

3/7/22 Monday

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Dems Urge Biden End 'Title 42' Expulsion Policy After Court Lifts Exemption for Migrant Children
By - Evan Craighead

A Texas court has ruled that the US can no longer exempt unaccompanied migrant children from Title 42, a pandemic-era expulsion policy which uses COVID-19 and public health as the basis for the expulsion of migrants seeking asylum in the US. Texas claimed that it had incurred a financial burden for education and housing of migrant children.

A group of Senate Democrats issued a joint memo to the Biden administration on Saturday advocating for the US president to end the use of a Trump-era immigration expulsion policy that has been used by the current administration to expel some hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking asylum at the southern US-Mexico border.

"The continued use of Title 42 has created life-threatening conditions for vulnerable migrants, enriched human smugglers, and significantly increased the number of dangerous border crossings," read a joint statement issued on Saturday by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), along with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Alex Padilla (D-CA).

The group of Senate Democrats also hailed a Friday ruling by the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia that permitted the continued use of Title 42, but stipulated that the government may not expel migrants to nations where their "life or freedom would be threatened."

"We urge the Biden Administration to fulfill its early promise to restore access to asylum and end the usage of Title 42 once and for all," wrote the Democrats.

"The [US] Center for Disease Control and Prevention should review their current order given the progress our nation has made in its pandemic recovery."

The Biden administration appears to be shifting gears regarding federal involvement in COVID-19 mitigation measures. During his State of the Union address on March 1, the US president told a maskless crowd that it was a "new moment" in the nation's fight against the novel contagious disease, emphasizing that it was time for American public schools to reopen for in-person learning.

"Because of the progress we've made, because of your resilience and the tools we have, tonight I can say we are moving forward safely, back to more normal routines," Biden remarked, noting that severe COVID-19 cases have dropped to a level not observed since July 2021.

Despite the so-called turning point, Title 42 will expand to no longer exempt unaccompanied minors from the emergency public health policy, following a separate court decision in Texas on Friday. Children encountered at the southern US border have previously been placed under custody of US Department of Health and Human Services

Dubbing the Title 42 exemption of unaccompanied children “arbitrary and capricious,” Texas District Court Judge Mark Pittman argued that the Biden administration had failed to justify the Trump-era order by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that codifies the Title 42 exemption.

Pittman was appointed to his position by then-US President Donald Trump in 2019.

“Here, the President has [arbitrarily] excepted COVID-19 positive unaccompanied alien children from Title 42 procedures—which were purposed with preventing the spread of COVID-19,” Pittman wrote in a 37-page order, which argued that Texas has borne a financial burden of migrant children who are relocated to the state and receive schooling and medical services under the policy.

“This matter is even more urgent now that the Northern District Court of Texas has made the unconscionable decision to order the Biden administration to resume the inhumane practice of expelling unaccompanied children,” wrote Sen. Menendez and his colleagues.

The group of US lawmakers noted that the administration made an early pledge to restore access to the asylum system and end the imposition of Trump's Title 42.

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Trump Reportedly Fuming and Confused as TruthSocial Nosedives From #1 to #72 in App Ranking

By - Evan Craighead

A new report citing sources around former US President Donald Trump claims the possible 2024 presidential candidate's alternative social media app has failed to produce the desired result and has been further impacted by negative press on the platform's promotional soft launch—which in true Trump style was actually a glorified waitlist for the app.

As former US President Donald Trump remains mum on whether he will return to the campaign trail for 2024, he has maintained star power and public pull due to his views on the current government and various rallies around the nation.

Trump's celebrity appears to not be enough for the rollout of Truth Social, however, his social media venture, designed as an alternative platform for supporters of the former US president and his 'Make America Great Again' personal agenda.

The conservative-friendly app rocketed to the top of Apple's App Store during its February release shortly after Trump issued his one-and-only post on the site: “Get Ready! Your favorite President will see you soon!”

As of this article's publication, Trump's posting, dubbed a “truth” on the website, has accrued tens of thousands of likes, and thousands of comments and retweets.

However, users were disheartened to learn that a so-called rollout of the app was in truth an application for a waitlist, rather than any immediate access and networking. The app is only available to Apple iOS devices, although Android users could theoretically download an iOS emulator to access the app.

The Truth Social app has acknowledged that it is dealing with bugs and other issues that will impact the pace of the waitlist, which has reportedly authorized hundreds of thousands of accounts although it is not known how many are 'bot' accounts.

Meanwhile, Trump appears to be growing increasingly impatient, as the app he heavily promoted and tied to his personal brand is not embraced as a viable competitor to Twitter and Facebook.

"'What the f**k is going on' with Truth Social?", Trump has been overheard asking within recent weeks, demanding additional information on why netizens are not flocking to the app, which has fallen from #1 in its first 24 hours to below 72nd in the Apple App Store.

A number of Republican lawmakers—including Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), Matt Gaetz (R-FL) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)—are said to have accounts on TruthSocial.

A former GOP House of representatives lawmaker in California, Devin Nunes is the dairy farmer whose pro-Trump loyalty chiefly led to him being offered the role of chief executive officer of the Trump Media & Technology Group, a conservative media outlet for Trump's personal brand.

The US lawmaker is notorious for taking critics to court with frivolous cases that generally result in dismissals. Despite his claims of being a farmer, the Fresno Bee discovered in 2019 that he had not reported income from a 'farm' in over a decade.

Nunes was among the senior-most members of the House Republican party at the time of his December 2021 departure to lead Trump's media venture.

One clear hurdle that the app hopes to achieve will be a standardization of content management that promotes free speech rather than erratic, case-by-case moderation.

The app, which touts itself as a safe space for "free expression" and encourages "all viewpoints," per a post-registration email, appears to take a different approach when the CEO is involved, as one user was promptly banned for creating the username @DevinNunesCow, a clear reference to the parody Twitter account 'Devin Nunes cow' (@DevinCow).

Nunes unsuccessfully sued both Twitter and the individual behind the referenced Twitter account that he complained had led a "vicious defamation campaign" against him.

A statement from Truth Social asserted that the app should be functional by the end of March.

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North Korea's Latest Launch Was Part of 'Important' Spy Satellite Testings

By - Evan Craighead

On Saturday, North Korea conducted its ninth missile test this year in firing a ballistic missile that South Korea claims traveled about 270 kilometers (168 miles), with a maximum altitudde if around 560 kilometers (348 miles).

Newly surfaced reports have revealed that North Korea's latest test launch was part of ongoing development for a "reconnaissance satellite," marking the second such test this year.

"The DPRK National Aerospace Development Administration (NADA) and the Academy of Defence Science conducted another important test on Saturday under the plan of developing a

reconnaissance satellite,” said the Korean Central News Agency said in a statement representing the Democratic People’s Republic of China.

The test allowed NADA the ability to confirm “the reliability of data transmission and reception system of the satellite, its control command system and various ground-based control systems.” No further details were provided by the state-owned news outlet.

Pyongyang's announcement comes a day after North Korea conducted its ninth missile launch this year—directing the projectile toward the East Sea.

The missile was launch from North Korea's Sunan area, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. The South Korean military forces who reported the launched viewed the projectile land in the sea between The Korean Peninsula and Japan.

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'Stay Tuned': Trucker Convoy Abruptly Halts Saturday DC Protest Over COVID-19 Mandates
By - Mary Manley

Those in our nation’s capital who deal with jammed highways, traffic and stressful commutes will be glad to hear that a far-right trucker convoy has paused their plans to protest public health measures in Washington, DC. The so-called ‘trucker convoy’ was expected to arrive this weekend, after rallying in Hagerstown, Maryland.

The truckers stationed themselves in [Hagerstown](#) on Friday afternoon after leaving Adelanto, California, on February 22. The truckers are expected to remain in Hagerstown all day on Saturday after the announcement was made by an administrator on the convoy’s Telegram channel, with a note saying: “Stay tuned for more updates.”

On Friday, Ohio State Highway Patrol Sergeant Brice Nihiser [reported](#) that the convoy consisted of an estimated 550 vehicles, including 200 commercial vehicles (tractor-trailers), 150 recreational vehicles (RVS or trucks), and 200 personal vehicles.

The pause on plans to protest public health measures in DC is partially the result of concerns surrounding a [tweet](#) by the Metropolitan Police Department which reads: “Members of the public are reminded that DC: CODE §7-2509.07 expressly prohibits anyone from carrying a firearm within 1,000 feet of any First Amendment activity, to include members of the public who have been issued a Concealed Carry Permit in the District of Columbia.”

