

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 1 of 61

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[1- Ken's Help Wanted](#)

[2- Groton placed first in three events at regions](#)

[3- Sisseton Golf Meet](#)

[3- Updated Summer Weather Outlook](#)

[4- Dodgers win Youth Baseball League Tournament](#)

[5- Weather Pages](#)

[9- Daily Devotional](#)

[10- 2022 Community Events](#)

[11- Subscription Form](#)

[12- News from the Associated Press](#)



“

As we work to create light for others, we naturally light our own way.

-Mary Anne Radmacher

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Friday, May 20

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

Saturday, May 21

10 a.m.: Emmanuel worship at Rosewood Court
SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 22

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel: Worship, 9 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

Methodist: Communion Sunday: Conde Worship at 9 a.m., Groton worship at 11 a.m.

St. John's: Bible Study, 8 a.m.; worship, 9 a.m.; Zion worship, 11 a.m.



HELP WANTED!

Groton Store

**Part time cashier & part time deli.
Deli must be 18 years of age or older.
Apply at Ken's in Groton.**

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

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

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 2 of 61

Groton placed first in three events at regions

Groton Area placed first in three events at the Regional Track Meet held Thursday in Clark. The final top 24 in the state will be released today. The regional track meet was the final meet of the season for athletes to try and improve on their times to secure a spot in the top 24.

The boys 3200m relay team took first while the girls 1600m Relay team took first as did Aspen Johnson in the triple jump.

Boy's Division

Team Points: 1. Milbank 224.5; 2. Webster Area 130.5; 3. Groton Area 80.5; 4. Clark/Willow Lake 71; 5. Florence/Henry 68; 6. Dakota Hills 54; 7. Redfield 53.5; 8. Sisseton 32; 9. Tiospa Zina 12

100 Meters: 2. Andrew Marzahn, 11.92

100 Meters - Prelims: 2. Andrew Marzahn, 11.73; 9. Korbin Kucker, 12.60; 11. Jayden Zak, 12.98

200 Meters: 10. Korbin Kucker, 25.89; 12. Tate Larson, 26.26

400 Meters: 5. Christian Ehresmann, 59.64; 8. Tate Larson, 1:01.86

800 Meters: 12. Tristan McGannon, 2:30.12; 14. Jayden Schwan, 2:44.41; 15. Ben Hoeft, 2:47.13

1600 Meters: 8. Tristan McGannon, 5:26.84; 12. Jayden Schwan, 5:56.98; 13. Ben Hoeft, 6:00.19

110m Hurdles - 39": 4. Caden McInerney, 20.55

110m Hurdles - 39" - Prelims: 4. Caden McInerney, 20.55

300m Hurdles - 36": 5. Caden McInerney, 50.20; 7. Colby Dunker, 54.48

4x100 Relay: 3. (Kaden Kurtz, Keegen Tracy, Korbin Kucker, Teylor Diegel), 46.77

4x200 Relay: 2. (Andrew Marzahn, Keegen Tracy, Kaden Kurtz, Teylor Diegel), 1:35.44

4x400 Relay: 4. (Keegen Tracy, Kaden Kurtz, Andrew Marzahn, Cole Simon), 3:37.95

4x800 Relay: 1. (Cole Simon, Keegen Tracy, Jacob Lewandowski, Lane Tietz), 8:53.99

SMR 200-200-400-800m - [2-2-4-8]: 3. (Lane Tietz, Teylor Diegel, Christian Ehresmann, Jacob Lewandowski), 4:05.55

Shot Put - 12lb: 7. Holden Sippel, 40-02.50; 9. Caleb Hanten, 38-04.00; 10. Kaleb Antonsen, 36-06.50

Discus - 1.6kg: 5. Logan Ringgenberg, 106-07; 7. Caleb Hanten, 100-01; 9. Holden Sippel, 95-00

High Jump: 5. Jackson Cogley, 5-04.00

Long Jump: 8. Jacob Zak, 18-05.50; 17. Tate Larson, 14-08.25

Triple Jump: 4. Jackson Cogley, 37-09.25; 6. Jacob Zak, 36-06.75 PR; 9. Tristan McGannon, 34-09.00

Girl's Division

Team Points: 1. Milbank 201.5; 2. Redfield 96; 3. Webster Area 91; 4. Groton Area 85; 5. Clark/Willow Lake 75.5; 6. Dakota Hills 65; 7. Florence/Henry 63; 8. Sisseton 36

100 Meters - Prelims: 11. Karsyn Jangula, 14.65; 15. Kayla Lehr, 15.13; 17. Brooklyn Hansen, 15.21

200 Meters: 9. Rylee Dunker, 29.80; 10. Karsyn Jangula, 29.98; 11. Brooklyn Hansen, 30.18

800 Meters: 2. Taryn Traphagen, 2:48.71

100m Hurdles - 33": 5. Talli Wright, 19.23

100m Hurdles - 33" - Prelims: 6. Talli Wright, 19.34

300m Hurdles - 30": 4. Talli Wright, 54.93

4x100 Relay: 2. (Rylee Dunker, Brooklyn Hansen, Kella Tracy, Karsyn Jangula), 56.05

4x200 Relay: 2. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Aspen Johnson, Laila Roberts), 1:54.67

4x400 Relay: 1. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Kella Tracy, Laila Roberts), 4:18.31

4x800 Relay: 3. (Kella Tracy, Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Rylee Dunker), 10:31.55

SMR 200-200-400-800m - [2-2-4-8]: 2. (Laila Roberts, Kennedy Hansen, Jerica Locke, Faith Traphagen), 4:36.02

Shot Put - 4kg: 5. Emma Kutter, 30-07.00 PR; 6. Maddie Bjerke, 29-04.00; 9. Faith Flihs, 28-00.50

Discus - 1kg: 14. Maddie Bjerke, 67-01; 15. Faith Flihs, 64-07; 19. Ashley Johnson, 47-04

High Jump: 6. Anna Fjeldheim, 4-06.00; 9. Emerlee Jones, 4-04.00

Long Jump: 2. Aspen Johnson, 15-00.00; 9. Anna Fjeldheim, 13-08.00

Triple Jump: 1. Aspen Johnson, 32-06.25; 10. Anna Fjeldheim, 28-01.00; 14. Emerlee Jones, 27-06.00

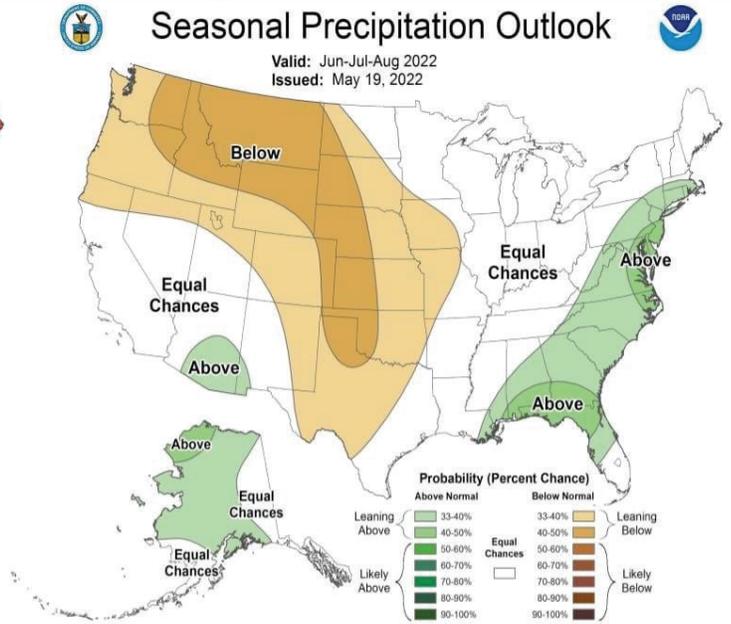
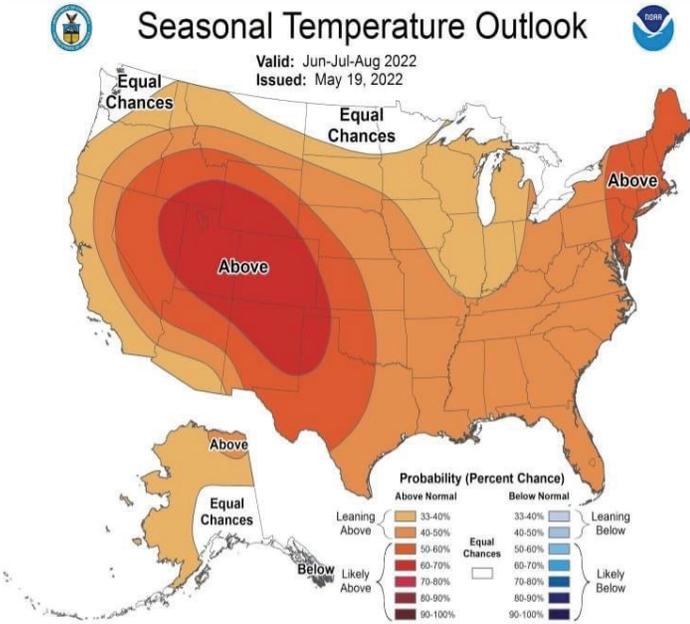
Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 3 of 61

Sisseton Golf Meet

Carly Guthmiller placed 11th at the Sisseton Invitational Golf Meet held Thursday. She shot a 104. Emma Schinkel placed 21st with a 117, Carly Gilbert shot a 126 for 26th place and Shaylee Peterson placed 29th with a 131.

 **Updated May 19 - The Summer Outlook** May 19, 2022
5:17 PM
Overall the forecast is for warmer and drier than average for South Dakota



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Dodgers win Youth Baseball League Tournament

The Groton Area boys "Dodgers" won the Aberdeen Smitty's Youth Baseball (3rd & 4th graders) Minor League End Of Year tournament Wednesday night. Pictured is the Championship team.

Back Row: Coaches Matt Locke, Ryan Schelle, Jarrett Zimmerman, Jason Hill

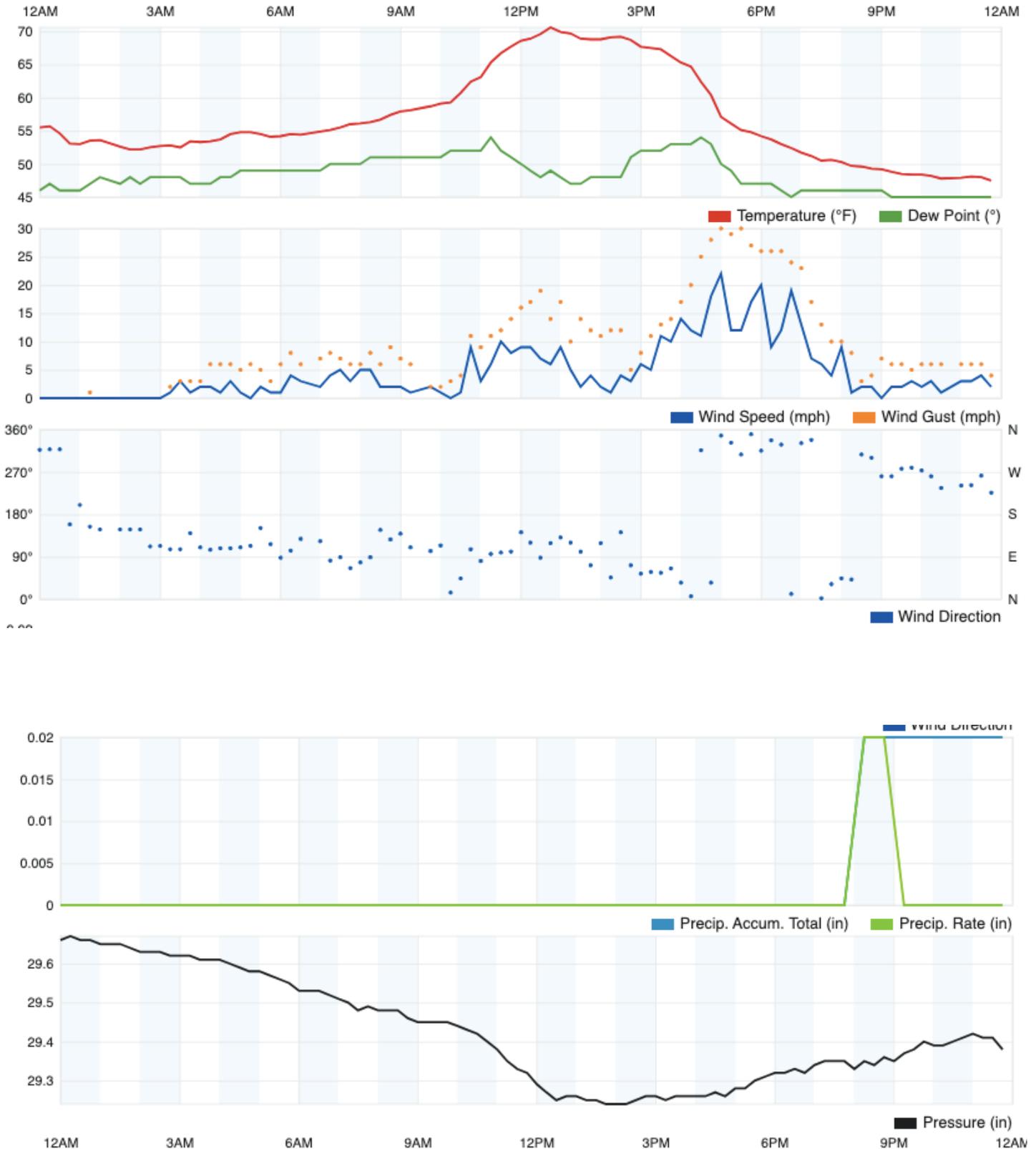
Middle Row: Asher Zimmerman, Rylan Blackwood, Eli Heilman, Graham Rose, Easton Larson, Hank Hill

Front Row: Drew Fjeldheim, Dawson Feist, Trey Tietz, Mason Locke, Knox Mulder, Trayce Schelle (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 5 of 61

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 6 of 61

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Breezy. Partly Sunny then Chance Showers	Slight Chance Showers and Breezy then Areas Frost	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy then Areas Frost	Areas Frost then Partly Sunny
High: 56 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 51 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 57 °F



Cold Saturday Morning
Lows 30 to 36°
✓ Time to protect sensitive plants

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 5/20/2022 4:10 AM Central



After a day with highs only in the upper 40s to upper 50s, it will not take much to get temperatures to fall into the low to mid 30s overnight into Saturday morning. A Freeze Watch has been posted for a portion of north central South Dakota. Look for updates, changes, and possibly expansion of frost and freeze products later in the day. Now is the time to think about protecting those sensitive plants. Looking ahead, Saturday night will be similar to tonight.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 7 of 61

Today in Weather History

May 20, 1965: A tornado hit north of Frederick. A barn and all outbuildings were destroyed on one farm. Windows exploded outward at the house. The tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 5 miles.

May 20, 1974: Softball size hail fell in Kennebec, in Lyman County, breaking many windows in the schools and other buildings.

1894: A record late snow of two to eight inches whitened parts of central and eastern Kentucky. Lexington received six inches of snow, and Springfield Kentucky received 5 inches.

1916: In three consecutive years, a tornado passed near or through the town of Codell, Kansas. The tornado on this day was an estimated F2. The estimated F3 tornado in 1917 passed two miles west of town. Finally, an estimated F4 tornado moved through Codell on May 20th, 1918. This tornado killed 9 and injured at least 65 others.

1957: A tornado touched down to the southwest of Kansas City and traveled a distance of seventy-one miles cutting a swath of near destruction through the southeastern suburbs of Ruskin Heights and Hickman Mills. The tornado claimed the lives of forty-five persons and left hundreds homeless. It was the worst weather disaster on record for Kansas City. About all that remained of one house were a small table and a fishbowl atop, with the fish still swimming about inside the bowl. A canceled check from Hickman Hills was found in Ottumwa, Iowa, 165 miles away. Pilots reported debris at an altitude of 30,000 feet.

1987 - Thunderstorms in southern Texas produced grapefruit size hail, near the town of Dilley ("by dilly"), and produced wind gusts to 73 mph at Lake Amistad. The large hail broke windows, killed small animals, and damaged watermelon. Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from Indiana to the Dakotas. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Denver IA, and wind gusts to 80 mph in southern Henry County IL. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms in the south central U.S. produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Omaha, NE, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Midland and Dallas, TX. Temperatures in California soared into the 90s and above 100 degrees. San Jose CA reported a record high of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Pre-dawn thunderstorms produced large hail in eastern Oklahoma and northwestern Arkansas. Later in the morning thunderstorms in North Carolina produced dime size hail at Hanging Dog. Thunderstorms also produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Central Plains Region later that day and night, with baseball size hail reported around Lawn, Novice and Eola TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across the southeastern quarter of the nation through the day and night. Severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes, including one which injured two persons at Algoma, MS, and another which injured nine persons at Rogersville, MO. There were 119 reports of large hail or damaging winds. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Houston MO and damaging winds which killed one person at Toccoa GA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 8 of 61

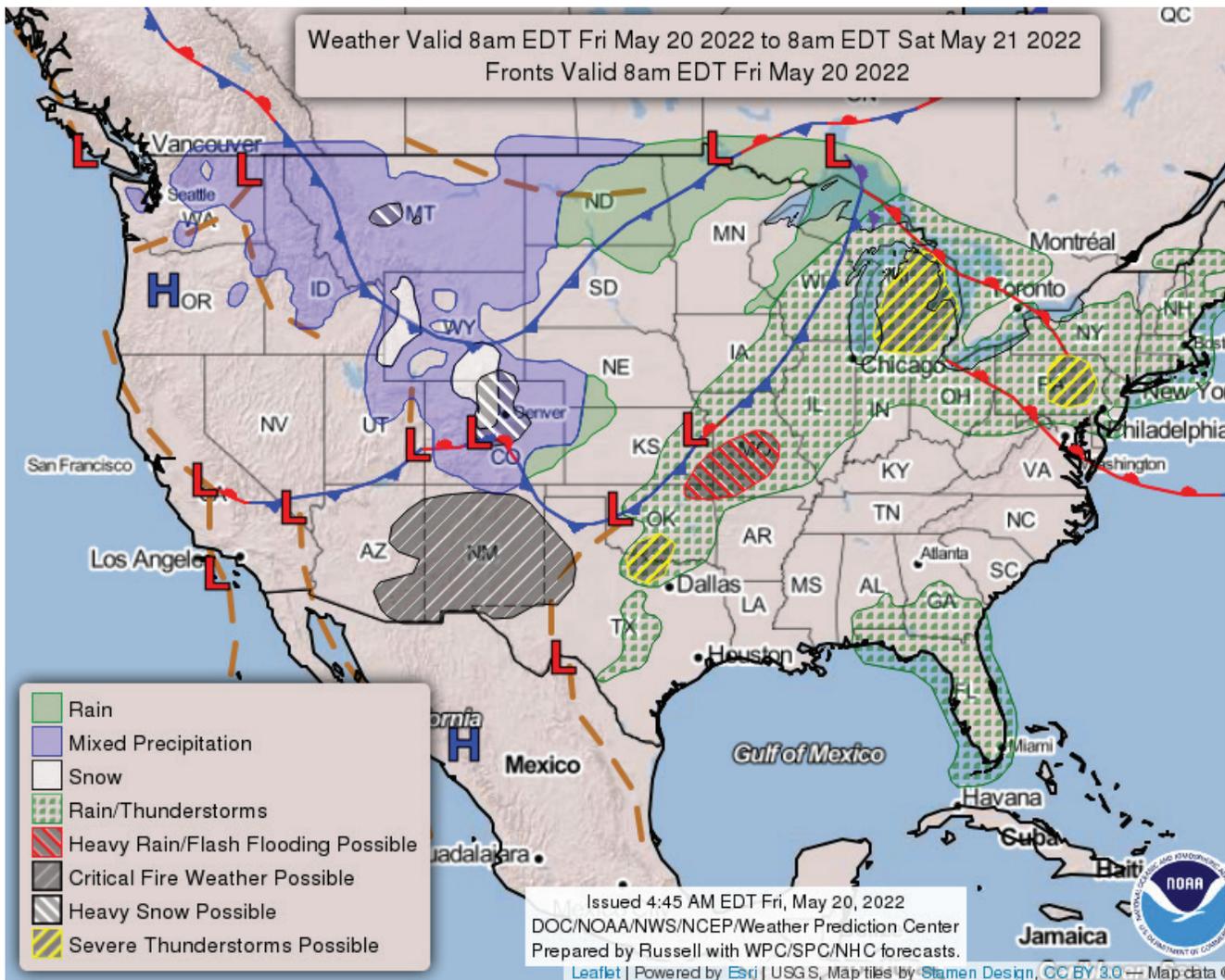
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 70.6 °F at 12:45 PM
Low Temp: 47.5 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 30 mph at 5:00 PM
Precip: 0.02

Day length: 15 hours, 08 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 96 in 1934
Record Low: 23 in 1907
Average High: 72°F
Average Low: 46°F
Average Precip in May.: 2.21
Precip to date in May.: 2.42
Average Precip to date: 6.18
Precip Year to Date: 8.92
Sunset Tonight: 9:03:24 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:53:31 AM





STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

A raging sea, a violent storm, a broken mast and a twenty-foot swell capsized the small ship. A survivor in a small rowboat was struggling for his life - looking for hope. Suddenly, through the dark clouds, he sighted a lone star shining brightly. Rowing with all his might, he said to himself over and over, "If I lose that star, I'm lost!"

What an appropriate scene for us to visualize when all seems lost and storms of life refuse to give way to calm seas. It seems as though wave after wave rises and falls while the wind grows stronger and the night darker. We strain, and we struggle against all the odds to survive. Is the sun gone from my life forever? Will I never see another blossom? Will the clouds never allow the stars to shine again?

Often, we fix our eyes on things that give us no hope or people who do not care for our best. The "immediate" is right here right now, and that's all that matters! So, we "reach out" and grab anything that is available.

However, there is a better way to respond when life has turned us upside down. The Psalmist wrote, "The eyes of all look to You in hope." There are those who "wish" for better days when things are bleak and black. And then there are Christians who have hope!

The difference between a "wish" and "hope" that comes from faith in Christ is quite significant. A wish is a "desire" or a "dream." But when we who belong to God say we "have this hope," it means that, because of His faithfulness, we have the confident assurance that we can trust the Lord to save us and sustain us in life's darkest hours.

