

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

Wednesday, April 13

7 p.m.: "Way of the Cross" at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church (will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)

Catholic Mass: 5:00pm Turton, 8:30am Groton

Emmanuel: 6 p.m. Confirmation, 6:30 p.m. League School Breakfast; Eggs and sausage.

School Menu: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, buttermilk biscuits, banana pudding with bananas.

Thursday, April 14

Emmanuel: 7 p.m.: Worship with 1st communion for youth

St. John's: 7 p.m. Worship with communion

SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.

Catholic: 5:00pm Turton, 8:30am Groton

School Breakfast: muffins.

School Lunch: Tacos.



"It takes strength to make your way through grief, to grab hold of life and let it pull you forward."

-PATTI DAVIS

Senior Menu: Sweet and sour pork, steamed rice, carrot and broccoli medley, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Friday, April 15 - Good Friday

No School, Groton City & States offices closed
7 p.m.: Worship at Emmanuel with Methodist & CM&A.

St. John's: 7 p.m. worship

Saturday, April 16

Groton High School Baseball vs. Howard at 2 p.m. and Oldham/Ramona/Rutland/Arlington at 4 p.m.

Emmanuel: 10 a.m.: Rosewood Court

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m.

SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

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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High Wind Warning

URGENT - WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
1132 PM CDT Tue Apr 12 2022

MNZ039-046-SDZ006>008-011-018>023-131245-
/O.CON.KABR.HW.W.0004.220413T1200Z-220415T0600Z/
Traverse-Big Stone-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Spink-Clark-
Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-
Including the cities of Wheaton, Ortonville, Aberdeen, Britton,
Sisseton, Webster, Redfield, Clark, Watertown, Milbank, Hayti,
and Clear Lake
1132 PM CDT Tue Apr 12 2022

...HIGH WIND WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 7 AM WEDNESDAY TO 1 AM CDT FRIDAY...

* WHAT...West winds 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to 60 mph expected.

* WHERE...Portions of northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

* WHEN...From 7 AM Wednesday to 1 AM CDT Friday.

* IMPACTS...High winds may move loose debris, damage property and cause power outages. Travel will be difficult especially for high profile vehicles.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

People are urged to secure loose objects that could be blown around or damaged by the wind.

**HELP
WANTED!**

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

Hanlon re-elected as Groton's Mayor



Incumbent Scott Hanlon
218 Votes



Aaron Grant
24 Votes

Twenty-five percent of the eligible voters in Groton turned out at the poll on Tuesday to vote for Groton's mayor position. There are 967 eligible voters with 244 turnout out to vote. Incumbent Mayor Scott Hanlon was re-elected to a three-year term with 218 votes. Challenger Aaron Grant received 24 votes and there was one spoiled ballot.

Schools will vote on seven activities association amendments

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — At its annual meeting Tuesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association approved submitting seven constitutional amendments to a vote of member schools.

Perhaps the most far-reaching of the amendments would use a free and reduced lunch formula to adjust the enrollment numbers that are used to determine classifications and alignments for schools in sports and activities.

The formula could reduce a school's enrollment numbers by 30%. An example offered Tuesday proposed a high school with an enrollment of 400 in which 85% of the students are eligible for a free or reduced lunch. The formula calls for 30 to be multiplied by .85 for 25.5. That number is then subtracted from 100 for 74.5. Used as a percentage, .745, that number is then multiplied by the enrollment figure, 400, reducing the enrollment number used for classification from 400 to 298.

The rationale for the amendment, as offered by SDHSAA staff and the organization's Native American Advisory Council says: "We have a number of schools on the line between classifications with large populations of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. In general, those schools and students have severe discrepancies in access to equipment and school/personal access to outside training opportunities as compared to similar-sized schools with low populations of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch."

The rationale statement goes on to say that the free and reduced lunch multiplier is used in other states where it is "widely accepted" as a major factor in athletic and activity success. Using the formula, according to the rationale, would allow schools to remain at a classification level that appropriately reflects their opportunities.

"There's a big difference there" in access to facilities, said SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos, noting that similar formulas are used in Minnesota and North Dakota.

Board members said there have been some questions about the amendment from schools.

"This may not have a possibility of passing if people don't know what the numbers are," said board member Kelly Messmer of Harding County.

Swartos said he would apply the free and reduced lunch numbers to some enrollments and send the data to schools so that members could see how it would affect classifications. He said Harding County and Lakota Tech, a relatively new high school near the Pine Ridge Reservation, are both close to going from A to AA in classification.

"This would prevent them from moving up," Swartos said.

Another amendment changes the eligibility appeals process for athletes. Currently, that process includes a Level One appeal that is heard by the executive director. If that decision is appealed, it goes to a Level Two appeal heard by a three-member committee that can include superintendents, high school principals, activities directors and school board members. If the committee's decision is appealed, Level Three is an appeal before the SDHSAA board of directors.

The amendment changes the Level Two appeal by appointing three SDHSAA board members to the appeals committee. The rationale for the change says that the association's executive director processes between 80 and 100 hardship requests per year. Changing the make-up of the appeals committee assures that the people hearing the appeal are better informed about SDHSAA rules and bylaws. The three board members on the Level Two committee would not participate in the Level Three appeal to the full board.

"It put those people in a bad spot," said Swartos, referring to the administrators selected randomly to hear appeals.

The amendment also makes changes to ensure that a school's superintendent or a school board member signs off whenever an appeal is made. In the past, some appeals have been brought to SDHSAA without the knowledge of member school administrators.

Two amendments bring the organization's bylaws into compliance with current state law regarding home-schooling. One allows competition by seventh and eighth grade students in high school activities if they satisfy SDHSAA's scholastic standards. Another allows students receiving alternative education to satisfy the scholastic standards for participation.

Two other amendments bring the bylaws into compliance with the organization's current practice. One calls for a school's resolution authorizing membership to be signed by the superintendent and the chairman of the board of education. The other notes that SDHSAA has suspended membership dues and fees, but allows them to be reinstated if necessary.

Another amendment deletes a reference to No Child Left Behind from transfer rules.

Member schools will receive their ballots for the amendments by April 22. Ballots must be returned to SDHSAA by May 31. Constitutional amendments must receive an endorsement from 60% of the member schools in order to pass.

—30—

Watertown superintendent will join SDHSAA board

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — During the annual meeting of the South Dakota High School Activities Association on Tuesday, nominations were offered for the Division II representative to the board of directors. This position must be filled by a superintendent.

The only candidate nominated was Watertown Superintendent Jeff Danielsen. He will serve a five-year term and is not eligible for re-election.

Danielsen will replace current board member Terry Rotert. Rotert, the activities director in Huron, is filling out the last year of the term of former Brookings Activities Director Randy Soma who resigned from the board when he was hired as an assistant executive director at SDHSAA.

Division II includes the state's larger schools, excluding Sioux Falls and Rapid City which are in Division I. Those schools include Brandon Valley, Aberdeen Central, Watertown, Brookings, Mitchell, Yankton,

Sturgis, Pierre, Douglas, Huron, Spearfish and Sioux Falls O'Gorman.

The board will have another opening soon as Derek Barrios of Elk Point-Jefferson will be leaving that school for a position at Watertown. A replacement for Barrios, who will represent the interests of the state's smaller high schools, will be appointed at the board's June meeting.

—30—

Schools to decide on changing 2023 football schedules

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The 2023 high school football schedules may get a second look after a lengthy discussion Tuesday by the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors.

At issue were complaints from schools that field nine-man teams and 11A schools. The board also discussed an oversight in the way conference games are scheduled.

Dave Hutchison, superintendent of the Irene-Wakonda School District, a 9-B school in football, asked the board if there was any chance of changing his school's football schedule for the coming fall.

"We don't have one 9-B game scheduled," Hutchison said. "Not one coach at that level is going to see our players play."

Hutchison explained that it was tough to get recognition for his players if the coaches at that level don't see them in action.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos told the board that a letter with similar complaints had recently been received from the Gayville-Volin School District.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma, in his first year of creating the football schedules, said conference games or games within a classification are not guaranteed.

"I want to make sure that everyone gets a schedule," Soma said, explaining that creating a schedule for each school is his top priority.

Football schedules are made two years at a time. For a time there was talk among board members of having the staff go back and redo the schedules for this fall and for the season after that.

Soma tried to get board members to see the difficulty of making changes to the schedule. "If you make changes, it's not three schools" that are affected, Soma said. "It's 40 schools."

Swartos noted that Soma scheduled more than 800 games. "He was trying to appease everybody," Swartos said.

Board member Kelly Messmer of Harding County said the board's reaction to the two complaints was worrisome. He said the board was discussing major changes with the "majority of schools not knowing we're discussing this today."

Messmer said some of schools he has talked with are happy with their schedules and will be upset by any changes. "It seems like a monumental topic for a few schools; I just wonder if it's an issue for the rest of them."

During the discussion, board members and the SDHSAA staff discovered that a directive regarding conference play had failed to make it into the organization's athletic handbook. That rule says that any football conference with more than seven teams would need to split into two divisions with the last game of the season played by the top teams in each division to declare a conference champion.

Swartos characterized the omission as an "honest oversight."

The board agreed that it was too late to change the fall football schedule. The board members directed Swartos to inform member schools about the conference scheduling oversight as well as ask their opinions about the 2023 football schedule and whether or not they would like to see it changed.

—30—

South Dakota Severe Weather Preparedness Week, April 25-29

South Dakotans are no strangers to severe weather. Unfortunately it can be easy to get complacent about safety plans and when to enact them. Severe Weather Preparedness Week in South Dakota is April 25-29, 2022 and serves as an opportunity to increase awareness and response to summer severe weather hazards.

The National Weather Service encourages people to think about personal safety plans and to 'Know Before You Go.' Whether at home, school, work or traveling, people should review the weather forecast and think about severe weather safety in every situation.

Along with personal safety, businesses should evaluate and practice their severe weather plans. The Federal Emergency Management Agency estimates that 62% of businesses do not have an emergency plan in place. Now is the time to develop and practice plans.

Each day during Severe Weather Preparedness Week has a specific theme to encourage people to focus their preparation and planning efforts. The links below provide additional safety information along with premade graphics that are free to use:

Monday: Weather Alerts and Warnings

Tuesday: Severe Storms Wind, Hail & Lightning

Wednesday: Tornado Safety Information

*The National Weather Service will be encouraging residents to practice their tornado drills on Wednesday but will not be activating the Emergency Alert System. Individual communities may sound sirens or plan other drills locally. Please contact your local emergency management office for more details.

Thursday: Flash Floods

Friday: Extreme Heat

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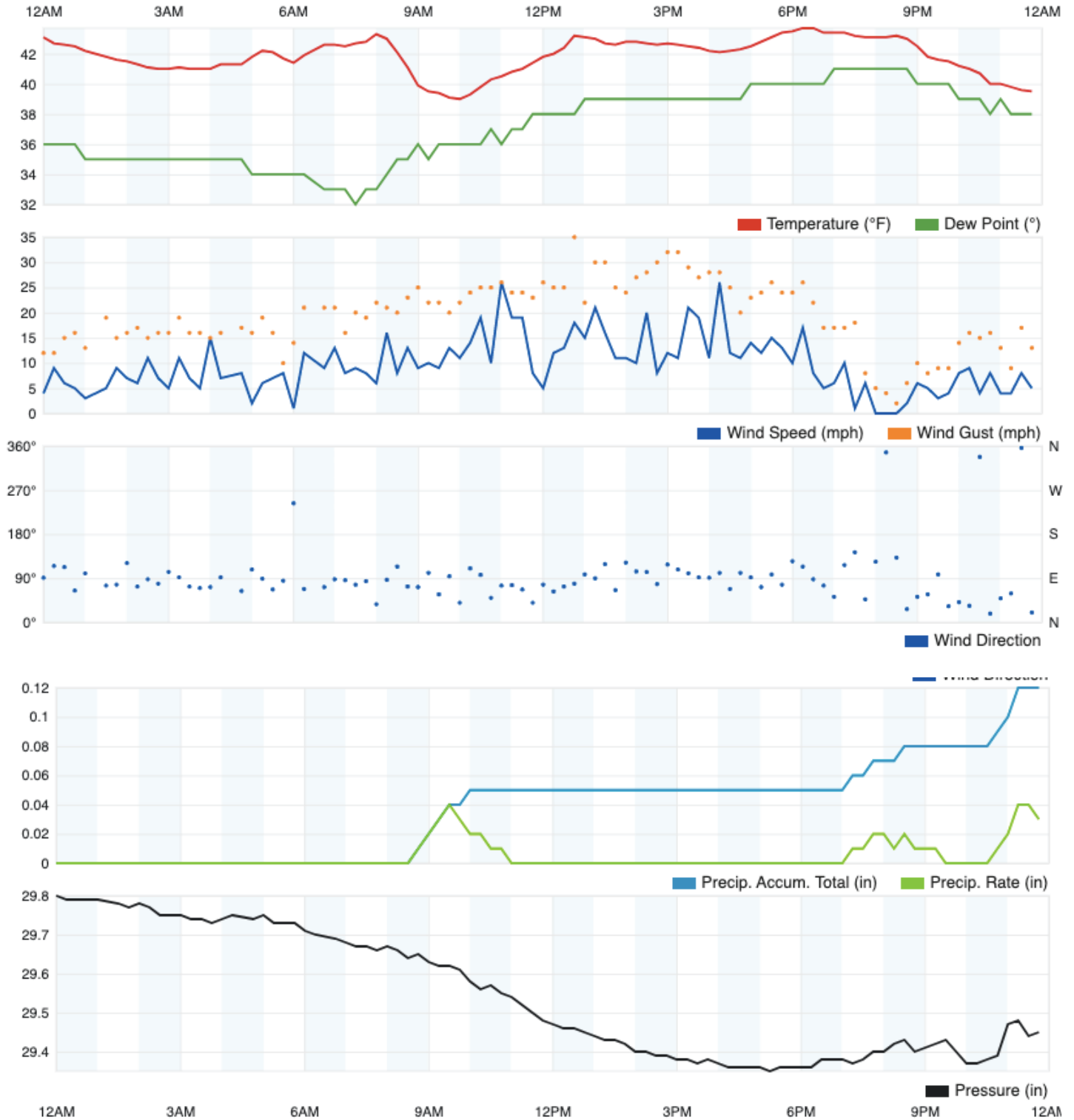


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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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High Wind Warning

Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Mostly Cloudy and Windy	Slight Chance Snow and Breezy 20%	Chance Snow and Windy 30%	Decreasing Clouds and Blustery	Partly Sunny and Breezy
High: 37 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 33 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 33 °F



Wind Timing & Intensity

April 13, 2022
4:09 AM

	4/13 Wed											4/14 Thu																															
	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm			
Aberdeen	38	40	44	46	47	48	48	48	47	45	44	41	40	40	40	40	41	41	41	43	43	44	44	45	46	47	48	49	49	49	48	47	46	45	41	39	36	36	35	35	35		
Britton	38	40	44	46	47	48	48	47	46	45	43	40	40	39	40	40	40	41	41	41	43	43	44	44	45	46	47	48	48	48	48	47	46	44	41	38	36	36	36	36	36		
Eagle Butte	44	45	47	48	49	51	51	51	51	49	49	48	48	47	47	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	47	47	48	48	48	48	47	46	45	43	40	38	36	33	31	30			
Eureka	38	41	45	47	49	51	51	51	49	48	47	45	45	45	45	46	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	48	48	49	49	49	49	48	47	45	43	40	38	36	35	33	33			
Gettysburg	43	46	48	51	52	53	53	53	52	51	49	48	48	48	48	48	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	51	52	52	53	53	53	52	51	48	46	43	40	39	38	37	36			
Kennebec	41	44	46	48	49	49	51	51	49	48	47	46	45	44	43	43	41	41	41	41	41	43	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	49	49	48	47	45	43	40	38	36	33	31	30		
McIntosh	43	45	47	49	51	53	53	53	53	53	53	52	52	51	51	51	51	51	51	49	49	48	48	48	49	49	51	52	52	52	52	51	49	48	46	45	43	39	37	35	33		
Milbank	40	41	41	43	43	43	43	43	43	41	41	40	40	40	40	40	40	41	41	41	43	43	44	44	45	46	48	49	52	52	52	51	48	45	43	38	35	33	33	32	31		
Miller	41	44	45	47	48	48	48	47	46	45	44	43	41	41	41	41	41	43	43	44	45	45	46	47	48	49	51	51	51	49	47	45	43	40	37	36	33	32	31				
Mobridge	39	43	45	47	49	51	51	51	49	47	46	44	45	46	47	48	49	51	49	48	47	45	44	43	43	44	45	46	47	47	46	45	44	41	39	37	35	33	32	32			
Murdo	43	46	48	51	53	54	54	54	53	52	51	48	47	46	45	45	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	45	46	47	48	49	51	51	49	48	46	44	40	38	36	33	31	30		
Pierre	40	44	46	48	51	52	52	52	51	48	47	45	44	43	41	41	40	40	40	41	41	43	43	44	45	45	46	47	48	49	51	51	51	49	47	46	43	40	37	36	33	32	31
Redfield	40	43	46	48	49	51	51	49	47	45	43	40	39	39	39	40	40	41	43	43	44	45	45	46	47	48	49	51	51	51	49	47	46	43	40	37	36	33	32	31			
Sisseton	43	44	45	45	46	46	45	45	44	43	40	39	39	39	39	40	40	41	43	44	46	47	48	49	51	52	53	53	53	52	51	48	46	43	39	36	35	35	33	33			
Watertown	39	43	45	46	47	48	48	47	47	45	44	41	40	39	39	39	40	40	41	43	44	46	47	48	49	51	52	52	53	52	51	48	46	44	40	37	36	35	33	33			
Wheaton	29	31	33	36	37	38	38	38	37	36	35	33	32	32	32	31	31	31	32	33	36	38	40	41	44	45	47	48	48	48	48	47	45	43	40	37	33	32	32	31	30		

*Table values in mph
**Created: 3 am CDT Wed 4/13/2022
***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Strong winds will expand across eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota through the day with windy conditions that will persist for parts of the area into Friday. Not a lot of additional snow with the system, but reduced visibility is possible with snow showers.

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Temperature and Wind Chills

April 13, 2022
4:11 AM

Much below average temperatures for mid-April

- High temperatures in the upper 20s to mid 40s for the next 7 days
- Low temperatures in the teens to mid-20s for the next 7 nights
- Wind chills approaching zero for several nights

Minimum Temperature Forecast

	4/13	4/14	4/15	4/16	4/17	4/18
	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Aberdeen	26	24	21	19	24	25
Britton	26	22	19	18	22	24
Eagle Butte	16	16	16	15	24	20
Eureka	22	19	16	13	20	19
Gettysburg	20	17	16	15	24	20
Kennebec	21	19	20	20	29	25
McIntosh	18	16	13	9	19	15
Milbank	29	26	22	21	23	28
Miller	23	19	19	17	25	24
Mobridge	22	20	19	17	25	23
Murdo	16	18	19	19	29	24
Pierre	22	21	21	20	29	24
Redfield	24	21	20	18	25	24
Sisseton	29	24	22	22	24	27
Watertown	26	22	20	19	23	25
Wheaton	29	23	20	20	22	26

Maximum Temperature Forecast

	4/13	4/14	4/15	4/16	4/17	4/18
	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Aberdeen	37	33	32	36	37	37
Britton	38	30	29	33	35	34
Eagle Butte	27	29	30	36	35	37
Eureka	31	28	27	30	33	33
Gettysburg	31	31	31	38	36	36
Kennebec	37	39	40	45	44	42
McIntosh	24	25	25	26	29	31
Milbank	42	35	33	36	38	36
Miller	37	35	37	41	40	39
Mobridge	33	34	32	35	37	40
Murdo	34	38	39	45	45	42
Pierre	36	38	38	44	43	43
Redfield	37	35	35	39	38	38
Sisseton	41	33	31	35	37	35
Watertown	42	32	31	34	36	34
Wheaton	41	32	29	33	35	33

*Table values in °F

**Created: 3 am CDT Wed 4/13/2022

***Values are minimums over the period beginning at the time shown.

*Table values in °F

**Created: 3 am CDT Wed 4/13/2022

***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Cold airmass has moved in today, and will persist through the next several days. Highs will average some 10 to 20 degrees below normal, with lows in the teens and 20s.



Temperature and Wind Chills

April 13, 2022
4:13 AM

Much below average temperatures for mid-April

- High temperatures in the upper 20s to mid 40s for the next 7 days
- Low temperatures in the teens to mid-20s for the next 7 nights
- Wind chills approaching zero for several nights

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast

	4/13 Wed				4/14 Thu				4/15 Fri				4/16 Sat					
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm
Aberdeen	10	17	24	21	13	10	8	7	11	18	19	16	11	9	7	7	9	20
Britton	14	17	24	17	11	9	9	7	8	12	15	10	6	5	4	4	5	15
Eagle Butte	-6	4	9	6	0	-3	-3	-4	-2	6	12	8	4	2	0	-1	1	9
Eureka	5	9	15	12	4	1	1	0	1	5	10	9	5	2	0	-1	1	5
Gettysburg	2	8	14	10	2	-1	-2	-2	3	11	15	10	5	3	1	0	4	10
Kennebec	5	15	22	15	5	3	2	0	5	16	25	19	11	7	7	6	11	19
McIntosh	-1	0	4	0	-3	-4	-4	-5	-4	1	5	4	0	-2	-4	-5	-3	1
Milbank	17	23	28	22	15	13	11	9	13	20	21	16	12	10	7	7	9	17
Miller	6	15	23	15	5	4	1	-1	6	16	21	16	10	7	5	4	8	18
Mobridge	5	11	18	12	6	5	2	2	6	13	20	13	9	7	5	5	7	13
Murdo	-1	11	18	10	4	2	-1	-1	2	15	25	15	9	6	4	4	7	18
Pierre	4	16	21	18	11	7	4	3	7	19	24	18	13	11	9	8	11	19
Redfield	8	18	24	19	9	7	4	2	8	16	22	16	10	9	7	6	8	17
Sisseton	15	21	26	20	16	14	12	10	13	17	18	13	10	9	6	7	9	14
Watertown	10	18	25	19	11	8	6	4	6	13	18	13	11	8	5	5	7	13
Wheaton	22	26	26	21	15	12	10	9	10	14	17	11	8	7	5	4	5	10

*Table values in °F

**Created: 3 am CDT Wed 4/13/2022

***Values are minimums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Today in Weather History

April 13, 1986: A significant spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas, it was the worst blizzard ever.

April 13, 1995: Flooding, resulting from snowmelt from the two major snowstorms in April and saturated soils, caused extensive road damage and inundation. The flooding caused several road closings and numerous flooded basements in many counties. Also, many lakes were overfull in Day and Campbell Counties. Flooded farmland caused severe delays in small grain planting. Spink, Sully, McPherson, and Brown Counties were declared disasters.

April 13, 2010: Unyielding south winds developed over central and northeast South Dakota in the early afternoon and continued into the early evening hours. South winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to near 70 mph caused some structural and shingled damage across the area. A pickup on Interstate-90 lost a camper to the high winds. The high winds, combined with lowered humidity and dry fuels, helped fan several grassland fires across the region. The most substantial fire started from a downed power line in Campbell County near the town of Glenham. The fire grew to be five miles long by two miles wide and traveled eight miles before it was under control. Almost 6000 acres were burned with nearly 20 fire departments dispatched.

