

SEMI-FINAL ROUND

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the West of cowardice while another top official said Russia was trying to split the nation in two, like North and South Korea. Zelenskyy made an exasperated plea for fighter jets and tanks to sustain a defense in Europe's biggest ground conflict since World War II. Speaking after U.S. President Joe Biden met with senior Ukrainian officials in Poland, Zelenskyy lashed out at the West's "ping-pong" about who and how jets and other defensive weapons should be provided to help Ukraine defend itself. Russia now says its main focus is on taking control of the eastern Donbas region, an apparent pullback from its earlier, more expansive goals.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United Arab Emirates' energy minister has doubled down on an oil alliance with Russia that's helped buoy crude prices to their highest in years as Moscow's war on Ukraine rattles markets and sends energy and commodity prices soaring. The minister spoke at an energy conference in Dubai on Monday. He said Russia is an important member of the OPEC+ alliance and that its 10 million barrels of oil a day are needed. He shot down suggestions the UAE would increase production unilaterally. The United States, Europe, Japan and others have been calling on Gulf Arab oil producers to do more to help bring down prices.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Will Smith marched on stage and smacked presenter Chris Rock during Sunday night's Oscars after Rock made a joke about the appearance of Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. Smith was awarded best actor for his role in "King Richard" moments later and apologized to the academy during his speech. The crowd at the Dolby Theatre hushed as Smith twice shouted at Rock to "keep my wife's name out of your (expletive) mouth." Rock made a joke about Pinkett Smith's shaved head. Pinkett Smith revealed in 2018 that she was diagnosed with alopecia. She has often discussed the challenges of hair loss on Instagram and other social media platforms.

MEDYKA, Poland (AP) — The daily number of people fleeing Ukraine has fallen in recent days but border guards, aid agencies and refugees say Russia's unpredictable war offers few signs whether it's just a temporary lull or a permanent drop-off. In the first two weeks after Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, about 2.5 million people in Ukraine's pre-war population of 44 million left the country to avoid the bombs and bloodshed. In the second two weeks, the number of Ukrainians leaving were roughly half that. The total exodus from the war now stands at just over 3.87 million, according to the U.N. refugee agency. Even if the exodus is slowing now, UNHCR says the war has triggered Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II.

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is releasing a budget blueprint that tries to tell voters what the diverse and at times fractured Democratic Party stands for. It calls for higher taxes on the wealthy, lower budget deficits, more money for police and greater funding for education, public health and housing. The 156-page plan also shows the splinters that persist in Biden's coalition. And there are possible gaps between the promise of what is being offered and the realities of what ultimately emerges. The proposal includes a minimum 20% tax on the incomes of households worth \$100 million or more.

NEW YORK (AP) — Walmart will no longer sell cigarettes in some of its stores though tobacco sales can be a significant revenue generator. Wall Street Journal was the first to report the development Monday. It noted some stores in California, Florida, Arkansas and New Mexico were on the list, citing anonymous sources and store visits. Walmart is not the first national retail chain to cut off cigarette sales even on a trial basis, but it is the largest. Target ended cigarette sales in 1996 and the drugstore chain CVS Health did the same in 2014.

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Taliban hard-liners are turning back the clock in Afghanistan with a flurry of repressive edicts over the past days that hark back to their harsh rule from the late 1990s. Girls have been banned from going to school beyond the sixth grade, women are barred from boarding planes if they travel unaccompanied by a male relative. Men and women can only visit public parks on separate days and the use of mobile telephones in universities is prohibited. Those familiar with top Taliban circles say the radical changes came on the orders of the Taliban's supreme leader — and despite promises to the international community that this wouldn't happen.

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Milwaukee police are investigating a triple homicide on the city's north side. Authorities say officers responded to a report of a shooting just before noon Sunday in the Graceland neighborhood. A 26-year-old man, 39-year-old man and 52-year-old man, all from Milwaukee, were found dead of gunshot wounds. The Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office says autopsies are scheduled for Monday. A release says the circumstances leading up to the shooting are under investigation and police are seeking "unknown suspects." No further information was immediately available.

