

intelligence that it believes shows China is weighing whether to supply weapons to support Russia's war in Ukraine, U.S. officials said. **A1**

◆ **Biden met** in Warsaw with leaders from Europe's eastern flank, demonstrating his administration's renewed focus on allies on the front lines of Washington's competition with Russia and China. **A8**

◆ **Ukraine's prosecutor** general alleged that more than 68,000 war crimes have been committed since the Russian invasion. **A8**

◆ **At least 11 Palestinians** were killed during a shootout between Israeli forces and militants in the West Bank, Palestinian health officials said, as violence escalated in the territory despite international efforts to ease tensions. **A18**

◆ **Mexico's Senate passed** laws to cut the budget and staff of the country's independent electoral institute, a measure that opponents say risks weakening the country's democracy. **A18**

◆ **The Supreme Court** heard oral arguments over whether Twitter and other social-media companies can be sued for allegedly aiding Islamic State, the second in a pair of cases this week testing the liability of internet providers for user posts. **A4**

◆ **Norfolk Southern's CEO** said the railroad was prepared to make changes after the derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, that has sparked an environmental cleanup and political skirmishing. **A4**

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Officials At DOE Cautioned On Stock Holdings

U.S. ethics officials in recent years have warned one-third of the Energy Department's senior officials that they or their families owned stocks related to the agency's

By *Rebecca Ballhaus, Brody Mullins, Chad Day and Coulter Jones*

work, reminding them not to violate federal conflict-of-interest rules.

Most held on to the stocks, a Wall Street Journal analysis of officials' financial disclosures from 2017 through 2021 shows.

The more than 300 agency officials who received such warnings include nearly six dozen who held stocks of major energy companies such as Exxon Mobil Corp.

More than 130 officials in the Energy Department collectively reported about 2,700 trades of shares, bonds and options in companies that ethics officers labeled as related to their agency's work, according to the Journal's analysis, which examined only disclosures by officials who filed annual reports in that period.

Behind those investments is a quirk in the Energy Department's policies. Its ethics lawyers, as they review officials' annual financial disclosure forms, painstakingly identify stocks that could pose conflicts with the department's work, including companies that are regulated by the agency, contractors and loan



THE FUTURE OF EVERYTHING

SURVIVING IN A HYBRID OFFICE **R1-8**

China Has Clinics to Remove Fish Bones Stuck in Your Throat

Families gather again for communal meals; specialists get diners off the hook

By *LIYAN QI*

Yu Yuan, an interior designer from the eastern Chinese city of Nanjing, is still bewildered by her encounter with a mandarin fish at the family dinner she hosted in December.

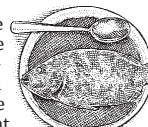
Tucking into the fish, braised whole in soy sauce as locals prefer, Ms. Yu felt a small bone catch in her throat. She swallowed mouthfuls of barely chewed rice and bread on her husband's advice in a bid to dislodge the bone, but that only succeeded in making it stick deeper.

She finally took herself to a nearby overnight fish-bone clinic, part of a network of specialized fish-bone services

to at least 11 such clinics, many located in the lower Yangtze region, sometimes referred to as the "land of fish and rice." But even regular hospitals in other parts of China are adept at getting diners off the hook.

Ms. Yu, who was freed of the half-inch bone at the clinic, has since become an evangelist on social media for professional fish-bone services, and is startled at how much dubious bone-removal advice is out there. "My lesson? Forget about all the home remedies. Go and see a doctor!"

The menace of the fish bone has been more or less excised from the Western diet, which overwhelmingly favors the easy-to-eat fish fillet. But



A bone to pick

Domestic Political Troubles Return for Ukraine's Zelensky

President confronts government corruption claims, political competition

By *MATTHEW LUXMOORE AND LINDSAY WISE*

KYIV, Ukraine—This time last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed the idea Russia would invade. His approval rating was falling. His government was pursuing a political rival on treason charges, to the dismay of Western allies.

Then, on Feb. 24, Russia invaded, and Mr. Zelensky rallied the nation, remaining in Kyiv as the enemy bore down on the capital. A former comic, he became the global face of Ukraine's sometimes improvised but thus far successful resistance, securing weapons and

billions in aid from initially reluctant Western backers.

Around the world, he has won support for the notion that the Ukrainian fight is both just and a line in the sand against Russian aggression toward its neighbors on Europe's border. In a surprise visit to Kyiv on Monday, President Biden reaffirmed U.S. support in a dramatic show of solidarity with Mr. Zelensky.

But back home, the politics of the prewar *Please turn to page A9*

◆ Kyiv alleges thousands of war crimes..... **A8**

Genetic Sleuths Tie Musician to Mystery

By *DAN FROSCH*

SANTA FE, N.M.—Within the world of devoted French-horn players in the U.S., Elliott Higgins was a pioneering figure.