1877 - The second coastal storm in just three days hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The first storm flattened the sand dunes at Hatteras, and widened the Oregon inlet three quarters of a mile. The second storm produced hurricane force winds along the coast of North Carolina causing more beach erosion and land transformation. (David Ludlum)

1955 - The town of Axis, AL, was deluged with 20.33 inches of rain in 24 hours establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A major spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas it was the worst blizzard ever. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in northern Texas produced wind gusts to 98 mph at the Killeen Airport causing a million dollars property damage. Two airplanes were totally destroyed by the high winds, and ten others were damaged. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced high winds across North Carolina, with gusts to 78 mph reported at Waves. The high winds combined with high tides to cause coastal flooding and erosion. About 275 feet of land was eroded from the northern tip of Pea Island. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in central Florida produced golf ball size hail and a tornado near Lakeland FL. Fair and mild weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1999: A two-mile-wide area of wind-driven hail pounded residences and farm equipment for about a 5 mile stretch at least as far as State Highway 158 in west Texas near Midland/Odessa. Hail grew up to about golf ball size and winds peaked at approximately 80 mph. The wind-driven hail broke windows in houses and blasted paint off the wooden siding. The strong winds took roofs off several mobile homes and at least one single-family house. Utility crews stated that the winds downed a total of 27 poles. The American Red Cross determined that 324 units were affected with 18 mobile homes and four houses destroyed. About 50-60 families were at least temporarily displaced.

2006: An F2 tornado hit Iowa City, Iowa and trekked across other Southeast parts of the University of Iowa campus doing 15+ million dollars damage hurting 30 people and damaging or destroying 1051 buildings. The roof/steeple/ bricks fell from the St. Patrick's Church shortly after 75 parishioners had taken to the rectory basement next door.

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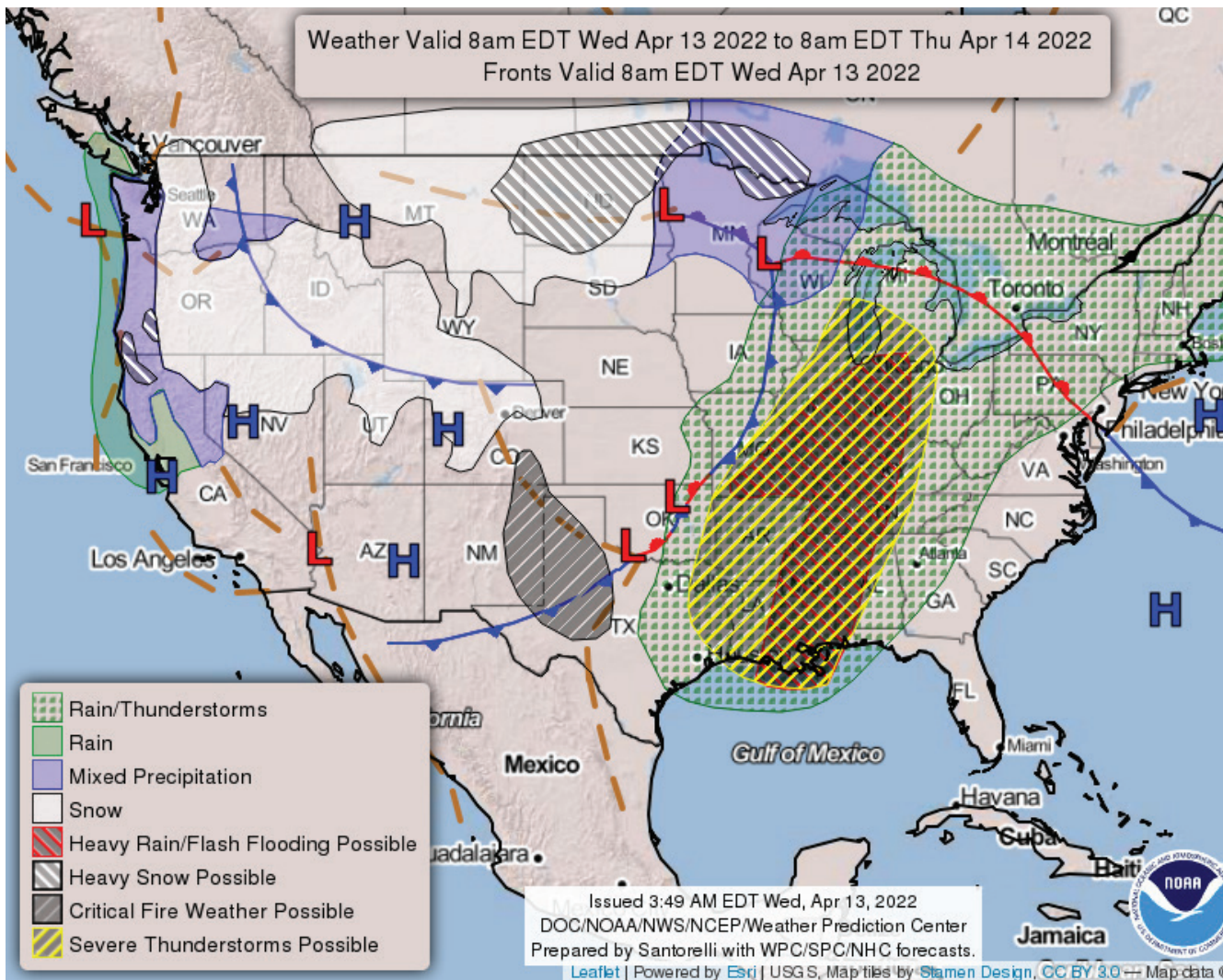
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 6:17 PM
Low Temp: 39 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 35 mph at 12:42 PM
Precip: 0.13

Day length: 13 hours, 29 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 2003
Record Low: 9 in 2013
Average High: 57°F
Average Low: 30°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.62
Precip to date in April.: 1.79
Average Precip to date: 2.68
Precip Year to Date: 3.59
Sunset Tonight: 8:17:22 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:46:33 AM



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MERCY WITHOUT MEASURE

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were the first spies ever to be executed for conspiracy to commit espionage for giving information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. As a result of their conviction, they were put to death in the electric chair in Sing Sing Prison, New York.

In his summation at the end of the grueling and bitter trial, the lawyer for the Rosenbergs said with deep emotion, "Your Honor, what my clients ask for is justice."

"The court has given what you have asked for - justice!" replied Judge Irving Kaufman. "What you really wanted is mercy. But that is something that this court has no right to give."

This response from the judge has a scriptural bearing: no one is good - no one in all the world. Every one of us has sinned. If God gave us justice, each one of us would have our place in hell - separated from God forever.

We are reminded of this fact in Psalm 130:3 where we read, "If You, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?" He then answers it with a gracious promise that brings the peace of God: "But with You there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve You."

If God kept a record of our sins - or if He held a grudge against us - we could say that He purposefully built a barrier between Himself and us so that we would be separated from Him forever.

But He did not do that. He sent His one and only begotten Son to be our one and only Savior. Now, we have access to Him, when we repent, because of His mercy.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Your willingness to forgive us of our sins and grant us Your love and salvation. Your mercy is a treasure to us! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. Psalm 130:3-4

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2022 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$106 million

Powerball

05-07-24-31-34, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 2

(five, seven, twenty-four, thirty-one, thirty-four; Powerball: four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$288 million

Man fatally shot by Rapid City police last month identified

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota state investigators have identified the man who died in a police shooting in Rapid City last month.

The Division of Criminal Investigation said Barney Leroy Peoples Jr. was shot by officers who responded to a report of a residential burglary.

The chief of staff for the state attorney general, Tim Bormann, says two Rapid City officers discharged their weapons during an encounter with Peoples on March 26. He was pronounced dead at the scene. No officers were injured, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Rapid City police and the Pennington County Sheriff's Office said earlier that officers entered a closed door inside the home and encountered the suspect, who was pointing a long gun at them.

DCI continues to investigate.

Capitol, government offices, schools close due to blizzard

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A blizzard has led to the closure of the North Dakota Capitol and other state facilities in the Bismarck area, as well as scores of schools, colleges, government offices and highways Tuesday.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for most of western and central North Dakota where up to 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow is forecast through Thursday. Locally higher amounts up to 30 inches (80 centimeters) are possible.

"This is nutso," Karley Gosch, of Mandan, said as she braved the strong winds and pelting snow while walking across the city's Main Street.

No travel was advised in the southwest and south central regions and authorities closed Interstate 94 from the Montana border to Jamestown, a distance of about 260 miles (418.43 kilometers). A 50-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 52 was shut down from Jamestown to Carrington. Officials said the conditions were life-threatening.

"This is going to be historic for some areas," said Jason Anglin, lead meteorologist for the weather service's Bismarck office. "It's going to be tough to travel, the impact to the ranching community is going to be big, even the impact to the power community — there's going to be a lot of water in this snow; it could bring down trees and bring down power lines."

Gov. Doug Burgum directed the state closures, noting that the Emergency Operations Center has been activated and is coordinating with partners and local emergency managers statewide to ensure that resources, including search and rescue, are available.

Bismarck and Mandan public schools were among those closed Tuesday. Schools sent students home with laptops in preparation for several snowbound days of virtual instruction, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

Bismarck State College and United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck canceled classes through Thurs-

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day. Dickinson State University will move to virtual instruction Tuesday through Thursday. Williston State College will close for the week at midday Tuesday.

Not everyone in the Capital City was deterred by conditions. The Bismarck City Commission held its regularly scheduled meeting at downtown building Tuesday evening despite numerous vehicles becoming stuck in the streets, including a semi-trailer truck.

The nasty weather moved into northeastern North Dakota late in the day, where the Highway Patrol said a 46-year-old man suffered "moderate injuries" when he rear-ended a snowplow in Grand Forks, near the Minnesota border. The patrol reported blizzard conditions at the time.

The University of North Dakota in Grand Forks called off classes for Wednesday.

A sliver of southeastern North Dakota, including the state's largest city, Fargo, was expected to avoid heavy snow, the National Weather Service said. Flights at the city's airport were arriving and departing mostly at scheduled times.

The blizzard warning extended into eastern Montana and the northwestern corner of South Dakota. Several schools were closed in both states. The storm's timing couldn't be worse for ranchers in all three states worried about spring calving.

South Dakota attorney general impeached over fatal crash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Tuesday impeached state Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg over a 2020 car crash in which he killed a pedestrian but initially said he might have struck a deer or another large animal.

Ravnsborg, a Republican, is the first official to be impeached in South Dakota history. He will at least temporarily be removed from office pending the historic Senate trial, where it takes a two-thirds majority to convict on impeachment charges. The Senate must wait at least 20 days to hold its trial, but has not yet set a date.

Ravnsborg pleaded no contest last year to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash, including making an illegal lane change. He has cast Joseph Boever's death as a tragic accident.

In narrowly voting to impeach the state's top prosecutor, the Republican-controlled House charged Ravnsborg with committing crimes that caused someone's death, making "numerous misrepresentations" to law enforcement officers after the crash and using his office to navigate the criminal investigation. A Senate conviction would mean Ravnsborg would be barred from holding any state office in the future.

"When we're dealing with the life of one of your citizens, I think that weighed heavily on everyone," said Republican Rep. Will Mortenson, who introduced the articles of impeachment.

Ravnsborg said in a statement he is looking forward to the Senate trial, "where I believe I will be vindicated."

Meanwhile, Tim Bormann, the attorney general's chief of staff, said his staff would "professionally dedicate ourselves" to their work while Ravnsborg is forced to take a leave.

Ravnsborg, who took office in 2019, was returning home from a Republican dinner in September 2020 when he struck and killed Boever, who was walking along a rural highway. A sheriff who responded after Ravnsborg called 911 initially reported it as a collision with an animal. Ravnsborg has said he did not realize he hit a man until he returned the next day and found the body.

The Highway Patrol concluded that Ravnsborg's car crossed completely onto the highway shoulder before hitting Boever, and criminal investigators said later that they didn't believe some of Ravnsborg's statements.

The House rejected the recommendation of a GOP-backed majority report from a special investigative committee, which argued that anything wrong he did was not part of his official duties "in office." But even Republican lawmakers who argued his actions did not meet constitutional grounds for impeachment said Ravnsborg should resign.

"He should have stepped down, should have done the honorable thing," said House Speaker Spencer Gosch, who oversaw the House investigation and voted against impeachment.

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The articles of impeachment required approval from a majority of the 70 members of the House and passed by just one vote.

Of the 36 people who voted in favor, eight were Democrats and 28 were Republicans. The 31 against it were all Republicans. Republican Rep. Scott Odenbach recused himself because he had given legal advice to the attorney general after the crash. Two other Republican lawmakers were absent.

Ravnsborg, who had been largely silent about the crash and was not present for the vote, sent lawmakers a pair of defiant letters Monday night urging them not to impeach him.

"In a few hours, your vote will set a precedent for years to come," Ravnsborg wrote. "No state has ever impeached an elected official for a traffic accident."

He also accused Republican Gov. Kristi Noem of interfering in the investigation and of supporting impeachment because of the attorney general's investigations into her behavior.

After Ravnsborg fell out with the governor following the crash, he pushed a pair of ethics complaints against Noem to the state's Government Accountability Board. His office is also investigating whether an organization aligned with the governor broke campaign finance disclosure laws.

Noem lauded the vote on Twitter, writing that the House "did the right thing for the people of South Dakota and for Joe Boever's family."

The decision brought some relief for his family, who his wedding photo as they watched from the House gallery during the vote. They have decried the criminal prosecution as a "slap on the wrist" for Ravnsborg.

"We're a step closer to justice. We're not done," said Boever's cousin, Nick Nemec.

"Now we just need the Senate's help on this because these laws need to be changed badly," said Jennifer Boever, who was married to Boever. "People are getting hurt and killed, and the pedestrian has no self-defense against a 4,000 pound (1,814 kilogram) vehicle."

Man gets 2 years for multistate motorized golf cart thefts

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A Florida man linked to dozens of motorized golf cart thefts in the Upper Midwest was sentenced Tuesday to two years in federal prison.

The FBI began investigating Nathan Rodney Nelson in July 2019 after the Cass County Sheriff's Office in Fargo, North Dakota, asked for help in solving a series of golf cart thefts starting in 2017 in the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Nelson, a former Minnesota resident living in Apollo Beach, Florida, was eventually arrested in June 2020 while he was caught trying to steal golf carts from a dealer in Donalsonville, Georgia. He also was carrying pre-printed serial number labels and burglary tools, according to court documents.

Investigators say he stole at least 63 golf carts in seven states, worth at least \$283,500.

Nelson would typically steal carts in pairs from rural Midwestern golf courses, usually at night. He sold many of the carts under the alias Mason Weber, at a cost of about \$2,500 each, court documents show.

Defense attorney Lorelle Moeckel said in a sentencing memorandum that her client was not able to keep his business going and pay his bills. He came up with the idea to steal golf carts to solve his financial problems and "from there it became easier and easier for him to stray from his long held moral compass."

Nelson pleaded guilty in December to interstate transportation of stolen property. His sentencing calls for him to serve three years of supervised release and pay back about \$14,000.

Polish, Baltic presidents head to Ukraine in show of support

By ADAM SCHRECK and OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The presidents of four countries on Russia's doorstep headed to Kyiv on Wednesday in a show of support for Ukraine, after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to continue his bloody seven-week offensive until its "full completion."

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — all NATO countries that worry they may face Russian attack in the future if Ukraine falls — were due to meet the Ukrainian leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In one of the most crucial battles of the war, Russia said more than 1,000 Ukrainian troops surrendered

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in the besieged port of Mariupol. The information could not be verified, and it's not clear how significant it would be, if true.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24 with the goal, according to Western officials, of taking Kyiv, toppling the government and installing a Moscow-friendly one. In the seven weeks since, the ground advance stalled and Russian forces lost potentially thousands of fighters — and the war has forced millions of Ukrainians to flee, rattled the world economy, threatened global food supplies and shattered Europe's post-Cold War balance.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday called Russia's actions in Ukraine "a genocide" for the first time, saying "Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

Zelenskyy applauded Biden's use of the word, saying "calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil."

"We are grateful for US assistance provided so far and we urgently need more heavy weapons to prevent further Russian atrocities," he added in his tweet.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said the leaders headed to Ukraine on Wednesday had "a strong message of political support and military assistance."

Nausėda, Estonian President Alar Karis, Poland's Andrzej Duda and Egils Levits of Latvia also plan to discuss investigations into alleged Russian war crimes, including the massacre of civilians.

Putin has denied his troops committed atrocities, and on Tuesday insisted Russia "had no other choice" but to invade and that the offensive aimed to protect people in parts of eastern Ukraine and to "ensure Russia's own security." He vowed it would "continue until its full completion and the fulfillment of the tasks that have been set."

He insisted Russia's campaign was going as planned despite a major withdrawal and significant losses.

Thwarted in their push toward the capital, Russian troops are now gearing up for a major offensive in the eastern Donbas region, where Russian-allied separatists and Ukrainian forces have been fighting since 2014, and where Russia has recognized the separatists' claims of independence. Military strategists say Moscow believes local support, logistics and the terrain in the region favor its larger, better-armed military, potentially allowing Russia to finally turn the tide in its favor.

Britain's defense ministry said Wednesday that "an inability to cohere and coordinate military activity has hampered Russia's invasion to date." Western officials say Russia recently appointed a new top general for the war, Alexander Dvornikov, to try to get a grip on its campaign.

A key piece to that campaign is Mariupol, which lies in the Donbas and which the Russians have besieged and pummeled since nearly the start of the war. Pockets of the city appeared to be still under Ukraine's control — but it's not clear how many forces are still defending it.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 1,026 troops from the Ukrainian 36th Marine Brigade had surrendered in the city. It was unclear when the alleged surrenders occurred.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych did not comment on the allegation, but said in a post on Twitter that elements of the same brigade managed to link up with other Ukrainian forces in the city as a result of a "risky maneuver."

Zelenskyy adviser Mykhailo Podoliak said on Twitter that the city's defenders were short of supplies but were "fighting under the bombs for each meter of the city. They make (Russia) pay an exorbitant price."

Ukrainian forces in Mariupol have alleged that a drone dropped a poisonous substance on the city. The assertion by the Azov Regiment, a far-right group now part of the Ukrainian military, could not be independently verified. The regiment indicated there were no serious injuries.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said Tuesday officials were investigating, and it was possible phosphorus munitions — which cause horrendous burns but are not classed as chemical weapons — had been used in Mariupol, which has been pummeled by weeks of Russian assaults.

Deliberately firing phosphorus munitions into an enclosed space to expose people to fumes could breach the Chemical Weapons Convention, said Marc-Michael Blum, a former laboratory head at the Netherlands-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Western officials warned that any use of chemical weapons by Russia would be a serious escalation of

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the already devastating war. Zelenskyy said that while experts try to determine what the substance might be, "The world must react now."

In Washington, a senior U.S. defense official said the Biden administration was preparing another package of military aid for Ukraine to be announced in the coming days, possibly totaling \$750 million. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans not yet publicly announced.

Biden used the word "genocide" about Russia's actions during a visit to Iowa. He said it would be up to lawyers to decide if Russia's conduct met the international standard for genocide, but said "it sure seems that way to me."

Neither he nor his administration announced new consequences for Russia or assistance to Ukraine following the assessment.

An investigation into war crimes is already underway in Ukraine, including into atrocities revealed after Moscow's retreat from cities and towns around Kyiv.

Zelenskyy said evidence of "inhuman cruelty" toward women and children in Bucha and other suburbs of Kyiv continued to surface, including alleged rapes.

More than 720 people were killed in Kyiv suburbs that had been occupied by Russian troops and over 200 were considered missing, the Interior Ministry said early Wednesday.

In Bucha alone, Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said 403 bodies had been found and the toll could rise as mine-sweepers comb the area.

In the Chernihiv region, villagers said more than 300 people had been trapped for almost a month by the occupying Russian troops in the basement of a school and only allowed outside to go to the toilet or cook on open fires.

Valentyna Saroyan told The Associated Press she saw at least five people die in Yahidne, 140 kilometers (86 miles) north of Kyiv. In one of the rooms, the residents wrote the names of those who perished during the ordeal — the list counted 18 people.

Ukraine's prosecutor-general's office said Tuesday it was also looking into events in the Brovary district, which lies to the northeast of the capital. It said the bodies of six civilians were found with gunshot wounds in a basement in the village of Shevchenkove and Russian forces were believed to be responsible.

Prosecutors are also investigating allegations that Russian forces fired on a convoy of civilians trying to leave by car from the village of Peremoha in the Brovary district, killing four people including a 13-year-old boy. In another attack near Bucha, five people were killed including two children when a car was fired upon, prosecutors said.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said humanitarian corridors used to get people out of cities under Russian attack will not operate on Wednesday because of poor security.

Forced into a basement in Ukraine, residents began to die

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI Associated Press

YAHIDNE, Ukraine (AP) — The Russian soldiers forced more than 300 villagers into a school basement. Then, during weeks of stress and deprivation, some began to die.

Residents of Yahidne, a village 140 kilometers (87 miles) from Kyiv, told The Associated Press about being ordered into the basement at gunpoint after the Russians took control of the area around the northern city of Chernihiv in early March.

In one room, those who survived wrote the names of the 18 who didn't.

"An old man died near me and then his wife died next," Valentyna Saroyan, a weary survivor, recalled Tuesday as she toured the darkened basement. "Then a man died who was lying there, then a woman sitting next to me. She was a heavy woman, and it was very difficult for her."

Village by village, town by town, Ukrainians in areas where Russians have withdrawn continue to unearth new horrors. More are feared.

The residents of Yahidne, which is on the outskirts of Chernihiv, said they were made to remain in the basement day and night except for the rare times when they they were allowed outside to cook on open

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fires or to use the toilet.

The health of the captives suffered.

"Here's a chair, and that's how we were sitting for a month," Saroyan said, recalling her aching legs.

As people died one by one in the basement, neighbors were allowed from time to time to place the bodies in a mass grave in a nearby cemetery.

Each time, they passed through a doorway marked in dripping red paint with the plaintive words "Attention. Children." The glare of a flashlight shows bright drawings on the walls.

The Russians could be cruel, surviving villagers said.

Svitlana Baguta said a Russian soldier who was "either drunk or high" made her drink from a flask at gunpoint.

"He pointed the gun at the throat, put the flask and said, 'Drink,'" Baguta said.

Julia Surypak said the soldiers allowed some people to make a short trip to their homes if they sang the Russian state anthem. "But they didn't allow us to walk much," she said.

The Russian forces left the village at the beginning of April, part of a regional withdrawal from northern Ukraine. Russia's military ordered in anticipation of after a large offensive in the east.

A message scrawled on a wall of the Yahidne school marked April 1 as "the last day" of their presence.

The soldiers left behind unexploded artillery shells, destroyed Russian vehicles and rubble.

Russia has yet to slow a Western arms express into Ukraine

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Western weaponry pouring into Ukraine helped blunt Russia's initial offensive and seems certain to play a central role in the approaching, potentially decisive, battle for Ukraine's contested Donbas region. Yet the Russian military is making little headway halting what has become a historic arms express.

The U.S. numbers alone are mounting: more than 12,000 weapons designed to defeat armored vehicles, some 1,400 shoulder-fired Stinger missiles to shoot down aircraft and more than 50 million rounds of ammunition, among many other things. Dozens of other nations are adding to the totals.

The Biden administration is preparing yet another, more diverse, package of military support possibly totaling \$750 million to be announced in the coming days, a senior U.S. defense official said Tuesday. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss plans not yet publicly announced. The additional aid is a sign that the administration intends to continue expanding its support for Ukraine's war effort.

