

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Thursday, Jan. 2
Senior Menu: Chicke strips, tri-tators, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast Pizza.
School Lunch: Lasagna bake, garlic toast.
School resumes
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 3
Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, winter blend, oranges.
School. Breakfast: Egg wraps.
School Lunch: Popcorn chicken, tri taters.
Girls Wrestling at McCook Central/Montrose (Salem), 2 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 4
Boys Wrestling Tournament at Webster, 10 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main
Basketball Double Header hosts Redfield ((Boys Girls JV at 1 p.m.; Boys JV/ at 2 p.m.; Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity to follow)

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



Sunday, Jan. 5
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.
United Methodist: Communion Sunday: Conde worship, 8:15 a.m.; Groton worship, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Time, 10:30 a.m.; Britton worship, 11:15 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.;
Pancake Sunday: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center (proceeds benefit the Historical Society's jail restoration.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9:45 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School

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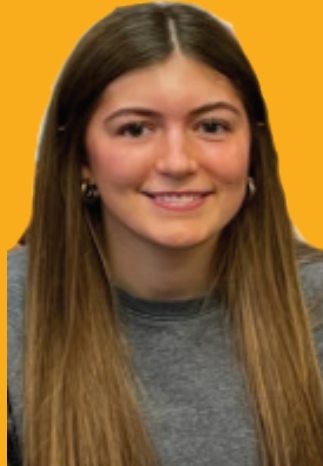
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Groton Area November Students of the Month



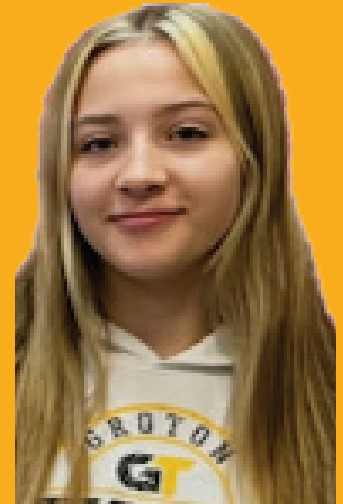
Faith Traphagen
Senior



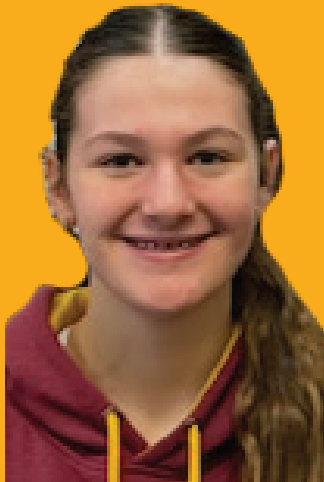
Talli Wright
Junior



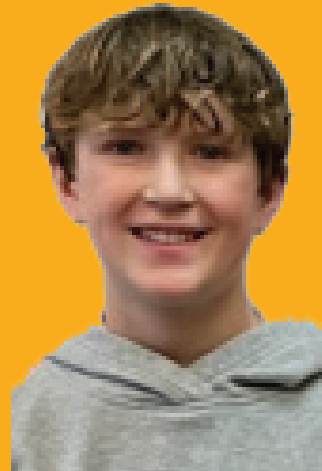
Liby Althoff
Sophomore



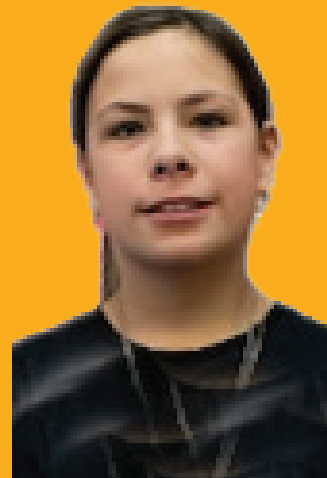
Kyleigh Kroll
Freshman



Abby Fjeldheim
Eighth Grade



Gavin Hanten
Seventh Grade



Lillian Davis
Sixth Grade

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.



Move into SD bunker backfires on family seeking a new life

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

Part 2

IGLOO, S.D. – David Streeter thought abandoning his traditional life to relocate into a survival bunker in South Dakota would allow his family to retreat from the stresses, expenses and restrictions of the modern world.

The family of three also wanted to be prepared in case an apocalypse of some kind altered the course of mankind and threatened their lives and way of life.

But 18 months after leasing a former Army munitions bunker in the Vivos xPoint residential complex south of Edgemont, the Streeters have had their dreams shattered. And they now find themselves embroiled in a situation that has brought on a level of upheaval, worry and danger they specifically sought to avoid.

“It’s been nothing but a nightmare,” Streeter, 51, said during an interview. “We just wanted to get away from the rat race and live peacefully, but obviously that hasn’t happened.”

In August, Streeter – an Army veteran who was injured while serving in Bosnia – shot a Vivos contract employee at close range. Streeter said the man had threatened his family and he was defending himself. No charges were filed in that case or another fatal shooting involving Streeter in Montana in 2010.

Streeter’s daughter witnessed and videotaped the shooting while his 12-year-old daughter was calling 9-1-1 for help. His younger daughter now sometimes cries in her sleep, Streeter said.

Streeter and his wife, Katja, a nurse who works in Hot Springs, were evicted from their bunker and are living in cramped quarters with nine other adults and children in a home with only one shower not far from the Vivos complex.

Streeter and his wife are the plaintiffs or defendants in a handful of lawsuits related to their eviction, the shooting, a protection order request against him and small claims cases.

For now, the Streeters have lost the money paid to lease and build out the Vivos bunker, a tab Streeter estimates is around \$300,00. They’ve also spent about \$15,000 in legal fees to file or fight several lawsuits.

Streeter said that even after moving out of Vivos, the on-site subcontractor he shot – a convicted felon known to carry guns – frequently parks outside or drives by the house where they now live.

Streeter said he also has been interviewed twice by agents of the FBI, which former Vivos residents say has launched an investigation in the bunker complex and its owner.

The stress of protecting his family, battling for his legal rights, maintaining financial solvency and trying to retain a sense of normalcy has led Streeter to make late-night calls to a veterans’ mental health hotline on four occasions, he said.



Chris Yellow Thunder, left, with David Streeter on Dec. 7, 2024, outside Yellow Thunder’s home in Igloo, S.D., where both of their families now live. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

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David Streeter hugs a puppy on Oct. 4, 2024, outside the front of a friend's bunker in the Vivos xPoint complex near Igloo, S.D.

(Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

"I find myself in a situation where I have to constantly defend my family, and it should never have been that way," said Streeter, who carries a handgun at all times.

Bunker complex a source of resident unrest

Streeter is not alone in his stress and disappointment on how things have turned out at the bunker complex, but he has become a lightning rod in the effort to hold the owners accountable and push for positive change.

The Vivos xPoint survivalist community was developed in 2016 on the site of the former Black Hills Army Depot munitions storage facility. More than 500 above-ground concrete bunkers are marketed for lease to those who are worried about a potential national or global disaster or who want to live mostly off-the-grid. It's located in a remote area 8 miles south of Edgemont in southwestern South Dakota.

The concrete bunkers, which look like earthen igloos, held military conventional and chemical munitions from 1942 to 1967. The town of Igloo grew up around the depot and was once home a young Tom Brokaw, a South Dakota native and former NBC anchor. The base

and town are now abandoned.

A four-month News Watch investigation recently revealed that the Vivos complex has been the subject of at least 16 lawsuits or legal filings, five complaints to the South Dakota Attorney General's Office, and is now part of an inquiry by the FBI.

Vivos is owned and managed by California businessman Robert K. Vicino, who told News Watch in an interview that the complex is largely peaceful, well-maintained and has been a financial success.

Vicino also denied allegations of financial impropriety, breaking of contractual obligations or retaliation against people who complained in legal or state documents. He said any unrest present at Vivos is being perpetuated by a small group of disgruntled residents and "bad apples," including Streeter.

In mid-2023, Streeter sold his home in Montana and leased a bunker at Vivos xPoint to get away from the modern world and test his mettle at building a home inside the bunker and successfully living off the grid.

The relatively low lease cost and monthly and annual fees, when compared to the cost of a traditional home and property taxes, would also allow Streeter and his family to travel internationally, he said.

After living for a time in a camper outside, he eventually moved himself, his wife and his daughter into the bunker. Later, he built out the bunker with a sub-floor, walls, and a kitchen, bathroom and TV rooms.

However, it wasn't long after that problems arose and his expectation of a peaceful life on the South Dakota prairie was shattered.

Streeter's complaints rejected by Vivos

Streeter began to contact Vivos management with complaints that his septic system at the bunker wasn't functional and that the tires on his truck had been destroyed by nails and railroad spikes mixed within the road gravel.

In email communications with Vicino, Streeter asked to be compensated for the ruined tires and to have Vivos pay to get the septic system fixed. Streeter also made extensive allegations about how Vivos was being run, how resident money was being spent, and warned that he would file in small claims court to be paid if a financial arrangement could not be made.