Prayer: Lord, as unworthy and undeserving as we are, we know that You will rescue us if we have faith in You. We look to You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The eyes of all look to You in hope. Psalm 145:15a

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 10 of 61

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)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 11 of 61

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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Biden forest plan stirs dispute over what counts as "old"

By MATTHEW BROWN and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — President Joe Biden's order to protect the nation's oldest forests against climate change, wildfires and other problems devastating vast woodlands is raising a simple yet vexing question: When does a forest grow old?

Millions of acres are potentially on the line — federal land that could eventually get new protections or remain open to logging as the administration decides which trees to count under Biden's order covering "old growth" and "mature" forests. Underlining the urgency of the issue are wildfires in California that killed thousands of giant sequoias in recent years.

Experts say there's no simple formula to determine what's old: Growth rates among different tree types vary greatly — and even within species, depending on their access to water and sunlight and soil conditions.

Any definitions for old-growth or mature trees adopted by the Biden's administration are "going to be subjective," said Mark Ashton, a forestry professor at the Yale School of the Environment.

Already disagreement is emerging between the timber industry and environmentalists over which trees to count. That's likely to complicate Biden's efforts to protect older forests as part of his climate change fight, with key pieces stalled in Congress.

"If you were looking at ecological and academic definitions of old growth, it's going to be very different from what the White House is thinking about," Ashton said. "Even the word 'mature' is difficult to define."

Groves of aspen, for example, can mature within a half century. For Douglas fir stands, it could take 100 years. Wildfire frequency also factors in: Ponderosa pine forests are adapted to withstand blazes as often as once a decade, compared to lodgepole pine stands that might burn every few hundred years.

There's wide consensus on the importance of preserving the oldest and largest trees — both symbolically as marvels of nature, and more practically because their trunks and branches store large amounts of carbon that can be released when forests burn, adding to climate change.

Global wildfires last year emitted the equivalent of about 7.1 billion tons (6.4 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide, according to the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service. That's equal to about 18% of global CO2 emissions from coal, oil and other energy sources recorded last year by the International Energy Agency.

Concerns that warming temperatures, fires and disease could doom the dwindling number of ancient trees on federal forests drew a bipartisan group of lawmakers to California this month. They touted planned legislation to preserve perhaps the most iconic old growth in the U.S.: stands of massive sequoias that can tower almost 300 feet (90 meters).

Lightning-sparked wildfires killed thousands of giant sequoias last year, adding to a two-year death toll that accounts for up to nearly a fifth of Earth's largest trees. The giants are concentrated in about 70 groves scattered along the western side of the Sierra Nevada range.

"We're going the wrong direction. We're burning up more trees and putting more carbon into the atmosphere," Arkansas Rep. Bruce Westerman told The Associated Press after visiting Sequoia National Forest.

But the unity behind saving rare sequoias quickly fades when it comes to "mature" forests — a term that White House climate adviser David Hayes said could apply to stands at least 80 years old.

Westerman, the ranking Republican on the House Natural Resources Committee and a licensed forester, said the sequoia groves clearly qualify as mature. But much beyond that "it's a vague term that has no scientific meaning at all."

"I've got a graduate degree in forestry and I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Biden's order calls for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management over the next year to define and inventory all mature and old growth forests on federal land. After that, the agencies must identify the biggest threats those forests face and come up with ways to save them.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 13 of 61

White House adviser Hayes described old growth forests generally as undisturbed stands with well-established canopies and individual trees usually over 150 years old.

"Mature forests," he added, "are generally 80 to 150 years old and have many of the same characteristics of old-growth forests or are on their way to developing those characteristics if left undisturbed."

Officials were developing a "workable definition" that would be made public, Hayes said. "Then based on a good definition, there will be the opportunity to ... get real and protect these stands and safeguard them to the greatest extent we can from the threats that they face."

Threats could include fire, drought, competition with younger trees, insect infestation and timber harvests, agency officials said in a statement. How those rank won't be known until after the inventory.

Environmentalists said Biden's inclusion of mature forests was crucial if the order is to be meaningful, since so many old growth stands already were cut over the past half-century, particularly in the Pacific Northwest.

They want the administration to adopt specific rules to protect those forests, rather than vague management plans that would be easier for a future Republican administration to reverse. Environmentalists also want to stop pending logging projects on federal lands in Oregon, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho and other states.

"This executive order clearly calls out the need for protections," said Randi Spivak with the environmental group Center for Biological Diversity. "I'm concerned the Forest Service will slow walk this until the clock runs out."

Spivak acknowledged that definitions of mature may vary among different tree species, but said complexity was no excuse to avoid acting.

"If you're looking for one age, 80 years is a good cutoff," she said.

Logging projects on federal forests often include a mix of older and younger trees. Smaller, densely packed trees are worse for wildfires, because they can burn faster and hotter. But larger trees are worth more, which can be used as an incentive to bring in timber companies that thin forests to reduce wildfire risks.

Environmentalists are pushing the administration to stop those projects, but the timber industry says that would undermine efforts to protect communities against wildfires.

Past protections for older trees have come indirectly, such as the "roadless rule" adopted under former President Bill Clinton in 2001 that blocked logging on 58.5 million acres (23.7 million hectares), or about one quarter of all federal forests.

On federal forest land in the Pacific Northwest, the size of tree trunks was used for almost two decades as a proxy to determine if they were too "old" for logging. Known as the "21-inch Rule," the restriction was dropped by the Forest Service last year after both logging companies and conservationists criticized it as too rigid.

Timber industry representative Nick Smith with the American Forest Resource Council said any definitions crafted under Biden would be difficult to put into practice. Smith said the administration should instead be concentrating on another piece of its strategy to combat wildfires — thinning stands where decades of fire suppression allowed undergrowth to flourish, which can be a recipe for disaster when fires ignite.

"It's hard to see how this Executive Order results in meaningful protections while also accelerating the pace and scale of treating our national forests," Smith said.

Biden opens Asia trip with global issues and tech on agenda

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

PYEONGTAEK, South Korea (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday opened his Asia trip by highlighting the computer chip shortage that has bedeviled the world economy, touring a Samsung computer chip plant that will serve as model for a \$17 billion semiconductor factory the Korean electronics company plans to open in Texas.

The Samsung visit was a nod to one of Biden's key domestic priorities: increasing the supply of computer chips. A semiconductor shortage last year hurt the availability of autos, kitchen appliances and other goods,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 14 of 61

causing higher inflation worldwide and crippling Biden's public approval among U.S. voters.

Biden will grapple with a multitude of foreign policy issues during a five-day visit to South Korea and Japan, but he also crafted an itinerary clearly meant to tend to the concerns of his home audience as well. The president noted that the Texas plant would add 3,000 jobs and the construction would include union labor.

"These little chips," Biden said in remarks at the plant, "are the key to propelling us into the next era of humanity's technological development."

Greeting Biden at the plant in South Korea was the country's new president, Yoon Suk Yeol, and Samsung Electronics Vice Chairman Lee Jae-yong. Yoon is a political newcomer who became president, his first elected office, slightly more than a week ago. He campaigned on taking a tougher stance against North Korea and strengthening the 70-year alliance with the U.S.

Yoon said in a speech before Biden spoke that he hopes the countries' partnership evolves into an "economic and security alliance based on cooperation in advanced technology and supply chains."

The chip plant showed the unique nature of manufacturing as visitors were required to don laboratory coats and blue booties to help keep the facility clean. Biden and Yoon, who did not wear protective clothing, saw a demonstration of the machinery.

At one point during his tour, Biden received an in-depth explanation of a KLA inspection system on the Samsung plant floor. The California-based company is a major supplier to Samsung's semiconductor operations. After a worker named Peter explained the ins and outs of the machinery, Biden quipped, "Don't forget to vote," when he returns home to the United States.

Part of the computer chip shortage is the result of strong demand as much of the world emerged from the coronavirus pandemic. But coronavirus outbreaks and other challenges also caused the closure of semiconductor plants. U.S. government officials have estimated that chip production will not be at the levels they would like until early 2023.

Global computer chip sales totaled \$151.7 billion during the first three months of this year, a 23% jump from the same period in 2021, according to the Semiconductor Industry Association.

More than 75% of global chip production comes from Asia. That's a possible vulnerability the U.S. hopes to protect against through more domestic production and \$52 billion worth of government investment in the sector through a bill being negotiated in Congress.

The risk of Chinese aggression against Taiwan could possibly cut off the flow of high-end computer chips that are needed in the U.S. for military gear as well as consumer goods. Similarly, the hermetic North Korea has been test-firing ballistic missiles amid a coronavirus outbreak, a possible risk to South Korea's manufacturing sector should the brinkmanship escalate.

In terms of chip production, China leads the global pack with a 24% share, followed by Taiwan (21%), South Korea (19%) and Japan (13%). Only 10% of chips are made in the U.S., according to the Semiconductor Industry Association.

Samsung announced the plant in Taylor, Texas in November 2021. It hopes to begin operations in the second half of 2024. The South Korean electronics giant chose the site based on a number of factors, including government incentives and the "readiness and stability" of local infrastructure.

The White House said in a fact sheet issued Friday that semiconductor companies have announced nearly \$80 billion in U.S. investments through 2025. That sum includes \$20 billion for Intel's plant outside Columbus, Ohio, up to \$30 billion by Texas Instruments, a \$1 trillion expansion by Wolfspeed in North Carolina and investments by Global Foundries and SK Group.

'I can't see the light': War fuels surging prices in Europe

By COLLEEN BARRY AP Business Writer

MILAN (AP) — Edoardo Ronzoni inspects a construction site near Milan that he shut down in March as costs for materials skyrocketed. He can't complete a half-built roundabout at an intersection known for fender-benders because asphalt, cast-iron pipes and concrete are too expensive — prices exacerbated by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 15 of 61

Public works projects in Italy are grinding to a halt just as the European Union is injecting 108 billion euros (\$114 billion) in pandemic recovery money meant to launch a construction frenzy.

Ronzoni laments that his company has already lost its three busiest months and expects the worst is ahead: "We fear we won't be able to work this year. We are closing all of our sites."

The war has accelerated inflation across Europe and the world, with prices for energy, materials and food surging at rates not seen for decades. It's causing sticker shock at the grocery store, gas pumps, electricity bills and construction sites.

Soaring oil and gas prices are the key driver of inflation in Europe, which is heavily reliant on Russian energy to generate electricity and power industry. Inflation is expected to hit nearly 7% this year in the 27-nation EU and is contributing to slowing growth forecasts.

Fishmongers and farmers are being forced to charge prices for their catch and crops that even they see as astronomical. High fuel prices threaten to paralyze ground transport of goods. Bread prices are soaring from Poland to Belgium. Protests over price hikes have erupted in places like Bulgaria. While governments have responded with tax cuts and other aid, they face limits in easing the impact of volatile energy markets.

Even the thrifty, with backyard hens, are wondering if the price of feed is worth the eggs they yield. Alina Czernik, a shop assistant in Warsaw, does the math, as she sees prices of grain for her hen go up 150%, to 200 zlotys (\$45) per 100 kilograms (220 pounds).

It is spreading a sense of futility, especially for those with low incomes.

"I've been a positive person, but for now, I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel," said Eva Fuchsova, a mother of three who lives in the town of Touskov in western Czech Republic.

"I have to tighten my belt. I buy fruits and vegetables so my kids have everything, but I don't touch it," she said.

Economists are calling it a perfect storm, striking as countries unleashed spending to spur an economic rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. Surging customer demand overwhelmed factories, ports and freight yards, with resulting shortages driving up prices.

Add to that: The war in Ukraine has blocked exports of raw materials like steel and minerals that kept western Europe humming, as well as commodities like grains and seed oil, accentuating global shortages.

Inflation is running especially hot in central and Eastern European countries nearest the battlefields of Ukraine. Prices in April rose 14.2% in the Czech Republic, 12.3% in Poland and 10.8% in Greece. They're an eye-popping 61% in Turkey, which saw its currency lose 44% of its value against the dollar last year.

Shop workers from Warsaw to Istanbul say customers are cutting back, buying lower-priced items, giving up on niceties like fresh-cut flowers and items they can delay, like new clothes.

In the Turkish capital, butcher Bayram Koza said he has seen a 20% drop in sales after prices nearly doubled, largely due to the cost of feed. That is making livestock breeding unprofitable, and many farmers are selling and moving to the city, he said.

"Even in (the affluent district of) Cankyaya, people are no longer buying according to their needs, but according to what they can afford. Those who bought two kilos of ground beef are now buying a kilo at the most," he said.

On the Greek island of Rhodes, fish restaurant owner Paris Parasos gets up at dawn to go out on fishing trips to keep costs down. But he has still had to raise prices at his restaurant in the island's main town as cooking oil prices quadrupled. Plus, cooking gas and electricity bills are three times higher.

"I could lower the quality and use the oil more, but I refuse to do it. We want customers to return and expect the same quality," Parasos said.

In Poland, bread prices are up 30%, sending shoppers to discount outlets. Bakers in Belgium are laying off workers, as prices for a loaf rise by 30 cents, to 2.70 euros (\$2.85).

"I know bakers who work 13 or 14 hours a day to get out of this and honor their loans," Albert Denoncin, president of the French-speaking bakery federation, told La Premiere radio. "We can do it for a while, but when I hear from the World Bank management that this will last until 2024, we are not going to make it."

In Spain, truckers have gotten some relief on diesel prices thanks to government emergency measures,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 16 of 61

including a small rebate and permission to pass along higher fuel costs to customers.

Still, the burden is high. Óscar Baños, who drives his own cargo trailer out of the central Spanish town of Palencia, said tires have risen from 400 to 500 euros, a new truck cab is up from 100,000 to 120,000 euros, and a liter of diesel has risen from 1.20 to 1.90 euros in the past year. That's the equivalent of a gallon of gasoline rising from \$4.80 to \$7.60.

"There is a lot of uncertainty, not just in our sector but across the board," Baños said.

Europe's auto market also is facing price hikes as factory shutdowns in Ukraine, sanctions on Russia and an existing global semiconductor shortage crimp supplies of components needed to make cars.

As a result, average new car prices in Europe are expected to rise \$500 to \$2,000 this year, according to Nishant Mishra, associate director of investment research at Acuity Knowledge Partners.

Back in Milan, the roundabout is just one of half a dozen non-EU-funded sites Ronzoni has had to close in recent months. He finds himself unable to deliver the work at the contracted prices.

High costs mean companies are not bidding to take on public works, including a bridge in Rome that was to be the first project built with EU recovery funds. With bidding stalled, the money earmarked for infrastructure — worth nearly half of the 220 billion euros from the EU — is at risk, along with the jobs it would bring, according to ANCE National Association of Construction Workers.

The government has announced 3 billion euros to help cover increased prices, but builders it's not sufficient, with costs up an average of 40%, but sometimes much higher. Iron prices, for example, are up 170%, Ronzoni said.

"It's exponential," he said.

Biden in Asia: New friends, old tensions, storms at home

By JOSH BOAK, AAMER MADHANI and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — President Joe Biden hopes to use his visit to Asia to confirm his belief that long-standing friendships can afford to become even friendlier — and pay dividends. He opened the trip in South Korea on Friday and will end in Japan next week at a time when world events are resetting the foundations of the global order.

The coronavirus pandemic disrupted supply chains and exposed the fragilities of a trade system focused primarily on low prices for consumers and high profits for corporations. Then Russia's invasion of Ukraine ushered in a return to Cold War-era intrigues.

The U.S. and other wealthy democracies — including Japan and South Korea — banded together to help Ukraine and punish Russia, but not all countries were ready to side with the alliance. China, India and others have aimed to stay cordial with Russia without crossing the sanctions.

The uncertainty leaves Biden determined to show that America's ultimate power rests with its ability to make friends and influence people rather than the raw capacity of its military and economy. A look at some of the key issues and themes on the table for Biden's visit:

EASING TENSIONS WITH NEW LEADERS

Relations between Japan and South Korea have been at their worst in decades because of disputes over wartime history and trade. These are rifts that the countries' two new leaders appear willing to heal, with Biden as a possible interlocutor who could help bring them closer together.

South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol assumed the presidency a week ago on the expectation of better ties with Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who took office in October, spoke with Yoon by phone the day after Yoon's March election victory, saying "sound relations" are crucial for regional and international peace and stability.

As Kishida sees it, the rules-based order is threatened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Japan fears the war that began in February could embolden China to seize territories in the Pacific, a big reason why better relations with South Korea are desired. Still, Kishida skipped Yoon's May 10 inauguration, sending his foreign minister instead. Because the U.S. has relations with both countries, one likely bridge toward improving ties is focusing on their shared interests.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 17 of 61

NORTH KOREAN PRESSURE COOKER

Biden's visit comes as the allies face a growing threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile program. The country's authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un is trying to force the United States to accept the idea of the North as a nuclear power and he's out to negotiate security and economic concessions from a position of strength.

Kim has conducted 16 rounds of missile tests so far this year, including the country's first flight of an intercontinental ballistic missile in nearly five years in March. He's attempting to exploit a favorable environment to push forward his weapons program as the U.N. Security Council remains divided over Russia's war on Ukraine.

The challenges posed by a decaying economy and an escalating COVID-19 outbreak across an unvaccinated population of 26 million are unlikely to slow his pressure campaign. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan says U.S. intelligence shows there's a "genuine possibility" that North Korea will conduct another ballistic missile test or nuclear test during or around Biden's visit.

Nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have stalled for more than three years about disagreements over how to relax crippling U.S.-led sanctions in exchange for disarmament steps by the North.

STORMS AT HOME

Even half a world away from home, Biden can't escape the turbulence rippling through the U.S.

The stock market is tanking over fears about the economy. The baby formula shortage is frustrating families, even amid efforts to bring in imports and boost domestic supplies. The pain of the Buffalo, New York, mass shooting and the racist motives underlying the attack are still fresh. Add to that rising gasoline prices and the persistent challenge of inflation at a nearly 40-year high.

The president may want to train the public's attention on his efforts abroad, but he'll likely face tough questions about what's happening at home.

THE QUAD

It meets Tuesday, but what is it? The Quad is a partnership composed of the U.S., Australia, India and Japan with the expressed goal of a "free and open" Indo-Pacific region. The joint statement coming out of their 2021 meeting didn't mention China, yet many of the stances adopted by the Quad are interpreted as a check on China's ambitions to be the dominant power in Asia.

This time, the drama might be more internal and deal with the complex nature of democracy itself. That's because Australia is holding elections Saturday. If the incumbent party wins, Prime Minister Scott Morrison would already be set to attend Tuesday's meeting in Tokyo. But if his party loses, Morrison would have to quickly resign so that opposition leader Anthony Albanese could be sworn in before the Tokyo meeting. Then there's the possibility that neither party captures a majority or the results are uncertain. If that happens, Albanese might be able to attend as an observer.

THE CHINA CONUNDRUM

China is carefully watching Biden's visit. The U.S. and its allies rely on China as a trade partner, yet rivalry persists as the shared economic interests have often revealed conflicting values systems. U.S. officials increasingly frame the relationship with China as one of competition.

Shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine in February, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin met at the Beijing Winter Olympics and told the world that the countries had a friendship of "no limits." Since the invasion, China has been critical of the sanctions imposed on Russia while appearing hesitant to cross the bans imposed by the U.S. and its allies.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian alluded to China as "a third party" who should not be disadvantaged by agreements between the U.S. and Japan.

"The development of bilateral relations between the U.S. and Japan should not target a third party or harm the interests of third parties," Zhao said at a Thursday briefing.

A NEW ACRONYM: IPEF

Former U.S. President Donald Trump torched years of trade negotiations by pulling the U.S. out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017. While Biden has portrayed himself as the anti-Trump, he's shown no

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 18 of 61

enthusiasm for returning to the deal as written.

This leaves the U.S. coming to Asia to promote an alternative trade pact: the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Or, IPEF.

The framework is about regional cooperation on trade, technology, supply chains, clean energy, worker standards, taxes and anti-corruption programs. None of that is necessarily controversial. But a possible hurdle is the administration signaling that the framework won't involve the usual financial sweeteners of lower tariffs and easier access to American customers, a possible nod to a U.S. voter backlash against past trade deals.

Australia, India and Japan — the three other members of the Quad — are likely members of the framework. South Korea and some Southeast Asian countries are also seen candidates. But the framework is still in its early stages. It was announced Tuesday that the U.S. Commerce Department is bringing in Sharon Yuan from The Asia Group, a business advisory firm, to be its chief negotiator for the agreement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday that any regional cooperation framework should feature "peace and development, enhance mutual trust and cooperation between regional countries, should not target any third parties or undermine their interests, and should not be selective or exclusive."

MORE CHIPS, PLEASE

It's the engine of the digital age: Almost everything needs a computer chip. But the world simply lacks a reliable supply in the wake of the pandemic. U.S. government officials expect the shortages to ease toward the end of this year, but it might not be until 2023 that enough semiconductors are on the market to meet industry needs.

No one denies the need for more cooperation, but there's an open debate about how to increase production to withstand disease, war, extreme weather and other calamities. Biden wants to see more chips made in the U.S. South Korea and Taiwan want to increase the resiliency of their own production as a fix to this crisis, according to a briefing by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And Japan's prime minister is making chips a cornerstone of his "new capitalism" policy, looking to make chips for robotic technology, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

Disinformation board's ex-leader faced wave of online abuse

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nina Jankowicz, like so many millennials, was excited to share a social media post announcing her new job on Twitter late last month when she was named executive director for a new disinformation board established by the Department of Homeland Security.

But instead of well-wishes, Jankowicz's tweet set off a torrent of sexist profanities across social media and menacing emails filled with rape or death threats that continue to follow her even after she resigned from that new job on Wednesday morning following the disastrous rollout of the program.

It's a familiar scenario.

A crush of online harassment, stalking and abuse has driven dozens of women around the globe from powerful positions. The speed and unchecked virulence of the attacks show another way that social media can serve as an accelerant to sowing discord.

"This type of silencing and terrorizing are global, sadly, and unsurprising," said Danielle Citron, a law professor at the University of Virginia who studies online privacy and hate crimes. "It is a playbook. And it's downright scary."

In 2018, after winning an election that made her the first female, Black legislator in Vermont, Kiah Morris said she was quitting the job because of racist threats, including from one Twitter user who threatened to stalk her at rallies.

Former Ohio health director Amy Acton, one of several female health officials across the U.S. who was subjected to threats online after recommending COVID-19 masking and stay-at-home orders, resigned weeks after protesters showed up at her house armed with sexist, antisemitic signs.