These armaments have helped an under-gunned Ukrainian military defy predictions that it would be quickly overrun by Russia. They explain in part why Russian President Vladimir Putin's army gave up, at least for now, its attempt to capture Kyiv, the capital, and has narrowed its focus to battling for eastern and southern Ukraine.

U.S. officials and analysts offer numerous explanations for why the Russians have had so little success interdicting Western arms moving overland from neighboring countries, including Poland. Among the likely reasons: Russia's failure to win full control of Ukraine's skies has limited its use of air power. Also, the Russians have struggled to deliver weapons and supplies to their own troops in Ukraine.

Some say Moscow's problem begins at home.

"The short answer to the question is that they are an epically incompetent army badly led from the very top," said James Stavridis, a retired U.S. Navy admiral who was the top NATO commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013.

The Russians also face practical obstacles. Robert G. Bell, a longtime NATO official and now a professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech University, said the shipments lend themselves to being hidden or disguised in ways that can make them elusive to the Russians — "short of having a network of espionage on the scene" to pinpoint the convoys' movements.

"It's not as easy to stop this assistance flow as it might seem," said Stephen Biddle, a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University. "Things like ammunition and shoulder-fired missiles

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can be transported in trucks that look just like any other commercial truck. And the trucks carrying the munitions the Russians want to interdict are just a small part of a much larger flow of goods and commerce moving around in Poland and Ukraine and across the border.

"So the Russians have to find the needle in this very big haystack to destroy the weapons and ammo they're after and not waste scarce munitions on trucks full of printer paper or baby diapers or who knows what."

Even with this Western assistance it's uncertain whether Ukraine will ultimately prevail against a bigger Russian force. The Biden administration has drawn the line at committing U.S. troops to the fight. It has opted instead to orchestrate international condemnation and economic sanctions, provide intelligence information, bolster NATO's eastern flank to deter a wider war with Russia and donate weapons.

In mid-March, a Russian deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said arms shipments would be targeted.

"We warned the United States that pumping weapons into Ukraine from a number of countries as it has orchestrated isn't just a dangerous move but an action that turns the respective convoys into legitimate targets," he said in televised remarks.

But thus far the Russians appear not to have put a high priority on arms interdiction, perhaps because their air force is leery of flying into Ukraine's air defenses to search out and attack supply convoys on the move. They have struck fixed sites like arms depots and fuel storage locations, but to limited effect.

On Monday, the Russians said they destroyed four S-300 surface-to-air missile launchers that had been given to Ukraine by an unspecified European country. Slovakia, a NATO member that shares a border with Ukraine, donated just such a system last week but denied it had been destroyed. On Tuesday, the Russian Ministry of Defense said long-range missiles were used to hit two Ukrainian ammo depots.

As the fighting intensifies in the Donbas and perhaps along the coastal corridor to the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula, Putin may feel compelled to strike harder at the arms pipeline, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called vital to his nation's survival.

In the meantime, a staggering volume and range of war materiel is arriving almost daily.

"The scope and speed of our support to meeting Ukraine's defense needs are unprecedented in modern times," said John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary. He said the approximately \$2.5 billion in weapons and other material that has been offered to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden administration is equivalent to more than half of Ukraine's normal defense budget.

One example: The Pentagon says it has provided more than 5,000 Javelin missiles, which are among the world's most effective weapons against tanks and other armored vehicles — and can even take down a low-flying helicopter. The missile, shaped like a clunky dumb bell and weighing 50 pounds (23 kilograms), is fired by an individual soldier; from its launch tube it flies up at a steep angle and descends directly onto its target in what its known as a curveball shot — hitting the top of a tank where its armor is weakest.

The specific routes used to move the U.S. and other Western materials into Ukraine are secret for security reasons, but the basic process is not. Just this week, two U.S. military cargo planes arrived in Eastern Europe with items ranging from machine guns and small arms ammunition to body armor and grenades, the Pentagon said.

A similar load is due later this week to complete delivery of \$800 million in assistance approved by President Joe Biden just one month ago. The weapons and equipment are offloaded, moved onto trucks and driven into Ukraine by Ukrainian soldiers for delivery.

Kirby said the material sometimes reaches troops in the field within 48 hours of entering Ukraine.

'It can't be fixed:' In shattered Irpin, signs of homecoming

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

IRPIN, Ukraine (AP) — Pounding sounds came from a sixth-floor window, along with the risk of falling glass. For once, it was not destruction in the Ukrainian town of Irpin, but rebuilding. Heartened by Russia's withdrawal from the capital region, residents have begun coming home, at least to what's left.

Irpin just weeks ago saw desperate scenes of flight. Terrified residents picked their way across slippery

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planks of a makeshift bridge after a concrete span was destroyed by Ukrainian forces to slow the Russian advance. But on Monday, a long line of cars waited to cross a recently improvised bridge allowing access between the town and the capital, Kyiv.

The early returnees are among the 7 million Ukrainians displaced inside their country by the war. They are crossing paths with the elderly and others who waited out Russia's assault in cold, damp basements, numbed by the sounds of shelling, and who have emerged into a landscape of ruined tanks and splintered homes.

In colorful Irpin apartment blocks where cafes and salons are still silent, there are the first signs of life amid the shattered glass and scorched walls. It feels like a turning point, even as police officers with flashlights continue to walk through near-empty buildings, looking for bodies and mines.

Upstairs and down a darkened hallway, Olexiy Planida worked to place a sheet of plastic over a large window facing a damaged playground. This was his first time home since he fled with his wife, two small children and their dog. The remains of breakfast, including a half-eaten bowl on a high chair, were where they left them. Nearby pots of flowers had wilted. A stuffed toy lay amid broken glass.

"It hurts," the 34-year-old Planida said. The Russians broke open all the apartment doors and took a laptop, iPad and jewelry. He's sure it was the Russians because local thieves pick the locks instead.

"I think for a couple of years it can't be fixed," he said of Irpin's homes, many of which have suffered similar damage or worse.

He hopes his children, ages 2 and 4, will never see their home the way it is now. He hopes they'll never remember the war itself, which he and his wife have tried to explain in the gentlest of terms.

"We're just talking to them like, 'Hey, some bad guys came to us,'" he said. "They shouldn't see such things." Even he was shocked by the ruins in parts of Irpin and in Bucha nearby.

Down the hallway, Oksana Lyul'ka cleared the broken glass from her living room floor, using work gloves to carry pieces as large as dinner plates.

Just months ago the 28-year-old had returned to Ukraine from Cyprus to start a new life closer to home, and she renovated the apartment. Now the structural damage alone is a concern, along with her missing jewelry.

She had arrived at the apartment an hour earlier. Downstairs, she cried.

She fled Irpin on the second day of the war and moved in with her parents. Now she is based in Kyiv, not so far away.

"We can't make plans for now," she said. "Our plan is to win the war, and then we will decide what to do with the apartment. It's not that important now."

Because the Russians remain in Ukraine they complicate any real recovery, she said. "We all feel pain and it's hard and it's terrible, but people are suffering, people are dying, and this is the main problem."

Near the slowly reviving bridge linking Irpin to the capital, dozens of cars that had been abandoned by fleeing residents were being placed in rows. Some were burned. Some were smashed. Some had the remnants of their owners' last seconds before giving up and going on foot: a coffee thermos. Face masks. Glove compartments left open, documents scattered.

Now people are showing up at the lot to look for what they left behind.

Not all find it. One man sat on the curb, holding two photographs, and wept. His brother was gone.

Giants' Alyssa Nakken becomes 1st MLB female coach on field

By JANIE McCAULEY AP Baseball Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Alyssa Nakken was hard at work in the batting cage, just a few steps from the dugout, when suddenly the call came: The San Francisco Giants needed her to coach at first base.

She quickly pulled off her sweatshirt, grabbed her No. 92 jersey and found a bright orange batting helmet.

A few minutes later, Nakken made major league history as the first female coach on the field in a regular-season game when she took her spot Tuesday night in a 13-2 win over San Diego.

"I think we're all inspirations doing everything that we do on a day-to-day basis and I think, yes, this

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carries a little bit more weight because of the visibility, obviously there's a historical nature to it," she said. "But again, this is my job."

Nakken came in to coach first base for the Giants in the third inning after Antoan Richardson was ejected.

When she was announced as Richardson's replacement, Nakken received a warm ovation from the crowd at Oracle Park, and a congratulatory handshake from Padres first baseman Eric Hosmer.

"Right now in this moment as I reflect back, I reflect back to somebody needed to go out, we needed a coach to coach first base, our first base coach got thrown out, I've been in training as a first base coach for the last few years and work alongside Antoan, so I stepped in to what I've been hired to do, is support this staff and this team," Nakken said.

The baseball Hall of Fame was ready, too. Her helmet is already on its way to the shrine in Cooperstown, New York.

San Francisco manager Gabe Kapler said Nakken had "prepared for this moment" while working with Richardson and others.

"So it's not a foreign spot on the field for her. She does so many other things well that aren't seen," he said. "So it's nice to see her kind of be right there in the spotlight and do it on the field."

Nakken is an assistant coach who works heavily with baserunning and outfield defense. She watches games from an indoor batting cage near the steps to the dugout — and keeps a Giants jersey nearby, just in case she needs it.

And in an instant Tuesday night, she needed it.

The 31-year-old Nakken jogged onto the field four days after Rachel Balkovec became the first woman to manage a minor league affiliate of an Major League Baseball team. She guided the New York Yankees' Class A Tampa club to a win in her first game.

Nakken had previously coached the position in spring training and during part of a July 2020 exhibition game at Oakland against now-Padres manager Bob Melvin when he was skipper of the Athletics. She started at first again a night later against the A's in San Francisco as the teams prepared for the pandemic-delayed season.

"You feel a sense of pride to be out there," Nakken said at the time. "Me personally, it's the best place to watch a game, that's for sure."

The former Sacramento State softball star, whose blonde braid hung out from her orange protective helmet Tuesday, became the first female coach in the big leagues when she was hired for Kapler's staff in January 2020.

At Sacramento State from 2009-2012, Nakken was a three-time all-conference player at first base and four-time Academic All American. She went on to earn a master's degree in sport management from the University of San Francisco in 2015 after interning with the Giants' baseball operations department a year earlier.

From Day One with the Giants, Nakken embraced her role as an example for girls and women that they can do anything.

"It's a big deal," she said. "I feel a great sense of responsibility and I feel it's my job to honor those who have helped me to where I am."

Biden: Russia war a 'genocide,' trying to 'wipe out' Ukraine

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — President Joe Biden said Russia's war in Ukraine amounted to "genocide," accusing President Vladimir Putin of trying to "wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

"Yes, I called it genocide," he told reporters in Iowa on Tuesday shortly before boarding Air Force One to return to Washington. "It's become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

At an earlier event in Menlo, Iowa, addressing spiking energy prices resulting from the war, Biden had

implied that he thought Putin was carrying out genocide against Ukraine, but offered no details. Neither he nor his administration announced new consequences for Russia or assistance to Ukraine following Biden's public assessment.

Biden's comments drew praise from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had encouraged Western leaders to use the term to describe Russia's invasion of his country.

"True words of a true leader @POTUS," he tweeted. "Calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil. We are grateful for US assistance provided so far and we urgently need more heavy weapons to prevent further Russian atrocities."

A United Nations treaty, to which the U.S. is a party, defines genocide as actions taken with the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Past American leaders often have dodged formally declaring bloody campaigns such as Russia's in Ukraine as genocide, hesitating to trigger an obligation that under international convention requires signing countries to intervene once genocide is formally identified. That obligation was seen as blocking President Bill Clinton from declaring Rwandan Hutus' killing of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis in 1994 as genocide, for example.

Biden said it would be up to lawyers to decide if Russia's conduct met the international standard for genocide, as Ukrainian officials have claimed, but said "it sure seems that way to me."

"More evidence is coming out literally of the horrible things that the Russians have done in Ukraine, and we're only going to learn more and more about the devastation and let the lawyers decide internationally whether or not it qualifies," he said.

Just last week Biden said he did not believe Russia's actions amounted to genocide, just that they constituted "war crimes."

During a trip to Europe last month, Biden faced controversy for a nine-word statement seemingly supporting regime change in Moscow, which would have represented a dramatic shift toward direct confrontation with another nuclear-armed country. "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power," Biden said.

He clarified the comments days later, saying: "I was expressing the moral outrage that I felt toward this man. I wasn't articulating a policy change."

Ukrainian in Japan returns home to help parents, country

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — As millions of Ukrainians fled their country, a longtime Tokyo resident did the opposite. Sasha Kaverina left her life in Japan and rushed to Ukraine to rescue her parents after a Russian missile hit their apartment building.

Kaverina's main goal in returning was to get her parents out of their hometown of Kharkiv, the second-largest city in battered eastern Ukraine, to a safer place in western Ukraine. But Kaverina, who had organized fund-raising and antiwar rallies in Japan for her homeland, also delivered medicine, first-aid kits and other relief goods.

Like many Ukrainian expats around the world, the war in her homeland has upended her life. Despite reports of horrendous Russian attacks, she said she is not afraid for herself, but for her parents and relatives.

Because of her antiwar and pro-Ukraine activities in Japan, she fears that the Russians could persecute or kill those close to her if they return to Kharkiv, which is now under fierce attack and may fall under Russian control.

"A lot of Ukrainians are worried (that) if Russians occupy us, pro-Ukrainian people would be killed," as they were in Bucha and other cities, she said in an online interview from Chernivtsi, a city in southwestern Ukraine near the border with Romania where she took her parents.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Since then, more than 4 million Ukrainians have fled the country and millions more have been displaced internally.

Kaverina's parents narrowly survived in early March when a Russian missile badly damaged their eighth-floor apartment in a 16-story building and forced them to evacuate to their relatives' home in the suburbs.

After nearly two days on planes and buses, Kaverina made it to Chernivtsi, where she reunited with her

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parents, who had driven across the country from Kharkiv to meet her.

She is renting an apartment in Chernivtsi for her parents while she does remote work for her job at an IT company in Japan, where she intends to return, and volunteers as an aid worker with the help of her parents.

Ukrainian officials have urged residents in eastern Ukraine to evacuate to the west. But even in Chernivtsi the family can hear air-raid warning sirens at night, though they haven't experienced actual bombings, she said.

Some people go to shelters every night, and the place may not be safe any more, Kaverina said.

Whenever a door bangs or they hear footsteps, her parents immediately jump, apparently because of trauma from the missile attack on their apartment.

Kaverina worries about more Russian atrocities.

"If Kharkiv is occupied, people who have been mentioned in the media or known for their pro-Ukrainian positions, they may be targeted. I have no problem ... but I'm worried about my parents," she said, requesting anonymity for her parents. "My parents will be targeted for being with me and for their pro-Ukrainian activities."

Several times a day, her parents call their relatives, friends and colleagues in Kharkiv to make sure everyone is safe and alive. They worry whenever anyone is unreachable.

One of her father's acquaintances was taken to "a filtering camp" where Russians forced residents to remove their shirts to look for any tattoos indicating a pro-Ukrainian stance, Kaverina said.

Her father can't leave the country because of local laws, she said, and she hasn't been able to persuade her mother to fly back to Tokyo with her. Her parents want to return as soon as possible to their hometown, where her father's 89-year-old mother has stayed behind because of old age.

"My parents ask me every day when they can go back to Kharkiv, and I say, 'No, you cannot,'" she said. "They want to go back to get their photos, not TV, money or documents. ... It's so sad and maybe stupid, but for them it's their whole life."

Kaverina said their apartment in Kharkiv is uninhabitable, but her parents, like many others, still hope to rebuild. To her, their determination seems linked to Ukraine's strong resistance to the Russians.

Kaverina, who has been in Japan for five years, said she has seen a lack of tolerance for foreign residents and diversity in Japan. So she was surprised by Tokyo's quick pledge to accept displaced Ukrainians, even though Japan does not expect many will come. Rather than going to a faraway, unfamiliar Asian country, most Ukrainians are turning to Europe, hoping to return home at some point.

About 400 war-displaced Ukrainians have arrived in Japan, where a number of municipalities and companies are offering to provide housing, language lessons and jobs.

The biggest hurdle for many Ukrainians is to get plane tickets to Japan, she said, because they have lost their jobs, homes and money since the invasion.

Japan was quick to join the United States and other leading economies in imposing sanctions against Russia and providing support for Ukraine. Tokyo has also sent nonlethal defense equipment such as helmets and bulletproof vests to Ukraine as an exception to its arms equipment transfer ban to countries in conflict.

Japan can also contribute to disaster relief, including sending construction equipment, Kaverina said. Because many people died under rubble while awaiting rescue, Kaverina said that she plans to reach out to Komatsu or other Japanese construction machine makers for help.

"I had been just an ordinary long-time resident in Japan until a month ago, but what happened changed not only the lives of Ukrainians (in the country) but also the lives of Ukrainians abroad," she said.

Police hunt gunman who wounded 10 in Brooklyn subway attack

By JENNIFER PELTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Police hunted late into the night for the gunman who opened fire Tuesday on a subway train in Brooklyn, an attack that left 10 people wounded by gunfire and once again interrupted New York City's long journey to post-pandemic normalcy.

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The search focused partly on a man who police say rented a van possibly connected to the violence.

Investigators stressed they weren't sure whether the man, Frank R. James, was responsible for the shooting. But authorities were examining social media videos in which the 62-year-old decried the United States as a racist place awash in violence and sometimes railed against the city's mayor, Eric Adams.

"This nation was born in violence, it's kept alive by violence or the threat thereof and it's going to die a violent death. There's nothing going to stop that," James said in one video.

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell called the posts "concerning" and officials tightened security for Adams.

The gunman sent off smoke grenades in a crowded subway car and then fired at least 33 shots with a 9 mm handgun, police said. Five gunshot victims were in critical condition but expected to survive. At least a dozen people who escaped gunshot wounds were treated for smoke inhalation and other injuries.

One passenger, Jordan Javier, thought the first popping sound he heard was a book dropping. Then there was another pop, people started moving toward the front of the car, and he realized there was smoke, he said.

When the train pulled into the station, people ran out and were directed to another train across the platform. Passengers wept and prayed as they rode away from the scene, Javier said.

"I'm just grateful to be alive," he said.

The shooter fled in the chaos, leaving behind the gun, extended magazines, a hatchet, detonated and undetonated smoke grenades, a black garbage can, a rolling cart, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van.

That key led investigators to James, who has addresses in Philadelphia and Wisconsin, said Chief of Detectives James Essig. The van was later found, unoccupied, near a subway station where investigators determined the gunman had entered the train system, Essig said.

Rambling, profanity-filled YouTube videos apparently posted by James, who is Black, are replete with violent language and bigoted comments, some against other Black people.

One video, posted April 11, criticizes crime against Black people and says drastic action is needed.

"You got kids going in here now taking machine guns and mowing down innocent people," James says. "It's not going to get better until we make it better," he said, adding that he thought things would only change if certain people were "stomped, kicked and tortured" out of their "comfort zone."

Several videos mention New York's subways.

A Feb. 20 video says the mayor and governor's plan to address homelessness and safety in the subway system "is doomed for failure" and refers to himself as a "victim" of the city's mental health programs. A Jan. 25 video criticizes Adams' plan to end gun violence.

Adams, who is isolating following a positive COVID-19 test on Sunday, said in a video statement that the city "will not allow New Yorkers to be terrorized, even by a single individual."

WH environmental justice advisors press for Justice40 action

BY DREW COSTLEY AP Science Writer

Key members of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council said Tuesday that the Biden administration hadn't done enough to make good on its promise that 40% of all benefits from climate investment go to disenfranchised communities.

Speaking at a press briefing ahead of the HBCU Climate Change Conference in New Orleans, the council members said they've secured \$14 million from the Bezos Earth Fund for a program called Engage, Enlighten and Empower to hold the Biden administration accountable for carrying out its Justice40 initiative.

President Biden made the commitment in a sweeping executive order on his first day in office. The initiative has been held up as an unprecedented push to bring environmental justice to communities long plagued by pollution and climate inaction.

The three members of the federal environmental justice council leading the \$14 million-dollar effort, Beverly Wright, Peggy Shepard and Robert Bullard, have been working closely with the administration on Justice40.

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But Wright told members of the press that more needs to be done to “turn a novel idea into a project that works.”

The trio are combining philanthropic grants from the Bezos Earth Fund, \$6 million from Shepard’s WE ACT for Environmental Justice, \$4 million from Wright’s Deep South Center for Environmental Justice and \$4 million from the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice, to ensure federal funding from Justice40 “goes where it’s intended,” Shepard said.

The effort should “ensure equitable implementation of the Justice40 initiative at the state and local level and empower local communities to participate in the policy-making” that comes as a result of the initiative, a press release said.

The funds will go to educate grassroots organizations on the resources available to them through Justice40, inform state and local governments on how the money should be used, and develop a screening tool to determine where Justice40 funds are needed most, one that includes racial demographic data. Controversially a federal screening tool used by the administration does not take into account the racial makeup of communities.

There has been little change on the ground yet from the Justice40 pledge because the federal government is still trying to figure out which communities are most in need of the investment. In recommendations to the Biden administration, many reputable environmental justice advocates pushed for a methodical, intentional process for identifying disadvantaged communities and disbursing funds.

At the briefing, Wright and Bullard said they’ve seen past federal social and infrastructure projects fail to deliver on promises to disadvantaged communities and don’t want to see it happen again.

“There’s been a lot of really novel approaches at changing the lives of Americans in general that have worked out” benefitting just white Americans, Wright said.

Bullard pointed to discrimination in how flood relief was distributed in Texas, where the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice is located, as an example.

California reparations panel to meet in San Francisco

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — California’s first-in-the-nation reparations task force meets in person Wednesday, the first time members have gathered face-to-face since their inaugural meeting nearly a year ago and mere weeks after the group voted to limit restitution to descendants of enslaved Black people.

The two-day event will be held at Third Baptist Church in San Francisco’s historic Fillmore district, a neighborhood once thriving with African American night clubs and shops until government redevelopment forced out residents. Its pastor is Rev. Amos Brown, task force vice chair and president of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation creating the two-year reparations task force in 2020, making California the only state to move ahead with a mission to study the institution of slavery, educate the public about its findings and develop remedies. Reparations at the federal level has not gone anywhere, but cities and universities across the country are taking up the issue.

In a dramatic vote last month, California’s task force voted 5-4 to limit reparations to descendants of people who can show they are descended from enslaved or free Black people in the U.S. as of the 19th century. Those who favor broader eligibility says lineage-based reparations unfairly shuts out Black people who have also suffered systemic discrimination.

Since its inaugural meeting in June, the nine-member panel has dedicated much of its time to hearing from experts in weighty areas such as housing and homelessness, racism in banking and discrimination in technology.

Wednesday’s agenda includes testimony from experts in education, while on Thursday, the committee is scheduled to discuss a report to be made public in June that shows how the institution of slavery continues to reverberate throughout California, including in the form of disparities in household income, health, employment and incarceration.

Task force members were appointed by the governor and the leaders of the two legislative chambers. A plan for reparations is due to the Legislature in 2023.

A million empty spaces: Chronicling COVID's cruel US toll

By ADAM GELLER, CARLA K. JOHNSON and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

On the deadliest day of a horrific week in April 2020, COVID took the lives of 816 people in New York City alone. Lost in the blizzard of pandemic data that's been swirling ever since is the fact that 43-year-old Fernando Morales was one of them.

Two years and nearly 1 million deaths later, his brother, Adam Almonte, fingers the bass guitar Morales left behind and visualizes him playing tunes, a treasured blue bucket hat pulled low over his eyes. Walking through a park overlooking the Hudson River, he recalls long-ago days tossing a baseball with Morales and sharing tuna sandwiches. He replays old messages just to hear Morales' voice.

