

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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

Tuesday, April 19

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

"True friends aren't the ones that make your problems disappear; they are the ones that won't disappear when you're facing problems."

AUTHOR UNKNOWN



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.

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

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A Major Winter Storm is possible by the middle of next week.

Posted on Dakota storm stalkers

Models have been on this for about a week now.

The question is: Where?

Some models have favored a more southern track keeping most of the snow in the Central Plains and affecting mostly SD and perhaps far southeastern ND.

Some others have favored a more northern track with significant snow accumulations up into all of South Dakota and North Dakota.

The southern scenario would still bring a very impactful winter storm to SD and possibly southeast ND, while the rest of ND would likely only experience strong winds and light snow.

The northern scenario would still have significant impacts for SD and southeast ND, but would affect much more of ND.

This gives SD and perhaps southeast ND a higher probability of a Winter Storm, while areas north and west have smaller odds right now.

There's very high confidence that enough cold air will be in place for the majority of precipitation to fall as heavy wet snow.

Ranchers in SD and perhaps southeast ND should be prepared for the potential of a Severe Winter Storm in the Tuesday evening-Friday time frame.

A more northern track is still possible, so those in western and central ND should also be alert to the possibility of major impacts from this storm.

**HELP
WANTED!**

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

Storybook Land Opens

10 a.m. April 15.

Wylie Park, 2300 24th Ave. N.W.

Free.

Weather pending, Storybook Land will open for the 2022 season. This is a soft opening, the concessions stands and rides will open May 27.

Senior Legion Baseball Meeting



Groton Legion Post #39 will be having a Baseball Meeting on Tuesday April 12, 2022 @7:00 at the Post Home. This meeting is for all Senior Legion age players who are eligible to play in the 2022 season. This meeting is required attendance for all players and their parents or legal guardian.

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

April 11, 2022 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of March 14, 2022 and March 28, 2022 school board meetings as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of March 2022 District bills for payment.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Approval of March 2022 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approval of March 2022 School Lunch Report.
4. Approval of March 2022 School Transportation Report.
5. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion and/or necessary action on facilities use request from James Valley Thunder [Justin Hanson].
2. Adopt supplemental budget for elementary roofing project and elementary re-finance GO certificate.
3. Approve bid from Foreman Sales for 14 passenger bus pending final bid award.
4. Approve District Membership Agreement for North Central Special Education Cooperative.
5. Authorize participation in SDDOE Title III (ELL) Statewide Consortium.
6. Adopt resolution authorizing membership in the SDHSAA.
7. Cast ballot for ASBSD Board of Directors – Northeast Region Enrollment 266-999.
8. Amend 2021-2022 School Calendar due to snow days.

ADJOURN

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Hello, Tourism Industry Members and Friends!

With visitor interest continuing to demand more authentic, experiential, off-the-beaten-path travel, agritourism was defined as a niche area of development for the South Dakota Department of Tourism in 2017. In 2019, a niche travel survey reported that 85% of consumers were interested in experiencing agritourism activities in South Dakota. Knowing that visitors are interested in this niche, the Department of Tourism began talking with potential stakeholders about agritourism opportunities in South Dakota, but liability seemed to be a consistent barrier for many. To address this, the department brought together a workgroup to review ways to strengthen agritourism laws in our state to spur further growth of agritourism.

First, we needed to clearly define agritourism. As we began drafting a bill for the 2022 legislative session, we knew the very first order of business needed to be cleaning up the current language in statute and providing a clear and consistent definition of agritourism activities. Through Senate Bill 135 (SB 135) an agritourism activity is defined as any activity carried out on a farm, on a ranch, or in a forest that allows members of the public, for recreation, entertainment, or education purposes, to view or participate in agricultural activities, including farming, ranching, historical, cultural, harvest-your-own, or nature-based activities and attractions. An activity is not an agritourism activity if the participant is paid to participate in the activity.

Next, we knew our liability laws in South Dakota were strong, but they only applied to agritourism operators that did not charge a fee. This meant agritourism operators that charged a fee for participation were required to provide a higher duty of care. The changes proposed through SB 135 provide an added layer of protection by creating an exemption for agritourism operators that charged a fee while still protecting consumers from the risk of gross negligence by the landowner.

One of the more significant changes the bill proposed was to add a new section to law requiring commercial agritourism activity operators, in other words those that charge a fee for participation, to post signage and maintain a written agreement with participants. The language for both is specified in the bill, under section 7.

Not only did SB 135 receive overwhelming support, we also succeeded in providing the protection our agritourism partners need in order to provide ranch and farm experiences that are such a special part of our state's heritage. Governor Kristi Noem signed SB 135 into law on March 2, 2022. The law will become effective on July 1, 2022.

For more information on SB 135 and the agritourism liability workgroup visit SDVisit.com. To learn more about agritourism opportunities in South Dakota contact the Department's Industry Outreach & Development Representative and Agritourism Manager, Jacey Ellsworth, at Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com. We can't wait to see how agritourism ventures grow in the years to come as a result of this bill.

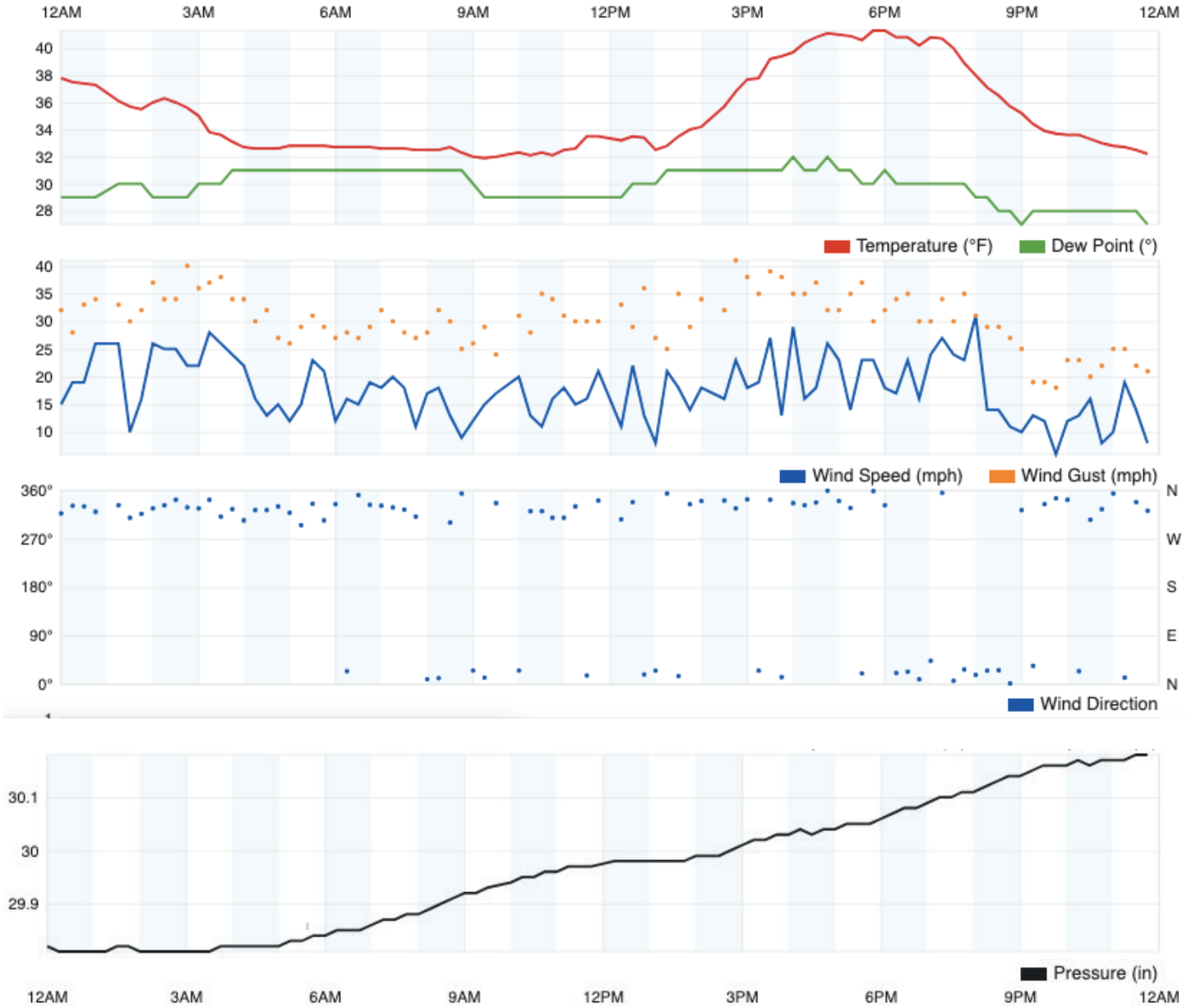
All our best,

Jim Hagen
Secretary of Tourism

Groton Daily Independent




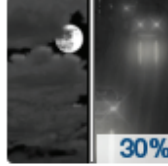

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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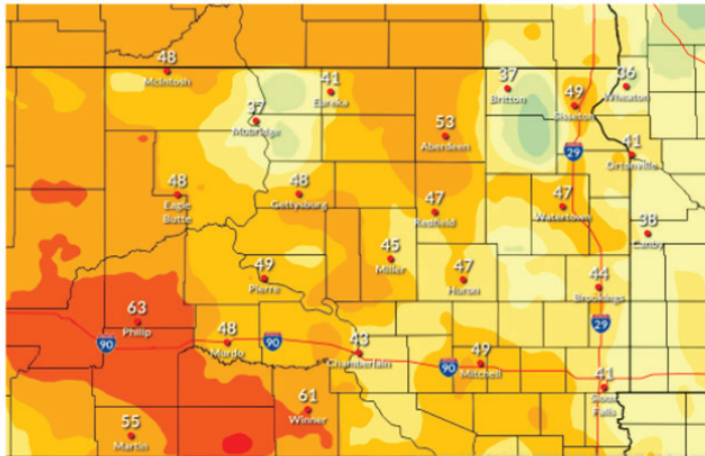
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy then Chance Rain	Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain
High: 49 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 50 °F



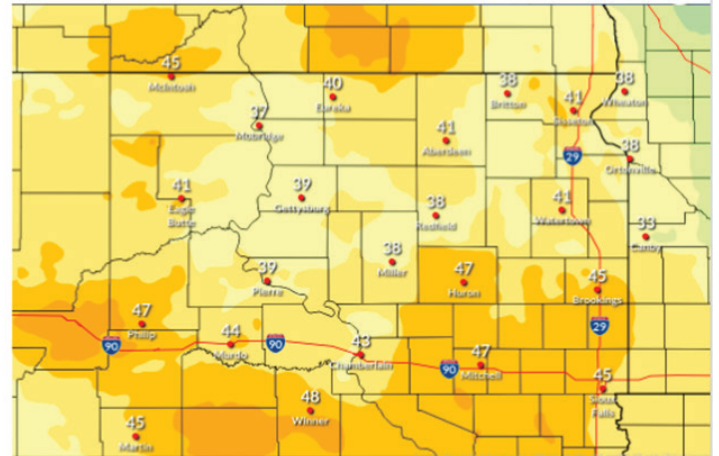
Strong Winds Through This Evening

April 7, 2022
3:51 PM

Max Wind Gusts 4-7pm



Max Wind Gusts 7pm-12am



- Winds will gradually diminish this evening and tonight, as low temperatures drop into the 20s
- Temperatures warm into the 40s and 50s on Friday, with sunny skies. **Elevated fire danger Friday**
- Rain/snow mix Saturday evening through Sunday



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winds will gradually diminish this evening and tonight with only light additional rain or snow, as low temperatures drop into the 20s. Warmer Friday, with highs in the 40s and 50s and plenty of sunshine, though breezy with elevated grassland fire danger. Precipitation chances return Saturday evening through Sunday.

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Today in Weather History

April 8, 1995: 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.

1919 - A tornado swarm in northern Texas resulted in the deaths of 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1926 - The lightning-set oil depot fire near San Luis Obispo CA boiled over and engulfed 900 acres. Many tornado vortices resulted from the intense heat of the fire. One such tornado traveled 1000 yards, picked up a house and carried it 150 feet, killing the two occupants inside. (The Weather Channel)

1938: Snow began to fall over central Oklahoma during the previous evening and continued to this day. In Oklahoma City, several snowfall records for the month soon fell to the storm, including the record for most total snowfall during April. The Oklahoma City snowfall totals of 0.8 inches on the 7th and 3.3 inches on the 8th remain daily records. In fact, the 3.3 inches of snow on the 8th is the most ever to fall on any single April day. The 4.1 inch total for the month is still the largest April monthly snowfall total.

1973: The state of Iowa and southwest Wisconsin saw severe blizzard conditions from April 8 through the 10th. Sustained wind of 40 to 50 mph, with gusts to 65 mph was reported with falling snow. Highways were closed, travel was suspended, and properties were damaged. Livestock and turkey losses approximated 20 million dollars. Record snowfall was reported in several localities. Belle Plaine had 20.3 inches; Dubuque had 19.2 inches, and Grundy Center saw 19 inches. Snow drifted as high as 16 feet. In southwest Wisconsin, this storm was quoted as being the "worst since 1921."

1987 - A cold front crossing the Northern Plateau and the Northern Rocky Mountain Region produced high winds in northeastern Wyoming. Winds gusting to 69 mph at Sheridan WY downed power lines and caused some property damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong northerly winds ushered cold air into the north central U.S. The strong winds, gusting to 60 mph at Rapid City SD and Williston ND, reduced visibilities in blowing dust over the Dakotas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Two dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Phoenix AZ equalled their record for April of 104 degrees established just the previous day. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Twenty-two cities reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and 30s across much of the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures severely damaged peach and apple orchards in West Virginia, where prolonged mild weather since January had caused an early blooming of spring vegetation. State and Federal agencies estimated a 50 percent loss in production for peaches and "Delicious Red Apples". (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: A major F5 tornado struck western Jefferson County in Alabama leveling the communities of Oak Grove, Rock Creek, Edgewater, McDonald's Chapel, Sylvan Springs and Pratt City. The tornado lifted just two miles from downtown Birmingham. The twister had a track of 20 miles with the damage path averaging between 1/2 and 3/4 of a mile in width. 34 people were killed, 221 injured and 1,000 homes destroyed.

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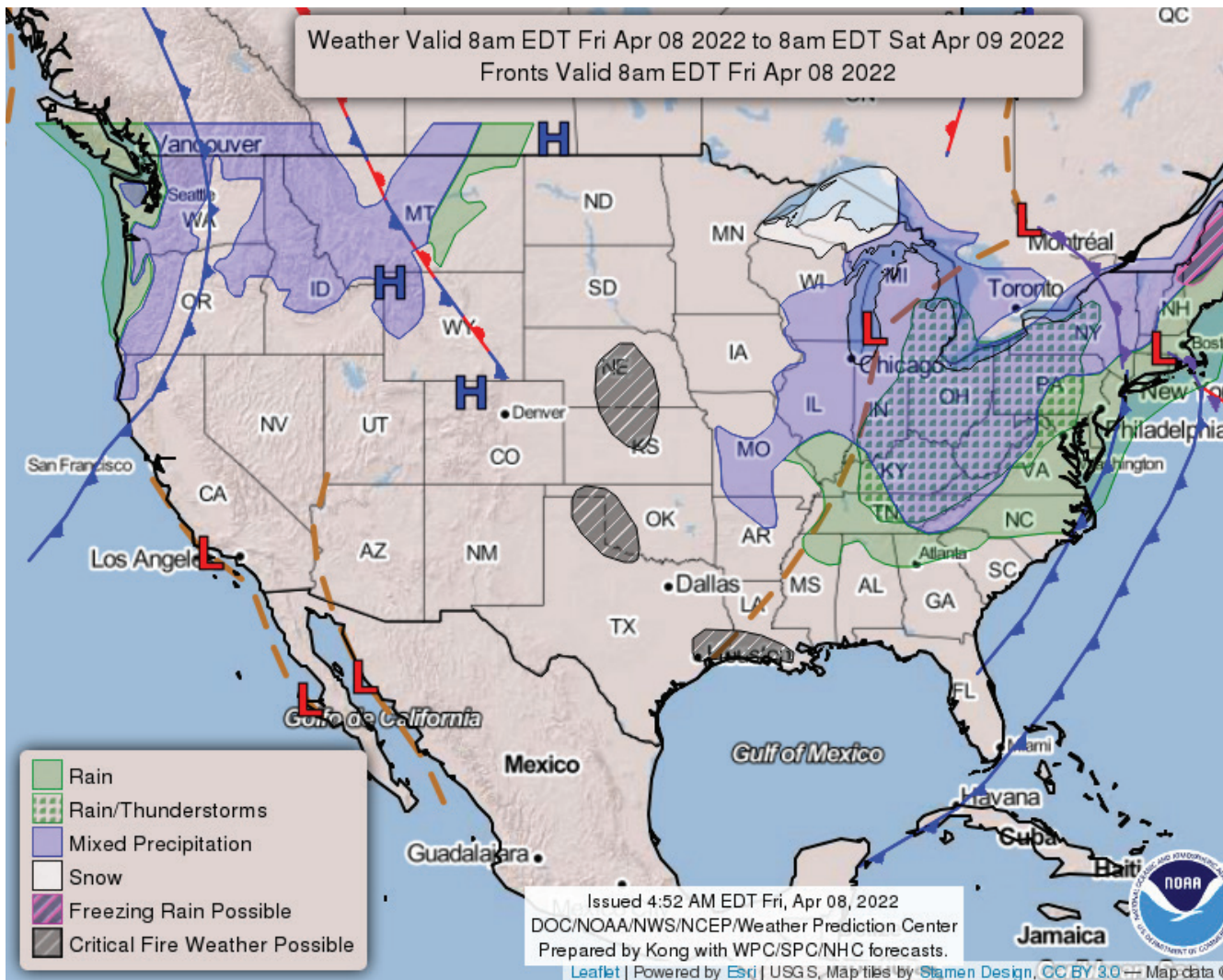
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 4:38 PM
Low Temp: 32 °F at 9:15 AM
Wind: 44 mph at 4:20 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 13 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 1945
Record Low: 6 in 1997
Average High: 54°F
Average Low: 29°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.36
Precip to date in April.: 0.30
Average Precip to date: 2.42
Precip Year to Date: 2.10
Sunset Tonight: 8:10:54 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:55:36 AM



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SLEEP! A THOUGHTFUL GIFT FROM GOD

Sleep - restful and peaceful sleep - is a nourishing and comforting gift from God.

Researchers who have studied the sleep patterns of humans have discovered that if we are awake for more than twenty-four hours, we do not act normally. Our recall of things that happened in the past fails and response time to events that are going on around us slows down tremendously. People who are normally "gentle and slow to wrath" become irritable and abusive when they are denied their normal amount of sleep.

Some who have difficulty in going to sleep resort to pills. Often the cure is harmful, ending up in a habit that leads to an addiction. Another problem is alertness: the reaction time required to respond to a life-or-death decision may result in tragedy. We all need a certain amount of sleep to function normally and meet the requirements of life.

The best, most nourishing sleep comes from God. In Psalm 127:2 we read, "for He grants sleep to those whom He loves!"

In His Word, we discover that God loves everyone. But, there seems to be a special love for those who have accepted His Son as their Savior and enthroned Him as Lord. Their sins are forgiven, and their relationship with God is as He has designed it to be. They can rest peacefully in His love.

And consider this: When we toss and turn and have a difficult time enjoying a "peaceful sleep," it may be the Holy Spirit urging us to quote Bible verses and pray.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to find our peace and rest in the goodness of Your grace and the depth of Your love. Give us true rest in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For He grants sleep to those whom He loves. Psalm 127:2

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2022 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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News from the Associated Press

Bird flu's grisly question: how to kill millions of poultry

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The spread of a bird flu that is deadly to poultry raises the grisly question of how farms manage to quickly kill and dispose of millions of chickens and turkeys.

It's a chore that farms across the country are increasingly facing as the number of poultry killed in the past two months has climbed to more than 24 million, with outbreaks reported nearly every day. Some farms have had to kill more than 5 million chickens at a single site with a goal of destroying the birds within 24 hours to limit the spread of the disease and prevent animals from suffering.

"The faster we can get on site and depopulate the birds that remain on site, the better," Minnesota State Veterinarian Beth Thompson said.

The outbreak is the biggest since 2015, when producers had to kill more than 50 million birds. So far this year, there have been cases in 24 states, with Iowa the hardest hit with about 13 million chickens and turkeys killed. Other states with sizable outbreaks include Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Indiana.

Farms faced with the need to kill so many birds turn to recommendations by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Even as it has developed methods to kill the poultry quickly, the association acknowledges its techniques "may not guarantee that the deaths the animals face are painless and distress free." Veterinarians and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials also typically oversee the process.

One of the preferred methods is to spray water-based firefighting foam over birds as they roam around the ground inside a barn. That foam kills the animals by cutting off their air supply.

When foam won't work because birds are in cages above the ground or it's too cold, the USDA recommends sealing up barns and piping carbon dioxide inside, first rendering the birds unconscious and ultimately killing them.

If one those methods won't work because equipment or workers aren't available, or when the size of a flock is too large, the association said a last resort is a technique called ventilation shutdown. In that scenario, farmers stop airflow into barns, which raises temperatures to levels at which the animals die. The USDA and the veterinary association recommend that farmers add additional heat or carbon dioxide to barns to speed up the process and limit suffering by the animals.

Mike Stepien, a spokesman for the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said the techniques are the best options when it's necessary to quickly kill so many birds.

"State animal health officials and producers carefully weigh the different options to determine the best option for humane depopulation and do not make such decisions lightly," Stepien said.

Not everyone agrees.

Animal welfare groups argue that all these methods for quickly killing birds are inhumane, though they are particularly opposed to ventilation shutdown, which they note can take hours and is akin to leaving a dog in a hot car. Animal rights groups delivered a petition last year signed by 3,577 people involved in caring for animals, including nearly 1,600 veterinarians, that urged the veterinary association to stop recommending ventilation shutdown as an option.

"We have to do better. None of these are acceptable in any way," said Sara Shields, director of farm animal welfare science at Humane Society International.

Opponents of the standard techniques said firefighting foam uses harmful chemicals and it essentially drowns birds, causing chickens and turkeys to suffer convulsions and cardiac arrest as they die. They say carbon dioxide is painful to inhale and detectible by the birds, prompting them to try to flee the gas.

Karen Davis, of the nonprofit group United Poultry Concerns, urged the veterinary association to stop recommending all of its three main options.

"They're all ways that I would not choose to die, and I would not choose anybody else to die regardless of what species they belong to," Davis said.

Shields said there are more humane alternatives, such as using nitrogen gas but those options tend to be more expensive and could have logistical challenges.

Sam Krouse, vice president of Indiana-based MPS Egg Farms, said farmers feel miserable about using any of the options.

"We pour our lives and livelihoods into taking care of those birds, and it's just devastating when we lose any of those birds," Krouse said. "Everything that we're doing every day is focused on keeping the disease out and making sure that we're keeping our hens as safe as possible."

Officials emphasize that this virus that's spread primarily through the droppings of infected wild birds doesn't threaten food safety or represent a significant public health threat. Sick birds aren't allowed into the food supply and properly cooking poultry and eggs kills any viruses that might be present. And health officials say no human cases of bird flu have been found in the United States during this current outbreak.

Once poultry are dead, farmers must quickly dispose of the birds. They usually don't want to risk the chance of spreading the virus by transporting the carcasses to landfills, so crews typically pile the birds up into huge rows inside barns and combine them with other materials, such as ground up corn stalks and sawdust to create a compost pile.

After a couple weeks of decomposition, the carcasses are converted into a material that can be spread on cropland to help fertilize crops. In some cases, carcasses are buried in trenches on the farm or incinerated.

Fire crews fight wildfire fueled by strong winds near Custer

CUSTER, S.D. (AP) — Federal, state and local fire crews are fighting a wildfire, fueled by strong winds, in Custer County.

The U.S. Forest Service says approximately 50 to 100 acres have burned just west of Custer with about 30% containment. An evacuation center has been opened in the Custer Armory gym for those residents wishing to leave their homes because of the fire.

Winds in excess of 40 mph temporarily closed Highway 16 from Custer to Pleasant Valley Road. The Custer County Sheriff's Office posted on social media that the stretch has since been reopened.

The fire is being managed by a unified command between South Dakota Wildland Fire and The Black Hills National Forest. Crews are using dozers to stop the fire's progression.

Nonprofit group trying to stop new pork plant in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A nonprofit group is urging city leaders in Sioux Falls to place a moratorium on the construction of a \$600 million pork processing plant.

Citizens for a Sustainable Sioux Falls say the plant, which will handle about 6 million hogs per year, will be a detriment to every day life in the area.

"We don't believe any serious attempt to study the impacts of odor contamination, noise contamination, traffic congestion, water contamination has been done," said the group's executive director Robert Peterson.

Locally-owned Wholestone Farms says the plant's design and odor will not be a hazard to the area's quality of life.