Some truckers may not be so brazen as to confront police in DC following the arrests of the January 6 insurrectionists. As of late February, 786 people from the right-wing mob of Trump supporters that stormed the Capital in 2021 have been [arrested](#).

Zachary Petrizzo from the Daily Beast [reported](#) speaking to some truckers in Hagerstown, who declared that they were “pretty worked up over a federal COVID-19 vaccine mandate” despite the fact that there is no such vaccine mandate.

On November 4, 2021, the Biden administration released two [policies](#) regarding COVID-19 vaccinations. The first announcement came from the Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) saying that employers with 100 or more employees

have to ensure their workers are either fully vaccinated or willing to test for COVID-19 on a weekly basis.

The second [policy](#) comes from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) at the Department of Health and Human Services requiring health care workers at their facilities to be fully vaccinated. Senate Republicans on [Wednesday](#) voted to roll back this policy, but their efforts to do away with the policy completely won't survive a Democratic-controlled House, and even if it did, US President Joe Biden would be sure to [veto](#) it.

Protesters are imitating those in Canada who in late January caused a three-week disruption in downtown Ottawa. The so-called trucker protest is claimed to have begun as a movement against vaccine mandates for truckers, before it was taken over by a [right-wing](#) collective with support from many American far-right groups.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared a national public order emergency - the first in Canada for over 40 years - on [February](#) 14 to end the protest. Trudeau's father, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, used the Emergencies Act in [1970](#) when two politicians were kidnapped by Quebec separatists.

Canadian police arrested over 100 people after the protest turned violent with truckers blocking roads and continuously honking horns, disrupting families and daily life in community neighborhoods. Almost [90%](#) of Canadian truckers are fully vaccinated, according to the Canadian government, signifying that the so-called anti-vaccine truckers were in a distinct minority.

While some in the DC-Maryland-Virginia region may be relieved to hear their Saturday plans won't be disrupted by noisy truck drivers, a handful of remaining supporters who saw their DC visit delayed are frustrated and are demanding clarification on a schedule.

One supporter [wrote](#) in a Telegram group chat, "Yes, updates would be nice. A lot of people have donated a lot of money and supplies as we're looking forward to supporting roadside. You're leaving us hanging."

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North Florida Wildfires Prompt Hundreds of Evacuations as Officials Declare Local State of Emergency

By - Mary Manley

Officials in northwestern Florida declared a local state of emergency and instituted a mandatory evacuation order on Friday. Only 30% of the fire has been contained thus far, with the Adkins Avenue Fire having burned 1,500 acres Saturday evening.

In the Florida [Panhandle](#), 600 homes have been evacuated, two have been destroyed, and 12 have been damaged by the spreading wildfire. Hurricane Michael from 2018 left 72 million tons of downed trees in the wake of its destruction, and, in combination with low humidity and strong winds, its debris has "created the perfect storm" now, said Florida Governor Ron [DeSantis](#) at a news conference on Saturday.

DeSantis and other state officials said state resources would be made available to control the fire burning in Bay County. Agencies battling the fire include over a dozen tractor plow units, multiple [helicopters](#), and over 200 firefighters, according to the Florida Forest Service.

The Bay County Sheriff's Office posted to Facebook on Friday, announcing Hiland Park Baptist Church, located at 2611 US-231, as an emergency shelter for those who had been evacuated due to the wildfire.

Those being evacuated include residents east of Highway 231 from S. Bear Creek to Veal Road, Springfield, from east of Transmitter Road, south of Highway 231 and north of 15th street, Bear Creek from Scotts Ferry Road and south, as well as: Bylsma Estates, Cedar Park, College Station, and Pipeline Road, according to a Facebook post by the Bay County, Florida Emergency Services.

While officials fight to contain the Adkins Avenue Fire in [Bay](#) County, a fire in Tallahassee is also spreading, burning 8,000 acres, with only 10% contained as of Saturday. The fire is named the Bertha Swamp Fire and - as in the Adkins Avenue Fire - is being fueled by the downed trees left over from Hurricane Michael.

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UN Report Warns of More Severe Weather in Gulf of Mexico as Climate Change Intensifies
By - Mary Manley

The UN has officially warned of rising seas in the Gulf Coast of the United States due to melting polar ice caps, collapsing fisheries and toxic tides. The coming years are predicted to ravage the environmental treasure which has fallen victim to human-led wreckage and political mismanagement.

The UN has released their Climate Change [report](#) for 2022, consisting of over 3,000 pages with 18 chapters alone detailing the human-caused climate crisis and its relentlessly damaging effects on the environment, as well as on human health and wellbeing.

The Gulf is responsible for a majority of the nation's offshore oil and gas, and produces about 97% of all Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas production. The Gulf of Mexico has been able to line the pockets of oil and gas tycoons with more than \$1 [trillion](#) since 2017.

The Gulf's economic boom in the oil and gas industry, combined with the conservative political majority in its surrounding states, hasn't done much to let up the heavy environmental weight under which the region now finds itself.

Political leaders in the area have largely sought to solve issues with short term solutions rather than addressing the crisis directly, going on to build higher [roads](#), higher seawalls - methods meant to prevent ocean water from flooding the homes and businesses of their constituencies.

On Tuesday, the Republican-led Florida House of Representatives [refused](#) to add clean energy as an option to a bill which is intended to address the state's rising sea levels and flooding. The sponsor of the bill, Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera (R-FL), said her goal was to focus on "what we can fix today".

Florida is experiencing wildfires in the state's northwest as of [Saturday](#), and Miami's risk of flooding has been deemed "severe" by the nonprofit First Street Foundation's Flood [Factor](#), with at least 38% of properties in the city being at risk of flooding over the next 30 years.

The findings might mean that former US President Donald Trump's daughter, [Ivanka](#), and her husband Jared Kushner's \$31 million home on Miami's "ultra-exclusive" Indian Creek Island may be at risk of flooding.

For the duration of the Trump administration, the former commander-in-chief largely lifted restrictions previously imposed by the Environmental Protection [Agency](#) (EPA). An analysis conducted by the New York Times shows the Trump White House rolled back over 100 environmental laws that protected our planet's clean air, water, and wildlife.

Currently, over a dozen other environmental protection policies are in the process of being destroyed.

"This is a very aggressive attempt to rewrite our laws and reinterpret the meaning of environmental protections. This [Trump] administration is leaving a truly unprecedented legacy," said Hana V. Vizcarra, staff attorney at Harvard's Environmental and Energy Law [Program](#).

The city of Miami Beach has spent over \$100 million to date to install pumps to flush water off the island, creating inequality in those area's housing markets by raising property values.

Flooding cost Miami's real estate a loss of close to \$500 million between 2005 and 2016, and the state of Florida risks losing even more millions in coral reef-related [tourism](#) after warming ocean waters bleached the third largest coral barrier reef system in the world.

An increase in outbreaks of red tide, a natural toxic organism, have become more frequent on coastlines in this region, resulting in a decline in fish populations and other aquatic animals. The smell of the dead fish on local beaches is ruining Florida's tourist industry and impacts the health of those who have fish in their [diet](#). Over a two-year period, Florida lost \$184 million in tourism revenue due to red tide.

Sea level rise also poses a severe risk to the state of Louisiana, as the Mississippi River delta sinks as coastal oil and gas extraction technologies create a loss of sediment in the surrounding land.

"South Louisiana is probably the most vulnerable place to climate change in the United States," says Louisiana's state climatologist Barry [Kleim](#), who confirmed the dangers detailed by the UN's 2022 report. "The hurricanes that we get, there's a higher probability that they can bloom up into major hurricanes," Kleim added.

Louisiana struggles with extreme weather, with homes destroyed by Hurricane Laura in 2020. Then a year later, the city of New Orleans was left without power for days in the wake of Hurricane Ida.

Louisiana is taking steps to address environmental issues. The state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority has a plan to replenish wetlands and rebuild barrier islands that have been destroyed by storms. In addition, the state announced on February 1 an optimistic plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by [2050](#).

"The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future," [said](#) Hans-Otto Portner, a marine biologist from Germany who assisted in coordinating the UN report.

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UNHCR's Angelina Jolie Urges Yemenis 'Deserve Same Compassion' as Ukrainian Refugees

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced on Sunday that its special envoy, actress Angelina Jolie, had arrived in the Yemeni port city of Aden "to help draw attention to the catastrophic consequences of the seven-year conflict on the people of Yemen."

"She will be visiting Yemeni families, including displaced families and refugees, to hear directly from them how the conflict has ripped their lives apart," the [UNHCR statement said](#).