"When he passed away it was like I lost a brother, a parent and a friend all at the same time," says Almonte, 16 years younger than Morales, who shared his love of books, video games and wrestling, and worked for the city processing teachers' pensions. "I used to call him just any time I was going through something difficult and I needed reassurance, knowing he would be there... That's an irreplaceable type of love."

If losing one person leaves such a lasting void, consider all that's been lost with the deaths of 1 million.

Soon, likely in the next few weeks, the U.S. toll from the coronavirus will surpass that once unthinkable milestone. Yet after a two-year drumbeat of deaths, even 1 million can feel abstract.

"We're dealing with numbers that humans are just not able to comprehend," says Sara Cordes, a professor of psychology at Boston College who studies the way people perceive quantity. "I can't comprehend the lives of 1 million at one time and I think this is sort of self-preservation, to only think about the few that you have heard about."

It goes far beyond faces and names.

COVID-19 has left an estimated 194,000 children in the U.S. without one or both of their parents. It has deprived communities of leaders, teachers and caregivers. It has robbed us of expertise and persistence, humor and devotion.

Through wave after wave, the virus has compiled a merciless chronology of loss -- one by one by one.

It began even before the threat had really come into focus. In February 2020, an unfamiliar respiratory illness started spreading through a nursing home outside Seattle, the Life Care Center of Kirkland.

Neil Lawyer, 84, was a short-term patient there, recovering after hospitalization for an infection. On the last Wednesday of the month he joined other residents for a belated Mardi Gras party. But the songs that filled the entertainment room were interrupted by frequent coughing. Before week's end, the facility was in lockdown. Days later Lawyer, too, fell ill.

"By the time he got to the hospital they allowed us to put on these space suits and go in and see him," son David Lawyer says. "It was pretty surreal."

When the elder Lawyer died of complications from COVID-19 on March 8, the U.S. toll stood at 30. Eventually 39 Life Care residents and seven others linked to the facility perished in the outbreak.

By any account, Lawyer -- known to his family as "Moose" -- lived a very full life. Born on a Mississippi farm to parents whose mixed-race heritage subjected them to bitter discrimination, he became the first in his family to graduate from college.

Trained as a chemist, he took an assignment in Belgium with a U.S. company and stayed for more than two decades. Fellow expats knew him for his devotion to coaching baseball and for the rich baritone he brought to community theater and vocal ensembles.

"He had the most velvet-like voice," says Marilyn Harper, who harmonized with Lawyer many times. "He loved to perform, but not in a showy way. He just got such great pleasure."

After Lawyer and his wife retired to Bellevue, Washington to be near two of their children, he embraced his role as grandfather of 17.

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When his energy for performing diminished, he visited clubs to hear his grandson play guitar. At weddings, he joined his sons, grandson and nephew to serenade brides and grooms in a makeshift ensemble dubbed the Moose-Tones.

Last October, when one of his granddaughters married, it marked the first family affair without Lawyer there to hold court. The Moose-Tones went on without him.

"He would have just been beaming because, you know, it was the most important thing in the world to him late in life, to get together with family," David Lawyer says.

By the end of March 2020, deaths in the U.S. topped 3,500 and the federal government's lead expert on infectious diseases, Dr. Anthony Fauci, predicted COVID would eventually take more than 100,000 lives.

Still, the idea that the toll could reach 1 million was "almost certainly off the chart," he said at the time. "Not impossible, but very, very unlikely."

Then deaths in the Northeast began to soar. President Donald Trump dropped talk of reopening the nation by Easter. In April, the U.S. surpassed Italy as the country with the most COVID deaths.

At first the virus appeared to bypass Mary Jacq McCulloch, who tested negative after others in her Chapel Hill, North Carolina nursing home were quarantined.

McCulloch, once a teacher in Tennessee, had long been the spark plug of her family, prone to dancing in supermarket aisles and striking up conversations with complete strangers.

When the 87-year-old became sick late that month, her children, all grown, gathered at her bedside and by phone.

The eldest, Julie McCulloch-Brown, recounted childhood nights falling asleep to the sound of her mother's bridge parties, "everybody laughing and a sense of being safe, that all was right with the world." The youngest, Drew, thanked his mother for the energy she gave to raising them, sometimes working multiple jobs to pay the bills.

McCulloch died the next afternoon, April 21, 2020. By day's end, the U.S. toll had eclipsed 47,000.

Her death came at the height of a North Carolina spring. Now, with the season here again, daughter Karen McCulloch is reminded of their drives together to gaze at the trees in blossom. Mary Jacq's favorite were the redbuds.

"They are stunning magenta," Karen says. "I can't see one in bloom without thinking, 'Mom would love this.' Kind of like her – brightly colored and demanding attention."

By late spring of 2020 the pandemic seemed to be loosening its grip. That is until governors moved to reopen their states and deaths spiraled again, especially in the south and southwest.

Luis Alfonso Bay Montgomery had worked straight through the pandemic's early months, piloting a tractor through the lettuce and cauliflower fields near Yuma, Arizona. Even after he began feeling sick in mid-June, he insisted on laboring on, says Yolanda Bay, his wife of 42 years.

By the time Montgomery, 59, was rushed to a hospital two weeks later, he required intubation, his body racked by the virus and a heart attack.

He died on July 18, a day that saw the U.S. toll surpass 140,000. And for the first time since they'd met as teenagers in their native Mexico, Bay was on her own.

The couple had endured hard times together, including the loss of their first child to chickenpox and Luis' deportation after they crossed into Arizona. But they had returned, finding work, saving to buy a home in San Luis, Arizona, and raising three children.

In the months since her husband died, Bay, a taxi driver, has worked hard to keep her mind occupied. But memories find a way in.

Some evenings she imagines Luis Alfonso sitting on "his" living room couch, boots and backpack on the floor, asking the kids about their day at school.

Others, "he's in the bedroom, watching me," she says, in Spanish. Driving past the fields he plowed, she imagines him on his tractor.

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"It's time to get rid of his clothes, but ...," she says, unable to finish the sentence. "There are times that I feel completely alone. And I still can't believe it."

On December 14, 2020, cameras jockeyed for position as the nation's first COVID vaccine was administered to a New York nurse, in time for the morning news shows.

"I feel like healing is coming," she said. But the vaccines had arrived too late to save a fellow caregiver, Jennifer McClung.

At Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield, Alabama, staffers knew McClung, a longtime dialysis nurse, as "Mama Jen." When new nurses started, she took them under her wing. When staffers on other floors had questions, they called her for advice. Some nights, she woke up crying with worry about her patients, her family says.

In November, McClung, 54, and her husband, John, also a hospital worker, both tested positive.

"Mama, I feel like I'm never coming home again," McClung texted her mother, Stella Olive, from a hospital bed. Her lungs severely damaged by the virus, she died just hours before the nation's vaccination campaign began. Later that day, the U.S. toll passed 300,000.

At a memorial service, McClung's body lay dressed in nursing scrubs at her family's request. The following day, heading home after getting her first shot, nurse Christa House became so upset she had to pull over.

If only the vaccine had come in time for her friend and colleague "she might have made it," House told herself.

Today, a decal with a halo and angel's wings marks the place McClung once occupied at a third-floor nurses' station. In Olive's kitchen, a digital picture frame displays a steady stream of pictures and videos of the daughter she lost.

"I can hear her laugh. I can hear her voice," McClung's mother says. "I just can't touch her. It is the hardest thing in the world."

By early last summer, lines at vaccine sites had dwindled and daily COVID deaths had declined by tenfold. Then the virus reinvented itself.

In southwest Missouri, where immunization rates had stalled at around 20 percent in some counties, hospitals were swamped by a surge among unvaccinated residents, people like Larry Quackenbush.

Quackenbush, 60, was the glue that held his family together. After wife Cathie suffered brain damage in a car accident more than 20 years ago, he became the primary cook, carpooler and caregiver, while working as a video producer for the Assemblies of God denomination in Springfield.

When his 12-year-old son, Landon, came home from summer camp sick with COVID, Quackenbush stepped up again.

Like many in the area, the family wasn't vaccinated. The shot made Cathie nervous. Mindful of her husband's heart problems and Parkinson's disease, though, she gave Larry permission to get it. He never did.

"Even when he started feeling sick, he kept taking care of everybody," daughter Macy Sweeters says.

In July, first Larry, then Cathie were rushed to the hospital. She was able to return home a day later, but her husband remained, tethered to a ventilator.

He died on August 3, as the U.S. toll topped 614,000. In the days that followed, Sweeters and her husband moved back to Springfield from Texas to help care for her brother.

Quackenbush's own brother, Randal, who leads a church in Boston, still despairs over the vaccine skepticism. Mostly, though, he mourns the loss of a man so selfless he once gave a college classmate the shirt off his back.

"That was just kind of Larry's heart," Randal says. "He was all about helping other people."

Even when the delta wave ebbed, the toll continued to rise.

Last August, Sherman Peebles, a sheriff's deputy in Columbus, Georgia, went away for a week of leadership training. On the way home, he was laboring so hard to breathe he drove straight to the emergency

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room.

The 49-year-old Peebles was widely known in Columbus as Uncle Sherman, devoted to community, church and family.

After nearly two decades on patrol and working in the county jail, he was a fixture in the courthouse, where he was the sergeant in charge. Every Saturday, he manned a barber chair at best friend Gerald Riley's shop, dispensing small talk along with haircuts, and admonishing young customers to stay out of trouble.

At home, he doted on wife, ShiVanda, his sweetheart since high school. The couple ran a business together, renting bouncy houses and popcorn carts for parties. But their partnership was much more. After ShiVanda had a kidney transplant, he turned their trips to Atlanta for continued care into mini-vacations, taking her to Braves games and out for dinner.

"He called me his queen," she says.

In late September, as Peebles lay in the hospital, the U.S. toll topped 675,000, surpassing the number of Americans killed by the Spanish flu pandemic a century ago.

He died the following day. To make room for an estimated 300 mourners, including the mayor and police chief, the funeral service was held in a local skating rink.

Months later, Riley still arrives at the barber shop each Saturday expecting to see Peebles' truck parked outside. At day's end, he thinks back to the routine he and his friend of more than 20 years always followed when closing.

"I love you, brother," they'd tell one another.

How could Riley have known those would be the last words they'd ever share?

The doctors and nurses were fighting for their lives.

And so, at 7 p.m. every evening through the spring of 2020, Larry Mass and Arnie Kantrowitz threw open the windows to thank them, joining New York's symphony of pan banging, air horns and raucous cheers.

Mass, a psychiatrist, felt reassured by the city's energy. But he worried about his partner, whose immune system was weakened by anti-rejection drugs required after a kidney transplant. For months, Kantrowitz, a retired professor and noted gay rights activist, took refuge on their couch, watching favorite Bette Davis movies with Mass by his side.

Kantrowitz, cinnamon-bearded as a young man, had long identified with the iconic red-headed actress. "Getting old ain't for sissies," she's widely credited with saying. Even as Kantrowitz grew older and frailer, he held on to his admiration for her spunk.

It helped sustain the 81-year-old through most of last year. But that and a booster shot were not enough when the omicron variant swept the city in December.

Arnie Kantrowitz died of complications from COVID on January 21, as the toll moved nearer to 1 million.

Kantrowitz's personal papers, now in the collection of the New York Public Library, preserve a record of his decades of activism. But the 40 years he shared with Mass can only live in memory.

On days when news headlines leave Mass feeling angry about the world, he reaches out to his missing partner. What would Kantrowitz say if he were here? Words of calm and conscience were always one of his special gifts.

"He's still with me," Mass says. "He's there in my heart."

Anxieties resurface as gunfire erupts on NYC subway

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As the year began, New Yorkers shuddered at a subway crime straight out of urban nightmares — the death of a woman shoved onto the tracks by a disturbed stranger. The city's new mayor vowed to "make sure New Yorkers feel safe in our subway system."

But commuters Tuesday morning faced an attack that evoked many riders' deepest fears. A rush-hour train car filled with smoke as it pulled into a Brooklyn station. Gunshots rang out — at least 33 of them — wounding at least 10 people.

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Frightened riders fled, and so did the gunman, who remains at large.

Much is still unknown about the attack, including whether it was an act of terrorism. At a Tuesday evening press conference, authorities said they were looking for Frank R. James, 62, who they say rented a van linked to the shooting.

It was a searing reminder of the city's unyielding battle with gun violence and the specter of terror-like attacks that hangs over New York City — particularly the subway system that is its transportation backbone.

Police and security officials have made many attempts to harden the city against such attacks, putting officers on trains and platforms, installing cameras and even doing rare spot checks for weapons on passengers entering some stations.

Yet the sprawling system, with its nearly 500 stations, largely remains like the city streets themselves: Too big to guard and too busy to completely secure.

In the hours after the shooting, with the gunman still on the loose, commuters like Julia Brown had little choice but to keep riding the rails.

"It's the only way to get home — other than the express bus and then another bus and then another bus," said Brown, who works in Manhattan. "I lived through 9/11. I lived through the blackout. You just have to be as safe as you can, and just be mindful around your environment."

Mayor Eric Adams vowed after Tuesday's mass shooting to keep fighting to make the system safe.

"We're going to double down on our patrol strength," the mayor told CBS News. Even before Tuesday's violence, the mayor had vowed to increase subway patrols and launch sweeps of subway stations and trains to remove homeless people using them as shelters.

Gov. Kathy Hochul posted a photo on social media showing her riding a train hours after the shooting.

Public officials say the transportation system is crucial in the city's recovery from COVID-19. During the height of the pandemic, many New Yorkers avoided mass transit. Typical daily ridership fell from 5.5 million riders to less than a tenth of that.

But as more people return to offices, ridership is increasing. On Monday, estimated ridership was 3.1 million, according to the MTA, which operates the system.

In a rambling video posted on YouTube, James replayed recent speeches by the mayor and governor and mocked their efforts to address violence as weak and futile.

"Their plan is doomed for failure," James said in the video.

In the 1980s, New York City's subways were a symbol of urban disorder: graffiti-covered, crime-plagued and shunned by tourists.

Like the rest of the city, though, the subways have cleaned up their act in recent decades. Before COVID-19 hit, the main problem with the trains wasn't crime but overcrowding and breakdowns related to aging infrastructure.

After the Sept. 11 terror attacks, New Yorkers learned to live with the worry that the subways or other parts of the city could be a terror target.

In 2017, an Islamic State group sympathizer detonated a pipe bomb strapped to his chest in a subway station near the Port Authority Bus Terminal, injuring several bystanders.

That same year, the city began expanding the use of vehicle-blocking sidewalk barriers after two attacks. In one, a man who prosecutors said was supportive of IS drove a rented truck down a bicycle path along the Hudson River, killing eight people and maiming others. In another, a psychologically disturbed man drove a car at high speed into pedestrians in Times Square, killing one and injuring as many as 20.

In 2016, a man who prosecutors said sympathized with Osama bin Laden set off homemade bombs in Manhattan and New Jersey, injuring some bystanders, before being captured in a shootout with police. And in 2010 a man tried to set off a car bomb in Times Square, only to have it fizzle.

Christopher Herrmann, a former city police officer who is now a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said episodes like Tuesday's shooting are bound to provoke a new round of anxiety, especially among people who use the subway.

"With 9/11, you have a specific target: the World Trade Center," Herrmann said. "A lot of people can wrap their heads around that."

But the seeming randomness of this week's attack "really invokes a lot of fear and worry," he said, "because most people don't consider themselves a target."

During Tuesday's evening commute, some subway riders expressed concern while others shrugged it off as an everyday risk.

"Sadly, this is the society we're in," said rider Blanca Palacio. "We don't know when it is going to happen, where it is going to happen. It can happen anywhere. We're taking a risk every day, and it's not just in the subway. It's everywhere."

Alexi Vizhnay considered boarding a ferry across the East River after work Tuesday afternoon but decided to take his chances on the subway. It was simply the most efficient way to get home to Queens.

"There's a lot of things that happen out of your control," he said. "As tragic as it is, all I can do is remind myself to be vigilant and be cautious."

Blame Trump? Jury hears that defense at Capitol riot trial

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mentions of Donald Trump have been rare at the first few trials for people charged with storming the U.S. Capitol, but that has changed: The latest Capitol riot defendant to go on trial is blaming his actions on the former president and his false claims about a stolen election.

Dustin Byron Thompson, an Ohio man charged with stealing a coat rack from the Capitol, doesn't deny that he joined the mob on Jan. 6, 2021. But his lawyer vowed Tuesday to show that Trump abused his power to "authorize" the attack.

Describing Trump as a man without scruples or integrity, defense attorney Samuel Shamansky said the former president engaged in a "sinister" plot to encourage Thompson and other supporters to "do his dirty work."

"It's Donald Trump himself spewing the lies and using his position to authorize this assault," Shamansky told jurors Tuesday during the trial's opening statements.

Justice Department prosecutor Jennifer Rozzoni said Thompson knew he was breaking the law that day.

"He chose to be a part of the mayhem and chaos," she said.

Thompson's lawyer sought subpoenas to call Trump and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani as witnesses at his trial this week. A judge rejected that request but ruled that jurors can hear recordings of speeches that Trump and Giuliani delivered at a rally before the riot.

Thompson's jury trial is the third among hundreds of Capitol riot prosecutions. The first two ended with jurors convicting both defendants on all counts with which they were charged.

In a February court filing, Shamansky said he wanted to argue at trial that Thompson was acting at the direction of Trump and "his various conspirators." The lawyer asked to subpoena others from Trump's inner circle, including former White House strategist Steve Bannon, former White House senior adviser Stephen Miller and former Trump lawyers John Eastman and Sidney Powell.

Prosecutors said Thompson can't show that Trump or Giuliani had the authority to "empower" him to break the law. They also noted that video of the rally speeches "perfectly captures" the tone, delivery and context of the statements to the extent they are "marginally relevant" to proof of Thompson's intent on Jan. 6.

Thompson's lawyer argued that Trump would testify that he and others "orchestrated a carefully crafted plot to call into question the integrity of the 2020 presidential election." Shamansky claimed that Giuliani incited rioters by encouraging them to engage in "trial by combat" and that Trump provoked the mob by saying that "if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

Shamansky said Thompson, who lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic, became an avid consumer of the conspiracy theories and lies about a stolen election.

"This is the garbage that Dustin Thompson is listening to day after day after day," Shamansky said. "He goes down this rabbit hole. He listens to this echo chamber. And he acts accordingly."

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton ruled in March that any in-person testimony by Trump or Giuliani could

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confuse and mislead jurors.

More than 770 people have been charged with federal crimes arising from Jan. 6. Over 250 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors. Thompson is the fifth person to be tried on riot-related charges.

On Monday, a jury convicted a former Virginia police officer, Thomas Robertson, of storming the Capitol with another off-duty officer to obstruct Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory. Last month, a jury convicted a Texas man, Guy Reffitt, of storming the Capitol with a holstered handgun.

A judge hearing testimony without a jury decided cases against two other Capitol riot defendants at separate bench trials. U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden acquitted one of them of all charges and partially acquitted the other.

Thompson has a co-defendant, Robert Lyon, who pleaded guilty to riot-related charges in March.

Thompson, then 36, and Lyon, then 27, drove from Columbus, Ohio, to Silver Spring, Maryland, stayed overnight at a hotel and then took an Uber ride into Washington, D.C., on the morning of Jan. 6. After then-President Donald Trump's speech, Thompson and Lyon headed over to the Capitol.

Thompson was wearing a "Trump 2020" winter hat and a bulletproof vest when he entered the Capitol and went to the Senate Parliamentarian's Office, where he stole two bottles of liquor and a coat rack worth up to \$500, according to prosecutors.

Thompson and Lyon traded text messages during the riot.

"Some girl died already," Lyon said in one text, an apparent reference to a law enforcement officer's fatal shooting of a rioter, Ashli Babbitt

"Was it Pelosi?" Thompson replied.

"I'm taking our country back," Thompson later texted Lyon.

Around 6 p.m. on Jan. 6, Thompson and Lyon were sitting on a sidewalk and waiting for an Uber driver to pick them up when Capitol police officers approached and warned them that they were in a restricted area. As they started to leave, Thompson picked up a coat rack that appeared to be from the Capitol, the FBI said. Thompson ran away when the officers told him to put down the rack, dropping it as he fled. Lyon stayed behind and identified himself and Thompson to police.

That night, Thompson received a text from his wife that said, "I will not post bail."

The FBI said agents later searched Lyon's cellphone and found a video that showed a ransacked office and Thompson yelling: "Wooooo! 'Merica Hey! This is our house!" A surveillance video also captured Thompson leaving a Capitol office with a bottle of bourbon, the FBI said.

Thompson is charged with six counts: obstructing Congress' joint session to certify the Electoral College vote, theft of government property, entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a Capitol building, and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building.

Lyon pleaded guilty to theft of government property and disorderly conduct. Both counts are misdemeanors punishable by a maximum of 1 year imprisonment. Walton is scheduled to sentence Lyon on June 3.

Search and rescue efforts bolstered in Philippine disaster

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — As search and rescue efforts increased with the arrival of equipment, the death toll has risen to at least 56, with 28 others missing, after a summer tropical depression that unleashed days of pounding rain caused landslides and floods in the central and southern Philippines, officials said Wednesday.

Nearly 200 villagers were injured mostly in the landslides in the hard-hit city of Baybay in central Leyte province over the weekend and early Monday, officials said. Army, police and other rescuers were struggling with mud and unstable heaps of earth and debris to find the missing villagers.

More rescuers and heavy equipment, including backhoes, arrived in the landslide-hit villages in Baybay. Its mayor, Jose Carlos Cari, said the weather cleared Wednesday, allowing the search and rescue work to go full force.

"We're looking for so many more missing people," Cari said and added that authorities would do a recount to determine how many villagers were really missing and believed buried in the landslides.

Forty-seven of the dead were recovered from the landslides that hit six Baybay villages, military and local officials said. Nine other people drowned elsewhere in floodwaters in four central and southern provinces, they said.

"We are saddened by this dreadful incident that caused an unfortunate loss of lives and destruction of properties," said army brigade commander Col. Noel Vestuir, who was helping oversee the search and rescue.

Coast guard, police and firefighters rescued some villagers Monday in flooded central communities, including some who were trapped on their roofs. In central Cebu city, schools and work were suspended Monday and Mayor Michael Rama declared a state of calamity to allow the rapid release of emergency funds.

At least 20 storms and typhoons batter the Philippines each year, mostly during the rainy season that begins around June. Some storms have hit even during the scorching summer months in recent years.

The disaster-prone Southeast Asian nation also lies on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," where many of the world's volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur.

John Lee secures nominations for Hong Kong leadership race

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's former No. 2 official John Lee said Wednesday he had formally registered his candidacy in the election for the top job after securing 786 nominations to enter the race.

Lee, who resigned as chief secretary last week before declaring he would run for chief executive, is the only candidate formally entered so far for the May 8 vote. He is considered Beijing's favored candidate and a sign of the central government further tightening its control over the territory.

Lee's 786 nominations are well over 50% of the 1,454-member Election Committee that will select the next chief executive. The nomination period ends Saturday and the committee will elect the winner by absolute majority.

"It is not easy, as I have been working very hard to explain to various members what my election platform will be like," Lee told reporters.

He reiterated that he will focus on a results-oriented approach to solve problems, keeping Hong Kong competitive and setting a firm foundation for the development of Hong Kong.

Current Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam is not seeking a second term, following a rocky five years in power that spanned the COVID-19 pandemic, a crackdown on political freedoms and Beijing's rapid and growing influence over the territory.