Heidi Allen, a member of British Parliament, stepped down in 2019, saying she was "exhausted" by "vile"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 19 of 61

online hatred she received, which included one man who posted aerial images of her home with specific threats. He was eventually jailed for his posts.

A United Nations report released earlier this year that studied Finland confirmed what many of those women already suspected: Female politicians, regardless of political affiliation, are subjected to 10 times more abusive messages on Twitter, including hate speech that sometimes suggested the women kill themselves. The online abuse, the U.N. concluded in its report, prevents democracies from being equally representative.

For her part, Jankowicz said Wednesday she won't be "silenced" by the online harassment and it was not the final provocation that led to her resignation.

But it had a similar effect.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas decided Tuesday to pause the work of the Disinformation Governance Board after such a negative reception and growing concerns that it was becoming a distraction for the department's other work on disinformation, according to two department officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. The board's pause led Jankowicz to quit Wednesday morning.

To be sure, the board's bungled launch and the agency's ensuing struggle to directly answer questions about its purpose, funding or work made the new initiative contentious from the start. Critics and Republican lawmakers raised serious questions about how the board might infringe on Americans' free speech and privacy rights. Others expressed concerns about Jankowicz's previous statements around the provenance of a laptop said to belong to Hunter Biden, the president's eldest son.

Conservative pundits, Twitter users and TV show hosts delivered a relentless campaign full of sexist attacks and misleading statements against Jankowicz. A Fox News personality questioned whether Jankowicz should have agreed to lead the board while pregnant. One far-right extremist called her "mentally ill" and a "nasty ... Jew," on his podcast; Jankowicz is not Jewish. Last week several conservative news sites circulated a misleading claim that Jankowicz was seeking powers to edit Twitter users' posts directly.

"I was trying to do important work to protect Americans from a real threat," Jankowicz said. But, instead, she was spending time reporting a steady wave of threats about herself.

"It was horrible. It was constant (direct messages), emails, threats on Twitter, threats on other places that I wasn't looking at. That's obviously really scary and really unpleasant."

Global stocks rise after Wall St slips closer to bear market

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Global stock markets rose Friday after Wall Street fell closer to bear territory, China cut a key interest rate and Japanese inflation edged higher.

London opened higher while Frankfurt retreated. Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Sydney gained. Oil prices declined.

Wall Street futures were higher after the benchmark S&P 500 index lost 0.6% on Thursday as rising interest rates, Russia's war on Ukraine and a Chinese economic slowdown added to investor unease. The benchmark is down 18.7% from its January high and close to the 20% decline that defines a bear market.

"This is unlikely to be rock bottom, given the tightening of financial conditions ahead," said Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank in a report. "Reality may again be harsher than expectations."

In early trading, the FTSE in London rose 1.5% to 7,409.16 while Frankfurt's DAX shed 0.9% to 13,882.30. The CAC 40 in Paris sank 1.3% to 6,272.71.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 future was up 0.8%. On Thursday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average also fell 0.8% and the Nasdaq slipped 0.3%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index rose 1.2% to 3,134.21 after the Chinese central bank reduced its rate on a five-year loan, which would shore up weak housing sales by cutting mortgage costs. The one-year loan rate that affects commercial borrowers was left unchanged.

That suggests Beijing is "trying to keep easing targeted and that we shouldn't expect large-scale stimu-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 20 of 61

lus," said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a report.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo jumped 1.3% to 26,746.24 after Japanese consumer inflation rose to 2.5% in April from the previous month's 1.3%. It was the first time since 2008 that inflation was above the central bank's 2% target.

Core inflation, which excludes fresh food and energy, rose to a seven-year high of 2.1% from March's 0.8%. Despite that, economists say the central bank is unlikely to change interest rates due to the weakness of the economy, which contracted in the last quarter.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong gained 2% to 20,533.33 and the Kospi in Seoul advanced 1.7% to 2,636.83. Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 added 1% to 7,139.00.

India's Sensex rose 2.2% to 53,950.87. New Zealand and Southeast Asian markets also rose.

Investors are watching the Federal Reserve for hints of more interest rate hikes to cool inflation that is running at a four-decade high. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said this week the U.S. central bank might take more aggressive action if price pressures fail to ease.

Traders also are uneasy about China's economy following official data that showed factory and consumer activity in April were weaker than forecast after Shanghai and other industrial centers shut down to fight coronavirus outbreaks.

U.S. tech stocks fell Thursday, accounting for a big share of the S&P 500's drop.

Cisco Systems slumped 13.7% after the seller of routers and switches cut its profit forecast amid supply chain constraints. Synopsis jumped 10.3% after the software company raised its financial forecasts for the year.

Retailers and other companies that rely on direct consumer spending mostly rose. Amazon added 0.2% and Expedia climbed 5.3%.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude lost 70 cents to \$109.19 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose \$2.62 on Thursday to \$112.21. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil trading, shed 45 cents to \$111.59 per barrel in London. It gained \$2.93 the previous session to \$112.04.

The dollar edged up to 127.78 yen from Thursday's 127.74 yen. The euro declined to \$1.0574 from \$1.0598.

Economy, China, climate dominate as Australia set for polls

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australians will go to the polls on Saturday following a six-week campaign that has focused on pandemic-fueled inflation, climate change and fears of a Chinese military outpost being established less than 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) off Australia's shore.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative coalition is seeking a rare fourth three-year term.

He began the campaign in April by urging voters to stick with a government that delivered one of the lowest pandemic death tolls of any advanced economy rather than risk the opposition center-left Labor Party.

An early election late last year had been widely anticipated with Morrison expected to reap the political capital from his government's success in containing the spread of COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic.

But his nickname "ScoMo" was changed by critics to "SloMo" a year ago when Australia's vaccine rollout fell months behind schedule.

Australia has recorded more than double the number of COVID-19 deaths so far this year than it did during the first two years of the pandemic. Around 8,000 people have died with COVID-19 among Australia's population of 26 million. Only 2,239 died in 2020 and 2021. The more transmissible virus variants have tarnished the government's pandemic record.

Opposition leader Anthony Albanese noted on Friday that he was the first candidate with a "non-Anglo Celtic name" to run for prime minister in the 121 years since the office was created.

Albanese was brought up in Sydney by a single Irish-Australian mother who fell pregnant in 1962 to an Italian during a trip to Europe. She took the father's name and lied that they had been married before he

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 21 of 61

died in a car accident. Father and son first met in 2009.

Albanese has recounted his own childhood hardships in advocating Labor policies of cheaper child care for low- and middle-income families and better nursing home care for the elderly.

"Part of what I've said during this campaign is: no one held back and no one left behind," Albanese said. "No one left behind because Labor will always look after the vulnerable and the disadvantaged."

The government changed voting regulations on Friday to enable thousands of people who have recently been infected with COVID-19 to vote by phone.

Some polling booths would be closed on Saturday because many of the 105,000 election workers were sick with the virus or flu. Army reservists have been asked to fill in, an official said.

The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have pushed up costs of living and cast doubt on the conservatives' boast of being better economic managers than Labor.

After the annual inflation rate soared to 5.1% in the March quarter, the central bank lifted its benchmark interest rate for the first time in more than 11 years from 0.1% to 0.35%.

Two weeks after cash rose by a quarter of a percentage point to 6.75% in November 2007, Prime Minister John Howard's conservative government was voted out of office, ending more than 11 years in power.

Opposition treasury spokesperson Jim Chalmers described the rate hike this month as a "full-blown cost of living crisis on Scott Morrison's watch."

Labor has also taken aim at the government's foreign policy credentials after China and the Solomon Islands confirmed during the election campaign they had finalized a bilateral security pact. Labor described it as Australia's worst foreign policy failure in the Pacific since World War II.

Australia already has a security pact with the Solomons and is the impoverished South Pacific island nation's most generous provider of foreign aid.

Foreign Minister Marise Payne had proposed in November doubling Australian aid to the Pacific to 2.88 billion Australian dollars (\$2 billion) a year to counter China's rising influence, The Australian newspaper reported on Friday, citing unnamed sources. But she was refused by her Cabinet's national security committee colleagues.

Morrison declined to confirm or deny the newspaper report because of the secrecy surrounding the committee's deliberations.

Morrison rejected the premise of a question when a reporter asked if he would consider doubling Pacific aid to counter Beijing's moves.

"You're suggesting that if you just double funding in the Pacific then somehow the Chinese government doesn't have any influence or won't be successful in seeking to coerce or exert its influence in the south-west Pacific," he said. "That's your assumption and that assumption doesn't hold."

Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said that there will be no Chinese naval base in his country and China has denied seeking a military foothold in the islands.

Senior government lawmakers have said the timing of the China-Solomons agreement during an election campaign is evidence that Beijing was attempting to undermine the ruling coalition's prospects for reelection.

The government maintains that Beijing wants a change of leadership because a Labor administration would be less likely to stand up against Chinese economic coercion.

As well as campaigning against Labor, Morrison's conservative Liberal Party is fighting off a new challenge from so-called teal independent candidates to key government lawmakers' reelection in party strongholds.

The teal independents are marketed as a greener shade than the Liberal Party's traditional blue color and want stronger government action on reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions than either the government or Labor are proposing.

The government aims to reduce Australia's emissions by 26% to 28% below 2005 levels by 2030. Labor has promised a 43% reduction.

Recent opinion polls have put Labor narrowly ahead of the coalition. But the pollsters' credibility has yet to recover since their spectacular failure in the 2019 election.

The split of votes between the government and Labor in 2019 was 51.5% to 48.5% — the mirror opposite of the result that Australia's five most prominent polls predicted.

Sri Lanka closes schools, limits work amid fuel shortage

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lankan authorities closed schools and asked public officials not to come to work in a desperate move to prepare for an acute fuel shortage that is expected to last days amid the nation's worst economic crisis in decades.

The Public Administration Ministry asked the public officials — except for those who maintain essential services — to stay home from work Friday “in a view of current fuel shortage and issues in transport facilities” across the country.

State- and government-approved private schools also closed Friday amid the worsening fuel shortage, with thousands of people waiting in queues at fuel stations across the country for days at a time.

Sri Lanka is now almost without gasoline and faces an acute shortage of other fuels as well.

The government has been struggling to find money to pay for the importation of fuel, gas and other essentials in recent months as the Indian Ocean island nation is on the brink of bankruptcy.

Its economic woes have brought on a political crisis, with the government facing widespread protests.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa swore in nine cabinet ministers Friday, raising the total number to 13 as he attempts to stabilize the government after a string of resignations.

The new ministers include four independent lawmakers, three from the ruling party and two from the main opposition party. Four ruling party lawmakers were appointed as cabinet ministers last week.

Rajapaksa sought a unity government in early April but the largest opposition political party, the United People's Force, had rejected the proposal.

For months, Sri Lankans have endured long lines to buy those essentials, most of which come from abroad. Shortages of hard currency have also hindered imports of raw materials for manufacturing and worsened inflation.

Protesters blocked main roads to demand gas and fuel, and television stations showed people in some areas fighting over limited stocks.

Authorities have announced countrywide power cuts of up to four hours a day because they can't supply enough fuel to power generating stations.

Sri Lanka has suspended repayment of about \$7 billion in foreign loans due this year out of \$25 billion to be repaid by 2026. The country's total foreign debt is \$51 billion. The finance ministry says the country currently has only \$25 million in usable foreign reserves.

Protesters have occupied the entrance to the president's office for more than a month, calling for Rajapaksa to resign.

Months of anti-government rallies have led to the near-dismantling of the once-powerful ruling family, with one of the president's brothers resigning as prime minister, and other siblings and a nephew leaving their Cabinet posts. Protesters accuse the Rajapaksas of triggering the crisis through corruption and misrule.

Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said Monday that about \$75 billion is needed urgently to help provide essential items, but the country's treasury is struggling to find even \$1 billion.

Attacks by Rajapaksa's supporters on protesters last week sparked nationwide violence that left nine people — including a lawmaker — dead, and more than 200 injured. Homes of lawmakers and their supporters were burned down.

Britain: Russian troops likely to redeploy from Mariupol

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — With the number of defenders left holed up in a Mariupol steel factory dwindling, Russian commanders will be coming under increasing pressure to reallocate troops from the strategic southern port city to bolster their offensive in eastern Ukraine, Britain's Defense Ministry said Friday.

More than 1,700 defenders of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol have surrendered since Monday, Rus-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 23 of 61

sian authorities said, in what appeared to be the final stage in the nearly three-month siege of the now-pulverized port city.

In fighting in the eastern Donbas region, 12 people were killed and 60 houses destroyed when Russia shelled the neighboring cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, northwest of Luhansk, regional governor Serhiy Haidai said in a Telegram post Friday.

In addition to Thursday's artillery attack, Russian ground troops attempted to assault Severodonetsk but took losses and retreated, Ukraine's General Staff said in its morning update.

In Mariupol, an unknown number of defenders remain in the sprawling Azovstal complex, which is the last bastion of Ukrainian resistance in the city — a target from the start of the invasion that has been under effective Russian control for some time.

If the factory falls, Russia will likely use troops from the city to reinforce operations elsewhere in the industrial Donbas region, but the duration of the stiff resistance will complicate or prolong that maneuver, Britain's Ministry of Defense said in a daily intelligence report.

"Staunch Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol since the start of the war means Russian forces in the area must be re-equipped and refurbished before they can be redeployed effectively," the ministry wrote on Twitter.

"Russian commanders, however, are under pressure to demonstrably achieve operational objectives. That means that Russia will probably redistribute their forces swiftly without adequate preparation, which risks further force attrition."

Analysts have said it is likely that most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the battle there have already left.

How long the remaining troops in the Azovstal factory can still hold out, however, is not clear.

In a brief video message Thursday, the deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, which led the defense of the steel mill, said he and other fighters were still inside.

"An operation is underway, the details of which I will not announce," Svyatoslav Palamar said.

Ukrainian troops, bolstered by Western weapons, thwarted Russia's initial goal of storming the capital, Kyiv, and have put up stiff resistance against Moscow's forces in the Donbas, which President Vladimir Putin now has set his sights on capturing.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said Thursday that it had gathered personal information from hundreds of the soldiers who had surrendered — name, date of birth, closest relative — and registered them as prisoners as part of its role in ensuring the humane treatment of POWs under the Geneva Conventions.

Amnesty International said in a tweet that the POW status means that the soldiers "must not be subjected to any form of torture or ill-treatment."

At least some of the fighters were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists. Others were hospitalized, according to a separatist official.

Russian state television distributed a video showing what it said was wounded Ukrainian soldiers from the Azovstal plant in a hospital in the Donetsk region.

The disheveled men, three to a room, lay in beds as they were fed and seen to by doctors and nurses. A doctor, identified only as Natalya, said most were in serious condition with multiple fractures and that many would need prosthetic limbs.

One unidentified Ukrainian patient winced and groaned as a nurse changed a bandage on his leg.

"The most important thing is that the leg was saved," he said in Russian. "The pain can be endured."

While Ukraine expressed hope for a prisoner exchange, Russian authorities have threatened to investigate some of the Azovstal fighters for war crimes and put them on trial, branding them "Nazis" and criminals.

The Azov Regiment's far-right origins have been seized on by the Kremlin as part of an effort to cast Russia's invasion as a battle against Nazi influence in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, in the first war crimes trial held by Ukraine, Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a Russian tank unit, told a court in Kyiv on Thursday that he shot Oleksandr Shelipov, a 62-year-old

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 24 of 61

Ukrainian civilian, in the head on orders from an officer.

Shishimarin apologized to the victim's widow, Kateryna Shelipova, who described seeing her husband being shot just outside their home in the early days of Russia's invasion.

She told the court that she believes Shishimarin deserves a life sentence, the maximum possible, but that she wouldn't mind if he were exchanged as part of a swap for the Azovstal defenders.

Also, more U.S. aid appeared to be on its way to Ukraine when the Senate overwhelmingly approved a \$40 billion package of military and economic aid for the country and its allies. The House voted for it last week. President Joe Biden's quick signature was certain.

"Help is on the way, really significant help. Help that could make sure that the Ukrainians are victorious," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

In other developments, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke by phone on Thursday with his Russian counterpart for the first time since the war began, and they agreed to keep the lines of communications open, the Pentagon said.

In Ukraine, surviving when your home is blasted

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

VELYKA KOSTROMKA, Ukraine (AP) — The explosions started in the middle of the night, shaking the house to its foundations. Roof timbers splintered and windows shattered, sending shards of glass hurtling above three sleeping children into the opposite wall.

It was around 2 a.m. and Iryna Martsyniuk had stayed up late watching a video on her computer while her children slept. She didn't know what was hitting her house — mortars, rockets or missiles. All she knew was that, in the dead of night, everything was exploding.

It wasn't the first time the Ukrainian village of Velyka Kostromka, just a few kilometers (miles) from the southern front line in the war in Ukraine, was being hit. But Thursday's early morning attack was the most intense and most widespread.

Around 20 houses were damaged, including three irreparably, and two people were lightly injured, said Olha Shaytanova, the head of the village. Later in the day, explosives experts blew up at least one undetonated device they found embedded in a field. Remnants of other devices lay scattered in the village.

Locals picked up jagged pieces of shrapnel. A farmer raked over a small crater left by an explosion in his potato field.

In Martsyniuk's home, an initial blast woke up the children. In tears, 7-year-old Maksym hid under his blanket. His twin sister Karyna and their 6-year-old brother Sasha clasped their mother in terror as she tried to calm them.

"Then it all started," said Martsyniuk. "There were flashes everywhere. The windows smashed, there was smoke everywhere."

The roof splintered and collapsed but the ceiling above their heads held fast.

She grabbed the children and ran toward the home's entrance. "But the corridor wasn't there anymore. Instead, we saw the starry night."

Five times they tried to leave the house and five times they failed, as more ordinance exploded around them.

The family hid inside, terrified, until the explosions subsided. But then they found they couldn't get out the front door. Instead, they climbed out of the house through a back window and ran down the road to a neighbor's home, where they hid in the basement. None of them was hurt.

The family's home is now likely beyond repair. A once-towering walnut tree in the front garden lies splintered and broken. The roof has caved in and piles of rubble lie around the front door. Inside, a child's drawing of a happy family outside a yellow house — just like Martsyniuk's — lies on the floor, shrapnel tears in the paper.

Martsyniuk is now staying with relatives in the village. She's thinking of going to the nearby city of Kryvyi Rih to rent an apartment while she figures out what to do next.

Elsewhere in the village, resident Anatolii Virko picked up pieces of shrapnel scattered around fields and homes and surveyed the damage to an abandoned house whose property he uses for his beehives.

He pulled back plastic sheeting to reveal an old Russian piano standing in the front yard. Placing the pieces of shrapnel carefully on the top of the piano, he began to play.

"Yes, it's a war," he said. "But music is eternal."

Senate ships \$40B Ukraine aid bill to Biden for signature

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate has whisked a \$40 billion package of military, economic and food aid for Ukraine and U.S. allies to final congressional approval, putting a bipartisan stamp on America's biggest commitment yet to turning Russia's invasion into a painful quagmire for Moscow.

The legislation, approved 86-11 Thursday was backed by every voting Democrat and most Republicans. While many issues under President Joe Biden have collapsed under party-line gridlock, Thursday's lopsided vote signaled that both parties were largely unified about sending Ukraine the materiel it needs to fend off Russian President Vladimir Putin's more numerous forces.

"I applaud the Congress for sending a clear bipartisan message to the world that the people of the United States stand together with the brave people of Ukraine as they defend their democracy and freedom," Biden said in a written statement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked the United States. "This is a demonstration of strong leadership and a necessary contribution to our common defense of freedom," he said in his nightly video address to the nation.

With control of Congress at stake in elections less than six months off, all "no" votes came from Republicans. The same thing happened in last week's 368-57 House vote, fueling campaign-season Democratic warnings that a nationalist wing of the GOP was in the thrall of former President Donald Trump and his isolationist, America First preferences.

Trump, who still wields clout in the party, has accused Biden of throwing money at Ukraine while mothers lack baby formula, a crisis sparked by a supply chain problem over which the government has scant impact.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called it "beyond troubling" that Republicans were opposing the Ukraine assistance. "It appears more and more that MAGA Republicans are on the same soft-on-Putin playbook that we saw used by former President Trump," said Schumer, using the Make America Great Again acronym Democrats are using to cast Republicans as extremists.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., a strong backer of the measure, warned his GOP colleagues that a Russian victory would move hostile forces ever closer to the borders of crucial European trading partners. That would prompt higher American defense spending and tempt China and other countries with territorial ambitions to test U.S. resolve, he said.

"The most expensive and painful thing America could possibly do in the long run would be to stop investing in sovereignty, stability and deterrence before it's too late," McConnell said.

Passage came as Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. had drawn down another \$100 million worth of Pentagon weapons and equipment to ship to Kyiv, bringing total U.S. materiel sent there since the invasion began to \$3.9 billion. He and other administration officials had warned that authority would be depleted by Thursday, but the new legislation will replenish the amount available by more than \$8 billion.

Overall, around \$24 billion in the measure is for arming and equipping Ukrainian forces, helping them finance weapons purchases, replacing U.S. equipment dispatched to the theater and paying for American troops deployed in nearby countries.

There is also \$9 billion to keep Ukraine's government afloat and \$5 billion to feed countries around the globe reliant on Ukraine's now diminished crop yields. And there is money to help Ukrainian refugees in the U.S., seize Russian oligarchs' assets, reopen the U.S. embassy in Kyiv and prosecute Russian war crimes.

The measure, which officials have said is designed to last through September, tripled the size of the initial \$13.6 billion in Ukraine aid that lawmakers approved shortly after the February invasion.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 26 of 61

The combined \$54 billion price tag exceeds what the U.S. has spent annually on all its military and economic foreign assistance in recent years, and approaches Russia's yearly military budget.

"Help is on the way, really significant help. Help that could make sure that the Ukrainians are victorious," said Schumer, voicing a goal that seemed nearly unthinkable when Russia first launched its brutal attack.

If the war drags on, as seems plausible, the U.S. may have to eventually decide whether to spend more even as inflation, huge federal deficits and a potential recession loom. Under those circumstances, winning bipartisan approval of any future aid bill could become tougher, especially as November draws near and cooperation between the parties frays.

Several potential 2024 GOP presidential contenders voted for the measure, including Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas, Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Marco Rubio of Florida. Another — Josh Hawley of Missouri — voted no. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who perhaps face this fall's toughest reelection races among GOP senators, backed the measure.

