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POLITICO Playbook PM: The post-SOTU blitz begins

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It's the day after SOTU. And while Washington is dragging with a SOTU hangover, the news sure as hell hasn't slowed down. Judge KETANJI BROWN JACKSON is on the Hill meeting with senators. Tragic news of civilian casualties continues to pour out of Ukraine. And there are quite a few good reads popping today that have nothing to do with any of the major news narratives driving this week, but which you should read.

First, three stories that caught our attention so far today:

1. **THE ESTABLISHMENT STRIKES BACK** — If you missed all the Texas news last night, take a look at [our colleague David Siders' takeaways](#). They include:

The GOP's establishment wing defeats MAGA candidates, from Gov. GREG ABBOTT to an open contest to replace Rep. KEVIN BRADY.

But former President DONALD TRUMP “bolsters his batting average.” After having a bit of endorsement remorse lately, all 16 of his chosen Texas House candidates won their races, as did several others he backed statewide.

The Bush dynasty “avoided extinction” — and lives to fight another day, as GEORGE P. BUSH advanced to a May runoff against Trump-endorsed Attorney General KEN PAXTON.

Progressives “stop their slide” after abysmal results last year, though it wasn't exactly a clear-cut victory. Rep. HENRY CUELLAR is considered damaged goods due to the ongoing FBI probe, so if their candidate JESSICA CISNEROS can't defeat him in this runoff, that result might be reversed.

2. **SO MUCH FOR PARTY UNITY** — Typically, election years are times when both parties seek to minimize internal fighting and turn the fire on the other side of the aisle. But our Congress Minutes man Anthony Adragna has picked up on an odd trend happening right now: within both parties, members are at each other's throats.

He's not just talking about the MITCH MCCONNELL-RICK SCOTT rift that spilled into the open Tuesday. The tussle over Michigan Democratic Rep. RASHIDA TLAIB's SOTU response also reignited the "Dems in disarray" headline for a hot second this week. [More here](#)

3. MEET VICTORIA SPARTZ — We missed it Tuesday night amid the SOTU news, but CNN's Mel Zanona [has a profile](#) of the Ukrainian-American GOP freshman who's leading the charge in Congress to push the U.S. to do more to help the country of her birth. Spartz, who grew up in the Soviet Union, has been "dealing with the emotional toll of watching the bloody invasion unfold, knowing she still has friends and family — including her grandmother — who are in Ukraine" all while "calling for stiffer sanctions, immediate aid and more military resources, saying the Ukrainian people want more weapons — not troops — because they want to fight the Russians themselves."

"I think we need to understand the situation in Ukraine. It's not a war. It's a genocide of the Ukrainian people by a crazy man," she said.

Today, Spartz joined Sen. LINDSEY GRAHAM (R-S.C.) [in introducing a resolution](#) calling for the International Criminal Court to investigate Russian President VLADIMIR PUTIN for war crimes, our Andrew Desiderio reports. [More from Andrew here on the latest Ukraine Hill action](#)

Good Wednesday afternoon.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA LATEST

First, the U.S. response ...

— President JOE BIDEN briefly addressed the Russia-Ukraine conflict as he left the White House this morning. (1) Asked whether Russian forces are deliberately targeting Ukrainian civilians, he said "they are," though he stopped short of deeming Russia's actions as war crimes, saying it's "too early to say." (FWIW, [here's the UN's list of war crimes](#).) (2) Asked if the U.S. might consider banning Russian oil imports, he said "nothing is off the table." (3) And asked whether he supports Ukraine joining NATO, he said "that's obviously" for NATO to decide. [More from WaPo](#)

— Senior Biden officials are "preparing to dramatically expand the number of Russian oligarchs subject to U.S. sanctions, aiming to punish the financial elite close to President VLADIMIR PUTIN over his invasion of Ukraine," [WaPo's Jeff Stein and Yeganeh Torbati report](#). "America's sanctions are expected to be more complicated than those imposed by the E.U., targeting not just the individuals but also their family members and companies they own."

— Toward that end, the Justice Department today said it would stand up a special task force — named "KleptoCapture" — to "help enforce sanctions against Russian government officials and oligarchs," [writes CNN's Evan Perez](#).

— Speaker NANCY PELOSI said today that "she hopes to have a top-line number for a Ukraine emergency aid package later today ... and that plan is to attach it to omnibus," [per Bloomberg's Billy House](#).