Hong Kong's leader is chosen every five years, although the selection process is carefully orchestrated behind the scenes by Beijing. The four chief executives selected since Hong Kong's handover have all been candidates seen as favored by Beijing.

Lee told reporters Tuesday that enacting Article 23 of the Basic Law — which stipulates that Hong Kong enacts its own security law — will be a "priority." Enacting such a law was temporarily shelved after mass protests against the government in 2003.

Hong Kong's own security law should prohibit acts of treason and the theft of state secrets, as well as other offences including secession, sedition and subversion.

Beijing in 2020 imposed its own national security law in Hong Kong. Lee is a staunch advocate of the national security law, which has been used against pro-democracy activists, supporters and media, diminishing freedoms promised to Hong Kong during Britain's handover to China in 1997.

Lee, 64, rose in the civil service ranks after years in the police force. He previously said he was running for the No. 1 position out of his loyalty and love for Hong Kong, as well as a "sense of duty to the Hong Kong people."

He also said loyalty was the "basic requirement" to run as a leader of the city — comments made after Hong Kong's electoral laws were amended last year to ensure that only "patriots" loyal to Beijing can hold

office.

The new Hong Kong leader will take office on July 1.

Echoes of one million lost in the spaces they left behind

By DAVID GOLDMAN AP Photographer

Put your son in Sherman Peebles' barber chair and along with a buzz you could count on Peebles, a sheriff's deputy who cut hair as a sideline, to issue a fatherly warning about staying out of trouble.

Now, seven months after the dapper sergeant died of COVID-19, life goes on at the Columbus, Georgia, shop owned by his best friend. But the aching emptiness of Peebles' absence lingers. The brotherly affection he brought to each day, gone missing. The jokes and stories that go untold.

The pandemic has claimed nearly 1 million lives in the U.S., leaving empty spaces in homes and neighborhoods across the country, whether we are aware of them or not.

In portraits of these places left behind, emptiness claims a chair at a nurses station in a busy Alabama hospital, long occupied by a caregiver co-workers recall as "like everybody's mama."

It fills the Arizona bedroom of an 13-year-old lost to COVID, his action figures lined up just as he left them, on the dresser.

It floats, silent, over a wooded path that a retired teacher, who died in the pandemic's early months, often visited with her daughter and granddaughter to enjoy North Carolina's flowers.

You have to look carefully to see the emptiness left by the loss of 1 million souls. But in the shadows, it is all too easy to feel it.

Sherman Peebles worked as a barber on weekends, in addition to his full-time job as a sheriff's deputy. He died of COVID in September, at age 49. His best friend Gerald Riley, who owns the barber shop, still arrives each Saturday expecting to see Peebles' truck parked outside. At day's end, he thinks back to the routine he and his friend of 25 years always followed when closing. "I love you, brother," they'd tell one another. How could Riley have known those would be the last words they'd ever share?

Donovan James Jones' mother can hardly bear to go into the room of her 13-year-old son, who died from complications of COVID in November. Teresita Horne was in the hospital battling the virus herself and never got the chance to say goodbye to her only son. "It's always difficult to go into his room because I always wait for the day for him to come back. I wait for him to come home after school," says Horne, of Buckeye, Arizona. "I would say to the world if they could know one thing about Donovan, he was very kind, especially in today's climate and culture where kindness is a lost concept. I would want people to show some type of kindness to someone for no reason at all, but to be kind."

Eddy Marquez spent 33 years cutting and arranging displays at his work station at US Evergreen Wholesale Florist in New York's flower district. He died of COVID in April 2020 during the deadliest week of the outbreak in the city. His brother-in-law, who lived in the same house, died days earlier. Marquez, who was 59 and the father of three, loved plants, and the yard of the family's home is filled with the hydrangea bushes and fruit trees he tended. His daughter, Ivett Marquez, recalls that her dad worked long hours, but always set aside Sundays for family. "He was an amazing father. He was an amazing husband, an amazing person. My father was just our best friend. You know, I guess his daughter's first love," she says. "He was everything to us. A supporter, a friend, just everything. He loved his job. He loved this family. He loved his house, his plants. That was just Eddy." She now tends the plants in his place.

Mary Jacq McCulloch loved to explore the paths that wind through the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, often visiting with her daughter and granddaughter. McCulloch's death in April 2020 at 87 came at the height of spring. Now, with the season arriving again, daughter Karen McCulloch is reminded of their drives together around Chapel Hill to gaze at the trees in blossom. Mary Jacq's favorite

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were the redbuds. "They are stunning magenta," Karen McCulloch says. "I can't see one in bloom without thinking, 'Mom would love this.' Kind of like her – brightly colored and demanding attention."

Arnie Kantrowitz got sick last winter when the omicron variant swept through New York, despite holing up in his home for most of the lockdown. The author, scholar and gay rights activist died of COVID in January. He was 81. "I'm not really grieving fully yet. That's going to go on for the rest of my life," said his long-time partner Larry Mass. "It's like I'm still caring for him. He's still with me." Sometimes when world events make him angry, he thinks about what Kantrowitz would have said to bring him back to earth. He was always good at that. "He's not totally gone," Mass says. "He's there in my heart."

Luis Alfonso Bay Montgomery worked straight through the pandemic's early months in Somerton, Arizona, piloting a tractor among lettuce and cauliflower fields. Even after he began feeling sick in mid-June, he insisted on laboring on, says Yolanda Bay, his wife of 42 years. When he died, at 59, in July 2020, Bay was on her own for the first time since they'd met as teenagers in their native Mexico. In the months since her husband died, Bay, a taxi driver, has worked hard to keep her mind occupied. But memories find a way in. Driving past the fields he plowed, she imagines him on his tractor. "It's time to get rid of his clothes, but ... " she says, unable to finish the sentence. "There are times that I feel completely alone. And I still can't believe it."

Jennifer McClung, a longtime dialysis nurse, was a central figure at the nurse's station in her ward at Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield, Alabama. In November of 2020, McClung, 54, tested positive for COVID. "Mama, I feel like I'm never coming home again," she texted her mother, Stella Olive, from a hospital bed. Her lungs severely damaged by the virus, she died just hours before the nation's vaccination campaign began, on December 14. If only the vaccine had come in time, McClung "might have made it," friend and fellow nurse Christa House says. Today, a decal with a halo and angel's wings marks the place McClung once occupied at a third-floor nurses' station. "It still just seems like she could just walk through the door," McClung's mother says. "I haven't accepted that she's she's gone. I mean, a body is here one day and talking and laughing and loving and and then, poof, they're just gone."

Larry Quackenbush worked as an audio and video producer for the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination based in Springfield, Missouri. He died in August after contracting the virus while caring for his then 12-year-old son, Landon, who came home from summer camp sick with COVID. "Even when he started feeling sick, he kept taking care of everybody," daughter Macy Sweeters said. "It just hurts so much. He was my best friend."

Neil Lawyer loved to sing while his son, David, accompanied him on the piano in his living room in Bellevue, Washington. The elder Lawyer died at 84 in March 2020, among the first residents of a Seattle area nursing home who succumbed to COVID during the outbreak. At weddings, he joined his sons, grandson and nephew to serenade brides and grooms in a makeshift ensemble dubbed the Moose-Tones. Last October, when one of his granddaughters married, it marked the first family affair without Lawyer there to hold court. The Moose-Tones went on without him. "He would have just been beaming because, you know, it was the most important thing in the world to him late in life, to get together with family," David Lawyer says. "I can honestly tell you he was terribly missed."

Fernando Morales and younger brother Adam Almonte used to sit, always on the same benches, at New York's Fort Tryon Park, eating sandwiches together. On the deadliest day of a horrific week in April 2020, COVID took the lives of 816 people in New York City alone. Morales, 43, was one of them. Walking through the park, Almonte visualizes long-ago days tossing a baseball with his brother and taking in the view from their bench with sandwiches in hand. He replays old messages to just to hear Morales' voice.

"When he passed away it was like I lost a brother, a parent and a friend all at the same time," Almonte says. "That's an irreplaceable type of love."

Police focus on van renter in Brooklyn subway shooting probe

By JIM MUSTIAN, JENNIFER PELTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — A gunman wearing a gas mask set off smoke grenades and fired a barrage of bullets inside a rush-hour subway train in Brooklyn, wounding at least 10 people Tuesday, authorities said. Police were trying to track down the renter of a van possibly connected to the violence.

Chief of Detectives James Essig said investigators weren't sure whether the man, identified as Frank R. James, 62, had any link to the subway attack.

Authorities were looking at the man's apparent social media posts, some of which led officials to tighten security for New York City Mayor Eric Adams. Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell called the posts "concerning."

The attack transformed the morning commute into a scene of horror: a smoke-filled underground train, an onslaught of at least 33 bullets, screaming riders running through a station and bloodied people lying on the platform as others administered aid.

Jordan Javier thought the first popping sound he heard was a textbook dropping. Then there was another pop, people started moving toward the front of the car, and he realized there was smoke, he said.

When the train pulled into the station, people ran out and were directed to another train across the platform. Passengers wept and prayed as they rode, Javier said.

"I'm just grateful to be alive," he said.

Five gunshot victims were in critical condition but expected to survive. At least a dozen people who escaped gunshot wounds were treated for smoke inhalation and other injuries.

Sewell said the attack was not being investigated as terrorism, but that she was "not ruling out anything." The shooter's motive was unknown.

Sitting in the back of the train's second car, the gunman tossed two smoke grenades on the floor, pulled out a Glock 9 mm semi-automatic handgun and started firing, Essig said. A rider's video shows a person raising an arm and pointing at something as five bangs sound.

Passengers in the smoke-filled car pounded on the door to an adjacent car, seeking to escape, rider Juliana Fonda, who was in that adjoining car, told the news site Gothamist. Fonda is a broadcast engineer for Gothamist's owner, public radio station WNYC.

Investigators believe the shooter's gun jammed and kept him from firing more, said two law enforcement officials who weren't authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Essig said police found the weapon, along with extended magazines, a hatchet, detonated and undetonated smoke grenades, a black garbage can, a rolling cart, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van.

That key led investigators to James, who has addresses in Philadelphia and Wisconsin, the detective chief said. The van was later found, unoccupied, near a subway station where investigators determined the gunman entered the train system, Essig said.

Rambling, profanity-filled YouTube videos apparently posted by James, who is Black, are replete with Black nationalist rhetoric, violent language and bigoted comments, some of them directed at other Black people. One, posted April 11, criticizes crime against Black people and says drastic action is needed to change things.

Several videos mention New York's subways, and Adams is a recurring theme.

A Feb. 20 video says the mayor and governor's plan to address homelessness and safety in New York City's subway system "is doomed for failure" and refers to himself as a "victim" of the mayor's mental health program. A Jan. 25 video criticizes Adams' plan to end gun violence.

The attack unnerved a city on guard about a rise in gun crimes and the ever-present threat of terrorism. It left some New Yorkers jittery about riding the nation's busiest subway system and prompted officials to increase policing at transportation hubs from Philadelphia to Connecticut.

"This individual is still on the loose. This person is dangerous," Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, warned

at a midday news conference.

In Menlo, Iowa, President Joe Biden praised “the first responders who jumped in action, including civilians, civilians who didn’t hesitate to help their fellow passengers and tried to shield them.”

After people streamed out of the train, quick-thinking transit workers ushered passengers to another train across the platform for safety, transit officials said.

High school student John Butsikaris was riding that other train and initially thought the problem was mundane until the next stop, when he heard screams for medical attention and his train was evacuated.

“I’m definitely shook,” the 15-year-old said. “Even though I didn’t see what happened, I’m still scared, because it was like a few feet away from me, what happened.”

New York City has faced a spate of shootings and high-profile bloodshed in recent months, including on the city’s subways. One of the most shocking was in January, when a woman was pushed to her death in front of a train by a stranger.

Adams, a Democrat a little over 100 days into his term, has made cracking down on crime — especially in the subways — an early focus of his administration, pledging to send more police officers into stations and platforms for regular patrols. It wasn’t immediately clear whether any officers were in the station when the shootings occurred.

The mayor, who is isolating following a positive COVID-19 test on Sunday, said in a video statement that the city “will not allow New Yorkers to be terrorized, even by a single individual.”

Putin vows to press invasion until Russia’s goals are met

By YURAS KARMANAU and ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Vladimir Putin vowed Tuesday that Russia’s bloody offensive in Ukraine would continue until its goals are fulfilled and insisted the campaign was going as planned, despite a major withdrawal in the face of stiff Ukrainian opposition and significant losses.

Russian troops, thwarted in their push toward Ukraine’s capital, are now focusing on the eastern Donbas region, where Ukraine said Tuesday it was investigating a claim that a poisonous substance had been dropped on its troops. It was not clear what the substance might be, but Western officials warned that any use of chemical weapons by Russia would be a serious escalation of the already devastating war.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24, with the goal, according to Western officials, of taking Kyiv, the capital, toppling the government and installing a Moscow-friendly regime. In the six weeks since, the ground advance stalled and Russian forces lost potentially thousands of fighters and were accused of killing civilians and other atrocities.

Putin insisted Tuesday that his invasion aimed to protect people in parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed rebels and to “ensure Russia’s own security.”

He said Russia “had no other choice” but to launch what he calls a “special military operation,” and vowed it would “continue until its full completion and the fulfillment of the tasks that have been set.”

For now, Putin’s forces are gearing up for a major offensive in the Donbas, which has been torn by fighting between Russian-allied separatists and Ukrainian forces since 2014, and where Russia has recognized the separatists’ claims of independence. Military strategists say Moscow appears to hope that local support, logistics and the terrain in the region favor its larger, better-armed military, potentially allowing Russia to finally turn the tide in its favor.

In Mariupol, a strategic port city in the Donbas, a Ukrainian regiment defending a steel mill claimed a drone dropped a poisonous substance on the city. It indicated there were no serious injuries. The assertion by the Azov Regiment, a far-right group now part of the Ukrainian military, could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that while experts try to determine what the substance might be, “The world must react now.” Evidence of “inhuman cruelty” toward women and children in Bucha and other suburbs of Kyiv continued to surface, he added, including of alleged rapes.

“Not all serial rapists reach the cruelty of Russian soldiers,” Zelenskyy said.

The claims came after a Russia-allied separatist official appeared to urge the use of chemical weapons,

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telling Russian state TV on Monday that separatist forces should seize the plant by first blocking all the exits. "And then we'll use chemical troops to smoke them out of there," the official, Eduard Basurin, said. He denied Tuesday that separatist forces had used chemical weapons in Mariupol.

Ukraine's Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said officials were investigating, and it was possible phosphorus munitions — which cause horrendous burns but are not classed as chemical weapons — had been used in Mariupol.

Much of the city has been leveled in weeks of pummeling by Russian troops. The mayor said Monday that the siege has left more than 10,000 civilians dead, their bodies "carpeted through the streets." Mayor Vadym Boychenko said the death toll in Mariupol alone could surpass 20,000.

Zelenskyy adviser Mykhailo Podolyak acknowledged the challenges Ukrainian troops face in Mariupol. He said via Twitter that they remain blocked and are having issues with supplies, while Ukraine's president and generals "do everything possible (and impossible) to find a solution."

"For more than 1.5 months our defenders protect the city from (Russian) troops, which are 10+ times larger," Podolyak tweeted. "They're fighting under the bombs for each meter of the city. They make (Russia) pay an exorbitant price."

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the use of chemical weapons "would be a callous escalation in this conflict," while Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said it would be a "wholesale breach of international law."

U.S. President Joe Biden for the first time referred to Russia's invasion as a "genocide." He was even blunter later Tuesday, repeating the term and saying: "It's become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in a statement that the U.S. could not confirm the drone report. But he noted the administration's persistent concerns "about Russia's potential to use a variety of riot control agents, including tear gas mixed with chemical agents."

Britain, meanwhile, has warned that Russia may resort to phosphorus bombs, which are banned in civilian areas under international law, in Mariupol.

Most armies use phosphorus munitions to illuminate targets or to produce smoke screens. Deliberately firing them into an enclosed space to expose people to fumes could breach the Chemical Weapons Convention, said Marc-Michael Blum, a former laboratory head at the Netherlands-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

"Once you start using the properties of white phosphorus, toxic properties, specifically and deliberately, then it becomes banned," he said.

In Washington, a senior U.S. defense official said the Biden administration was preparing yet another package of military aid for Ukraine possibly totaling \$750 million to be announced in the coming days. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans not yet publicly announced. Delivery is due to be completed this week of \$800 million in military assistance approved by Biden a month ago.

In the face of stiff resistance by Ukrainian forces bolstered by Western weapons, Russian forces have increasingly relied on bombarding cities, flattening many urban areas and killing thousands. The war has driven more than 10 million Ukrainians from their homes — including nearly two-thirds of the country's children.

Moscow's retreat from cities and towns around Kyiv led to the discovery of large numbers of apparently massacred civilians, prompting widespread condemnation and accusations of war crimes.

More than 720 people were killed in Kyiv suburbs that had been occupied by Russian troops and over 200 were considered missing, the Interior Ministry said early Wednesday.

In Bucha alone, Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said 403 bodies had been found and the toll could rise as minesweepers comb the area.

Ukraine's prosecutor-general's office said Tuesday it was also looking into events in the Brovary district, which lies to the northeast.

It said the bodies of six civilians were found with gunshot wounds in a basement in the village of

Shevchenkove and Russian forces were believed to be responsible.

Prosecutors are also investigating allegations that Russian forces fired on a convoy of civilians trying to leave by car from the village of Peremoha in the Brovary district, killing four people including a 13-year-old boy. In another attack near Bucha, five people were killed including two children when a car was fired upon, prosecutors said.

Putin falsely claimed Tuesday that Ukraine's accusation that hundreds of civilians were killed by Russian troops in the town of Bucha were "fake." Associated Press journalists saw dozens of bodies in and around the town, some of whom had their hands bound and appeared to have been shot at close range.

Speaking at the Vostochny space launch facility in Russia's far east, in his first known foray outside Moscow since the war began, Putin also said the West would fail to isolate Russia and its economy has withstood a "blitz" of sanctions.

Addressing the pace of the campaign, he said Moscow was proceeding "calmly and rhythmically" to "achieve the planned goals while minimizing the losses."

The Russian defense ministry said Tuesday that it used air- and sea-launched missiles to destroy an ammunition depot and airplane hangar at Starokostiantyniv in the western Khmelnytskyi region and an ammunition depot near Kyiv.

Biden: Russia war a 'genocide,' trying to 'wipe out' Ukraine

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday said Russia's war in Ukraine amounted to "genocide," accusing President Vladimir Putin of trying to "wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

"Yes, I called it genocide," he told reporters in Iowa shortly before boarding Air Force One to return to Washington. "It's become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

At an earlier event in Menlo, Iowa, addressing spiking energy prices resulting from the war, Biden had implied that he thought Putin was carrying out genocide against Ukraine, but offered no details. Neither he nor his administration announced new consequences for Russia or assistance to Ukraine following Biden's public assessment.

Biden's comments drew praise from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had encouraged Western leaders to use the term to describe Russia's invasion of his country.

"True words of a true leader @POTUS," he tweeted. "Calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil. We are grateful for US assistance provided so far and we urgently need more heavy weapons to prevent further Russian atrocities."

A United Nations treaty, to which the U.S. is a party, defines genocide as actions taken with the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Past American leaders often have dodged formally declaring bloody campaigns such as Russia's in Ukraine as genocide, hesitating to trigger an obligation that under international convention requires signing countries to intervene once genocide is formally identified. That obligation was seen as blocking President Bill Clinton from declaring Rwandan Hutus' killing of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis in 1994 as genocide, for example.

Biden said it would be up to lawyers to decide if Russia's conduct met the international standard for genocide, as Ukrainian officials have claimed, but said "it sure seems that way to me."

"More evidence is coming out literally of the horrible things that the Russians have done in Ukraine, and we're only going to learn more and more about the devastation and let the lawyers decide internationally whether or not it qualifies," he said.

Just last week Biden had he did not believe Russia's actions amounted to genocide, just that they constituted "war crimes."

During a trip to Europe last month, Biden faced controversy for a nine-word statement seemingly supporting regime change in Moscow, which would have represented a dramatic shift toward direct confrontation with another nuclear-armed country. "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power," Biden said.

He clarified the comments days later, saying: "I was expressing the moral outrage that I felt toward this man. I wasn't articulating a policy change."

Elon Musk accused of breaking law while buying Twitter stock

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Elon Musk's huge Twitter investment took a new twist Tuesday with the filing of a lawsuit alleging that the colorful billionaire illegally delayed disclosing his stake in the social media company so he could buy more shares at lower prices.

The complaint in New York federal court accuses Musk of violating a regulatory deadline to reveal he had accumulated a stake of at least 5%. Instead, according to the complaint, Musk didn't disclose his position in Twitter until he'd almost doubled his stake to more than 9%. That strategy, the lawsuit alleges, hurt less wealthy investors who sold shares in the San Francisco company in the nearly two weeks before Musk acknowledged holding a major stake.

Musk's regulatory filings show that he bought a little more than 620,000 shares at \$36.83 apiece on Jan. 31 and then continued to accumulate more shares on nearly every single trading day through April 1. Musk, best known as CEO of the electric car maker Tesla, held 73.1 million Twitter shares as of the most recent count Monday. That represents a 9.1% stake in Twitter.

The lawsuit alleges that by March 14, Musk's stake in Twitter had reached a 5% threshold that required him to publicly disclose his holdings under U.S. securities law by March 24. Musk didn't make the required disclosure until April 4.

That revelation caused Twitter's stock to soar 27% from its April 1 close to nearly \$50 by the end of April 4's trading, depriving investors who sold shares before Musk's improperly delayed disclosure the chance to realize significant gains, according to the lawsuit filed on behalf of an investor named Marc Bain Rasella. Musk, meanwhile, was able to continue to buy shares that traded in prices ranging from \$37.69 to \$40.96.

The lawsuit is seeking to be certified as a class action representing Twitter shareholders who sold shares between March 24 and April 4, a process that could take a year or more.

Musk spent about \$2.6 billion on Twitter stock — a fraction of his estimated wealth of \$265 billion, the largest individual fortune in the world. In a regulatory filing Monday, Musk disclosed he may increase his stake after backing out of an agreement reached last week to join Twitter's board of directors.

Jacob Walker, one of the lawyers that filed the lawsuit against Musk, told The Associated Press that he hadn't reached out to the Securities and Exchange Commission about Musk's alleged violations about the disclosure of his Twitter stake. "I assume the SEC is well aware of what he did," Walker said.

An SEC spokesperson declined to comment.

The SEC and Musk have been wrangling in court since 2018 when Musk and Tesla agreed to pay a \$40 million fine to settle allegations that he used his Twitter account to mislead investors about a potential buyout of the electric car company that never materialized. As part of that deal, Musk was supposed to obtain legal approval for his tweets about information that could affect Tesla's stock price — a provision that regulators contend he has occasionally violated and that he now argues unfairly muzzles him.

Musk didn't immediately respond to a request for comment posted on Twitter, where he often shares his opinion and thoughts. Alex Spiro, a New York lawyer representing Musk in his ongoing dispute with the SEC, also didn't immediately respond to a query from The Associated Press.

EXPLAINER: Why Finkenaue's Senate bid rests on 3 signatures

By DAVID PITT and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa Democrat Abby Finkenaue's hopes of running against Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley this fall may hinge on a state Supreme Court ruling on three petition signatures.

Finkenaue's campaign was thrown into turmoil this week after a judge overturned a panel's decision that she had qualified for the ballot. Finkenaue, a former one-term congresswoman, called the ruling "deeply partisan" and appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court.