Three Democratic senators missed the vote. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland is recovering from what he's called a minor stroke. Sherrod Brown of Ohio's office said he woke up "not feeling well," took precautionary tests at George Washington University Hospital, was resting at home and plans to return to the Capitol next week. Jacky Rosen of Nevada's office said she was attending her daughter's law school graduation.

Biden had proposed a \$33 billion plan that lawmakers bolstered with added defense and humanitarian spending. He had to drop his request to include \$22.5 billion more to fuel the government's continued fight against the pandemic, spending that was opposed by many Republicans and got entwined in a politically complicating fight over immigration.

No Republican opposed to the legislation spoke during Thursday's debate. After passage, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., among the 11 conservatives who voted "no," questioned whether voters would support the bill if Congress asked them to pay for it.

"I wonder if Americans across our country would agree if they had been shown the costs, if they had been asked to pay for it," said Paul. "We simply borrow it. 'Put it on my tab' is what Congress says."

Paul, who often opposes U.S. intervention and makes a habit of derailing bills on the brink of approval, had used Senate procedures to upend Schumer's and McConnell's plans to approve the Ukraine assistance last week.

Religious backers of abortion rights say God's on their side

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (AP) — It was lunch hour at the abortion clinic, so the nurse in the recovery room got her Bible out of her bag in the closet and began to read.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding," her favorite proverb says, and she returns to it again and again. "He will make your paths straight."

She believes God led her here, to a job at the West Alabama Women's Center, tending to patients who've just had abortions. "I trust in God," said Ramona, who asked that her last name not be used because of the volatility America's abortion debate.

Out in the parking lot, protesters bellowed at patients arriving for appointments, doing battle against what they regard as a grave sin.

The loudest voices in the abortion debate are often characterized along a starkly religious divide, the faithful versus not. But the reality is much more nuanced, both at this abortion clinic and in the nation that surrounds it. The clinic's staff of 11 — most of them Black, deeply faithful Christian women — have no trouble at all reconciling their work with their religion.

And as the U.S. Supreme Court appears poised to dismantle the constitutional right to an abortion, they draw on their faith that they will somehow continue.

God is on our side, they tell each other. God will keep this clinic open.

Robin Marty, who moved from Minneapolis to Tuscaloosa a couple years ago to help run this clinic, was surprised to hear nurses pray for guidance as the future of abortion grows uncertain.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 27 of 61

"That is one of the things that has caused a whiplash for me — I had this stereotype in my head of a Southern religious person," said Marty. "I just assumed that there was no compatibility between people who are religious and people who support the ability to get an abortion."

Marty realized she was wrong — most people are.

"We need to have a real conversation about what we describe as Christianity," said Kendra Cotton, a member of the Black Southern Women's Collective, a network of Black women organizers, many of them from faith-based groups.

The white evangelical worldview that abortion is murder has consumed the conversation, flattening the understanding of how religion and views on abortion truly intersect, she said.

Before *Roe v. Wade*, faith leaders in many places led efforts to help pregnant women access underground abortions, because they considered it a calling to show compassion and mercy to the most vulnerable.

Now, Black Protestants have some of the most liberal views on access to abortion: Nearly 70% believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases, according to the Public Religion Research Institute. White evangelicals are the other extreme, with only 24% believing abortion should be allowed in most or all cases.

For faithful women of color, there's often a very different balancing act of values when confronting the question of whether women should be able to end unwanted pregnancies, Cotton said.

"We know that Christianity supports freedom, and inherent in freedom is bodily autonomy. Inherent in Christianity is free will. When people talk about the body being a temple of God, you have purview over your body, there is nothing more sacred," Cotton said.

The idea of the state restricting what a person can do with their own body is in direct conflict with that, she said, and it is reminiscent of being under someone else's control -- of slavery.

"You don't get to tell me what to do," Cotton said

In Tuscaloosa, the West Alabama Women's Center sits on the edge of a nondescript medical plaza, a half-mile from the University of Alabama campus. Though many of the center's clientele are college students, others come from all over the state and some surrounding ones -- it is the only abortion clinic for two hours in every direction. Many of their clients are Black, many already have children and more than 75% survive below the poverty line.

Every patient comes into Ramona's recovery room after their abortion. She keeps the lights low. Working here, to her, feels like a righteous calling. She believes the Christian way is to love people where they are, and that means walking kindly with them as they make the best decision for themselves.

Sometimes they cry, and tell her they didn't want to be there. She's heard stories of rape and domestic violence, but most talk about fear of having more mouths they can't afford to feed. She always says, "I understand."

"I mean that, I do understand, I've gone through that myself," she said.

Ramona, 39, is a single mother of four children, and had her first child at 16. She sometimes imagines what her life might have been had she started her family later. She had to drop out of college. There were times, when her children were young, when she couldn't pay the gas bill, and she boiled water so they could have warm baths.

"Women go through so much, it's hard," she said. "So you should have that choice, whether or not you're ready to be a mother. No one else should choose for you."

Her daughter used to say "Mom, I want to be just like you," and she would stop her. "No ma'am," she'd say to her. "I want you to be better." Her daughter is now 22 and studying to be a doctor.

She clawed herself out of poverty and built a life she loves. Her co-worker at the front desk calls her Miss Wonderful -- she's at peace with God, she said, so every day is a great one.

For a time, she tried to be friendly with one of the regulars who protested outside, trying to convince patients that abortion is murder and they shouldn't go in. She'd visit on her breaks or as she was leaving for the day. They discussed Scripture, forgiveness, sin.

She'd say, "I can see where you're coming from. Can you see where I'm coming from? I'm not going to love you any less because of what you believe in or what you think."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 28 of 61

Then one day she was walking by and he shouted at her: When you die, you know where you'll be going, and it isn't heaven. She doesn't talk to him anymore.

Alesia Horton, the clinic's director, eyed the protesters from the window.

"I don't know what Bible they're reading, 'cause it's not the one that I read," she said. She and Ramona have been friends since childhood and share a Christian faith.

If people heard the stories she had inside this clinic, she can't imagine trying to mandate that people be forced into motherhood. She had a patient once who had cancer, wanted the child but couldn't continue chemotherapy while she was pregnant. She had to choose between her own life and the child she wanted.

Just two weeks before, Horton wept when she met a 13-year-old who'd been raped, and she can't shake the look on the child's face, staring blankly in the exam room.

"It's going to be OK. Don't think you did anything wrong because you didn't," Horton told her.

She often hears patients cry that they're going to go to hell.

"I've had patients against abortion until it happened to their child, or it happened to them," she said. "The first thing they say, 'I don't believe in this.' And I say, 'Let's get past that. Now that you're pregnant, what are you doing to do? Are you still not going to believe in this? Now you're on the other side. Where you were judging, now it's you.'"

They pray that the Supreme Court won't overturn *Roe v. Wade*, because they know their poorest patients will bear the burden of abortion bans. Wealthy women will always find a way. They can travel to states where abortion is legal and all the headaches that entails: time off work, babysitters, a tank full of gas, hotel rooms.

If *Roe* falls, abortion would be barred in Alabama in almost every instance. A 2019 state law, put on hold by the courts for now, outlaws the procedure in all but emergency cases. This clinic is going to try to stay open for those left behind. It is expanding into a full-service gynecological office that people can turn to if they self-administer an abortion and require medical attention, without fear that someone will report them to the police.

In the meantime, the ideological gulf between the believers inside and outside remains wide.

Some of the protesters outside stand quietly, holding signs and hoping their silent presence rattles patients enough to head back to their cars and go home. Some shout at patients as they walk through the parking lot into the clinic, trying to hand them leaflets or direct them to the anti-abortion crisis pregnancy center next door. Some say they want abortion barred completely, with no exceptions even for rape or life-threatening complications, because they believe abortion is murder no matter the circumstances. Most would not give their names; the pregnancy center declined an interview.

The protesters are sometimes aggressive: They have screamed into the clinic's back doors, recorded biohazard bins being carted away, called police if a patient lashes out when they tell them they're going to hell.

The clinic locks the doors for security reasons during the lunch hour between morning and afternoon appointments. On a recent day, as Ramona read her Bible in the back room, a 23-year-old woman arrived and couldn't get inside.

A group of protesters beckoned the woman, who did not want to be named. She was confused — perhaps these people worked for the clinic. "We can help you," they told her.

"I just walked over there and had a million things thrown in my face," the woman said. "I'm a baby killer, I'm a murderer."

She ran away weeping. The clinic staff heard and sought her out.

"I'm so sorry," Horton said.

She glared at the protesters from the window.

"God isn't theirs," she said, "God is all of ours."

Canada bans China's Huawei Technologies from 5G networks

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 29 of 61

TORONTO (AP) — Wireless carriers in Canada won't be allowed to install Huawei equipment in their high-speed 5G networks, the Canadian government said Thursday, joining allies in banning the giant Chinese technology company.

Canada had been the only member of the Five Eyes intelligence-pooling alliance not to bar or restrict use of equipment from Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. in its 5G networks. The U.S. and the other members — Britain, Australia and New Zealand — previously banned Huawei.

"We are announcing our intention to prohibit the inclusion of Huawei and ZTE products and services in Canada's telecommunications systems," Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne said.

Canada's ban also includes ZTE Corp., one of China's biggest tech companies and one that is state-owned. Champagne added that "providers who already have this equipment installed will be required to cease its use and remove it." He said Canada's wireless companies won't be offered compensation.

Canada's major wireless companies already had started working with other providers.

"There are many hostile actors who are ready to exploit vulnerabilities in our defenses," Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said.

Mendicino said the government did an extensive review and is redoubling efforts to protect Canadians.

China condemned the move against one of its national champions as a form of "political manipulation" carried out in coordination with the U.S., which was aimed at "suppressing" Chinese companies in violation of free market principles.

"China will comprehensively and seriously evaluate this incident and take all necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies," the Chinese Embassy in Canada said in a statement posted on its website.

China commonly employs such language in commercial disputes, which often does not lead to a firm response from Beijing.

The U.S. government has been lobbying allies like Canada for years to exclude Huawei from new ultra-fast 5G mobile networks over worries that China's communist rulers could compel the company to help with cyberespionage. The U.S. has warned it would reconsider intelligence sharing with any countries that use Huawei gear.

The company has repeatedly denied the allegations.

"We're disappointed but not surprised. We're surprised it took the government so long to make a decision," Huawei spokesman Alykhan Velshi said. "We see this as a political decision, one born of political pressure primarily from the United States."

Velshi said there will be Huawei equipment in Canada for years to come. He said the company has over 1,500 employees in Canada and two-thirds of them work in research and development.

The development of 5G, or fifth-generation, networks will give people speedier online connections and provide vast data capacity to meet ravenous demand as more and more things link to the internet and innovations such as virtual reality, immersive gaming and autonomous vehicles emerge.

Huawei is the biggest global supplier of network gear for phone and internet companies. It has been a symbol of China's progress in becoming a technological world power — and a subject of U.S. security and law enforcement concerns. Some analysts say Chinese companies have flouted international rules and norms and stolen technology.

China, the U.S. and Canada completed what was effectively a high-stakes prisoner swap last year involving a top executive from Huawei who had been charged with fraud by the U.S.

China jailed two Canadians shortly after Canada arrested Meng Wanzhou, Huawei Technologies' chief financial officer and the daughter of the company's founder, on a U.S. extradition request. They were sent back to Canada in September, the same day Meng returned to China after reaching a deal with U.S. authorities in her case.

Many countries labeled China's action "hostage politics," while China has described the charges against Huawei and Meng as a politically motivated attempt to hold back China's economic and technological development.

"The decision should have been taken two or three years ago, but it's a case of better late than never,"

Guy Saint-Jacques, a former Canadian ambassador to China, said of the move to ban Huawei. "We are faced with a China that is a lot more aggressive in the conduct of its foreign policy but also in the way it obtains information to achieve its goals."

Saint-Jacques said that under Chinese law no company can refuse a request from the Chinese government to share information, so it would have been impossible to allow Huawei's participation.

He expects China to retaliate.

"I expect we will hear from them pretty rapidly," he said. "They use trade as a weapon and I suspect that's what we'll see in this case."

Ukrainian troops surrendering at Mariupol registered as POWs

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CIARAN McQUILLAN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The fate of hundreds of Ukrainian fighters who surrendered after holding out against punishing attacks on Mariupol's steel factory hung in the balance Thursday, amid international fears that the Russians may take reprisals against the prisoners.

The International Committee of the Red Cross gathered personal information from hundreds of the soldiers — name, date of birth, closest relative — and registered them as prisoners of war, as part of its role in ensuring the humane treatment of POWs under the Geneva Conventions.

Amnesty International said in a tweet that the Ukrainian soldiers are now prisoners of war and as such "must not be subjected to any form of torture or ill-treatment."

More than 1,700 defenders of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol have surrendered since Monday, Russian authorities said, in what appeared to be the final stage in the nearly three-month siege of the now-pulverized port city.

At least some of the fighters were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists. Others were hospitalized, according to a separatist official.

But an undisclosed number remained in the warren of bunkers and tunnels in the sprawling plant.

In a brief video message, the deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, which led the defense of the steel mill, said he and other fighters were still inside.

"An operation is underway, the details of which I will not announce," Svyatoslav Palamar said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was working to ensure "that the most influential international forces are informed and, as much as possible, involved in saving our troops."

While Ukraine expressed hope for a prisoner exchange, Russian authorities have threatened to investigate some of the Azovstal fighters for war crimes and put them on trial, branding them "Nazis" and criminals.

The Azov Regiment's far-right origins have been seized on by the Kremlin as part of an effort to cast Russia's invasion as a battle against Nazi influence in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, in the first war crimes trial held by Ukraine, a captured Russian soldier testified that he shot an unarmed civilian in the head on an officer's orders, and he asked the victim's widow to forgive him. The soldier pleaded guilty earlier in the week, but prosecutors presented the evidence against him in line with Ukrainian law.

In the Poltava region, two other Russian soldiers appeared in court Thursday on war-crimes charges that they shelled civilians. Prosecutors said both pleaded guilty. The next court session in their case was set for May 26.

Also, more U.S. aid appeared to be on its way to Ukraine when the Senate overwhelmingly approved a \$40 billion package of military and economic aid for the country and its allies. The House voted for it last week. President Joe Biden's quick signature was certain.

"Help is on the way, really significant help. Help that could make sure that the Ukrainians are victorious," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Taking the Azovstal steel plant would allow Russia to claim complete control of Mariupol and secure a long-sought victory. But it would be a mostly symbolic victory at this point, since the city is already effectively in Moscow's hands and analysts say most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the battle

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 31 of 61

there have already left.

Kyiv's troops, bolstered by Western weapons, thwarted Russia's initial goal of storming the capital, Kyiv, and have put up stiff resistance against Moscow's forces in the Donbas, the eastern industrial region that President Vladimir Putin has set his sights on capturing.

The surprising success of Ukraine's troops has buoyed Kyiv's confidence.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy who was involved in several rounds of talks with Russia, said in a tweet addressed to Moscow: "Do not offer us a cease-fire — this is impossible without total Russian troops withdrawal."

"Until Russia is ready to fully liberate occupied territories, our negotiating team is weapons, sanctions and money," he wrote.

Russia, though, again signaled its intent to incorporate or at least maintain influence over areas its troops have seized.

Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin this week visited the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, large parts of which have been under the control of Russian forces since shortly after the invasion began in February. He was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying the regions could become part of "our Russian family."

Also, Volodymyr Saldo, the Kremlin-installed head of the Kherson region, appeared in a video on Telegram saying Kherson "will become a subject of the Russian Federation."

In other developments, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke by phone on Thursday with his Russian counterpart for the first time since the war began, and they agreed to keep the lines of communications open, the Pentagon said.

On the battlefield, Ukraine's military said Russian forces pressed their offensive in various sections of the front in the Donbas but were being repelled. The governor of the Luhansk region said Russian shelling killed four civilians, while separatist authorities in Donetsk said Ukrainian shelling killed two.

Zelenskyy said 12 people were killed and dozens more wounded in the city of Severodonetsk, and attacks on the northeastern Chernihiv region included a severe strike on the village of Desna, where many more died and rescuers were still going through the rubble.

On the Russian side of the border, the governor of Kursk province said a truck driver was killed by shelling from Ukraine.

At the war crimes trial in Kyiv, Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a Russian tank unit, told the court that he shot Oleksandr Shelipov, a 62-year-old Ukrainian civilian, in the head on orders from an officer.

Shishimarin said he disobeyed a first order but felt he had no choice but to comply when it was repeated by another officer. He said he was told the man could pinpoint the troops' location to Ukrainian forces.

A prosecutor has disputed that Shishimarin was acting under orders, saying the direction didn't come from a direct commander.

Shishimarin apologized to the victim's widow, Kateryna Shelipova, who described seeing her husband being shot just outside their home in the early days of Russia's invasion.

She told the court that she believes Shishimarin deserves a life sentence, the maximum possible, but that she wouldn't mind if he were exchanged as part of a swap for the Azovstal defenders.

Senate OKs overhaul of baby formula rules in aid program

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate approved a bill Thursday aimed at easing the baby formula shortage for families participating in a government assistance program that accounts for about half of all formula purchased in the United States.

The House passed the bill the day before, so it now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

Participants in a program known as WIC get vouchers that are redeemed for specific foods to supplement their diets. The vouchers usually can only be used to purchase one brand of infant formula, which

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 32 of 61

encourages the manufacturer to offer big discounts to secure a state's business.

The bill makes it possible in extenuating circumstances for the Department of Agriculture to waive certain requirements so that WIC participants can purchase whatever brand is available.

"Now, millions of parents will have an easier time finding the baby formula that they need," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said after the bill was passed.

Also Thursday, the Biden administration said the Defense Department is working to book commercial aircraft to fly about 246 pallets of Nestlé formula from Zurich, Switzerland, to Plainfield, Indiana.

The shipments will include the equivalent of up to 1.5 million 8-ounce bottles of three formulas — Alfamino Infant, Alfamino Junio, and Gerber Good Start Extensive HA, all hypoallergenic formulas for children with cow's milk protein allergy. The White House said these are a priority because they serve a critical medical purpose and are in short supply.

Lawmakers are also considering boosting staffing at the Food and Drug Administration with a \$28 million emergency spending bill. That legislation also passed the House this week, but faces uncertain prospects in the Senate.

The baby formula shortage was caused by the safety-related closure of the country's largest formula manufacturing plant. The head of the FDA told lawmakers Thursday that the factory could be up and running as soon as next week.

Oklahoma passes strictest abortion ban; services to stop

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma lawmakers on Thursday approved a bill prohibiting all abortions with few exceptions, and providers said they would stop performing the procedure as soon as the governor signs it in the latest example of the GOP's national push to restrict access to what has been a constitutional right for nearly a half century.

Oklahoma lawmakers this year already passed a half-dozen anti-abortion measures, and while abortion providers across the country have been bracing for the possibility that the U.S. Supreme Court's new conservative majority might further restrict the practice, that has especially been the case in Oklahoma and Texas.

Two of Oklahoma's four abortion clinics already stopped providing abortions after the governor signed a six-week ban earlier this month, and an attorney for the two other independent clinics said Thursday they will no longer offer services once the bill is signed. The bill is likely to reach Gov. Kevin Stitt's desk early next week, and the first-term Republican running for reelection has already said he would sign any anti-abortion bill the Legislature sends to him. It would take effect immediately after he signs it.

"This bill could go into effect at any time, and once it does, any person can sue the clinic, the doctors, anyone else who is involved in providing an abortion in Oklahoma," said Rabia Muqaddam, an attorney for the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is representing Oklahoma clinics in legal challenges against several proposed new anti-abortion laws.

The bills are part of an aggressive push in Republican-led states across the country to scale back abortion rights. It comes on the heels of a leaked draft opinion from the nation's high court that suggests justices are considering weakening or overturning the landmark Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nearly 50 years ago.

The bill by Collinsville Republican Rep. Wendi Stearman would prohibit all abortions, except to save the life of a pregnant woman or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest that has been reported to law enforcement.

"Is our goal to defend the right to life or isn't it?" Stearman asked her colleagues before the bill passed on a 73-16 vote, mostly along party lines.

The bill specifically authorizes doctors to remove a "dead unborn child caused by spontaneous abortion," or miscarriage, or to remove an ectopic pregnancy, a potentially life-threatening emergency that occurs when a fertilized egg implants outside the uterus, often in a fallopian tube and early in pregnancy.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 33 of 61

With all of the state's abortion clinics expected to stop offering services, it's not clear where a woman who qualified under one of these exemptions would go to get an abortion because providers say many doctors would be afraid of running afoul of the law.

The bill also does not apply to the use of Plan B, other morning-after pills or any type of contraception.

Because the bill defines an "unborn child" as a human fetus or embryo in any stage of gestation from fertilization until birth, it is not expected to apply to in vitro fertilization, which is when eggs are fertilized in a lab before being transferred into a woman's uterus, said Dr. Eli Reshef, an Oklahoma City fertility specialist.

"(The bill) does not criminalize what we do," Reshef said. "No matter one's position on abortion, we are not concerned about the bill harming our particular profession."

The bill is one of at least three anti-abortion bills sent this year to Stitt. Another abortion bill similar to a Texas bill passed last year that prohibits the procedure after cardiac activity can be detected in the embryo, which experts say is about six weeks, already has taken effect and has already dramatically curtailed the practice in Oklahoma. Another bill set to take effect this summer would make it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. That bill contains no exceptions for rape or incest.

"At this point, we are preparing for the most restrictive environment politicians can create: a complete ban on abortion with likely no exceptions," said Emily Wales, interim president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which stopped providing abortions at two of its Oklahoma clinics after the six-week ban took effect earlier this month. "It's the worst-case scenario for abortion care in the state of Oklahoma."

Like the Texas law, the Oklahoma bill would allow private citizens to sue abortion providers or anyone who helps a woman obtain an abortion. After the U.S. Supreme Court allowed that mechanism to remain in place, other Republican-led states sought to copy Texas' ban. Idaho's governor signed the first copycat measure in March, although it has been temporarily blocked by the state's Supreme Court.

After Texas passed its bill last year, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of abortions performed in that state, with many women going to Oklahoma and other surrounding states for the procedure.

There are legal challenges pending in Oklahoma to both the bill to criminalize abortion and the six-week Texas ban, both of which could still be halted, but the courts have so far failed to do so.