Wholestone chairman Luke Minion tells KSFY-TV the plant will not be an eye sore or emit the foul odors that the nonprofit group fears.

"We have spent five years and about \$50 million dollars to make sure new plant's technology on odor reduction will match or exceed the City of Sioux Falls treatment plant," which is located nearby.

"I live in Sioux Falls, and trust me, we are well aware of the concerns people have. We've been open about sharing our designs. We've built the best odor mitigation technology available."

The Citizens for a Sustainable Sioux Falls director isn't convinced that will be enough.

"Mitigation isn't elimination," Peterson said. "Odor is subjective. Things may smell stronger to one person than they do to another person. So how do we measure that?"

City Planning and Development Director Jeff Eckhoff says before the land was purchased by Wholestone, the acreage was zoned for heavy industry, so there isn't much the city can do.

Wholestone still needs permits from the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to make sure it meets air and water safety standards.

Israeli forces kill Palestinian attacker after manhunt

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli security forces early Friday hunted down and killed a Palestinian man who had opened fire into a crowded bar in central Tel Aviv, killing two and wounding over 10 in an attack that caused scenes of mass panic in the heart of the bustling city.

It was the fourth deadly attack in Israel by Palestinians in three weeks, and came at a time of heightened tensions around the start of Ramadan. Tens of thousands of Palestinians attended the first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month in Jerusalem amid a heavy Israeli security presence, with no immediate reports of unrest.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met with top security officials and announced that a major crossing in the northern West Bank near the attacker's hometown would be closed indefinitely.

"Every murderer will know that we'll get to him, and anyone who helps terrorists should know that the price he will pay will be unbearable," Bennett said in a statement.

Israel proceeded with plans to allow Palestinian women, children and older men from the occupied West Bank to enter Jerusalem for prayers. Protests and clashes in the holy city during Ramadan last year eventually ignited an 11-day Gaza war.

Thursday's shooting took place in a crowded bar on Dizengoff Street, a central thoroughfare that has seen other attacks over the years. Thursday night is the beginning of the Israeli weekend, and the area was packed with people in bars and restaurants.

In videos spread on social media, dozens of terrified people were seen running through the streets as police searched for the attacker and ordered people to stay indoors. The deceased were identified as Tomer Morad and Eytam Magini, childhood friends in their late 20s from Kfar Saba, a town just north of Tel Aviv.

Hundreds of Israeli police officers, canine units, and army special forces, had conducted a massive manhunt throughout the night across Tel Aviv, searching building by building through densely populated residential neighborhoods.

Early Friday, authorities said they found the attacker hiding near a mosque in Jaffa, an Arab neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv, and killed him in a shootout.

The Shin Bet internal security service identified the attacker as Raad Hazem, a 28-year-old Palestinian man from Jenin, in the occupied West Bank. It said he did not belong to an organized militant group and had no prior record. It said he had entered Israel illegally without a permit.

The Jenin refugee camp was the scene of one of the deadliest battles of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, 20 years ago. In April 2002, Israeli forces fought Palestinian militants in the camp for nearly three weeks. Twenty-three Israeli soldiers and at least 52 Palestinians, including civilians, were killed, according to the United Nations.

The Israeli military frequently conducts arrest raids in Jenin, often coming under fire. The Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the occupied West Bank and coordinates with Israel on security matters, appears to have little control over the area.

After Thursday's attack, 13 Israelis have been killed in recent weeks, making this one of the worst waves of violence in years.

The militant Hamas group that rules the Gaza Strip praised the attack but did not claim responsibility. President Mahmoud Abbas, who heads the PA, condemned the attack, saying the killing of civilians on either side "can only lead to a further deterioration of the situation."

All of the attackers appear to have acted individually or with minimal support from a small cell. Three of them are believed to have identified with the extremist group Islamic State. But militant groups do not appear to have trained them or organized the attacks.

Seeking to avoid a repeat of last year's war, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian leaders have held a flurry

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of meetings in recent weeks to discuss ways to maintain calm.

Israel has taken a number of steps aimed at calming tensions, including issuing thousands of additional work permits for Palestinians from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. But the attacks have set off growing calls in Israel for a tougher crackdown.

Israel allowed women, children and men over 40 from the occupied West Bank to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in east Jerusalem on Friday. The Muslim body that oversees the site said 80,000 people attended prayers.

Police mobilized thousands of forces in and around the Old City, home to Al-Aqsa and other holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam and sits on a hilltop that is the most sacred site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount. The holy site has long been a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Israel has worked to sideline the Palestinian issue in recent years, instead focusing on forging alliances with Arab states against Iran. But the century-old conflict remains as intractable as ever.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories to form their future state. The last substantive peace talks broke down more than a decade ago, and Bennett is opposed to Palestinian statehood, though he supports steps to improve their economy and quality of life.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and considers the entire city to be its capital. It is building and expanding Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, which most of the international community considers illegal.

Israel withdrew soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005. But along with neighboring Egypt, it imposed a crippling blockade on the territory after the militant Hamas group seized power from rival Palestinian forces two years later. Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since then.

Israel says the conflict stems from the Palestinians' refusal to accept its right to exist as a Jewish state and blames attacks in part on incitement on social media. Palestinians say such attacks are the inevitable result of a nearly 55-year military occupation that shows no sign of ending.

Doctors, crater disprove Ukraine hospital airstrike misinfo

By LORI HINNANT and MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — A woman on the verge of giving birth with her leg flayed open by shrapnel. A shockwave that shattered the glass and ceramic lining of a room with medical waste. A nurse who suffered a concussion.

This is what the Ukrainian doctors remember of the Russian airstrike that destroyed the Mariupol maternity hospital where they once worked. And these memories are now all they have from a day they wish they could forget: Russian soldiers purged the evidence from their phones when they fled Mariupol.

"With just one blow, there was simply nothing, no children's clinic, it was simply blown away," said Dr. Lyudmila Mykhailenko, the acting director at Hospital No. 3 in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol. The sprawling courtyard of the hospital complex was — and remains — "one continuous shell crater."

Three doctors and a paramedic spoke with The Associated Press to offer new details from a March 9 airstrike that happened when communications were all but severed, and to counter fresh Russian misinformation. They left the city separately in private cars, as have thousands from Mariupol in recent weeks, and are now scattered in other towns around Ukraine and in Poland.

Their testimony, along with AP reporting, AP footage from the scene and interviews with munitions experts who analyzed the size of the shell crater, directly contradicts Russian claims that there was no airstrike. Russian officials have repeatedly tried to sow doubt about atrocities in Mariupol, the shattered city in eastern Ukraine that is a key Russian military objective.

Two of the three doctors, like most who passed through Russian checkpoints on the way out of Mariupol, said their cell phones were searched and videos and photos of the city were deleted. People with what

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was considered suspect imagery or who lacked documents were separated out, but it's not clear what ultimately happened to them.

"I had lists on my phone, I had photos, I had everything, but we were strongly told to delete all of this," said Mykhailenko, who spoke for two hours with hardly any interruptions with a fierce determination to describe the attack and her narrow escape. "The trash bin was deleted. ... We had dashcam footage of everything that was going on in the city, but they made us delete that as well."

Most recently, a Russian government-linked Twitter account shared an interview last week with Mariana Vishegirskaia, one of the women in the maternity hospital. Vishegirskaia, wearing polka dot pajamas and looking dazed, emerged almost unscathed from the hospital airstrike.

In the latest interview, the new mother said the hospital was not hit by an airstrike last month. She described the explosions as a pair of shells that struck nearby, saying she heard no airplanes. She left vague who could be responsible.

She said fellow survivors from the basement agreed when they discussed it in the moments afterward. "They did not hear it either. They said that it was a shell that flew in from somewhere else. That is, it did not come from the sky," she said in the interview.

Vishegirskaia is now in Russia-controlled territory, but it's not clear exactly where or under what conditions the interview was filmed.

However, a team of Associated Press journalists working on the ground in Mariupol nearby documented the sound of the plane, then the twin explosions. One of the explosions blasted a crater more than two stories deep in the courtyard — consistent with an airstrike using a 500-kilogram bomb and considerably stronger than artillery crossfire, according to two munitions experts consulted by The Associated Press.

Joseph Bermudez, an imagery analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the size of the hole and the visible effects of impact on the surrounding buildings leave no doubt it was an airstrike.

The attack on the Mariupol hospital was one of at least 37 Russian strikes on medical facilities across Ukraine recorded by The Associated Press. Over the course of the war, every hospital in the city has been struck at least once by shells or airstrikes — the first was just four days after fighting began. Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko said Wednesday that 50 people had burned to death in Russian strikes on hospitals in the city.

Before the attack, it was a relatively quiet day at the Mariupol hospital.

Dr. Yana Frantsusova was sorting medical waste in a room in another building at the hospital compound when the tiles and glass around her shattered. It was about 2:45 p.m. She started to run, but the shockwave slammed the door shut in her face.

"I ran out with difficulty, and all of us, all people from my department, all the nurses, doctors who were there, everyone was already on the floor," she said. "Then another explosion occurred."

Frantsusova had survived an airstrike once already, on a house near hers, and this felt the same — an intense shockwave followed by utter destruction. She and her team of medics got up from the floor to take in the injured and those able to walk.

Among the pregnant women in the gravest danger, "one was already giving birth, at the moment when she was brought to us," she said. Another had an open wound to her thigh. A third was in a state of shellshock, with shrapnel gashes in both legs.

The AP journalists filmed two large plumes of smoke in the distance in the direction of the airstrike. It then took them about 25 minutes to arrive at the scene.

By then, it was chaos. Paramedics raced up the stairs to bring down anyone who couldn't make it on their own feet. Children and expectant fathers stumbled out the doors to an apocalyptic scene of blackened trees, smoldering earth and a crater big enough to swallow a truck.

Vishegirskaia was already outside, hugging a blanket around her shoulders. When an AP journalist with a camera asked how she was, she answered "Fine," then went off to try and retrieve her belongings from the hospital. In the interview with Russian media, she falsely said she told AP journalists she did not want to be filmed.

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Sergei Chernobrivets, a paramedic who was on the scene that day, described the injuries to multiple women. He said he wasn't in a position to determine the source of the explosions, but he confirmed the extensive damage to the hospital compound.

Dr. Yulia Kucheruk, one of the maternity ward's physicians, said a nurse suffered a concussion and another medical worker was shellshocked. There was no point staying behind to try and retrieve useable medical supplies, she added, because "it was all trashed, in chaos." Kucheruk spoke only briefly about a day that remains painful to revisit.

Several women were transferred to another hospital, including Vishegirskaia and a woman with a fractured pelvis who died along with her unborn child the same day. Vishegirskaia gave birth the next day to a girl.

By then, the Russian misinformation campaign was in full swing. The country's embassy in the United Kingdom shared the AP's photos of Vishegirskaia and another woman wounded on a stretcher, placing the word "FAKE" over the images and claiming that Vishegirskaia had posed in both in "realistic makeup." The misinformation was repeated by Russian ambassadors in other parts of the world.

Russia blames Ukrainian shelling for attacks on hospitals, including the one on the maternity ward in Mariupol, although their story of the violence that day has shifted over time.

Twisting the truth about war crimes is a deliberate Russian tactic, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly address on Monday, just three days after Vishegirskaia's interview was released in Russian media.

"They have already launched a campaign of fakes to hide their guilt of mass killing of civilians in Mariupol," he said.

The hospital was struck again on March 17, and four or five of the patients lining the corridors were killed, Mykhailenko said. With no one to fetch the bodies, they were buried on the hospital grounds.

Days later, in despair and with a leg ailment increasingly making it hard for her to run from shelling, she and her family packed up what little they had left and piled into the car.

At the first checkpoint, her phone was wiped. At the second, their belongings were searched and their sole knife was seized. They picked their way through a minefield where a car had blown up the previous day. More than two weeks later, they made it to safety in Poland.

On March 24, Kucheruk also drove out and headed for western Ukraine. She passed through 20 Russian checkpoints, including one where her cell phone was searched and its contents deleted.

Now the bulk of Mariupol's doctors have fled, and the city is left without a single fully functioning hospital. They have lost the lives and the careers that they had built, and can only hope against hope to one day return to their destroyed city.

"All your life turned into a pile of ruins in one instant, everything that was dear to you, everything you were trying to do, everything you were trying to achieve," Mykhailenko said. "Everything got canceled simply because some guy threw this bomb after another bastard gave this order."

Ukraine: Russian missile kills 30 civilians at train station

By ADAM SCHRECK and ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

CHERNIHIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian leaders predicted more gruesome discoveries would be made in reclaimed cities and towns as Russian soldiers retreat to focus on eastern Ukraine, where officials said a Russian rocket attack on a packed train station used to evacuate civilians killed over 30 people Friday.

Hours after warning that Ukraine's forces already had found worse scenes of brutality in a settlement north of Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that "thousands" of people were at the station in Kramatorsk, a city in the eastern Donetsk region, when it was hit by a missile.

Zelenskyy accompanied a social media post with photos that showed a train car with smashed windows, abandoned luggage and bodies lying in what looked like an outdoor waiting area. Authorities said the strike wounded more than 100 people.

"The inhuman Russians are not changing their methods. Without the strength or courage to stand up

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to us on the battlefield, they are cynically destroying the civilian population," the president said. "This is an evil without limits. And if it is not punished, then it will never stop."

After failing to take Ukraine's capital, Russia has shifted its focus to the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region in eastern Ukraine where Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years and control some areas.

Ukrainian officials warned residents this week to leave as soon as possible for safer parts of the country and said they and Russia had agreed to establish multiple evacuation routes in the east. Kramatorsk is located in government-controlled territory.

In his nightly video address, Zelenskyy predicted more gruesome discoveries would be made in northern cities and towns the Russians withdrew from the concentrate on eastern Ukraine. He said evidence of civilians killed at close range and dumped on streets in Bucha already had surfaced in a worse way in Borodianka, another settlement outside the capital.

"And what will happen when the world learns the whole truth about what the Russian troops did in Mariupol?" Zelenskyy said late Thursday, referring to the besieged southern port that has seen some of the greatest suffering since Russia invaded Ukraine. "There on every street is what the world saw in Bucha and other towns in the Kyiv region after the departure of the Russian troops. The same cruelty. The same terrible crimes."

Spurred by reports that Russian forces committed atrocities in areas surrounding the capital, NATO nations agreed to increase their supply of arms after Ukraine's foreign minister pleaded for weapons from the alliance and other sympathetic countries to help face down an expected offensive in the east.

Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said investigators found at least three sites of mass shootings of civilians during the Russian occupation. Most victims died from gunshots, not from shelling, he said, and some corpses with their hands tied were "dumped like firewood" into mass graves, including one at a children's camp.

Fedoruk said 320 civilians were confirmed dead as of Wednesday, but he expected more as bodies are found in the city that was home to 50,000 people. Only 3,700 remain, he said.

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy said Bucha's horrors may be only the beginning. In the northern city of Borodianka, just 30 kilometers (20 miles) northwest of Bucha, he warned of even more casualties, saying "there it is much more horrible."

Ukrainian and several Western leaders have blamed the massacres on Moscow's troops. The weekly magazine Der Spiegel reported Germany's foreign intelligence agency intercepted radio messages among Russian soldiers discussing killings of civilians. Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

A Kremlin spokesman said Thursday that Russia has suffered major troop casualties during its six-week military operation in Ukraine.

"Yes, we have significant losses of troops and it is a huge tragedy for us," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sky News.

Peskov also hinted the fighting might be over "in the foreseeable future," telling Sky that Russian troops were "doing their best to bring an end to that operation."

On Thursday, a day after Russian forces began shelling their village in the southern Mykolaiv region, Sergei Dubovienko, 52, drove north in his small blue Lada with his wife and mother-in-law to Bashtanka, where they sought shelter in a church.

"They started destroying the houses and everything" in Pavlo-Marianovka, he said. "Then the tanks appeared from the forest. We thought that in the morning there would be shelling again, so I decided to leave."

Hundreds of people have fled villages in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions that are either under attack or occupied by Russian forces.

Marina Morozova and her husband fled from Kherson, the first major city to fall to the Russians.

"They are waiting for a big battle. We saw shells that did not explode. It was horrifying," she said.

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Morozova, 69, said only Russian television and radio was available. The Russians handed out humanitarian aid, she said, and filmed the distribution.

Anxious to keep moving away from Russian troops, the couple and others boarded a van that would take them west. Some will try to leave the country, while others will remain in quieter parts of Ukraine.

The United Nations estimates the war has displaced at least 6.5 million people within the country.

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, said that more than 4.3 million, half of them children, have left Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24 and sparked Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II.

The International Organization for Migration estimates more than 12 million people are stranded in areas of Ukraine under attack.

The United Nations' humanitarian chief told The Associated Press on Thursday that he's "not optimistic" about securing a cease-fire after meeting with officials in Kyiv and in Moscow this week, given the lack of trust between the sides. He spoke hours after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Ukraine of backtracking on proposals it had made over Crimea and Ukraine's military status.

Two top European Union officials and the prime minister of Slovakia traveled to Kyiv on Friday, looking to shore up the EU's support for Ukraine. Prime Minister Eduard Heger said he, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell have trade and humanitarian aid proposals for Zelenskyy and his government.

Part of that, Heger says is "to offer options for transporting grains, including wheat." Ukraine is a major world wheat supplier and Russia's war on Ukraine is creating shortages, notably in the Middle East.

Western nations have stepped up sanctions, and the Group of Seven major world powers warned that they will keep adding measures until Russian troops leave Ukraine.

The U.S. Congress voted Thursday to suspend normal trade relations with Russia and ban the importation of its oil, while the EU approved other new steps, including an embargo on coal imports. The U.N. General Assembly, meanwhile, voted to suspend Russia from the world organization's leading human rights body.

U.S. President Joe Biden said the U.N. vote demonstrated how "Putin's war has made Russia an international pariah." He called the images coming from Bucha "horrifying."

"The signs of people being raped, tortured, executed — in some cases having their bodies desecrated — are an outrage to our common humanity," Biden said.

Jackson confirmation takes Biden political story full circle

By ZEKE MILLER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a moment 46 days — and more than 46 years — in the making.

President Joe Biden on Friday will celebrate the confirmation of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman to reach the Supreme Court, marking the pinnacle of her legal career and bringing his political story full circle.

As a longtime Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, Biden had a front-row seat to some of the most contentious confirmation battles in the Court's history, as well as the hearings for Justice Stephen Breyer, whose retirement this summer is clearing the way for Jackson to join the bench.

"This is a tremendously historic day in the White House and in the country, and this is a fulfillment of a promise the president made to the country," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. She added that Biden's time on the Judiciary Committee "was defining for him and gave him historically exceptional preparation" for putting a justice on the court.

In nominating Jackson, Biden delivered on a campaign promise to select the first Black woman to serve on a court that was made up entirely of white men for almost two centuries, declared her race unworthy of citizenship and endorsed American segregation.

He also chose an attorney who will be the high court's first former public defender and who possesses the elite legal background of other justices as well, with degrees from Harvard and Harvard Law School and top clerkships, including for Breyer himself.

Jackson's arrival on the bench won't upend the current 6-3 ideological balance in favor of conservatives,

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but Biden sees the pick as historic nonetheless. He nominated her on the second anniversary of his pledge ahead of the South Carolina presidential primary to select a Black woman for the court. The move helped resurrect his flailing campaign and preserved his pathway to the White House.

"We've taken another step toward making our highest court reflect the diversity of America," Biden said in a tweet Thursday after posing for a selfie with the justice-in-waiting. "She will be an incredible Justice, and I was honored to share this moment with her."

Jackson had joined Biden at the White House to watch the Senate vote unfold on TV, the two of them clasping hands in the Roosevelt Room as her confirmation became reality.

"History doesn't happen by accident — it's made," said White House chief of staff Ron Klain. He took note on MSNBC of the vote on Brown's nomination being presided over in the Senate by Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black vice president, also selected by Biden.

Throughout his 50 years in Washington, Biden has played an instrumental part in shaping the court, both inside and out of the Senate. But this was his first opportunity to make a selection of his own.

Biden may not get another chance. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, in an interview Thursday with Axios, refused to commit to hold confirmation hearings for a future Biden nominee to the high court if the GOP retakes control of the Senate in 2023.

Biden took part in confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominees Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981 and Antonin Scalia in 1986, both nominated by President Ronald Reagan. He also participated in the 1986 hearing to elevate Justice William Rehnquist to the position of chief justice of the United States.

As committee chairman, he presided over the hearings for doomed nominee Robert Bork, then the successful confirmations of Anthony M. Kennedy, David Souter, Clarence Thomas, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Breyer.

He was on the committee in 2005 but no longer chairman when now-Chief Justice John Roberts was confirmed to the court, and in 2006 when Samuel Alito became a justice.

As vice president, Biden helped counsel President Barack Obama on his three Supreme Court picks: Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, who were confirmed, and now-Attorney General Merrick Garland, whose nomination was blocked by the GOP ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

Jackson won't take office immediately. Breyer is set to step down after the court concludes its current term, which is usually in late June or early July. Only then will Jackson take the oath to become an associate justice. A White House official said Jackson will remain in her role on the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit but will continue to recuse herself from cases.

Friday's celebratory event on the South Lawn of the White House comes amid a COVID-19 outbreak among Washington's political class that has sidelined members of Biden's administration and lawmakers, including Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who tested positive for the virus just hours after voting for Brown's confirmation.

Psaki on Thursday addressed concerns that the White House event could be a "super-spreader" for the virus, like President Donald Trump's Rose Garden ceremony announcing the nomination of now-Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Psaki emphasized that the risks from the virus are now much lower because of vaccinations and treatments.

"At that point in time, vaccines were unavailable, people were not vaccinated, it certainly puts us in a different space," Psaki said.

Jackson will join more diverse and conservative high court

By MARK SHERMAN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will join a Supreme Court that is both more diverse than ever and more conservative than it's been since the 1930s.

She's likely to be on the losing end of a bunch of important cases, including examinations of the role of race in college admissions and voting rights that the high court, with its 6-3 conservative majority, will

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take up next term.

Jackson, 51, is the first Black woman confirmed to the Supreme Court following Thursday's 53-47 vote by the Senate. She won't join the court for several months, until Justice Stephen Breyer retires once the court wraps up its work for the summer — including its verdict on whether to overturn the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling on abortion rights.

When Jackson takes the bench as a justice for the first time, in October, she will be one of four women and two Black justices — both high court firsts.

And the nine-member court as a whole will be younger than it's been for nearly 30 years, when Breyer, now 83, came on board.

Among the younger justices are three appointees of former President Donald Trump, and the court's historic diversity won't obscure its conservative tilt.

In Breyer's final term, the conservative justices already have left their mark even before deciding major cases on abortion, guns, religion and climate change. By 5-4 or 6-3 votes, they allowed an unusual Texas law to remain in effect that bans abortions after roughly six weeks; stopped the Biden administration from requiring large employers to have a workforce that is vaccinated against COVID-19 or be masked and tested; and left in place redrawn Alabama congressional districts that a lower court with two Trump appointees found shortchanged Black voters in violation of federal law.

Jackson's replacement of Breyer, for whom she once worked as a law clerk, won't alter that Supreme Court math.

"She's just going to be swimming against the tide every day. That's a lot to take on," said Robin Walker Sterling, a Northwestern University law professor.

But Jackson's presence could make a difference in the perspective she brings and how she expresses herself in her opinions, said Payvand Ahdout, a University of Virginia law professor.

Jackson, who was raised in Miami, may see the high court's cases about race "from the lens of being a Black woman who grew up in the South. She has an opportunity early on to show how representation matters," Ahdout said.

During her Senate confirmation hearings, Jackson 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.

"Historically, the court goes to some length to try to get as much participation as possible. So I wouldn't be surprised to see the two dealt with separately," said Ahdout, who was a clerk to the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg the last time the court dealt with race in college admissions, in 2016. Just seven justices took part in that case, because Justice Antonin Scalia died before it was decided and Justice Elena Kagan had been involved as a Justice Department official before joining the court.

For now, Jackson might not have much to do. She remains a judge on the federal appeals court in Washington, but she stepped away from cases there when President Joe Biden nominated her to the Supreme Court in February and will continue to do so, a White House official said.

That could reduce the number of times Jackson has to recuse herself from any of her old cases that later make their way to the Supreme Court.

Breyer said in January that he would retire once his successor had been confirmed, but not before the end of the term. With a bare Senate majority, Democrats didn't want to risk waiting until the summer for confirmation hearings and a vote.

That leaves Jackson in a situation that is "unprecedented in modern times," said Marin Levy, a Duke University law professor who studies the federal judiciary.

Most new justices begin work a few days after they are confirmed, Levy said. Justice Brett Kavanaugh was sworn in to the court just a few hours after his tumultuous Senate vote.

Jackson could spend time arranging for her clerks and other staff for the Supreme Court, and closing down her current office.

But she won't have to find new housing or upend the lives of her husband and children. Her new work-

place is less than a mile from the court of appeals.

3 Shanghai officials sacked over COVID-19 response

BEIJING (AP) — Three local officials in Shanghai have been sacked over a slack response to the COVID-19 outbreak in China's largest city, where residents are complaining of harsh lockdown conditions leading to shortages of food and basic necessities.