"As we continue to watch the horrors unfolding in Ukraine, and call for an immediate end to the conflict and humanitarian access, I'm here in Yemen to support people who also desperately need peace," Jolie posted on her Instagram account on Sunday.

"The situation here is one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, with one civilian killed or injured every hour in 2022. An economy devastated by war, and over 20 million Yemenis depending on humanitarian assistance to survive," Jolie wrote, adding: "If we learn anything from this shocking situation, it is that we cannot be selective about who deserves support and whose rights we defend. Everyone deserves the same compassion. The lives of civilian victims of conflict everywhere are of equal value. After seven years of war, the people of Yemen also need protection, support, and above all, peace."

The Saudi-led coalition allied with Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi has been bombing northern Yemen since early 2015, when the Houthi rebel movement seized the capital of Sana'a and forced Hadi from the country. Between bombing and blockade, the war has turned Yemen into the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with [nearly 400,000 killed](#) and hunger, malnutrition and epidemic diseases endangering millions more.

However, the pace of that bombing has increased sharply in recent weeks as the Houthis launch strikes deep into Saudi Arabia and its ally, the [United Arab Emirates](#). While the Houthi missiles have largely been intercepted with minimal casualties, the Saudi coalition enjoys [almost total command](#) of Yemeni airspace and its strikes [have been devastating](#), killing hundreds this year.

On Monday, new airstrikes targeted the Al-Sawad military camp in southern Sana'a, with the explosions "rock[ing] the whole capital," according to [Xinhua News Agency](#). According to [Mehr News](#), the day prior, the Saudi coalition carried out 153 attacks in Hudaydah Province.

However, Western media coverage of the attack, or of others such as the US bombing of Somalia and Israeli airstrikes against Syria, have been few and far between, being lost in a sea of stories about Russia's special military operation in Ukraine that began on February 24.

"In total, in the week between Monday, February 21 and Sunday, February 27, Fox News, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and MSNBC ran almost 1,300 separate stories on the Ukraine invasion, two stories on the Syria attack, one on Somalia, and none at all on the Saudi-led war on Yemen," [MintPress News' Alan MacLeod](#) wrote on March 2, noting that amounts to about one new story on Ukraine every hour.

How the Western corporate media has covered the situation in Ukraine is also a part of that: numerous television reporters and correspondents from the BBC to CNN and other outlets have remarked about Ukrainian refugees in ways that betray their bias against refugees from the Middle East and other non-European peoples.

"It just occurred to me that this is the first major war between civilized nations in my lifetime," Daily Wire journalist Michael Knowles [wrote on Twitter](#) on February 26.

"This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades," CBS correspondent [Charlie D'Agata said](#) on live television that same day. "This is a relatively civilized, relatively European - I have to choose those words carefully, too - city, one where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen."

The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists [Association issued a statement](#) condemning such framing, writing that "This type of commentary reflects the pervasive mentality in Western journalism of normalizing tragedy in parts of the world such as the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. It dehumanizes and renders their experience with war as somehow normal and expected."

"Newsrooms must not make comparisons that weigh the significance or imply justification of one conflict over another - civilian casualties and displacement in other countries are equally as abhorrent as they are in Ukraine," the group added.

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Disney CEO Says Condemning Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' Bill Would Make Company 'Political Football'

Multimedia giant Disney has rushed to defend its noncommittal stance on a Florida bill after being criticized by LGBTQ activists and advocates, saying that condemning the bill would turn the company into a "political football."

Florida's HB 1557, the "Parental Rights in Education" bill, is better known as the "[Don't Say Gay](#)" bill because it would ban discussions of gender identity and sexuality in classrooms. This would reportedly stop LGBTQ teachers from discussing their identities or mentioning their same-gender spouses, and the children of LGBTQ parents from mentioning their parents in school.

The bill passed the Florida House in late February and is now before the Senate for consideration. It has also been endorsed by Florida Governor [Ron DeSantis, who claims](#) it is banning "sexual instruction" and "a focus on transgenderism."

Although Disney is headquartered in southern California, its EPCOT Center in Bay Lake, Florida, makes it a major economic powerhouse in the Sunshine State, as well. Last week, Disney CEO Bob Chapek released a statement about "creating a more inclusive world" and supporting the LGBTQ community, but did not directly mention HB 1557.

The company was widely panned for the non-response, with GLAAD president and CEO Sarah [Kate Ellis saying](#) companies that do business in states preparing or implementing anti-LGBTQ discriminatory laws "have a responsibility to speak out."

Chapek's predecessor, [Robert Iger, also stepped up](#) and unequivocally condemned the bill, retweeting a statement by US President Joe Biden that [condemned the bill](#) and saying: "I'm with the President on this! If passed, this bill will put vulnerable, young LGBTQ people in jeopardy." All this and more prompted Chapek to [issue an internal memo](#) to Disney staff on Monday.

"I want to be crystal clear: I and the entire leadership team unequivocally stand in support of our LGBTQ+ employees, their families, and their communities. And, we are committed to creating a more inclusive company - and world," Chapek wrote. However, he said the company wouldn't be changing its position on not taking a position.

"As we have seen time and again, corporate statements do very little to change outcomes or minds," he said. "Instead, they are often weaponized by one side or the other to further divide and inflame. Simply put, they can be counterproductive and undermine more effective ways to achieve change."

After recounting some of the company's many films highlighting different marginalized identities in US society, Chapek said that "our ability to tell such stories - and have them received with open eyes, ears, and hearts - would be diminished if our company were to become a political football in any debate."

However, this hasn't always been the company's policy. [In 2016, Disney condemned](#) the so-called "license to discriminate" bill that passed in Georgia, but was ultimately vetoed by then-Governor Nathan Deal. In addition, the [Orlando Sentinel revealed](#) that Disney has donated to the campaigns of every single sponsor and co-sponsor of the "Don't Say Gay" bill.

Chapek told Disney employees on Monday that Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Geoff Morrell would be "reassessing our advocacy strategies around the world - including political giving" in response to the blowback.

The bill is one of [more than 160 bills](#) potentially infringing on LGBTQ rights in US state legislatures this year, according to the LGBTQ rights group [Human Rights Campaign](#). These bills span a wide variety of topics, from banning transgender teenagers from competing in girls' sports teams to banning transgender women from using women's restrooms.

In Texas, Governor [Greg Abbott decreed last month](#) that gender-affirming health care or behavior for transgender children would be considered "child abuse," directing the state's Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate reported and suspected cases. The rule could see children taken from their parents and taught going through puberty as the gender they were assigned at birth, [which has been identified](#) by health professionals as destructive of their mental health.

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott [issued an executive order](#) last month declaring that gender-affirming health care or behavior for children would be considered "child abuse," directing the state's Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate reported and suspected cases. The rule could see children taken from their parents and taught going through puberty as the gender they were assigned at birth, which has been [identified](#) by health professionals as being detrimental to their mental health.

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Study Suggests Possible Genetic Disposition to Severe COVID-19 Cases

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists suggested the SARS-CoV-2 virus might be so deadly because it provokes an immune system overreaction called a “cytokine storm.”

However, they now believe a number of factors could cause severe infections, including autoantibodies present in the blood due to autoimmune disorders.

The cause of some severe cases of COVID-19 could be linked to genetics, a massive new study has found.

According to the study, the results of which were [published in Nature](#) on Monday, 16 genetic variants in patients’ DNA are connected to the causes of their hospitalization with COVID-19.

Those genes include some related to blood clotting, immune response, and intensity of inflammation. The study is based on genetic samples from more than 57,000 patients in intensive care units (ICUs) due to symptoms of COVID-19.

The study also confirmed a previous discovery by the same team of seven other genetic variations that also contribute to severe COVID-19.

“Our latest findings point to specific molecular targets in critical COVID-19. These results explain why some people develop life-threatening COVID-19, while others get no symptoms at all. But more importantly, this gives us a deep understanding of the process of disease and is a big step forward in finding more effective treatments,” Kenneth Baillie, consultant in critical care medicine at the University of Edinburgh and one of the study’s authors, told [reporters on Monday](#).

“It is now true to say that we understand the mechanisms of Covid better than the other syndromes we treat in intensive care in normal times - sepsis, flu, and other forms of critical illness. COVID-19 is showing us the way to tackle those problems in the future,” he added.

“It is potentially possible in future that we will be able to make predictions about patients based on their genome at the point of presenting (for) critical care,” [Baillie said, adding](#) that “we can’t know if these medicines will work until we try them in people.”