The number of abortions performed each year in Oklahoma has declined steadily over the last two decades, from more than 6,200 in 2002 to 3,737 in 2020, the fewest in more than 20 years, according to data from the Oklahoma State Department of Health. In 2020, before the Texas law was passed, about 9% of the abortions performed in Oklahoma were women from Texas.

In the first four months after Texas' law took effect last September, abortions at clinics in the state dropped an average of 46% compared to the same span the year prior. But studies also found a sharp increase in the number of Texas women who were ordering abortion pills by mail and traveling out of state for abortions.

CDC urges Pfizer booster for children ages 5 to 11

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Kids ages 5 to 11 should get a booster dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, advisers to the U.S. government said Thursday.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention quickly adopted the panel's recommendation, opening a third COVID-19 shot to healthy elementary-age kids — just like what is already recommended for everybody 12 and older.

The hope is that an extra shot will shore up protection for kids ages 5 to 11 as infections once again are on the rise.

"Vaccination with a primary series among this age group has lagged behind other age groups leaving them vulnerable to serious illness," said CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, in a statement.

"We know that these vaccines are safe, and we must continue to increase the number of children who are protected," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 34 of 61

Earlier this week, the Food and Drug Administration authorized Pfizer's kid-sized booster, to be offered at least five months after the youngsters' last shot.

The CDC takes the next step of recommending who actually needs vaccinations. Its advisers debated if all otherwise healthy 5- to 11-year-olds need an extra dose, especially since so many children were infected during the huge winter surge of the omicron variant.

But the U.S. now is averaging 100,000 new cases a day for the first time since February. And ultimately, the CDC's advisers pointed to growing evidence from older kids and adults that two primary vaccinations plus a booster are providing the best protection against the newest coronavirus variants.

"This always perhaps should have been a three-dose vaccine," said Dr. Grace Lee of Stanford University, who chairs the CDC's advisory panel.

The booster question isn't the hottest vaccine topic: Parents still are anxiously awaiting a chance to vaccinate kids under 5 — the only group not yet eligible in the U.S.

Dr. Doran Fink of the Food and Drug Administration said the agency is working "as rapidly as we can" to evaluate an application from vaccine maker Moderna, and is awaiting final data on the littlest kids from rival Pfizer. The FDA's own advisers are expected to publicly debate data from one or both companies next month.

For the 5- to 11-year-olds, it's not clear how much booster demand there will be. Only about 30% of that age group have had the initial two Pfizer doses since vaccinations opened to them in November.

CDC adviser Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot of Vanderbilt University said health authorities must put more effort into getting youngsters their initial shots.

"That needs to be a priority," she said.

Thursday's decision also means that 5- to 11-year-olds with severely weakened immune systems, who are supposed to get three initial shots, would be eligible for a fourth dose.

Pfizer and its partner BioNTech currently make the only COVID-19 vaccine available for children of any age in the U.S. Those ages 5 to 11 receive a dose that's one-third the amount given to everyone 12 and older.

In a small study, Pfizer found a booster revved up those kids' levels of virus-fighting antibodies — including those able to fight the super-contagious omicron variant — the same kind of jump adults get from an extra shot.

Vaccines may not always prevent milder infections, and the omicron variant proved especially able to slip past their defenses. But CDC cited data during the omicron surge that showed unvaccinated 5- to 11-year-olds had twice the rate of hospitalization as youngsters who got their first two doses.

Health authorities say for all ages, the vaccines are still offering strong protection against COVID-19's worst outcomes, especially after a third dose.

Some especially high-risk people, including those 50 and older, have been offered the choice of a second booster, or fourth shot — and the CDC on Thursday strengthened that recommendation, too, urging anyone who's eligible to go ahead and get the extra dose.

Still to be decided is whether everyone will need additional shots in the fall, possibly reformulated to offer better protection against newer coronavirus variants.

How gas interests slowed Chile's clean energy transition

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Chile holds itself out as a global leader on climate change. Nearly 22% of Chile's electricity is generated by solar and wind farms, putting it far ahead of both the global average, 10%, and the United States, at 13%. It was one of the first countries to declare a target for renewable energy, in 2008.

Yet even as solar farms have spread across the north and center of the long, narrow nation, imported natural gas, a polluting fossil fuel, has been able to sideline the clean electricity they provide thanks to a sweet deal won from the government.

Marcelo Mena, a former environment minister in Chile, witnessed that waste of clean power before he

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 35 of 61

took the helm at the new Global Methane Hub, a nonprofit aimed at reducing global methane emissions. Natural gas is basically methane.

"They're actually hindering the power that we can deliver from renewable energy," Mena said of his experience with natural gas in an interview with the Associated Press. "It's been more of an opposition towards 100% renewable target."

Mena became disillusioned as he saw renewable energy pushed out by fossil fuels in the north of the country, where sunshine is most plentiful.

"At the same time, in the south of Chile, there is a big lack of natural gas for heating and people are heating themselves with wood and choking on it. It was such a big contradiction," said Mena. "That's my personal journey."

Chile provides a view into the way fossil fuel companies can manage to stay on top, even under governments that try to pursue clean energy.

The shock that led to an energy transition in Chile came in the mid 2000s, when Argentina drastically reduced gas exports to Chile to focus on its domestic market. Chileans faced strict power rationing and regular blackouts.

After scrambling to come up with an alternative, the nation saw an opportunity.

Chile receives some of the strongest and most consistent sunshine on the planet, especially in the Atacama Desert, in the north. So it was natural for the country to seek investment in solar and wind projects through public auctions and quotas that required electricity companies to offer a minimum amount of renewable energy.

Investors heard their call. Developers built out hundreds of solar, wind and geothermal plants throughout the country, which stretches 4,300km (2,700 miles) from north to south.

But the devil was in the details. To provide power when the sun wasn't shining, the government also invested heavily in fossil fuel infrastructure.

Natural gas importers and owners of gas-fired plants successfully argued that to secure long-term contracts for gas, they needed a guarantee that the Chilean power grid would take their gas-fired electricity even when other, greener generators were making plenty of power.

Chilean power generator Colbun, a large consumer of natural gas, said international contracts in which LNG importers must pay for gas whether they need it or not, along with a lack of storage, leave the sector vulnerable.

"It is important that the regulations recognize this condition so that the electricity market has enough natural gas to ensure the safety and competitiveness of the system," the company said in an emailed response to the AP.

The government allowed them to declare electricity from LNG imports as "forced gas," meaning gas-fired electricity was given priority on the power market, which otherwise favors renewables.

"Any situation in the electricity market that preferences fossil fuel, taking space away from renewables, is a loss for the environment and for the energy transition," said Ana Lía Rojas, who leads the Chilean Association of Renewable Energies and Storage.

Another consequence of forcing gas-fired electricity into the market is that it lowered electricity prices for all providers, meaning they got paid less, said Alfredo Solar, a solar plant manager with over 20 years of experience.

"I have worked in solar plants that, for example, were in default because the market price was much lower than what was projected," Solar said, stressing that providers of renewable energy operate without contracts and depend on those revenues.

Emissions from burning gas, oil and coal for electricity, transportation and other uses are the chief driver of climate change. Last year, researchers calculated that nearly 60% of the world's oil and gas reserves and 90% of the coal reserves need to stay underground by 2050 in order to meet the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Natural gas or methane is a powerful greenhouse gas that has an even stronger impact on the environment than carbon dioxide, in the short term. Methane traps heat 84 times more effectively than carbon

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 36 of 61

dioxide over a 20-year period, making methane reduction one of the fastest routes to reducing global warming, experts said.

In November, during the U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, the Biden administration, the European Union and dozens of other nations pledged to reduce overall methane emissions worldwide by 30% by 2030.

Last year, the Chilean government reduced the advantage given to natural gas power providers. Their power still enters the grid at a reduced price, but is not supposed to displace renewables. Yet the concept of "forced gas" still exists, and renewable advocates in Chile say the changes are not enough.

In other countries, battery storage is rapidly taking the place of new gas-fired power plants because they can provide electricity to the grid when the sun is down or the wind is not blowing. In the United States, this kind of stored electricity has increased 1200% in five years. An amount equaling what three nuclear plants can provide was installed in 2021. That was double the year before.

But large-scale battery storage is still too expensive to be widely used in Chile, said Daniel Salazar, former executive director of Chile's northern power grid, now with consultancy firm EnergiE. "Chile has several projects, but they are still high-cost solutions that do not compete with other options," Salazar said.

Even Rojas, of the Chilean renewable energy association, supported the role of natural gas. "Natural gas is the fuel of the energy transition, the technology that will allow us to make those adjustments, as long as it never takes space away from renewables," she said.

In many other countries, the idea of natural gas as the fuel that enables the energy transition is fading. That's because the fuel is only more climate friendly than coal if it does not leak out and is not deliberately released from wells and infrastructure along its path to the power plant. But studies and satellite imagery show both things do happen.

By 2030, solar power should account for 30% of total installed electricity capacity in Chile, according to the Association of Power Generators. That would make it the nation's largest source of power.

Mena, the former environment minister, said the established energy companies used to tell him that phaseout of fossil fuels takes a long time. Five years ago, he said, people were telling him the price of solar could never plunge. But it did. "My take-home message is change comes from unreasonable people," willing to go up against what is supposedly impossible, he said pointing to Chile's large and growing clean energy sector. "We need unreasonable people making that change."

Jan. 6 panel asks GOP lawmaker to testify about Capitol tour

By FARNOUSH AMIRI The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The congressional committee investigating the U.S. Capitol insurrection is asking a House Republican for more information about a tour of the building the panel says he led the day before the deadly attack.

The committee's letter to Georgia Rep. Barry Loudermilk on Thursday is the latest attempt by House investigators to obtain cooperation from GOP lawmakers in the probe of the Jan. 6, 2021 attack, Supporters of then-President Donald Trump violently broke into the Capitol that day and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

"Based on our review of evidence in the Select Committee's possession, we believe you have information regarding a tour you led through parts of the Capitol complex on January 5, 2021," wrote Reps. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi and Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the chairman and vice-chairwoman of the committee.

"Public reporting and witness accounts indicate some individuals and groups engaged in efforts to gather information about the layout of the U.S. Capitol, as well as the House and Senate office buildings" in advance of the insurrection, they wrote.

The voluntary request comes as the panel has already conducted more than 1,000 interviews about the insurrection and as it prepares for a series of hearings in June. The questions about tours of the Capitol ahead of the attack have lingered since the days afterward, when Democrats suggested that some Republican members may have helped the rioters. But so far there has been no public evidence of that assistance.

The letter to Loudermilk said that Republicans on a separate panel, the House Administration Committee,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 37 of 61

had previously said they reviewed security footage from Jan. 5 and said there were “no tours, no large groups, no one with MAGA hats on.” Loudermilk is a member of that panel.

But the Jan. 6 committee’s review of the evidence “directly contradicts that denial,” Thompson and Cheney wrote.

That earlier assessment by GOP members came after three dozen Democrats sent a letter to the committee days after the attack citing alleged sightings of “unusually large” groups led by either Republican lawmakers or their staff in the days leading up to the attack.

In a statement Thursday, Loudermilk said the Jan. 5 tour was with a constituent family and took place in the House office buildings and not inside the Capitol building itself

“We call on Capitol Police to release the tapes,” Loudermilk and Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., the ranking member of the House administration committee, wrote in a joint response to the letter.

The request comes a week after the panel issued subpoenas to five Republican members, including Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

The decision to issue subpoenas to McCarthy, R-Calif., and Reps. Jim Jordan of Ohio, Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Mo Brooks of Alabama was a dramatic show of force by the panel, which has already interviewed nearly 1,000 witnesses and collected more than 100,000 documents as it investigates the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries.

The five Republicans, all of whom have repeatedly downplayed the investigation’s legitimacy, have yet to say whether they will comply.

In total, the committee has now publicly requested cooperation from at least eight lawmakers it believes have information crucial to the planning and execution of the attack and former President Donald Trump’s potential role in inciting it.

Rebutting Turkey, Biden lauds NATO bids of Sweden, Finland

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Flanked by the leaders of Finland and Sweden, President Joe Biden forcefully supported their applications to join NATO on Thursday as Russia’s war in the heart of Europe challenges the continent’s security. The U.S. president rejected Turkey’s opposition, insisting the two countries “meet every NATO requirement and then some.”

Biden walked to a White House Rose Garden appearance with his hands on the shoulders of Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden and President Sauli Niinistö of Finland for an event designed to emphasize U.S. backing of their NATO candidacies.

The firm show of support was targeted not only at Russia, but also Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who earlier emphasized his opposition to the two countries joining the military alliance. Erdogan’s new comments added to uncertainty about whether he is determined to derail the expansion, which needs the unanimous support of all 30 NATO members, or whether he is using the threat to gain concessions from the two nations as well as the United States.

Biden, in a notable pledge, said the U.S. and allies would “deter and confront any aggression while Finland and Sweden are in this accession process.”

Once-neutral Finland and Sweden are abandoning what in Sweden’s case has been 200 years of military non-alignment, driven to join NATO’s mutual defense pact in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and ongoing war there.

Acceptance of the countries would bring into the alliance two well-equipped, modern militaries on Russia’s doorstep. It would also serve as a powerful and lasting rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the consequences of his invasion.

The two leaders also visited the Capitol and met with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who said she was honored to “offer the fullest support and endorsement to your request to be part of NATO, the greatest defense alliance in the history of the world.”

Separately, the Senate approved \$40 billion in fresh economic and military aid for Ukraine, sending the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 38 of 61

bill to Biden for his signature.

At the White House, Prime Minister Andersson said: "Russia's full-scale aggression against a sovereign and democratic neighbor ... was a watershed moment for Sweden. And my government has come to the conclusion that the security of the Swedish people will be best protected within the NATO alliance."

Not only are Sweden and Finland fully qualified, she said, but "having two new NATO members in the high north will enhance the security of our alliance."

Even as the three leaders were gathering, however, Turkish President Erdogan was hardening his public stand against the expansion effort. He accused the two countries — as he often does the U.S. and Western nations in general — of being too receptive to Turkish Kurdish groups that Erdogan calls terrorists.

Erdogan's abrupt objections on that point have brought uncertainty to an application process that had been expected to win quick approval.

"We have told our relevant friends we would say 'no' to Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO, and we will continue on our path like this," Erdogan said in a video aired Thursday in Turkey.

Still, U.S. officials remain hopeful. And NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday, "I am confident that we will come to a quick decision to welcome both Sweden and Finland to join the NATO family."

Biden said he began the private discussions that led to the two Scandinavian leaders' "momentous" decision to join NATO back in December, even as Russian forces were gathering on the border with Ukraine, ahead of Putin's Feb. 24 invasion.

The United States and its allies say the invasion, while failing in Russia's aim of unseating Ukraine's Western-friendly government, is only strengthening the West's security alliances.

Finland's Niinistö on Thursday credited Biden's months of encouragement with playing a crucial role in the decision by his country and Sweden to team with NATO to face any future threat from Russia or others.

The Finnish leader, speaking after Biden in the Rose Garden, addressed some of his remarks directly to the Turkish president.

"As NATO allies, we will commit to Turkey's security, just as Turkey will commit to our security," Niinistö said. "We take terrorism seriously. We condemn terrorism in all its forms and we are actively engaged in combating it."

The Finnish and Swedish leaders said their governments already are in discussion with Erdogan's to try to overcome Turkey's opposition "in an open and constructive manner."

"New members joining NATO is not a threat to any nation," Biden said. "It never has been."

Erdogan has said Turkey's objection stems from grievances with Sweden's — and to a lesser degree Finland's — perceived support of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and an armed group in Syria that Turkey sees as an extension of the PKK. The conflict with the PKK has killed tens of thousands of people since 1984.

Turkey also accuses Sweden and Finland of harboring the followers of Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Muslim cleric whom the Turkish government blames for a 2016 military coup attempt.

The objections echo longtime Turkish complaints over even more substantial U.S. support for Kurds, as well as Gulen's presence in America.

Turkey's labeling of terrorists extends to Kurdish forces serving as close allies of the United States in Syria.

Erdogan has a history of exploiting high-profile NATO events to promote Turkey's interests, particularly when it comes to Western support for the country's fight against Kurdish extremists. At a NATO summit in 2009, he refused to endorse Anders Fogh Rasmussen as new secretary-general of the 30-nation alliance, demanding that a Kurdish TV channel in the Dane's home country be shut down first.

A decade later, at a summit in London in 2019, he threatened to block NATO moves to bolster the defenses of the Baltic countries — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — after he was criticized for launching a ground attack against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria. Both times he eventually backed down.

Speculation this time is more about the purchase of U.S. fighter jets than objections to the way Finland and Sweden are dealing with Kurdish extremists. Turkey was dropped from the F-35 advanced fighter jet

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 39 of 61

development program after Erdogan bought a Russian air defense system.

Since then, Turkey has been pressing the U.S. to sell it new F-16 fighters or at the very least to refurbish its existing fleet. Rejecting Finland and Sweden's candidacies this week, Erdogan said diplomats from the two countries should not even bother coming to Turkey to discuss that issue. At the same time, he sent Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu to Washington.

Asked about any guarantees for Finland's and Sweden's security while their NATO bids are considered, Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said, "We would be prepared to work with Finland and Sweden to respond to any aggression that occurred."

Tiger trouble: Woods winces way through opening 74 at PGA

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — By the time Tiger Woods walked toward the fifth tee box Thursday, the hot start to his return to the PGA Championship had turned cold, and what was quickly becoming a steamy day at Southern Hills had also become an agonizing grind.

Two early birdies that had him in the red seemed distant memories, replaced by mishits off the tee, wayward irons into the green, fliers out of bunkers and not enough made putts to save his round. Woods wound up with a 4-over 74 on the same course where he won the 2009 PGA, leaving him weary of the cut line heading into Friday's second round.

"I got off to a great start and didn't keep it going," said Woods, who was often wincing down the stretch on a right leg that was nearly amputated 15 months ago. "I really didn't give myself any looks for birdie. I was struggling trying to get the ball on the green, and I missed quite a few iron shots both ways. It was a frustrating day."

Painful one, too.

Woods was optimistic that after making it around hilly Augusta National during the Masters, the right leg that was so severely injured in a car crash would fare well on the reasonably flat, compact layout in Tulsa. But whether he was fidgeting with a compression wrap on it during his second nine, or using his driver almost like cane as he walked down the fairways, it quickly became evident that the leg was bothering him.

After knocking his tee shot into the greenside bunker on his penultimate hole, Woods grimaced as he walked gingerly back to his bag. He then leaned heavily on it while watching playing partner Rory McIlroy hit his approach shot.

"My leg is not feeling as good as I would like it to be," acknowledged Woods, who missed last year's tournament at Kiawah Island while recovering. "I just can't load it. Loading hurts, pressing off it hurts and walking hurts, and twisting hurts."

At one point, Woods had five bogeys during an eight-hole stretch, and he added two more on his final two holes. The result was his worst opening around at the PGA since shooting 75 in 2015, when he missed the cut.

"We'll start the recovery process," Woods said, "and get after it tomorrow."

Playing in the day's featured group with McIlroy and Jordan Spieth, Woods gave a huge gallery following their very move Thursday an early reason to roar. He hit one of his few crisp approach shots at the par-4 10th and rolled in a birdie to begin his round, then hit his approach to about 13 feet at the long par-3 14th and made another birdie.

But a poor iron off the tee at the par-4 15th led to bogey, and another poor iron after a perfect drive at the 18th resulted in another. And after making the turn at even, Woods bogeyed three of the first four holes on the front side, then added those two to finish — including at the ninth, where he flubbed a chip shot from above the green.

"Hit a lot of bad iron shots in the middle part of the round and late in the round," Woods said simply.

Making things seem worse? The fact that McIlroy was making things seem easy.

McIlroy aggressively hit driver just about whenever he could, while Woods conservatively hit irons off several tees in the hopes of finding the fairway. But the result was that the Northern Irishman was often

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 40 of 61

100 yards closer to the green, leaving him mid- and even short-irons for his approaches, and helping to produce a 5-under 65 and the early lead.

"Well, it wouldn't have been so far back if I would have hit the iron shot solid and put the ball in the fairway," Woods said. "I was playing to my spots, and those guys obviously have a different game plan. It's just different."

Spieth also hit driver whenever possible, though it didn't do him as much good. He struggled to a 2-over 72, leaving him in need of a low score Friday as he pursues the missing piece of the career Grand Slam.

Woods will also need a big second round at Southern Hills, but he can take comfort in having done it before. He shot 63 on Friday to seize control of the 2007 PGA, then cruised through the weekend to his fourth Wannamaker Trophy.

Then again, that was a long time and many injuries ago.

"Lots of treatment, lots of ice baths," Woods said. "Try and get the inflammation out and try and get ready for tomorrow."

20 years after spate of hospital deaths, ex-worker accused

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

In the five months that Jennifer Anne Hall was a respiratory therapist at Hedrick Medical Center, the rural Missouri hospital experienced 18 "code blue" incidents — an alarming increase in sudden cardiac arrest events for a hospital that historically averaged one of them a year, according to a police investigator.

Nine of those patients died, and nine recovered. Twenty years later, Hall was charged this month with first-degree murder in one of the deaths — that of 75-year-old Fern Franco.

Livingston County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Warren, who launched an investigation 10 years ago, said Franco died of lethal doses of succinylcholine — a relaxant that paralyzes the respiratory muscles — and the pain reliever morphine. The prosecutor did not disclose a possible motive or say why the investigation took a decade.

Hall's attorney, Matt O'Connor, said she is innocent and that as a respiratory therapist, she didn't have access to succinylcholine, morphine or any other drugs. He said Hall became a scapegoat for the deaths at Hedrick because of an arson conviction that she was cleared of in 2005.

It's unclear if Hall will face additional murder charges in the 2002 deaths at Hedrick. Warren declined interview requests, and Livingston County Sheriff Steve Cox did not respond to phone and email messages seeking comment.

Aprille Franco, Franco's granddaughter, hopes investigators get to the bottom of the other deaths.

"Just for the other families' sake," Franco, 44, of Kansas City, Missouri, said. "They've been waiting 20 years for answers. It's up to my grandma's case to find answers for them."

Hall, 41, pleaded not guilty Thursday and is jailed without bond. O'Connor said he will seek bond so Hall can get chemotherapy treatment for leukemia. A hearing on that request was set for May 27.

She began working at Hedrick in December 2001. The small hospital is in Chillicothe, a town of 9,100 residents 90 miles (145 kilometers) northeast of Kansas City.