An official notice Friday gave no details of the allegations against the three officials, but said their failure to fulfill their duties in epidemic prevention and control had allowed the virus to spread, leading to a "serious impact" on efforts to control the outbreak.

Shanghai announced more than 21,000 new local cases on Friday, of which only 824 had symptoms. Total cases in the outbreak that began last month in Shanghai have soared past the 100,000 mark, making it one of China's most serious since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

No additional deaths have been reported in the outbreak blamed on the hugely infectious but relatively less lethal omicron subvariant BA.2. China's vaccination rate is around 90%, but considerably lower among the elderly.

Shanghai has placed all 26 million residents under lockdown and implemented mass testing, while requiring anyone with a positive result to be held in an isolation center, some of which have been newly created from converted gymnasiums and exhibition halls.

Some residents have received government food packages containing meat and vegetables. Many, however, are struggling to obtain rice and other basics, with online vendors sold out and delivery services unable to keep up with demand.

With no word on when the lockdown will be lifted, anxiety is rising, along with frustration over the city's apparent lack of preparation for an extended lockdown.

Travel in and out of Shanghai has largely come to a standstill and usually bustling city streets are deserted apart from police, health workers and residents reporting for testing.

China has repeatedly enforced lengthy mass lockdowns over the two-year course of the epidemic. Shanghai, however, had largely escaped the most onerous measures under China's "zero-COVID" strategy that aims to isolate every infected person.

Home to many of China's wealthiest, best educated and most cosmopolitan citizens, the city was first promised a two-phase lockdown starting March 28 and lasting no more than eight days total. With little notice given, residents made a run on supermarkets, quickly leaving shelves bare.

Those measures have since been extended, leaving many families that had planned for only a limited time in quarantine without supplies. Authorities say they will determine future steps based on testing results, but have given no specifics.

Officials say Shanghai, which includes the world's busiest port and China's main stock exchange, has enough food. But a deputy mayor, Chen Tong, acknowledged Thursday that getting it the "last 100 meters" to households is a challenge.

City officials have apologized for mishandling the lockdown and promised to improve food supplies. The Communist Party leadership in Beijing is working to squelch complaints, especially online, in hopes of preventing the lockdown and accompanying dissatisfaction from becoming a political issue ahead of a key party congress later this year.

In a further endorsement of the government's approach, Xi credited China's "closed loop" management with keeping the infection rate to just 0.45% of those involved in this year's Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games,

China's COVID-19 policy has "once again withstood the test, contributing useful experience for the world to fight against the virus and host major international events," Xi said in an address at a ceremony Friday honoring Chinese Games participants.

The government says it is trying to reduce the impact of its tactics, but authorities are still enforcing curbs that also block access to the industrial cities of Shenyang, Changchun and Jilin with millions of residents

in the northeast.

Meanwhile, punishments meted out to officials seen as being insufficiently rigorous appears to be incentivizing local governments to take extreme measures. Dozens of local officials around the country have been sacked or otherwise punished, though no one at the central government level has been held to account.

Friday's notice identified those fired as Cai Yongqiang, Xu Jianjun and Huang Wei, all officials at the district, neighborhood or township level.

NATO eyes in the sky, keeping Europe out of Russia's war

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

UEDEM, Germany (AP) — As Russia's military buildup near Ukraine accelerated early this year, military planners at NATO began preparing to dispatch scores of fighter jets and surveillance aircraft into the skies near Russia and Ukraine. It was a warning to Moscow not to make the mistake of targeting any member country.

Even in the weeks preceding the war, politicians and analysts were divided over whether President Vladimir Putin would really order Russian troops to invade. From a military point of view, though, the forces arrayed around Ukraine appeared designed to do just that.

It became a matter of urgency to put more eyes in the sky and to tightly link NATO aircraft, warships, ground-based missile systems and radar installations to protect the alliance's eastern flank.

"We are monitoring very closely," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said this week. "Information, best possible situation awareness, is of course extremely critical in such a dangerous situation as we see in Ukraine now."

In the lead-up to the Feb. 24 invasion, the alliance's Combined Air Operations Center in Uedem, western Germany, shifted gear. A few dozen military personnel now simultaneously manage up to 30 aircraft in skies from the northern tip of Norway down to Slovakia.

From an underground bunker in quiet farmland, patrolling aircraft are diverted to monitor suspicious Russian planes. Jets on 15-minute standby are routinely "Alpha Scrambled" from around Europe to intercept unidentified aircraft near NATO airspace.

More than 100 aircraft can be working aloft on any given day, mixed in among roughly 30,000 civilian flights made daily through European skies.

Six Boeing E-3A surveillance planes from NATO's ageing fleet of early warning and control aircraft help create an "air picture" to share with member nations. These "eyes in the sky" do not fly into Ukraine or Russia, but can see up to 400 kilometers (250 miles) across borders.

Fighter jets also provide information about what is going on inside part of two countries at war. These "assets" are sometimes sent from as far away as western France, refueled mid-air, and can patrol for about an hour in the border area before they must return.

The 30-nation military alliance is wary of being drawn into a wider war with Russia, so borders and airspace are scrupulously respected.

"There is always the fog of war, and we don't want to have NATO assets close by because even unintentionally you might have some losses," said Major General Harold Van Pee, commander of the NATO facility in Uedem.

The most sensitive zones for unidentified planes are the Kola Peninsula — at the high north borders of Russia and Norway — the Gulf of Finland approaching the Russian city of St. Petersburg, and the skies around Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad, sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland.

From their computer screens, NATO personnel can also track cruise missiles, like those that Russia used last month to pound a military training base in western Ukraine near NATO member Poland, killing 35 people.

But shadowing them with aircraft is a high-risk endeavor, particularly at night, in poor weather or when the missiles hug the ground, flying so low that electrical pylons and cables become a danger. "We have to be convinced that there is a credible threat" to go after one, Van Pee said.

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A less obvious challenge to NATO airspace is rogue drones. Military officers said that Russia is using powerful electromagnetic devices for communication jamming purposes which can disrupt remotely controlled flights.

Last month, a military drone drifted uncontrolled out of Ukraine through the airspace of three members – Romania, Hungary and Croatia – before crashing in the Croatian capital. Some parked cars were damaged but no one was hurt.

The drone weighed just over 6 tons. Both Russia and Ukraine denied launching it. Military officers and NATO officials refuse to comment on the incident until an investigation is completed.

“Even if you fly alongside one of those drones, are you going to do something about it? You have to ask yourself, because if you shoot it down then for sure you’re going to do damage on the ground. If you let it fly, hopefully it will crash in the sea. I mean, you don’t know,” Van Pee said.

Whether it’s a rogue drone or a missile threat, political and legal experts are supposed to be involved in any decision to shoot something down. Despite the war in its backyard, NATO is operating under strict peacetime rules and is determined to keep it that way.

“Before you start using force there has to be an imminent threat to either NATO forces or NATO populations. That’s a judgement call, and that’s always hard to make,” Van Pee said.

Opening Day in MLB: New No. 21 patches, NL DHs and Guardians

By BEN WALKER AP Baseball Writer

Andrew McCutchen got the first hit of the year, up against the still-dormant ivy at Wrigley Field. He delivered as a National League designated hitter. Wearing a Roberto Clemente No. 21 patch, too.

A little later on opening day, Nico Hoerner hit the first home run of 2022. He connected off a pitcher who used an electronic wristband to receive his signals from the catcher.

Soon after that, in another yard, the Cleveland Guardians took the field for the first time.

New season, and definitely a new look all across Major League Baseball.

And if the weather wasn’t quite summer-like in some spots Thursday, well, who cares?

“It might be cold, it might be windy. But it’s opening day,” Cardinals fan Mary Welsh of Belleville, Illinois, said at Busch Stadium before St. Louis hosted Pittsburgh.

Out near Disneyland, where temperatures neared 100 degrees, AL MVP Shohei Ohtani flashed his 100 mph heat and took his swings for the Los Angeles Angels.

Late night in Phoenix, after Padres starter Yu Darvish threw six no-hit innings, rookie Seth Beer cracked a three-run homer in the ninth to give Arizona a comeback win on National Beer Day in the United States.

No joke.

In Atlanta, the Braves celebrated their World Series championship with a pregame parade. At every ballpark, umpires started to get their say — this year, they’ve joined referees from other sports in announcing replay review decisions to the crowd.

As seats filled up in rainy Washington, chilly Kansas City and more, it seemed fans decided the 99-day owners’ lockout that delayed spring training and pushed back opening day by a week wouldn’t deter them from coming back.

Wearing an Ernie Banks jersey, 23-year-old Philip Lijewski from Guthrie, Oklahoma, enjoyed the view at Wrigley as the Chicago Cubs and Milwaukee Brewers loosened up. He said the anger and acrimony over the labor strife didn’t dampen his enthusiasm for the game.

“Not really,” Lijewski said. “I’m glad that they came to a conclusion sooner rather than later. I was bummed that we didn’t get to do it April 4. But it’s April 7, so not too many days after.”

More than eight months after announcing a new change, Cleveland played its first regular-season game as the Guardians. Known as the Indians since 1915, the club made the switch in the interest of social justice.

Cleveland wore its road uniforms for the game in Kansas City, with the city name on the jersey.

“Supporting the city is what it comes down to,” star pitcher Shane Bieber said a day before the opener. “Going out there with my teammates, doing it the right way is really all we can do. It was a little bit dif-

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ferent getting used to the change, but I'd say we're all getting used to it day by day."

Plenty of stars from other sports were at Kauffman Stadium to see top prospect Bobby Witt Jr. and the Royals beat the Guardians 3-1. Kansas City Chiefs coach Andy Reid and several of his players were in attendance, as were members of the Kansas basketball team, which rallied past North Carolina in the men's NCAA championship game Monday night in New Orleans.

A strong wind made it seem much colder than the game-time temperature of 47 degrees, and intermittent drizzle turned to streaking pellets of ice during the national anthem.

After earlier rainouts at Yankee Stadium and Target Field, the Brewers-Cubs game became the first one of the season.

It was a raw 44 degrees when Chicago right-hander Kyle Hendricks threw the first pitch, which Kolten Wong lofted for a wind-blown popout.

McCutchen sliced a double in the second inning for the season's first hit, then singled and scored in the fourth for the first run. The 2013 NL MVP, the 35-year-old McCutchen was Milwaukee's designated hitter.

As part of the MLB labor deal, the National League has now permanently adopted the designated hitter — the American League began using it in 1973, and the NL added it for the pandemic-shortened 2020 season before going back to letting pitchers hit last year.

Before the Cubs batted in the bottom of the third, the videoboard in left field showed a clip dedicated to pitchers hitting with Sarah McLachlan's "I Will Remember You" serving as the soundtrack.

"Thank you pitchers. See you in a pinch," it said at the end.

McCutchen is among several active Roberto Clemente Award winners who will wear No. 21 — the number worn by the late Pirates Hall of Famer — on the backs of their hats and helmets for the rest of their careers.

MLB said it was a "special tribute to his enduring legacy." The announcement was timed for the 50th anniversary of the year in which Clemente, the Pittsburgh great from Puerto Rico, died in a plane crash while on a humanitarian relief effort.

"It's a privilege. An honor," said Nationals slugger Nelson Cruz, the most recipient of the Clemente award. "He means so much for baseball, in general. He was an example to follow — how to be professional, on and off the field. A remarkable player and a remarkable human being who lost his life trying to help others."

"He paid the ultimate price, and whatever we do is not enough," he said.

Hoerner launched the first homer, a two-run drive for the Cubs off NL Cy Young Award winner Corbin Burnes. Brewers catcher Omar Narváez and Burnes used the newly approved electronic pitch calling system — Narváez could push a button on his wristband to signal what he wanted thrown, without fear of wiggling his fingers and having the sign stolen.

Not that Hoerner needed any help, apparently.

"Who had Nico in the first homer pool?" Cubs manager David Ross kidded after the 5-4 win.

In St. Louis, Tommy Edman's drive became the first play that resulted in an umpire announcing the result of a replay check.

"After review, the call is confirmed. Home run," crew chief Jim Reynolds succinctly told the gleeful Cardinals crowd.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu hopes to transform her adopted city

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — When she was elected mayor of Boston in November, Michelle Wu transformed the image of the city's chief executive — up until then the sole domain of white men, many of Irish descent.

Now in office, the Chicago-born daughter of Taiwanese immigrants is facing a raft of challenges, including making good on key campaign promises like creating a fare-free public transit system and blunting the city's skyrocketing housing costs.

Wu, 37 and the mother of two, has also grappled with early morning protests outside her home and racist online taunts.

"You can't take things personally in jobs like this," Wu said in an interview with The Associated Press.

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"At the same time, it does seem like in the last few years especially we've seen a normalizing of behavior that is toxic and harmful and personally abusive to many, many people."

"Women and women of color in particular often have the most racialized and gender-based versions of that intensity," she added.

The noisy morning gatherings outside her home prompted Wu to push through a new city ordinance limiting the hours during which protesters can gather in residential neighborhoods to the window between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

She's also dismissed online chatter which tried to raise doubts about her mental health. Wu has been open about her mother's struggles with mental illness.

"What has been most staggering about some of the rumors or these whisper campaigns is that in fact, I think it has the opposite impact," Wu said. "If I needed mental health support, I would be the first to say that."

She's also run into flak from city unions on pandemic mandates and, more recently, tried to thread a needle on whether and how to allow restaurants to continue offering sidewalk dining along the narrow streets of the city's North End.

The post is still a dream job for Wu — a former Democratic city councilor and policy wonk in the mold of mentor Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

"In many ways, it feels familiar and exhilarating and energizing to be able to roll up my sleeves and just work on issues that I had been talking about," Wu said. "The energy right now in Boston to get things done is felt everywhere across the city."

While Wu is the first woman of color to be elected mayor, she wasn't the first to hold the seat. Former City Council President Kim Janey, who is Black, held the post of acting mayor for much of 2021 after former Mayor Marty Walsh resigned to become President Joe Biden's labor secretary.

Unlike the typical Boston mayor, Wu wasn't born and raised in the city. She first arrived from Chicago to attend Harvard University in neighboring Cambridge.

She would eventually relocate her two younger sisters and mother to Boston as she attended Harvard Law School.

"Boston has given me everything that I cherish in my life — the ability to take care of my family, to connect my mom to health care in a way that saved her life, the schools that I was able to raise my sisters in and now my own two boys," Wu said. "It's a city of every possible opportunity that you can think of, but it's also a city that really needs to take down barriers, still, for that to be felt across every single part of our neighborhoods."

One of biggest challenges facing Wu is housing.

Boston is facing a hollowing-out, driven by rapid gentrification as sleek new apartment buildings rise in neighborhoods that traditionally relied on three-story wooden homes to house a working and middle class

"We are working to throw everything we have at housing right now," said Wu, who has pledged to revive rent control, outlawed by Massachusetts voters in 1994.

Hemmed in by neighboring communities and the Atlantic Ocean, Boston doesn't have many large open spaces for new housing. One of the last — a former industrial landscape rebranded as the Seaport District — has been filled with boxy glass-enclosed high rises.

Wu is eyeing three other parcels: a former horse track in the city's East Boston neighborhood; a reconfiguration of Interstate 90 that could unlock land largely owned by Harvard; and an industrial area near the city's South Boston neighborhood that had been eyed for a stadium during the city's aborted bid for the 2024 Olympics.

During the campaign, Wu also promised a free public transit system.

The city has put a down payment on that pledge with three free bus lines serving primarily riders of color and lower income neighborhoods. The city is picking up the tab — \$8 million in federal pandemic relief funds — for the next two years.

"Bus service is the most cost efficient and the most equitable place to start, because that is where we

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see some of the largest gaps in rider experience," Wu said, noting that Black riders spend 64 more hours per year sitting on buses in Boston compared to white riders.

Expanding the fare-free push to other bus lines and the subway system would likely require action by state lawmakers, the governor and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which oversees the public transit system. Republican Gov. Charlie Baker has panned the idea.

Wu said she's hoping to change what it means to be mayor of the nearly 400-year-old city — and maybe change the way the rest of the country sees Boston while she's at it.

"I made a promise to myself early on that I would be proud of who I was in politics long after I got out of politics," Wu said. "I was anxious at first that being in this role would mean having to change my family's life in different ways. But politics doesn't have to be how we see it now. Politics is what we make of it."

"I hope that, in leaning into who I am — a mom with two young kids, someone who didn't grow up in the city, raised by parents who didn't grow up in this country — that I expand the definition of what leadership looks like," she said.

North demolishing hotel that was symbol of Korean engagement

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea is demolishing a South Korean-owned hotel at a North Korean resort that was one of the last symbols of inter-Korean engagement, according to Seoul officials who called for the North to stop the "unilateral" destruction.

South Korea built dozens of facilities at North Korea's Diamond Mountain resort to accommodate tourism by its citizens during a high period of engagement between the rivals in the 1990s. But North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in 2019 called the South Korean facilities there "shabby" and ordered them destroyed after months of frustration over Seoul's unwillingness to defy U.S.-led sanctions that kept the tours from resuming.

The North postponed the demolition work in 2020 as part of stringent measures to prevent COVID-19.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said Friday that North Korea was proceeding with the demolition of the Haegumgang Hotel. The floating hotel, docked at a coastal area of the resort, was a major property among dozens of facilities South Korea established to accommodate Diamond Mountain tours, which began in 1998.

Unification Ministry spokesperson Cha Deok-cheol said it wasn't clear whether the North also was destroying other facilities at the site. He said Seoul "strongly regrets North Korea's unilateral dismantlement" of the hotel and urged the North to engage in talks to resolve disagreements over the South Korean properties at the site.

Commercial satellite images indicate the demolition work has been underway for weeks. Cha said Seoul used inter-Korean communication channels to demand an explanation and talks on the issue, but the North has ignored the request.

The demolition comes amid heightened tensions over recent missile launches. North Korea conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test since 2017 on March 24, as Kim revives brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United States and other rivals to accept the North as a nuclear power and remove crippling sanctions.

South Korean tours to Diamond Mountain were a major symbol of cooperation between the Koreans and a valuable cash source for the North's broken economy before the South suspended them in 2008 after a North Korean guard fatally shot a South Korean tourist.

South Korea can't restart mass tours to Diamond Mountain or any other major inter-Korean economic activity without defying sanctions, which have been strengthened since 2016, when the North began accelerating its nuclear and missile tests. While U.N. sanctions don't directly ban tourism, they prohibit bulk cash transfers that can result from such business activities.

During their brief diplomacy in 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in met Kim three times and vowed to restart Diamond Mountain tours, voicing optimism that sanctions could end. But North Korea

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suspended cooperation with the South after diplomacy with the U.S. collapsed in 2019 and Seoul wasn't able to wrest concessions from Washington on its behalf.

Biden bets strong job market will shield economy from slump

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy faces plenty of threats: War in Ukraine, high grocery bills, spiking gasoline prices, splintered supply chains, the lingering pandemic and rising interest rates that slow growth.

The Biden White House is betting the U.S. economy is strong enough to withstand these threats, but there are growing fears of a coming economic slump among voters and some Wall Street analysts.

The next few months will test whether President Joe Biden built a durable recovery full of jobs with last year's \$1.9 trillion relief package, or an economy overfed by government aid that could tip into a downturn. On the line for Democrats ahead of the midterm elections is whether voters see firsthand in their lives that inflation can be tamed and the economy can manage to run hot without overheating.

Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters this week that the 3.6% unemployment rate and last year's robust growth puts the U.S. in a safe place compared to the rest of the world.

"The core question is whether the strength of the US economy is now an asset or a liability," Deese said. "What we have done over the course of the last 15 months is driven a uniquely strong economic recovery in the United States, which positions us uniquely well to deal with the challenges ahead."

But others see an economy that could struggle to preserve growth while reducing inflation now running at a 40-year high of 7.9%. The Federal Reserve has signaled a series of benchmark interest rate increases and other policies to slow inflation this year, yet Russia's invasion of Ukraine has destabilized the global energy and food markets in ways that could push prices upward.

Deutsche Bank on Tuesday became the first major financial institution to forecast a U.S. recession. And Harvard University economist Larry Summers — a Democrat and former treasury secretary — noted that the U.S. economy has gone into recession within two years each time inflation eclipsed 4% and unemployment was below 5% as they are now.

Joe LaVorgna, who worked in the Trump White House and is now chief economist for the Americas at Natixis, said he expects economic growth this year to be just below 1%, a potentially dangerous level.

While household balance sheets are solid and unemployment low, wages are not keeping up with inflation, which could dampen consumer spending. And supply chain disruptions and higher energy costs will be additional drags.

"The reason why you have a recession when the economy is growing 1% is it's like a weakened immune system," LaVorgna said. "Any negative event, even a small one, is going to throw you off course and stall speed becomes a recession."

Still, because of the strong labor market and household savings, LaVorgna also anticipates that any downturn would be mild.

So far, consumer spending has been healthy even if the public views the economy as anemic.

Nearly 7 in 10 Americans believe the economy is in poor shape, according to a poll last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Yet Bank of America noted that total debit and credit card spending in March was up 11% from a year ago, and its analysts concluded households are "strong enough to weather the storm provided it doesn't persist too long."

There are also signs that consumers are adjusting as higher oil prices have led average gasoline costs to hit \$4.15 a gallon, according to AAA. Gas costs have fallen in the past week, but they're still up 45% from a year ago.

One consequence of higher prices is that Americans began to use less oil and gas. The U.S. consumed a daily average of 21.9 million barrels during the first full week of February; the figure fell 9% to 19.9 million barrels during the first week of April, according to the Energy Information Administration. That decline is larger than the normal seasonal drop-off in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic. Gasoline usage

has dropped more than 6% during the same period.

A recent Goldman Sachs research note stood out to Biden administration officials because it suggested that job growth and pay increases would cushion the economy from higher commodity prices. Because of the strong labor market, the economy is better protected from commodity shocks than in the recessions of 1974, 1980 and 1990, as well as the 2008 financial crisis.

The White House has watched with some frustration as the public conversation about the economy has been reduced to inflation, believing that largely ignores the strength of the labor market and the idea that families are able to manage the higher prices because of the coronavirus relief provided earlier.

The administration believes that Fed rate increases as well as a drop in deficit spending this year will help to lower inflation. But the key message that the White House wants to deliver in response to public fears about the economy is that Biden understands their concerns.

The challenge, however, is that many Americans are so focused on inflation that they believe the job market — and wider economy — is weaker than it actually is. That means the White House has to make a nuanced case in which it recognizes the economic weaknesses but repeats the low unemployment rate again, again and again so that it lodges in the public mind.

The doubts about the economy — despite the solid jobs numbers — are “a signal that we need to continue to make that case clearly and unambiguously,” said Deese.

Palestinian kills 2, wounds several in Tel Aviv shooting

By ARIEL SCHALIT and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — A Palestinian opened fire into a crowded bar in central Tel Aviv, killing at least two people and wounding several others. The attacker, who was from the occupied West Bank, eluded police for hours before he was killed in a shootout with security forces early Friday, officials said.

It was the fourth deadly attack in Israel by Palestinians in less than three weeks and came at a time of heightened tensions around the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Protests and clashes in Jerusalem during Ramadan last year eventually ignited an 11-day Gaza war.

The militant Hamas group that rules the Gaza Strip praised the attack but did not claim responsibility.

Hundreds of Israeli police officers, canine units, and army special forces, had conducted a massive man-hunt in central Tel Aviv, searching building by building through densely populated residential neighborhoods.

Israel's Shin Bet security agency said they eventually cornered the attacker in a mosque in the Jaffa neighborhood, where he was killed in an exchange of fire.

“After a difficult night, and after long hours of activity by police, the army and the Shin Bet, we succeeded this morning, through intelligence and operational cooperation, to close the circle and to kill the terrorist in a shootout,” Israeli police chief Kobi Shabtai said.

Thursday's attack took place at the start of the Israeli weekend in the popular nightlife area. Medics described scenes of panic, with dozens of people fleeing after the shots rang out.

Israel's Magen David Adom emergency service said two men around 30 years old were killed. Another seven people were wounded, three of them seriously, it said.

Eleven Israelis were killed in three previous attacks, making this one of the worst waves of violence in years.

The shooting took place on Dizengoff Street, a central thoroughfare that has seen other attacks over the years. In the most recent, an Arab citizen of Israel shot and killed two Israelis and wounded several others on the street in January 2016.

Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian leaders have held a flurry of meetings in recent weeks, and Israel has taken a number of steps aimed at calming tensions, including issuing thousands of additional work permits for Palestinians from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

Prior to the attack, Israel had said it would allow women, children and men over 40 from the occupied West Bank to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in east Jerusalem on Friday, the first weekly prayers of Ramadan. Tens of thousands were expected to attend.

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The mosque is the third holiest site in Islam and sits on a hilltop that is the most sacred site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount. The holy site has long been a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Israel has worked to sideline the Palestinian issue in recent years, instead focusing on forging alliances with Arab states against Iran. But the century-old conflict remains as intractable as ever.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories to form their future state. The last substantive peace talks broke down more than a decade ago, and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is opposed to Palestinian statehood.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and considers the entire city to be its capital. It is building and expanding Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, which most of the international community considers illegal.