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The court, under pressure to rule quickly to meet deadlines to mail ballots to Iowa residents who live out of the country, will hear arguments Wednesday and likely will issue a decision within days. The state's primary is June 7.

Here's what you should know about the challenge to Finkenauer:

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL ARGUMENTS?

Two Republicans who have served as county election officials in Iowa challenged several signatures on Finkenauer's nomination petitions. They claimed that three signatures out of the 5,000 obtained by Finkenauer's campaign were not properly dated, as required by state law. Without the signatures from rural Allamakee and Cedar counties, Finkenauer didn't meet a requirement that at least 100 signatures come from at least 19 counties.

A three-member State Objections Panel voted 2-1 last week to reject the arguments, saying the panel has historically favored ballot access and given campaigns deference if they substantially complied with the nomination petitions law. Secretary of State Paul Pate, a Republican, voted against Finkenauer, but Attorney General Tom Miller and state Auditor Rob Sand, both Democrats, voted in favor of placing her on the ballot.

In 2020, the same three officials rejected challenges to the nomination petitions of four Republicans running for Congress that also included at least one case of a missing date. The panel's decision was not challenged further, and all four candidates, including then-state Sen. Randy Feenstra and then-U.S. Rep. Steve King, stayed on the ballot. Feenstra ultimately won the election.

This year, the panel's 2-1 decision was challenged, and the case ended up before District Judge Scott Beattie, a 2018 appointee of Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds. He disagreed with the panel, abiding by a strict reading of the law that requires each signature line to also have the date the petition was signed. His ruling eliminated the three signatures, leaving Finkenauer two counties short of the 19-county requirement.

ARE PARTISAN POLITICS TO BLAME FOR THE JUDGE'S RULING?

Finkenauer and other Democrats think so. Finkenauer, who in 2018 at age 29 became the second-youngest woman ever elected to Congress, said Judge Beattie "did the bidding of Chuck Grassley and his allies in Washington." Iowa Democratic Senate leader Zach Wahls called the ruling a "dangerous injection of partisan politics into the ballot qualification process."

But others said Finkenauer should acknowledge her own mistake in not gathering more signatures in case any ended up being thrown out.

"Regardless of which party you're from, candidates seem to get fixated on hiring staff, raising money and building websites, and forget that small detail called getting on the ballot," said Randy Evans, executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which represents media organizations and advocates for government transparency.

He also faulted her for being too quick to assume the judge had partisan motives, noting that it was a Republican-appointed Iowa Supreme Court justice who wrote the 2009 unanimous opinion that legalized gay marriage in the state. The same chief justice, the late Mark Cady, wrote the 2018 majority opinion that Iowa's constitution allows the right to an abortion.

But the challenge itself was undoubtedly political. It was brought by two Republican county election officials represented by lawyer Alan Ostergren, who has supported conservative causes and represented former President Donald Trump's campaign to nullify absentee ballots in Iowa. It's not uncommon in Iowa for political activists to challenge the nomination papers of opposite party candidates to knock them off a ballot, so the process is part of Iowa politics.

The Iowa Supreme Court decision, however, could change the landscape for such objections if it upholds the judge's decision and requires strict adherence to the letter of the law rather than allowing the "substantial compliance" standard to stand.

Although Republicans have previously benefited from the substantial compliance standard, Iowa Republican Party Chair Jeff Kauffman put all the blame on Finkenauer.

"Abby Finkenauer made the fundamental, ridiculous, illogical decision to not get more signatures that

every city council member, every single supervisor, every legislator does in case this comes up," Kauffman said. "This didn't need to happen."

WHAT WOULD A RACE WITHOUT FINKENAUER LOOK LIKE?

Although Finkenauer is the best-known Democrat in the race, her opponents question whether she is the strongest candidate to take on Grassley, who has held elected office since 1959 and will be heavily favored to win another Senate term.

Finkenauer, now 33, lost her reelection bid in 2020 after serving just one term in Congress representing a district anchored by the Cedar Rapids and Waterloo metro areas.

She won the seat by 5 percentage points in 2018 by knocking off a Republican incumbent but lost by 2.6 points to Republican Ashley Hinson, a former TV news anchor, in 2020.

Finkenauer's top Democratic competitor is Mike Franken, a retired vice admiral and 36-year naval veteran. He ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination to face Republican Sen. Joni Ernst in 2020.

Since then, Franken has kept pace with Finkenauer's fundraising, taking in \$1.8 million, just behind Finkenauer's \$1.9 million. Franken also reported having \$1 million in his campaign account as of March, compared to Finkenauer's roughly \$724,000.

"I do think Franken has broader appeal and would be a stronger candidate in Iowa against Grassley," said Nancy Bobo, a longtime Des Moines area Democratic activist and Franken's Polk County campaign chair. "He's just as strong as he can be."

Grassley, who will turn 89 in September, is seeking his eighth term in office. He had \$3.7 million in the bank as of March and is viewed favorably by 47% of Iowans and unfavorably by 41%, according to The Des Moines Register's Iowa Poll, conducted in late February and early March.

In Rio, rescue dogs watch out for their rescuers

By MARIO LOBAO Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — In Rio de Janeiro, two rescue dogs have turned local mascots and budding online influencers after joining their rescuers' ranks, wooing their growing audience, one bark at a time.

Corporal Oliveira, a dog with short brown hair thought to be around four years old, turned up one morning in 2019 at a police station on Rio's Governador Island, injured and weak.

"I gave him food, water. It took a while for him to get used to me," said Cpl. Cristiano Oliveira, the officer who took the dog under his wing and later gave him his name. But within a few days, Corporal Oliveira — the furry animal — started following his new master around the precinct. Oliveira has since joined another precinct, but the dog never left.

Corporal Oliveira has his own Instagram profile with more than 45,000 fervent followers, always hungry for more photos and videos of their mascot in his trademark police uniform, standing on top of police armoured vehicles, motorcycles or sticking his little head out of a regular patrol car's window. He even has a miniature toy firearm attached to his uniform.

A dozen miles from there, in the leafy and leftist neighborhood of Laranjeiras, another rescue dog has turned mascot.

Caramello — a name inspired by the colour of his fur — has been residing at the fire brigade that found him injured across the iconic Sugarloaf mountain ever since he was rescued nearly a year ago. During that time, the 11-year-old dog has amassed some 27,000 followers.

Older, and slightly less adventurous than Corporal Oliveira, Caramello's online efforts have focused on drawing attention to a wide range of good causes and campaigns.

He has used his newly found clout to promote awareness around cancer, or to encourage donations for victims of natural disasters such as the recent deadly landslides in Petropolis. He's also helped other rescue dogs or cats find new homes.

"Caramello is a real digital influencer," said Maj. Fabio Contreiras, from the Catete Fire Brigade, one of Rio de Janeiro's oldest.

But with fame, comes burden. And the dogs' fans are demanding.

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"Sometimes I have too much work. I go a week without posting and people complain: 'Where is (Corporal) Oliveira? Has he gone missing?'" jokes Oliveira, the police officer in charge of the dog's social media. He can get more than 200 messages in one day. Sometimes, he just has to tell them: "He's on holiday!"

Gilbert Gottfried, actor and comic's comic, dies at 67

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Gilbert Gottfried, the actor and legendary standup comic known for his raw, scorched voice and crude jokes, has died. He was 67.

Gottfried died from a rare genetic muscle disease that can trigger a dangerously abnormal heartbeat, his publicist and longtime friend Glenn Schwartz said in a statement.

"In addition to being the most iconic voice in comedy, Gilbert was a wonderful husband, brother, friend and father to his two young children. Although today is a sad day for all of us, please keep laughing as loud as possible in Gilbert's honor," his family said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Gottfried was a fiercely independent and intentionally bizarre comedian's comedian, as likely to clear a room with anti-comedy as he was to kill it with his jokes.

"The first comedian I saw who would go on and all the other comics would go in the room to watch," standup comic Colin Quinn said on Twitter.

He first came to national attention with frequent appearances on MTV in its early days and with a brief stint in the cast of "Saturday Night Live" in the 1980s.

Gottfried also did frequent voice work for children's television and movies, most famously playing the parrot Iago in Disney's "Aladdin."

"Look at me, I'm so ticked off that I'm molting," a scratchy-voiced Gottfried said early in the film as his character shed feathers.

To a younger generation he's known as the voice of Digit the bird on PBS Kids' "Cyberchase."

Gottfried was particularly fond of doing obscure and dated impressions for as long as he could milk them, including Groucho Marx, Bela Lugosi and Andrew "Dice" Clay. He would often do those voices as a guest on the Howard Stern show, prompting listeners by the dozens to call in and beg Stern to throw him off.

In his early days at the club the Comedy Store in Hollywood, the managers would have him do his impression of then-little-known Jerry Seinfeld at the end of the night to get rid of lingering patrons.

Gottfried was especially beloved by his fellow comedians and performers.

Jon Stewart said that getting to open for Gottfried was one of the great thrills of his early standup career.

"He could leave you gasping for breath," Stewart tweeted, "just indescribably unusually hilarious."

"I am so sad to read about the passing of Gilbert Gottfried," actor Marlee Matlin said on Twitter. "Funny, politically incorrect but a softie on the inside. We met many times; he even pranked me on a plane, replacing my interpreter." (Gottfried bore a close resemblance to Matlin's American Sign Language interpreter Jack Jason.)

Gottfried was interviewed by The Associated Press last month following Will Smith's Oscar night slap of Chris Rock. While he took the attack seriously, saying it might imperil other comedians, he couldn't resist wisecracks.

He said that before on stage, he "just had to worry about wearing a mask. Now I have to worry about wearing a football helmet." He later added: "If Will Smith is reading this, dear God, please don't come to my shows."

The year has already seen the loss of several beloved comedians, including Louie Anderson and Bob Saget.

In January, Gottfried tweeted a picture of the three men together, with the text, "This photo is very sad now. RIP Bob Saget and RIP Louie Anderson. Both good friends that will be missed."

Gottfried was born in Brooklyn, the son of a hardware store owner and a stay-at-home mom. He began doing amateur standup at age 15.

He thought he was getting his big break when he landed a spot on "Saturday Night Live" alongside Eddie Murphy in 1980. But he was given little to do on the show.

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He later said a low point was playing the body in a sketch about a funeral. He would last only 12 episodes. But he would find his own way, doing bits on MTV and as a both beloved and hated guest on talk shows. He had roles in "Beverly Hills Cop II" and the "Problem Child" films and presented bad movies as host of "USA Up All Night" from 1989 to 1998.

And he had recurring voice roles on "Ren and Stimpy," "The Fairly OddParents" and several spin-offs of "Aladdin."

Gottfried's schtick wasn't always popular. In 2011, Aflac Inc. fired him as the voice of the duck in its commercials over tasteless tweet the comic sent about the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Less than a month after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, at the Friars Club Roast of Hugh Hefner, Gottfried made jokes about planes making stops at skyscrapers, and was met with boos and shouts of "Too soon!" He responded with an especially foul version of the comedians' inside joke "The Aristocrats," which many in the audience took as a message that he believed it was the comic's job to remain crude at all costs.

"To me, funny is funny," he told the AP last month. "I'll regret a bit I do that just doesn't get a laugh, because it's not funny or an ad lib that doesn't work. But if it gets a laugh, I feel like, I'm the comedian and that's my job."

He made many notorious contributions to televised roasts, his harshness and love of old-timey standup style making him a perfect contributor. He took famously cruel and relentless jabs at roastees including Matlin, George Takei and Roseanne.

"Like most monsters she goes by one name," he said at the Roseanne roast in his signature style, leaning into the microphone, hands spread apart, shouting himself hoarse. "And that name is Rozilla."

"I shall miss you, my friend, my sometimes foil, my always pain in my side, usually from the belly laughs," Takei said on Twitter Tuesday. The heavens are a great deal louder with you out there now, I'm sure. Keep 'em shaking their heads and smiling, Gilbert."

Gottfried is survived by his wife Dara, sister Karen, 14-year-old daughter Lily and 12-year-old son Max.

Biden waiving ethanol rule in bid to lower gasoline prices

By WILL WEISSERT, JOSH BOAK and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

MENLO, Iowa (AP) — With inflation at a 40-year high, President Joe Biden journeyed to corn-rich Iowa on Tuesday to announce a modest step aimed at trimming gasoline prices by about a dime a gallon at a limited number of stations by waiving rules that restrict ethanol blending.

His action reflects the ways Biden is deploying almost every weapon in his bureaucratic arsenal to ease price pressures, yet the impact appears to be small and uncertain. Inflation has only accelerated in recent months, instead of fading as Biden once promised it would after the recovery from the coronavirus recession following last year's \$1.9 trillion relief package.

A government report Tuesday that consumer prices jumped 8.5% in March from a year ago — the worst reading since December 1981 — only deepened the political challenge for Biden and fellow Democrats ahead of this year's midterm elections. More than half the increase came from higher gas prices, which spiked in part because of Russia's war in Ukraine, but costs also jumped for housing, food and other items.

Biden called the inflation report "Putin's price hike."

"Your family budget, your ability to fill up your tank, none of it should hinge on whether a dictator declares war and commits genocide a half a world away," the U.S. president said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But in his remarks at the POET biofuels facility in Menlo, west of Des Moines, Biden acknowledged that the waiver on ethanol mixes was a small step.

"I'm doing everything within my power by executive orders to bring down the price," he said. "It's not going to solve all our problems, but it's going to help some people."

Most gasoline sold in the U.S. is blended with 10% ethanol, a biofuel that is currently cheaper than gas. Biden was announcing that the Environmental Protection Agency will issue an emergency waiver to allow widespread sale of a 15% ethanol blend that is usually prohibited between June 1 and Sept. 15 because

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of concerns that it adds to smog in high temperatures.

Senior Biden administration officials said the action will save drivers an average of 10 cents per gallon based on current prices, but at just 2,300 gas stations out of the nation's more than 100,000. The affected stations are mostly in the Midwest and the South, including Texas, according to industry groups.

Administration officials said the EPA has determined that the "emergency" step of allowing more E15 gasoline sales for the summer is not likely to have a significant air quality impact. That's despite some environmentalists long arguing that more ethanol in gasoline increases pollution, especially during warmer summer months.

The waiver is another effort to help ease global energy markets that have been rocked since Russia invaded Ukraine. Last month, the president announced the U.S. will release 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve over the next six months. His administration said that has helped to slightly reduce gas prices lately, after they climbed to an average of about \$4.23 a gallon by the end of March, compared with \$2.87 at the same time a year ago, according to AAA.

"Not only is this decision a major win for American drivers and our nation's energy security, it means cleaner options at the pump and a stronger rural economy," Emily Skor, CEO of the biofuel trade association group Growth Energy, said in a statement.

Members of Congress from both parties also had urged Biden to grant the E15 waiver.

"Homegrown Iowa biofuels provide a quick and clean solution for lowering prices at the pump, and bolstering production would help us become energy independent once again," said Iowa Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley. He was among nine Republican and seven Democratic senators from Midwestern states who sent Biden a letter last month urging him to allow year-round E15 sales.

The trip will be Biden's first as president to Iowa, where his 2020 presidential campaign limped to a fourth-place finish in the state's caucus. He will arrive saddled with sagging approval ratings and the high inflation while his party faces the prospect of big midterm election losses that could cost it control of Congress.

The president also planned to promote his economic plans to help rural families and highlight the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law enacted last fall. That law includes money to improve internet access, as well as for modernizing wastewater systems, reducing flooding threats and improving roads and bridges, drinking water and electric grids in sparsely populated areas.

Biden had hoped Democrats could run on the low 3.6% unemployment rate and an agenda geared toward lifting the middle class, but inflation has hijacked those ambitions and given Republicans a target for criticism.

Iowa Republican Party Chairman Jeff Kauffman was unsparing in his criticism of Biden's handling of the economy and inflation. But, he said, the temporary move on ethanol was the right one.

"First of all, let me say that that's a good thing. Absolutely good thing. It would have been nice had he done it earlier," Kauffman said. "Am I glad about this waiver? Yes I am. Is it enough? Nope."

The high inflation also poses a threat to Biden's broader domestic agenda that likely hinges on the vote of Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Manchin released a statement saying that the Biden administration and the Federal Reserve failed "to act fast enough," to curb costs for the American people and that the problem of high prices predates the invasion of Ukraine.

Manchin, whose opposition doomed Biden's 10-year, roughly \$2 trillion measure in December, had recently returned to the negotiating table with the White House. It remains unclear what impact the new inflation data will have on those negotiations.

After Iowa, Biden will visit Greensboro, North Carolina, on Thursday.

The EPA has lifted seasonal restrictions on E15 in the past, including after Hurricane Harvey in 2017. The Trump administration did so in the summer two years later but had that action struck down by a federal appeals court.

A group representing petroleum refiners blasted Biden's decision, saying the only emergency was his dropping poll numbers.

"We are right there with the administration on wanting to see relief for consumers at the pump, but an

unlawful executive order is not how to solve the problem," said Chet Thompson, president & CEO of the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers.

Blame Trump? Jury hears that defense at Capitol riot trial

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mentions of Donald Trump have been rare at the first few trials for people charged with storming the U.S. Capitol, but that changed Tuesday: The latest Capitol riot defendant to go on trial is blaming his actions on the former president and his false claims about a stolen election.

Dustin Byron Thompson, an Ohio man charged with stealing a coat rack from the Capitol, doesn't deny that he joined the mob on Jan. 6, 2021. But his lawyer vowed to show that Trump abused his power to "authorize" the attack.

Describing Trump as a man without scruples or integrity, defense attorney Samuel Shamansky said the former president engaged in a "sinister" plot to encourage Thompson and other supporters to "do his dirty work."

"It's Donald Trump himself spewing the lies and using his position to authorize this assault," Shamansky told jurors Tuesday during the trial's opening statements.

Justice Department prosecutor Jennifer Rozzoni said Thompson knew he was breaking the law that day.

"He chose to be a part of the mayhem and chaos," she said.

Thompson's lawyer sought subpoenas to call Trump and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani as witnesses at his trial this week. A judge rejected that request but ruled that jurors can hear recordings of speeches that Trump and Giuliani delivered at a rally before the riot.

Thompson's jury trial is the third among hundreds of Capitol riot prosecutions. The first two ended with jurors convicting both defendants on all counts with which they were charged.

In a February court filing, Shamansky said he wanted to argue at trial that Thompson was acting at the direction of Trump and "his various conspirators." The lawyer asked to subpoena others from Trump's inner circle, including former White House strategist Steve Bannon, former White House senior adviser Stephen Miller and former Trump lawyers John Eastman and Sidney Powell.

Prosecutors said Thompson can't show that Trump or Giuliani had the authority to "empower" him to break the law. They also noted that video of the rally speeches "perfectly captures" the tone, delivery and context of the statements to the extent they are "marginally relevant" to proof of Thompson's intent on Jan. 6.

Thompson's lawyer argued that Trump would testify that he and others "orchestrated a carefully crafted plot to call into question the integrity of the 2020 presidential election." Shamansky claimed that Giuliani incited rioters by encouraging them to engage in "trial by combat" and that Trump provoked the mob by saying that "if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

Shamansky said Thompson, who lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic, became an avid consumer of the conspiracy theories and lies about a stolen election.

"This is the garbage that Dustin Thompson is listening to day after day after day," Shamansky said. "He goes down this rabbit hole. He listens to this echo chamber. And he acts accordingly."

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton ruled in March that any in-person testimony by Trump or Giuliani could confuse and mislead jurors.

More than 770 people have been charged with federal crimes arising from Jan. 6. Over 250 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors. Thompson is the fifth person to be tried on riot-related charges.

On Monday, a jury convicted a former Virginia police officer, Thomas Robertson, of storming the Capitol with another off-duty officer to obstruct Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory. Last month, a jury convicted a Texas man, Guy Reffitt, of storming the Capitol with a holstered handgun.

A judge hearing testimony without a jury decided cases against two other Capitol riot defendants at separate bench trials. U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden acquitted one of them of all charges and par-

tially acquitted the other.

Thompson has a co-defendant, Robert Lyon, who pleaded guilty to riot-related charges in March.

Thompson, then 36, and Lyon, then 27, drove from Columbus, Ohio, to Silver Spring, Maryland, stayed overnight at a hotel and then took an Uber ride into Washington, D.C., on the morning of Jan. 6. After then-President Donald Trump's speech, Thompson and Lyon headed over to the Capitol.

Thompson was wearing a "Trump 2020" winter hat and a bulletproof vest when he entered the Capitol and went to the Senate Parliamentarian's Office, where he stole two bottles of liquor and a coat rack worth up to \$500, according to prosecutors.

Thompson and Lyon traded text messages during the riot.

"Some girl died already," Lyon said in one text, an apparent reference to a law enforcement officer's fatal shooting of a rioter, Ashli Babbitt

"Was it Pelosi?" Thompson replied.

"I'm taking our country back," Thompson later texted Lyon.

Around 6 p.m. on Jan. 6, Thompson and Lyon were sitting on a sidewalk and waiting for an Uber driver to pick them up when Capitol police officers approached and warned them that they were in a restricted area. As they started to leave, Thompson picked up a coat rack that appeared to be from the Capitol, the FBI said. Thompson ran away when the officers told him to put down the rack, dropping it as he fled. Lyon stayed behind and identified himself and Thompson to police.

That night, Thompson received a text from his wife that said, "I will not post bail."

The FBI said agents later searched Lyon's cellphone and found a video that showed a ransacked office and Thompson yelling: "Wooooo! 'Merica Hey! This is our house!" A surveillance video also captured Thompson leaving a Capitol office with a bottle of bourbon, the FBI said.

Thompson is charged with six counts: obstructing Congress' joint session to certify the Electoral College vote, theft of government property, entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a Capitol building, and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building.

Lyon pleaded guilty to theft of government property and disorderly conduct. Both counts are misdemeanors punishable by a maximum of 1 year imprisonment. Walton is scheduled to sentence Lyon on June 3.

Oklahoma governor signs bill to make abortion illegal

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt signed a bill into law on Tuesday that makes it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, as part of an aggressive push in Republican-led states across the country to scale back abortion rights.

The bill, which takes effect 90 days after the Legislature adjourns next month, makes an exception only for an abortion performed to save the life of the mother. Abortion rights advocates say the bill signed by the GOP governor is certain to face a legal challenge.

Its passage comes as the conservative U.S. Supreme Court considers ratcheting back abortion rights that have been in place for nearly 50 years.

"We want to outlaw abortion in the state of Oklahoma," Stitt said during a signing ceremony for the bill, flanked by anti-abortion lawmakers, clergy and students. "I promised Oklahomans that I would sign every pro-life bill that hits my desk, and that's what we're doing here today."

Under the bill, anyone convicted of performing an abortion would face up to 10 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine. It does not authorize criminal charges against a woman for receiving an abortion.

Sen. Nathan Dahm, a Broken Arrow Republican now running for Congress who wrote the bill, called it the "strongest pro-life legislation in the country right now, which effectively eliminates abortion in Oklahoma."

Dahm said the bill would apply to any physicians in Oklahoma who dispense abortion medication to women, which accounted for about 64% of all abortions performed in Oklahoma in 2020, the most recent year for which statistics were available. There is no enforcement mechanism in the bill for women

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who order abortion medication online from out-of-state suppliers. Oklahoma lawmakers passed a bill last year to prevent women from ordering abortion medication online, but that measure was blocked by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

Abortion rights advocates say the bill is clearly unconstitutional, and similar laws approved recently in Arkansas and Alabama have been blocked by federal courts.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki released a statement Tuesday describing the bill as an “unconstitutional attack on women’s rights.”