The blood clotting gene, called “Factor 8,” is one also tied to the most US Stocks Fall by 797

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Points as Anti-Russia Sanctions Push Petrol Above \$130 per Barrel

White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday the Biden administration had not yet reached a decision whether it would ban oil imports from Russia. US President Joe Biden is reportedly already planning to press Saudi Arabia to increase production and is even sending out peace feelers to Venezuela.

When the closing bell rang on Monday, US stocks had continued their downward march several weeks ago and were driven largely by the same fears: the impact of US sanctions on Russia for its special military operation in Ukraine.

The Dow Jones fell by 797.42 points on Monday to finish at 32,817.38; the Nasdaq Composite also declined, falling by 482.48 points to finish at 12,830.96; and the S&P 500 fell by 127.78 points to close at 4,201.09.

The price of petroleum continued to rise over the weekend, hitting \$130 per barrel of crude before [settling at \\$123 on Monday](#), as gasoline prices in the US [topped \\$4 per gallon](#) for the first time in 15 years. Consequently, stocks in petroleum companies increased markedly on Monday, with oil and gas services provider Baker Hughes adding 5% to its stock value. Chevron increased by 1.4% and ExxonMobil by 2%.

"The rise in oil is destabilizing the market," Jay Hatfield, chief executive and portfolio manager at Infrastructure Capital Advisors, told the [Wall Street Journal](#). "The market is concerned about the war and its impact on U.S. growth and U.S. companies."

However, bank stocks suffered greatly, with US Bancorp losing 3% of its value and Citigroup down 1.4%. Service companies also declined based on expectations of higher operating costs due to rising gas prices, with McDonald's, Starbucks and Nike all falling.

US sanctions on the Russian economy, which have targeted its financial sector, have caused chaos in markets around the globe, and on Monday, the [US and its allies began](#) discussing a possible ban on importing Russian petroleum products - the country's largest export. Russia provides 40% of European gas.

However, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday that "no decision has been made at this point by the president" and offered no timeline on the decision, either.

Biden is reportedly considering a [trip to Saudi Arabia](#) to ask the world's largest oil producer and a close US partner to increase petroleum production to offset the potential loss of Russian gas.

The [New York Times](#) also reported on Saturday that US diplomats had headed to Caracas to try and bury the hatchet with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, using the lure of dropping destructive US sanctions to get him to break with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has long supported the South American state's stand against US hegemony in the region. The US [has tried for years](#) to oust Maduro from power by supporting a no-name opposition candidate named Juan Guaido, who declared himself the country's interim leader three years ago.

Some fear that rising oil prices could [further fuel rising inflation](#), which is already at its highest point in 40 years thanks to other operations cost increases caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jim Paulsen, chief investment strategist for the Leuthold Group, [told CNBC on Monday](#) that "'stagflation' is rapidly becoming the central focus in portfolio strategies," referring to the 1970s phenomenon caused by Middle Eastern oil exporters imposing an embargo on Western nations who supported Israel in the 1973 war.

"Preparing for slower growth and more persistent inflation is driving investor fears and actions," the analyst added.

common form of [hemophilia, a disease](#) that prevents blood from clotting and wounds from scabbing over.

"Blood clotting is one of the main reasons why patients with COVID-19 develop a shortage of oxygen. So, that's potentially targetable to prevent those clots from forming," Baillie noted.

Ironically, the [rollout of some COVID-19](#) vaccines has also suffered due to [rare cases of blood clots](#) developing in patients.

Another study also [published in Nature](#) on Monday found that an infection by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can cause the brain's gray matter to shrink, impacting smell and memory processing, among other functions. The study is based on data from 785 people between the ages of 51 and 81 who contributed brain scans to the UK Biobank imaging repository.

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US Gas Prices Reach All-Time High of \$4.17 Per gallon - Automobile Association

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - US gasoline prices reached an all-time high record of \$4.17 per gallon, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said on Tuesday.

"Current Average (regular) \$4.173," the AAA said on its website accompanied by a map that showed prices reaching as high as \$5.44 per gallon in some US states.

This is the highest recorded national average price, the AAA added. On Monday, the average price for regular gas was \$4.065 per gallon, while a week ago it was \$3.619, according to the AAA.

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Biden to Announce Further Anti-Russia Actions Later on Tuesday - White House

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will unveil new actions in response to Russia's operation in Ukraine later on Tuesday, according to his schedule distributed by the White House.

"In the morning, the President will receive the President's Daily Brief. This meeting will be closed press," the White House said. "Then, the President will announce actions to continue to hold Russia accountable for its unprovoked and unjustified war on Ukraine."

The announcement will take place at 10:45 a.m. EST (15:45 GMT).

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US to Ban Import of Russian Oil As Early As Tuesday – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is planning to announce a ban on imports of Russian oil as early as Tuesday, a Bloomberg reporter said on Twitter, citing sources.

"US to ban imports of Russian oil... White House announcement as soon as TODAY," the reporter said.

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One Person Dead, 2 Others in Critical Condition After Shooting in Iowa - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - One person died and two others remain in critical condition as a result of a shooting outside a high school in the US state of Iowa, local media outlet KCCI reported.

The report said on Monday, citing police, the three individuals were hit during a shooting outside of East High School in the city of Des Moines.

The suspects in the shooting are in police custody, the report added.

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Coinbase Says Blocked Over 25,000 Accounts Linked to Russians Suspected of Crime

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The cryptocurrency exchange platform Coinbase has blocked more than 25,000 accounts associated with illicit activity linked to Russian individuals or entities, Coinbase Chief Legal Officer Paul Grewal said in an official blog post.

"Today, Coinbase blocks over 25,000 addresses related to Russian individuals or entities we believe to be engaging in illicit activity, many of which we have identified through our own proactive investigations. Once we identified these addresses, we shared them with the government to further support sanctions enforcement," Grewal said late on Sunday.

Most of the addresses were identified prior to the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Grewal said.

Coinbase has not seen a surge in sanctions evasion activity amid the situation, Grewal also said.

Coinbase fully supports sanctions efforts and is committed to remaining in compliance with them, he added.

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Procter & Gamble Chief Says 'Significantly Reducing' Business Activities in Russia

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Procter & Gamble (P&G) is significantly reducing its business activity in Russia in response to the country's ongoing military operations in Ukraine, P&G President and CEO Jon Moeller said in a letter to the company employees.

"We have discontinued all new capital investments in Russia and are suspending all media, advertising, and promotional activity. We are significantly reducing our product portfolio to focus on basic health, hygiene and personal care items needed by the many Russian families who depend on them in their daily lives," Moeller said on Monday.

Moeller said P&G's manufacturing and distribution teams across Europe are also working around the clock to address the logistical challenges and continue to serve consumers.

The announcement comes alongside that of other Western companies ranging from IBM to Netflix who have similarly decided to reduce or eliminate their business activities in Russia.

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IBM Suspends All Business in Russia - CEO Arvind Krishna

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The multinational technology corporation IBM has suspended all its business in Russia due to the conflict in Ukraine, CEO Arvind Krishna said. "I've heard from many of you in response to last week's announcement regarding the war in Ukraine and I appreciate your feedback. First, let me be very clear - we have suspended all business in Russia," Krishna said in a statement on Monday.

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China Urges West to Hold Equal Dialogue With Russia, Consider Its Concerns - Envoy to UN

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Beijing urges the United States, NATO and the European Union to hold dialogue with Russia on equal basis and be attentive to Moscow's security concerns, China's Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said.

"We encourage the United States, NATO, EU to carry an equal dialogue with Russia and to face up to the antagonism and problems that had been accumulating for years," Zhang said on Monday.

Zhang also urged the West to pay attention to the negative effect to the security environment for Russia resulted from the eastward expansion of NATO and in accordance with the principle of the indivisibility of security to seek to establish in European security mechanism that is balanced, effective and sustainable.

The Chinese ambassador called on Russia and Ukraine to continue to hold direct negotiations. "We express the hope that their talks are fruitful where a peace can be created," he said.

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US Deports 9/11 Suspect to Saudi Arabia to Receive Mental Health Care - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - A mentally ill Guantanamo Bay detainee suspected of planning to participate in the September 11 attacks was deported to Saudi Arabia on Monday to receive mental health care, the New York Times reported.

The report said on Monday that Mohammed al-Qahtani, the suspected would be "20th hijacker," was flown to Saudi Arabia in a US military aircraft.

In February, a US review board consisting of six-national security agencies issued a recommendation to repatriate Qahtani to a Saudi mental health care facility after it determined that his detention was no longer necessary.

Qahtani was reportedly tortured so bad by US military interrogators at Guantanamo Bay, a senior US defense official determined he could not be prosecuted due to how he was initially treated.