It withdrew soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005. But along with neighboring Egypt, it imposed a crippling blockade on the territory after the militant Hamas group seized power from rival Palestinian forces two years later. Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since then.

Hamas spokesman Abdelatif Al-Qanou said late Thursday that the "the heroic attack in the heart of the (Israeli) entity has struck the Zionist security system and proved our people's ability to hurt the occupation."

On March 29, a 27-year-old Palestinian from the West Bank shot and killed five people in the central town of Bnei Brak. Two days earlier, a shooting attack by two Islamic State group sympathizers in the central city of Hadera killed two police officers. The week before, an IS supporter killed four people in a car-ramming and stabbing attack in the southern city of Beersheba. The Hadera and Beersheba attacks were carried out by Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The recent attacks appear to have been carried out by lone assailants, perhaps with the help of accomplices. No Palestinian militant group has claimed them, though Hamas has welcomed the attacks.

Israel says the conflict stems from the Palestinians' refusal to accept its existence as a Jewish state and blames attacks in part on incitement on social media. Palestinians say such attacks are the inevitable result of a nearly 55-year military occupation that shows no sign of ending.

Tiger is back at Masters, and it already felt like a victory

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Tiger Woods playing the Masters again, his shirt as pink as the azaleas at Augusta National, would have been enough reason to celebrate Thursday.

It felt that way to him, too.

Woods twirled his club after good shots, and there were enough. He pumped his fist after his longest birdie putt. And then normalcy gave way to reality when he used his wedge as a walking stick for his once-battered and now weary legs for a final climb toward the 18th green.

Another par save for a 1-under 71, four shots behind Sungjae Im.

But this wasn't just about a score. Woods was competing in a major, the first time in 508 days since a car crash some 14 months ago that shattered his right leg. That much was clear when asked if simply being able to play felt like a victory. His answer: "Yes."

"If you would have seen how my leg looked to where it's at now, the pictures — some of the guys know; they've seen the pictures — to see where I've been, to get from there to here, it was no easy task," Woods said.

It doesn't figure to get any easier the rest of the way.

Still to come is Friday, the first time he will have walked 18 holes at Augusta National on consecutive days since the accident with what he described as "lots of ice" in between.

Ahead of him are a collection of players who have won majors, who have won at Augusta, and who have spent the last year honing their games instead of figuring out how to get from a hospital bed to finding joy in the simple pleasure of walking.

Im, the 24-year-old South Korean known for rarely missing the center of the club face, ran off three straight birdies at the start, recovered from a pair of bogeys with a 12-foot eagle putt on the 13th and

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added a late birdie for a 5-under 67.

He was one shot ahead of Cameron Smith, playing for the first time since winning The Players Championship a month ago. The Aussie with the mullet had the most dynamic round of the day with his eight birdies, all between a double bogey at the start and the finish.

"To be honest, those couple of double bogeys really didn't have too bad a shot in them. It's not like I was scratching it out of the trees," Smith said. "Just misjudged the wind on both wedges. Just left myself in a bit of a tough spot. Other than that, it was just really solid."

Im's 67 was the highest score to lead after 18 holes at the Masters since 2014, and that was to be expected. Even with 2 inches of rain that softened the course, the front that cleared out the clouds brought enough wind to jangle the nerves at every turn.

Dustin Johnson, who held off Im and Smith when he won the Masters in November 2020, was 4 under through 10 holes and poised to present a daunting target with the scoring holes ahead of him. He had to settle for pars, dropped a shot late and was in the large group at 69.

Also at 69 were former Masters champion Danny Willett, world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler and Joaquin Niemann, who holed out for eagle on No. 9 and still didn't get the biggest roar of the round. He was playing with Woods, who heard them all day.

The crowd was so large that Woods could barely be seen over so many heads as he walked from the clubhouse to the putting green and then to the first tee, big cheers at each station, all the way down to Amen Corner until the end.

"Probably at the beginning I noticed that there was a lot of people, but then I was trying to talk to my caddie, and I couldn't hear anything that he was saying," Niemann said.

Overlooked in Woods playing again was the return of the spectators, and it was a beautiful and roaring marriage. There were pockets of cheers from around Augusta National, and endless cheers for Woods.

He missed that. They missed him. And he didn't waste time giving them reason for hope by making a 10-foot par putt on the first hole.

"The place was electric," Woods said. "I hadn't played like this since '19 when I won because in '20 we had COVID and we had no one here, and I didn't play last year. So to have the patrons fully out and to have that type of energy out there was awesome to feel."

He couldn't feel the same about his legs. He said they were sore, which he expected, but he could compete over five hours on soft turf and so many undulations.

He came within a few feet of an ace on the par-3 sixth. He made a 30-foot birdie on the par-3 16th, and his other on an approach that hugged the top of the green at the par-5 13th for a simple two-putt. His big regret was a pitch that came up woefully short on the par-5 eighth, followed by a chip that was too strong and a poor putt.

He dropped another shot from a 4-iron chip on the 14th that ran 8 feet by.

It wasn't his best. But after going that long without serious competition, he had few complaints.

"I'm going to be sore, yes. That's just the way it is," he said. "And this is only one round. We've got three more to go. There's a long way to go and a lot of shots to be played."

But it was a start, and that felt like a win. And he was among 17 players from the 90-man field who broke par, and that was big.

"I was able to finish up in the red," Woods said. "I'm right where I need to be."

The thousands of spectators who stood a dozen deep in some spots, who filled every inch of grass around Amen Corner, couldn't have agreed more.

Manhattan DA: Trump criminal investigation is continuing

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rejecting suggestions he has lost interest in going after Donald Trump, the Manhattan district attorney said Thursday a criminal investigation into the former president and his business practices is continuing "without fear or favor" despite a recent shakeup in the probe's leadership.

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In a rare public statement, Alvin Bragg denied the three-year-old investigation was winding down or that a grand jury term expiring this month would impede his office's ability to bring charges.

Citing secrecy rules, the district attorney said he couldn't discuss details of the probe but pledged to publicly disclose findings when it's over.

"In recent weeks, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office has been repeatedly asked whether our investigation concerning former President Donald J. Trump, the Trump Organization, and its leadership is continuing," Bragg wrote. "It is."

The Democrat's affirmation of the investigation was part of a double dose of bad legal news for Trump on Thursday.

It came shortly after the New York attorney general's office asked a judge to hold Trump in contempt and fine him \$10,000 per day for not meeting a March 31 deadline to turn over documents in a parallel civil investigation. Trump is appealing a subpoena for his testimony in that investigation, but not one requiring him to provide documents.

"Instead of obeying a court order, Mr. Trump is trying to evade it," Attorney General Letitia James said. "We are seeking the court's immediate intervention because no one is above the law."

Trump slammed James as an "operative for the Democrat Party" and called her effort to sanction him "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt of all time."

"I've been investigated by the Democrats more than Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and Al Capone, combined," Trump said in a statement. "This has been going on for years, and in all cases, I have been innocent."

Bragg's statement proclaiming that the Trump investigation was still active marked his first public comment on the matter since the two men who had been leading it, Mark Pomerantz and Carey Dunne, resigned Feb. 23 in a dispute over the direction of the case.

Pomerantz, a former mafia prosecutor, wrote in a resignation letter that he believed Trump is "guilty of numerous felony violations" but that Bragg, who inherited the probe when he took office in January, had decided not to pursue charges.

Pomerantz said in the letter, published last month by The New York Times, that there was "evidence sufficient to establish Mr. Trump's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt" of allegations he falsified financial statements to secure loans and burnish his image as a wealthy businessman.

"I believe that your decision not to prosecute Donald Trump now, and on the existing record, is misguided and completely contrary to the public interest," Pomerantz wrote.

Bragg's silence after the resignations and the March 23 publication of Pomerantz's letter gave rise to a narrative that the investigation was effectively dead.

After Pomerantz and Dunne left, Trump lawyer Robert Fischetti told the Associated Press: "I'm a very happy man. In my opinion, this investigation is over."

Pomerantz and Dunne started on the probe under former District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

Pomerantz wrote that Vance had directed them to seek an indictment of Trump and other defendants "as soon as reasonably possible," but that Bragg reached a different conclusion after reviewing the evidence.

Vance and Bragg are Democrats. No ex-president has ever been charged with a crime.

In his statement Thursday, Bragg tried to wrest back the narrative, putting Trump on notice that he isn't done while reassuring his own supporters, who backed him in part because he pledged to continue investigating the former president, a Republican.

Bragg said that a team of "dedicated, experienced career prosecutors" is working on the investigation, led by his Investigation Division chief Susan Hoffinger and that they are "going through documents, interviewing witnesses, and exploring evidence not previously explored."

"In the long and proud tradition of white-collar prosecutions at the Manhattan D.A.'s Office, we are investigating thoroughly and following the facts without fear or favor," Bragg said.

So far, the three-year investigation has resulted only in tax fraud charges against Trump's company, the Trump Organization, and its longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg relating to lucrative fringe benefits such as rent, car payments and school tuition. They have pleaded not guilty.

Weisselberg's lawyers filed court papers in February asking a judge to throw out his case, arguing that

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prosecutors targeted him as punishment because he wouldn't flip on the former president.

Trump has cited potential peril from the criminal case as he appeals a ruling requiring him to answer questions under oath in James' civil investigation.

Trump's lawyers contend James, who assigned two lawyers to work on the criminal case, is using the guise of a civil deposition to get around a state law barring prosecutors from calling someone to testify before a criminal grand jury without giving them immunity.

James, a Democrat, has said her investigation has uncovered evidence that Trump may have misstated the value of assets like golf courses and skyscrapers on his financial statements for more than a decade.

Bragg said his career and perspective have been shaped by "high-profile, complex investigations," including a lawsuit he oversaw while a top deputy in the attorney general's office that led to the closure of Trump's charity over allegations he used it to further his political and business interests.

"Prosecutors fulfilling their duties cannot and do not bring only cases that are 'slam dunks,'" Bragg wrote. "To the contrary, every case must be brought for the right reason — namely that justice demands it. That's what I've done throughout my career, regardless of how easy or tough a case might be."

A grand jury convened in the Trump investigation last fall hasn't met regularly for several months and its term is expected to run out soon, but Bragg said there are grand juries sitting in Manhattan all the time and "there is no magic at all to any previously reported dates."

"In the meantime, we will not be discussing our investigative steps. Nor will we be discussing grand jury matters," Bragg wrote. "In short, as we have previously said, the investigation continues."

Missing divers surfaced before drifting apart, survivor says

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysian authorities resumed search for a third day Friday for three Europeans, including two teenagers, who disappeared while diving off a southern island.

Authorities had expressed hope for finding them after Norwegian diving instructor Kristine Grodem was rescued Thursday. She told authorities the four surfaced safely Wednesday afternoon but they drifted away from the boat and were separated by the strong current.

The group was diving in water about 15 meters (50 feet) deep at an island off the town of Mersing in southern Johor state. Grodem, 35, was rescued by a tugboat about 22 nautical miles (40 kilometers) from the dive site.

The missing divers are Alexia Alexandra Molina, 18, of France; Adrian Peter Chesters, 46, of Britain; and his Dutch son, Nathen Renze Chesters, 14.

Authorities have deployed two planes, 18 boats and about 90 personnel, including rescue divers as they expanded the search area.

Maritime officials said Grodem was providing dive training for the other three, who were seeking to obtain advanced diving licenses.

"Based on her account, the three others managed to surface. With their equipment, their full gear and their experience, we believe there is a strong chance of finding them alive," district police chief Cyril Edward Nuing said Thursday.

The boat's skipper was detained for further investigation, and Johor's state ruler suspended diving activities off Mersing. There are five islands off the town that are popular dive spots for local residents and tourists.

Malaysia's borders reopened to foreigners on April 1 after being closed for more than two years during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russian retreat reveals destruction as Ukraine asks for help

By ADAM SCHRECK and ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

CHERNIHIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops retreating from this northern Ukrainian city left behind crushed buildings, streets littered with destroyed cars and residents in dire need of food and other aid — images that added fuel to Kyiv's calls Thursday for more Western help to halt Moscow's next offensive.

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Dozens of people lined up to receive bread, diapers and medicine from vans parked outside a shattered school now serving as an aid-distribution point in Chernihiv, which Russian forces besieged for weeks as part of their attempt to sweep south towards the capital before retreating.

The city's streets are lined with shelled homes and apartment buildings with missing roofs or walls. A chalk message on the blackboard in one classroom still reads: "Wednesday the 23rd of February — class work."

Russia invaded the next day, launching a war that has forced more than 4 million Ukrainians to flee the country, displaced millions more within it and sent shock waves through Europe and beyond.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba warned Thursday that despite a recent Russian pullback, the country remains vulnerable, and he pleaded for weapons from NATO to face down the coming offensive in the east. Nations from the alliance agreed to increase their supply of arms, spurred on by reports that Russian forces committed atrocities in areas surrounding the capital.

Western allies also ramped up financial penalties aimed at Moscow, including a ban by the European Union on Russian coal imports and a U.S. move to suspend normal trade relations with Russia.

Kuleba encouraged Western countries to continue bearing down on Russia, suggesting that any letup will result in more suffering for Ukrainians.

"How many Buchas have to take place for you to impose sanctions?" Kuleba asked reporters, referring to a town near Kyiv where Associated Press journalists counted dozens of bodies, some burned, others apparently shot at close range or with their hands bound. "How many children, women, men, have to die — innocent lives have to be lost — for you to understand that you cannot allow sanctions fatigue, as we cannot allow fighting fatigue?"

Ukrainian officials said earlier this week that the bodies of 410 civilians were found in towns around the capital city. Volunteers have spent days collecting the corpses, and more were picked up Thursday in Bucha.

Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said investigators have found at least three sites of mass shootings of civilians during the Russian occupation. Most victims died from gunshots, not from shelling, he said, and corpses with their hands tied were "dumped like firewood" into recently discovered mass graves, including one at a children's camp.

The mayor said the count of dead civilians stood at 320 as of Wednesday, but he expected the number to rise as more bodies are found in his city, which once had a population of 50,000. Only 3,700 now remain, he said.

In his nightly address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested that the horrors of Bucha could just be the beginning. In the northern city of Borodianka, just 30 kilometers northwest of Bucha, Zelenskyy warned of even more casualties, saying "there it is much scarier."

The world should brace itself, he said, for what might soon be found in the seaport city of Mariupol, saying that on "on every street is what the world saw in Bucha and other towns in the Kyiv region after the departure of the Russian troops. The same cruelty. The same terrible crimes."

He pledged that an international war crimes investigation already underway will identify "each of the executioners" and "all those who committed rape or looting."

Ukrainian and several Western leaders have blamed the massacres on Moscow's troops, and the weekly Der Spiegel reported Thursday that Germany's foreign intelligence agency had intercepted radio messages between Russian soldiers discussing the killings of civilians. Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

Kuleba became emotional while referring to the horrors in the town, telling reporters that they couldn't understand "how it feels after seeing pictures from Bucha, talking to people who escaped, knowing that the person you know was raped four days in a row."

His comments came in response to a reporter's question about a video allegedly showing Ukrainian soldiers shooting a captured and wounded Russian soldier. He said he had not seen the video and that it would be investigated. He acknowledged that there could be "isolated incidents" of violations.

The footage has not been independently verified by the AP.

In the 6-week-old war, Russian forces failed to take Ukraine's capital quickly, denying what Western

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countries said was Russian leader Vladimir Putin's initial aim of ousting the Ukrainian government. In the wake of that setback and heavy losses, Russia shifted its focus to the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region in eastern Ukraine where Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years.

The United Nations' humanitarian chief told the AP on Thursday that he's "not optimistic" about securing a cease-fire after meeting with officials in Kyiv and in Moscow this week, underlining the lack of trust the two sides have for one another. He spoke hours after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Ukraine of backtracking on proposals it had made over Crimea and Ukraine's military status.

It's not clear how long it will take withdrawing Russian forces to redeploy, and Ukrainian officials have urged people in the country's east to leave before the fighting intensifies there.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Ukrainian and Russian officials agreed to establish civilian evacuation routes Thursday from several areas in the Donbas.

Even as Ukraine braced for a new phase of the war, Russia's withdrawal brought some relief to Chernihiv, which lies near Ukraine's northern border with Belarus and was cut off for weeks.

Vladimir Tarasovets described nights during the siege when he watched the city on fire and listened to the sound of shelling.

"It was very hard, very hard. Every evening there were fires, it was scary to look at the city. In the evening, when it was dark, there was no light, no water, no gas, no amenities at all," he said. "How did we go through it? I have no words to describe how we managed."

In addition to spurring NATO countries to send more arms, the revelations about possible war crimes led Western nations to step up sanctions, and the Group of Seven major world powers warned that they will continue strengthening the measures until Russian troops leave Ukraine.

The U.S. Congress voted Thursday to suspend normal trade relations with Russia and ban the importation of its oil, while the European Union approved punishing new steps, including the embargo on coal imports. The U.N. General Assembly, meanwhile, voted to suspend Russia from the world organization's leading human rights body.

U.S. President Joe Biden said the U.N. vote demonstrated how "Putin's war has made Russia an international pariah." He called the images coming from Bucha "horrifying."

"The signs of people being raped, tortured, executed — in some cases having their bodies desecrated — are an outrage to our common humanity," Biden said.

The U.S. State Department said it was blacklisting the United Shipbuilding Corp., Russia's largest military shipbuilder, as well as its subsidiaries and board members. The move blocks their access to American financial systems. The department also said it would levy sanctions against the world's largest diamond mining company, Russia-backed Alrosa.

US speeds entry for Ukrainians as more reach Mexico border

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — The United States has sharply increased the number of Ukrainians admitted to the country at the Mexican border as even more refugees fleeing the Russian invasion follow the same circuitous route.

A government recreation center in the Mexican border city of Tijuana grew to about 1,000 refugees Thursday, according to city officials. A canopy under which children played soccer only two days earlier was packed with people in rows of chairs and lined with bunk beds.

Tijuana has suddenly become a final stop for Ukrainians seeking refuge in the United States, where they are drawn by friends and families ready to host them and are convinced the U.S. will be a more suitable haven than Europe.

Word has spread rapidly on social media that a loose volunteer coalition, largely from Slavic churches in the western United States, is guiding hundreds of refugees daily from the Tijuana airport to temporary 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

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expanding network to provide food, security, transportation and shelter.

U.S. officials began funneling Ukrainians Wednesday to a pedestrian crossing in San Diego that is temporarily closed to the public, hoping to process 578 people a day there with 24 officers, said Enrique Lucero, the city of Tijuana's director of migrant affairs.

Vlad Fedoryshyn, a volunteer with access to a waiting list, said Thursday that the U.S. processed 620 Ukrainians over 24 hours, while about 800 others are arriving daily in Tijuana. Volunteers say the U.S. was previously admitting a few hundred Ukrainians daily.

CBP didn't provide numbers in response to questions about operations and plans over the last two days, saying only that it has expanded facilities in San Diego to deal with humanitarian cases.

On Thursday, Ukrainians steadily arrived and left the bustling recreation center, wheeling large suitcases. Some wore winter coats in unseasonably warm weather.

A Tijuana camp that had held hundreds of Ukrainians near the busiest border crossing with the U.S. was dismantled. Refugees dispersed to the recreation center, churches and hotels to wait.

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 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 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.

The waiting list stood at 973 families or single adults Tuesday.

"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 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. Parole, which grants temporary protection from deportation, is generally given for two years for Afghans and one year 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 volunteer presence in Tijuana reassured them, and a friend in Ohio agreed to host them.

"We have food. We have a place to stay," Dugnyk said a day after arriving at the Tijuana recreation center, where hundreds slept on a basketball court. "We hope everything will be fine."

Alerted by text message or social media, Ukrainians are summoned to the border crossing as their numbers near.

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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 he 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.'"

Appeals court OKs Biden federal employee vaccine mandate

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — President Joe Biden's requirement that all federal employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 was upheld Thursday by a federal appeals court.

In a 2-1 ruling, a panel of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court and ordered dismissal of a lawsuit challenging the mandate. The ruling, a rare win for the administration at the New Orleans-based appellate court, said that the federal judge didn't have jurisdiction in the case and those challenging the requirement could have pursued administrative remedies under Civil Service law.

Biden issued an executive order Sept. 9 ordering vaccinations for all executive branch agency employees, with exceptions for medical and religious reasons. U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Brown, who was appointed to the District Court for the Southern District of Texas by then-President Donald Trump, issued a nationwide injunction against the requirement in January.

When the case was argued at the 5th Circuit last month, administration lawyers had noted that district judges in a dozen jurisdictions had rejected a challenge to the vaccine requirement for federal workers before Brown ruled.

The administration argued that the Constitution gives the president, as the head of the federal workforce, the same authority as the CEO of a private corporation to require that employees be vaccinated.

Lawyers for those challenging the mandate had pointed to a recent Supreme Court opinion that the government cannot force private employers to require employee vaccinations.

Twelve of 17 active judges at the 5th Circuit were nominated to the court by Republicans, including six Trump appointees.

Judges Carl Stewart and James Dennis, both nominated to the court by President Bill Clinton, were in the majority. Judge Rhesa Barksdale, a senior judge nominated by President George H.W. Bush, dissented, saying the relief the challengers sought does not fall under the Civil Service Reform Act cited by the administration.

The case marked ideological divides at the appeals court even before Thursday's ruling.

A different panel had refused in February to block Brown's ruling pending the appeal. That panel's vote was 2-1. There were no reasons given by the majority — Judge Jerry Smith, a President Ronald Reagan nominee, and Don Willett, a Trump nominee.

But there was a lengthy dissent by Judge Stephen Higginson, a nominee of President Barack Obama, who said a single district judge "lacking public health expertise and made unaccountable through life tenure," should not be able to block the president from ordering the same type of COVID-19 safety measures many private sector CEOs have ordered.

Experts say US suspension of COVID aid will prolong pandemic

By MARIA CHENG and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — In the latest Senate package targeted at stopping the coronavirus, U.S. lawmakers dropped nearly all funding for curbing the virus beyond American borders, a move many health experts slammed as dangerously short-sighted.

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They warn the suspension of COVID-19 aid for poorer countries could ultimately allow the kind of unchecked transmission needed for the next worrisome variant to emerge and unravel much of the progress achieved so far.

The U.S. has been the biggest contributor to the global pandemic response, delivering more than 500 million vaccines, and the lack of funding will be a major setback. The money has paid for numerous interventions, including a mass vaccination campaign in the Cameroonian capital that saw hundreds of thousands of people get their first dose, as well as the construction of a COVID-19 care facility in South Africa and the donation of 1,000 ventilators to that country.

Other U.S.-funded vaccination campaigns in dozens of countries, including Uganda, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Mali, could also come to a grinding halt.

"Any stoppage of funds will affect us," said Misaki Wayengera, a Ugandan official who heads a technical committee advising the government on the pandemic response. He said Uganda has leaned heavily on donor help — it received more than 11 million vaccines from the U.S. — and that any cuts "would make it very difficult for us to make ends meet."

"This is a bit of a kick in the teeth to poor countries that were promised billions of vaccines and resources last year in grand pledges made by the G7 and the G20," said Michael Head, a global health research fellow at Britain's Southampton University.

"Given how badly we've failed on vaccine equity, it's clear all of those promises have now been broken," he said, adding that without concerted effort and money to fight COVID-19 in the coming months, the pandemic could persist for years.

While about 66% of the American population has been fully immunized against the coronavirus, fewer than 15% of people in poorer countries have received a single dose. Health officials working on COVID-19 vaccination in developing countries supported by the U.S. say they expect to see a reversal of progress once the funds disappear.

"Vaccination will stop or not even get started in some countries," said Rachel Hall, executive director of U.S. government advocacy at the charity CARE. She cited estimates from USAID that the suspended funding would mean scrapping testing, treatment and health services for about 100 million people.

Although vaccines are more plentiful this year, many poorer countries have struggled to get shots into arms and hundreds of millions of donated vaccines have either expired, been returned or sat unused. To address those logistical hurdles, U.S. aid has financed critical services in countries across Africa, including the safe delivery of vaccines, training health workers and fighting vaccine misinformation.

For example, in November the U.S. Embassy in the Cameroonian capital set up a tent for mass vaccination: Within the first five days, more than 300,000 people received a dose. Those kinds of events will now be harder to conduct without American funds.

Hall also noted there would be consequences far beyond COVID-19, saying countries struggling with multiple disease outbreaks, like Congo and Mali, would face difficult choices.

"They will have to choose between fighting Ebola, malaria, polio, COVID and more," she said.

Jeff Zients, the outgoing leader of the White House COVID-19 task force, expressed regret the legislation doesn't include resources for the international pandemic fight, noting that would also compromise efforts to track the virus' genetic evolution.

"It is a real disappointment that there's no global funding in this bill," he said. "This virus knows no borders, and it's in our national interest to vaccinate the world and protect against possible new variants."

