that the Bucha slayings were a ploy for the West to impose tougher sanctions on Russia.

Analysts note it isn't the first time in its six-week-old invasion of Ukraine that the Kremlin has employed such an information warfare strategy to deny any wrongdoing and spread disinformation in a coordinated campaign around the globe.

"This is simply what Russia does every time it recognizes that it has suffered a PR setback through committing atrocities," said Keir Giles, senior consulting fellow with the Russia and Eurasia program at the Chatham House think tank. "So the system works almost on autopilot."

Before the war, Russia denied U.S. intelligence reports that detailed its plans to attack Ukraine. Last month, Russian officials tried to discredit AP photos and reporting of the aftermath of the bombing of a maternity hospital in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, which left a pregnant woman and her unborn child dead.

The photos and video from Bucha have set off a new wave of global condemnation and revulsion.

After his video appearance Tuesday at the U.N. Security Council, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy enumerated the killings in Bucha by Russian troops and showed graphic video of charred and decomposing bodies there and in other towns. Russian U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia dismissed them as staged.

Across social media, a chorus of more than a dozen official Russian Twitter and Telegram accounts, as well as state-backed media Facebook pages, repeated the Kremlin line that images and video of the dead were staged or a hoax. The claims were made in English, Spanish and Arabic in accounts run by Russian officials or from Russian-backed news outlets Sputnik and RT. The Spanish-language RT en Español has sent more than a dozen posts to its 18 million followers.

"Russia rejects allegations over the murder of civilians in Bucha, near Kiev," an RT en Español post said Sunday.

Several of the same accounts sought to discredit claims that Russian troops carried out the killings by pointing to a video of Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk, taken March 31, in which he talked about the suburb being freed from Russian occupation.

"He confirms that Russian troops have left Bucha. No mentioning of dead bodies in the streets," top Russian official Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted Monday.

But Fedoruk had publicly commented on the violence before the Russian troops left in an interview with Italian news agency Adnkronos on March 28, where he accused them of killings and rapes in Bucha.

In an AP interview March 7, Fedoruk talked about dead bodies piling up in Bucha: "We can't even gather up the bodies because the shelling from heavy weapons doesn't stop day or night. Dogs are pulling apart the bodies on the city streets. It's a nightmare."

Satellite images by Maxar Technologies while Russian troops occupied Bucha on March 18 and 19 back up Fedoruk's account of bodies in the streets, showing at least five bodies on one road.

Some social media platforms have tried to limit propaganda and disinformation from the Kremlin. Google blocked RT's accounts, while in Europe, RT and Sputnik were banned by tech company Meta, which also stopped promoting or amplifying Russian-state media pages on its platforms, which include Facebook and Instagram.

Russia has found ways to evade the crackdown with posts in different languages through dozens of official Russian social media accounts.

"It's a pretty massive messaging apparatus that Russia controls — whether it's official embassy accounts, bot or troll accounts or anti-Western influencers — they have many ways to circumvent platform bans," said Bret Schafer, who heads the information manipulation team at the Alliance for Securing Democracy,

a nonpartisan think tank in Washington.

Pope Francis kisses Ukrainian flag from 'martyred' Bucha

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Wednesday kissed a battered Ukrainian flag that he said was brought to him from the "martyred" Ukrainian city of Bucha as he denounced the "massacre" there and called again for an end to the war.

Francis held the flag as he welcomed a half-dozen Ukrainian refugee children up to the stage of the Vatican audience hall at the end of his Wednesday general audience and gave them each a giant chocolate Easter egg. He urged prayers for them and for all Ukrainians.

"The recent news from the war in Ukraine, instead of bringing relief and hope, brought testimony of new atrocities, like the massacre in Bucha, even more horrendous cruelty carried out against civilians, defenseless women and children," he said.

"They are victims whose innocent blood cries up to the sky and implores that this war be stopped, and that the weapons be silenced. Stop disseminating war and destruction."

He held up a dirtied Ukrainian flag that he said had arrived Tuesday at the Vatican from Bucha, where evidence has emerged since the Russians pulled out of what appears to be intentional killings of civilians.

Kissing it, the pope said: "This flag comes from the war, from that martyred city Bucha. ... Let us not forget them. Let us not forget the people of Ukraine."

And gesturing to the children, Francis said: "These children had to flee to arrive in a safe place. This is the fruit of war."

Francis has amplified his outrage at the Russian invasion after his initial tepid response, though he has refrained from citing Russia or President Vladimir Putin by name in keeping with Vatican diplomatic tradition.

Francis has sought to keep open a path of dialogue with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Putin-allied Patriarch Kirill. Speaking to reporters en route home from Malta last weekend, Francis said he was working on organizing a second meeting with the patriarch, who has seemingly justified the war by evoking Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" and describing the conflict as a "metaphysical" battle against the West and its "gay parades."