A probable cause statement from Chillicothe Officer Brian Schmidt said that during Hall's brief time at Hedrick, sudden cardiac collapse incidents — code blues — "rose alarmingly."

Hospital officials were alerted to the concerns about Hall but "did everything in the world to cover it up" to avoid bad publicity, said Scott Lindley, the county coroner. No criminal investigation was launched at the time.

A wrongful-death lawsuit naming the hospital and the company that now operates it, St. Luke's Health System, was filed in 2010 on behalf of relatives of five patients who died. The Missouri Supreme Court tossed the lawsuit in 2019, ruling it was filed after the statute of limitations had run out.

St. Luke's Health System noted in a statement that it took over operation of Hedrick more than a year after the deaths.

"We, too, are only interested in the truth, and look forward to a final resolution of the investigation,"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 41 of 61

the statement read.

Warren, who was elected prosecutor in 2010, opened the investigation in 2012, saying he didn't believe that a "thorough investigation has ever been completed."

The deaths involved people of varying ages and levels of health.

World War II veteran Charles O'Hara, 88, was admitted for evaluation of a high temperatures, vomiting and agitation on Feb. 2, 2002, and died two days later. Retired conservation agent Coval Gann was 82.

But David Harper was just 37. He had been hospitalized with pneumonia, but the lawsuit said he was so much better that he was about to be discharged. He died on March 20, 2002.

Similarly, 49-year-old Shirley Eller was a day away from going home after being treated for pneumonia when she collapsed and died on March 9, 2002.

The lawsuit said Eller's death was attributed to "natural causes," the same as the others who died. Eller's sister, Helen Pittman, found that puzzling. Eller smoked but was otherwise healthy and active.

"It was a shock," Pittman said. "It just seems really suspicious. Shirley was doing good."

Franco also had been hospitalized with pneumonia. Hall and another staff member identified only as "J.A." in the probable cause statement found her dead on May 18, 2002.

"Hall's victim was a sick, defenseless, elderly woman who was depending on Hall to care for physical ailment within a medical facility," Schmidt wrote. He said the succinylcholine caused a "ghastly death from suffocation" while Franco was fully conscious.

Hall was placed on administrative leave three days after Franco's death and the code blue incidents "returned to historical frequency," Schmidt's report stated.

Hall was fired months later, but not because of the patient deaths. O'Connor said she was fired after hospital officials learned she had been convicted of an arson fire at another small Missouri hospital, Cass Regional Medical Center in Harrisonville, where she previously worked. She was free on appeal when she took the job in Chillicothe and later spent a year behind bars before being acquitted at a retrial.

O'Connor called it unfathomable that Hall would again be singled out for a crime she didn't commit.

"To go through it once is terrible," O'Connor said. "To go through it twice is a recurring nightmare."

He said Hall's proximity to the patients shouldn't be unexpected since it's a small hospital with a small staff.

Twenty years after the death of her younger sister, Pittman, 79, wasn't ready to pass judgment, but she does want investigators to keep looking into Shirley Eller's death.

"It's hard for me to believe people can be that mean," Pittman said. "But I guess they can."

A bear market may be on the horizon. Here's what that means

By STAN CHOE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Investors on Wall Street need a place to hide.

The stock market's skid this year has pulled the S&P 500 close to what's known as a bear market. Rising interest rates, high inflation, the war in Ukraine and a slowdown in China's economy have caused investors to reconsider the prices they're willing to pay for a wide range of stocks, from high-flying tech companies to traditional automakers.

The last bear market happened just two years ago, but this would still be a first for those investors that got their start trading on their phones during the pandemic. For years, thanks in large part to extraordinary actions by the Federal Reserve, stocks often seemed to go in only one direction: up. Now, the familiar rallying cry to "buy the dip" after every market wobble is giving way to fear that the dip is turning into a crater.

Here are some common questions asked about bear markets:

WHY IS IT CALLED A BEAR MARKET?

A bear market is a term used by Wall Street when an index like the S&P 500, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, or even an individual stock, has fallen 20% or more from a recent high for a sustained period

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 42 of 61

of time.

Why use a bear to represent a market slump? Bears hibernate, so bears represent a market that's re-treating, said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA. In contrast, Wall Street's nickname for a surging stock market is a bull market, because bulls charge, Stovall said.

The S&P 500 index slipped 22.89 points Thursday to 3,900.79. It's now down 18.7% from its high of 4,796.56 on Jan. 3. The Nasdaq is already in a bear market, down 29.1% from its peak of 16,057.44 on Nov. 19. The Dow Jones Industrial Average is more than 15% below its most recent peak.

The most recent bear market for the S&P 500 ran from February 19, 2020 through March 23, 2020. The index fell 34% in that one-month period. It's the shortest bear market ever.

WHAT'S BOTHERING INVESTORS?

Market enemy No. 1 is interest rates, which are rising quickly as a result of the high inflation battering the economy. Low rates act like steroids for stocks and other investments, and Wall Street is now going through withdrawal.

The Federal Reserve has made an aggressive pivot away from propping up financial markets and the economy with record-low rates and is focused on fighting inflation. The central bank has already raised its key short-term interest rate from its record low near zero, which had encouraged investors to move their money into riskier assets like stocks or cryptocurrencies to get better returns.

Last week, the Fed signaled additional rate increases of double the usual amount are likely in upcoming months. Consumer prices are at the highest level in four decades, and rose 8.3% in April compared with a year ago.

The moves by design will slow the economy by making it more expensive to borrow. The risk is the Fed could cause a recession if it raises rates too high or too quickly.

Russia's war in Ukraine has also put upward pressure on inflation by pushing up commodities prices. And worries about China's economy, the world's second largest, have added to the gloom.

SO, WE JUST NEED TO AVOID A RECESSION?

Even if the Fed can pull off the delicate task of tamping down inflation without triggering a downturn, higher interest rates still put downward pressure on stocks.

If customers are paying more to borrow money, they can't buy as much stuff, so less revenue flows to a company's bottom line. Stocks tend to track profits over time. Higher rates also make investors less willing to pay elevated prices for stocks, which are riskier than bonds, when bonds are suddenly paying more in interest thanks to the Fed.

Critics said the overall stock market came into the year looking pricey versus history. Big technology stocks and other winners of the pandemic were seen as the most expensive, and those stocks have been the most punished as rates have risen.

Stocks have declined almost 35% on average when a bear market coincides with a recession, compared with a nearly 24% drop when the economy avoids a recession, according to Ryan Detrick, chief market strategist at LPL Financial.

SO I SHOULD SELL EVERYTHING NOW, RIGHT?

If you need the money now or want to lock in the losses, yes. Otherwise, many advisers suggest riding through the ups and downs while remembering the swings are the price of admission for the stronger returns that stocks have provided over the long term.

While dumping stocks would stop the bleeding, it would also prevent any potential gains. Many of the best days for Wall Street have occurred either during a bear market or just after the end of one. That includes two separate days in the middle of the 2007-2009 bear market where the S&P 500 surged roughly 11%, as well as leaps of better than 9% during and shortly after the roughly monthlong 2020 bear market.

Advisers suggest putting money into stocks only if it won't be needed for several years. The S&P 500

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 43 of 61

has come back from every one of its prior bear markets to eventually rise to another all-time high. The down decade for the stock market following the 2000 bursting of the dot-com bubble was a notoriously brutal stretch, but stocks have often been able to regain their highs within a few years.

HOW LONG DO BEAR MARKETS LAST AND HOW DEEP DO THEY GO?

On average, bear markets have taken 13 months to go from peak to trough and 27 months to get back to breakeven since World War II. The S&P 500 index has fallen an average of 33% during bear markets in that time. The biggest decline since 1945 occurred in the 2007-2009 bear market when the S&P 500 fell 57%.

History shows that the faster an index enters into a bear market, the shallower they tend to be. Historically, stocks have taken 251 days (8.3 months) to fall into a bear market. When the S&P 500 has fallen 20% at a faster clip, the index has averaged a loss of 28%.

The longest bear market lasted 61 months and ended in March 1942 and cut the index by 60%.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN A BEAR MARKET HAS ENDED?

Generally, investors look for a 20% gain from a low point as well as sustained gains over at least a six-month period. It took less than three weeks for stocks to rise 20% from their low in March 2020.

Reports: Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky welcome baby boy in LA

By The Associated Press undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky have welcomed a baby boy, according to multiple reports.

The couple, who first revealed her pregnancy with a belly-baring Harlem photo shoot in January, became parents May 13 in Los Angeles, said TMZ, the first to report the birth Thursday based on unnamed sources. A representative for Rihanna did not immediately return an email from The Associated Press seeking confirmation.

During her pregnancy, Rihanna stunned in designer looks that showed off her growing bump, but her pregnancy wasn't drama free.

The 33-year-old A\$AP was arrested April 20 at Los Angeles International Airport in connection with a shooting in Hollywood last year, authorities said. The rapper, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, was accused of firing a handgun at an acquaintance, who sustained a minor injury and later sought medical treatment, police said.

People magazine, citing an unnamed source, said A\$AP and Rihanna, 34, are home in Los Angeles with the baby, their first.

The two went public with their relationship in 2020.

GOP directs culture war fury toward green investing trend

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Republicans are coming out swinging against Wall Street's growing efforts to consider factors like long-term environmental risk in investment decisions, the latest indication that the GOP is willing to damage its relationship with big business to score culture war points.

Many are targeting a concept known as ESG — which stands for environmental, social and governance — a sustainable investment trend sweeping the financial world. Red state officials deride it as politically correct and woke and are trying to stop investors who contract with states from adopting it on any level.

For right-wing activists who previously brought criticisms of critical race theory (CRT), diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and social emotional learning (SEL) to the forefront, it's the latest acronym-based source of outrage to find a home at rallies, in conservative media and in legislatures.

ESG has yet to take hold as mainstream political messaging, but backlash against it is gaining steam. Last week, former Vice President Mike Pence attacked the concept during a speech in Houston. And on Wednesday, the same day he said on Twitter he planned to vote Republican, Elon Musk attacked it after

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 44 of 61

Tesla lost its place on the S&P 500's ESG Index. He called it a scam "weaponized by phony social justice warriors."

The concept calls on investors to consider criteria such as environmental risk, pay equity or how transparent companies are in their accounting practices. Aided by recently proposed disclosure requirements and analysis from ratings agencies, they have adopted the principles to such an extent that those who use them control \$16.6 trillion in investments held in the U.S.

In response, Republicans — historically known for supporting fewer regulations — are in many places attempting to impose new rules on investors. Their efforts reflect how members of the party are willing to distance themselves from big business to push back against those they see as ideological foes.

"I don't think we're the party of big business anymore. We're the party of people — more specifically, we're the party of working people. And the problem that we have is with big banks and corporations right now trying to dictate how we're going to live our lives," West Virginia Treasurer Riley Moore said.

Opponents criticize ESG as politicized and a potentially costly diversion from purely financial investment principles, while advocates say considering the criteria more accurately accounts for risk and promises steadier returns.

"We focus on sustainability not because we're environmentalists, but because we are capitalists and fiduciaries to our clients," Larry Fink, CEO of investment firm BlackRock and a leading proponent, told clients in a letter this year.

But Moore and others including Utah's Republican state treasurer Marlo Oaks argue favoring green investment over fossil fuels denies key industries access to the financial system and capital. They have targeted S&P Global Ratings for appending ESG scores to their traditional state credit ratings. They worry that without changes, their scores could make borrowing for projects like schools or roads costlier.

In an April letter, Oaks demanded S&P retract analysis that rated Utah as "moderately negative" in terms of environmental risk due to "long-term challenges regarding water supply, which could remain a constraint for its economy ... given pervasive drought conditions in the western U.S."

The letter was co-signed by the governor, legislative leaders and the state's congressional delegation, including Sen. Mitt Romney, whose former firm Bain Capital calls ESG factors "strategic, fact-based and diligence-driven." It said ratings system "attempts to legitimize a dubious and unproven exercise" and attacks the "unreliability and inherently political nature of ESG factors in investment decisions."

Though he likened ESG to critical race theory, Oaks said he was mostly concerned with capital markets and what he called attempts by fossil fuel opponents to manipulate them by pressuring investors to pick businesses with high ESG scores.

"DEI, CRT, SEL. It can be hard to keep up with the acronyms," he wrote on an economics blog last month, "but there's a relatively new one you need to know: ESG."

Investors making carbon neutral or net zero criteria common were, in effect, Oaks said, limiting access to capital for oil and gas businesses, hurting their returns and potentially contributing to gas price spikes.

In more than a dozen red states, officials dispute the idea that the energy transition underway could make fossil fuel-related investments riskier in the long term. They argue employing asset managers with a preference for green investments uses state funds to further agendas out of sync with constituents.

In statehouses, anti-green investing efforts are backed by conservative groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council and the Heartland Institute, a think-tank skeptical of scientific consensus on human-caused climate change that has backed bills that either divest state funds from financial institutions that use ESG or forbid them from using it to score businesses or individuals.

In Texas, West Virginia and Kentucky, lawmakers have passed bills requiring state funds limit transactions with companies that shun fossil fuels. Wyoming considered banning "social credit scores" that evaluate businesses using criteria that differ from accounting and other financial metrics, like ESG

After conservative talk show host Glenn Beck visited the Idaho Statehouse and referred to ESG as critical race theory "on steroids," the Legislature passed a law in March prohibiting investment of state funds in companies that prioritize commitments to ESG over returns.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 45 of 61

The American Legislative Exchange Council recently published model policy that would subject banks managing state pensions to new regulations limiting investments driven by what it calls “social, political and ideological” goals.

Though the policy doesn’t mention it outright, Jonathan Williams, the group’s chief economist, said ESG’s mainstreaming amid broader trends of political correctness was a driving force. He said his research shows that incorporating factors beyond traditional financial metrics can lower the rate of return for already underfunded state pensions.

Sustainable investing advocates deny that charge and say considering the risks and realities of climate change amounts to responsible investing.

West Virginia and Arkansas recently divested their pension funds from BlackRock in response to the asset manager adding businesses with smaller carbon footprints to its portfolios. Moore, West Virginia’s treasurer, hopes more will follow.

Though it’s drawing enthusiasm, the green investment discourse differs from recurring debates over gender and sexuality or how history is taught. Both proponents and detractors acknowledged they’re surprised pensions, credit ratings and investment decisions have become campaign rally fodder.

Last month at the Utah state party’s convention, thousands of Republicans roared when Sen. Mike Lee described green investment in similar terms to critical race theory — another acronym-based foil: “Between CRT and ESG and MSNBC, we get way too much B.S.,” Lee said.

Bryan McGannon, a lobbyist with US SIF: The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment, said opponents were wrong in framing sustainable investing trends as political. If states refuse to reckon with how the future will likely rely less on fossil fuels and limit how environmental risk can be considered, he said, they’re making decisions with incomplete information.

“If a state’s not considering those risks, it may be a signal to an investor that this might not be a wise government to be putting our money with,” McGannon said. “Investors use a huge swath of information, and ESG is a piece of that mosaic.”

Captive medic’s bodycam shows firsthand horror of Mariupol

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — A celebrated Ukrainian medic recorded her time in Mariupol on a data card no bigger than a thumbnail, smuggled out to the world in a tampon. Now she is in Russian hands, at a time when Mariupol itself is on the verge of falling.

Yuliia Paievska is known in Ukraine as Taira, a moniker from the nickname she chose in the World of Warcraft video game. Using a body camera, she recorded 256 gigabytes of her team’s frantic efforts over two weeks to bring people back from the brink of death. She got the harrowing clips to an Associated Press team, the last international journalists in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, one of whom fled with it in a tampon.

Russian soldiers captured Taira and her driver the next day, March 16, one of many forced disappearances in areas of Ukraine now held by Russia. Russia has portrayed Taira as working for the nationalist Azov Battalion, in line with Moscow’s narrative that it is attempting to “denazify” Ukraine. But the AP found no such evidence, and friends and colleagues said she had no links to Azov.

The military hospital where she led evacuations of the wounded is not affiliated with the battalion, whose members have spent weeks defending a sprawling steel plant in Mariupol. The footage Taira recorded itself testifies to the fact that she tried to save wounded Russian soldiers as well as Ukrainian civilians.

A clip recorded on March 10 shows two Russian soldiers taken roughly out of an ambulance by a Ukrainian soldier. One is in a wheelchair. The other is on his knees, hands bound behind his back, with an obvious leg injury. Their eyes are covered by winter hats, and they wear white armbands.

A Ukrainian soldier curses at one of them. “Calm down, calm down,” Taira tells him.

A woman asks her, “Are you going to treat the Russians?”

“They will not be as kind to us,” she replies. “But I couldn’t do otherwise. They are prisoners of war.”

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 46 of 61

Taira is now a prisoner of the Russians, one of hundreds of prominent Ukrainians who have been kidnapped or captured, including local officials, journalists, activists and human rights defenders.

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has recorded 204 cases of enforced disappearances. It said some victims may have been tortured, and five were later found dead. The office of Ukraine's ombudswoman said it had received reports of thousands of missing people by late April, 528 of whom had probably been captured.

The Russians also are targeting medics and hospitals even though the Geneva Conventions single out both military and civilian medics for protection "in all circumstance." The World Health Organization has verified more than 100 attacks on health care since the war began, a number likely to rise.

More recently, Russian soldiers pulled a woman off a convoy from Mariupol on May 8, accused her of being a military medic and forced her to choose between letting her 4-year-old daughter accompany her to an unknown fate or continuing on to Ukrainian-controlled territory. The mother and child ended up separated, and the little girl made it to the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, U.N. officials said.

"This is not about saving one particular woman," said Oleksandra Chudna, who volunteered as a medic with Taira in 2014. "Taira will represent those medics and women who went to the front."

Taira's situation takes on a new significance as the last defenders in Mariupol are evacuated into Russian territories, in what Russia calls a mass surrender and Ukraine calls a mission accomplished. Russia says more than 1,700 Ukrainian fighters have surrendered this week in Mariupol, bringing new attention to the treatment of prisoners. Ukraine has expressed hope that the fighters can be exchanged for Russian prisoners of war, but a Russian official has said without evidence that they should be not exchanged but put on trial.

Ukraine's government has said it tried to add Taira's name to a prisoner exchange weeks ago. However, Russia denies holding her, despite her appearance on television networks in the separatist Donetsk region of Ukraine and on the Russian NTV network, handcuffed and with her face bruised. The Ukrainian government declined to speak about the case when asked by the AP.

Taira, 53, is known in Ukraine as a star athlete and the person who trained the country's volunteer medic force. What comes across in her video and in descriptions from her friends is a big, exuberant personality with a telegenic presence, the kind of person to revel in swimming with dolphins.

The video is an intimate record from Feb. 6 to March 10 of a city under siege that has now become a worldwide symbol of the Russian invasion and Ukrainian resistance. In it, Taira is a whirlwind of energy and grief, recording the death of a child and the treatment of wounded soldiers from both sides.

On Feb. 24, the first day of the war, Taira chronicled efforts to bandage a Ukrainian soldier's open head wound.

Two days later, she ordered colleagues to wrap an injured Russian soldier in a blanket. "Cover him because he is shaking," she says in the video. She calls the young man "Sunshine" — a favorite nickname for the many soldiers who passed through her hands — and asks why he came to Ukraine.

"You're taking care of me," he tells her, almost in wonder. Her response: "We treat everyone equally."

Later that night, two children — a brother and sister — arrive gravely wounded from a shootout at a checkpoint. Their parents are dead. By the end of the night, despite Taira's entreaties to "stay with me, little one," so is the little boy.

Taira turns away from his lifeless body and cries. "I hate (this)," she says. She closes his eyes.

Talking to someone in the dark outside as she smokes, she says, "The boy is gone. The boy has died. They are still giving CPR to the girl. Maybe she will survive."

At one point, she stares into a bathroom mirror, a shock of blond hair falling over her forehead in stark contrast to the shaved sides of her head. She cuts the camera.

Throughout the video, she complains about chronic pain from back and hip injuries that left her partially disabled. She embraces doctors. She cracks jokes to cheer up discouraged ambulance drivers and patients alike. And always, she wears a stuffed animal attached to her vest to hand to any children she might treat.

With a husband and teenage daughter, she knew what war can do to a family. At one point, an injured

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 47 of 61

Ukrainian soldier asks her to call his mother. She tells him he'll be able to call her himself, "so don't make her nervous."

On March 15, a police officer handed over the small data card to a team of Associated Press journalists who had been documenting atrocities in Mariupol, including a Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital. The office contacted Taira on a walkie-talkie, and she asked the journalists to take the card safely out of the city. The card was hidden inside a tampon, and the team passed through 15 Russian checkpoints before reaching Ukrainian-controlled territory.

The next day, Taira disappeared with her driver Serhiy. On the same day, a Russian airstrike shattered the Mariupol theater and killed close to 600 people.

A video aired during a March 21 Russian news broadcast announced her capture, accusing her of trying to flee the city in disguise. Taira looks groggy and haggard as she reads a statement positioned below the camera, calling for an end to the fighting. As she talks, a voiceover derides her colleagues as Nazis, using language echoed this week by Russia as it described the fighters from Mariupol.

The broadcast was the last time she was seen.

Both the Russian and Ukrainian governments have publicized interviews with prisoners of war, despite international humanitarian law that describes the practice as inhumane and degrading treatment.

Taira's husband, Vadim Puzanov, said he has received little news about his wife since her disappearance. Choosing his words carefully, he described a constant worry as well as outrage at how she has been portrayed by Russia.

"Accusing a volunteer medic of all mortal sins, including organ trafficking, is already outrageous propaganda — I don't even know who it's for," he said.

Raed Saleh, the head of Syria's White Helmets, compared Taira's situation to what volunteers with his group faced and continue to face in Syria. He said his group also has been accused of organ trafficking and dealing with terrorist groups.

"Tomorrow, they may ask her to make statements and pressure her to say things," Saleh said.

Taira has outside importance in Ukraine because of her reputation. She taught aikido martial arts and worked as a medic as a sideline.

She took on her name in 2013, when she joined first aid volunteers at the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that drove out a Russia-backed government. In 2014, Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine.

Taira went to the eastern Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists fought Ukrainian forces. There, she taught tactical medicine and started a group of medics called Taira's Angels. She also worked as a liaison between the military and civilians in front-line towns where few doctors and hospitals dared operate. In 2019, she left for the Mariupol region, and her medical unit was based there.