A Navy doctor suggested last year that Qahtani, who spent about 20 years in Guantanamo Bay, should be transferred since he would not receive the medical treatment he needed at the naval base and the detainee was considered too impaired to pose a threat in the future, according to media reports.

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Wall Street in Deep Red as Oil Hits \$130, Tech Stocks Down Almost 4%

NEW YORK, March 7 (Sputnik) - Wall Street ended in deep red territory on Monday, with tech stocks losing almost 4% after oil prices hit 14-year highs above \$130 a barrel on the Russia-Ukraine crisis and analysts saying the ensuing inflation could result in a global recession.

"US stocks declined as surging commodity prices continued to add to worry that economic growth prospects will take a big hit as the Ukraine uncertainty persists," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "The crippling effect of oil prices above \$130 would send many European economies into a recession and that sent major European stock indexes into bear market territory."

Wall Street's three major stock indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed the session down between 2.5% and 3.7%. All three indexes have seen double-digit losses for the year.

In Monday's trade, both US crude and global oil benchmark Brent soared to highs seen just before the 2008 financial crisis as the United States and Europe kept open the option of banning supplies from Russia, which provides about 10% of world oil supply.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, made up mostly of industrial stocks, closed down 2.4%. The Dow has lost almost 10% since the year began.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, settled down 3.5%. For the year, it was down about 12%.

The Nasdaq Composite, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, finished down 3.7%. It has lost almost 18 % so far for 2022.

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Multiple Shooting Victims Outside US High School in Iowa - Police Department
(Updates with more details in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Multiple people have been injured in a shooting outside a high school in the US state of Iowa, the Des Moines Police Department said in a statement.

"[Des Moines Police and Fire Departments] on scene at East HS. Multiple Shooting victims outside of school," the statement, posted on Twitter, said on Monday.

Three victims who appear to be teenagers have been taken to a hospital, where they currently remain in critical condition, Sergeant Paul Parizek told local media.

The incident resulted in the closure of nearby roadways, the police said. The school was also placed on lockdown and potential suspects have been detained, it added.

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Multiple Shooting Victims Outside US High School - Police Department

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Multiple people have been injured in a shooting outside a high school in the US state of Iowa, the Des Moines Police Department said via Twitter.

"[Des Moines Police and Fire Departments] on scene at East HS. Multiple Shooting victims outside of school," the police department said on Monday.

The incident resulted in the closure of nearby roadways, the Des Moines Police Department also said via Twitter.

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Nebenzia Says Ukraine Refused to Cooperate on Evacuating Civilians

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – Authorities of Ukraine are refusing to cooperate on evacuating civilians from cities, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said at a Security Council meeting.

"Ukrainian authorities categorically refused to cooperate on evacuating people from Kharkov or Sumy," Nebenzia said on Monday.

He assured that the Russian Federation opened humanitarian corridors from the cities of Kiev, Mariupol and Sumy, considering the catastrophic humanitarian situation there and personal request of French President Emmanuel Macron to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Nebenzia said this information was conveyed to the government of Ukraine and international organizations on March 6, but Kiev's request came back only Monday morning. Humanitarian corridors to Russia were ignored, he added.

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Ukraine Leaderships Asks US Congress to Ban Russian Companies From Stock Market - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Senior Ukrainian official Davyd Arakhamia sent a letter to US lawmakers requesting them to ban all Russian companies from raising profits in the stock market in response to its military operation in Ukraine.

"We believe that more can be done in terms of sanctions [on Russia] and ask you to consider implementing the following sanctions: 1. Ban all US investments and all US dollar-denominated investments into any companies, shares and financial instruments provided that they and/or their affiliates pay taxes to the Russian budget," the letter said on Monday.

Arakhamia also asked the US lawmakers to sanction and freeze assets of all Russian so-called "oligarchs" within 48 hours unless they publicly protest against the Russian military operation in Ukraine as well as denounce Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions.

Arakhamia serves as chairman of Servant of the People Faction in the Ukrainian parliament and is one of the closest allies of Volodymyr Zelenskyy. He was also a member of the Ukrainian delegation at the peace talks with Russia in Belarus.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend themselves from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

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Trucker Convoy Circles Washington, DC for Second Straight Day

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Large group of truckers, known as The People's Convoy, who are opposed to COVID-19-related restrictions and other policies of the US authorities, reached the closest neighborhood to the nation's capital city for the second consecutive day, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the ground.

Truckers gathered at the city of Hagerstown, Maryland on Monday, as they did the day before, to start their almost 80-mile ride to Washington, DC. The convoy seemed to stretch for several miles: hundreds of trucks, SUVs, buses, small and big cars - most with American flags and different slogans, urging to protect freedom. The convoy practically blocked the right lane of Interstate 70 heading to the US capital city.

All trucks were moving no faster than 40 miles per hour, while the speed limit at some parts of the road reached 65-70 miles per hour. That has created some traffic problems almost at every ramp from and to the highway, particularly when the convoy entered Interstate 270 closer to Washington. Other drivers were trying to change lanes in order to enter or exit the road, so they had to drive slowly and carefully.

Many people waited for the convoy on multiple bridges over the highway. They were greeting truckers by waving flags. Truckers, in turn, responded with their massive and loud horns.

The convoy reached Interstate 495, a major highway around Washington in the early afternoon, approximately three hours after starting in Hagerstown. Protesters said earlier that they do not plan to approach the capital itself, nor to stop by during their trip.

The trucker protest, known as The People's Convoy, is protesting inflation and pandemic-related mandates.

The convoy traveled from California over the last several days and worked with local authorities throughout its trek to ensure safety and security.

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US Shuts Down Jet Fuel Facility in Hawaii After Contamination Accident - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has decided to shut down a jet fuel storage facility on Oahu, Hawaii, following a leakage accident that resulted in water contamination, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

"After close consultation with senior civilian and military leaders, I have decided to defuel and permanently close the Red Hill bulk fuel storage facility in Hawaii," Austin said in the statement on Monday. "This is the right thing to do."

The Secretary of the Navy will provide an action plan for safe and expeditious defueling of the facility that will be completed in a about 12 months, the statement also said.

Meanwhile, the US Defense Department will work with the Hawaii Department of Health and local officials to clean up the water at the Red Hill, the statement added.

In December, Rear Adm. Blake Converse said Navy officials believed the contamination occurred on November 20 when 14,000 gallons (52,995 liters) of jet fuel spilled at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility built in 1943. Since, residents have complained about foul-smelling water and suffering cramps or vomiting after they drank it.

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OPEC Chief Urges Against Politicizing Oil Deliveries Amid Russia-Ukraine Situation

HOUSTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – OPEC is doing everything possible to stay away from politics and urges leaders around the world to stop politicizing oil deliveries, Secretary General

Mohammed Barkindo said on the opening day of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

The statement comes as the West is weighing a ban on energy imports from Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

"We are not a political organization. We try as much as we can to stay away from the politics. We also continuously work to depoliticize oil ... We may have difficulties, but please when you come to the secretariat or meet virtually, you put that aside," Barkindo said on Monday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States in recent days has continued to deliver military assistance to Ukraine and has not seen any major impact yet amid Russia's military operation there, a senior US Defense Department official said.
- * UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres continues to engage in discussions at various levels, including with officials from Russia and Ukraine, to try to facilitate a solution to the ongoing conflict, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.
- * EU expects up to five million refugees to enter the European Union following the crisis in Ukraine, Foreign Policy chief Josep Borrell said.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE TALKS

- * Russia's expectations of negotiations with Ukraine in the Brest region of Belarus were not met, but contacts will continue, Russian presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky said on Monday.
- * Kiev is ready to comply with the ceasefire agreement in Donbas to evacuate civilians through humanitarian corridors amid Russia's military operation in the country, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said.
- * Kiev has agreed to Moscow's proposal to open humanitarian corridors, with the exception of those directed to Russia, the chief of the Russian National Defense Management Center, Mikhail Mizintsev, said.
- * Ukrainian delegation representative Mykhailo Podolyak said small progress in improving the logistics of humanitarian corridors in Ukraine has been made.

ENERGY CRISIS IN EUROPE

- * More coal may enter the European energy market despite a push for renewables on the continent due to concerns about short-term security, S&P Global Senior Director for European Power and Renewables Coralie Laurenchin said on Monday.
- * The recent pullout of the largest oil and gas companies out of Russia is very significant and will have a profound impact on the global energy market, US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry said.

* US sanctions on Russia over their ongoing military operation in Ukraine carry costs including volatile energy prices that are already being seen in the market, Kerry said.