In an email correspondence from March 30, reviewed by News Watch, Vicino rejected Streeter's claims that Vivos was responsible for tire or septic system damages.

"So now you are threatening extortion and tort," Vicino wrote, warning that "I think you are going down

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the rabbit hole.”

In April, Streeter filed two small claims cases against Vivos xPoint, both of which are pending.

A near-fatal shooting, but no charges filed

After that, Streeter said, Vivos' on-site contract employees began to frequently drive by his home, sometimes fast and sometimes slowly, give him the middle finger or take pictures or videos of him, his bunker and his family.

Streeter said Vivos contract employee Shear "J.R." Rodriguez ran him and his wife off the roadway several times within the Vivos complex. Even though Streeter complained to management and law enforcement, he said the dangerous behavior continued. Streeter said a Fall River Sheriff's Office lieutenant told him that officers could not respond because the Vivos complex was on private property.

In August, Streeter said his concerns intensified when his adult daughter and young grandchildren moved onto his bunker property.

On Aug. 23, Streeter said Rodriguez drove at high speeds past Streeter's bunker. Streeter said he tracked down Rodriguez, pulled him over and reached into his truck and grabbed him by the shirt, warning him to stay away from his family.

A while later, Vivos contract employee Kelly Anderson drove up to Streeter's bunker on a Caterpillar track loader, which the manufacturer indicates weighs up to 9,000 pounds and has a top speed of 7 mph.

Streeter said Anderson began to threaten Streeter, who pulled his handgun and pointed it at Anderson.

At one point, Streeter said Anderson lunged toward him, and Streeter fired a single shot, striking Anderson in the chest. A few moments later, Streeter, a former emergency medical technician, left his yard and began to provide aid to Anderson.

Streeter and another man who arrived on the scene, Chris Yellow Thunder, loaded Anderson into a truck and drove him off the bunker property, where they were met by an ambulance and authorities.

Prior to arriving at Streeter's property, Anderson sent text messages to Yellow Thunder, who is an acquaintance of both Anderson and Streeter, that he was heading to Streeter's bunker to confront him.

In the text message, viewed by News Watch, Anderson stated: "I'm about to f— his ass up" and "What he did isn't right and I'm gonna educate this mother f——."

Months later, according to Fall River State's Attorney Lance Russell, a grand jury heard testimony and reviewed evidence in the case and decided not to charge Streeter with a crime related to the shooting. Streeter was charged with one count of simple assault for the earlier confrontation with Rodriguez, according to court documents.

Rodriguez could not be reached for comment. Anderson did not return a message left on his voicemail.

Streeter was evicted from his bunker and is being sued in civil court for damages by Anderson, who did not return a call seeking comment. A court overturned the eviction, but Streeter is still unable to legally enter Vivos due to a separate legal filing.

"Vivos promises to do all this vetting, but why do you then hire a known felon who carries guns to work down here?" Streeter said.

Vicino told News Watch that he hopes the state attorney general's office, despite the grand jury ruling, will eventually charge Streeter with attempted murder.

"There's no vendetta here, and we had no bone to pick with this guy," Vicino said. "He has a temperament issue, and that was an egregious act."

Streeter's attorney, J. Scott James of Custer, said the relationship between Streeter and Vivos, and the



"It's been nothing but a nightmare. We just wanted to get away from the rat race and live peacefully, but obviously that hasn't happened."

David Streeter, resident of bunker community near Igloo in southwestern South Dakota

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on-site subcontractors, has left Streeter in an almost untenable situation.

"I think Mr. Streeter came here with a lot of hope about how his life would be when he got here, and I think that he's been frustrated and disappointed by the way his interactions with Vivos have gone, and that he certainly didn't expect to be in the middle of a shooting match with a (Vivos) employee," James said. "He didn't expect to be fearful for his safety and his life at all times, and has to basically guard himself 24 hours a day to keep everything from being taken from him."

Hard to back down now

Streeter, by nature, is not one to back away from a fight. He grew up on a ranch in Montana, and his military service in Bosnia and his later work as a federal prison correctional officer, law enforcement officer and certified emergency medical technician are all roles that require some fortitude.

Streeter is also no stranger to using violence to protect his loved ones. In 2010, he was called to his mother's home to break up a violent fight between her and Streeter's stepfather. When his stepfather emerged with a loaded shotgun, Streeter shot and killed him. No charges were filed in that case, according to local press accounts.

When Streeter was evicted, his friend Yellow Thunder immediately opened his home to Streeter, his wife and daughter as well as Streeter's adult daughter and her four children. The home is one of a handful in the former town of Igloo and sits a mile or so from the entrance to Vivos xPoint.

"I don't trust easy, but Dave and I hit it off the second we met," Yellow Thunder told News Watch. "So when they needed a place to stay, it was never a question that they would come in here, and in fact, I would have been offended if they had gone to a hotel or anywhere else to live."

Streeter said he is angry over how he and other Vivos residents have been treated. But he is also disappointed that formal complaints made by him and other Vivos residents to the Fall River County Sheriff's Office and the state attorney general's office of consumer affairs have not led to substantive investigations or action.

"It's like they think, 'If we don't see any problems, they're not there,'" Streeter said. "All we need is for someone to take an interest and do something. All of this has happened down here, and I've reported it to every entity I can find, everybody that should have authority over it, and nothing has been done to help me or all these other people being hurt down here."

Fall River County Sheriff Lyle Norton did not return calls seeking comment, and attorney general's office spokesman Tony Mangan said there is no ongoing AG investigation into Vivos.

Meanwhile, Streeter said he is waiting for lawsuits he has filed or those filed against him to be resolved before making any plans for the future.

"I don't like to run from things, and I'm tired of giving in to all this bulls—," Streeter said. "My wife and my daughter have asked me not to go back down there to Vivos, but what do we do? I've got \$300,000 into that (bunker), and we're not a rich family. We put all of our savings into building a home there."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Bart Pfkuch at bart.pfkuch@sdnewswatch.org.



David Streeter on Oct. 4, 2024, outside the front door of the bunker he once leased in the Vivos xPoint complex near Igloo, S.D. Streeter and his family have since been evicted from the bunker. (Photo: Bart Pfkuch / South

Dakota News Watch)

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You have to start some time! Why not **now!**

5 months to get your through the winter!
Student: \$175.75, Single: \$202.40, Couple: \$298.90,
Family: \$362.15

This will get you into the gym through the end of May!



Gift
Certificates
Available!

Daily Pass Available for \$5

Age 65 or older
Physical Therapy
\$20 per month

Annual Memberships:

Student: \$255.60

Single: \$319.50

Couple: \$575.10

Family: \$702.26



15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Living Heart Fitness Center

Open 24/7

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

From Charles Dickens: Advice for American Fulfillment and Reconciliation

In this season of peace and joy and celebration—accentuated in many homes by the presence of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, whether on television or in print—comes useful advice for America's progress in overcoming our deep political division and polarization and fulfilling our yearning for a measure of civility and reconciliation, from my favorite English novelist's lesser-known book, *The Life and Times of Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), which Dickens once told a friend was his "best work thus far."

Dickens was no great admirer of the United States when he visited for the first time in 1842, but he mused about America's potential if it lived up to its ideals and best standards. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens sends the title character to America, which he satirizes as a country filled with self-promoting hucksters. He writes critically of slavery and our propensity to violence. Twenty-five years later, Dickens returned to America and noted its significant improvements.

In *Chuzzlewit*, Mark Tapley, the title character's servant, wonders during his voyage back to England how, if *Chuzzlewit* were an artist, he would paint the American eagle.

Chuzzlewit replies, "Paint it as like an Eagle as you could, I suppose."

"No," said Mark. "That wouldn't do for me, sir. I should want to draw it like a Bat, for its short-sightedness; like a Bantam, for its bragging; like a Magpie, for its honesty; like a Peacock, for its vanity; like an Ostrich, for its putting its head in the mud, and thinking nobody sees it."

"And like a Phoenix, for its power of springing from the ashes of all its faults and vices and soaring up anew into the sky!" said Martin. "Well, Mark, let us hope so."

Of course, we should all hope so. What Gunnar Myrdal called the "American Creed"—the foundational values embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—are rallying points for American citizens to honor, defend, and, when we fall short, to fulfill. These values and principles, set forth by those, to borrow from Abraham Lincoln, who conceived this nation in liberty, are the guiding lights of the nation. The men who signed the Declaration, Lincoln observed, established standards intended to chart the American course, with goals and principles, "even though not perfectly attained, are to be revered by all and constantly approximated."

As Myrdal noted, "The schools teach them, the churches preach them. The courts pronounce their judicial decisions in their terms." There has been, perhaps more often than we care to admit, a gap between the creed and governmental practice, which is why achievement of the creed remains aspirational, but the gap has supplied powerful motive to many across the decades in the battle for justice.