He said a Mideast location was possible, and the Vatican confirmed Tuesday that a June visit to Lebanon was under study, suggesting a possible encounter there.

During his weekly catechism lesson, Francis lamented that the war made clear the failure of the United Nations and the post-World War II international system of peace and security.

"After the Second World War they tried to lay the foundations for a new history of peace, but unfortunately — we do not learn — the old story of competing great powers continued," he said. "And, in the current war in Ukraine, we are witnessing the impotence of United Nations organizations."

China calls for probe into Bucha killings, assigns no blame

BEIJING (AP) — China on Wednesday said images of civilian deaths in the Ukrainian town of Bucha are "deeply disturbing" but that no blame should be apportioned until all facts are known.

Emerging evidence of what appeared to be widespread civilian massacres in the wake of Russian withdrawals from the Kyiv areas may complicate Beijing's attempts to guide public opinion over the conflict, in which China has refused to criticize Moscow.

China supports all initiatives and measures "conducive to alleviating the humanitarian crisis" in the country, and is "ready to continue to work together with the international community to prevent any harm to civilians," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters at a daily briefing.

"The truth and the cause of the incident must be verified," Zhao said. "All parties should exercise restraint and avoid unfounded accusations before a conclusion of the investigation is drawn."

Zhao's remarks echo those of China's ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, who earlier called for an investigation, also describing the reports and images of civilian deaths in Bucha as "deeply disturbing."

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"The relevant circumstances and specific causes of the incident should be verified and established," Zhang said in remarks to the Security Council on Tuesday, adding that, "before the full picture is clear, all sides should exercise restraint and avoid unfounded accusations."

China has called for talks while refusing to criticize Russia. It opposes economic sanctions on Moscow and blames Washington and NATO for provoking the war and fueling the conflict by sending arms to Ukraine.

The entirely ruling Communist Party-controlled media have largely stuck to a pro-Moscow narrative, including repeating Russian disinformation and unfounded conspiracy theories about issues such as alleged American-Ukrainian bioweapons production.

Zhao repeated China's objections to sanctions, while accusing the U.S. of having manipulated the situation to "profit from the chaos and make a lot of money."

"History and reality have proven that sanctions do not bring peace and security, but only bring lose-lose or multiple losses, adding to the already difficult world economy and impacting the existing world economic system," Zhao said.

The hashtag "China expresses Bucha death incident must be thoroughly investigated" was a trending topic on Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter, with nearly 30 million views and more than 500 discussions by afternoon Wednesday

Despite the pro-Russian stance of authorities who regularly censor postings, opinions were divided between support for Moscow, demands Russia be held accountable, accusations of untrustworthiness against the West and Ukraine, and calls for an impartial investigation.

"This is merely a play acted out by the Americans and Ukrainian Nazis in an attempt to divert public opinion, but people of the world with eyes and hearts won't ignore the facts of the U.S. and Ukraine researching bio weapons," read one posting signed "Understands the Cold War Better Than America."

The Russian Embassy in Beijing also made use of the platform to reject the accusations, while its Ukrainian counterpart drew attention to "Russian war crimes against civilians in Irpin," another town where atrocities allegedly occurred.

Prior to the Feb. 24 war, China had dismissed talk of a Russian invasion as "fake news" and U.S. fear-mongering. Since then, it has claimed to be holding to an independent, and often contradictory, stance, asserting the sanctity of borders and national sovereignty while refusing to condemn Russian aggression or even use the words "war" and "invasion," in apparent deference to Moscow.

The Global Times, a nationalistic tabloid published by the Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily, sought to balance the competing messages with an editorial Wednesday headlined "Bucha Incident' not to be used as pretext for inflaming situation."

"As long as Russia and Ukraine cannot achieve a cease-fire, humanitarian tragedies will not end," the paper said.

"However, it is regrettable that after the exposure of the 'Bucha incident,' the U.S., the initiator of the Ukraine crisis, has not shown any signs of urging peace and promoting talks, but is ready to exacerbate the Russia-Ukraine tensions and create obstacles to the peace talks between the two sides," it said.

WHO: COVID cases and deaths continue to fall globally

GENEVA (AP) — The number of coronavirus cases reported globally has dropped for a second consecutive week and confirmed COVID-19 deaths also fell last week, according to a World Health Organization report issued Wednesday.

In its latest pandemic report, WHO said 9 million cases were reported, a 16% weekly decline, and more than 26,000 new deaths from COVID-19. The U.N. health agency said confirmed coronavirus infections were down in all regions of the world.

However, it warned that the reported numbers carry considerable uncertainty because many countries have stopped widespread testing for the coronavirus, meaning that many cases are likely going undetected.

WHO said it was also tracking an omicron variant that is a recombination of two versions: BA.1 and BA.2, which was first detected in Britain in January. WHO said early estimates suggest the recombined

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omicron could be about 10% more transmissible than previous mutations, but further evidence is needed.