* Energy supplies from Russia were exempt from sanctions, as there are no other ways to ensure Europe's energy security now, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* US President Joe Biden and the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom reaffirmed their determination to continue raising costs on Russia in retaliation for its military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Monday.

* A bipartisan group of US lawmakers have reached an agreement on efforts to ban the import of energy products from Russia and suspend normal trade relations with them and Belarus over the ongoing military operations in Ukraine, senior lawmakers announced.

* Canada has imposed sanctions against ten individuals with close ties to the Russian leadership, including Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, businessman Oleg Deripaska and RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan, Ottawa said.

* UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that London and other Western governments are seriously considering sanctions on Russian energy exports in response to the ongoing military operation in Ukraine.

* The European union is finalizing a new package of sanctions against Russia, some of which can be adopted as early as Tuesday, Bloomberg reported, citing informed sources.

UN ON SITUATION IN UKRAINE

* The United Nations is seeking a system of stable communication with the parties to the conflict in Ukraine to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid, Under Secretary General of the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said on Monday.

* Griffiths called on Russia and Ukraine to provide safe passage for humanitarian aid into areas of active hostilities, including the cities of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Melitopol.

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Pentagon Urges Americans Not to Go to Ukraine to Fight, Encourages Donations to Charities

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense is urging Americans not to go to Ukraine to fight and encourages potential foreign fighters to instead donate to charity groups helping provide humanitarian aid, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday. "I don't have an estimate of Americans who might want to be volunteering to go there [Ukraine]," Kirby said during a press briefing. "I would say what I said last week ... the best thing you can do is to find a way to donate to so many agencies that are trying to deal with what is now clearly a humanitarian crisis in the region, certainly there in Ukraine. We still do not believe that Ukraine is a safe place for Americans to go, we urge them not to go."

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UN Seeking System of Communication With Parties to Ukraine Conflict – Griffiths

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) – The United Nations is seeking a system of stable communication with the parties to the conflict in Ukraine to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid, Under Secretary General of the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said on Monday.

"[W]e urgently need a system of constant communication with parties to the conflict and assurances to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid. A humanitarian notification system can support delivery of aid at the scale needed," Griffiths said during a press briefing.

The under secretary added he had conveyed his points about humanitarian corridors and communications channels to Ukraine and Russia.

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US Admits Europe in More Challenging Position on Sanctions Due to Reliance on Russian Oil

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States recognizes that Europe's reliance on Russian oil puts them in a more challenging position amid discussions about energy-related sanctions on Moscow over its ongoing military operation in Ukraine, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"The reliance on the import of Russian oil is so much more significant in Europe, that while over the course of time it's clear they recognize the need to diversify their means of getting oil, this is a bigger challenge and puts them in a more challenging position, and we recognize that from here," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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UN Undersecretary Griffiths Calls on Russia, Ukraine to Allow Passage of Humanitarian Aid

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths on Monday called on Russia and Ukraine to provide safe passage for humanitarian aid into areas of active hostilities, including the cities of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Melitopol.

"We need safe passage for humanitarian supplies into areas of active hostilities. Civilians in places like Mariupol, Kharkiv, Melitopol, and elsewhere desperately need aid, especially

life-saving medical supplies. Many modalities are possible, but it must take place in line with the parties' obligations under the laws of war," Griffiths said during a press briefing.

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If China Does Not Abide by Sanctions on Russia, US Can 'Take Steps' – White House

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has means to "take steps" against China if Beijing does not abide by the sanctions on Russia amid the conflict in Ukraine, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We have also seen China abide by the sanctions that have been put in place [on Russia]. They obviously abstained, also from the UN Security Council vote, and have made some comments about the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. If they don't abide by the sanctions we always have, you know, we clearly have means to take steps but that's what we have seen today," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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UN Undersecretary Griffiths Calls on Russia, Ukraine to Allow Safe Passage of Civilians

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - Under Secretary General of the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths on Monday called on both parties of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine to allow safe passage for civilians to leave areas with active hostilities.

"The parties [of the conflict] must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian homes and infrastructure in their military operations. This includes allowing safe passage for civilians to leave areas of active hostilities on a voluntary basis, in the direction they choose," Griffiths said during a press briefing.

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US, Russia Make Progress on Iran Nuclear Negotiations Amid Tensions - White House

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia continue to make progress with Iran on negotiations to return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) amid tensions between the two countries over Ukraine, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We're making progress together. Russia's a member of the P5+1... Certainly as the Secretary of State [Antony Blinken] said just yesterday, we don't believe that the sanctions on them have anything to do with that shared goal," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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OPEC to Remain Reliable Supplier of Oil Despite Market Volatility Over Ukraine - Chief

HOUSTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - OPEC will remain a reliable supplier of oil to the world despite volatility in the global energy market over Ukraine, OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo said on Monday.

"I want to use this opportunity to reassure the world that OPEC will continue to be a reliable supplier of oil to global markets," Barkindo said on opening day of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

Barkindo added that OPEC countries will do their best under the current circumstances to guarantee energy security around the world.

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US Not Opposed to Poland Sending Jets to Ukraine, Backfill Process May Take Years - Psaki

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The White House does not oppose Poland sending planes to Ukraine, but the US backfill process could take years, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We are talking about Polish planes... These fighter jets they are requesting. We are working with Poland on this issue and consulting with the rest of our NATO allies on it, this is Poland's sovereign decision to make. We have in no way opposed Poland transferring planes to Ukraine," Psaki said. "As it relates to the backfill question, we're working through some pretty complicated logistics questions on that front as well including how we would backfill because procuring new planes and transferring serious weapons systems often takes years to do from the United States."

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white house says If China does not abide by sanctions on Russia, US has means to take steps against Beijing

Sputnik

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White House Says Next Year US Will Produce More Oil 'Than Ever Before'

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States over the next year will produce more oil than ever before, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday amid concerns about rising energy prices over the Russia-Ukraine situation.

"The US produced more oil this past year than in President Trump's first year. Next year, according to the Department of Energy, we will produce more oil than ever before," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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US Officials in Caracas Discussed Energy Security, Health of Detained Americans - Psaki

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - A US delegation traveled to Venezuela recently to discuss a range of issues including energy security and the health of Americans detained in the Latin American country, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"As it relates to Venezuela, the purpose of the trip that was taken by administration officials was to discuss a range of issues including certainly energy energy security, but also to discuss the health and welfare of detained US citizens," Psaki said during a press briefing.

On Saturday, The New York Times reported that senior US officials had left for Venezuela to meet with the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, possibly in an attempt to separate Moscow from its international allies. As the West is considering sanctions on Russian oil exports, Venezuela's reserves could be used to substitute those, the report said.

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White House Says No Decision Yet on Possible Ban of Oil Imports From Russia

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has not made a decision on whether to ban Russian oil imports in the United States, but that is an ongoing discussion, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"No decision has been made at this point by the president about a ban on importing oil from Russia and those discussions are ongoing internally," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki added that there is no timeline on when Biden is expected to make a decision on the matter.

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S&P Predicts More Coal in Europe's Energy Mix Due to Concerns About Short-Term Security

HOUSTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - More coal may enter the European energy market despite a push for renewables on the continent due to concerns about short-term security, S&P Global Senior Director for European Power and Renewables Coralie Laurenchin said on Monday. "You've got more options and Europe is going to go 100% for renewables. There's also the possibility that more coal may come into the energy mix. There's a lot of coal that's meant to be closing in Europe by 2030. Those closures could be delayed," Laurenchin said. The move would come with more emissions, which is not what Europe is looking for, but short-term security and interest may overtake longer-term goals, Laurenchin added. On Sunday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US and the European Union were exploring the possibility of banning the import of Russian oil and energy products in response to the military operation in Ukraine.

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US Inflation Growing Faster Income Due to Russia-Ukraine Conflict - Morning Consult

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Inflation heightened by the Russia-Ukraine conflict is growing faster than the incomes of Americans and they are likely to reduce both essential and discretionary spending in the coming months, the economics study group Morning Consult said in a report on Monday.

"Inflation is rising faster than incomes, eroding affordability and putting certain purchases out of reach for US consumers," Kayla Bruun, author of Morning Consult's "Inflation Americas" study focused on the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on US prices, said. "Major purchases, as well as discretionary goods and services, are most likely to be cut from monthly budgets as a result of price growth."

The US Consumer Price Index reading for February - due on Thursday - is expected to show a 7.9% year-on-year growth, according to a consensus of economists polled by US media.

January's year-on-year growth of 7.5%, the highest since 1982.