The fundamental values that define the American Creed are the ties that bind our nation, the principles that should govern even in the most challenging of times. The Declaration of Independence provides the

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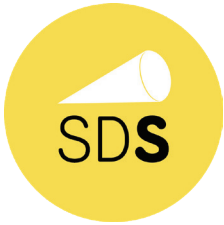
ends; the Constitution, the means. The essence of the creed—American Constitutionalism—calls on all citizens, as the distinguished historian Michael Kammen wrote in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Machine That Would Go of Itself*, to accept “conflict within consensus.”

The ratification of the Constitution in 1787-1788, and all subsequent amendments, represents our agreement—for governors and governed alike—to the constitutional consensus to obey the Constitution. This is the doctrine of the Social Contract, the agreement to which all are a party, without which American democracy disintegrates into a world in which the strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must, legal restraints disappear, and law is reduced to the arbitrary will of the ruler.

Within this consensus, we will experience conflict, for how could it be otherwise in a nation of 300-plus million people? However, the conflicts will occur within the framework of the Constitution—between the lines, so to speak—including the commitment to representation and compromise, equal protection and due process, and an absolute commitment to playing by the rules, which will prevent sharp differences from spilling over into acts of violence, or worse, rebellion.

With this commitment, we certainly have the opportunity, in darkest times, when divisions threaten to boil over, to rise like a Phoenix and maintain a governmental system which, for all its imperfections, has remained the envy of the world for 250 years.

-David Adler



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota Searchlight's most-read news and commentary of 2024

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 31, 2024 9:33 AM

As 2024 comes to a close, here's a look back at South Dakota Searchlight's most-read news stories and commentary of the year, ranked by pageviews:

Most-read news stories of 2024

1. Trump calls Noem to podium at Ohio rally, comments on her appearance
2. Ellsworth temporarily moving 17 planes and 800 people to North Dakota
3. Latest Amtrak study maps include potential routes through Sioux Falls, Rapid City
4. Man in photo Noem used as alleged proof of cartels says it's hindered his right to a fair trial
5. Health lab director says 'very unusual' Sturgis rally overdose reports remain a mystery
6. Drug cartels: A link in every illegal fentanyl pill in South Dakota, not just on reservations
7. McCook Lake residents say their homes were sacrificed, and they want a new flood plan
8. Tribe gets nearly \$8 million from federal program that state shunned
9. Noem rejects more than \$70 million in federal funds for energy and environmental programs
10. New landscape confronts South Dakota Republicans after political earthquake shakes incumbents

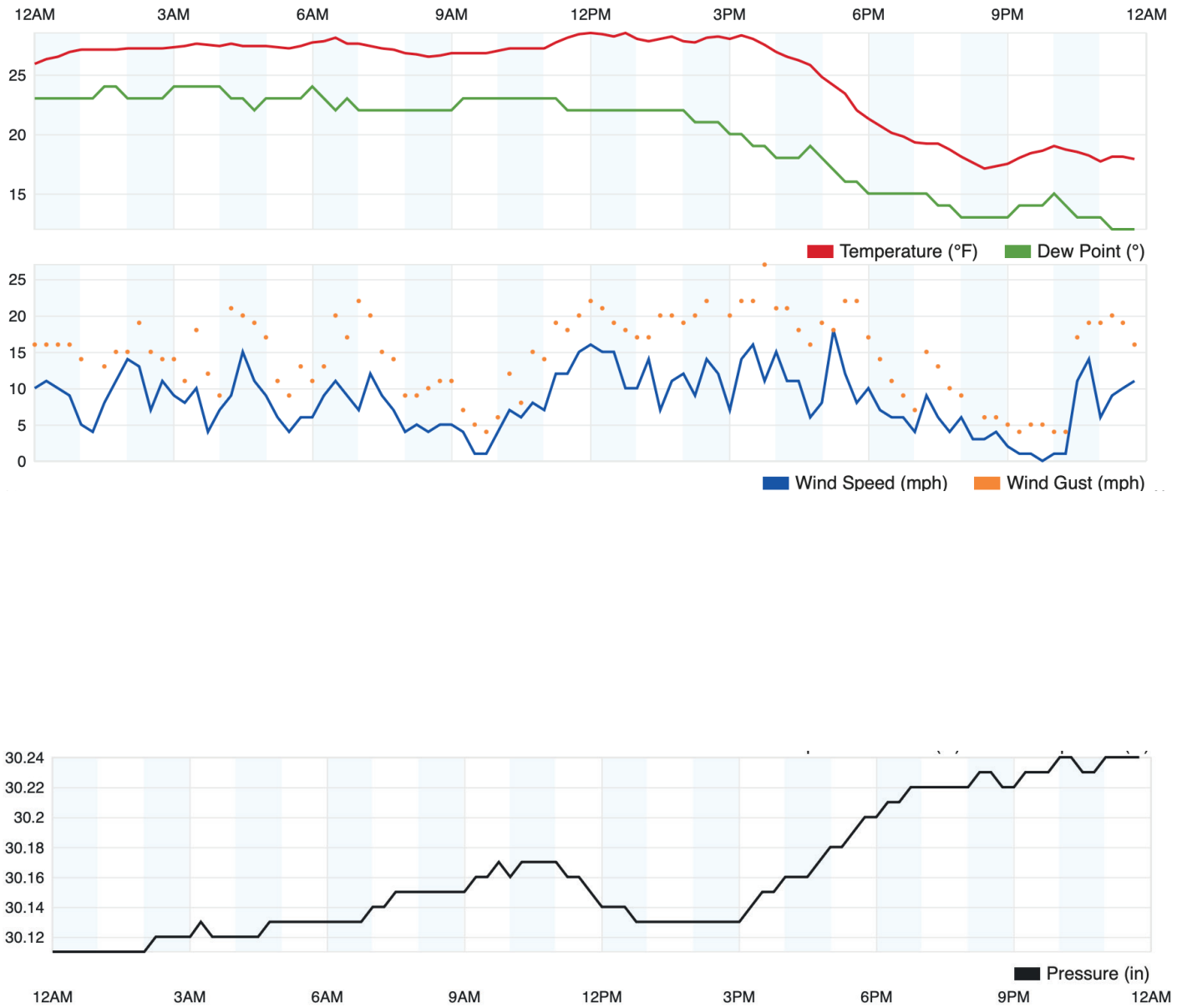
Most-read commentary of 2024

1. Flood washes away Noem's false veneer of leadership
2. Noem-Lewandowski relationship doesn't have to be an affair to be inappropriate
3. Noem's dog killing was bad, but to really understand her, consider the goat
4. South Dakota drug conviction is among the baggage RFK Jr. brings to the ballot
5. What Noem's shot heard around the world says about her approach to problems
6. Well, it's official. Kristi Noem is breaking up with South Dakota.
7. Puppy-killing Kristi Noem may have brought us together
8. Why South Dakota health care is the nation's second most expensive
9. Noem rides back to D.C., possibly eyeing a bigger prize
10. Noem's border aid comes with personal costs for South Dakotans

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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New Year's Day



High: 24 °F

Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 6 °F

Mostly Cloudy

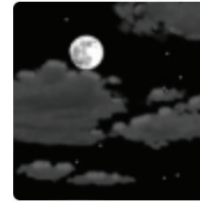
Thursday



High: 17 °F

Mostly Sunny

Thursday Night



Low: -1 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 11 °F

Mostly Sunny



Happy New Year 2025!

January 1, 2025
3:51 AM

Key Messages

- Colder than normal temperatures should be in place across the region by Thursday.
- The next chance for accumulating snowfall: Saturday/Sunday.

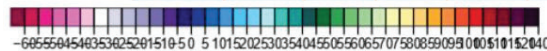
Impacts

- **WIND CHILLS** this weekend and next week down to -10 to -25 degrees.
- Fluffy/blowable accumulating snow Saturday/Sunday

Noteworthy Cooling Trend In The 7-Day

Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	1/1 Wed	1/2 Thu	1/3 Fri	1/4 Sat	1/5 Sun	1/6 Mon	1/7 Tue
Aberdeen	25	18	12	8	9	10	9
Miller	26	19	13	11	9	9	8
Mobridge	27	20	15	12	13	14	12
Murdo	29	22	17	14	13	13	14
Ortonville	23	15	11	8	9	9	9
Pierre	29	23	17	14	13	14	13
Sisseton	21	13	10	6	8	9	8
Watertown	22	15	12	8	10	9	8



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Some of the coldest air of the season will move into the region by the end of the work week. Right now, the next round of accumulating snow appears to be taking shape across western and central South Dakota over the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 29 °F at 12:05 PM

Low Temp: 17 °F at 8:37 PM

Wind: 27 mph at 3:43 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 51 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1998