Still, Zients announced the U.S. would be the first to donate "tens of millions" of doses for children to poorer countries and said more than 20 nations had already requested the shots.

J. Stephen Morrison, director of the Global Health Policy Center at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, lamented that lawmakers were erring on the side of optimism about the pandemic precisely when another surge might be arriving.

"We've made that mistake several times in this pandemic. And we may be making that mistake again," he said. In recent weeks, COVID-19 cases caused by the hugely infectious omicron subvariant BA.2 have

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surged across Europe, and American officials say they expect a U.S. spike soon.

Other experts worried the suspension of U.S. global support for COVID-19 might prompt officials to drop current vaccination goals. The World Health Organization had set a target of immunizing at least 70% of people in all countries by the middle of this year, but with nearly 50 countries vaccinating fewer than 20% of their populations, hitting that target is highly unlikely.

Instead, some organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation have pushed for officials to "refocus vaccination goals away from vaccinating 70% of all adults by summer to vaccinating 90% of those most at-risk in each country," in what some critics say is an implicit acknowledgment of the world's repeated failures to share vaccines fairly. Others point out there shouldn't be competing vaccine targets and that health authorities simply need to do more, rather than adjusting global goals.

In Nigeria, which has so far received at least \$143 million in COVID-19 aid from the U.S., authorities dismissed suggestions their coronavirus programs would suffer as a result of lost funding. The Nigerian president's office said help from the U.S. was mostly "in kind" via capacity building, research support and donations of laboratory equipment and vaccines. "We are confident that this will not cause any disruption of our current programs," it said.

However, others warned the U.S. decision set an unfortunate precedent for global cooperation to end the pandemic at a time when fresh concerns like the Ukraine war are drawing more attention.

U.S. President Joe Biden originally planned to convene a virtual summit in the first quarter of this year to keep international efforts on track, but no event has been scheduled.

"In light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, we don't yet have a final date for the summit, but we are working closely with countries and international partners to advance commitments," said a senior Biden administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly.

As of this month, WHO said it had gotten only \$1.8 billion of the \$16.8 billion needed from donors to speed access to coronavirus vaccines, medicines and diagnostics.

"Nobody else is stepping up to fill the void at the moment and the U.S. decision to suspend funding may lead other donor countries to act similarly," said Dr. Krishna Udayakumar, director of Duke University's Global Health Innovation Center.

Keri Althoff, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, described the U.S. suspension of funding as "devastating."

"How could this possibly be what we're debating right now?" she asked. "It's a moral obligation to the rest of the world to continue to contribute to this global pandemic response, not only to protect ourselves but to protect people from around the world."

Tiger Time: Woods thrills patrons with Masters comeback

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — He walked among the azaleas with just the slightest hint of a limp.

He couldn't quite bend over to read the putts on Augusta National's tricky greens.

Otherwise, there was nothing to indicate that Tiger Woods nearly lost his right leg 14 months ago in a devastating car wreck.

Woods' greatest comeback yet got off to an electrifying start Thursday when he shot a 1-under 71 in the opening round of the Masters.

"To end up in the red," he said confidently, "I'm right where I need to be."

As Woods walked briskly toward the clubhouse after a grueling day that stretched to nearly 5 1/2 hours, he heard shouts of "Way to go, Tiger!" from the spectators.

He was just three strokes off the lead - with roughly half the field still on the course - after making three birdies, a pair of bogeys and a whole lot of solid pars — many of them salvaged by his deft touch around the greens.

Woods pulled off one last Houdini act at No. 18. After yanking his tee shot into the towering pine trees on the right, he had to lay up short of the green.

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But he pitched to 6 feet and rolled in the putt to keep his score under par.

"I felt good," Woods said. "Once the adrenaline kicks in and I get into my own little world, I knew I should be able to handle business."

Yep, there's still a long way to go. Woods still must prove his body can bounce back day after day — four of them, should he make it to Sunday.

But it felt as if he was already a winner.

"You just can't not watch him," said Australia's Cameron Smith, among those tied for the lead after shooting a 68. "It's an inspiration with him coming back and playing golf."

With storm clouds giving way to brilliant spring sunshine, Woods defied everyone's expectations.

Except his own.

When Woods delivered an emphatic clutch of the right fist after rolling in a 30-footer for birdie at the 16th hole, it seemed like old times at one of golf's most hallowed courses.

From the collapse of his marriage to multiple surgeries, Woods has always found a way to bounce back.

He's doing it again, looking every bit like the guy who's won five green jackets and defied the odds time and time again.

A tap-in birdie at No. 6 sent the patrons into a frenzy. A sloppy bogey at the par-5 eighth brought some groans, but Woods' brilliant short game kept him from posting one of those big numbers that can spell doom at Augusta.

He made it clear he had every intention of winning when he decided to make the Masters his first competitive tournament since that horrific car wreck in February 2021 led him to say doctors said his right leg might need to be amputated.

Woods started the round with five straight pars — he just missed a birdie at the tough No. 5 hole when a 15-foot putt lipped out — before delivering a vintage tee shot at the par-3 sixth.

The ball climbed up a ridge on the green and stopped 2 feet short of the flag, leaving Woods with a gimme that put him in red numbers for the first time.

A wedge shot and errant chip led to a bogey at No. 8, a hole that should be a prime birdie opportunity. "A loss of concentration there," he moaned.

But Woods bounced back with a tricky downhill from 8 feet to save par at No. 9.

Woods insisted his hands still held the amazing touch that has helped him win 15 major titles — the first of them 25 years ago at this very place — and capture a record-tying 82 victories on the PGA Tour.

Beginning at No. 7, he missed the green on five straight holes, but kept recovering with his short irons and putter.

Wearing a pink shirt and black pants, Woods was greeted by thunderous applause when his name was announced to a huge gallery surrounding the first tee.

Woods failed to make solid contact with his first shot: a 264-yard drive that faded behind a bunker on the right side of the fairway. His approach rolled off the front of the green, but he sank a 10-foot putt to save par, bringing another huge roar from the patrons.

Woods walked slowly, knowing that he faced four tough days on an extremely hilly course if he manages to make the cut.

He couldn't fully bend over to read putts, forcing him to rely more on caddie Joe LaCava to help him judge the treacherous greens at Augusta National.

But those felt like minor inconveniences after all he's been through.

Woods' career was in jeopardy after the car wreck left him confined to a hospital bed for three months. Woods was out of the public eye until last November, when he posted a video of him swinging a club with a simple message, "Making progress."

His lone tournament in the 508 days since he last competed was a just-for-fun event in December in which he rode in a cart and was paired with his 13-year-old son, Charlie.

Despite the long layoff and the obvious physical limitations with screws and rods still holding the bones in place in his right leg, Woods clearly thinks he can win his sixth green jacket.

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At 46, he would be the oldest Masters champion by three weeks over Jack Nicklaus.

The biggest question is how Woods holds up over 18 holes over four straight days, presuming he makes the cut as he always does at Augusta.

He walked 18 holes last week — his first big test — during a scouting trip with his son.

Playing an entire tournament will be much more challenging.

What now?

"Lots of ice," he said, breaking into a big grin.

Just like old times.

Jackson confirmed as first Black female high court justice

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court on Thursday, shattering a historic barrier by securing her place as the first Black female justice and giving President Joe Biden a bipartisan endorsement for his promised effort to diversify the high court.

Cheers rang out in the Senate chamber as Jackson, a 51-year-old appeals court judge with nine years experience on the federal bench, was confirmed 53-47, mostly along party lines but with three Republican votes. Presiding over the vote was Vice President Kamala Harris, also the first Black woman to reach her high office.

Biden tweeted afterward that "we've taken another step toward making our highest court reflect the diversity of America." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer exulted that it was "a wonderful day, a joyous day, an inspiring day — for the Senate, for the Supreme Court and for the United States of America."

Harris said as she left the Capitol that she was "overjoyed, deeply moved."

Jackson will take her seat when Justice Stephen Breyer retires this summer, solidifying the liberal wing of the 6-3 conservative-dominated court. She joined Biden at the White House to watch the vote, embracing as it came in. The two were expected to speak, along with Harris, at the White House Friday.

During four days of Senate hearings last month, Jackson spoke of her parents' struggles through racial segregation and said her "path was clearer" than theirs as a Black American after the enactment of civil rights laws. She 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.

She told senators she would apply the law "without fear or favor," and pushed back on Republican attempts to portray her as too lenient on criminals she had sentenced.

Jackson will be just the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She will join three other women, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett — meaning that four of the nine justices will be women for the first time in history.

Her eventual elevation to the court will be a respite for Democrats who fought three bruising battles over former President Donald Trump's nominees and watched Republicans cement a conservative majority in the final days of Trump's term with Barrett's confirmation. While Jackson won't change the balance, she will secure a legacy on the court for Biden and fulfill his 2020 campaign pledge to nominate the first Black female justice.

"This is a tremendously historic day in the White House and in the country," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki after the vote. "And this is a fulfillment of a promise the president made to the country."

The atmosphere was joyful, though the Senate was divided, as Thursday's votes were cast. Senators of both parties sat at their desks and stood to vote, a tradition reserved for the most important matters. The upper galleries were almost full for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago, and about a dozen House members, part of the the Congressional Black caucus, stood at the back of the chamber.

Harris called out the tally, pausing with emotion, and Democrats erupted in loud applause and cheers, Schumer pumping his fists. A handful of Republicans stayed and clapped, but most by then had left.

Despite Republican criticism of her record, Jackson eventually won three GOP votes. The final tally was

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far from the overwhelming bipartisan confirmations for Breyer and other justices in decades past, but it was still a significant accomplishment for Biden in the 50-50 split Senate after GOP senators aggressively worked to paint Jackson as too liberal and soft on crime.

Statements from Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitt Romney of Utah 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 increasingly partisan confirmation fights, which only worsened during the battles over Trump's three picks. Collins said the process was "broken" and Murkowski called it "corrosive" and "more detached from reality by the year."

Biden, a veteran of a more bipartisan Senate, said from the day of Breyer's retirement announcement in January 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 Trump's presidency, when Democrats vociferously opposed the three nominees, and from the end of President Barack Obama's, when Republicans blocked nominee Merrick Garland from getting a vote.

Once sworn in, Jackson will be the second youngest member of the court after Barrett, 50. She will 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.

Judith Browne Dianis, executive director the Advancement Project, a civil rights organization, said Jackson will make the court more reflective of communities that are most impacted by the judiciary.

"The highest court in the land now will have a firsthand perspective of how the law impacts communities of color — via voting rights, police misconduct, abortion access, housing discrimination or the criminal legal system, among other issues," she said. "This will ultimately benefit all Americans."

Jackson could wait as long as three months to be sworn in, as the court's session generally ends in late June or early July. She remains a judge on the federal appeals court in Washington, but she stepped away from cases there when she was nominated in February.

Republicans spent the confirmation hearings strongly questioning her sentencing record, including the sentences she handed down in child pornography cases, which they argued were too light. Jackson declared that "nothing could be further from the truth" and explained her reasoning in detail. Democrats said she was in line with other judges in her decisions.

The GOP questioning in the Judiciary Committee showed the views of 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 Black, told Jackson that he felt emotional watching her testify. He said he saw "my ancestors and yours" in her image.

"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."

UN aid chief: 'I'm not optimistic' about Ukraine ceasefire

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The United Nations' humanitarian chief said Thursday he's not optimistic about securing a ceasefire to halt the fighting in Ukraine following high-level talks in Moscow and Kyiv that underscored how far apart the two sides are.

Undersecretary-General Martin Griffiths gave the bleak assessment in an interview with The Associated

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Press in the Ukrainian capital after wrapping up talks with Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and other top officials. That followed discussions with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow earlier in the week.

"I think it's not going to be easy because the two sides, as I know now ... have very little trust in each other," he said.

"I'm not optimistic," he added later.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres dispatched Griffiths to the Russian and Ukrainian capitals to explore the possibility of establishing a cease-fire that would allow desperately needed aid into Ukraine and potentially lay the groundwork for talks aimed at ending the war.

Griffiths suggested that goal remained far in the distance.

"Obviously, we all want that to happen. But as you know — you're here — that's not going to happen immediately," he said.

Russia launched its assault on Ukraine just over six weeks ago, on February 24. The fighting has displaced millions of people within the country and prompted more than 4 million Ukrainians to seek shelter abroad.

The UN's human rights office has recorded more than 1,400 civilians killed in the fighting, though the actual numbers of deaths is certain to be higher.

Representatives of the two countries have held a number of meetings by video link and in person, but those discussions have not ended the fighting.

Short of a full ceasefire, Griffiths said he is seeking ways to build confidence on both sides and focus on smaller goals, such as establishing local ceasefires in parts of the country and creating humanitarian corridors that allow civilians to escape the fighting.

"This war is not stopping tomorrow," he said. "Where we are a little bit closer is to get the understanding of both sides ... of what a local ceasefire would affect. There are many parts of Ukraine where we can achieve tomorrow local ceasefires, which are defined in geography and time."

Relief supplies have begun flowing to some harder to reach parts of the country, he noted.

Russian troops have withdrawn from parts of Ukraine, particularly around Kyiv, ahead of what many believe is an intensified push in the country's east.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba renewed his country's plea for more weapons from NATO countries Thursday, pointing to atrocities that have come to light in the town of Bucha and other areas that Russian troops have withdrawn from in recent days.

Local ceasefires could still mean progress even in areas without ongoing fighting, Griffiths said, because they require that forces don't move and so therefore could not regroup elsewhere.

Aid groups have struggled to get supplies to those in need.

Over the past week, members of a Red Cross convoy were prevented from reaching the besieged city of Mariupol to help evacuate a convoy of civilians. They were detained at one point during their mission, and eventually ended up accompanying around 1,000 people who had found ways of their own out of Mariupol to a city further west.

An overwhelming majority of the 193-member U.N. General Assembly has twice called for an immediate end to the fighting in Ukraine, on March 2 and March 24.

Griffiths said he expects to travel to Turkey in the next week or two for further talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire. That country, which shares a Black Sea coast with Russia and Ukraine, maintains ties with both and has positioned itself as a go-between for peace negotiations.

He also expects to return to Moscow, and characterized his most recent visit as a first round of talks.

"Look, I'm used to the idea that a ceasefire, which is what I'm tasked to try and achieve, takes time," he said.

NOAA: Potent heat-trapping methane increases at record pace

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Global atmospheric levels of the potent but short-lived greenhouse gas methane increased a record

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amount last year, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday, worrying scientists because of the large role methane has in climate change.

The preliminary airborne level of methane jumped 17 parts per billion, hitting 1895.7 parts per billion last year. It's the second year in a row that methane rose at a record rate with 2020 going up 15.3 ppb over 2019, according to NOAA. Methane levels are now way more than double pre-industrial levels of 720 parts per billion, said Lindsay Lan, an atmospheric scientist at NOAA and the University of Colorado.

Methane is a big contributor to climate change, leading to about a 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit (0.5 degrees Celsius) increase in temperature since the 19th century, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Carbon dioxide has caused about 50% more warming than methane.

"This trend of accelerating increase in methane is extremely disturbing," said Cornell University methane researcher Robert Howarth.

Methane is about 25 times more powerful at trapping heat than carbon dioxide. But it only lasts nine years in the air instead of thousands of years like carbon dioxide, Lan said. Because it doesn't last in the air long, many nations last year agreed to target methane for quick emission cuts as low hanging fruit in the global efforts to limit future warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius (2.7 or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. The world has already warmed 1.1 to 1.2 degrees Celsius (about 2 to 2.2 degrees Fahrenheit).

"To limit warming to well-below 2C this century, we need to cut our methane emissions dramatically, and today we are clearly moving in the wrong direction," climate scientist Zeke Hausfather of Stripe and Berkeley Earth said in an email. "Cutting methane has strong immediate climate benefits, as it is the only greenhouse gas for which emission reductions can quickly cool the climate (versus slowing or stopping the rate of warming)."

NOAA has been tracking methane levels in the air since 1983.

Lan said early signs point more to natural causes for the methane jump, because of La Nina, the natural and temporary cooling of parts of the Pacific that change weather worldwide, but it's still early. La Nina tends to make it rain more in some tropical regions and the two years in a row of record increases during La Nina points to methane escaping from wetlands, she said.

Methane is also a natural gas and an increasingly used energy source. Much methane comes out of livestock and human-generated agriculture, as well as from landfills. Scientists also fear future release of trapped methane under the ocean and in frozen Arctic land, but there's no indication that's happening on a large scale.

The key question is whether this increasing trend could add to climate change problems or is a pandemic-related blip due to the decrease in methane-destroying nitrous oxides from less car and industrial pollution, said Stanford University climate scientist Rob Jackson.

"It seems to be something else instead of COVID," Lan said. She figures high levels in 2020 and then even higher levels in 2021, when lockdowns were eased, point away from a pandemic effect.

Both fossil fuels and agriculture are key in methane increases, Howarth said. But he said, "my research strongly points toward fossil fuels as being the largest cause of the increase since 2008, with increase emissions from shale gas production from fracking in the U.S. being a major part of that."

In a study last year, Lan looked at the chemical isotopes to isolate where steady increases in methane emissions since 2006 may be coming from. The chemical signature pointed away from fossil fuels as the bigger guilty party and more toward either natural wetland emissions or agriculture, she said.

NOAA also said carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere last year increased 2.66 parts per million over 2020, one of the higher increases in history but not a record. The annual average for 2021 for carbon dioxide was 414.7 parts per million. Pre-industrial is about 280 parts per million. NOAA said carbon dioxide are now the highest since about 4.3 millions year when the sea level was about 75 feet (23 meters) higher and the average temperature was about 7 degrees Fahrenheit (3.9 degrees Celsius) warmer.

"Our data show that global emissions continue to move in the wrong direction at a rapid pace," said NOAA chief Rick Spinrad said in a statement.

2 more Black coaches sue NFL alleging racial discrimination

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two Black coaches joined Brian Flores on Thursday in his lawsuit alleging racist hiring practices by the NFL when there are vacancies for coaches and general managers.

The updated lawsuit in Manhattan federal court added coaches Steve Wilks and Ray Horton.

The lawsuit said Wilks was discriminated against by the Arizona Cardinals in 2018 when he was hired as a “bridge coach” but was given no meaningful chance to succeed, while Horton was subjected to discriminatory treatment when he was given a sham interview for the Tennessee Titans head coach position in January 2016.

Flores also criticized the NFL in the rewritten lawsuit for its response to the lawsuit he brought against it and its teams several weeks ago.

The lawsuit added the Houston Texans to the teams Flores has alleged discriminated against him, saying the Texans engaged in “blatant retaliation” by removing him from consideration for its head coach vacancy after he sued the league.

In a release from the lawsuit’s attorneys, Wilks said he hoped the lawsuit would help bring racial equality to the league. Arizona replaced Wilks with Kliff Kingsbury, a white man with no NFL coaching experience, and gave a white general manager an extension despite a drunk driving conviction.

“When Coach Flores filed this action, I knew I owed it to myself, and to all Black NFL coaches and aspiring coaches, to stand with him,” Wilks said. “This lawsuit has shed further important light on a problem that we all know exists, but that too few are willing to confront. Black coaches and candidates should have exactly the same ability to become employed, and remain employed, as white coaches and candidates.”

Horton said he was “devastated and humiliated” when he learned that his interview with the Titans was a sham.

“By joining this case, I am hoping to turn that experience into a positive and make lasting change and create true equal opportunity in the future,” he said.

The NFL declined to comment Thursday.

“The decisions we made after the 2018 season were very difficult ones,” the Arizona Cardinals said in a statement. “But as we said at the time, they were entirely driven by what was in the best interests of our organization and necessary for team improvement. We are confident that the facts reflect that and demonstrate that these allegations are untrue.”

Houston, in a statement, said its search for a head coach was “very thorough and inclusive.”

“Due to his previous success as a coach in the NFL, Brian Flores was among the first candidates we held a formal interview with for the position and he remained a candidate until the very end,” it said. “We enjoyed our multiple conversations with Brian regarding his vision for our organization.”

It added: “In the end, we made the decision to hire Lovie Smith as our head coach and we believe he is the best fit for our team moving forward. It was a very fluid process that allowed us to spend time with a number of quality candidates. We are proud of our decision and will vigorously defend our process.”

Smith, who is Black, was announced as the Texans head coach in February. He served as the team’s defensive coordinator in 2021.

The Titans in a statement defended their 2016 coach selection process as “thoughtful and competitive,” saying it obeyed NFL guidelines and its organizational values.

“We conducted detailed, in-person interviews with four talented individuals, two of whom were diverse candidates. No decision was made, and no decision was communicated, prior to the completion of all interviews,” the Titans said.

The Titans concluded their interview with Horton by midday Jan. 16, 2016, and announced Mularkey was hired hours later. Mularkey said on a podcast in 2020 that he still regretted taking part in the interview process after having been told he would be the Titans’ head coach before they satisfied the Rooney Rule.

“I sat there knowing I was the head coach in ‘16 as they went through this fake hiring process ...,” Mu-

larkey said then. "I'm sorry I did that. It was not the way to go about it."

Flores sued the NFL and three teams on Feb. 1 after he was fired as Miami Dolphins coach in January after leading the Dolphins to a 24-25 record over three years. They went 9-8 in their second straight winning season, but failed to make the playoffs during his tenure.

He has since been hired as an assistant coach by the Pittsburgh Steelers.

In the updated lawsuit Thursday, lawyers for Flores noted that the NFL responded to the lawsuit in February by saying it was "without merit" but its executives have made statements and taken steps in "unguarded moments" that showed it "has begrudgingly acknowledged the decades-long problem of systemic discrimination."

The lawsuit, as it did previously, seeks class-action status and unspecified damages from the league and individual teams. It alleges that the league has discriminated against Flores and other Black coaches for racial reasons, denying them positions as head coaches and other top coaching posts as well as a chance to be a general manager.

It also highlights the lack of progress in the two decades since the "Rooney Rule" — named after former Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney — was created to give more minority candidates opportunities to become a head coach.

In 2020, the NFL amended the Rooney Rule to stipulate teams must interview at least two minority candidates not associated with their team for a head coaching vacancy and one minority candidate for coordinator positions and high-ranking front office positions, including general manager.

Last month, the NFL changed it again to require its 32 clubs to employ a woman or a member of an ethnic or racial minority to serve as an offensive assistant coach.

US: Man impersonated agent, claimed ties to Pakistani intel

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One of two men accused of impersonating federal agents and giving actual Secret Service agents gifts and free apartments in Washington has claimed to have ties to Pakistani intelligence and had visas showing travel to Pakistan and Iran, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

The men, Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 35, were arrested Wednesday. The FBI raided a luxury apartment building in Southeast Washington, where the men were staying and had been offering free apartments and other gifts to U.S. Secret Service agents and officers.

During a court appearance Thursday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Rothstein said Ali had told witnesses that he was affiliated with the Inter-Services Intelligence agency in Pakistan and that he had multiple visas from Pakistan and Iran in the months before prosecutors believe the men began impersonating U.S. law enforcement officials. Rothstein said the U.S. has not yet been able to verify the veracity of Ali's claims to the witnesses.

Prosecutors believe the men were trying to "ingratiate themselves" and "integrate" with U.S. federal agents and people who worked in the U.S. defense community, Rothstein said.

The FBI searched five residences at the building on Wednesday and three vehicles. They found body armor, gas masks, zip ties, handcuffs, equipment to break through doors, drones, radios and police training manuals, Rothstein said.

The two men also had surveillance equipment and a high-power telescope, he said. The FBI found evidence that they may have been creating surveillance devices and also found a binder with information on all the residents in the luxury apartment building, which is home to law enforcement officers, defense officials and congressional staffers.

Prosecutors say the men had also set up surveillance in the building and had been telling residents there that they could access any of their cellphones at any time. The residents also told investigators they believed the men had access to their personal information.

The FBI also found several firearms — including handguns and ammunition — and disassembled rifle pieces and sniper scopes, Rothstein said.

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Prosecutors allege Taherzadeh and Ali had falsely claimed to work for the Department of Homeland Security and work on a special task force investigating gangs and violence connected to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Taherzadeh is accused of providing Secret Service officers and agents with rent-free apartments — including a penthouse worth over \$40,000 a year — along with iPhones, surveillance systems, a drone, a television, a generator, a gun case and other policing tools, according to court documents. In one instance, Taherzadeh offered to purchase a \$2,000 assault rifle for a Secret Service agent who is assigned to protect the first lady, prosecutors said.

The plot unraveled when the U.S. Postal Inspection Service began investigating an assault involving a mail carrier at the apartment building and the men identified themselves as being part of a phony Homeland Security unit they called the U.S. Special Police Investigation Unit.

Investigators believe Ali had taken multiple trips to the Middle East and had three visas showing he had been to Pakistan and two Iranian visas, Rothstein said. U.S. travel records also showed he had traveled to Istanbul, Turkey and Doha in Qatar, he said.

Prosecutors allege one of the men also tried to destroy evidence once he learned he was being investigated. After Taherzadeh found out the FBI was starting to investigate him, he took steps to delete posts on social media and admitted that he had deleted the posts that would've been evidence in the case against him, Rothstein said.