"The US economy isn't immune to conflict abroad," Bruun said. "Prior to Russia's attack on Ukraine, household budgets in the United States were already being strained by rising prices. Escalating tensions in Eastern Europe are further disrupting supply and driving up inflation for categories like gas and food. While consumers have little choice but to absorb some cost increases, it is likely that nonessential spending categories will suffer as a result."

Global oil prices as indicated by the Brent benchmark averaged \$93.75 a barrel for the first three weeks of February before the Russia-Ukraine war began. They have averaged \$110.50 since, with Brent hitting a near 14-year high of \$130 a barrel on Monday and inching toward its all-time high of \$147.

US natural gas futures have increased from \$4.62 per thermal unit before the Russia-Ukraine crisis to a session high of \$5.18 on Monday, an increase of 12%.

Among other commodities, wheat, which nearly 30% of world supply is jointly provided by Russia and Ukraine, is trading at 14-year highs of above \$12 per bushel after rising 68% this year. Corn is at 12-year highs of \$8 per bushel, having rallied 25% for 2020.

Bruun said in February, more than 2 in 3 American adults who considered buying a home or car did not end up making the purchase — and about half of those who opted out of these potential purchases cited high prices as the reason.

"Discretionary purchases like exercise equipment and vacations were also subject to a high level of unfulfilled buying considerations last month," she said.

High prices also discouraged restaurant meals for Americans last month, Morning Consult's February study showed.

While US adults continue to prioritize buying goods that support essential functions of the household, rising prices exacted a growing strain on their budgets. "Only about 1 in 10 consumers who considered buying food items last month ended up not doing so, and this was more often due to limited availability from product shortages than price concerns," Bruun said. Gasoline is another staple US consumers could cut back on as pump prices of the fuel average above the \$4 per gallon level seen just before the global markets meltdown that resulted in the 2008 financial crisis.

Bruun said 30% of US adults surveyed by Morning Consult said they drove less than usual in February, when gasoline prices were still below \$4 per gallon then. The majority cited "high prices" as the reason for the cutback in travel.

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Biden, European Leaders Recommit to Raising Costs on Russia in Video Call - White House

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden and the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom reaffirmed their determination to continue raising costs on Russia in retaliation for its military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Monday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. held a secure video call today with President Emmanuel Macron of France, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom. The leaders affirmed their determination to continue raising the costs on Russia for its unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine," the White House said in a press release.

The four leaders also reiterated their commitment to continue providing security, economic,

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Putin Commits Nearly 100% of Amassed Forces to Ukraine Operation - US Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has committed almost all of Russia's prepositioned combat forces to the ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Monday.

"We now assess that Mr. Putin has committed nearly 100% of his combat power into Ukraine, and by combat power, I mean that combat power that he had amassed along the border with Ukraine and in Belarus. Nearly 100%," the official said.

Tensions between Russia, Ukraine and the West have increased over the last several months following the buildup and subsequent use of Russian forces placed along the Ukrainian border. Russia says that the special military operation it undertook in Ukraine is intended to demilitarize and de-Nazify the country as well as protect residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

The operation had sparked condemnation from the United States and its allies who have imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia and Belarus as well as have moved troops on NATO's eastern flank.

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TotalEnergies CEO Says 'No Push' From Authorities to Exit Russia, Europe Needs Russian Gas

HOUSTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Oil and gas company TotalEnergies is not facing pressure from authorities to cut off ties with Russia considering Europe is heavily dependent on Russian gas, the company's CEO Patrick Pouyanne said on Monday.

"We need gas, we are heavily dependent on Russian gas," Pouyanne said during the opening of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference. "In my country, there is no push to exit from Russia."

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Harris Announces Federal Actions to Modernize US Public Transit, Cut Emissions - WH

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Vice President Kamala Harris announced today that the federal government will begin major actions that will expand clean public transit and school buses, reduce emissions from dirty diesel trucks, and create good-paying jobs, the White House said in a press release Monday.

"The Biden-Harris Administration will modernize public transit that connects people to their jobs, school, health care, and loved ones, freight trucks and ports that move goods through the American economy, and the iconic American yellow buses that bring children safely to school leveraging investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and American Rescue Plan investments, as well as a new proposed rule that would set heavy-duty vehicle emissions standards," the release said.

The end result, the release added, will be cleaner vehicles, less noxious emissions and reduced air pollution that has disproportionately affected low-income communities and communities of color for decades.

According to the White House, there is funding for The Low-No Program which helps state and local governments buy American-built electric transit buses and other cleaner model vehicles that will improve local air quality and expand what the White House describes as affordable and accessible transportation options in communities nationwide.

The Environmental Protection Agency is awarding \$17 million to fund electric zero-emission and low-emission school buses, and it is also issuing a proposed rule that would guarantee that heavy-duty vehicles and engines are as clean as possible as the administration moves towards zero-emission vehicles in its heavy-duty fleet, the release added.

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US Approves 12th Release From Strategic Oil Reserve to Lower Price at Pump - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The US government has approved the 12th release of oil from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) to local petroleum refineries, with ExxonMobil receiving 2.7 million barrels in the latest bid by the Biden administration to lower pump prices of gasoline that are retailing near 14-year highs, the Department of Energy (DOE) said in a statement on Monday.

"This release falls under the authorization published in the DOE announcement on November 23, 2021," the statement said, referring to the released 2.7 million barrels. "Combined, DOE has provided 24.4 million barrels of SPR crude oil available for exchange to boost the nation's fuel supply."

The Energy Department said previously that the companies receiving SPR crude oil through the exchange have agreed to return the amount received as well as an additional amount, depending upon the length of time in which they hold the oil.

The Biden administration has said it hopes to reduce the amount of crude oil that petroleum refineries buy directly from the open market in order to cap prices for both the raw material and the fuel sold at pumps.

The average price of gasoline at US pumps has topped \$4 per gallon while a barrel of US crude oil itself was trading at almost \$120 per barrel on Monday - both at levels last seen before the global markets meltdown of 2008.

Oil prices have spiked by roughly \$50 a barrel this year after Western governments imposed sanctions on Russia's exports due to Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine. Prior to the Ukraine conflict, Russia provided about 10% of the world's crude oil supply.

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US Has Not Seen Evidence Belarus Preparing to Join Military Operation in Ukraine- Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has so far not seen any indication that Belarusian troops are preparing to join Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and has not seen Belarusian units inside that country, a senior US Defense Department official said on Monday.

"We still don't have any indication that the Belarusians are making preparations to join the fight and we have seen no Belarusian units inside Ukraine," the official said during a press briefing.

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US Continues to Send Military Aid to Ukraine, No Impact on Supplies Yet - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – The United States in recent days has continued to deliver military assistance to Ukraine and has not seen any major impact on the supplies yet amid Russia's military operation there, a senior US defense official said on Monday.

"We have certainly, in recent days, continued to flow things into Ukraine and not just us, but 14 other nations are doing the same thing," the official said during a press briefing. "We have not seen those [delivery] avenues [to Ukraine] closed or thrive and but it is certainly possible that over time, it can, it can become more difficult, but we just haven't seen that being impacted yet."

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Killing of Ukraine Delegate to Talks With Russia in Kiev Should Be Fully Investigated - UN

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - The killing of Denis Kireev, a member of the first Ukrainian delegation to negotiations with Russia, in Kiev should be fully investigated, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"Obviously that should be investigated fully," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

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UN Chief in Talks With Russia, Ukraine, Others to Find Way Forward in Conflict - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres continues to engage in discussions at various levels, including with officials from Russia and Ukraine, to try to facilitate a solution to the ongoing conflict, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"He's [Guterres] continued to have political contacts at different levels, also with with a lot of permanent representatives here, in order to try to find a way forward," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric added that Guterres is also in talks with Ukrainian and Russian officials.

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UN, Russian Military Coordinate Communication Channels on Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - United Nations representatives and Russian Defense Ministry officials met to discuss coordinating efforts to facilitate the humanitarian response in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"[They] agreed on the way about further cooperation and information sharing to enhance humanitarian civil-military coordination, to facilitate rapid life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable people in Ukraine," Dujarric said.

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US Discussing Options for Backfill If Countries Like Poland Provide Aircraft to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is discussing options for potential backfill in case countries such as Poland provide Ukraine with military aircraft in response to the Russian military operation in the country, a senior US defense official said on Monday.

"The administration is discussing what options might be available in terms of potential backfill should a country like Poland want to provide fighter aircraft to Mr. Zelenskyy," the senior official said.

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US Has Not Seen Movement of Additional Russian Forces to Ukraine - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has not seen indications that Russia intends to move additional battalion tactical groups into Ukraine to support the forces already positioned there, a senior defense official said on Monday.