Record Low: -32 in 2018

Average High: 24

Average Low: 4

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.02

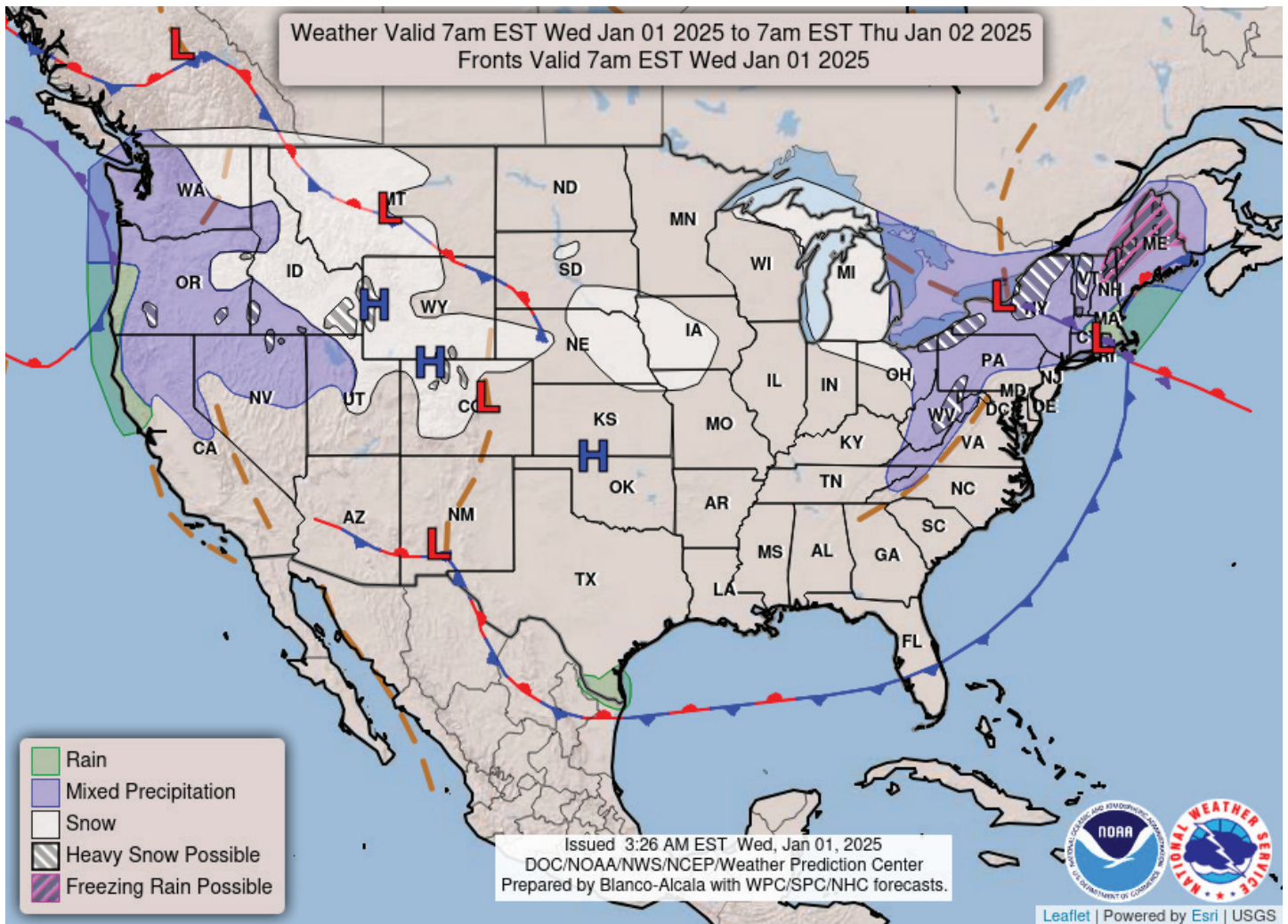
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.02

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:01:56 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:28 am



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Today in Weather History

January 1, 1960: The winter storm began on New Year's Eve as a low-pressure center moved from Colorado northeast to the Great Lakes. Snowfall ranged from 5 to 10 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. High winds on the 1st and 2nd caused low visibilities and drifted highways over affecting holiday travel. There were scattered power and telephone outages due to breakage from wind and ice. The storm wended down in the afternoon of the 2nd.

1767: The morning temperature in Boston was -8°F!

1864: A historic cold blast of air charged southeast from the Northern Plains to Ohio Valley. Chicago had a high temperature of -16°. A farmer near Hometown, Indiana, reported the same high temperature as Chicago, with a low of 21 degrees below zero. He remarked "rough day" in his weather diary. Minneapolis had a temperature of 25 degrees below zero at 2 PM. St. Louis, Missouri, saw an overnight low of 24 degrees below zero. The Mississippi was frozen solid with people able to cross it.

1886: Norway's coldest night on record occurred as the low temperature dropped to -60.5°F at Karasjok. Meteorologisk Institutt.

1888: The Signal Corps office opened in Rapid City, South Dakota, on January 1, 1888. It was located in the Sweeney Building at the corner of 7th and Main Streets. The high and low temperature that day was 6 and -17°F.

1892: At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dandelions were in bloom in parks.

1934 - Heavy rain which began on December 30th led to flooding in the Los Angeles Basin area of California. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 45 persons. Walls of water and debris up to ten feet high were noted in some canyon areas. Rainfall totals ranged up to 16.29 inches at Azusa, with 8.26 inches reported in Downtown Los Angeles. (The Weather Channel)

1935: The Associated Press Wire Photo Service made its debut, delivering the great weather maps twice each day to newspapers across the country. The first photo transmitted was a plane crash in the Adirondack of New York on this day. The plane crashed during the evening hours on December 28, but the rescue did not occur until New Year's Day.

1949 - A six day blizzard began over the Northern Rockies and the Great Plains. The storm produced the most adverse weather conditions in the history of the west. (David Ludlum)

1961: A three-day-long ice storm was beginning over northern Idaho, which produced an accumulation of ice eight inches thick, a U.S. record. Dense fog, which blanketed much of northern Idaho from Grangeville to the Canadian border, deposited the ice on power and phone lines, causing widespread power outages.

1964: A snowstorm struck the Deep South on December 31st, 1963, through January 1st, 1964. Meridian MS received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans, LA. The University of Alabama Head Football Coach "Bear" Bryant said that the only thing that could have messed up his team's chances in the Sugar Bowl against Ole Miss in New Orleans, LA was a freak snowstorm. Well, much to his chagrin, 4.5 inches of snow fell the night before the big game. Alabama won the game 12-7 anyway. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day.

1979 - The temperature at Maybell CO plunged to 60 degrees below zero to tie the state record set back in 1951 at Taylor Park. (The Weather Channel)

1999: The start of 1999 was ushered in with snow, ice, and freezing weather across central and south-central Nebraska. On New Year's Day, a steady snowfall along and north of Interstate 80 dumped from 1 to 5 inches of snow. By late morning, freezing drizzle developed southeast of Hastings and eventually coated area roads with a layer of ice. Light snow later that evening made travel even more treacherous. Several accidents occurred on the Interstates and Highway 30. Once the ice and snow ended, arctic air spilled across the area abroad 20 to 30 mph north winds. Blowing and drifting of the fallen snow caused reduced visibilities for a time on the 2nd. Temperatures dropped to 5 to 15 below zero through midday the 3rd.

2011: Southern and central Mississippi saw 11 tornadoes during the night of December 31st into the morning hours of January 1st. Of the 11, two were EF-3 with two more EF-2. Six were EF-1 with one EF-0.



AN ATTITUDE FOR GRATITUDE

James and his grandmother were having a wonderful day at the beach. The wind was gentle, the sun warm and the crowd friendly. It was a delight for her to watch James as he splashed in the waves not far from where she was relaxing.

Suddenly a large wave came crashing over James and pulled him into the water and out of her sight. In fear and anguish she shouted, "Oh, God, I'll do anything You ever ask me if You will only save my grandson and return him safely to shore. Please God – help me."

The very next wave brought James back to shore safely, but a bit frightened. Standing up and walking toward him, his grandmother gave a sigh of relief knowing he was safe. Then she put her hands on her hips and said, "O.K. God. What happened to his hat?"

Paul wrote, "Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart." It seems to be much easier to "devote ourselves to prayer" than to "devote ourselves to a thankful heart." Giving thanks to someone means we are indebted to them for something.

Our God is a gracious and giving God and all that we have is the result of His goodness and grace. He stands before us with outstretched arms and open hands waiting to draw us close to Himself to protect us and provide for our every need, beginning with our salvation. Yet, too often we fail to be grateful!