As a young hornist in the 1970s, he helped launch the first French-horn soloist competition in the U.S., inspired by the performances of European players. He conducted the Albuquerque Philharmonic, and started a renowned annual French-horn workshop that drew top talent from across the country. And during summers, Mr. Higgins, with his wisps of white hair and crimson cheeks, could be found teaching aspiring players at his family's music camp tucked away in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico.

Earlier this month, investigators in Tuscaloosa, Ala., said that Mr. Higgins, who died in 2014 at 73 years old, was re-

darker. According to law enforcement, DNA evidence, new genetic genealogy research and additional police work showed that the distinguished horn instructor was a serial rapist with a trail of crimes across the country. The evidence, they said, linked him to at least three unsolved violent sexual assaults of women, crimes that had vexed investigators in Alabama and Colorado for decades.

Subsequent genetic testing of Mr. Higgins's surviving relatives indicated with a probability of greater than 99.99% that he was the attacker in the crimes where DNA evidence was collected, police said.

His adult daughter, Amber Higgins, said she was in total disbelief when an investigator told her of the findings. She said she was filled with rage, sadness and humiliation, and wanted to be helpful to law

Politics Return for Zelensky

Continued from Page One
period are returning for the 45-year-old president.

Corruption, a perennial problem in Ukraine, has come back into view in recent weeks. Mr. Zelensky has fired nearly a dozen senior officials for alleged schemes such as marking up the prices of eggs and other food procured for the military. One person whose home was raided by security services was a politically connected tycoon and onetime supporter of Mr. Zelensky's.

A close ally of the president said the defense minister, well liked by Western partners, was on his way out in connection with a corruption scandal under his watch, but in the end he stayed.

Opponents say Mr. Zelensky's grip on the media has a whiff of authoritarianism. Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, the popular chief of Ukraine's armed forces and a potential political rival to Mr. Zelensky, needs the president's signoff for media interviews but rarely gets it, according to people familiar with the matter.

At the start of the war, a presidential decree mandated that Ukraine's main news channels broadcast identical content, and they heavily feature government officials. Opponents of Mr. Zelensky say it constitutes an effective monopoly in a country that relies predominantly on TV for its news.

Mr. Zelensky's approval ratings are still high, but much of that support is conditional, according to political analysts.

"Am I satisfied with him as president? I don't ask myself that question," said Kostyantyn Petrushevskiy, a former colleague of Mr. Zelensky's during his comedy acting days. "I'm ready to create a religion in the name of Zelensky and Zaluzhnyi and become a pastor—until the end of the war."

Spending questioned

Such domestic issues could create problems abroad, especially if the front lines, which Russia has reinforced with tens of thousands of fresh troops, remain deadlocked. Some Republican lawmakers have questioned the level of spending on Ukraine. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) will need to win over some skeptics in his party, or rely on votes from Democrats, to pass further aid packages.

"The fact that we have such broad bipartisan support is, in part, a result of the way he's sold the cause and become kind of the face of the cause for other countries," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said in an interview. Mr. McConnell said he has advised Mr. Zelensky that to shore up support in Congress, he needs to tackle corruption and reach out to Republican lawmakers who may be wavering.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, above, at the presidential palace last July. Mr. Zelensky visited the liberated city of Kherson, below, in November.

A Western diplomat in Kyiv said it was important initially for Mr. Zelensky to mobilize the West, but if he struggles to maintain the momentum then "all the dirt will come back: the corruption allegations, the political opponents, the messy reform process."

Mr. Zelensky's popularity had been flagging before Russia invaded. Ukrainians had elected him in a landslide in 2019, impressed by his plain speaking about the ills of his country, particularly corruption, his lack of political baggage, and his pledge to end a yearslong conflict with Russian proxy forces in eastern Ukraine.

But his charisma carried him only so far. Western officials privately expressed disappointment that he wasn't delivering on his campaign against corruption. His efforts to strike a deal with Russia to bring peace in eastern Ukraine stalled as Moscow sought to use its control there to revive its historical claim to Ukraine.

As Russia built up troops around Ukraine in late 2021, Mr. Zelensky played down the threat and told Ukrainians not to panic. In January, pro-Western former President Petro Poroshenko appeared in court on treason charges he described as trumped up. Trust in Mr. Zelensky had slid to 28% of the population, according to a survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, a polling firm tied to a Kyiv university.

When Moscow invaded, Ukrainians picked up whatever weapons they could get their hands on to help the army defend their towns and villages.

Amid reports that a Russian assassination squad was preparing to assault the presidential compound, Mr. Zelensky spoke to European leaders by video. "This may be the last time you see me alive," he told them, a statement one senior European diplomat said swayed the leaders to pass, days later, a sanctions package targeting Russia. His decision to stay in Kyiv as Russians



closed in garnered him respect and support from abroad.

Western assessments that Russia would take Kyiv in days were proven wrong, thanks to strong Ukrainian resistance. But Mr. Zelensky needed help from the West.