A lawyer for Taherzadeh and Ali argued that both men should not be detained. But Magistrate Judge Michael Harvey ordered both men held until a detention hearing can be held on Friday afternoon.

Rothstein said the case was being presented to a grand jury and he expected both men to face federal conspiracy charges.

Louisiana prosecutor pursues own case in Ronald Greene death

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — No longer waiting for a federal investigation that has so far taken two and a half years, a state prosecutor said Thursday that he intends to pursue his own possible charges against the Louisiana troopers involved in the deadly 2019 arrest of Black motorist Ronald Greene.

Union Parish District Attorney John Belton told a bipartisan legislative committee looking into the case that U.S. Justice Department prosecutors last week dropped their request for him to hold off on a state prosecution until the federal probe is complete.

And he added that Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, also asked him to independently pursue charges against the troopers who were seen on long-withheld body-camera video swarming her son after a high-speed chase, jolting him with stun guns, punching him the face and dragging him by his ankle shackles as he wailed, "I'm scared! I'm scared!"

"No one is above the law -- no one," Belton told committee members at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge. He added that, based on the evidence, the officers "committed criminal acts, including the violation of Mr. Greene's civil rights."

Belton said he is "moving swiftly" to empanel a special grand jury as soon as he collects the most up-to-date evidence from the federal investigation. That includes a reexamined autopsy ordered by the FBI last year that rejected troopers' initial account that Greene died from injuries suffered in a car crash. It instead attributes Greene's death to "physical struggle," troopers repeatedly stunning him, striking him in the head, restraining him at length and Greene's use of cocaine.

"It is of the utmost importance that the Ronald Greene family and the public as a whole be provided with the complete and truthful answers about what happened to him," Belton said.

To date, nearly three years after Greene's May 10, 2019, death along a rural roadside in northeast Louisiana, no one has been criminally charged.

Long shrouded in secrecy and accusations of cover-up, it took 474 days for state police to open an internal inquiry into the case and officials from Gov. John Bel Edwards on down refused to release troopers'

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body-camera video for more than two years until The Associated Press obtained and published it last year. That jump-started the ongoing federal investigation into Greene's death, which expanded to look into whether state police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers. One supervisor recently told the legislative committee that his bosses instructed him not to give prosecutors the body-camera footage of Greene's arrest.

Federal investigators are separately looking into a string of other cases in which troopers are accused of beatings and cover-ups, even when they are caught on video.

Lawmakers in Thursday's hearing repeatedly expressed frustration at the length of time the federal investigation is taking and the pace at which the state police are seeking answers internally.

State Rep. Tony Bacala, a Republican, appeared particularly upset when the head of the Louisiana State Police, Col. Lamar Davis, said it would likely take several more weeks to complete an internal probe of his second-in-command, Lt. Col. Doug Cain, for having his state cellphone "sanitized" — erased of all data — amid the federal investigation.

"We're exceeding the speed limit," Bacala said, "and you all are putting down the road."

Another tense exchange came when state Rep. Edmond Jordan, a Democrat, questioned Davis about a 120-hour internal suspension given to a lawyer for the state Department of Public Safety, which includes state police, for telling colleagues about her part in an internal investigation of state police beatings of Black motorists. That was more than double the 50-hour internal punishment Trooper Kory York received after he was seen on the body-camera video dragging Greene by his ankle shackles.

"It seems the only people disciplined are the people who are trying to do the right thing," Jordan said. "This is difficult to deal with."

The legislative probe into "all-levels" of the state's response to Greene's death began in February after an AP report that Edwards was informed within hours that troopers arresting Greene had engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle." Yet the Democrat stayed mostly silent on the case for two years as state troopers pushed the car crash narrative.

Edwards has said he did not speak out about the troopers' actions — even after privately watching body-camera footage of the arrest — because he did not want to interfere with the federal investigation. He has since come to describe the actions of the troopers in Greene's arrest as criminal and racist.

Abortion rights backers block 'trigger' law in Nebraska

By GRANT SCHULTE Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Abortion rights proponents scored a surprising victory in Nebraska by derailing a bill that would have automatically outlawed abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court ever overturns its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that legalized the procedure throughout the country.

The vote on Wednesday frustrated abortion rights opponents, who usually win fights over the issue in the conservative Legislature. More than a dozen other conservative states have passed similar measures already, but abortion rights backers in Nebraska managed to block it using a filibuster in the single-chamber Legislature.

The bill's supporters fell two votes short of the 33 they needed to end the filibuster and force a vote. The 31-15 vote left the proposal essentially dead for the rest of the year, even though a majority of lawmakers supported it. The vote largely fell along party lines in the ostensibly nonpartisan Legislature.

In 2010, Nebraska became the first state to ban abortions after the 20th week of pregnancy, and the state outlawed a second-trimester abortion procedure in 2020 despite fervent protests from abortion rights supporters.

The latest bill, however, faced a tougher path because of the current makeup of the Legislature, where Republicans are one seat short of the supermajority needed to overcome filibusters. One Republican and Democrat each crossed party lines, effectively canceling the other's vote. One Republican and two Democrats were absent.

Supporters argued that the majority of Nebraska voters oppose abortion, based on who the state consistently elects.

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"We envision a Nebraska where every life is celebrated and protected," said state Sen. Joni Albrecht, the bill's sponsor.

Opponents assailed it as an intrusion on women's autonomy and vowed not to budge in their opposition. "In state by state, legislatures are taking a sledgehammer to women's freedom," said state Sen. Anna Wishart, of Lincoln.

The debate turned personal at times, with abortion rights supporters railing against the bill's backers for supporting it even though it doesn't include exceptions for rape or incest.

"Proponents of this bill have no shame left," said state Sen. Megan Hunt, of Omaha, adding that she was offended as both a mother and a sexual assault survivor. "I will cherish the time that I have worked here forever, but when I am term limited (out of office), I will probably not talk to most of you ever again."

The debate came ahead of an expected June ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which concerns a Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

Both sides have told the court there's no middle ground in the case. In anticipation of the ruling, 13 states have passed so-called trigger laws to automatically ban abortions if the court sides with abortion opponents. Ohio and Oklahoma approved their trigger laws last year.

On Thursday, Michigan's Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer, filed a lawsuit asking a court to recognize the right to get an abortion under the state constitution and to overturn the state's 176-year-old ban, which might take effect again if *Roe v. Wade* ruling is vacated.

The *Roe v. Wade* ruling allows states to regulate but not ban abortions up to the point of fetal viability, which is around the 24th week of a pregnancy. Justices reaffirmed the decision in 1992.

The Nebraska vote drew promises of political retribution against some elected officials. Jim Pillen, a top Republican candidate for governor, said Thursday that he would work to unseat some lawmakers who are up for reelection and who voted to block the bill.

"Last night, the Legislature failed the people of Nebraska in voting to keep abortion legal," Pillen said. "Abortion is murder, and as a pro-life state, the majority of Nebraskans realize we need to outlaw it."

'A moment like this': Senate history in Supreme Court vote

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Moments before the Senate began Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's confirmation vote to become the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, the chamber filled with the swell of history.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus walked through the doors of the Senate to witness the moment. Black female lawmakers sat shoulder to shoulder along the back walls.

The visitor galleries above, largely closed these past two years, first from the COVID pandemic and then insurrection at the Capitol, filled with young people, including many young Black men and women, some congressional staffers, to watch.

Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman, who protected the chamber against an extremist mob on Jan. 6, 2021, ushered people into the gallery, guarding the members and their visitors once again.

"I'm here today to witness history," freshman Rep. Marilyn Strickland, D-Wash., said in the halls. "It's touching, it's moving and I'm so proud."

Vice President Kamala Harris, who presided over the session, called for the vote.

"The clerk will call the roll," she said, beaming.

Senators remained seated, as is the tradition for momentous votes, and the roll was called one name at a time.

Despite the political divisions over President Joe Biden's historic Supreme Court pick, the first Black woman in the court's 233-year history, the last day of the process carried more celebration than tension, coming to a final vote not with a bitter public fight but a flourish.

The 53-47 tally was no cliffhanger. Democrats had the votes to confirm Jackson on their own with their slim majority, boosted by three Republican senators — Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and Mitt Romney —

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who crossed party lines.

Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff watched from the gallery as Harris, his wife, presided over the session, though her tie-breaking vote would not be needed.

A short delay emerged when Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky was late, making him the last to vote and slightly prolonging the inevitable outcome.

"What a great day it is for the United States of America," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, the first Black senator from Georgia, in a speech before voting began.

Jackson's journey to this moment "is a reflection of our own journey" toward the nation's ideals, the senator said.

Harris, Warnock and Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey all huddled near the dais.

She then reached into a folder she had on her desk and pulled out two pieces of vice-presidential stationery paper.

Harris handed one each to Warnock and Booker. The assignment for the only two Black Democrats in the Senate, she told them, was to write a letter to a young Black woman in their life to mark this day in history.

"I thought it was a beautiful gesture," Booker told The Associated Press after the vote.

The former presidential candidate said there were a few people in his life that immediately came to mind, but he wanted more time to think it over.

Shortly after, Paul popped his head out from the side cloakroom to cast his no vote.

"On this vote, the yeas are 53, the nays are 47," Harris said. The nomination was confirmed.

Cheers broke out in the gallery. Louder than any at the Capitol in recent memory.

Democratic senators stood in ovation.

Murkowski joined their side of the aisle.

Many Republican senators had already left as the Senate is about to start a two-week spring recess.

The remaining Republicans filed out of the chamber.

Romney, alone on his side, stood clapping.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee who led the nomination to confirmation, gave a nod to the rare show of bipartisanship, harkening back to an earlier era.

During the debate, he noted that Romney's father, a former Republican governor, had marched for civil rights in Michigan.

"To my colleague, Sen. Mitt Romney — you are your father's son," he said.

After the vote, the vice president, herself a history-making leader, took stock of the moment, at a time of brutal war overseas.

"There is so much about what's happening in the world now that is presenting the worst of ... human behavior," Harris said. "And then we have a moment like this that I think reminds us that there is so much left to accomplish."

Russian Nobel-winning editor says he was attacked on train

Nobel Peace Prize-winning Russian newspaper editor Dmitry Muratov said he was attacked on a Russian train Thursday by an assailant who poured red paint over him, causing severe discomfort to his eyes.

Muratov told Novaya Gazeta Europe, a project launched by newspaper staff after the paper suspended operation last week under government pressure, that the assault occurred on a train heading from Moscow to Samara.

"My eyes are burning terribly," Muratov was quoted as saying on Novaya Gazeta Europe's Telegram channel. He said the assailant shouted: "Muratov, here's one for our boys."

The post showed photos of Muratov and a train compartment drenched in red liquid.

Novaya Gazeta, Russia's leading independent newspaper, announced March 28 that it was suspending operations for the duration of what it referred to in quotation marks as "the special operation" in Ukraine, the term that Russian authorities insist media must use for the war in Ukraine.

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The newspaper was the last major independent media outlet critical of President Vladimir Putin's government after others either shut or had their websites blocked since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on Feb. 24.

The trigger for the shutdown was a second formal warning from the Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor, which has increasingly taken on the role of a censor in recent years, Novaya Gazeta had long had a difficult relationship with the government.

Longtime editor Muratov shared the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize with Maria Ressa, a journalist from the Philippines.

Exactly why Novaya Gazeta was warned remains unclear. Roskomnadzor told state news agency Tass that the newspaper had failed to identify an unnamed non-governmental organization as a "foreign agent" in its reporting, as required by Russian law. It didn't specify the report in question.

Novaya Gazeta removed much of its war reporting from its website after Russian lawmakers passed a law March 4 threatening jail terms of up to 15 years for information deemed to be "fake" by Russian authorities. That can include any mention of Russian forces harming civilians or suffering losses on the battlefield.

EXPLAINER: Russia is not a 'most favored nation.' What now?

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Congress voting to suspend normal trade relations with Russia and ban the importation of its oil, President Joe Biden's action to tighten the U.S. squeeze on Russia's economy now can intensify.

The action Thursday by the U.S. House and Senate to revoke Moscow's "most favored nation" trade status and ban oil imports intensifies the U.S. response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine amid mounting reports of atrocities. Lawmakers showed overwhelming support for action striking at Russia's economy, with the two separate bills each passing the Senate 100-0 and garnering near-unanimity in the House.

Last month Biden moved, with European and other key allies, to revoke Moscow's normal trade status. He also has taken executive action to ban U.S. imports of Russian oil, liquefied natural gas and coal. Also banned are imports of Russian seafood, alcohol and diamonds.

Biden can now sign the new legislation into law. The bill to end normal trade relations with Russia opens the way for Biden to impose higher tariffs on various imports, such as certain steel and aluminum products, further weakening the Russian economy under President Vladimir Putin. It also ensures that Moscow ally Belarus receives less favorable tariff treatment.

And the U.S. is cutting the flow the other way, too: It has barred the export of expensive watches, cars, clothing and other luxury American products to Russia.

The U.S. revocation of Russia's long-standing most favored trade status was one in a series of economic and financial sanctions that have been leveled against Russia in response to its brutal war against Ukraine that began Feb. 24.

By itself, the downgrade of its trade status won't have an immediate far-reaching effect on the Russian economy. But combined with the other sanctions the U.S. and its allies have imposed, the goal is to intensify the pressure on Putin and force a pullback of his Russian forces.

A closer look:

WHAT IS 'MOST FAVORED NATION' STATUS?

The idea behind MFN status is to equalize the trade treatment in tariffs and import quotas for all of a country's trading partners. Say, for example, that the U.S. levies a 13% tariff on imported leather gloves. MFN status means that gloves imported from France, China, Brazil and Russia would all be taxed at that same rate.

MFN status has been a baseline for global trade, ensuring that countries within the World Trade Organization are treated on a similar footing, with some exceptions that allow, for example, preferential treatment for developing countries.

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Over the years, the U.S. has revoked the MFN status of more than two dozen countries — generally for political reasons, with the Cold War bringing the sanction against the then-Soviet Union and other communist countries, for example.

With the exception of Cuba and North Korea, the preferred status of those nations was eventually restored. This was done, for example, after the thaw of the Cold War in Eastern Europe and the opening of U.S.-China relations after the visit of President Richard Nixon. With these latest moves, Russia joins the ranks of those two communist countries in lacking MFN status with the U.S.

WHAT ABOUT REAL IMPACT VS SYMBOLISM?

For the U.S. at least, removing most favored nation status is a mostly symbolic gesture. The U.S. ban that was announced last month on imports of Russian oil, gas and coal already eliminated about 60% of all U.S. imports from Russia. The import bans against alcohol, seafood and diamonds add up to only about \$1 billion in revenue, according to White House figures.

Russia provided less than 1% of all U.S. vodka imports in December, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, and less than 2% of U.S. seafood imports by volume, according to federal statistics.

But symbolism can be important in war.

In debate on the legislation Thursday, Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., said innocent Ukrainians were being slaughtered even as lawmakers were meeting.

“We have no time to waste and must immediately further punish Vladimir Putin,” Neal said.

Russia’s 6-week-old invasion failed to take Ukraine’s capital Kyiv quickly, and in the wake of that failure and heavy losses, Russia has shifted its focus to the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine’s foreign minister begged again Thursday for weapons from NATO — and the western alliance agreed, spurred into action by atrocities revealed in the wake of the Russian withdrawal from areas around Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials said hundreds of bodies of civilians were found, many lying in the street, in towns around Kyiv.

DIAMONDS, VODKA, KING CRAB. WHAT ELSE DOES THE U.S. IMPORT FROM RUSSIA?

The U.S. buys mostly natural resources from Russia for which existing tariffs are mostly low or zero — oil and metals such as palladium, rhodium, uranium and silver bullion. Imports also include chemical products and semi-finished steel products, plywood and, paradoxically, bullets and cartridge shells.

Because the imports from Russia are mostly natural resources, they generally will face little to no increase in tariffs as a result of the lost MFN status, Ed Gresser, director for trade and global markets at the left-leaning Progressive Policy Institute, noted in an online posting.

To replace the current tariff rates, U.S. buyers of Russian goods would pay import taxes established under a 1930 U.S. law that disrupted trade during the Great Depression. It would still be zero for the metals. But the rates would soar — to levels considered punitive — for unwrought aluminum, plywood and semi-finished steel, among other products.

Europe agrees to ban Russian coal, but struggles on oil, gas

By The Associated Press undefined

The European Union nations have agreed to ban Russian coal in the first sanctions on the vital energy industry over the war in Ukraine, but it has underlined the 27 countries’ inability to agree so far on a much more sweeping embargo on oil and natural gas that would hit Russia harder but risk recession at home.

The coal ban should cost Russia 4 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) a year, the EU’s executive commission said. Energy analysts and coal importers say Europe could replace Russian supply in a few months from other countries, including the U.S.

The move is significant because it breaks the taboo on severing Europe’s energy ties with Russia. It’s also

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certain to fuel already record-high inflation. But compared with natural gas and oil, coal is by far the easiest to cut off quickly and inflicts far less damage on Russian President Vladimir Putin's war chest and the European economy. The EU pays Russia \$20 million a day for coal — but \$850 million a day for oil and gas.

Shocking pictures of bodies in the Ukrainian town of Bucha are keeping discussion of broader sanctions alive, with EU officials saying they're working on targeting Russian oil.

While the EU ponders additional sanctions, Italian Premier Mario Draghi said no embargo of Russian natural gas is up for consideration now.

"And I don't know if it ever will be on the table," he told reporters Wednesday.

EU countries, especially big economies like Italy and Germany, rely heavily on Russian natural gas to heat and cool homes, generate electricity and keep industry churning.

Still, Draghi said, "the more horrendous this war gets, the allied countries will ask, in the absence of our direct participation in the war, what else can this coalition of allies do to weaken Russia, to make it stop."

In case a gas embargo is proposed, Italy "will be very happy to follow it" if that would make peace possible, Draghi said. "If the price of gas can be exchanged for peace ... what do we choose? Peace? Or to have the air conditioning running in the summer?"

For now, even the coal ban brings worrying consequences for politicians and consumers. Germany and EU members in Eastern Europe still generate a large share of their power from coal despite a yearslong transition toward cleaner energy sources.

"The coal ban means European consumers will have to brace for high power prices throughout this year," according to a Rystad Energy statement.

Higher prices in countries that use more coal will spread across the EU through its well-connected power grid, the energy research company said. That will bring more pain. Europe has been facing high energy prices for months over a supply crunch, and jitters over the war have sent them even higher.

Governments already have been rolling out cash support and tax relief for consumers hit by higher utility bills. High energy prices have pushed inflation in the 19 member countries that use the euro currency to a record 7.5%.

Commodities analyst Barbara Lambrecht at German bank Commerzbank said EU governments likely could agree on a coal embargo because it would take effect after three months and only apply to new contracts. The downside is the limited impact on Russia, with coal only 3.5% of its exports and only a quarter going to the EU.

Germany's coal importer's association said Russian coal could be completely replaced from the U.S., South Africa, Colombia, Mozambique and Indonesia "by next winter" — at higher prices.

European coal futures prices jumped after the EU announced the coal proposal, from around \$255 per ton to \$290 per ton. It was approved by the EU ambassadors and the sanctions should become official once published in the EU's official journal on Friday.

The big debate remains oil and natural gas, with the European Union dependent on Russia for 40% of its gas and 25% of its oil. It's tougher for Europe to cut off than the U.S., which imported little Russian oil and no gas and has banned both.

Yet European Council President Charles Michel said, "I believe that measures on oil and even on gas will also be needed sooner or later."

It's difficult for the EU to agree on energy sanctions because countries like Germany, Italy and Bulgaria are much more dependent on Russian gas in particular than others. Europe has scrambled to get additional gas through pipelines from Norway and Algeria and with more liquefied gas that comes by ship, but those global supplies are limited.

For now, the EU's plan is to cut dependence on Russian gas by two-thirds by year's end and completely over the next several years by stepping up alternative supplies, conservation and wind and solar.

Germany has reduced its reliance on Russian natural gas from 55% to 40%, but the government says the consequences to jobs from a cutoff would be too great.

Germany's steelmaking association, for instance, has warned of forced shutdowns that would throw people out of their jobs or onto government support and send shortages of basic parts rippling through

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the rest of the economy.

Energy Minister Robert Habeck says the country will halt Russian coal this summer, oil by year's end and gas in mid-2024.

Oil would be easier to ban than natural gas, because like coal, there's a large and liquid global market for oil and it comes mostly by ship, not fixed pipeline like gas.

But it's not problem-free either. Russia is the world's largest oil exporter, with 12% of global supply. Taking its oil to Europe off the market would drive up prices from other exporters, such as Saudi Arabia, when supplies are already tight.

Russia might simply sell the oil to India and China, which aren't taking part in sanctions — although the price Moscow gets might be lower.

The economic hit from a full energy cutoff range from a drop of 1.2% to 2.2% of gross domestic product in the 19 countries using the euro, plus 2 percentage points of additional inflation, recent economist estimates say.

Fed casting its inflation fight as battle against inequality

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Federal Reserve intensifies its efforts to tame high inflation, its top officials are casting their aggressive drive in a new light: As a blow against economic inequality.

That thinking marks a sharp reversal from the conventional view of the Fed's use of interest rates. Normally, the steep rate hikes the Fed is planning for the coming months would be seen as a particular threat to disadvantaged and lower-income households. These groups are most likely to suffer if rate hikes weaken an economy, cause unemployment to rise and sometimes trigger a recession.

Instead, some of the most dovish Fed officials, who typically favor low rates to nurture the job market, are now going out of their way to point out ways in which inflation falls hardest on poorer Americans. Curbing high inflation, they argue, is a fairness issue.

The burden of high prices "is particularly great for households with more limited resources," Lael Brainard, an influential member of the Fed's Board of Governors and a longtime interest rate dove, said in a speech Tuesday. "That is why getting inflation down is our most important task."

Brainard noted that food and energy together account for one-quarter of the price spikes that have driven inflation to 40-year highs. Poorer Americans spend about one-fourth of their incomes on groceries and transportation, she said, while wealthier households spend less than one-tenth.

Members of Congress from both parties generally agree that the Fed must tackle the surge in inflation by steadily raising rates, which will make many consumer and business loans costlier. Indeed, most economists have said the Fed has waited too long to do so and now runs the risk of having to tighten credit too fast and derailing the economy. Last month, the Fed raised its key rate from near zero to a range of 0.25% to 0.5%.

Still, some Democrats have expressed concern that higher rates will slow hiring significantly, even while unemployment for Black workers, for example, remains higher than that for whites.

"We clearly have a long way to go when it comes to making sure everyone has a good quality job," Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, said last month at a hearing on Jerome Powell's nomination for a second four-year term as Fed chair. "Hiking up interest rates too early can depress job growth."

Tim Duy, chief U.S. economist at SGH Macro Advisers and some other analysts say the Fed is right to highlight the damage that inflation can do to Americans' ability to afford basic needs such as food, gas, and rent. But they also suggest that some recent Fed comments have exaggerated the notion that inflation worsens economic inequality.

Nathan Sheets, global chief economist for Citi and a former Fed economist, notes, for instance, that inflation reduces the burden of debt, which can disproportionately benefit lower-income Americans. Wages typically rise to keep up with inflation. But mortgages and other debts usually carry fixed interest rates, making them easier to pay off.

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Brainard's speech this week was one of the starker examples of the Fed's argument that inflation can exacerbate inequality. Brainard, who has been nominated for the Fed's No. 2 role and is part of Powell's inner circle, said that lower-income households — defined as the poorest one-fifth — spend 77% of their income on necessities, including food and housing. By contrast, the richest one-fifth spend just 31% of their incomes on those categories.

Likewise, Mary Daly, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and long a dovish voice on the Fed's policymaking committee, surprised Fed watchers this week when she declared that "inflation is as harmful as not having a job."

"I understand ... that if you have a job (but) you can't pay your bills, or I feel like I can't save for what I need to do, then that's keeping you up at night," Daly said in remarks to the Native American Financial Officers Association.

Brainard, in her speech, noted that poorer people often pay higher prices for the same item. Higher-income households, for example, can afford to make bulk purchases or to stock up on an item when it's being sold at a discount, thereby lowering their cost per item.

And when inflation rises, Brainard said, households that buy name-brand cereals can switch to cheaper store brands. But poorer consumers that are already buying cheaper items can't make an equivalent price-lowering switch.

Powell himself began shifting his rhetoric in this direction last winter during testimony to Congress, Duy said, when the Fed chair mentioned the harsh impact that inflation inflicts on disadvantaged Americans. Powell hadn't raised that concern in previous testimony in September.

It was a notable change for the Powell Fed, which has focused on inequality in the job market more than its predecessors. In August 2020, the Fed updated its policy framework to specify that its goal of maximum employment was "broad and inclusive."

This meant the Fed would consider unemployment rates for Black and Hispanic workers, rather than just headline figures, in setting its interest rate policies. The central bank also said it would no longer raise rates in anticipation of higher inflation, but would wait until higher prices actually materialized.