Prayer: Forgive us, Heavenly Father, if we have been forgetful in expressing our gratitude to You for all You have done for us. May our thankfulness be equal to Your gifts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Colossians 4:2

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.24

13 22 27 29 35 1

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$42,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 13 Hrs 21
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.30.24

12 16 38 45 50 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$19,540,000

NEXT 12 Hrs 36 Mins
DRAW: 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.24

19 27 37 41 48 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 12 Hrs 51 Mins
DRAW: 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.28.24

5 10 20 27 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$191,000

NEXT 12 Hrs 51 Mins
DRAW: 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.30.24

15 34 52 56 57 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 20 Mins
DRAW: 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.30.24

9 19 33 38 39 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$178,000,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 20 Mins
DRAW: 12 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Avon 41, Irene-Wakonda 20
Canton 59, Alcester-Hudson 27
Castlewood 44, Arlington 38
Centerville 69, Beresford 43
Deubrook 49, Garretson 18
Gayville-Volin High School 68, Bon Homme 25
Harrisburg 49, Yankton 39
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 89, Little Wound 16
Sioux Falls Jefferson 57, Sioux Falls Lincoln 32
Sioux Falls Washington 58, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33
Parkston Classic=
Dakota Valley 62, Wall 36
McCook Central-Montrose 58, Wessington Springs 38

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Alcester-Hudson 57, Canton 42
Beresford 64, Centerville 62
Castlewood 72, Arlington 32
Deubrook 63, Garretson 61
Gayville-Volin High School 58, Bon Homme 28
Hanson 56, Kimball-White Lake 28
Harrisburg 48, Yankton 40
Sioux Falls Lincoln 68, Sioux Falls Jefferson 63
Sioux Falls Washington 57, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 48
Parkston Classic=
Dakota Valley 63, Winner 47
Parkston 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 42
Wall 65, McCook Central-Montrose 45
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Avon vs. Irene-Wakonda, ppd. to Dec 31st.

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Former South Dakota St. player and assistant Dan Jackson hired as Jackrabbits' head football coach

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Former South Dakota State player and assistant Dan Jackson has been hired as the Jackrabbits' new head coach, the school announced Tuesday night.

Jackson takes over for Jimmy Rogers, who left for Washington State after leading the Jackrabbits to the Football Championship Subdivision semifinals.

Jackson was Idaho coach Jason Eck's defensive coordinator this season and had been set to move to New Mexico for the same position under Eck before the SDSU job opened.

Jackson played for the Jackrabbits from 2003-05 and became a graduate assistant at SDSU in 2012,

when the program began its current streak of 13 straight FCS playoff appearances.

He was elevated to cornerbacks coach in 2014 and also served as recruiting coordinator, special teams coordinator and assistant head coach under John Stiegelmeier before moving on to Northern Illinois following the 2019 season. Jackson coached two seasons at Northern Illinois, then was hired at Vanderbilt, where he coached defensive backs during the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

The Jackrabbits, who won national titles in 2022 and 2023, finished this season 12-3 overall and as co-champions in the Missouri Valley Football Conference.

Jimmy the Baptist: Carter redefined 'evangelical,' from campaigns to race and women's rights

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Before reaching the 1978 peace deal between Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin, Jimmy Carter managed months of intense preparation, high-stakes negotiations at Camp David and a field trip to the Gettysburg battlefield to demonstrate the consequences of war.

But looking back on his most celebrated foreign policy achievement, the 39th president said intricate diplomacy ultimately wasn't the deciding factor.

"We finally got an agreement because we all shared faith in the same God," Carter told biographer Jonathan Alter, as he traced his Christianity, Begin's Judaism and Sadat's Islam to their common ancestor in each religion's sacred texts. "We all considered ourselves the sons of Abraham."

Carter, who died Sunday at 100, was widely known as a man of faith, especially after his long post-presidency became defined by images of the Baptist Sunday School teacher building homes for low-income people and fighting diseases across the developing world.

Yet beyond piety and service, the Georgia Democrat stood out from his earliest days on the national stage with unusually prolific, nuanced explanations of his beliefs. Carter quoted Jesus and famous theologians and connected it all to his policy pursuits, living out his own definition of what it means to be a self-professed Christian in American politics.

"Most people go to Washington in search of their own power," said David Gergen, a White House adviser to four presidents. "Carter went to Washington in search of our national soul. That doesn't mean those others didn't have good intentions, but for Jimmy Carter it just seemed like a different purpose."

What happened when Carter described his faith to 'Playboy' magazine

As a candidate in 1976, Carter described himself as a "born-again Christian." Based on the New Testament, the reference is routine for many Protestants in the South who believe following Jesus means adopting a new version of oneself. To national media and voters unfamiliar with evangelical lexicon, it made Carter a curiosity.

"We saw ourselves as being very much cultural outcasts" as evangelicals in the mid-1970s, said Dartmouth College professor Randall Balmer, who has written extensively on Carter's faith. The evangelical movement had not yet become a political force mostly aligned with Republicans, and "to have someone use our language to describe himself and still be taken seriously as a presidential candidate," Balmer said, "was startling, really."

Carter used the presidency to elevate human rights in U.S. foreign policy, champion environmental conservation and resist military conflict. He criticized American greed and consumerism. He proselytized to other world leaders.

Carter continued the approach for decades thereafter through The Carter Center and its global efforts on peace, democracy and public health. Into his 90s, Carter criticized American militarism and noted one of Jesus's Biblical monikers: "Prince of Peace."

"He carried his faith with him every minute of every day, and he put it to use every single minute of every single day," said Jill Stuckey, a Plains resident and longtime friend of Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, who died in November 2023 at 96.

Carter's faith insisted on public service above politics

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U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg attended some of Carter's church lessons in Plains, Georgia, and sought the former president's counsel during his own campaign in 2020. He said Carter elevated faith beyond partisan divisions.

"There are a lot of conservatives who seem to use the Bible almost as a weapon or a cudgel, and there are a lot of liberals who seem to use faith mostly as a way to desperately signal that they're not bad people," Buttigieg told The Associated Press. "President Carter demonstrated a third thing — faith that calls you to make yourself useful to others."

Carter's unabashed evangelism was an outlier in a Democratic Party that grew more secular and pluralistic during his public life. Yet Carter advocated "absolute and total separation of church and state" and opposed public money for religious schools. He admired the Rev. Billy Graham personally, but called it "inappropriate" to invite the nation's leading evangelical to lead White House prayer services, as Graham did for previous administrations.

Carter further distinguished himself from many evangelicals by criticizing Israel's treatment of Palestinians and taking liberal stances on race relations, women's rights and, as he grew older, LGBTQ rights. He once described feeling shocked when a "high official" in the Southern Baptist Convention told him in the Oval Office that "we are praying, Mr. President, that you will abandon your secular humanism as your religion."

By his later years, Carter "was happy with the label of 'progressive evangelical,'" Balmer said.

How did Carter come to define his faith?

Carter grew up as the son of a deacon in the Southern Baptist Convention, a conservative denomination founded before the Civil War as a regional splinter group that supported slavery. He did not openly question his father's segregationist views or the white supremacist origins of his denomination, and he didn't yet consider himself an evangelical as a young man. But he had exposure to Black evangelical traditions by occasionally visiting St. Mark AME Church, the congregation of the tenant farming families that worked his father's land.

"I could see spirit, sincerity and fervor in their worship services that we lacked in our church in Plains," Carter once wrote.

Decades later, during the Civil Rights Movement, Carter urged his Plains congregation to allow integrated worship, but he and Rosalynn stood virtually alone. Carter was a state senator by then, and notably did not offer such explicit integration advocacy beyond church walls.

After his failed bid for governor in 1966, Carter was "disillusioned with politics and life in general," he wrote. His sister Ruth, a well-known evangelist and faith healer, persuaded him to go on "pioneer missions." The future president knocked on doors to share the gospel in Pennsylvania and in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods of Massachusetts. He came to see these sojourns as a catalyst to "apply my Christian faith much more regularly to my secular life."

Carter spread his gospel to folksingers and communist leaders

Carter even got to share his Christianity with Bob Dylan, in a one-on-one session the iconic folksinger sought with the Georgia governor in 1971.

In 1977, during his first foreign trip as president, Carter was invited by Edward Gierek, Poland's top leader under Moscow's Soviet control, to speak without their aides present, Carter later recalled. Gierek was "somewhat ill at ease" while explaining that he was an atheist in conformity with the Kremlin, but wanted to learn about Christianity. So Carter shared some Christian principles, and "asked him if he would consider accepting Jesus Christ as his personal savior."

Gierek replied that he could not make a public declaration, and "I never knew what his decision was," Carter later wrote. But in 1979, Gierek rebuffed Moscow's orders by allowing newly elected Pope John Paul II to visit his native Poland. The Kremlin deposed Gierek in 1980, but that visit became a seminal moment in John Paul's papacy and his efforts to break the Soviet Union.

At a White House dinner, Carter pressed Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to allow freedom of worship and Bible ownership and admit American missionaries. Xiaping allowed the first two but not the latter. Carter in 2018 noted projections that China, by 2025, will have more Protestants than America.

And at Camp David, Carter prayed often and talked openly of faith with Begin and Sadat, unpacking ancient animosities between their religions.

Carter evolved on equal rights and gay marriage

When the Carters left the White House in 1981, having had enough of the lingering racial tensions at Plains Baptist Church, they transferred to nearby Maranatha Baptist Church, Balmer said. Carter's hometown funeral will take place there after his state service at Washington's National Cathedral.

Carter disaffiliated from Southern Baptists two decades later, at the age of 76, because the denomination's leadership, he said, demeaned women as subservient to men in the home, church and wider society. Carter remained at Maranatha, noting that the congregation's deacons were divided about evenly between the sexes.