The agency has continued to warn countries not to drop their COVID-19 protocols too quickly and predicted that future variants could spread easily if surveillance and testing systems are shelved.

Last week, the U.K. said COVID-19 had hit record levels across the country, with government statistics estimating that about 1 in 13 people were infected. Those figures came on the same day the British government abandoned its free testing program.

Meanwhile, Chinese authorities conducted more mass testing this week across Shanghai, which remains in lockdown following another jump in infections; the city has recorded more than 90,000 cases but no deaths during the pandemic.

Despite growing public frustration and concerns about economic effects, China says it is sticking to its hard-line "zero-tolerance" approach mandating lockdowns, mass testing and the compulsory isolation of all suspected cases and close contacts. Following a public uproar, Shanghai authorities said Wednesday they would allow at least some parents to stay with children infected with COVID-19, making an exception to a policy of isolating anyone who tests positive.

Today in History: April 7, LA becomes second biggest

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 7, the 97th day of 2022. There are 268 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 7, 1984, the Census Bureau reported Los Angeles had overtaken Chicago as the nation's "second city" in terms of population.

On this date:

In 1862, Union forces led by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell defeated the Confederates at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee.

In 1915, jazz singer-songwriter Billie Holiday, also known as "Lady Day," was born in Philadelphia.

In 1922, the Teapot Dome scandal had its beginnings as Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall signed a secret deal to lease U.S. Navy petroleum reserves in Wyoming and California to his friends, oilmen Harry F. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny, in exchange for cash gifts.

In 1945, during World War II, American planes intercepted and effectively destroyed a Japanese fleet, which included the battleship Yamato, that was headed to Okinawa on a suicide mission.

In 1949, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "South Pacific" opened on Broadway.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower held a news conference in which he spoke of the importance of containing the spread of communism in Indochina, saying, "You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." (This became known as the "domino theory," although Eisenhower did not use that term.)

In 1957, shortly after midnight, the last of New York's electric trolleys completed its final run from Queens to Manhattan.

In 1959, a referendum in Oklahoma repealed the state's ban on alcoholic beverages.

In 1962, nearly 1,200 Cuban exiles tried by Cuba for their roles in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion were convicted of treason.

In 1966, the U.S. Navy recovered a hydrogen bomb that the U.S. Air Force had lost in the Mediterranean Sea off Spain following a B-52 crash.

In 1994, civil war erupted in Rwanda, a day after a mysterious plane crash claimed the lives of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi; in the months that followed, hundreds of thousands of minority Tutsi and Hutu moderates were slaughtered by Hutu extremists.

In 2020, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly resigned after lambasting the officer he'd fired as the captain of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, which had been stricken by a coronavirus outbreak; James McPherson was appointed as acting Navy secretary.

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Ten years ago: A massive avalanche engulfed a Pakistani military complex in a mountain battleground close to the Indian border; all 140 people on the base died. CBS newsman Mike Wallace, 93, died in New Canaan, Connecticut.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump concluded his two-day summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, saying he had developed an "outstanding" relationship with the Chinese leader. Gov. Jerry Brown declared an end to California's historic drought emergency imposed in 2014.

One year ago: Former NFL player Phillip Adams fatally shot six people in Rock Hill, South Carolina, including a prominent doctor, his wife and their two grandchildren, before killing himself. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said investigators found that golfer Tiger Woods had been driving at more than 80 miles an hour – nearly twice the posted speed limit – when he lost control of an SUV in February; the wreck left Woods seriously injured. Anne Beatts, a groundbreaking comedy writer who was on the original staff of "Saturday Night Live," died at her California home at 74.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Bobby Bare is 87. R&B singer Charlie Thomas (The Drifters) is 85. Former California Gov. Jerry Brown is 84. Movie director Francis Ford Coppola is 83. Actor Roberta Shore is 79. Singer Patricia Bennett (The Chiffons) is 75. Singer John Oates is 74. Former Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels is 73. Singer Janis Ian is 71. Country musician John Dittrich is 71. Actor Jackie Chan is 68. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Tony Dorsett is 68. Actor Russell Crowe is 58. Christian/jazz singer Mark Kibble (Take 6) is 58. Actor Bill Bellamy is 57. Rock musician Dave "Yorkie" Palmer (Space) is 57. Rock musician Charlie Hall (The War on Drugs) is 48. Former football player-turned-analyst Tiki Barber is 47. Actor Heather Burns is 47. Christian rock singer-musician John Cooper (Skillet) is 47. Actor Kevin Alejandro is 46. Retired baseball infielder Adrian Beltre is 43. Actor Sian Clifford is 40. Rock musician Ben McKee (Imagine Dragons) is 37. Christian rock singer Tauren Wells is 36. Actor Ed Speleers is 34.