Brainard had highlighted one reason for taking a more patient approach in a speech in February 2021. In those remarks, she said that raising rates to pre-empt inflation "may curtail progress for racial and ethnic groups that have faced systemic challenges."

Powell and other Fed officials say their goal now is to reduce inflation by slowing, but not stopping, growth. Reducing high inflation is important to keep the economy expanding, they say, and, ultimately, to keep unemployment low.

For now, Sheets suggested, the Fed can raise rates without worrying too much about hurting the job market because its benchmark rate is so low. Fed officials don't think their key rate will start to restrain growth until it reaches about 2.4%.

The minutes from the Fed's most recent meeting in March, released Wednesday, showed that the officials want to "expeditiously" reach that level, and economists expect them to do so by the end of this year. At that point, if inflation is still too high, the Fed might have to raise rates further, to a point where layoffs occur and the risks of a recession rise.

"That's when it will get sticky and challenging for the Fed — when those short-run trade-offs arise," Sheets said.

Key particle weighs in a bit heavy, confounding physicists

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The grand explanation physicists use to describe how the universe works may have some major new flaws to patch after a fundamental particle was found to have more mass than scientists thought.

"It's not just something is wrong," said Dave Toback, a particle physicist at Texas A&M University and a spokesperson for the U.S. government's Fermi National Accelerator Lab, which conducted the experiments. If replicated by other labs, "it literally means something fundamental in our understanding of nature is

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wrong.”

The physicists at the lab crashed particles together over ten years and measured the mass of 4 million W bosons. These subatomic particles are responsible for a fundamental force at the center of atoms, and they exist for only a fraction of a second before they decay into other particles.

“They are constantly popping in and out of existence in the quantum froth of the universe,” Toback said.

The difference in mass from what the prevailing theory of the universe predicts is too big to be a rounding error or anything that could be easily explained away, according to the study by a team of 400 scientists from around the world published Thursday in the journal Science.

The result is so extraordinary it must be confirmed by another experiment, scientists say. If confirmed, it would present one of the biggest problems yet with scientists’ detailed rulebook for the cosmos, called the standard model.

Duke University physicist Ashutosh V. Kotwal, the project leader for analysis, said it’s like discovering there’s a hidden room in your house.

Scientists speculated that there may be an undiscovered particle that is interacting with the W boson that could explain the difference. Maybe dark matter, another poorly understood component of the universe, could be playing a role. Or maybe there’s just new physics involved that they just don’t understand at the moment, researchers said.

The standard model says a W boson should measure 80,357,000 electron volts, plus or minus six.

“We found it slightly more than that. Not that much, but it’s enough,” said Giorgio Chiarelli, another scientist for the Fermi team and research director for the Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics. The Fermi team’s scale put the W boson at a heftier 80,433,000 electron volts, plus or minus nine.

It doesn’t seem like a big difference, but it is a huge one in the subatomic world.

But both the team and experts not involved in the research said such a big claim requires extra proof from a second team, which they don’t have yet.

“It’s an incredibly delicate measurement, it requires understanding of various calibrations of various little effects,” said Claudio Campagnari, a particle physicist at the University of California Santa Barbara, who wasn’t part of the Fermi team. “These guys are really good. And I take them very seriously. But I think at the end of the day what we need is a confirmation by another experiment.”

Earlier, less precise measurements of the W boson by other teams found it to be lighter than predicted, so “maybe there is just something wonky about this experiment,” said Caltech physicist Sean M. Carroll, who wasn’t part of the research and said it is “absolutely worth taking very seriously.”

The finding is important because of its potential effect on the standard model of physics.

“Nature has facts,” Duke’s Kotwal said. “The model is the way we understand those facts.”

Scientists have long known the standard model isn’t perfect. It doesn’t explain dark matter or gravity well. If scientists have to go in and tinker with it to explain these findings they have to make sure it doesn’t throw out of whack mathematical equations that now explain and predict other particles and forces well, researchers said.

It is a recurring problem with the model. A year ago a different team found another problem with the standard model and how muons react.

“Quantum mechanics is really beautiful and weird,” Toback said. “Anyone who has not been deeply troubled by quantum mechanics has not understood it.”

Biden bets strong job market will shield economy from slump

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy faces plenty of threats: War in Ukraine, high grocery bills, spiking gasoline prices, splintered supply chains, the lingering pandemic and rising interest rates that slow growth.

The Biden White House is betting the U.S. economy is strong enough to withstand these threats, but there are growing fears of a coming economic slump among voters and some Wall Street analysts.

The next few months will test whether President Joe Biden built a durable recovery full of jobs with last year’s \$1.9 trillion relief package, or an economy overfed by government aid that could tip into a downturn.

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On the line for Democrats ahead of the midterm elections is whether voters see firsthand in their lives that inflation can be tamed and the economy can manage to run hot without overheating.

Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters this week that the 3.6% unemployment rate and last year's robust growth puts the U.S. in a safe place compared to the rest of the world.

"The core question is whether the strength of the US economy is now an asset or a liability," Deese said. "What we have done over the course of the last 15 months is driven a uniquely strong economic recovery in the United States, which positions us uniquely well to deal with the challenges ahead."

But others see an economy that could struggle to preserve growth while reducing inflation now running at a 40-year high of 7.9%. The Federal Reserve has signaled a series of benchmark interest rate increases and other policies to slow inflation this year, yet Russia's invasion of Ukraine has destabilized the global energy and food markets in ways that could push prices upward.

Deutsche Bank on Tuesday became the first major financial institution to forecast a U.S. recession. And Harvard University economist Larry Summers — a Democrat and former treasury secretary — noted that the U.S. economy has gone into recession within two years each time inflation eclipsed 4% and unemployment was below 5% as they are now.

Joe LaVorgna, who worked in the Trump White House and is now chief economist for the Americas at Natixis, said he expects economic growth this year to be just below 1%, a potentially dangerous level.

While household balance sheets are solid and unemployment low, wages are not keeping up with inflation, which could dampen consumer spending. And supply chain disruptions and higher energy costs will be additional drags.

"The reason why you have a recession when the economy is growing 1% is it's like a weakened immune system," LaVorgna said. "Any negative event, even a small one, is going to throw you off course and stall speed becomes a recession."

Still, because of the strong labor market and household savings, LaVorgna also anticipates that any downturn would be mild.

So far, consumer spending has been healthy even if the public views the economy as anemic.

Nearly 7 in 10 Americans believe the economy is in poor shape, according to a poll last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Yet Bank of America noted that total debit and credit card spending in March was up 11% from a year ago, and its analysts concluded households are "strong enough to weather the storm provided it doesn't persist too long."

There are also signs that consumers are adjusting as higher oil prices have led average gasoline costs to hit \$4.15 a gallon, according to AAA. Gas costs have fallen in the past week, but they're still up 45% from a year ago.

One consequence of higher prices is that Americans began to use less oil and gas. The U.S. consumed a daily average of 21.9 million barrels during the first full week of February; the figure fell 9% to 19.9 million barrels during the first week of April, according to the Energy Information Administration. That decline is larger than the normal seasonal drop-off in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic. Gasoline usage has dropped more than 6% during the same period.

A recent Goldman Sachs research note stood out to Biden administration officials because it suggested that job growth and pay increases would cushion the economy from higher commodity prices. Because of the strong labor market, the economy is better protected from commodity shocks than in the recessions of 1974, 1980 and 1990, as well as the 2008 financial crisis.

The White House has watched with some frustration as the public conversation about the economy has been reduced to inflation, believing that largely ignores the strength of the labor market and the idea that families are able to manage the higher prices because of the coronavirus relief provided earlier.

The administration believes that Fed rate increases as well as a drop in deficit spending this year will help to lower inflation. But the key message that the White House wants to deliver in response to public fears about the economy is that Biden understands their concerns.

The challenge, however, is that many Americans are so focused on inflation that they believe the job

market — and wider economy — is weaker than it actually is. That means the White House has to make a nuanced case in which it recognizes the economic weaknesses but repeats the low unemployment rate again, again and again so that it lodges in the public mind.

The doubts about the economy — despite the solid jobs numbers — are “a signal that we need to continue to make that case clearly and unambiguously,” said Deese.

Up to 65% of Africans have had COVID, far more than thought

Associated Press undefined

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — The World Health Organization said that up to 65% of people in Africa have been infected with the coronavirus and estimates the number of actual cases may have been nearly 100 times more than those reported.

In a new analysis released Thursday, the U.N. health agency reviewed 151 studies of COVID-19 in Africa based on blood samples taken from people on the continent between January 2020 and December 2021. WHO said that by last September, about 65% of people tested had some exposure to COVID-19, translating into about 800 million infections. In contrast, only about 8 million cases had been officially reported to WHO during that time period.

“This undercounting is occurring worldwide and it’s no surprise that the numbers are particularly large in Africa where there are so many cases with no symptoms,” WHO’s Africa director Matshidiso Moeti said in a statement. WHO’s analysis found that a large proportion of people with COVID-19 — 67% — showed no symptoms when infected with the disease, a higher percentage than other world regions.

Despite repeated warnings from WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus that the coronavirus would devastate Africa, the continent has been among the least affected by the pandemic. In its new analysis, WHO said the milder COVID-19 cases seen in Africa were attributable in part to the continent’s much smaller proportion of people with underlying risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

“Africa’s youthful population is also a protective factor,” the U.N. health agency said. Some studies have also suggested that previous infection with diseases including malaria, may offer people some protection against the coronavirus, although those hypotheses have yet to be confirmed.

To date, Africa has reported 11.5 million COVID-19 cases including more than 250,000 deaths. WHO said the virus has been trending downwards since January, although there have been some variations in some countries and some, including South Africa, have been hit particularly hard during successive waves of disease. Last week, WHO said the number of COVID deaths fell by about 30% on the continent.

“Despite Africa’s declining infections and high exposure to the virus, we cannot declare victory yet against COVID-19,” said WHO Africa chief Moeti.

“The risks of more lethal variants emerging which overwhelm immunity gained from past infections cannot be brushed aside,” she said, calling for increased vaccination rates across the continent. To date, only about 15% of people in Africa have been immunized against COVID-19.

Biden, Putin children open targets in sanctions over Ukraine

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In targeting Vladimir Putin’s adult daughters with sanctions over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration ripped aside the privacy Putin has long maintained over his closest ties — avoiding mention of the two women’s full names in public, and most other references to them as well.

The sanctions imposed on immediate family members of Putin and other Russian oligarchs also showcase improved techniques of the U.S. and its allies targeting individuals for financial penalties.

In Russia in particular and in autocracies around the world, sanctioning family members is often essential to making sure financial penalties have the desired punch. Powerful and wealthy leaders often employ the tactic common to many tycoons of putting assets under the names of spouses, children and others.

“We generally want to hold accountable those who have enriched themselves at the expense of the Rus-

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sian state and elevated their family members into some of the highest positions of power in the country," said Morgan Finkelstein, a spokesperson for the Treasury Department.

"But also, we know that oligarchs and other sanctioned elites often try to move money or hide assets via family members or other associates," she said.

The U.S. announced Wednesday that it would target the assets of Putin daughters Katerina Vladimirovna Tikhonova and Maria Vladimirovna Vorontsova.

Bill Browder, an influential longtime campaigner for sanctions over Russia's human rights abuses, said the move was "sort of an obvious thing, particularly in ... the Russian kleptocratic system."

"You can't just sanction the principal, you have to sanction the family because the family owns a lot of the assets of the principal," Browder said. "We've seen this in so many different cases now."

In the case of Putin, expanding what are already thousands of Western sanctions over Russia's war to include Putin's family may sting him personally, but not prove much of a threat to his wealth.

Putin — no stranger to fears of concerted Western moves against him — is believed to have taken care to have stashed much of his estimated \$200 billion or more with the Russian oligarchs he helped enrich, says Browder, whose decades-long campaign has reshaped the U.S. global sanctions regime overall.

Sanctions against oligarchs' family members started to ramp up in early March, when the U.S. specifically targeted wives and daughter of oligarchs. Oil executive Nikolay Tokarev's family members — including his wife, Galina Tokareva, and daughter, Maiya Tokareva — were said to have benefited from his proximity to Putin and the Russian government and were also hit by the sanctions. Maiya Tokareva's real estate empire in Moscow has been valued at more than \$50 million, according to Treasury.

One reason family members are increasingly being targeted is that recently passed anti-money-laundering legislation helps federal officials unveil the true owners of property.

The targeting of family members goes both ways.

Russia recently imposed a travel ban on President Joe Biden's son, although that was seen as more of a symbolic insult, at most.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki was dismissive in comments to reporters after Russia imposed its travel ban in mid-March against administration officials, as well as Hunter Biden and Hillary Clinton. "It won't surprise any of you that none of us are planning tourist trips to Russia," she said.

The Biden administration and administrations before it have included children and spouses of other countries' leaders in sanctions. That includes Biden administration sanctions against family members of military officers in the 2021 coup in Myanmar, and Trump administration sanctions against the son of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Kim Richard Nossal, a political science professor at Queen's University in Ontario, said financial penalties against children of the wealthy and powerful were in a special category of ethical considerations.

"Generally speaking, if my father commits a crime, it's always wrong to punish me," Nossal said. "But if my father commits a crime and I benefit from it, most people would say it's entirely appropriate for the community to limit the benefits I get from someone else's wrongdoing."

"I think most people would say the onus is on the family member to demonstrate they have not benefited from the proceeds of the person being targeted," he said.

The U.S. sanctioned Putin himself soon after he launched the invasion. Wednesday's new measures also target the wife and children of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Putin's main defender to the world, who had already been named in the U.S. sanctions over the invasion.

Lavrov's 26-year daughter is reported by British press to have lived a lavish life in London, including buying a multimillion-dollar apartment in cash.

Putin stressed the value of discretion in one of his few public mentions of his own daughters.

"I never discuss my family with anyone." Putin told reporters at a 2015 news conference, according to the BBC.

"Every person has a right for their fate, they live their own life and do it with dignity," he added.

Putin married Lyudmila Shkrebnova in the 1980s when he was a KGB agent and she was an Aeroflot flight attendant. They divorced three decades later.

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Oldest daughter Maria is a medical researcher focusing on the endocrine system of children. She's also reportedly a businesswoman and developer.

Younger daughter Katerina was a competitive dancer turned tech developer, appearing publicly at performances and in occasional tech conferences.

Left unsanctioned by the U.S. so far is the woman named in news reports as Putin's longtime romantic partner. Photos from public appearances document years of Putin beaming at Alina Kabaeva, an Olympic gymnast in her youth, as he hands her bouquets or state honors.

Kabaeva in later years became a lawmaker in the Duma and later a board member of a Russian national media company, whose news outlets have promoted Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As British tabloids noted, Kabaeva's photo and name disappeared from the website of the National Media Group this week, as sanctions on Putin's intimates neared.

Imprisoned Russian rights campaigner Alexey Navalny urged sanctions against Kabaeva in a tweet from his cell this week, saying one of the news outlets under her authority was taking the lead in portraying Western accusations over the Russian invasion as an orchestrated campaign of disinformation.

Asked about any planned sanctions on Kabaeva, a senior administration official said it was still an option and that more sanctions on Russian elites close to Putin and their family members were possible. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal considerations.

Putin is thought to have been careful to hide away his wealth with Russia's oligarchs, businesspeople obligated to the Russian leader for enabling and allowing their prosperity, often with the help of Russia's government and resources, noted Browder.

That makes piling on more sanctions against oligarchs essential. But hitting Putin's closest personal figures with sanctions will sting, too.

"He was living in this world where everybody was tiptoeing around him," Browder said. "And now the West is sort of fully ignoring his sensitivities and going for the jugular. And I think that that's a good thing."

Social programs weak in many states with tough abortion laws

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, CAMILLE FASSETT and JASEN LO Associated Press

States with some of the nation's strictest abortion laws are also some of the hardest places to have and raise a healthy child, especially for the poor, according to an analysis of federal data by The Associated Press.

The findings raise questions about the strength of the social safety net as those states are poised to further restrict or even ban abortion access following an expected U.S. Supreme Court decision later this year. The burden is likely to fall heaviest on those with low incomes, who also are the least able to seek an abortion in another state where the procedure remains widely available.

Mississippi has the nation's largest share of children living in poverty and babies with low birth weights, according to 2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control, the latest available. Texas has the highest rate of women receiving no prenatal care during their first trimester and ranks second worst for the proportion of children in poverty who are uninsured, the data show.

Laws from both states are at the center of the nationwide fight over abortion access. The Supreme Court's conservative majority signaled willingness in a Mississippi case to gut or strike down Roe v. Wade.

Anti-abortion lawmakers there say they will further promote adoption and foster-care programs if abortion is banned, as well as funding alternatives to abortion programs.

If Roe is overturned, 26 states are certain or likely to quickly ban abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a think tank that supports abortion rights. Many of those states ranked poorly in measurements that nonpartisan advocacy groups consider key to ensuring children get a healthy start.

Data analyzed by the AP illustrates the hurdles pregnant women and their children face in states with the most stringent abortion restrictions and how access to resources can lag behind that of states that also have more permissive abortion laws.

Jazmin Arroyo, a 25-year-old old single mom in Kokomo, Indiana, had to stop working as a receptionist

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after her first child was born because she couldn't afford day care.

Arroyo found a job as a restaurant host, but it didn't offer insurance and her second child has a heart defect. She now has thousands in unpaid medical bills.

"I never could have imagined how hard it would end up being," she said.

Indiana has the second-highest rate of women — 18% — who don't receive prenatal care during their first trimester and has a high percentage of children in poverty without insurance, more than 9%.

The AP analyzed figures from several federal government agencies in seven categories — metrics identified by several nonprofits and experts as essential to determining whether children get a healthy start.

Generally, states that had passed preemptive abortion bans or laws that greatly restrict access to abortion had the worst rankings. Alabama and Louisiana joined Mississippi as the top three states with the highest percentage of babies born with low birth weights. Texas, Indiana and Mississippi had the highest percentage of women receiving no prenatal care during their first trimester.

In response to AP's findings, many conservative state lawmakers said women can give their newborns up for adoption and said they would support funding increases for foster-care programs. In Oklahoma, GOP Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat said he would work to increase salaries for child-welfare workers and state money for adopting foster parents.

"There's going to be a commitment there, but it won't be a new commitment. It will be a continuing effort on our part," he said.

Some Democratically controlled states with more permissive abortion laws also measured poorly in some categories.

New Mexico ranks third highest for the share of its children living in poverty, Delaware ranks fifth highest for the percentage of women who receive no early prenatal care and California is among the top five states — between Oklahoma and Arkansas — for the share of women and children on food stamps.

Those states are generally outliers. Overwhelmingly, the data show far more challenges for newborns, children and their parents in states that restrict abortion.

Abortion restrictions and troubling economic data aren't directly linked, but finances are a major reason why women seek abortions, according to research by Diana Greene Foster, a professor of reproductive science at the University of California, San Francisco.

Children born to women who were denied an abortion are more likely to live in a household where there isn't enough money for basic living expenses, her work has found.

Texas last year passed an unusual law that leaves enforcement of an abortion ban after six weeks to civilians — a law the Supreme Court largely left in place.

Maleeha Aziz, an organizer for the Texas Equal Access Fund, had an abortion when she was a 20-year-old college student, after birth control failed. She's also experienced a condition called hyperemesis gravidarum, which causes persistent, extreme nausea and vomiting.

"I was a vegetable. I could not move," said Aziz, who later had a daughter. "Pregnancy is not a joke. It is the hardest thing that a person's body will ever go through."

In Texas, 20% of women don't get prenatal care in their first trimester, according to pregnancy-risk assessment data collected by the CDC in 2016, the most recent data available from that state. The lack of prenatal care increases the risk of the mother dying or delivering a baby with low birth weight.

Texas abortion foes also point to a program called Alternatives to Abortion. As with similar groups in other states, it funds pregnancy counseling, adoption services and classes about life skills, budgeting and parenting.

"This social service network is really critical in our mind to right now supporting pregnant women and expecting families," said John Seago, the legislative director for Texas Right to Life.

Most such groups, known generally as crisis pregnancy centers, are not licensed to provide medical care.

Social programs weak in many states with tough abortion laws

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, CAMILLE FASSETT and JASEN LO Associated Press

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States with some of the nation's strictest abortion laws are also some of the hardest places to have and raise a healthy child, especially for the poor, according to an analysis of federal data by The Associated Press.

The findings raise questions about the strength of the social safety net as those states are poised to further restrict or even ban abortion access following an expected U.S. Supreme Court decision later this year. The burden is likely to fall heaviest on those with low incomes, who also are the least able to seek an abortion in another state where the procedure remains widely available.

Mississippi has the nation's largest share of children living in poverty and babies with low birth weights, according to 2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control, the latest available. Texas has the highest rate of women receiving no prenatal care during their first trimester and ranks second worst for the proportion of children in poverty who are uninsured, the data show.

Laws from both states are at the center of the nationwide fight over access to abortion. The Supreme Court's conservative majority signaled willingness in a Mississippi case to severely erode or even strike down *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that made abortion legal nationwide until a baby can survive outside the womb. Numerous states with Republican majorities are poised to follow the strictest interpretation of the ruling.

If *Roe* is overturned, 26 states are certain or likely to quickly ban abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a think tank that supports abortion rights. Many of those states ranked poorly in measurements that nonpartisan advocacy groups consider key to ensuring children get a healthy start. Among them is Louisiana, which has the second-highest rate of babies with low birth weight and where 27% of children live in poverty.

Anti-abortion lawmakers there say they will further promote adoption and foster-care programs if abortion is banned.

"We win the biggest battle if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. But then there's still some battles that we must fight. And I'm going to love a child in the womb, at 5 years old, at 10, at 15," said Louisiana state Sen. Katrina Jackson, a Democrat who opposes abortion and also wants to address health care and education needs.

While some women could travel out of state for abortions, "there will be people who will be forced to carry their pregnancies to term simply because they will not be able to get to that care," said Destiny Lopez with the abortion-access group All(asterisk) Above All.

Data analyzed by the AP illustrates the hurdles pregnant women and their children face in states with the most stringent abortion restrictions and how access to resources can lag behind that of states that have more permissive abortion laws.

The AP analyzed figures from several federal government agencies in seven categories — metrics identified by several nonprofits and experts as essential to determining whether children get a healthy start. They were: the percentage of children in poverty; participation in the Women, Infants, Children federal assistance program; the rate of child abuse or neglect; women experiencing intimate partner violence during pregnancy; low birth weight; women receiving no prenatal care in their first trimester; and uninsured children in poverty.

Generally, states with preemptive abortion bans or laws that greatly restrict abortion access showed the worst rankings. Alabama and Louisiana joined Mississippi as the top three states with the highest percentage of babies born with low birth weights. Texas, Indiana and Mississippi had the highest percentage of women receiving no prenatal care during their first trimester. Wyoming, Texas and Utah had the highest percentage of poor children 18 and younger who had no health insurance.

Texas inserted itself into the nationwide debate over abortion last year with an unusual law that leaves enforcement of an abortion ban after six weeks of pregnancy to civilians rather than state or local authorities — a law the Supreme Court largely left in place.

A weaker safety net pattern isn't consistent for all measurements. Some Democratically controlled states with more permissive abortion laws also measured poorly in some categories.

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New Mexico, where Democrats last year overturned a pre-Roe abortion ban, ranks third highest for the share of its children living in poverty and for the percentage of pregnant women who experience violence from an intimate partner. It's also among states with the highest rates of abuse and neglect for children under 5, also called maltreatment. Delaware ranks fifth highest for the percentage of women who receive no early prenatal care and is among the states with the highest percentage of low birth weight babies. California is among the top five states — between Oklahoma and Arkansas — for the share of women and children on food stamps.

Those states are generally outliers. Overwhelmingly, the data show far more challenges for children and their parents in states that have passed abortion restrictions.

In response to AP's findings, several conservative state lawmakers said women can give their newborns up for adoption and said they would support funding increases for foster-care programs. In Oklahoma, Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, a Republican and longtime abortion opponent, said he would work to increase salaries for child-welfare workers and boost state money for foster parents who adopt, as well as send more public money to groups that offer alternatives to abortion.

"I have a 10-year history of trying to improve our rankings there," he said. "So, yes, there's going to be a commitment there, but it won't be a new commitment. It will be a continuing effort on our part."

Others in Oklahoma say the teen birthrate, fourth highest in the nation, would likely increase if the Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade* and a state "trigger law" banning most abortions takes effect. More than 10% of the 4,424 abortions in Oklahoma in 2019 were for women younger than 20, according to the most recent state health statistics.

Kathy Harms, who had her first child at age 16, worked jobs in retail and fast food to support her family and said she sometimes had to choose between paying the electric or the gas bills.

"We have to juggle which one we can risk getting turned off," said Harms, executive director of Teen emPower, a teen-pregnancy-reduction group in Oklahoma. "It's an endless cycle of stress and wondering if it is ever going to get better ... every aspect of life is more difficult for single mothers."

Some lawmakers and anti-abortion activists have said they believe that outlawing or severely restricting abortion would lead people to change their sexual behavior.

"We think that a decision from the court could very well affect the way that people regard being a mother or a father ... that certain things might be done differently than they are now," said Tony Lauinger, chair of Oklahomans for Life.