"There is one incontrovertible act concerning the relationship between Jesus Christ and women," Carter explained in his final book, "Faith," published in 2018. "He treated them as equal to men, which was dramatically different from the prevailing custom of the times."

Carter had a slower shift on LGBTQ matters. In a 1976 campaign interview with Playboy magazine, he said he considered sexual relations outside of marriage a sin and, thus, could not easily reconcile homosexuality. The answer did not contemplate same-sex marriage as a legitimate civil or religious institution.

Carter asked: 'What would Jesus do?'

As his 75th wedding anniversary approached in 2021, however, Carter had a different view on government- and church-sanctioned marriage for same-sex couples. "I don't have any opposition it," he told AP, declaring himself "very liberal" on any issue "that relates to human rights." Sexuality "will continue to be divisive" within Christianity, he predicted, "but the church is evolving."

Buttigieg, an Episcopalian whose same-sex marriage is recognized by his church, said Carter's willingness to be open about his faith, in all its complexity, provides a "tremendous example" for "a generation of Christians who don't believe that God belongs to any political party."

The Rev. Bernice King, the daughter of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., praised Carter as a "man of peace and compassion" and argued that for all his books and expositions and Sunday School lessons, the Baptist from Plains hewed to a simple faith.

"He looked at the life of Jesus Christ and how Christ interfaced and interacted with people," King said. "He wrestled with that as a leader. I think he took serious: 'What would Jesus do? ... What would somebody that is love-centered do?'"

Israeli strikes kill 12 in Gaza including children as war grinds into the new year

By WAFSA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes killed at least 12 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, officials said Wednesday, as the nearly 15-month war ground on into the new year.

One strike hit a home in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza, the most isolated and heavily destroyed part of the territory, where Israel has waged a major operation since early October. Gaza's Health Ministry said seven people were killed, including a woman and four children, and at least a dozen other people were wounded.

Another strike overnight in the built-up Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza killed a woman and a child, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies.

"Are you celebrating? Enjoy as we die. For a year and a half, we have been dying," said a man carrying the body of a child in the flashing lights of emergency vehicles.

Israel's military said militants fired rockets at Israel from the Bureij area overnight and that its forces responded with a strike targeting a militant. The military also issued evacuation orders for the area.

A third strike in the southern city of Khan Younis killed three people, according to Nasser Hospital and the European Hospital, which received the bodies.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200

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people and abducting around 250. About 100 hostages are still held in Gaza, at least a third believed to be dead.

Israel's air and ground offensive has killed over 45,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says women and children make up more than half the dead but does not say how many of those killed were militants.

The Israeli military says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because its fighters operate in dense residential areas. The army says it has killed 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, many of them multiple times.

Hundreds of thousands live in tents on the coast as winter brings frequent rainstorms and temperatures drop below 10 degrees Celsius (50 F) at night. At least six infants and another person have died of hypothermia, according to the Health Ministry.

Many displaced Palestinians in central Gaza rely on charity kitchens as their sole food provider amid restrictions on aid and skyrocketing prices. AP footage showed a long line of children waiting for rice, the only item served at the kitchen in Deir al-Balah on Wednesday.

"Some of those kitchens close because they don't receive aid, and others distribute little amounts of food and it's not enough," said Umm Adham Shaheen, displaced from Gaza City.

American and Arab mediators have spent nearly a year trying to broker a ceasefire and hostage release, but those efforts have repeatedly stalled. Hamas has demanded a lasting truce, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep fighting until "total victory."

Israel sees net departure of citizens for a second year

More than 82,000 Israelis moved abroad in 2024 and 33,000 people immigrated to the country, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics said. Another 23,000 Israelis returned after long periods abroad.

It was the second straight year of net departures, a rare occurrence in the history of the country that actively encourages Jewish immigration. Many Israelis, looking for a break from the war, have moved abroad, leading to concern about whether it will drive a "brain drain" in sectors like medicine and technology.

Last year, 15,000 fewer people immigrated to Israel than in 2023.

Military blames 'weakening of discipline' in archaeologist's death

In a separate development, Israel's military blamed "operational burnout" and a "weakening of discipline and safety" in the killing of a 70-year-old archaeologist in southern Lebanon in November along with a soldier while visiting a combat zone.

According to Israeli media reports, Zeev Erlich was not on active duty but was wearing a military uniform and had a weapon. The army said he was a reservist and identified him as a "fallen soldier" when it announced his death.

Erlich was a well-known West Bank settler and researcher of Jewish history. Media reports have said he entered Lebanon to explore an archaeological site.

The military launched an investigation after the two were killed in a Hezbollah ambush. A separate probe is looking into who allowed Erlich to enter. The family of the soldier who was killed with him has expressed anger over the circumstances.

The military said the entry of civilians who are not military contractors or journalists into combat zones is not widespread. Still, there have been multiple reports of Israeli civilians who support a permanent Israeli presence in Gaza or Lebanon entering those areas.

Law enforcement officials tell the AP that the suspect in the New Orleans crash is dead

By KEVIN MCGILL and GERALD HERBERT Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The suspect who drove a vehicle at high speed into a crowd of revelers in New Orleans on New Year's Day was killed after a firefight with police, law enforcement officials told the AP.

The officials were not authorized to discuss details of the investigation publicly and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Ten people were killed and 30 were injured after the suspect rammed a vehicle at high speed into a crowd of pedestrians in New Orleans' bustling French Quarter district at 3:15 a.m. Wednesday along Bourbon Street.

The area is known worldwide as one of the largest destinations for New Year's Eve parties, and with crowds in the city ballooning in anticipation for the Sugar Bowl college football playoff game at the nearby Superdome later in the day.

The FBI said in a statement that it was heading an investigation "with our partners to investigate this as an act of terrorism." At a news conference, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell described the killings as a "terrorist attack" and the city's police chief said the act was clearly intentional.

Alethea Duncan, an assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's New Orleans field office, said officials were investigating the discovery of at least one suspected improvised explosive device at the scene.

Whit Davis, 22, told CNN he was leaving a nightclub at the time of the attack.

"Everyone started yelling and screaming and running to the back, and then we basically went into lockdown for a little bit and then it calmed down but they wouldn't let us leave," Davis said.

"When they finally let us out of the club, police waved us where to walk and were telling us to get out of the area fast. I saw a few dead bodies they couldn't even cover up and tons of people receiving first aid."

Police Commissioner Anne Kirkpatrick said police officers would work to ensure safety at the Sugar Bowl, indicating that the game would go on as scheduled.

She said the suspect was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did."

"It was very intentional behavior. This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said.

Two police officers who were shot after the driver emerged from the truck are in stable condition, she said.

Officials did not immediately provide an update on the status of the driver, whether there was an ongoing threat to the public or offer a suspected motive in the fatal incident.

NOLA Ready, the city's emergency preparedness department, said the injured had been taken to five local hospitals.

The White House said President Joe Biden has been briefed. Attorney General Merrick Garland was also briefed on the attack, the Justice Department said.

Trump says he is planning to attend Jimmy Carter's funeral

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump said Tuesday that he's planning to attend the funeral of former President Jimmy Carter.

Asked about it as he walked into a New Year's Eve party at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, Trump responded, "I'll be there." Pressed on whether he'd spoken to members of Carter's family, Trump said he'd rather not say.

Funeral services honoring Carter, who died Sunday at 100, will be held in Georgia and Washington, beginning Jan. 4 and concluding Jan. 9.

Trump was a frequent and fierce critic of Carter on the campaign trail ahead of November's election, using the rising inflation rates of the 1970s to unfavorably compare President Joe Biden to Carter and his administration.

But the president-elect was gracious about the former president in posts on his social media site after Carter's death Sunday, writing that the nation "owed him a debt of gratitude."

"While I strongly disagreed with him philosophically and politically, I also realized that he truly loved and respected our Country, and all it stands for," Trump wrote of Carter. "He worked hard to make America a better place, and for that I give him my highest respect."

Wearing a tuxedo as he entered the festivities, Trump took a few minutes of questions from reporters

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on various topics. He was asked about the possibility of a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza, but said only, "We're going to see what happens."

The president-elect added of hostages seized more than a year ago by Hamas, "I'll put it this way: They better let the hostages come back soon."

Trump also said he thought 2025 would be a "great year" and "we're going to do fantastically well as a country."

"There's a whole light over the whole world, not just our country. They're a lot of happy people," Trump said of recent weeks.

Asked about his resolutions for the new year, Trump said, "I just want everybody to be happy, healthy and well."

Trump later took the stage to briefly address the crowd ringing in the new year at Mar-a-Lago and promised "to do a great job as your president."

Biden, for his part, spent New Year's Eve celebrating the wedding of his niece Missy Owens in Greenville, Delaware, followed by the reception in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Biden and first lady Jill Biden cut short their traditional holiday trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands to attend the ceremony.