"We have not seen indications that they are preparing to move additional Battalion Tactical Groups from elsewhere in the country to shore up what they've put into Ukraine," the senior official said.

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UN Delegation Visits Russia to Discuss Humanitarian Efforts in Ukraine - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 7 (Sputnik) - A United Nations delegation has visited the Russian Defense Ministry in Moscow to discuss humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"As agreed in a phone call between the Secretary General [Antonio Guterres] and the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Shoigu, team from the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has arrived in Moscow," Dujarric said. "In cooperation with our colleagues at the UN information center and the UN Department of Safety and Security they held their first technical meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Defense."

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Pentagon Chief Orders Deployment of Additional 500 Troops to Europe – US Official
WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered the deployment of additional 500 soldiers to Europe over the weekend in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, a senior US defense official said on Monday.

"[O]ver the weekend, Secretary Austin did order the deployment from the United States of an additional, roughly 500 US military personnel to locations in Europe to augment existing forces that are there. These additional forces are going to be positioned to respond to the current security environment in light of Russia's renewed aggression against Ukraine and again to reinforce deterrence and defensive capabilities of NATO, particularly in the eastern flank," the official said during a press briefing.

The official added that the latest deployment has brought the number of US military personnel in Europe, on both rotational and permanent orders, to about 100,000.

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US Lawmakers Launch Bill to Suspend Normal Trade Relations With Russia, Belarus-
Statement

(Updates with more details in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of senior US lawmakers announced on Monday that they have reached an agreement on the efforts to ban the import of Russian energy products and suspend normal trade relations with Russia as well as with Belarus over the ongoing military operations in Ukraine.

"As Russia continues its unprovoked attack on the Ukrainian people, we have agreed on a legislative path forward to ban the import of energy products from Russia and to suspend normal trade relations with both Russia and Belarus," the lawmakers said in a statement. The statement was issued by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Mike Crapo, House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal as well as Ways and Means Ranking Member Kevin Brady. The Congress is committed to using the tools at its disposal to stop Russia's actions in Ukraine and hold Belarus accountable for its involvement in the military operation, the statement said.

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National Guard Support Extended Amid Trucker Protest in DC - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin extended the number of days National Guard troops will support local authorities in Washington DC expecting a large trucker protest this week, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday. "Secretary Austin has approved requests from the US Capitol Police (USCP) and the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency to extend previously approved National Guard support in the District, including around the US Capitol area, providing support at traffic control points for two additional days, through Wednesday, March 9," Kirby said in a statement.

The convoy drove through the DC beltway a first time on Sunday and is expected to drive through a second time later today.

The trucker protest, known as The People's Convoy, is protesting inflation and pandemic-related mandates.

The convoy traveled from California over the last several days and worked with local authorities throughout its trek to ensure safety and security. The convoy is currently in contact with DC authorities as well, according to the group.

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US Lawmakers Launch Bill to Suspend Normal Trade Relations With Russia, Belarus

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US lawmakers have reached an agreement on efforts to ban the import of energy products from Russia and suspend normal trade relations with them and Belarus over the ongoing military operations in Ukraine, senior lawmakers announced on Monday.

"As Russia continues its unprovoked attack on the Ukrainian people, we have agreed on a legislative path forward to ban the import of energy products from Russia and to suspend

normal trade relations with both Russia and Belarus," the lawmakers on key Senate and House panels said in a statement.

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Canada Introduces Sanctions Against Kremlin Spokesman Peskov, Businessman Deripaska

TORONTO, March 7 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions against ten individuals with close ties to the Russian leadership, including Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, businessman Oleg Deripaska and RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan, Ottawa said on Monday in an updated sanctions document.

Additions to the so-called Special Economic Measures Act also include Minister of Health Mikhail Murashko, parliamentarian Pavel Krasheninnikov, businessman Dmitry Patrushev, TV personality Vladimir Solovyov, TV executive Konstantin Ernst as well as Victor Gavrillov and Dmitry Ivanov.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized the civilian population is not in danger.

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Exit of Major Oil and Gas Firms Out of Russia Will Have Profound Impact - US Climate Envoy

HOUSTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - The recent pullout of the largest oil and gas companies out of Russia is very significant and will have a profound impact on the global energy market, US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry said on Monday.

"I think the decision of some of our largest oil and gas producing companies in the world to pull out of Russia is very significant and will have profound impact," Kerry said during the opening of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference. "And many other companies are pulling back. I think that's part of this movement, if you will, people realize it's a serious moment for all of us in the world."

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US Wheat Trading Suspended After Reaching 7% Based on Russia-Ukraine Crisis Concern

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - Trading in US wheat futures were suspended on Monday after they rose the 7% limit allowed in a day to reach 14-year highs amid worries the military confrontation between major growers Russia and Ukraine would affect global supplies.

Wheat for May delivery on the Chicago Board of Trade rose 8.5 cents, or 7.04%, to \$12.94 per bushel before trading was suspended, exchange data showed.

That was the highest price for a front-month delivery contract in US wheat since March 2008, when a drought-induced harvest shortage in major grower Australia squeezed global supplies of the grain.

Russia is the largest exporter of wheat while Ukraine is among the four biggest exporters of the commodity, according to US investment bank JPMorgan. Statistically, some 17% of international wheat trade comes from Russia, while another 12% is derived from Ukraine, according to Bank of America.

Chicago-traded wheat has hit limit-up three times over the past week after Russia began on February 24 a special military operation in Ukraine. Since the year began, US wheat futures have risen 68%.

Aside from wheat, corn, another major Ukraine export, has hit multi-year highs lately.

Corn futures on the Chicago Board of Trade rose to \$8 per bushel on Friday, their highest since 2012. Ukraine accounts for 16% of world corn supply. US corn prices have rallied by almost 25% since the start of 2022.

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US Sanctions on Russia Carry Cost Already Reflected in Energy Prices - Climate Envoy Kerry

WASHINGTON, March 7 (Sputnik) - US sanctions on Russia over their ongoing military operation in Ukraine carry costs including volatile energy prices that are already being seen in the market, Climate Envoy John Kerry said on Monday.

"I think it is clear that we should do exactly what we are doing with President Biden and our allies. There may be costs, and obviously energy is turbulent right now. We see the volatility of price and demand," Kerry said during the opening of the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) Week conference.

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UK to Provide Further \$230Mln in Aid to Ukraine – Johnson

LONDON, March 7 (Sputnik) - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Monday an extra 175 million pounds (\$230 million) in aid for Ukraine and called on "Ukraine's friends" around the world to create a coalition of humanitarian, economic and defensive military support to ensure that Russia's military operation "fails."

"I am announcing a further £175 million of UK aid to Ukraine, £100 million of which will be provided directly to the Ukrainian government," Johnson told a press briefing alongside his Canadian and Dutch counterparts, Justin Trudeau and Mark Rutte.

He said the new funds would take the UK's total aid to Ukraine to 400 million pounds.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donbas republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

The move has elicited condemnation from Western leaders and the start of still more sanctions against Russia.

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UK's Johnson Says Sanctions on Russian Energy Very Much 'On The Table'

LONDON, March 7 (Sputnik) – UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday that London and other Western governments are seriously considering sanctions on Russian energy exports in response to the ongoing military operation in Ukraine.

"Something that perhaps three or four weeks ago we would never have considered, is now very much on the table. We have to all consider how we can all move away ... from dependence, reliance on Russian hydrocarbons," Johnson told a press briefing alongside his Canadian and Dutch counterparts in response to a question regarding sanctions on Russian energy exports. On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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UK's Johnson Says Use of Russian Oil, Gas Cannot Be Shut Down Overnight

LONDON, March 7 (Sputnik) – Russian oil and gas deliveries cannot be shut down overnight and such a transition will require time to find appropriate substitute supplies, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday.

"You can't simply close down use of oil and gas overnight, even from Russia. That's obviously not something that every country around the world can do," Johnson told a press briefing alongside his Canadian and Dutch counterparts. "Clearly, there is going to be a transitional period. We are going to have to look for supply, we are going have to look for substitute supplies from elsewhere."

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Trudeau Says Canada to Sanction 10 Individuals Linked to Russian Operation in Ukraine

TORONTO, March 7 (Sputnik) – Canada will impose sanctions on 10 individuals linked to Russia's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday.

"Today, Canada is announcing new sanctions on 10 individuals complicit in this unjustified invasion. This includes former and current senior government officials, oligarchs and supporters of Russian leadership," Trudeau told a news conference in London.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.