On a phone call with then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pleading for more military support, he broke into a rendition of a Beatles song. "All you need is N love!" he sang, referring to the NLAW antitank weapon the U.K. had delivered to Ukraine, according to a U.K. official who heard the call.

The U.K. soon shipped thousands more antitank weapons to Ukraine, helping to repel a Russian armored assault on Kyiv, and has since led the way in providing heavier and more advanced weaponry.

At home, Mr. Zelensky won over some former critics, and his popularity soared. He started giving nightly video addresses. Mr. McConnell, a history buff, began referring to him in speeches on the Senate floor as "Churchill in a T-shirt."

Sen. Josh Hawley (R., Mo.), who opposes aid to Ukraine, is unmoved by Mr. Zelensky's appeals. "He's trying to look out for the interests of his people who are being invaded, so that's all fine," he said. "We've got to make our own judgment about what's good for our people and our interests." He said Europeans should take "first

responsibility" for providing conventional arms.

Mr. Zelensky also has tried to cultivate support from regular citizens in the West. "We were looking for all stages and all audiences, everywhere," said Serhiy Leshchenko, a former journalist who joined the president's team last March. "Movie festivals, book exhibitions, energy-sector conferences, anything."

In June, Mr. Leshchenko reached out to a friend, who helped arrange a video appearance for the president at Glastonbury music festival in England. Mr. Zelensky urged revelers there to "put pressure on all the politicians you know to help restore peace in Ukraine."

Mr. Zelensky's style at times has irked supporters. President Biden rebuked Mr. Zelensky during a phone call in June when the Ukrainian president was pushing for extra aid, according to several U.S. officials, who added that the incident did no longstanding damage to their relationship. Mr. Zelensky's spokesman didn't respond to requests for comment.

In Germany, two government officials said there is a sense among some west European governments that Mr. Zelensky has been trying to drag the U.S. and its allies into the war, not only by seeking offensive weapons systems that could be used on Russian territory, but also with his

claims that Russia had fired missiles into or over North Atlantic Treaty Organization territory. "I don't blame Zelensky," one of the officials said. "In his place, we would do the same."

In the U.S., aid packages to Ukraine had drawn bipartisan support, but future packages must pass both the Senate, led by Democrats, and the House, where Republicans now have a slim majority. Some Republicans are opposed to spending taxpayer dollars in Ukraine, citing concern about corruption and arguing that the money could be better spent domestically. American officials responsible for tracking more than \$110 billion in U.S. aid to Ukraine are preparing to deploy auditors and investigators into the war zone, though they have thus far not claimed any major fraud or illegality.

Addressing skeptics

On a December trip to Washington—his first trip abroad since the start of the war—Mr. Zelensky tried to sway skeptics in an address to Congress. He spoke about his visit the day before to the embattled eastern city of Bakhmut, presenting a flag signed by Ukrainian soldiers there. His audience in the packed chamber gave him multiple standing ovations.

In interviews, soldiers in that city said the president had visited troops for nearly half an hour as explosions rang out in the distance, motivating them to keep defending Bakhmut. "The fact that he came personally convinced us that we wouldn't give up the city without a fight," said Yuriy Syrotiuk, a 47-year-old grenadier who has been defending Bakhmut since June.

In Congress, Mr. Zelensky said Ukrainians don't expect U.S. boots on the ground, and that any U.S. aid would be used responsibly and accounted for.

In Ukraine, though, media reports about alleged corruption were piling up. In a video

address in January, Mr. Zelensky announced a fresh drive against graft. He removed nearly a dozen senior officials, including the deputy head of his administration, who was photographed driving a Porsche allegedly belonging to a businessman and was accused of appropriating a sport-utility vehicle donated to deliver aid. That official denied wrongdoing. The country's deputy infrastructure minister was caught accepting a bribe of \$400,000, according to Ukrainian law enforcement, which detained him. His lawyer said he would fight the allegations in court.

Security services raided the home of billionaire Ihor Kolomoisky, a former political backer who owns a television station that helped vault Mr. Zelensky to stardom. Officials said they had found evidence of misappropriation of funds at a state-owned oil company once controlled by Mr. Kolomoisky, who hasn't commented on the raid.

Mr. Kolomoisky had been placed under U.S. sanctions in 2021 for alleged financial wrongdoing at a bank he once controlled, which he denied. Some U.S. lawmakers have praised Mr. Zelensky's efforts, noting that the corruption allegations weren't associated with Western funds or weapons deliveries.

In November, the president publicly criticized Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko, a former heavyweight boxing champion with a large fan base and a good rapport with Western officials, accusing his office of poor accounting and failing to supply power and heating hubs for city residents left without electricity.

Mr. Klitschko denied the accusations. "I don't want to engage in political battles, especially in the current situation," he said in his own video address. "I have things to get on with."

—Max Colchester, Laurence Norman, Vivian Salama and Bojan Pancevski contributed to this article.

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