Taira was a member of the Ukraine Invictus Games for military veterans, where she was set to compete in archery and swimming. Invictus said she was a military medic from 2018 to 2020 but had since been demobilized.

She received the body camera in 2021 to film for a Netflix documentary series on inspirational figures being produced by Britain's Prince Harry, who founded the Invictus Games. But when Russian forces invaded, she used it to shoot scenes of injured civilians and soldiers instead.

That footage is now especially poignant, with Mariupol on the brink. In one of the last videos Taira shot, she is seated next to the driver who would disappear with her. It is March 9.

"Two weeks of war. Besieged Mariupol," she says quietly. Then she curses at no one in particular, and the screen goes dark.

'We're done': A&M's Fisher fires back at 'narcissist' Saban

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

The Southeastern Conference spring meetings will be held in person for the time since 2019 in a little less than two weeks.

It is unlikely two of the SEC's superstar coaches will be chumming around Destin, Florida, together.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 48 of 61

Texas A&M coach Jimbo Fisher called Nick Saban a "narcissist" on Thursday after the Alabama coach accused the rival Aggies of using name, image and likeness deals to land their top-ranked recruiting classes.

Less than 24 hours after Saban said Texas A&M was essentially "buying" players, Fisher called an impromptu news conference to blast college football's most accomplished coach and his former boss at LSU.

"It's despicable that a reputable head coach can come out and say this when he doesn't get his way or things don't go his way," Fisher said in College Station, Texas. "The narcissist in him doesn't allow those things to happen — it's ridiculous — when he's not on top. And the parity in college football he's been talking about? Go talk to coaches who have coached for him. You'll find out all the parity. Go dig into wherever he's been."

Texas A&M had the consensus No. 1 recruiting class in the country for 2022 after beating Alabama during the regular season. The Tide's class was No. 2. In his session which lasted about 10 minutes, Fisher declared: "We never bought anybody, no rules are broken. Nothing was done wrong."

The Crimson Tide lost to the Aggies in 2021, but went on to win the SEC championship and play for the national title. The Aggies finished 8-4 in their fourth season under Fisher, who, like Saban, is among the highest-paid coaches in the game at more than \$9 million per season.

The public spat is perhaps the ugliest display of the growing angst and concerns among college coaches who are wrestling with two big changes: The compensation era, launched last July, and its impact on recruiting, and the ease with which players can now transfer.

Saban, who has won six national championships and is widely regarded as one of the greatest coaches in the history of the game, has called the current state of affairs unsustainable. At an event in Birmingham, Alabama, he said some schools were spending "tons of money to get players."

"You read about it, you know who they are," Saban said Wednesday. "We were second in recruiting last year. A&M was first. A&M bought every player on their team. Made a deal for name, image and likeness. We didn't buy one player. But I don't know if we're going to be able to sustain that in the future, because more and more people are doing it. It's tough."

Fisher was an assistant under Saban in the early 2000s at LSU, working as offensive coordinator on the Tigers' 2003 national title team. That relationship is now badly damaged.

"We're done," Fisher said, adding Saban reached out by phone but he did not take the call. "He showed you who he is. He's the greatest ever, huh? When you got all the advantages, it's easy."

He said Saban's comments were insulting to Texas A&M and the families of the players who signed with the Aggies.

"Some people think they're God," Fisher said. "Go dig into how God did His deal. You may find out about a guy, a lot of things you don't want to know. We build him up to be this czar of football. Go dig into his past or anybody who's ever coached with him. You can find out anything you want to find out what he does and how he does it."

"There's a reason I ain't went back and worked for him, with opportunities. I don't want to be associated with him," Fisher added.

Texas A&M plays at Alabama on Oct. 8, but Fisher and Saban won't have to wait that long to cross paths with the SEC meetings just around the corner.

"I don't cheat. I don't lie. If you did my old man slapped me across the face. Maybe someone should have slapped him (Saban)," Fisher said.

The 56-year-old Fisher won a national championship in 2013 as head coach at Florida State before receiving a 10-year contract for \$75 million to leave Tallahassee for Texas A&M in 2017.

The NCAA lifted most of its rules barring athletes from earning money from sponsorship and endorsement deals last July, but there are concerns among many in college sports that NIL deals are being used to as recruiting inducements and de facto pay-for-play. Last week, the NCAA issued guidance to Division I members to clarify its rules against boosters being involved in recruiting.

In February, Fisher went off on competitors who were pushing rumors that Texas A&M had spent \$30 million on NIL deals to land one the highest-rated recruiting classes in history.

The 70-year-old Saban was more targeted in his critique of the current state of college football than he has been in the past. He also mentioned Jackson State and Miami in his remarks.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 49 of 61

Jackson State coach Deion Sanders, an Pro Football Hall of Famer, landed one of the top recruits in the country in cornerback Travis Hunter, who had been committed to Florida State until a signing day flip in December.

"We as a PEOPLE don't have to pay our PEOPLE to play with our PEOPLE," Sanders tweeted Wednesday night. Hunter also chimed in on social media.

As for Fisher, he said he's looking forward to the Destin meetings.

"I don't mind confrontation. Lived with it my whole life," Fisher said. "Kind of like it myself. Backing away from it isn't the way I was raised."

NATO chief sure spat over Sweden, Finland will be resolved

By ZEYNEP BILGINSOY and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Turkey's leader flatly opposes having Sweden and Finland join NATO, but the military alliance's chief said Thursday he was confident the standoff would be resolved and the two Nordic nations would have their membership requests approved soon.

Turkey's approval of Finland and Sweden's application to join the Western military alliance is crucial because NATO makes decisions by consensus. Each of its 30 member countries has the power to veto a membership bid.

"We have told our relevant friends we would say 'no' to Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO, and we will continue on our path like this," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Turkish youths in a video for Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day, a national holiday.

Ankara is objecting to their membership over security concerns, accusing them of supporting outlawed groups that Turkey deems existential threats, as well as their restrictions on weapons exports to Turkey.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said during a Thursday visit to Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, he was "confident that we will come to a quick decision to welcome both Sweden and Finland to join the NATO family."

"We are addressing the concerns that Turkey has expressed, because when an important ally (like) Turkey raises security concerns, raises issues, then of course the only way to deal with that is to sit down and find common ground," Stoltenberg told reporters in Copenhagen, Denmark.

U.S. President Joe Biden met the leaders of Sweden and Finland on Thursday in Washington and expressed full support for their membership.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said his government was open to discussing Turkey's concerns.

"As NATO allies, we will commit to Turkey's security, just as Turkey will commit to our security. We take terrorism seriously," he said.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said her government was reaching out to Turkey and other NATO nations "to sort out any issues."

Finland and Sweden officially applied to join the world's biggest security organization on Wednesday. A first meeting of NATO ambassadors to discuss their applications failed to reach a consensus. For the moment, no new meeting of NATO ambassadors is yet planned.

Erdogan says Turkey's objections stem from its security concerns and grievances with Sweden's — and to a lesser degree Finland's — perceived support of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and an armed group in Syria that Turkey sees as an extension of the PKK. Turkey's conflict with the PKK has killed tens of thousands of people since 1984.

Asked whether Finland might get admitted before Sweden, Stoltenberg replied: "We handled this as one process, and we are working with this as one process."

In his remarks made available Thursday, Erdogan branded the two prospective NATO members and especially Sweden as "a focus of terror, home to terror." He accused them of giving financial and weapons support to the armed groups, and claimed the countries' alleged links to terror organizations meant they should not be part of the trans-Atlantic alliance.

Erdogan's ruling party spokesman, Omer Celik, said Thursday they had proof that Swedish weapons

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 50 of 61

were showing up in PKK hands, while also warning the United States and France for “giving to the group that kills my country’s citizens.” If NATO is to expand, Celik argued, then potential members must “cut off their support to terror groups.”

Turkish officials, including the president, also have pointed to arms restrictions on Turkey as a reason for Ankara’s opposition to the two countries becoming part of NATO.

Several European countries, including Sweden and Finland, restricted arms exports to Turkey following the country’s cross-border operation into northeast Syria in 2019 with the stated goal of clearing the border area of Kurdish militants.

Turkey says the Syrian Kurdish People’s Defense Units, or YPG, is directly linked to the PKK. American support for the Syrian Democratic Forces, which mainly consists of YPG fighters, to combat the Islamic State group has been infuriating Ankara.

Turkey also accuses Sweden and Finland of harboring followers of Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Muslim cleric whom the Turkish government blames for 2016 military coup attempt. Gulen has denied any links to the coup attempt.

Vangelis, the Greek ‘Chariots of Fire’ composer, dies at 79

By NICHOLAS PAPHITIS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Vangelis, the Greek electronic composer who wrote the unforgettable Academy Award-winning score for the film “Chariots of Fire” and music for dozens of other movies, documentaries and TV series, has died at 79.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and other government officials expressed their condolences Thursday. Greek media reported that Vangelis — born Evangelos Odysseas Papathanassiou — died in a French hospital late Tuesday.

“Vangelis Papathanassiou is no longer among us,” Mitsotakis tweeted, calling him an “electronic sound trailblazer” whose death is “sad news for the entire world.”

The opening credits of “Chariots of Fire” roll as a bunch of young runners progress in slow motion across a glum beach in Scotland, as a lazy, beat-backed tune rises to a magisterial declamation. It’s one of the most instantly recognizable musical themes in cinema — and its standing in popular culture has only been confirmed by the host of spoofs it has sired.

The 1981 British film made Vangelis, but his initial encounter with success came with his first Greek pop band in the 1960s.

He evolved into a one-man quasi-classical orchestra, using a vast array of electronic equipment to conjure up his enormously popular undulating waves of sound. A private, humorous man — burly, with shoulder-length hair and a trim beard — he quoted ancient Greek philosophy and saw the artist as a conduit for a basic universal force. He was fascinated by space exploration and wrote music for celestial bodies, but said he never sought stardom himself.

Still, a micro-planet spinning somewhere between Mars and Jupiter — 6354 Vangelis — will forever bear his name.

Born on March 29, 1943 near the city of Volos in central Greece, Vangelis started playing the piano at age 4, although he got no formal training and claimed he never learned to read notes.

“Orchestration, composition — they teach these things in music schools, but there are some things you can never teach,” he said in a 1982 interview. “You can’t teach creation.”

At 20, Vangelis and three friends formed the Forminx band in Athens, which did very well in Greece. After it disbanded, he wrote scores for several Greek films and later became a founding member — together with another later-to-be internationally famous Greek musician, Demis Roussos — of Aphrodite’s Child. Based in Paris, the progressive rock group produced several European hits, and their final record “666,” released in 1972, is still highly acclaimed.

Aphrodite’s Child also broke up, and Vangelis pursued solo projects. In 1974, he moved to London, built his own studio and cooperated with Yes frontman Jon Anderson, with whom he recorded as Jon and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 51 of 61

Vangelis and had several major hits.

But his huge breakthrough came with the score for "Chariots of Fire" that told the true story of two British runners competing in the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris. Vangelis' score won one of the four Academy Awards the film captured, including best picture. The signature piece is one of the hardest-to-forget movie tunes worldwide — and has also served as the musical background to endless slow-motion parodies.

Vangelis later wrote music scores for Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner" (1982) and "1492: Conquest of Paradise" (1992), as well as for "Missing" (1982) and "Antarctica" (1983), among others.

He refused many other offers for film scores, saying in an interview: "Half of the films I see don't need music. It sounds like something stuffed in."

Vangelis was wary of how record companies handled commercial success. With success, he said, "you find yourself stuck and obliged to repeat yourself and your previous success."

His interest in science — including the physics of music and sound — and space exploration led to compositions linked with major NASA and European Space Agency projects. When British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking died in 2018, Vangelis composed a musical tribute for his interment that the ESA broadcast into space.

Vangelis brought forth his symphonic swells playing alone on a bank of synthesizers, while flipping switches as his feet darted from one volume pedal to another.

"I work like an athlete," he once said.

He avoided the lifestyle excesses associated with many in the music industry, saying that he never took drugs — "which was very uncomfortable, at times."

Vangelis said he didn't ever experiment with his music and usually did everything on the first take.

"When I compose, I perform the music at the same time, so everything is live, nothing is pre-programmed," he said.

Decca, the record label for his last three albums, called the composer "a genius."

"Vangelis created music of extraordinary originality and power, and provided the soundtrack to so many of our lives," it said. "Decca had the pleasure of partnering with Vangelis and his team for his past three albums and we will miss him enormously. His music will live on forever."

The composer lived in London, Paris and Athens, where he bought a house at the foot of the Acropolis that he never dolled up, even when his street became one of the most desirable pedestrian walks in town. The neoclassical building was nearly demolished in 2007 when government officials decided that it spoilt the view of the ancient citadel from a new museum built next door, but eventually reconsidered.

Vangelis received many awards in Greece, France and the U.S. Little was known of his personal life besides that he was an avid painter.

"Every day I paint and every day I compose music," he said — in that order.

Blowback as Bush gaffes Iraq war, not Ukraine, 'unjustified'

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Former President George W. Bush is facing criticism after mistakenly describing the invasion of Iraq — which he led as commander in chief — as "brutal" and "wholly unjustified," before correcting himself to say he meant to refer to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The result is an absence of checks and balances in Russia, and the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq — I mean of Ukraine," Bush said Wednesday night during a speech at his presidential center in Dallas.

The 75-year-old former president jokingly blamed the mistake on his age, shaking his head and correcting himself, drawing laughter from the crowd.

"Iraq, too — anyway," he added, before moving on without explaining the Iraq reference.

In his remarks, Bush also likened Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill, a comparison he also made earlier this month after meeting with Zelenskyy via video chat, according to social posts from his presidential center.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 52 of 61

But the comment, which was quickly and widely shared on social media, drew condemnation from critics pointing to Bush's decision to launch a U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, an inquiry into alleged weapons of mass destruction that were never discovered.

"If you were George W. Bush, you think you'd just steer clear of giving any speech about one man launching a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion," former Rep. Justin Amash, I-Mich., wrote on Twitter.

"I wish he would have been this honest and critical of himself 20 years, countless lives, and trillions of dollars ago," Donald Trump Jr. said in a tweet.

"George Bush is laughing in this clip because he knows he and every other Iraq War supporter were rewarded with riches and big media jobs for their work killing a million people, rather than being held accountable and shunned," tweeted David Sirota, a former speechwriter for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign.

A spokesman for the former president did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Launched with a search for suspected weapons of mass destruction that never materialized, the Iraq war resulted in the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government, along with the deaths of U.S. service members and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

All U.S. forces were withdrawn at the end of 2011, but just three years later, American troops were back to help Iraq beat back the Islamic State group, which had swept across the border from Syria to gain control of a large swath of the country.

Since leaving office, through his presidential center, Bush has focused on assisting veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including helping with the transition to civilian life and hosting recreational events.

Bush, whose slips of the tongue came to be known as "Bushisms" through his presidency, has also subsequently poked fun at the unsuccessful WMD hunt, including during the 2004 White House Correspondents Dinner, as a photo of him looking under Oval Office furniture appeared on a screen.

"Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be here somewhere," he joked.

In his memoir, "Decision Points," Bush seriously referenced the situation, writing that "No one was more shocked and angry than I was when we didn't find the weapons."

"I had a sickening feeling every time I thought about it. I still do."

Cancer deaths in Black people drop; still higher than others

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Cancer death rates have steadily declined among Black people but remain higher than in other racial and ethnic groups, a U.S. government study released Thursday shows.

Cancer deaths have been dropping for all Americans for the past two decades because of lower smoking rates and advances in early detection and treatment.

The rates among Black people fell 2% each year from 1999 to 2019, from 359 cancer deaths per 100,000 to 239 deaths per 100,000, according to the report published online in JAMA Oncology.

In 2019, the highest cancer death rates were in Black men — 294 deaths per 100,000 — almost double the lowest rate in Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The rate for white men was 249 deaths per 100,000. For Hispanic men, it was 177 deaths per 100,000 and 255 deaths per 100,000 among Native American men.

An earlier report from the American Cancer Society found the racial gap was narrowing, mostly because of a bigger decline in cigarette smoking among Black people.

In the new study, based on an analysis of death certificates, deaths from most cancers dropped in Black men and women. The biggest declines were in lung cancer among Black men and stomach cancer in Black women. Both are linked with declines in smoking, which contributes to many other cancers.

Liver cancer deaths increased among older men and women; and uterine cancer death rates increased among women aged 35 to 70. Both cancers are strongly linked with obesity.

The persistently higher death rate among Black Americans remains a concern, and likely reflects social and economic disparities including poverty, less access to care and mistrust of doctors, said National Cancer Institute researcher Wayne Lawrence, who led the study.

"It's showing that we can't simply rely on medical care as a way to address and eliminate the disparities," said Carla Williams, a Howard University expert in cancer-related health disparities, who had no role in the research.

Cancer prevention expert Dr. Otis Brawley of Johns Hopkins University noted that other data show Black Americans get worse cancer care than white people. That's in part because they're more likely to be treated at hospitals with overworked doctors and fewer resources, and less likely to have a college degree, he said.

Evidence suggests that people with college degrees are more likely to exercise, not be obese, and to seek medical care when they notice changes that could signal cancer, Brawley said.

Spy agencies urged to fix open secret: A lack of diversity

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The peril that National Security Agency staff wanted to discuss with their director didn't involve terrorists or enemy nations. It was something closer to home: racism and cultural misunderstandings inside America's largest intelligence service.

The NSA and other intelligence agencies held calls for their staff shortly after the death of George Floyd. As Gen. Paul Nakasone listened, one person described how they would try to speak up in meetings only to have the rest of the group keep talking over them. Another person, a Black man, spoke about how he had been counseled that his voice was too loud and intimidated co-workers. A third said a co-worker addressed them with a racist slur.

The national reckoning over racial inequality sparked by Floyd's murder two years ago has gone on behind closed doors inside America's intelligence agencies. But publicly available data, published studies of diversity programs and interviews with retired officers indicate spy agencies have not lived up to years of commitments made by their top leaders, who often say diversity is a national security imperative.

People of color remain underrepresented across the intelligence community and are less likely to be promoted. Retired officers who spoke to The Associated Press described examples of explicit and implicit bias. People who had served on promotion boards noted non-native English speakers applying for new jobs would sometimes be criticized for being hard to understand — what one person called the "accent card." Some say they believe minorities are funneled into working on countries or regions based on their ethnicity.

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, the first woman to serve in her role, has appointed diversity officials who say they need to collect better data to study longstanding questions, from whether the process for obtaining a security clearance disadvantages people of color to the reasons for disparities in advancement. Agencies are also implementing reforms they say will promote diversity.

"It's going to be incremental," said Stephanie La Rue, who was appointed this year to lead the intelligence community's efforts on diversity, equity and inclusion. "We're not going to see immediate change overnight. It's going to take us a while to get to where we need to go."

The NSA call following Floyd's death was described by a participant who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private discussion. The person credited Nakasone for listening to employees and making public and private commitments to diversity. But the person and other former officials said they sometimes felt that their identities as people of color were discounted or not fully appreciated by their employers.

The NSA said in a statement that the agency "has been steadfast in our commitment to building and sustaining a diverse and expert workforce."

"Beyond the mission imperative, NSA cultivates diversity and promotes inclusion because we care about our people and know it is the right way to proceed," the statement said.

A former NSA contractor alleged this year that racist and misogynistic comments often circulate on classified intelligence community chatrooms. The contractor, Dan Gilmore, wrote in a blog post that he was fired for reporting his complaints to higher-ups. A spokeswoman for Director Haines, Nicole de Haay, declined to comment on Gilmore's allegations but said employees who "engage in inappropriate conduct are subject to a variety of accountability mechanisms, including disciplinary action."

The U.S. intelligence community has evolved over decades from being almost exclusively run by white

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 54 of 61

men — following a stereotype that Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat, referred to in a hearing on diversity last year as “pale, male, Yale.” Intelligence agencies that once denied security clearances to people suspected of being gay now have active resource groups for people of different races and sexual orientation.

Testifying at the same hearing as Himes, CIA Director William Burns said, “Simply put, we can’t be effective and we’re not being true to our nation’s ideals if everyone looks like me, talks like me, and thinks like me.”

But annual charts published by the Office of Director of National Intelligence show a consistent trend: At rising levels of rank, minority representation goes down.

Latinos make up about 18% of the American population but just 7% of the roughly 100,000-person intelligence community and 3.5% of senior officers. Black officers comprise 12% of the community — the same as the U.S. population — but 6.5% at the most senior level. And while minorities comprise 27% of the total intelligence workforce, just 15% of senior executives are people of color.

A 2015 report commissioned by the CIA said the “underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority officers and officers with a disability at the senior ranks is not a recent problem and speaks to unresolved cultural, organizational, and unconscious bias issues.” Among the report’s findings: Progress made between 1984 and 2004 in promoting Black officers to senior roles had been lost in the following decade and recruitment efforts at historically Black colleges and universities “have not been effective.”

“Since its founding, the Agency has been unmistakably weak in promoting diverse role models to the executive level,” the report said.

Lenora Peters Gant, a former senior human capital officer for the CIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, wrote last year that the intelligence community constantly imposes barriers on minorities, women and people with disabilities. Gant, now an adviser at Howard University, called on agencies to release some of their classified data on hiring and retention.

“The bottom line is the decision making leadership levels are void of credible minority participation,” Gant said.

ODNI is starting an investigation of the slowest 10% of security clearance applications, reviewing delays in the cases for any possible examples of bias. It also intends to review whether polygraph examiners need additional race and ethnicity training.

The intelligence community currently doesn’t report delays in getting a security clearance — required for most agency jobs — based on race, ethnicity or gender. The months or years a clearance can take can push away applicants who can’t wait that long.

The office is implementing annual grant monitoring and assigning additional staff to work with universities in the intelligence community’s Centers for Academic Excellence program, intended to recruit college students from underrepresented groups. A 2019 audit said it was impossible to judge the program due to poor planning and a lack of clear goals.

The program also got a new logo after ODNI officials heard that the previous “IC CAE” insignia appeared to spell out “ICE,” an unintended reference to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Additional quiet changes are taking place across the agencies. Officials say the changes were in process before Floyd’s death, though conversations held with employees brought new urgency to diversity issues.

The NSA stopped requiring applicants for internal promotions to disclose the date they were last promoted to the boards considering their application. Officials familiar with the change say it was intended to benefit applicants who take longer to move up the agency ladder, often including working parents or people from underrepresented communities.

The agency said in a statement that officials “regularly examine the outcomes of our personnel systems to assess their fairness.”