The world welcomes 2025 with light shows, embraces and ice plunges

By MELISSA GOLDIN, CEDAR ATTANASIO and CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — From Sydney to Mumbai to Paris to Rio de Janeiro, communities around the world welcomed 2025 with spectacular light shows, embraces and ice plunges.

The New Year's Eve ball dropped in soggy Times Square, where thousands of revelers stuck it out in heavy rain to celebrate the start of 2025 in New York City.

Countries in the South Pacific Ocean were the first to ring in the New Year, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball dropped in Times Square. Auckland was the first major city to celebrate, with thousands thronging downtown or climbing the city's ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point.

Conflict muted acknowledgements of the start of 2025 in places like the Middle East, Sudan and Ukraine. American Samoa will be among the last to welcome 2025, a full 24 hours after New Zealand.

Earliest fireworks

A few hours after Auckland, fireworks blasted off Australia's Sydney Harbor Bridge and across the bay. More than a million people gathered at iconic Sydney Harbor for the celebration. British pop star Robbie Williams led a singalong with the crowd.

The celebration also featured Indigenous ceremonies and performances that acknowledged the land's first people.

American traditions, old and new

In New York City, crowds cheered and couples kissed when the ball weighing almost 6 tons (5.4 metric tons) and featuring 2,688 crystal triangles descended down a pole in Times Square. The celebration included musical performances by TLC and Jonas Brothers.

The revelry culminated with a dance party and a carpeting of soggy confetti as attendees left singing along to Frank Sinatra's version of "New York, New York."

Angie Cuadrado, from Virginia, said she hopes 2025 is going to be great. "We're sending positive vibes everywhere," she said.

Las Vegas' pyrotechnic show will be on the Strip, with 340,000 people anticipated as fireworks are launched from the rooftops of casinos. Nearby, the Sphere venue will display for the first time countdowns to midnight in different time zones.

In Pasadena, California, Rose Parade spectators were camping out and hoping for prime spots. And some 200,000 people flocked to a country music party in Nashville, Tennessee.

Asia prepares for Year of the Snake

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Much of Japan shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday, as temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning.

The upcoming Year of the Snake in the Asian zodiac is heralded as one of rebirth — alluding to the reptile's shedding skin. Other places in Asia will mark the Year of the Snake later, with the Lunar New Year.

In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or canceled during a period of national mourning following Sunday's crash of a Jeju Air flight in Muan that killed 179 people.

China and Russia exchange goodwill

Chinese state media covered an exchange of New Year's greetings between leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a reminder of growing closeness between two leaders who face tensions with the West.

Xi told Putin their countries will "always move forward hand in hand," the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China has maintained ties and robust trade with Russia since the latter invaded Ukraine in 2022, helping to offset Western sanctions and attempts to isolate Putin.

Seaside celebrations and beyond

In India, thousands of revelers in the financial hub of Mumbai flocked to the city's bustling promenade facing the Arabian Sea. In Sri Lanka, people gathered at Buddhist temples to light oil lamps and incense sticks and pray.

In Dubai, thousands attended a fireworks show at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper. And in Nairobi, Kenya, scattered fireworks were heard.

A Holy Year begins

Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities have an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration projected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025.

On Tuesday, Francis celebrated a vespers at St. Peter's Basilica. During Mass on Wednesday he is expected to again appeal for peace in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Jan. 1 is a day of obligation for Catholics, marking the Solemnity of Mary.

In Saint Paul, Minnesota, about 400 Catholics joined the archbishop for a rare 11 p.m. Mass followed by a champagne reception in the city's monumental cathedral.

"People have the tradition to stay up and toast the new year, so we said, 'Ok, let's build on that,'" said the Rev. Joseph Johnson.

Paris recaptures the Olympic spirit

Paris capped a momentous 2024 with its traditional countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the Champs-Élysées. The city's emblematic Arc de Triomphe monument was turned into a giant tableau for a light show that celebrated the city's landmarks and the passage of time, with whirring clocks.

"Paris is a party," proclaimed Mayor Anne Hidalgo.

The Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games hosted in the French capital from July to September had transformed the city into a site of joy, fraternity and astonishing sporting achievements.

Wintry weather, for good and bad

London rang in the New Year with a pyrotechnic display along the River Thames. With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland, were canceled.

But in Switzerland and some other places, people embraced the cold, stripping and plunging into the water in freezing temperatures.

Millions revel in Rio

Rio de Janeiro threw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana beach, with barges shooting off 12 straight minutes of fireworks. Thousands of tourists on cruise ships and charter boats witnessed the show up close, while many more streamed onto the sand to find their spot.

The crowd on Copacabana was expected to exceed 2 million people — most decked out in white to keep with tradition. They packed together to enjoy concerts by Brazilian music legends Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia and Ivete Sangalo, among others. Right after the fireworks concluded, Brazil's biggest pop star,

Anitta, took the stage.

"It's so magical. It's an incredible thing," Alejandro Legarreta, a tourist from Puerto Rico, said after diving into the ocean.

South Korea air crash investigators extract black box data as grieving families mourn the victims

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Grieving relatives of the victims of the South Korea plane crash gathered at the site to pay respects to their loved ones on New Year's Day, as officials said they've extracted data from one of the retrieved black boxes to find the exact cause of the crash.

All but two of the 181 passengers and crew on board the Boeing 737-800 operated by Jeju Air died when it crashed at Muan International Airport, in southern South Korea, on Sunday.

Video showed the aircraft without its landing gear deployed landing on its belly at high speed and then skidding off the end of the runway into a concrete fence and bursting into flames. The footage showed the plane was experiencing an apparent engine problem in addition to the landing gear malfunction.

Investigators say the pilot received a warning from air traffic controllers of possible bird strikes and the plane issued a distress signal before the crash.

The Transport Ministry said in a statement Wednesday that it has completed works to extract data from the cockpit voice recorder — one of the two black boxes recovered from the wreckage. It said the data would be converted into audio files. A damaged flight data recorder will be sent to the United States for an analysis, the ministry added.

All of the victims were South Korean, except for two Thais nationals, with many returning from Bangkok after Christmas holidays.

The bereaved families visited the site on Wednesday for the first time since the crash for an emotional memorial service. They were bused to the site where they took turns laying white flowers. Many knelt and bowed deeply before a memorial table laid with food, including "ddeokguk," a Korean rice cake soup eaten on New Year's Day.

The Transport Ministry said authorities have completed the complicated process of identifying all 179 victims. It said the government has so far handed over 11 bodies to relatives.

The country is observing seven days of national mourning following the deadliest disaster in South Korea's aviation history in decades.

The government has begun safety inspections of all 101 Boeing 737-800s operated by the country's domestic airlines. On Tuesday, a team of U.S. investigators, including representatives from Boeing, examined the crash site.

Officials have said they will consider whether the airport's localizer — a set of antennas housed in a concrete fence at the end of the runway designed to guide aircraft during landings — should have been constructed with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact.

Harry Chandler, Navy medic who survived Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, dies at 103

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Harry Chandler, a Navy medic who helped pull injured sailors from the oily waters of Pearl Harbor after the 1941 Japanese attack on the naval base, has died. He was 103.

Chandler died Monday at a senior living center in Tequesta, Florida, according to Ron Mahaffee, the husband of his granddaughter Kelli Fahey. Chandler had congestive heart failure, but Mahaffee said doctors and nurses noted his advanced age when giving a cause of death.

The third Pearl Harbor survivor to die in the past few weeks, Chandler was a hospital corpsman 3rd

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class on Dec. 7, 1941, when waves of Japanese fighter planes dropped bombs and fired machine guns on battleships in the harbor and plunged the U.S. into World War II.

He told The Associated Press in 2023 that he saw the planes approach as he was raising the flag that morning at a mobile hospital in Aiea Heights, which is in the hills overlooking the base.

"I thought they were planes coming in from the states until I saw the bombs dropping," Chandler said. His first instinct was to take cover and "get the hell out of here."

"I was afraid that they'd start strafing," he said.

His unit rode trucks down to attend the injured. He said in a Pacific Historic Parks oral history interview that he boarded a boat to help pluck wounded sailors from the water.

The harbor was covered in oil from exploding ships, so Chandler washed the sailors off after lifting them out. He said he was too focused on his work to be afraid.

"It got so busy you weren't scared. Weren't scared at all. We were busy. It was after you got scared," Chandler said.

He realized later that he could have been killed, "But you didn't think about that while you were busy taking care of people."

The attack killed more than 2,300 U.S. servicemen. Nearly half, or 1,177, were sailors and Marines on board the USS Arizona, which sank nine minutes after it was bombed.

Chandler's memories came flowing back when he visited Pearl Harbor for a 2023 ceremony commemorating the 82nd anniversary of the bombing.

"I look out there, and I can still see what's going on. I can still see what was happening," Chandler told The Associated Press.

Asked what he wanted Americans to know about Pearl Harbor, he said: "Be prepared."

"We should have known that was going to happen. The intelligence has to be better," he said.

After the war Chandler worked as a painter and wallpaper hanger and bought an upholstery business with his brother. He also joined the Navy reserves, retiring as a senior chief in 1981.