“Protecting the right recognized in *Roe v. Wade* continues to be a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration, and we call on Congress to pass the Women’s Health Protection Act, which would shut down these attacks and codify this long-recognized, constitutional right,” Psaki said.

Although similar anti-abortion bills approved by the Oklahoma Legislature in recent years have been stopped as unconstitutional, anti-abortion lawmakers have been buoyed by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to allow new Texas abortion restrictions to remain in place.

The new Texas law, the most restrictive anti-abortion law to take effect in the U.S. in decades, leaves enforcement up to private citizens, who are entitled to collect what critics call a “bounty” of \$10,000 if they bring a successful lawsuit against a provider or anyone who helps a patient obtain an abortion.

“The U.S. Supreme Court’s failure to stop Texas from nullifying the constitutional right to abortion has emboldened other states to do the same,” Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights, said in a statement. “We’ve sued the state of Oklahoma ten times in the last decade to protect abortion access and we will challenge this law as well to stop this travesty from ever taking effect.”

Several states, including Oklahoma, are pursuing legislation similar to the Texas law this year.

The Texas law bans abortion after roughly six weeks of pregnancy and makes no exceptions in cases of rape or incest. Abortions in Texas have plummeted by about 50% since the law took effect, while the number of Texans going to clinics out of state and requesting abortion pills online has gone up. If the Oklahoma bill were allowed to take effect, women from Texas seeking abortions would be forced to travel further distances to Democratic-led states like Colorado and New Mexico, which have recently passed laws to protect abortion access.

One of the Texas-style Oklahoma bills that is one vote away from the governor’s desk would ban abortions from the moment of conception and would take effect immediately upon the governor’s signature.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s conservative majority also has indicated they would uphold a Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy and allow states to ban abortion much earlier. The court may even overturn the nationwide right to abortion that has existed for nearly 50 years.

COVID-19, overdoses pushed US to highest death total ever

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — 2021 was the deadliest year in U.S. history, and new data and research are offering more insights into how it got that bad.

The main reason for the increase in deaths? COVID-19, said Robert Anderson, who oversees the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s work on death statistics.

The agency this month quietly updated its provisional death tally. It showed there were 3.465 million deaths last year, or about 80,000 more than 2020’s record-setting total.

Early last year, some experts were optimistic that 2021 would not be as bad as the first year of the pandemic — partly because effective COVID-19 vaccines had finally become available.

“We were wrong, unfortunately,” said Noreen Goldman, a Princeton University researcher.

COVID-19 deaths rose in 2021 — to more than 415,000, up from 351,000 the year before — as new coronavirus variants emerged and an unexpectedly large numbers of Americans refused to get vaccinated or were hesitant to wear masks, experts said.

The coronavirus is not solely to blame. Preliminary CDC data also shows the crude death rate for cancer

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rose slightly, and rates continued to increase for diabetes, chronic liver disease and stroke.

Drug overdose deaths also continued to rise. The CDC does not yet have a tally for 2021 overdose deaths, because it can take weeks of lab work and investigation to identify them. But provisional data through October suggests the nation is on track to see at least 105,000 overdose deaths in 2021 — up from 93,000 the year before.

New research released Tuesday showed a particularly large jump in overdose deaths among 14- to 18-year-olds.

Adolescent overdose death counts were fairly constant for most of the last decade, at around 500 a year, according to the paper published by the Journal of the American Medical Association. They almost doubled in 2020, to 954, and the researchers estimated that the total hit nearly 1,150 last year.

Joseph Friedman, a UCLA researcher who was the paper's lead author, called the spike "unprecedented."

Those teen overdose deaths were only around 1% of the U.S. total. But adolescents experienced a greater relative increase than the overall population, even though surveys suggest drug use among teens is down.

Experts attributed the spike to fentanyl, a highly lethal drug that has been cut into heroin for several years. More recently it's also been pressed into counterfeit pills resembling prescription drugs that teens sometimes abuse.

The total number of U.S. deaths often increases year to year as the U.S. population grows. But 2020 and 2021 saw extraordinary jumps in death numbers and rates, due largely to the pandemic.

Those national death trends affect life expectancy — an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live.

With rare exceptions, U.S. life expectancy has reliably inched up year after year. But the CDC's life expectancy estimate for 2020 was about 77 years — more than a year and a half lower than what it was in 2019.

The CDC has not yet reported its calculation for 2021. But Goldman and some other researchers have been making their own estimates, presented in papers that have not yet been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Those researchers think U.S. life expectancy dropped another five or six months in 2021 — putting it back to where it was 20 years ago.

A loss of more than two years of life expectancy over the last two years "is mammoth," Goldman said.

One study looked at death data in the U.S. and 19 other high-income countries. The U.S. fared the worst.

"What happened in the U.S. is less about the variants than the levels of resistance to vaccination and the public's rejection of practices, such as masking and mandates, to reduce viral transmission," one of the study's authors, Dr. Steven Woolf of Virginia Commonwealth University, said in a statement.

Some experts are skeptical that life expectancy will quickly bounce back. They worry about long-term complications of COVID-19 that may hasten the deaths of people with chronic health problems.

Preliminary — and incomplete — CDC data suggest there were at least 805,000 U.S. deaths in about the first three months of this year. That's well below the same period last year, but higher than the comparable period in 2020.

"We may end up with a 'new normal' that's a little higher than it was before," Anderson said.

EXPLAINER: How to investigate alleged chemical attacks

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Ukraine said Tuesday it is investigating a claim that a poisonous substance was dropped on the besieged city of Mariupol. Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said it was possible that phosphorus munitions — which cause horrendous burns but are not classed as chemical weapons — had been used.

Now the question is how to establish the truth amid the fog of war that has descended over a city still under attack from Russian forces. A clear answer is unlikely to emerge any time soon.

The global chemical weapons watchdog said Tuesday it is "concerned by the recent unconfirmed report of chemical weapons use in Mariupol" and is closely monitoring the situation in Ukraine. Both Russia and Ukraine are among the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' 193 member states.

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The Nobel Peace Prize-winning OPCW says that it “remains ready to assist any State Party upon its request, in case of use or threat of use of chemical weapons.”

WHO COULD INVESTIGATE?

First in line to investigate in Ukraine is the country’s own law enforcement agencies. There also are teams from other nations investigating allegations — particularly around the Ukrainian town of Bucha — of war crimes and the International Criminal Court has launched an investigation in Ukraine. The OPCW has, so far, not announced any investigations in Ukraine, although it says on its website that it “is monitoring the status of relevant chemical industrial facilities and any threats of use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the country.”

Marc-Michael Blum, former head of the OPCW’s laboratory and now an independent consultant, said the organization won’t send a team to Mariupol any time soon to investigate.

“We have an active war zone where the OPCW would not send a team in because the security of the team cannot be guaranteed,” Blum told The Associated Press.

HOW ARE SUSPECTED CHEMICAL ATTACKS INVESTIGATED?

If a team of experts were able to investigate what was used and by whom, it would seek to build a dossier of evidence based on laboratory tests of samples collected at the scene and from victims. That means taking soil samples and testing them for traces of possible chemical weapons or other munitions. Samples of blood and urine from victims who were exposed to the munition would also be tested.

Then investigators would seek to interview witnesses and survivors, to build a picture of what they experienced, and the physicians who treated them. In past investigations, experts have studied gas dispersion models and topographic charts and looked at digital images. The OPCW has experience building such investigations in Syria, where its experts have confirmed the use of chemical weapons on multiple occasions.

Damascus denies using chemical weapons.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CASES OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS USE ELSEWHERE?

Hundreds of people were killed in gas poisoning attacks in Syria during the country’s civil war. The OPCW faced numerous hurdles and Russian vetoes complicating the establishment of investigation mechanisms. To this day, no one has been held accountable.

Two recent cases outside Syria show how a suspected chemical weapon use can be investigated by local authorities — the poisoning in 2020 of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny and of former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the English city of Salisbury in 2018.

In those cases, authorities in Germany, where Navalny went for treatment, and in the United Kingdom in the case of the Skripals, took and tested biological samples and concluded that they were targeted with a Soviet-era nerve agent known as Novichok. In those cases, the OPCW tested the samples and confirmed the findings by national authorities.

Russia denied involvement in both attacks.

IF PHOSPHORUS WAS USED IN MARIUPOL, IS IT ILLEGAL?

Phosphorus munitions are not considered chemical weapons. Most armies have phosphorus munitions to use for illuminating battlefields or targets or to produce smoke screens. However, if an army deliberately fired a phosphorus munition into an enclosed space in order to expose people to toxic fumes, it could be a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, said Blum.

“Once you start using the properties of white phosphorus, toxic properties, specifically and deliberately then it becomes banned,” he said.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF A SUCCESSFUL INVESTIGATION IN BESIEGED MARIUPOL?

Blum is not optimistic. “Given the current situation we have Mariupol, almost impossible to really pin down, and so I have no high hopes for any any kind of investigation,” he said.

EXPLAINER: Why US inflation is so high, and when it may ease

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Another month, another four-decade high for inflation.

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For the 12 months that ended in March, consumer prices rocketed 8.5%. That was the fastest year-over-year jump since 1981, far surpassing February's mark of 7.9%, itself a 40-year high.

Even if you toss out food and energy prices — which are notoriously volatile and have driven much of the price spike — so-called core inflation jumped 6.5% in the past 12 months. That was also the sharpest such jump in four decades.

Consumers have felt the squeeze in everyday routines. Gasoline is up an average of 48% in the past year. Airline tickets are up 24%, men's suits nearly 15%, bacon 18%.

The Federal Reserve never anticipated inflation this severe or persistent. Back in December 2020, the Fed's policymakers had forecast that consumer inflation would stay below their 2% annual target and end 2021 at around 1.8%.

Yet after having been merely an afterthought for decades, high inflation reasserted itself last year with brutal speed. In February 2021, the government's consumer price index was running just 1.7% above its level a year earlier. From there, the year-over-year increases accelerated — 2.6% in March, 4.2% in April, 5% in May, 5.4% in June.

By October, the figure was 6.2%, by November 6.8%, by December 7%.

For months, Fed Chair Jerome Powell and some others characterized higher consumer prices as merely "transitory" — the result, mainly, of shipping delays and temporary shortages of supplies and workers as the economy rebounded from the pandemic recession much faster than anyone had anticipated. Now, most economists expect inflation to remain elevated well into next year, with demand outstripping supplies in numerous areas of the economy.

So the Fed has radically changed course. Last month, it raised its benchmark short-term rate by a quarter-point and is expected to keep raising it, probably aggressively, well into 2023. In doing so, the Fed is moving decisively away from the ultra-low rates that helped revive the economy from the recession but also helped fuel surging consumer prices.

The Fed is making a high-risk bet that it can slow the economy enough to rein in inflation without weakening it so much as to trigger a recession. The overall economy is healthy, with a robust job market and extremely low unemployment. But many economists say they worry that the Fed's steady credit tightening will cause an economic downturn.

WHAT'S CAUSED THE SPIKE IN INFLATION?

Good news — mostly. When the pandemic paralyzed the economy in the spring of 2020 and lockdowns kicked in, businesses closed or cut hours and consumers stayed home as a health precaution, employers slashed a breathtaking 22 million jobs. Economic output plunged at a record-shattering 31% annual rate in 2020's April-June quarter.

Everyone braced for more misery. Companies cut investment and postponed restocking. A brutal recession ensued.

But instead of sinking into a prolonged downturn, the economy staged an unexpectedly rousing recovery, fueled by vast infusions of government aid and emergency intervention by the Fed, which slashed rates, among other things. By spring of last year, the rollout of vaccines had emboldened consumers to return to restaurants, bars, shops, airports and entertainment venues.

Suddenly, businesses had to scramble to meet demand. They couldn't hire fast enough to fill job openings or buy enough supplies to meet customer orders. As business roared back, ports and freight yards couldn't handle the traffic. Global supply chains seized up.

With demand up and supplies down, costs jumped. And companies found that they could pass along those higher costs in the form of higher prices to consumers, many of whom had managed to pile up savings during the pandemic.

Critics blamed, in part, President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, with its \$1,400 checks to most households, for overheating an economy that was already sizzling on its own. Many others argued that the Fed kept rates near zero far too long, lending fuel to runaway spending and inflated

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prices in stocks, homes and other assets.

HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Elevated consumer price inflation could endure as long as companies struggle to keep up with consumers' demand for goods and services. A recovering job market — employers added a record 6.7 million jobs last year and are adding 560,000 a month so far this year — means that Americans as a whole can continue to splurge on everything from lawn furniture to electronics.

Many economists foresee inflation staying well above the Fed's 2% annual target this year. But relief from higher prices might be coming. Jammed-up supply chains are beginning to show some signs of improvement, at least in some industries. The Fed's pivot away from easy-money policies toward an anti-inflationary policy could eventually reduce consumer demand. There will be no repeat of last year's COVID relief checks from Washington. Inflation itself is eroding purchasing power and might force some consumers to shave spending.

At the same time, new COVID variants could cloud the outlook — either by causing outbreaks that force factories and ports to close and disrupt supply chains even more or by keeping people home and reducing demand for goods.

HOW ARE HIGHER PRICES AFFECTING CONSUMERS?

The strong job market is boosting workers' pay, though not enough to offset higher prices. The Labor Department says that after accounting for higher consumer prices, hourly earnings for private-sector employees fell 2.7% last month from a year earlier, the 12th straight such drop.

There are exceptions: After-inflation wages rose 8% for hotel workers and 4% for restaurant and bar employees in March from a year earlier.

Partisan politics, in the meantime, is influencing the way Americans view the inflation threat. With a Democrat in the White House, Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say that inflation is having a negative effect on their personal finances, according to surveys of consumer sentiment conducted by the University of Michigan.

EXPLAINER: New front, same challenges for Russian offensive

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia is readying a massive, new offensive in eastern Ukraine, hoping to reverse its fortunes on the battlefield after a catastrophic start to seven weeks of war.

A long convoy of combat vehicles has jammed highways across northeastern Ukraine in preparation for an attack that could begin within days, and the Kremlin has named a general known for overseeing Moscow's campaign in Syria to lead it.

A look at Russia's military objectives and challenges it faces.

A BOTCHED BLITZ

A failed Russian attempt to storm Kyiv and other big cities took a heavy toll in personnel and equipment, boosted morale in Ukraine and allowed it to rally broad international support.

"The myth about the invincibility of the Russian military as the second-most powerful in the world has been shattered to much surprise of the Ukrainians themselves," Ukrainian military expert Oleh Zhdanov told The Associated Press.

The flow of Western weapons into Ukraine and a growing popular resistance to Russian aggression will further raise the costs of war for Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin badly needs a quick battlefield victory to find an exit from what increasingly looks like a disastrous quagmire.

Russia's focus is turning to Ukraine's industrial heartland, known as the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian government forces since the conflict there erupted shortly after the Kremlin's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

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"In the first round, Russia has lost face both politically and militarily," Zhdanov said. "It has done every possible stupid thing in the careless hope for a blitz ... but it will make the Russian attack in the next round even more furious."

REFOCUS AND REDEPLOYMENT

After their retreat from Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy, Russian forces pulled back to the territory of Belarus, Moscow's ally, as well as areas in western Russia to be rearmed and resupplied for the new offensive.

Retired British Gen. Sir Richard Barrons estimated the Russians have "probably lost about 25% of the ground forces they started out with in the sense that those have been units that have become noncombat effective."

"So they're amalgamating them, they're refitting them, they're reinforcing them and then moving them around," Barrons told AP.

Russia also was trying to move additional equipment from elsewhere and mobilize reservists in a desperate attempt to build a sufficient attack force, said Barrons, a co-chair of the consulting group Universal Defence & Security Solutions.

"They've had a beating, and they will have only a few weeks to get better," he said.

Recently, Russian troops have been seen rolling into eastern Ukraine to move into attack positions. A convoy stretched for about 13 kilometers (8 miles) on a highway east of Kharkiv, heading south toward Ukrainian lines near Izyum, a strategic road junction.

At the same time, Russian forces rushed to crush remaining pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol after besieging the vital Sea of Azov port for nearly 1 1/2 months.

The offensive is expected to start once Mariupol is fully under Russian control, and the troops pulled from areas near Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy complete their redeployment.

WILL A NEW COMMANDER MAKE THE DIFFERENCE?

Gen. Alexander Dvornikov was appointed the new military commander for the campaign in Ukraine. The 60-year-old soldier is one of Russia's most experienced officers, credited with leading Moscow's forces to victory in Syria in a ruthless campaign to shore up President Bashar Assad's regime in a civil war that saw entire cities flattened and millions displaced.

In 2016, Putin awarded Dvornikov the Hero of Russia medal, one of the country's highest awards, and named him the chief of the Southern Military District, commanding units in southwestern Russia.

Dvornikov's appointment is seen as reflecting the Kremlin's awareness to quickly improve poor coordination among various forces that hampered previous military efforts. Skeptics point out, however, that the Syrian campaign involved a relatively small number of troops, unlike the massive operation in Ukraine.

TRYING NEW BATTLEFIELD TACTICS

Ukrainian and Western experts expect the Russians to try to encircle Ukrainian forces in Donbas with a pincer movement by advancing from Izyum in the north and Mariupol in the south.

Some predict Russia also may try to use its forces north of Crimea to try to capture the industrial hubs of Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro on the Dnieper River, effectively cutting Ukraine in half.

Barrons said the Russians are focusing on the east "instead of trying to do three or four big things at once and spreading the air power and the logistics."

"The key conundrum is, can the Russians muster enough force ... good enough to overwhelm a very good Ukrainian defensive position by sheer weight of brutality" by concentrating firepower and troops in a few key locations, he said.

WILL RUSSIA'S LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS PERSIST?

Despite a new commander, the offensive will likely face the same logistical challenges Russian troops encountered early in the campaign.

During the botched attempt to storm Kyiv, Russian convoys stretched along highways leading to the capital, becoming easy prey for Ukrainian artillery, drones and scouts.

Supporting the operations in the east could be equally hard, with Russian supply lines likely to face hit-and-run raids, helped by the arrival of spring as foliage offers natural cover for Ukrainian scouts and guerrillas.

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Control of the skies also has been a problem, with Ukrainian air defense assets continuing to shoot down Russian warplanes, making it more difficult for ground troops to advance. In recent days, Russia has launched strikes on Ukrainian long-range air defense systems in apparent preparation for the offensive.

"If the Russians learned the lessons of their failure so far and could concentrate more force and could connect their air force to the ground forces better and could sort the logistics out, then they might start to overwhelm the Ukrainian positions eventually, although I still think it would be a battle of enormous attrition," Barrons told AP.

MORE FAVORABLE TERRAIN FOR RUSSIA?

During the eight years of fighting separatists in the east, Ukrainian forces have built multilayered defenses, which Russian troops failed to break despite persistent attacks since the invasion began Feb. 24.

"They've been fighting in these current positions in the Donbas for about eight years, so they're very seasoned and they're very well prepared," Barrons said of Ukrainian forces.

He noted, however, that "this will be different because the Russian onslaught will be potentially very much greater" and the east's flat terrain could give the Russians an edge.

"The sort of ambush tactics the Ukrainians were highly successful with around Kiev may not apply in the Donbas," Barrons said. "And if the Russians were capable of maneuvering their armor so tanks, armored infantry and armored artillery at speed, they could get behind the Ukrainian position. It is going to be a much harder, bigger fight than we've seen so far."

Ukraine has pleaded with the West for warplanes, long-range air defense systems, heavy artillery and armor to counter a massive Russian edge in firepower.

"There is a battle of time and space between the Russians and Ukrainians for the Russians to muster enough force and the Ukrainians to get the weapons that they need and rehearse themselves for what will be a bigger and slightly different battle, and I think it is finely balanced," Barrons said.

FOR PUTIN, A RACE AGAINST TIME

After earlier battlefield failures, Putin desperately needs a quick success in the east.

Battered by Western sanctions, Russia lacks financial resources for a protracted conflict. If the fighting drags on, it will inevitably worsen the economy and could bring social tensions, eroding the Kremlin's support base.

The military already has put its most capable combat units in the campaign, and continued fighting will likely force it to call up more reservists and throw fresh conscripts into combat — moves that could be extremely unpopular.

Putin could be hoping to quickly expand the territory under separatist control in the east, then try to force Ukraine into concessions in negotiations to wrap up the campaign and spin it as victory.

Ketanji Brown Jackson is and isn't 1st Black female justice

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Shirley Troutman, a judge on New York's highest court, was working last week when her daughter texted messages that included a clapping hands emoji. Soon, her phone was buzzing with other celebratory messages. The applause and the excitement was for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who last week was confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court and will become its first Black female justice.

Jackson will become the court's 116th member. That's special for Troutman, who is the 116th member of her court too.

"As a judge, as a Black woman, I am extremely proud and wish her the best," said Troutman, who took her seat earlier this year and is the second Black woman to serve on her court. She said she cried "tears of joy" Thursday when Jackson was confirmed.

Troutman is among 17 Black women and 14 Black men currently serving on their state's highest court, according to the Brennan Center for Justice in New York, which has tracked diversity on those courts. A majority of the women joined the bench within the last five years and, like Jackson, shattered a barrier, becoming the first Black woman on their state's high court. In interviews, some of those women described

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not only their own delight at Jackson's confirmation but also suggested there's more work to be done to make America's courts more reflective of its citizens.

"I am so proud and optimistic about her accomplishment and what this means," said Justice Melissa Long of Rhode Island's Supreme Court.

Long, who joined her state's high court in 2021, also feels a "great sense of connection" to Jackson. They were born 10 days apart in 1970 in Washington, D.C. Long's parents had married in the city because laws against interracial marriage, struck down by the Supreme Court in 1967, prohibited them from getting married in Virginia.

Being the first Black woman and first person of color on her state's five-member court "feels like a responsibility," Long said. "It's an important responsibility, but it does feel like a responsibility."

That's in part because diversity overall on state courts is lacking. People of color make up 17% of the judges on state supreme courts, but as of last year, 22 states had high courts where no member identified as a person of color, according to the Brennan Center. In 11 of those states, minorities make up at least 20% of the population, according to the Brennan Center. About 30% of all federal judges, meanwhile, identify as people of color.

Those numbers help explain why the Brennan Center's Madiba Dennie says she's wary of people thinking that Jackson's confirmation means: "We did it. We have a Black woman on the Supreme Court now." There's more work to be done, she said, with "huge disparities throughout the rest of the federal judiciary and at the state judiciary as well."

The history of Black women serving on their state's highest court goes back to 1988 when Juanita Kidd Stout joined Pennsylvania's highest court. That was seven years after Justice Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman on the U.S. Supreme Court. Stout served for a year before she reached the mandatory age of retirement. Today, the four men and three women on Pennsylvania's highest court are all white.

Other state high courts are more diverse. Maryland has two Black women on its highest court, the Court of Appeals, where members wear red robes with white collars and are called judge, not justice. Judge Shirley M. Watts joined the seven-member court in 2013 and Judge Michele D. Hotten in 2015.

In California, Justice Leondra Kruger was among the women President Joe Biden considered nominating to fulfill his campaign pledge to put a Black woman on the Supreme Court, if given the opportunity. In Ohio, Justice Melody Stewart was a classically trained pianist before making the switch to a career in law. And in Washington, Justice G. Helen Whitener is one of two gay justices and one of seven women on state's nine-member high court.

In Massachusetts, Kimberly Budd serves as her court's chief justice, a position she has held since 2020. North Carolina's Cheri Beasley served as the chief justice of that state's Supreme Court and is now a leading candidate in the Democratic primary for the 2022 U.S. Senate election.