— The U.S.’ diplomatic push to rally allies for Ukraine in the Middle East isn’t going to plan. “From the Persian Gulf’s oil-rich monarchies to Israel, U.S. allies and partners are staying neutral or tempering their criticism of Moscow in a revealing sign of Russia’s growing influence in the region,” write WSJ’s David Cloud, Benoit Faucon and Summer Said.

Meanwhile, in Europe ...

— “A missile struck a government building in Ukraine’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, on Wednesday, and rescue workers pulled 10 people from the burning wreckage, the city’s emergency services agency said,” NYT’s Matthew Mpoke Bigg writes.

— Where supplies stand: “Russia has lost roughly 3% to 5% of its tanks, aircraft, artillery and other military assets inside Ukraine — compared to Ukrainian losses of roughly 10% of its capabilities, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the latest intelligence,” per CNN’s Jim Sciutto, Barbara Starr and Katie Bo Lillis.

— Roughly 20 different countries “are funneling arms into Ukraine,” NYT’s Steven Erlanger reports from Brussels. “But whether European weaponry will continue to reach the Ukrainian battlefield in time to make a difference is far from certain.”

— A handful of rich Russian oligarchs “have begun, albeit tentatively, to speak out — though it may be too little to end the war, or to protect their Western fortunes,” AP’s Jill Lawless writes.

— Eastern European countries watching Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “fear a catastrophe of their own could be in the making, as Mr. Putin seeks to turn back the clock and reclaim Russia’s lost sphere of influence, perilously close to their frontiers. Even leaders in the region who have long supported Mr. Putin are sounding the alarm,” writes NYT’s Andrew Higgins in Poland.

TWEETING THROUGH IT — Sen. MARCO RUBIO (R-Fla.) has been a prolific presence on Twitter since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As a member of the so-called “Gang of Eight,” who receive more intelligence than any other member, Rubio is uniquely knowledgeable of the situation. On Tuesday, Rubio tweeted extensive observations of Russia’s military movements. And last week, he said, “I wish I could share more, but for now I can say it’s pretty obvious to many that something is off” with Putin, suggesting that Rubio is privy to some extra information about the Russian leader.

“It’s a highly unusual display of transparency from a senior senator on the Intelligence Committee who gets regular, bipartisan briefings on high-level U.S. assessments,” our Andrew Desiderio writes. “But Rubio is comfortable parsing Russia’s war in public, saying he isn’t revealing anything classified or sensitive, even as critics slam his tweets as irresponsible and unverified. He says he’s using any tools he can to convince Americans to care about the violence in Ukraine.”

— Major social media companies have officially joined the fray. Mark Scott and Rebecca Kern report that “the implications will be long-lasting. By taking action against the Kremlin, tech companies have adopted policies that could become the de facto norm for future conflicts.”

OUCH — World Taekwondo stripped Putin of his ninth-degree black belt and banned “Russian or Belarusian flags to be waved or anthems to be played at its events,” [WaPo’s Julian Mark writes](#).

PROGRAMMING ALERT — Defense Secretary LLOYD AUSTIN will sit down for an exclusive interview on the Russia-Ukraine conflict with NBC’s Lester Holt airing at 6:30 p.m. on “NBC Nightly News.” [53-second preview clip](#)

THE ECONOMY

INFLATION NATION — Fed Chair JEROME POWELL told a congressional panel this morning that “it would be appropriate for the central bank to raise its benchmark interest rate at its meeting in two weeks amid high inflation, strong economic demand and a tight labor market. Mr. Powell said it was too soon to tell how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the strict economic curbs imposed by the West against Moscow would influence the U.S. economy. But his overall remarks suggested growing urgency to tighten policy,” [WSJ’s Nick Timiraos writes](#).

JUDICIARY SQUARE

SCOTUS SCHEDULE — Senate Judiciary Chair DICK DURBIN (D-Ill.) officially announced today that hearings for Jackson’s nomination to the Supreme Court will begin the week of Monday, March 21. (If you’re an ardent POLITICO reader, you knew this news two days ago, because [our ace colleague Marianne LeVine scooped it](#).) Also, the White House [released a promotional video](#) for Jackson this afternoon.

WHAT GILLIBRAND TOLD ROBERTS — Sen. KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D-N.Y.) had a conversation with Chief Justice JOHN ROBERTS at the State of the Union address Tuesday night. Here’s what she told reporters she said to Roberts: “Have a conscience, wisdom and to continue to lead the court, because he is the only hope we have at the Supreme Court.” [More from Anthony Adragna and Burgess Everett for Congress Minutes](#)

THE WHITE HOUSE

FACT-CHECKING SOTU ...