The CIA two years ago formally tied yearly bonuses for its senior executives to their performance on diversity goals, measured next to factors such as leadership and intelligence tradecraft. Last year’s class of new senior executives was the most diverse in the agency’s history, with 47% women and 27% people from minority backgrounds, exceeding the percentages of women and minorities in the agency’s total

workforce.

Said CIA spokesperson Tammy Thorp: "We are proud of the agency's progress in ensuring our hiring, assignment, and promotion processes do not create barriers to advancement."

La Rue, the chief diversity officer for the intelligence community, has hired several data analysts and plans for her office to issue annual report cards on diversity for each intelligence agency. She acknowledges advocates have to break through enduring skepticism inside and outside government that diversity goals undermine the intelligence mission or require lower standards.

"The narrative that we have to sacrifice excellence for diversity, or that we are somehow compromising national security to achieve our diversity goals, is ridiculous," she said.

New Twitter policy aims to pierce fog of war misinformation

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Twitter is stepping up its fight against misinformation with a new policy cracking down on posts that spread potentially dangerous false stories. The change is part of a broader effort to promote accurate information during times of conflict or crisis.

Starting Thursday, the platform will no longer automatically recommend or emphasize posts that make misleading claims about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including material that mischaracterizes conditions in conflict zones or makes false allegations of war crimes or atrocities against civilians.

Under its new "crisis misinformation policy," Twitter will also add warning labels to debunked claims about ongoing humanitarian crises, the San Francisco-based company said. Users won't be able to like, forward or respond to posts that violate the new rules.

The changes make Twitter the latest social platform to grapple with the misinformation, propaganda and rumors that have proliferated since Russia invaded Ukraine in February. That misinformation ranges from rumors spread by well-intentioned users to Kremlin propaganda amplified by Russian diplomats or fake accounts and networks linked to Russian intelligence.

"We have seen both sides share information that may be misleading and/or deceptive," said Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of safety and integrity, who detailed the new policy for reporters. "Our policy doesn't draw a distinction between the different combatants. Instead, we're focusing on misinformation that could be dangerous, regardless of where it comes from."

The new policy will complement existing Twitter rules that prohibit digitally manipulated media, false claims about elections and voting, and health misinformation, including debunked claims about COVID-19 and vaccines.

But it could also clash with the views of Tesla billionaire Elon Musk, who has agreed to pay \$44 billion to acquire Twitter with the aim of making it a haven for "free speech." Musk hasn't addressed many instances of what that would mean in practice, although he has said that Twitter should only take down posts that violate the law, which taken literally would prevent action against most misinformation, personal attacks and harassment. He has also criticized the algorithms used by Twitter and other social platforms to recommend particular posts to individuals.

The policy was written broadly to cover misinformation during other conflicts, natural disasters, humanitarian crises or "any situation where there's a widespread threat to health and safety," Roth said.

Twitter said it will rely on a variety of credible sources to determine when a post is misleading. Those sources will include humanitarian groups, conflict monitors and journalists.

A senior Ukrainian cybersecurity official, Victor Zhora, welcomed Twitter's new screening policy and said that it's up to the global community to "find proper approaches to prevent the sowing of misinformation across social networks."

While the results have been mixed, Twitter's efforts to address misinformation about the Ukraine conflict exceed those of other platforms that have chosen a more hands-off approach, like Telegram, which is popular in Eastern Europe.

Asked specifically about the Telegram platform, where Russian government disinformation is rampant but

Ukraine's leaders also reaches a wide audience, Zhora said the question was "tricky but very important." That's because the kind of misinformation disseminated without constraint on Telegram "to some extent led to this war."

Since the Russian invasion began in February, social media platforms like Twitter and Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, have tried to address a rise in war-related misinformation by labeling posts from Russian state-controlled media and diplomats. They've also de-emphasized some material so it no longer turns up in searches or automatic recommendations.

Emerson Brooking, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab and expert on social media and disinformation, said that the conflict in Ukraine shows how easily misinformation can spread online during conflict, and the need for platforms to respond.

"This is a conflict that has played out on the internet, and one that has driven extraordinarily rapid changes in tech policy," he said.

Jordan king places 'erratic' half-brother under house arrest

JERUSALEM (AP) — Jordan's king has gone public with a royal rift with his half-brother and formalized the former crown prince's house arrest, calling him "erratic" in an unprecedented harshly worded letter published Thursday.

King Abdullah II said in the letter that he had approved measures to detain Prince Hamzah in his palace and restrict his communications and movements, citing his half brother's "erratic behavior and aspirations."

"We will provide Hamzah with all that he requires to live a comfortable life, but he will not have the space he once abused to offend the nation, its institutions, and his family, nor to undermine Jordan's stability," the king said.

King Abdullah had tried to keep the rift within the family, in part to protect the Hashemite Royal family brand. His harshly worded public condemnation of his half-brother is a potentially risky move. Hamzah has enjoyed considerable popularity, particularly among the Jordanian tribes, traditionally a bedrock of support for the monarchy.

Abdullah and Hamzah are sons of King Hussein, who ruled Jordan for nearly a half-century before his death in 1999. Abdullah had appointed Hamzah as crown prince upon his succession but stripped him of the title in 2004.

The monarch had placed Hamzah under house arrest in April 2021 for his alleged plot to destabilize the Western-allied kingdom. Abdullah had accused his brother of sedition but said the matter was being resolved within the family, with Hamzah remaining in his palace under the king's protection.

In March, Hamzah apologized to the king, according to a letter released by the Royal Court, saying that he hoped that "we can turn the page on this chapter in our country's and our family's history."

But last month, the outspoken Hamzah formally relinquished his princely title and protested on Twitter, writing that his convictions could not be reconciled with the "current approaches, policies and methods of our institutions" in an oblique criticism of the king.

In Thursday's letter, King Abdullah lashed out at his half-brother, saying he would "never allow our country to be held hostage to the whims of someone who has done nothing to serve his country."

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a close Western ally and has long been seen as a stable Arab monarchy in a turbulent region.

EXPLAINER: What might happen to 100s of Ukrainian POWs?

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Breaking its recent silence on prisoners of war, the Red Cross said Thursday it has registered "hundreds" of Ukrainian prisoners of war who left the giant Azovstal steel plant in the southern city of Mariupol after holding out in a weeks-long standoff with besieging Russian forces.

The announcement by the International Committee of the Red Cross, which acts as a guardian of the Geneva Conventions that aim to limit "the barbarity of war," came shortly after Russia's military said 1,730

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 57 of 61

Ukrainian troops at the steel mill have surrendered.

Attention now is turning to how those prisoners of war might be treated and what rights they have. Here's a look at some key questions about POWs in Russia's nearly three-month-old war on Ukraine:

WHO IS A PRISONER OF WAR?

Article 4 of the third Geneva Convention, which focuses on POWs, defines them as any member of armed forces or militias — including organized resistance movements — in a conflict who “who have fallen into the power of the enemy.”

It also includes non-combatant crew members, war correspondents and even “inhabitants of a non-occupied territory who, on the approach of the enemy, spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading forces.”

WHAT RIGHTS DO POWS HAVE?

The Geneva Conventions set out requirements to ensure that POWs are treated humanely. They include issues such as where they can be held; the relief they should receive, including medical help for wounded ex-fighters; and legal proceedings they might face.

“In this case, the Russian Federation has an entire list of obligations: To treat them humanely, to let the ICRC (have) access to them, to inform the ICRC of their names, to allow them to write to their families, to care for them if they are wounded and sick, to feed them and so on,” said Marco Sassoli, a professor of international law at the University of Geneva.

“But obviously, the detaining power may deprive them of their liberty until the end of the international armed conflict and may hold them — unlike civilians — on their own territories. So they may be brought to Russia,” he said.

CAN THEY BE PUT ON TRIAL?

Only under certain conditions, notably if an individual fighter is accused of committing one or more war crimes. Such an accusation must be based on published evidence, Sassoli said.

“They can certainly not be punished for having participated in the hostilities, because that's the privilege of combatants and of prisoners of war,” he said.

COULD POWS BECOME PART OF PRISONER EXCHANGES?

The Geneva Conventions do not set rules for prisoner exchanges. In the past, Red Cross intermediaries have helped carry out agreed-upon POW exchanges.

Still, much has been made of the insistence by some Russian officials that detained Ukrainian ex-fighters should face trial and should not be included in any prisoner exchanges.

COULD RUSSIA CLAIM THE FIGHTERS ARE NOT ENTITLED TO POW STATUS?

Some countries have tried to sidestep their Geneva Conventions obligations — or simply argue that they're not bound by them.

A prominent case was when the United States detained hundreds of fighters allegedly linked to terrorist groups like al-Qaida. They were detained as “enemy combatants” at a U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, after the Sept. 11 attacks and the subsequent U.S.-led military operation to topple the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan.

Sassoli said there are “all kinds of reasons” why an individual might lose their prisoner of war status. For example, if the fighter “didn't distinguish themselves from the civilian population” during combat.

“But here, to the best of my knowledge, no one claims that these people (detainees from the Azov Regiment in Mariupol) didn't wear a uniform, or if they don't belong to the Ukrainian armed forces,” Sassoli said. “It's basically Ukraine who decides who belongs to their armed forces.”

Ukrainian leaders have repeatedly touted the regiment's role in the armed forces and have celebrated what they call its members' heroism for holding out so long against far-larger Russian forces.

THE AZOV REGIMENT IS PART OF THE NATIONAL GUARD — DOES THAT MATTER?

Ukraine and Russia have both accepted an important annex to the Geneva Conventions that broadens the definition of what fighters — militia or otherwise — might be considered as part of the national military force, based in part on whether they follow military commands.

As for the Azov Regiment fighters, “there's no doubt” they are part of Ukraine's military force, said

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 58 of 61

Sassoli, who was on a three-person team commissioned by the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe that travelled to Ukraine in March.

However, Russia hasn't been fully clear about who is detaining the former Azovstal fighters — Russia itself, or the breakaway pro-Russian areas in Ukraine such as the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" or the "Luhansk People's Republic," which could blur such distinctions.

WHAT'S THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RED CROSS STATEMENT?

Thursday's statement was the first time since Russia invaded on Feb. 24 that the ICRC — which plays an often-confidential role to check on prisoners of war — has said anything officially about POWs in the conflict.

"Normally, the ICRC will not tell you how these people are treated, but the ICRC will say whom they visited," said Sassoli. "But the ICRC — to the best of my knowledge, until this media release — did not clarify how many people it had access to, on both sides."

Beyond its communication about the Azovstal fighters, the ICRC has not said whether it has registered other POWs or carried out any visits with POWs on either side of the war.

Female referees to officiate men's World Cup for 1st time

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — Female referees will make World Cup history this year by working games at a major men's tournament for the first time in Qatar.

Three female referees and three female assistant referees were announced Thursday by FIFA among 129 officials selected for World Cup duty, including one man who caused controversy when refereeing a chaotic African Cup of Nations game in January while suffering with heatstroke.

French referee Stéphanie Frappart already worked men's games in World Cup qualifying and the Champions League, after handling the 2019 Women's World Cup final. She also refereed the final of the men's French Cup this month.

"As always, the criteria we have used is 'quality first' and the selected match officials represent the highest level of refereeing worldwide," said FIFA Referees Committee chairman Pierluigi Collina, who worked the 2002 World Cup final. "In this way, we clearly emphasize that it is quality that counts for us and not gender."

Salima Mukansanga of Rwanda and Yoshimi Yamashita of Japan are also on the list of 36 referees preparing for the 64 games at the tournament, which will be played from Nov. 21-Dec. 18.

The 69 assistant referees include Neuza Back of Brazil, Karen Díaz Medina of Mexico and Kathryn Nesbitt of the United States.

"I would hope that in the future the selection of elite women's match officials for important men's competitions will be perceived as something normal and no longer as sensational," Collina said.

Among the male referees is Janny Sikazwe of Zambia, who blew the final whistle at an African Cup group match after 85 minutes and again 13 seconds before the 90 minutes were complete, with Mali leading Tunisia 1-0.

About 30 minutes after the match, officials ordered the teams back on the field to restart play but Tunisia refused. The result was later ratified by the Confederation of African Football despite an official protest by Tunisia.

The match was played in heat and humidity in Cameroon, and Sikazwe later explained he started to become confused in the intense conditions.

Sikazwe will be working at his second World Cup after handling two group games at the 2018 tournament in Russia.

The extreme heat in Qatar led FIFA to decide in 2015 to move the tournament to the cooler months in the Gulf emirate.

FIFA has picked 24 men to work on video reviews. The VAR system made its debut in 2018.

FIFA said 50 referee-and-assistant trios began preparing in 2019 for World Cup duty, with the project affected by limits on international travel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 59 of 61

Two referees were picked from each of Argentina, Brazil, England and France. All the officials — who were not allocated into specific teams of three — face future technical, physical and medical assessments this year, FIFA said.

More Americans apply for jobless benefits last week

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — More Americans applied for jobless aid last week, but the total number of Americans collecting unemployment benefits is at a 53-year low.

Applications for unemployment benefits rose by 21,000 to 218,000 for the week ending May 14, the Labor Department reported Thursday. First-time applications generally track the number of layoffs.

The four-week average for claims, which smooths out some of the weekly volatility, rose 8,250 from the previous week to 199,500.

The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits for the week ending May 7 fell again from the previous week, to 1,317,000. That's the fewest since December 27, 1969.

American workers are enjoying historically strong job security two years after the coronavirus pandemic plunged the economy into a short but devastating recession. Weekly applications for unemployment aid have been consistently below the pre-pandemic level of 225,000 for most of 2022, even as the overall economy contracted in the first quarter and concerns over inflation persist.

Earlier this month, the government reported America's employers added 428,000 jobs in April, leaving the unemployment rate at 3.6%, just above the lowest level in a half-century. Hiring gains have been strikingly consistent in the face of the worst inflation in four decades, with employers adding at least 400,000 jobs for 12 straight months.

Inflation may be the only thing hotter than the U.S. job market. Last week, the government reported that U.S. producer prices soared 11% in April from a year earlier, a hefty gain that indicates high inflation will remain a burden for consumers and businesses in the months ahead.

Also last week, the government reported that inflation at the consumer level eased slightly in April after months of relentless increases but remained near a four-decade high. Consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago, just below the 8.5% year-over-year surge in March, which was the highest since 1981.

Earlier in May, the Federal Reserve ratcheted up its fight against the worst inflation in 40 years by raising its benchmark short-term interest rate by a half-percentage point — its most aggressive move since 2000 — and signaling further large rate hikes to come. The increase in the Fed's key rate raised it to a range of 0.75% to 1%, the highest point since the pandemic struck in March of 2020.

With sequel plans, Rob Reiner turns 'Spinal Tap' up to 11

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — One of the most memorable lines — and Rob Reiner's personal favorite — of "This Is Spinal Tap" goes: "There's a fine line between stupid and clever."

You could say the same thing about the classic 1984 mockumentary. It could have so easily not panned out. No one in Hollywood thought it was a good idea. It was saved by Norman Lear who, after Reiner made his pitch and departed, is said to have turned to the executives in the room and announced: "Who's going to tell him he can't do it?"

Now, Reiner and company want to get the band back together for a sequel. Reiner was at the Cannes Film Festival this week for an anniversary screening on the beach of "This Is Spinal Tap" and to drum up excitement for the just-announced sequel that will also see Michael McKean, Harry Shearer, and Christopher Guest reprise their roles as band members David St. Hubbins, Derek Smalls and Nigel Tufnel.

"The bar is high. There's no question about it," Reiner said in an interview by the beach. "And we wrestled with that forever, whether or not we should even bother to do it. But we had an idea. Over the years, people have come up and said, 'Oh, you should do a sequel.' We've always said, 'No, no, no.' But as time

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 60 of 61

went by, we finally had something we think can work. And we'll find out!"

The 1984 movie had no script, just a four-page outline. It was almost entirely improvised. Reiner's first cut of the film was seven hours long. Even the jokes they did have planned — like the infamous "these amps goes to 11" scene — were filmed off-the-cuff.

"Quick!" Reiner recalls shouting. "Make an amp with an extra number on it!"

But what teetered so close to never panning out in the first place, has of course become one of the most beloved comedies of the '80s and a massive influence to countless mockumentaries that have followed. It is even in the Library of Congress.

Reiner assures that this time, too, there will be no screenplay. He will depend on the still sharp improvisational talents of his cast, who have carried on Spinal Tap — a fictional band turned into a semi-real one — in occasional concerts in the intervening decades. Reiner's character, the director Marti DeBergi (styled after Martin Scorsese in The Band concert documentary "The Last Waltz"), will naturally return.

"Here we are 40 years later and Marti DeBergi — who has not been the greatest filmmaker, let's put it that way. The man made 'Kramer vs. Kramer vs. Godzilla.' And I think he did 'Attack of the 52-Foot Woman,'" says Reiner. "Because he said there's going to be this reunion, we wanted to make this film, and we've given him free reign."

When "This Is Spinal Tap" was first released, many thought Spinal Tap was a real band. Reiner, who studied rock documentaries like "The Kids Are Alright" and "The Song Remains the Same" for preparation, enlisted a cinematographer, Peter Smokler, with a documentary background. What was real and what was parody was almost indistinguishable. Sting, Reiner says, has since told him he watched it countless times but didn't know if he should laugh or cry.

And some bits were taken straight from rock 'n' roll lore. The band getting lost on their way to the stage came from an experience by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, who may have been enjoying the pre-show backstage atmosphere too much.

Asked if Scorsese ever spoke to him about Reiner's riff on him, Reiner responds: "Initially, Marty got mad. But over the years, he's come to love it. We did 'Wolf of Wall Street' a few years ago and we talked about it. He said, 'Ah, I love it. I love that you did that.'"

"The Last Waltz" will again be a major touchstone for the sequel which Reiner is developing for his re-launched production company Castle Rock. Reiner's plan entails Spinal Tap reconvening for one last show.

Many of Reiner's most beloved films are seemingly sequel-proof. Recapturing the tone of "The Princess Bride"? Inconceivable. (Writer William Goldman did try, though.) And it's just as hard to imagine the magic of "Stand by Me" or "When Harry Met Sally" being captured a second time. But "Spinal Tap," Reiner thinks, isn't done rocking.

"If you have an idea," he says, "then you say, 'OK.'"

Today in History: May 20, Lindbergh takes off

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, May 20, the 140th day of 2022. There are 225 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 20, 1956, the United States exploded the first airborne hydrogen bomb over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

On this date:

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, which was intended to encourage settlements west of the Mississippi River by making federal land available for farming.

In 1916, the Saturday Evening Post published its first Norman Rockwell cover; the illustration shows a scowling boy dressed in his Sunday best, dutifully pushing a baby carriage past a couple of boys wearing baseball uniforms.

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off from Roosevelt Field on Long Island, New York, aboard the Spirit of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 20, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 317 ~ 61 of 61

St. Louis on his historic solo flight to France.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart took off from Newfoundland to become the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. (Because of weather and equipment problems, Earhart set down in Northern Ireland instead of her intended destination, France.)

In 1948, Chiang Kai-shek (chang ky-shehk) was inaugurated as the first president of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

In 1959, nearly 5,000 Japanese-Americans had their U.S. citizenships restored after choosing to renounce them during World War II.

In 1961, a white mob attacked a busload of Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Alabama, prompting the federal government to send in U.S. marshals to restore order.

In 1969, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces captured Ap Bia Mountain, referred to as "Hamburger Hill" by the Americans, following one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War.

In 1985, Radio Marti, operated by the U.S. government, began broadcasting; Cuba responded by attempting to jam its signal.

In 2009, in a rare, bipartisan defeat for President Barack Obama, the Senate voted overwhelmingly, 90-6, to keep the prison at Guantanamo Bay open for the foreseeable future and forbid the transfer of any detainees to facilities in the United States.

In 2015, four of the world's biggest banks — JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup's banking unit Citicorp, Barclays and the Royal Bank of Scotland — agreed to pay more than \$5 billion in penalties and plead guilty to rigging the currency markets.

In 2020, President Donald Trump threatened to hold up federal funds for two election battleground states (Michigan and Nevada) that were making it easier to vote by mail during the pandemic. Police ticketed seven people for cutting hair during a protest against coronavirus restrictions outside the Michigan Capitol, where about a dozen barbers and hair stylists defied stay-at-home orders to give free haircuts.

Ten years ago: A two-day NATO summit hosted by President Barack Obama opened in Chicago. Thousands of protesters marched through downtown Chicago, airing grievances about war, climate change and a wide range of other complaints. Abdel Baset al-Megrahi (AHB'-dehl BAH'-seht AH'-lee ahl-meh-GRAH'-hee), 60, the only man convicted in connection with the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988, died in Tripoli, Libya. Robin Gibb, 62, who along with his brothers Maurice and Barry, defined the disco era as part of the Bee Gees, died in London.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump opened a five-stop overseas tour, his first since taking office, receiving a lavish royal welcome in Saudi Arabia.

One year ago: Israel and Hamas announced a cease-fire, ending a bruising 11-day war that caused widespread destruction in the Gaza Strip and brought life in much of Israel to a standstill. CNN said it was inappropriate for news anchor Chris Cuomo to have been involved in phone calls with the staff of his brother, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, as the governor decided how to respond to sexual harassment allegations. (CNN would fire Chris Cuomo in December 2021 over his role in helping his older brother.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor-author James McEachin is 92. Actor Anthony Zerbe is 86. Actor David Proval is 80. Singer-actor Cher is 76. Actor-comedian Dave Thomas is 74. Rock musician Warren Cann is 72. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, is 71. Former New York Gov. David Paterson is 68. Delaware Gov. John Carney is 66. Actor Dean Butler is 66. TV-radio personality Ron Reagan is 64. Rock musician Jane Wiedlin (The Go-Go's) is 64. Actor Bronson Pinchot is 63. Singer Susan Cowsill is 63. Actor John Billingsley is 62. Actor Tony Goldwyn is 62. Singer Nick Heyward is 61. TV personality Ted Allen is 57. Actor Mindy Cohn is 56. Rock musician Tom Gorman (Belly) is 56. Actor Gina Ravera is 56. Actor Timothy Olyphant is 54. Former race car driver Tony Stewart is 51. Rapper Busta Rhymes is 50. Actor Daya Vaidya is 49. Actor Matt Czuchy (zoo-KREE') is 45. Actor Angela Goethals is 45. Actor-singer Naturi Naughton is 38. Country singer Jon Pardi is 37.