Louisiana also until recently had a Black woman leading its highest court. Bernette Johnson was elected to the court in 1994 and served as its chief from 2013 to her 2020 retirement. Today, Justice Piper D. Griffin is the second Black woman and third Black person to serve on that court.

Griffin called Jackson's confirmation "surreal" and "humbling." "It was one of those things that you never think you'd see in your lifetime. You know, it's kind of like you, you're hopeful, but you're never expecting it," said Griffin, who was elected to her position in 2020.

Griffin said her phone "blew up" Thursday afternoon when Jackson was confirmed. "I got lots of exclamation points," she said. One friend, knowing Griffin couldn't watch Vice President Kamala Harris announce live that Jackson had been confirmed, recorded the moment on her phone and texted it to her. Over and over and over again friends texted one word: Yes!

Troutman, the judge on New York's highest court, said one of the things her daughter sent her that day was a picture of Jackson and the president hugging. It's important that Jackson is the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, Troutman said, but: "It is most important that she shall not be the last."

'It's not the end': The children who survived Bucha's horror

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By CARA ANNA and RODRIGO ABD Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — The coffin was made from pieces of a closet. In a darkened basement under a building shaking from the bombardment of war, there were few other options.

Six-year-old Vlad watched as his mother was carried out of the shelter last month and to the yard of a nearby home. The burial was hurried and devastating.

Now Russian forces have withdrawn from Bucha after a monthlong occupation, and Vlad's father, Ivan Drahun, dropped to his knees at the foot of the grave.

He reached out and touched the dirt near his wife Maryna's feet. "Hi, how are you?" he said during the visit last week. "I miss you so much. You left so soon. You didn't even say goodbye."

The boy also visits the grave, placing on it a juice box and two cans of baked beans. Amid the stress of war, his mother barely ate. The family still doesn't know what illness caused her death. They, much like their town, barely know how to move on.

Bucha witnessed some of the ghastliest scenes of Russia's invasion, and almost no children have been seen in its silent streets since then. The many bright playgrounds in the once popular community with good schools on a far edge of the capital, Kyiv, are empty.

The Russians used a children's camp in Bucha as an execution ground, and bloodstains and bullet holes mark a basement. On a ledge near the camp entrance, Russian soldiers placed a toy tank. It appeared to be connected to fishing wire — a possible booby trap in the most vulnerable of places.

Steps away from Vlad's home, some of the Russians used a kindergarten as a base, leaving it intact while other nearby buildings suffered. Casings of used artillery shells were left along a fence in the yard. In a nearby playground, white and red tape marked off unexploded ordnance. The booms of de-mining operations were so strong they set off car alarms.

At the apartment block where Vlad, his older brother Vova and sister Sophia live, someone had spray-painted "CHILDREN" in child-high letters on an outside wall. Under it, a wooden box once used for ammunition held a teddy bear and other toys.

It is here that Bucha's fragile renewal can be seen.

A small group of neighborhood children gathered, finding distraction from the war. Bundled up in winter coats, they kicked a football, wandered around with bags of snacks handed out by visiting volunteers, called out from a glass-less window above.

Their parents, taking in the feeble warmth of spring after weeks in freezing basements, reflected on how they tried to protect the children. "We covered his ears," said Polina Shymanska of her 7-year-old great-grandson Nikita. "We hugged him, kissed him." She tried to play chess and the boy let her win.

Upstairs, in a neighbor's apartment where Vlad's father for now has merged his family with that of the neighbor to help manage their collection of children, Vlad curled up on a bed with another boy and played cards. The radiator gave off no heat. There was still no gas, no electricity, no running water.

Not everyone in Vlad's family can stand to return to their own apartment nearby. The memories of Maryna are everywhere, from the perfume bottles on the table by the front door to the quiet kitchen.

In the living room, time has stopped. Limp balloons dangled from the overhead light. A string of colorful flags still hung on the wall, along with a family photo. It showed Ivan and Maryna holding Vlad on the day he was born. They celebrated his birthday on Feb. 19.

Five days later, the war began. And the family's life shrank to a dank concrete half-room in the basement, lined with blankets and scattered with sweets and toys. It was very, very cold, Ivan remembers. He and Maryna did what they could to muffle the sounds of shelling for Vlad and keep him calm. But they were afraid, too.

Two weeks ago, Ivan took Vlad to the makeshift toilet in the shelter and visited neighbors. Then he came to Maryna to tell her that he was going outside. "I touched her shoulder, and she was cold," he said. "I realized she was gone."

At first, he said, Vlad appeared not to understand what had happened. The boy said his mother had moved away. But at the burial, the boy watched Ivan kneel and cry, and now he knows what death is.

Death is inseparable from Bucha. Local authorities told The Associated Press that at least 16 children

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were among the hundreds of people killed. Those who survived face a long recovery.

"They've realized that now it's calm and quiet," Ivan said. "But at the same time, older children understand that it's not the end. The war is not finished. And it's hard to explain for the smaller ones that war is still going on."

The children are adapting, he said. They have seen a lot. Some even saw dogs killed.

Now the war has slipped into the games they play.

In a sandbox outside the kindergarten, Vlad and a friend "bombed" each other with fistfuls of sand.

"I'm Ukraine," one said. "No, I'm Ukraine," said the other.

In Cuba, crabs embark on perilous migration to Bay of Pigs

By ANDREA RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

PLAYA GIRON, Cuba (AP) — Every year in Cuba, millions of crabs emerge from the forest at the beginning of the spring rains and head for the waters of the Bay of Pigs, crossing streets and highways on a perilous journey to mate and reproduce.

Now underway, the migration causes concern to drivers who try to swerve in an often futile attempt not to kill the crustaceans. The crabs are a nuisance to residents but the sight of their road-crossing is a wonder for tourists and other first-time onlookers.

"They got here before us," said Amaury Urrea, a 50-year-old hiking guide who spent his entire life in this part of the Ciénega de Zapata, the largest wetland in the Caribbean, particularly picturesque for the backdrop of turquoise sea waters and the coastal cliffs. "We're used to this."

"Where I live, which is in the center of the town of Girón, the crabs don't get there as much," though there are plenty on the outskirts, he said.

Located about 180 kilometers (110 miles) southeast of Havana, the area was the scene of a 1961 failed invasion by Cuban exiles who signed up for a covertly CIA-funded operation to overthrow Fidel Castro.

This year, the crabs started their journey early. At the end of March, the municipal authorities issued a warning to drivers to avoid traveling in the morning and evening hours - the favorite crossing times for the crabs. Environmentalists usually demand the closure of the main road, especially at key migration times.

The passage of the red crustaceans — the species is called *gecarcinus ruricola* — could last until July. The largest amount of traffic occurs between April and May. Residents have to be careful: When the crabs feel threatened, they can puncture car tires with their pincers.

Official figures estimate that some 3.5 million crabs die each season on the road, many crushed by passing vehicles. They take a minute and a half to cross.

This type of crab lives and migrates in the Bahamas, Nicaragua, Jamaica and Dominica. But only here, and perhaps in another sector of the coast towards the neighboring province of Cienfuegos, does its path collide so dramatically with human traffic.

Pouring it on: Climate change made 2020 hurricanes rainier

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Climate change made the record-smashing deadly 2020 Atlantic hurricane season noticeably wetter, a new study says. And it will likely make this season rainier, too, scientists said.

Human-caused climate change made the entire season -- 30 named storms -- drop 5% more rain. During the 14 storms that reached hurricane status the rainfall was 8% heavier, according to the study in Tuesday's Nature Communications.

"It doesn't sound like a lot, but if you're near a threshold, a little bit can push you over the top," said Lawrence Berkeley National Lab climate scientist Michael Wehner, co-author of the paper. "The implication is that that means there was more freshwater flooding and that the damages from freshwater flooding were increased, but by how much would require a more detailed analysis."

While past studies have predicted climate change would make storms wetter and found individual storms, such as 2017's Harvey, were in fact wetter because of human-caused climate change, this is the first study

to look at an entire season, Wehner said. That's important because it removes the selection bias of just picking the worst storms, such as Harvey.

"It's not just the big monster ones, it's a whole season," Wehner said.

It's likely 2020 is not the only year made significantly rainier by climate change. Warming is probably increasing the downpours in nearly all storms and most hurricane seasons, including the one that starts June 1, said study lead author Kevin Reed, an atmospheric scientist at Stony Brook University.

And what a season 2020 was. It broke records not only for the number of named storms, but for the number that became major storms with winds of at least 111 miles per hour -- seven -- and the number that made landfall in the United States. Louisiana got hit five times. Overall, more than 330 people were killed directly by named storms in 2020 and damage soared past \$41 billion, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Hurricanes Laura, Sally, Isaias, Zeta, Delta, Eta and Hanna all caused more than \$1 billion in damage, much of it from flooding. Laura, for example, was 10% wetter than it would have been without climate change, a separate quick analysis shows, Reed said.

The researchers used computer simulations -- continually updated with real-time observations -- to calculate how much water fell during the 30 storms and then compared them to a simulated world with no human caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas. The difference is what's caused by global warming. This scientifically accepted technique came up with the 5% and 8% figures.

When scientists looked at just the three rainiest hours of each storm, climate change amped them up 8% compared to the mythical world without climate change. For the storms that hit hurricane status, 11% more rain fell during the peak rainy time than would have otherwise, the study found.

A fundamental rule of physics is that the atmosphere can hold nearly 4% more moisture for every degree Fahrenheit the air warms (7% more for every degree Celsius). Globally, temperatures have increased about 2 degrees (1.1 degrees Celsius) since pre-industrial times. And the water of the Atlantic hurricane basin, which acts as storm fuel, has warmed about 1.3 degrees (.7 degrees Celsius) in the past century, Wehner said.

"That signal will only get larger as the sea surface temperatures continue to warm," Reed said.

Storms are getting stronger, which also makes them wetter, Wehner said.

"The expected increase in hurricane rainfall is probably the most robust prediction concerning the response of hurricanes to climate change," said MIT atmospheric science professor Kerry Emanuel, who wasn't part of the study team. But the study is limited by not looking at how climate change could have affected storm track, intensity and frequency, he said.

Gunmen kill more than 100 in Nigeria's north, say survivors

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — An armed gang has killed more than 100 people in a remote part of northern Nigeria, survivors and local authorities said on Tuesday.

The attackers targeted four villages in the Kanam area of Plateau State, the most recent in a series of violent attacks in Nigeria's north.

Such attacks in Nigeria's northern region have become frequent, especially between Fulani Muslims who are mostly cattle herders and Christian communities from the Hausa and other ethnic groups who are mainly farmers.

The conflict over access to land and water has further worsened the sectarian division between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with its 206 million people deeply divided along religious lines.

In this recent attack, the assailants arrived Sunday afternoon, ransacking houses and shooting at residents, according to Alpha Sambo, a survivor and Kanam youth leader who is helping those displaced and injured.

"The people that have been killed are more than 100," he told The Associated Press on Tuesday. Other

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witnesses say as many as 130 died and many have been injured and displaced.

The police and the state government confirmed the attacks but did not give details on the cause or number of casualties. Authorities in Nigeria have in the past been accused of withholding information about death tolls in such killings.

On social media, videos viewed by AP appeared to show razed houses and bodies wrapped in mats and bags in mass graves. Many were buried even before their loved ones heard of their demise, residents said.

While there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest violence, residents said it was carried out by the herdsmen.

The assailants "were well-armed" with AK-47 rifles and machetes and arrived on dozens of motorcycles each carrying up to three men, said youth leader Sambo.

Two days after the attack, the Kanam area is still tense and calm has not been fully restored, Dayyabu Yusuf Garga, chairman of the Kanam local government authority, said.

Plateau State Governor Simon Bako Lalong directed security forces to restore peace and order in the affected villages and vowed "to make it difficult for terrorists and other criminals to set their bases in any part of the state," according to a government statement.

The State Security Council has adopted "far-reaching measures to strengthen all security measures," Lalong said, but similar commitments made in the past have not succeeded in improving security in the area, say residents.

President Muhammadu Buhari was elected in 2015 on promises that he would improve Nigeria's security and is facing growing pressure to curb the killings as he reaches the end of his second and final four-year term as the country's leader.

The West African nation continues to grapple with security challenges in other parts of the country. A decade-long insurgency in Nigeria's northeast by the Islamic extremist rebels of Boko Haram and violence by armed groups in the northwest have led to the deaths of thousands more.

Nigerian security forces are often outnumbered and outgunned by the armed groups in those volatile areas, say security analysts, creating a serious challenge to Nigeria's quest for peace and stability.

Russian war worsens fertilizer crunch, risking food supplies

By GEOFFREY KAVITI, CHINEDU ASADU and PAUL WISEMAN Associated Press

KIAMBU COUNTY, Kenya (AP) — Monica Kariuki is about ready to give up on farming. What is driving her off her 10 acres of land outside Nairobi isn't bad weather, pests or blight — the traditional agricultural curses — but fertilizer: It costs too much.

Despite thousands of miles separating her from the battlefields of Ukraine, Kariuki and her cabbage, corn and spinach farm are indirect victims of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion. The war has pushed up the price of natural gas, a key ingredient in fertilizer, and has led to severe sanctions against Russia, a major exporter of fertilizer.

Kariuki used to spend 20,000 Kenyan shillings, or about \$175, to fertilize her entire farm. Now, she would need to spend five times as much. Continuing to work the land, she said, would yield nothing but losses.

"I cannot continue with the farming business. I am quitting farming to try something else," she said.

Higher fertilizer prices are making the world's food supply more expensive and less abundant, as farmers skimp on nutrients for their crops and get lower yields. While the ripples will be felt by grocery shoppers in wealthy countries, the squeeze on food supplies will land hardest on families in poorer countries. It could hardly come at a worse time: The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said last week that its world food-price index in March reached the highest level since it started in 1990.

The fertilizer crunch threatens to further limit worldwide food supplies, already constrained by the disruption of crucial grain shipments from Ukraine and Russia. The loss of those affordable supplies of wheat, barley and other grains raises the prospect of food shortages and political instability in Middle Eastern, African and some Asian countries where millions rely on subsidized bread and cheap noodles.

"Food prices will skyrocket because farmers will have to make profit, so what happens to consumers?" said Uche Anyanwu, an agricultural expert at the University of Nigeria.

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The aid group Action Aid warns that families in the Horn of Africa are already being driven "to the brink of survival."

The U.N. says Russia is the world's No. 1 exporter of nitrogen fertilizer and No. 2 in phosphorus and potassium fertilizers. Its ally Belarus, also contending with Western sanctions, is another major fertilizer producer.

Many developing countries — including Mongolia, Honduras, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Mexico and Guatemala — rely on Russia for at least a fifth of their imports.

The conflict also has driven up the already-exorbitant price of natural gas, used to make nitrogen fertilizer. The result: European energy prices so high that some fertilizer companies "have closed their businesses and stopped operating their plants," said David Laborde, a researcher at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

For corn and cabbage farmer Jackson Koeth, 55, of Eldoret in western Kenya, the conflict in Ukraine was distant and puzzling until he had to decide whether to go ahead with the planting season. Fertilizer prices had doubled from last year.

Koeth said he decided to keep planting but only on half the acreage of years past. Yet he doubts he can make a profit with fertilizer so costly.

Greek farmer Dimitris Filis, who grows olives, oranges and lemons, said "you have to search to find" ammonia nitrate and that the cost of fertilizing a 10-hectare (25-acre) olive grove has doubled to 560 euros (\$310). While selling his wares at an Athens farm market, he said most farmers plan to skip fertilizing their olive and orange groves this year.

"Many people will not use fertilizers at all, and this as a result, lowers the quality of the production and the production itself, and slowly, slowly at one point, they won't be able to farm their land because there will be no income," Filis said.

In China, the price of potash — potassium-rich salt used as fertilizer — is up 86% from a year earlier. Nitrogen fertilizer prices have climbed 39% and phosphorus fertilizer is up 10%.

In the eastern Chinese city of Tai'an, the manager of a 35-family cooperative that raises wheat and corn said fertilizer prices have jumped 40% since the start of the year.

"We can hardly make any money," said the manager, who would give only his surname, Zhao.

Terry Farms, which grows produce on 2,100 acres largely in Ventura, California, has seen prices of some fertilizer formulations double; others are up 20%. Shifting fertilizers is risky, vice president William Terry said, because cheaper versions might not give "the crop what it needs as a food source."

As the growing season approaches in Maine, potato farmers are grappling with a 70% to 100% increase in fertilizer prices from last year, depending on the blend.

"I think it's going to be a pretty expensive crop, no matter what you're putting in the ground, from fertilizer to fuel, labor, electrical and everything else," said Donald Flannery, executive director of the Maine Potato Board.

In Prudentópolis, a town in Brazil's Parana state, farmer Edimilson Rickli showed off a warehouse that would normally be packed with fertilizer bags but has only enough to last a few more weeks. He's worried that, with the war in Ukraine showing no sign of letting up, he'll have to go without fertilizer when he plants wheat, barley and oats next month.

"The question is: Where Brazil is going to buy more fertilizer from?" he said. "We have to find other markets."

Other countries are hoping to help fill the gaps. Nigeria, for example, opened Africa's largest fertilizer factory last month, and the \$2.5 billion plant has already shipped fertilizer to the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico.

India, meanwhile, is seeking more fertilizer imports from Israel, Oman, Canada and Saudi Arabia to make up for lost shipments from Russia and Belarus.

"If the supply shortage gets worse, we will produce less," said Kishor Rungta of the nonprofit Fertiliser Association of India. "That's why we need to look for options to get more fertilizers in the country."

Agricultural firms are providing support for farmers, especially in Africa where poverty often limits access

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to vital farm inputs. In Kenya, Apollo Agriculture is helping farmers get fertilizer and access to finance.

"Some farmers are skipping the planting season and others are going into some other ventures such as buying goats to cope," said Benjamin Njenga, co-founder of the firm. "So these support services go a long way for them."

Governments are helping, too. The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced last month that it was issuing \$250 million in grants to support U.S. fertilizer production. The Swiss government has released part of its nitrogen fertilizer reserves.

Still, there's no easy answer to the double whammy of higher fertilizer prices and limited supplies. The next 12 to 18 months, food researcher LaBorde said, "will be difficult."

The market already was "super, super tight" before the war, said Kathy Mathers of the Fertilizer Institute trade group.

"Unfortunately, in many cases, growers are just happy to get fertilizer at all," she said.

Asadu reported from Lagos, Nigeria, and Wiseman from Washington. Contributing to this story were: Tatiana Pollastri in Sao Paulo, Brazil; Debora Alvares in Brasilia, Brazil; Sheikh Saaliq in New Delhi; Lefteris Pitarakis in Athens; Jamey Keaten in Geneva; Joe McDonald and Yu Bing in Beijing; Lisa Rathke in Marshfield, Vermont; Dave Kolpack in Fargo, North Dakota; Kathia Martínez in Panama City; Christoph Noelting in Frankfurt; Fabiola Sánchez in Mexico City; Veselin Toshkov in Sofia, Bulgaria; Tarik El-Barakah in Rabat, Morocco; Tassanee Vejpongsa and Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok; Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem; Edie Lederer at the United Nations; and Aya Batrawy in Dubai.

Today in History: April 13, Apollo 13 damaged by explosion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 13, the 103rd day of 2022. There are 262 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 13, 1970, Apollo 13, four-fifths of the way to the moon, was crippled when a tank containing liquid oxygen burst. (The astronauts managed to return safely.)

On this date:

In 1743, the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was born in Shadwell in the Virginia Colony.

In 1861, at the start of the Civil War, Fort Sumter in South Carolina fell to Confederate forces.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., on the 200th anniversary of the third American president's birth.

In 1953, "Casino Royale," Ian Fleming's first book as well as the first James Bond novel, was published in London by Jonathan Cape Ltd.

In 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first Black performer in a leading role to win an Academy Award for his performance in "Lilies of the Field."

In 1997, Tiger Woods became the youngest person to win the Masters Tournament and the first player of partly African heritage to claim a major golf title.

In 1999, right-to-die advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian was sentenced in Pontiac, Michigan, to 10 to 25 years in prison for second-degree murder in the lethal injection of a Lou Gehrig's disease patient. (Kevorkian ended up serving eight years.)

In 2005, a defiant Eric Rudolph pleaded guilty to carrying out the deadly bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and three other attacks in back-to-back court appearances in Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta.

In 2009, music producer Phil Spector was found guilty by a Los Angeles jury of second-degree murder in the shooting of actor Lana Clarkson (he was later sentenced to 19 years to life in prison; he died in prison in January 2021).

In 2011, ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his two sons were detained for investigation of

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corruption, abuse of power and killings of protesters. A federal jury in San Francisco convicted baseball slugger Barry Bonds of a single charge of obstruction of justice, but failed to reach a verdict on the three counts at the heart of allegations that he'd knowingly used steroids and human growth hormone and lied to a grand jury about it. (Bonds' conviction for obstruction was ultimately overturned.)

In 2016, the Golden State Warriors became the NBA's first 73-win team by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 125-104, breaking the 1996 72-win record of the Chicago Bulls. Kobe Bryant of the Lakers scored 60 points in his final game, wrapping up 20 years in the NBA.

In 2020, Charles Thacker Jr., a crew member on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, died at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Guam, becoming the first active-duty military member to die from the coronavirus. Bernie Sanders urged his progressive supporters to rally behind Joe Biden's presidential campaign.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama arrived in Cartagena, Colombia, to attend the Summit of the Americas; however, the visit was overshadowed by a prostitution scandal involving a group of Secret Service agents and officers who had gone to Cartagena to prepare for the president's trip. North Korea's much-touted satellite launch ended in a nearly \$1 billion failure. (The North succeeded in launching a satellite eight months later.) Jennifer Capriati was elected to the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

Five years ago: Pentagon officials said U.S. forces in Afghanistan had struck an Islamic State tunnel complex in eastern Afghanistan with "the mother of all bombs," the largest non-nuclear weapon ever used in combat by the U.S. military.

One year ago: U.S. health officials recommended a "pause" in use of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to investigate reports of rare but potentially dangerous blood clots, setting off a chain reaction worldwide and dealing a setback to the global vaccination campaign. (Officials lifted the pause on vaccinations 11 days later.)

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., is 89. Actor Edward Fox is 85. Actor Paul Sorvino is 83. R&B singer Lester Chambers is 82. Movie-TV composer Bill Conti is 80. Rock musician Jack Casady is 78. Actor Tony Dow is 77. Singer Al Green is 76. Actor Ron Perlman is 72. Actor William Sadler is 72. Singer Peabo Bryson is 71. Bandleader/rock musician Max Weinberg is 71. Bluegrass singer-musician Sam Bush is 70. Rock musician Jimmy Destri is 68. Comedian Gary Kroeger is 65. Actor Sandra Santiago is 65. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., D-Pa., is 62. Chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov is 59. Actor Page Hannah is 58. Actor-comedian Caroline Rhea (RAY) is 58. Rock musician Marc Ford is 56. Reggae singer Capleton is 55. Actor Ricky Schroder is 52. Rock singer Aaron Lewis (Staind) is 50. Actor Bokeem Woodbine is 49. Singer Lou Bega is 47. Actor-producer Glenn Howerton is 46. Actor Kyle Howard is 44. Actor Kelli Giddish is 42. Actor Courtney Peldon is 41. Pop singer Nellie McKay (mih-KY') is 40. Rapper/singer Ty Dolla \$ign is 40. Actor Allison Williams is 34. Actor Hannah Marks is 29.