— AP: “President Joe Biden related a faulty Democratic talking point about guns in his first State of the Union speech, made his plan on electric vehicles sound more advanced than it is and inflated the sweep of his infrastructure package. On several fronts, he presented ambitions as achievements.” [More](#)

— WaPo’s Glenn Kessler: “He stuck to the script more closely in his first State of the Union address. Here’s a roundup of seven claims that caught our attention.” [More](#)

AN ADMIN ON THE MOVE — “President Joe Biden and top administration officials fanned out across the country the day after his State of the Union address as Democrats try to build momentum ahead of November’s midterm elections,” [AP’s Darlene Superville and Chris Megerian write](#). “Each trip Wednesday was calibrated for maximum political impact,

showcasing a presidency tending to domestic issues even as the world has been riveted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.”

CONGRESS

MOOD RING — The Atlantic’s Elaine Godfrey takes the temperature of official Washington. The diagnosis? “Bipartisanship still exists in Washington,” she writes. “But all is not well on Capitol Hill. ... Many lawmakers and staff say that something has shifted in the past two years — that the changes brought on by COVID-19 and the Capitol riot have frayed relationships and shattered trust between members, in some cases beyond repair. In light of this shift, members are doing their best to adjust and move forward.” The piece is rife with quotes from lawmakers and staffers:

— “‘I have to deal with them,’ Representative DAN KILDEE of Michigan told me of his colleagues who objected to the certification of the 2020 election. But ‘I look at them as smaller people now.’”

— Rep. ILHAN OMAR (D-Minn.): “A lot of us still feel unsafe. We have colleagues who walk around with their guns on them, and we’re still worried about who they might let in.”

— Rep. DAN CRENSHAW (R-Texas) on the metal detectors at the Capitol: “These kinds of things make this place a circus instead of a place where reasonable people can disagree.”

— But there may be hope anew with the Ukraine situation. Rep. TOM COLE (R-Okla.): “It’s been a rough patch in American politics. But I don’t think there’s broad differences on doing everything we possibly can to help Ukraine.”

JAN. 6 AND ITS AFTERMATH

WHAT THE COMMITTEE IS UP TO — Kyle Cheney has a look at what the Jan. 6 select committee is working on as it prepares for hearings in a few weeks. “Recent court filings, subpoenas and conversations with members of the Jan. 6 select committee show they’re homing in on interactions that Republican members had with Trump and his allies in the weeks preceding the riot. One critical pressure point is the committee’s search for communications between members of Congress and JOHN EASTMAN, the attorney who helped craft Trump’s last-ditch legal strategy to prevent Joe Biden from taking office.”

ALL POLITICS

FOR YOUR RADAR — As New York City prepares to allow roughly 800,000 green card holders and others authorized to work in the country vote for mayor, City Council and other local offices, Erin Durkin writes that “a national movement to give voting rights to legal noncitizens has found its way to the country’s most populous city and, pending court battles, will soon give those immigrants the chance to shape local elections. ... The impact on local elections could potentially be far-reaching.”

MEDIAWATCH

ONE TO WATCH — “New York Times editors are focusing on staff retention as policies about outside projects spark frustrations and exits,” by Insider’s Steven Perlberg

PLAYBOOKERS

MEDIA MOVE — Hannah Dreier is joining NYT as an investigative reporter. She currently is a national enterprise reporter at WaPo. The announcement

TRANSITIONS — Pierce Wiegard is now deputy chief counsel for oversight on the Senate EPW Committee. He previously was senior counsel for Sen. Dan Sullivan’s (R-Alaska) office. ... Corie Whalen is now media relations director at the R Street Institute. She previously was media relations director at the CATO Institute and is a Justin Amash alum. ... Megan Devlin is joining Deloitte Government & Public Services as a senior consultant. She currently is director of comms and marketing at the Meridian International Center. ...

... Ericka King is now VP of Ervin Graves Strategy Group. She previously was legislative counsel for Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.). ... Tera Proby is joining Americans for the Arts as advocacy manager. She previously was government affairs associate for Ohio State University, and is a Nydia Velazquez and Marcia Fudge alum.

WEEKEND WEDDING — Rebecca Mark, senior director of marketing at Cloudera and a Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Kevin Brady alum, and Trent Edwards, a VP at TechNet, got married Saturday in an intimate ceremony at a beachfront villa in Sayulita, Mexico. The two met at the NRCC in the 2010 election cycle. Pic ... Another pic ... SPOTTED: Brian and Natasha Walsh, Gideon Lett, Austin Carson, Jackie Barber and Geoff Antell.

BONUS BIRTHDAYS: POLITICO’s Brakkton Booker and Caitlin Floyd