Others say that view isn't realistic and doesn't align with the reasons most women seek an abortion.

Maleeha Aziz, an organizer for the Texas Equal Access Fund, had an abortion when she was 20 after birth control failed. She was a recent immigrant from Pakistan and a college student sharing a one-bedroom apartment who knew she couldn't afford to raise a child financially.

Her broader experience also reflected the health risks inherent in many pregnancies. She had a condition called hyperemesis gravidarum, which causes persistent, extreme nausea and vomiting.

"I was a vegetable. I could not move," said Aziz, who later had a daughter. "Pregnancy is not a joke. It is the hardest thing that a person's body will ever go through."

She's now seeing panic and anxiety among people seeking abortions in Texas.

"I can't believe this is our reality," she said.

Jazmin Arroyo, a 25-year-old old single mom in Kokomo, Indiana, had to stop working as a receptionist after her first child was born because she couldn't afford day care on top of rent, a car payment and other expenses.

Indiana has the second-highest rate of women — 18% — who don't receive prenatal care during their first trimester and has among the highest percentages of children in poverty without insurance, more than 9%.

Arroyo found a job as a restaurant host, but it didn't offer insurance and she was already starting to drown in bills when she had her second child, who has a heart defect that required special care. She now has thousands in unpaid medical bills.

"I never could have imagined how hard it would end up being," she said.

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The reasons why people seek abortions are complex, but financial concerns are often a top factor, according to research from Diana Greene Foster, a professor of reproductive science at the University of California, San Francisco.

Children born to women who were denied an abortion and carried the pregnancy to term are more likely to live in a household where there isn't enough money for basic living expenses, her work has found. When women can get abortions, the children they do have fare better.

"So there is a clear effect on poverty, but there is also an effect on child development," Greene Foster said.

In states with strict abortion laws, performance on measurements such as access to health insurance for low-income people is linked in part to political realities: Leaders who have supported abortion restrictions for decades generally also have espoused small-government principles and opposed measures such as Medicaid expansion, said legal historian Mary Ziegler at Florida State University's law school.

"The pro-life movement has made its political bones by relying on the GOP," she said. "The GOP has not been in favor of expanding the social safety net for young children and pregnant people, and the pro-life movement, which may have otherwise wanted to do that, is not willing to expend political capital on that because its priority is abortion, basically, and nothing beyond it."

In Texas, state Sen. Nathan Johnson, a Democrat who has unsuccessfully pushed to expand Medicaid to more low-income residents in the state, said he is heartened that lawmakers recently extended that coverage for new mothers and added guardrails to prevent eligible kids from losing health care. But he said much more needs to be done.

"I get tired of very important but relatively small measures like these two that are very specific acting as a substitute for an overall responsible state policy towards health care," Johnson said.

Texas in 2005 created a program called Alternatives to Abortion. As with similar groups in other states, the program funds pregnancy counseling, adoption services and classes about life skills, budgeting and parenting.

"This social service network is really critical in our mind to right now supporting pregnant women and expecting families," said John Seago, the legislative director for Texas Right to Life. "But also as we look forward to potentially a post-Roe Texas, these are the types of social services that are going to be even more in demand."

Most such groups, known generally as crisis pregnancy centers, are not licensed to provide medical care.

While adoption can be an alternative, its expensive for adoptive families and has a fraught history in the U.S. marred at times by racism, said Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, an obstetrician-gynecologist who founded and serves as president of the National Birth Equity Collaborative. Children can end up lingering for years in the foster-care system, which is troubled in Texas.

Carrying babies to term also presents health risks. In Texas, 20% of women don't get prenatal care in their first trimester, according to pregnancy-risk assessment data collected by the CDC in 2016, the most recent year for which data was available for the state.

A lack of prenatal care increases the risk of the mother dying or delivering a baby with low birth weight. Black women bear the heaviest risk: They are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than white women, said Oriaku Njoku, executive director of the group Access Reproductive Care-Southeast, which provides abortion and reproductive counseling in seven Southern states. Some lack insurance, others live in counties without OB-GYNs.

"Our folks deserve better," she said.

UK looks to nuclear power to cut Russian energy dependence

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday announced plans to build more nuclear power plants, boost renewable energy production and further tap domestic oil and gas reserves to help the U.K. reduce its dependence on Russian energy following the invasion of Ukraine.

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Critics quickly panned Johnson's energy security strategy for focusing almost entirely on boosting supplies while doing little to increase energy efficiency and cut demand. As a result, they said, the plan offers no relief to consumers pummeled by soaring utility bills and risks undermining Britain's commitment to cut carbon emissions in response to global warming.

"This takes the U.K. backwards not forwards," said Professor Matthew Paterson, an expert in the politics of climate change at the University of Manchester. "It is a knee-jerk response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine that goes back to old, tired solutions focused on expanding energy supply, and does so in ways that contradict the U.K.'s climate strategy."

Johnson announced the strategy three weeks after he said Western countries had made a "terrible mistake" in failing to wean themselves off Russian energy following President Vladimir Putin's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea eight years ago. That emboldened Putin to invade Ukraine in February and left Europe vulnerable to "blackmail" amid Russian threats to cut off energy supplies, he said at the time.

Oil and natural gas prices have soared in recent months, first as demand for energy increased following the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently amid concern that the war could curtail supplies from Russia. High energy prices are fueling a cost-of-living crisis in Britain, where household gas and electricity prices jumped 54% this month.

The government on Thursday responded to these issues with what it called a strategy to boost "long-term energy independence, security and prosperity."

"This is about tackling the mistakes of the past and making sure that we are set well for the future," Johnson said at Hinkley Point C, a nuclear power plant under construction in southwest England. "And we are never again subject to the vagaries of the global oil and gas prices, and we can't be subject to blackmail, as it were, from people such as Vladimir Putin."

That includes plans to build eight new nuclear reactors by 2050, tripling U.K. production of nuclear energy to 24 gigawatts, or a quarter of projected electricity demand. A key challenge in meeting this goal is the development of as yet unproven technology for small modular reactors that are less than a third the size of existing reactors, the government said.

Paul Dorfman, an associate fellow at the University of Sussex Science Policy Research Unit, was particularly critical of the focus on nuclear power, which is expensive and slow to develop. He described it as a "boys and their toys" response that the government is portraying as a magic solution to the problem.

"The reality is these things will turn out to be white elephants and very, very costly white elephants," Dorfman told The Associated Press. "There really is no logic to it, especially given the low-hanging fruit to start off with is energy efficiency, demand-side management and energy conservation."

In addition, the strategy targets a 10-fold increase in production of electricity from offshore wind farms and an unspecified boost from onshore wind farms in a "limited number of supportive communities."

Community opposition has curtailed onshore wind projects, which currently account for less than 8% of U.K. electricity generation capacity.

The government also announced a new round of licensing for oil and gas projects in the North Sea, saying these fuels would be key to U.K. energy security and as a transition to low-carbon renewable energy. The government also argued that domestically produced oil and gas would have a lower carbon footprint than overseas energy that has to be transported to the U.K.

Other elements of the strategy include promoting the use of solar power and increasing hydrogen production for use in fuel cells.

Responding to criticism that the plan does little to address the current high price of gas and electricity, Johnson highlighted a 9 billion pound (\$11.8 billion) package of measures previously announced to help consumers offset the rising cost of living.

"We're already doing a huge amount to help people with the immediate cost of living and, of course, we're going to do more," he said.

From green jacket to prison, Angel Cabrera's big fall

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By TIM DAHLBERG AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — His picture is still on the wall of champions in the press building at Augusta National, sandwiched between Trevor Immelman and Phil Mickelson. His chair at the champion's dinner Tuesday night was empty, though, and if there was an invite to play the Masters this year, no one saw it.

As the Masters unfolds this week, Angel Cabrera sits in an Argentine prison. He's serving two years for domestic abuse, and there's a chance he could face an even longer sentence.

The glory of 2009 never seemed so far away.

"A lot of kids grow up without a role model and make some bad decisions, their anger within them takes over," said Charlie Epps, a Houston golf pro who has a father-son relationship with Cabrera. "But it doesn't justify doing the wrong thing."

Cabrera was an unlikely champion to begin with, a street urchin who grew up without parents and never had a formal education. A huge crowd greeted him when he flew home after winning the 2007 U.S. Open and there was a parade in his honor.

Then he became a two-time major champion — and the first South American to win a green jacket — by winning a three-way Masters playoff in 2009. His future in golf seemed unlimited.

But what was once a feel-good story has now gone bad, and no one can predict when Cabrera will be free, much less play golf again.

Meanwhile, Epps watches Cabrera's vacant house in Houston and wonders how it all went wrong.

"I saw a lot of it in his golf, he was a perfectionist early on and had a temper," Epps said. "He never had a sports psychologist or anything like that and he grew up with a chip on his shoulder. Once he got it under control, he became a champion he is."

While the details of Cabrera's case remain somewhat murky, he was charged with gender violence with a former partner and could face additional time for allegedly threatening the woman by phone after being charged. Prosecutors are also looking at allegations from two other women, including the mother of his children, and his lawyer says there's a chance he could be charged with more crimes.

What is clear is that Cabrera — who was arrested in Brazil in January 2021 after prosecutors issued an international warrant for not attending his first trial — was convicted in July 2021 of assaulting, threatening and harassing Cecilia Torres Mana, his partner between 2016 and 2018. He is not scheduled to be released from prison until next January at the earliest, despite his pleas of innocence.

"There was no crime," his lawyer, Carlos Hairabedian told The Associated Press via phone from Argentina on Wednesday, alleging the charges were brought "out of spite and resentment." Hairabedian claimed that in the reported cases "the common denominator is that there was no physical violence but an exchange of high-sounding words."

Cabrera's rise in the golf world wasn't exactly meteoric, though it seemed like it at the time. Abandoned by his parents, he became a caddie at the age of 8 to earn enough money to eat and it wasn't long before he took up the game himself.

Epps was living in Argentina at the time and Cabrera caddied for some of his friends, leading the two to begin a relationship with Epps serving as an instructor and father figure to the young player. They would reconnect after Cabrera turned pro, with the work leading to his breakthrough win at the 2007 U.S. Open.

"He really wanted to get better and he saw everybody had a coach so he asked me to help him," Epps said. "He's a quality golfer, a quality ball striker. He's really athletic and could have been a soccer player, or even a linebacker if he grew up around football."

The Open win established him as a major champion, even if the golf world didn't totally embrace him. Cabrera didn't speak English and never seemed to gain the kind of acclaim another player might have, even after adding the green jacket with his three-hole playoff win against Kenny Perry and Chad Campbell.

The player known as el Pato (the duck) because of his unusual gait told reporters in Spanish afterward that it was the dream of a lifetime.

"Incredible ... I still can't believe it," he said.

Epps says he hasn't spoken to Cabrera since he was imprisoned, though he watches the house the golfer

owns in Houston. He still holds out hope of working with the now 52-year-old when he gets out of prison and tries to resume his career on the senior tour.

"I want the best for him and I think he's got a lot of golf ahead of him," Epps said. "I think he'll come out of this a better man. At least that's the hope."

Meta: Russian invasion driving more disinformation online

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Hackers aligned with Russia broke into the social media accounts of dozens of Ukrainian military officers and were working to upload videos of defeated and surrendering Ukrainian soldiers when the plot was disrupted, according to a report Thursday from Meta that details a troubling increase in social media disinformation this year.

The report from the owner of Facebook and Instagram found a surge in content linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as new cases of domestic disinformation and propaganda in countries around the world, suggesting that tactics pioneered by foreign intelligence agencies are now being used more widely.

"While much of the public attention in recent years has been focused on foreign interference, domestic threats are on the rise globally," said Nick Clegg, Meta's president for global affairs and a former British deputy prime minister.

Russia and its allies are major players, according to the report, with groups linked to the Kremlin spreading disinformation about its invasion of Ukraine while amplifying pro-Russian conspiracy theories at home.

Meta traced the effort to take over the social media accounts of dozens of Ukrainian military leaders back to a shadowy hacker organization known as Ghostwriter, which previous research has linked to Belarus, a Russian ally. Ghostwriter has a history of spreading content critical of NATO, and also has tried to hack email accounts.

"This is a tried-and-true thing that they do," said Ben Read, director of cyberespionage analysis at Mandiant, a prominent U.S. cybersecurity firm that has tracked Ghostwriter's activities for years. Last year Mandiant said digital clues suggested the hackers were based in Belarus, though EU officials have previously blamed Russia.

Belarus and Russia have not responded to the claims.

The report outlined other disinformation efforts tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including one involving dozens of fake accounts that spread anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. Another network filed thousands of fake complaints about Ukrainian Facebook users in an effort to get them kicked off the platform. That network hid its activities in a Facebook group supposedly dedicated to cooking.

Within Russia, the Kremlin has blocked hundreds of news sources and websites, including Facebook and Twitter, and threatened jail time to anyone who tries to report on the war. In the place of accurate journalism, the state-controlled media have pumped out discredited conspiracy theories about Ukrainian Nazis or secret U.S. bioweapon labs.

Meta and other big tech companies have responded by removing or restricting Russian state-run media, by targeting disinformation networks and by labeling content it does not remove. Twitter this week announced it would also label state-controlled media from Belarus.

The prevalence of Russian-linked propaganda and disinformation on social media shows that a more aggressive response is needed, according to the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a London-based nonprofit that supports greater social media regulation. A study by the group found numerous Facebook mentions of Russia's discredited bioweapon conspiracy theory.

"Despite taking action against state channels under enormous pressure, Meta is failing badly to contain major disinformation narratives that benefit Putin's regime," said Imran Ahmed, the center's CEO.

Meta said it would be rolling out additional policies in the coming weeks and months to make sure it stays ahead of groups looking to exploit its platforms. Nathaniel Gleicher, Meta's head of security policy, noted that groups looking to spread disinformation and propaganda are adapting their tactics too.

"We would expect them to keep coming back," Gleicher said.

House panel: Justice Dept. 'obstructing' Trump records probe

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MICHAEL BALSAMO The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional oversight committee on Thursday said the Justice Department is "obstructing" its investigation into former President Donald Trump's handling of White House records by preventing the release of information from the National Archives.

The House Committee on Oversight and Reform sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland accusing the Justice Department of impeding the panel's expanded investigation into the 15 boxes of White House records that Trump took to his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after leaving office last year. The Archives in February revealed it had found classified material in the boxes and referred the matter to the Justice Department.

The letter from Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., the chairwoman of the Oversight Committee, outlines communications between the committee and the National Archives that took place between February to late March.

In those letters, Maloney made a series of requests for information she said the committee needs to determine if Trump violated federal records laws over his handling of sensitive and even classified information. In response, the general counsel for the archivist wrote on March 28 that "based on our consultation with the Department of Justice, we are unable to provide any comment."

"By blocking NARA from producing the documents requested by the Committee, the Department is obstructing the Committee's investigation," Maloney wrote in the letter released Thursday.

Maloney added that while the committee is not looking to interfere with the department's ongoing investigation, lawmakers have not received any explanation as to why the department is preventing the archivist from providing information about the contents of the boxes.

The House's oversight panel has repeatedly cited its authority to investigate matters involving the Presidential Records Act, which was enacted in 1978 after former President Richard Nixon wanted to destroy documents related to the Watergate scandal.

Maloney had warned in December 2020 that she had "grave concerns" that the Trump administration was not complying with the federal records act, even writing in a letter to the archivist citing those concerns that the departing administration "may not be adequately preserving records and may be disposing of them."

While federal law bars the removal of classified documents to unauthorized locations, it is possible that in this case, Trump could try to argue that, as president, he was the ultimate declassification authority.

The former president has denied reports of tensions with the National Archives and his lawyers have said that "they are continuing to search for additional presidential records that belong to the National Archives."

The attorney general has acknowledged that the department received the referral from the Archives, but it is longstanding Justice Department policy not to comment on investigations.

Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill may face a long wait for answers to their questions about specific investigations.

Generally, under Justice Department guidelines, details of investigations are supposed to remain out of the public view until charges are filed or warrants are filed. And, if grand juries are convened, the Justice Department is precluded under federal law from discussing specifics of a grand jury investigation before an indictment is handed down.

Garland has also made clear to prosecutors that the Justice Department won't be influenced by outside political pressure.

The Oversight Committee asked Garland to respond by next week with either a green light for the National Archives to cooperate with their request or provide an explanation as to why the department is imposing such limitations.

Shanghai wrestles with food shortages under virus shutdown

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By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Residents of Shanghai are struggling to get meat, rice and other food supplies under anti-coronavirus controls that confine most of its 25 million people in their homes, fueling frustration as the government tries to contain a spreading outbreak.

People in China's business capital complain online grocers often are sold out. Some received government food packages of meat and vegetables for a few days. But with no word on when they will be allowed out, anxiety is rising.

Zhang Yu, 33, said her household of eight eats three meals a day but has cut back to noodles for lunch. They received no government supplies.

"It's not easy to keep this up," said Zhang, who starts shopping online at 7 a.m.

"We read on the news there is (food), but we just can't buy it," she said. "As soon as you go to the grocery shopping app, it says today's orders are filled."

The complaints are an embarrassment for the ruling Communist Party during a politically sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

Shanghai highlights the soaring human and economic cost of China's "zero-COVID" strategy that aims to isolate every infected person.

On Thursday, the government reported 23,107 new cases nationwide, all but 1,323 of which had no symptoms. That included 19,989 in Shanghai, where only 329 had symptoms.

Complaints about food shortages began after Shanghai closed segments of the city on March 28.

Plans called for four-day closures of districts while residents were tested. That changed to an indefinite citywide shutdown after case numbers soared. Shoppers who got little warning stripped supermarket shelves.

City officials apologized publicly last week and promised to improve food supplies.

Officials say Shanghai, home of the world's busiest port and China's main stock exchange, has enough food. But a deputy mayor, Chen Tong, acknowledged Thursday getting it the "last 100 meters" to households is a challenge.

"Shanghai's battle against the epidemic has reached the most critical moment," Chen said at a news conference, according to state media. He said officials "must go all out to get living supplies to the city's 25 million people."

At the same event, a vice president of Meituan, China's biggest food delivery platform, blamed a shortage of staff and vehicles, according to a transcript released by the company. The executive, Mao Fang, said Meituan has moved automated delivery vehicles and nearly 1,000 extra employees to Shanghai.

Another online grocer, Dingdong, said it shifted 500 employees in Shanghai from other posts to making deliveries.

Li Xiaoliang, an employee of a courier company, complained the government overlooks people living in hotels. He said he is sharing a room with two coworkers after positive cases were found near his rented house.

Li, 30, said they brought instant noodles but those ran out. Now, they eat one meal a day of 40 yuan (\$6) lunch boxes ordered at the front desk, but the vendor sometimes doesn't deliver. On Thursday, Li said he had only water all day.

The local government office "clearly said that they didn't care about those staying in the hotel and left us to find our own way," Li said. "What we need most now is supplies, food."

After residents of a Shanghai apartment complex stood on their balconies to sing this week in a possible protest, a drone flew overhead and broadcast the message: "Control the soul's desire for freedom and do not open the window to sing. This behavior has the risk of spreading the epidemic."

The government says it is trying to reduce the impact of its tactics, but authorities still are enforcing curbs that also block access to the industrial cities of Changchun and Jilin with millions of residents in the northeast.

While the Shanghai port's managers say operations are normal, the chair of the city's chapter of the

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European Chamber of Commerce in China, Bettina Schoen-Behanzin, said its member companies estimate the volume of cargo handled has fallen 40%.

Some large factories and financial firms are having employees sleep at work to keep operating. But Schoen-Behanzin said with no timetable to end lockdowns, "some workers aren't volunteering any more."

Residents of smaller cities also have been confined temporarily to their homes this year as Chinese officials try to contain outbreaks.

In 2020, access to cities with a total of 60 million people was suspended in an unprecedented attempt to contain the outbreak. The ruling party organized vast supply networks to bring in food.

A resident of the Minhang district on Shanghai's west side who asked to be identified only by her surname, Chen, said her household of five was given government food packages on March 30 and April 4. They included chicken, eggplant, carrots, broccoli and potatoes.

Now, vegetables are available online but meat, fish and eggs are hard to find, Chen said. She joined a neighborhood "buying club." Minimum orders are 3,000 yuan (\$500), "so you need other people," she said.

"Everyone is organizing to order food, because we can't count on the government to send it to us," Chen said. "They're not reliable."

A message from a viewer of an online news conference by the city's health bureau challenged officials: "Put down the script! Please tell leaders to buy vegetables by mobile phone on the spot."

Gregory Gao, an operations specialist for an automaker who lives alone in the downtown Yangpu district, said only Meituan remains after food sellers said supply sites in the area were closing.

"I can't get anything for two or three days in a row," said Gao, 29.

Zhang said some of her neighbors have run out of rice.

"The government told us at the beginning this would last four days," she said. "Many people were not prepared."

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.

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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 happening,” 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 collects and saves 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 hor-

rible 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.

Dolphins' playful social habits form bonds, but spread virus

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

REEDVILLE, Va. (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, 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."

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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.

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!"

Today in History: April 8, Hank Aaron hits 715th homer

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 8, the 98th day of 2022. There are 267 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On April 8, 1974, Hank Aaron of the Atlanta Braves hit his 715th career home run in a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, breaking Babe Ruth's record.

On this date:

In 1513, explorer Juan Ponce de Leon and his expedition began exploring the Florida coastline.

In 1864, the United States Senate passed, 38-6, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery. (The House of Representatives passed it in January 1865; the amendment was ratified and adopted in December 1865.)

In 1911, an explosion at the Banner Coal Mine in Littleton, Alabama, claimed the lives of 128 men, most of them convicts loaned out from prisons.

In 1913, the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, providing for popular election of U.S. senators (as opposed to appointment by state legislatures), was ratified. President Woodrow Wilson became the first chief executive since John Adams to address Congress in person as he asked lawmakers to enact tariff reform.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered a freeze on wages and prices to combat inflation.

In 1952, President Harry S. Truman seized the American steel industry to avert a nationwide strike. (The Supreme Court later ruled that Truman had overstepped his authority, opening the way for a seven-week strike by steelworkers.)

In 1973, artist Pablo Picasso died in Mougins (MOO'-zhun), France, at age 91.

In 1990, Ryan White, the teenage AIDS patient whose battle for acceptance had gained national attention, died in Indianapolis at age 18.

In 1992, tennis great Arthur Ashe announced at a New York news conference that he had AIDS (Ashe died the following February of AIDS-related pneumonia at age 49).

In 1993, singer Marian Anderson died in Portland, Oregon, at age 96.

In 2010, President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the New START treaty in Prague.

In 2020, a 76-day lockdown was lifted in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the global pandemic began; residents would have to use a smartphone app showing that they had not been in recent contact with anyone confirmed to have the virus. Sen. Bernie Sanders ended his presidential bid, making Joe Biden the presumptive Democratic nominee to challenge President Donald Trump.

Ten years ago: A U.N.-brokered plan to stop the bloodshed in Syria effectively collapsed after President Bashar Assad's government raised new, last-minute demands that the country's largest rebel group swiftly rejected. The U.S. and Afghanistan signed a deal giving Afghans authority over raids of Afghan homes, resolving one of the most contentious issues between the two wartime allies. Bubba Watson saved par from the pine straw and won the Masters on the second hole of a playoff over Louis Oosthuizen (WUHST'-hy-zen).

Five years ago: Immigrant workers at the famed Tom Cat Bakery in New York who were threatened with being fired if they didn't produce legal work papers rallied outside President Donald Trump's Manhattan home.

One year ago: Medical experts testifying at the murder trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin said George Floyd had died of a lack of oxygen from being pinned to the pavement with a knee on his neck, emphatically rejecting the defense theory that Floyd's drug use and underlying health problems killed him. American author John Naisbitt, whose 1982 bestseller "Megatrends" was published in dozens of countries, died in Austria at 92.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian Shecky Greene is 96. Author and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh is 85. "Mouseketeer" Darlene Gillespie is 81. Singer Peggy Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 81. Songwriter-producer Leon Huff is 80. Actor Stuart Pankin is 76. Rock musician Steve Howe is 75. Former House Republican leader Tom DeLay is 75. Movie director John Madden is 73. Rock musician Mel Schacher (Grand Funk Railroad) is 71. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., is 67. Actor John Schneider is 62. "Survivor" winner Richard Hatch is 61. Rock musician Izzy Stradlin is 60. Singer Julian Lennon is 59. Actor Dean Norris is 59. Rock singer-musician Donita Sparks is 59. Actor Robin Wright is 56. Actor Patricia Arquette is 54.

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Actor JR Bourne is 52. Rock singer Craig Honeycutt (Everything) is 52. Rock musician Darren Jessee is 51. Actor Emma Caulfield is 49. Actor Katee Sackhoff is 42. Actor Taylor Kitsch is 41. Rock singer-musician Ezra Koenig (Vampire Weekend) is 38. Actor Taran Noah Smith is 38. Actor Kirsten Storms is 38. Actor Sadie Calvano is 25.