FOND DU LAC, Wis. (AP) — Authorities say a woman who fled police during a traffic stop in Fond du Lac and eventually went into an occupied house was arrested without incident. Fond du Lac police say the incident began shortly before 7 a.m. Sunday when an officer observed someone driving recklessly and attempted to stop the vehicle. The driver, a 39-year-old woman from Ripon, first sped away and then fled on foot when police stopped the vehicle. She eventually entered a house through the garage after one of the residents left to pick up breakfast for he and his wife. A police detective who was familiar with the suspect quickly convinced her to surrender. The two occupants of the home, both 88, were not injured.

DARLINGTON, Wis. (AP) — Authorities say one man is dead following an early-morning fire at a home in Darlington, in southwestern Wisconsin. Police and fire crews responded to a call about 4:15 a.m. Sunday and found the home engulfed in flames when they arrived. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene. Police believe the fire originated from a kitchen stove. The home is considered a total loss.

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — The Green Bay Packers have signed former Las Vegas Raiders cornerback Keisean Nixon. Nixon appeared in 40 games and made two starts during his three seasons with the Raiders. He made 20 tackles on defense and 18 on special teams. He had a team-high nine tackles on special teams as a rookie in 2019. This move reunites Nixon with new Packers special teams coach Rich Bisaccia. Bisaccia went 7-6 as the Raiders' interim head coach last season after the resignation of Jon Gruden.

JUPITER, Fla. (AP) — One of the St. Louis Cardinals' greatest sluggers is back home. Albert Pujols, who is 42, signed a one-year deal over the weekend. Pujols was cheered by fans at the Cards spring-training complex today. He was a three-time MVP and helped the Cardinals win two World Series titles. He split last season with the Los Angeles Angels and Dodgers. He says this will be his last season.

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — USA Gymnastics is overhauling its leadership structure in its women's elite program. Instead of having one person serve as the program's high-performance director, USA Gymnastics is dividing the job into three positions. Each person will report to the program's vice president of women's gymnastics. The organization had been looking for someone to replace Tom Forster, who stepped down as high-performance director in December. The organization says it has discovered having the perception that one person is in charge "put untenable pressure on a single person."

Today

Showers and thunderstorms, mainly before 4pm. Some of the storms could be severe. High near 78. Windy, with a south wind 20 to 25 mph increasing to 25 to 30 mph in the afternoon. Winds could gust as high as 50 mph. Chance of precipitation is 100%. New rainfall amounts between a quarter and half of an inch possible.

Tonight

Mostly clear, with a low around 51. Southwest wind 5 to 15 mph becoming northwest after midnight. Winds could gust as high as 25 mph.

Tomorrow

Sunny, with a high near 75. North wind 5 to 10 mph.

Tomorrow Night

Mostly clear, with a low around 48. North wind around 5 mph.

Import Minded :30

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CHICAGO (AP) - The chance to get free gasoline is fueling a rush to get in line at some four dozen Chicago-area gas stations. The tab for Thursday's gas giveaway is being picked up by businessman and onetime Chicago mayoral candidate Willie Wilson. He has contributed \$1 million to pay for as much as \$50 for each motorist who pulls up at participating gas stations. AAA reports that the cost of gas has inched close to \$5 in the Chicago metro area, up from a little more than \$3 a year ago. Some motorists waited for well over an hour to reach the pump but police say thus far things have been peaceful.

FALL RIVER, Mass. (AP) - A Massachusetts man says he has the answer for those singing the blues about stratospheric gas prices. Rick Madeira, of Fall River, has taken to riding his electric unicycle to work, saving on gas and cutting his commute time. He tells The Herald News that it's more convenient and more fun. Madeira's Gotway Nikola Plus, with no seat or handle bars, just places for his feet, can go 70 or 80 miles on one charge and reaches speeds of up to 40 mph. He says he can get to work in four minutes now, compared to eight minutes in a vehicle.

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (AP) - Authorities say an Alabama taxi driver is facing several charges in Tennessee after leading deputies on a chase through both states. The Madison County Sheriff's Office in Alabama says the pursuit began Wednesday in Huntsville, when a police officer tried to stop the American Cab Co. taxi for a traffic violation. Authorities say that shortly after the cab entered Tennessee, the driver deliberately struck a Lincoln County Sheriff's Office patrol vehicle and wrecked the taxi. The Madison County Sheriff's Office said that when the driver was asked why she didn't stop, she replied, "I just didn't feel like stopping today."