Chandler was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and lived for most of his adult life in nearby South Hadley, Mahaffee said. In recent decades he split his time between Massachusetts and Florida.

An avid golfer, he shot five hole-in-ones during his lifetime, his grandson-in-law added.

Chandler had one biological daughter and adopted two daughters from his second marriage, to Anna Chandler, who died in 2004. He is survived by two daughters, nine grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

Military historian J. Michael Wenger has estimated that there were some 87,000 military personnel on the island of Oahu the day of the attack. With Chandler's death only 15 are still living, according to a tally maintained by Kathleen Farley, the California state chair of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors.

Bob Fernandez, who served on the USS Curtiss, also died this month, at age 100, and Warren Upton, 105, who served on the USS Utah, died last week.

Jimmy the Baptist: Carter redefined 'evangelical,' from campaigns to race and women's rights

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Before reaching the 1978 peace deal between Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin, Jimmy Carter managed months of intense preparation, high-stakes negotiations at Camp David and a field trip to the Gettysburg battlefield to demonstrate the consequences of war.

But looking back on his most celebrated foreign policy achievement, the 39th president said intricate diplomacy ultimately wasn't the deciding factor.

"We finally got an agreement because we all shared faith in the same God," Carter told biographer Jonathan Alter, as he traced his Christianity, Begin's Judaism and Sadat's Islam to their common ancestor in each religion's sacred texts. "We all considered ourselves the sons of Abraham."

Carter, who died Sunday at 100, was widely known as a man of faith, especially after his long post-

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presidency became defined by images of the Baptist Sunday School teacher building homes for low-income people and fighting diseases across the developing world.

Yet beyond piety and service, the Georgia Democrat stood out from his earliest days on the national stage with unusually prolific, nuanced explanations of his beliefs. Carter quoted Jesus and famous theologians and connected it all to his policy pursuits, living out his own definition of what it means to be a self-professed Christian in American politics.

"Most people go to Washington in search of their own power," said David Gergen, a White House adviser to four presidents. "Carter went to Washington in search of our national soul. That doesn't mean those others didn't have good intentions, but for Jimmy Carter it just seemed like a different purpose."

What happened when Carter described his faith to 'Playboy' magazine

As a candidate in 1976, Carter described himself as a "born-again Christian." Based on the New Testament, the reference is routine for many Protestants in the South who believe following Jesus means adopting a new version of oneself. To national media and voters unfamiliar with evangelical lexicon, it made Carter a curiosity.

"We saw ourselves as being very much cultural outcasts" as evangelicals in the mid-1970s, said Dartmouth College professor Randall Balmer, who has written extensively on Carter's faith. The evangelical movement had not yet become a political force mostly aligned with Republicans, and "to have someone use our language to describe himself and still be taken seriously as a presidential candidate," he said, "was startling, really."

Carter used the presidency to elevate human rights in U.S. foreign policy, champion environmental conservation and resist military conflict. He criticized American greed and consumerism. He proselytized to other world leaders.

Carter continued the approach for decades thereafter through The Carter Center and its global efforts on peace, democracy and public health. Into his 90s, Carter criticized American militarism and noted one of Jesus's Biblical monikers: "Prince of Peace."

"He carried his faith with him every minute of every day, and he put it to use every single minute of every single day," said Jill Stuckey, a Plains resident and longtime friend of Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, who died in November at 96.

Carter's faith insisted on public service above politics

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg attended some of Carter's church lessons in Plains, Georgia, and sought the former president's counsel during his own campaign in 2020. He said Carter elevated faith beyond partisan divisions.

"There are a lot of conservatives who seem to use the Bible almost as a weapon or a cudgel, and there are a lot of liberals who seem to use faith mostly as a way to desperately signal that they're not bad people," Buttigieg told The Associated Press. "President Carter demonstrated a third thing — faith that calls you to make yourself useful to others."

Carter's unabashed evangelism was an outlier in a Democratic Party that grew more secular and pluralistic during his public life. Yet Carter advocated "absolute and total separation of church and state" and opposed public money for religious schools. He admired the Rev. Billy Graham personally, but called it "inappropriate" to invite the nation's leading evangelical to lead White House prayer services, as Graham did for previous administrations.

Carter further distinguished himself from many evangelicals by criticizing Israel's treatment of Palestinians and taking liberal stances on race relations, women's rights and, as he grew older, LGBTQ rights. He once described feeling shocked when a "high official" in the Southern Baptist Convention told him in the Oval Office that "we are praying, Mr. President, that you will abandon your secular humanism as your religion."

By his later years, Carter "was happy with the label of 'progressive evangelical,'" Balmer said.

How did Carter come to define his faith?

Carter grew up as the son of a deacon in the Southern Baptist Convention, a conservative denomination founded before the Civil War as a regional splinter group that supported slavery. He did not openly ques-

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tion his father's segregationist views or the white supremacist origins of his denomination, and he didn't yet consider himself an evangelical as a young man. But he had exposure to Black evangelical traditions by occasionally visiting St. Mark AME Church, the congregation of the tenant farming families that worked his father's land.

"I could see spirit, sincerity and fervor in their worship services that we lacked in our church in Plains," Carter once wrote.

Decades later, during the Civil Rights Movement, Carter urged his Plains congregation to allow integrated worship, but he and Rosalynn stood virtually alone. Carter was a state senator by then, and notably did not offer such explicit integration advocacy beyond church walls.

After his failed bid for governor in 1966, Carter was "disillusioned with politics and life in general," he wrote. His sister Ruth, a well-known evangelist and faith healer, persuaded him to go on "pioneer missions." The future president knocked on doors to share the gospel in Pennsylvania and in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods of Massachusetts. He came to see these sojourns as a catalyst to "apply my Christian faith much more regularly to my secular life."

Carter spread his gospel to folksingers and communist leaders

Carter even got to share his Christianity with Bob Dylan, in a one-on-one session the iconic folksinger sought with the Georgia governor in 1971.

In 1977, during his first foreign trip as president, Carter was invited by Edward Gierek, Poland's top leader under Moscow's Soviet control, to speak without their aides present, Carter later recalled. Gierek was "somewhat ill at ease" while explaining that he was an atheist in conformity with the Kremlin, but wanted to learn about Christianity. So Carter shared some Christian principles, and "asked him if he would consider accepting Jesus Christ as his personal savior."

Gierek replied that he could not make a public declaration, and "I never knew what his decision was," Carter later wrote. But in 1979, Gierek rebuffed Moscow's orders by allowing newly elected Pope John Paul II to visit his native Poland. The Kremlin deposed Gierek in 1980, but that visit became a seminal moment in John Paul's papacy and his efforts to break the Soviet Union.

At a White House dinner, Carter pressed Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to allow freedom of worship and Bible ownership and admit American missionaries. Xiaping allowed the first two but not the latter. Carter in 2018 noted projections that China, by 2025, will have more Protestants than America.

And at Camp David, Carter prayed often and talked openly of faith with Begin and Sadat, unpacking ancient animosities between their religions.

Carter evolved on equal rights and gay marriage

When the Carters left the White House in 1981, having had enough of the lingering racial tensions at Plains Baptist Church, they transferred to nearby Maranatha Baptist Church, Balmer said. Carter's hometown funeral will take place there after his state service at Washington's National Cathedral.

Carter disaffiliated from Southern Baptists two decades later, at the age of 76, because the denomination's leadership, he said, demeaned women as subservient to men in the home, church and wider society. Carter remained at Maranatha, noting that the congregation's deacons were divided about evenly between the sexes.

"There is one incontrovertible act concerning the relationship between Jesus Christ and women," Carter explained in his final book, "Faith," published in 2018. "He treated them as equal to men, which was dramatically different from the prevailing custom of the times."

Carter had a slower shift on LGBTQ matters. In a 1976 campaign interview with Playboy magazine, he said he considered sexual relations outside of marriage a sin and, thus, could not easily reconcile homosexuality. The answer did not contemplate same-sex marriage as a legitimate civil or religious institution.

Carter asked: 'What would Jesus do?'

As his 75th wedding anniversary approached in 2021, however, Carter had a different view on government- and church-sanctioned marriage for same-sex couples. "I don't have any opposition it," he told AP, declaring himself "very liberal" on any issue "that relates to human rights." Sexuality "will continue to be divisive" within Christianity, he predicted, "but the church is evolving."

Buttigieg, an Episcopalian whose same-sex marriage is recognized by his church, said Carter's willingness to be open about his faith, in all its complexity, provides a "tremendous example" for "a generation of Christians who don't believe that God belongs to any political party."

The Rev. Bernice King, the daughter of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., praised Carter as a "man of peace and compassion" and argued that for all his books and expositions and Sunday School lessons, the Baptist from Plains hewed to a simple faith.

"He looked at the life of Jesus Christ and how Christ interfaced and interacted with people," King said. "He wrestled with that as a leader. I think he took serious: 'What would Jesus do? ... What would somebody that is love-centered do?'"

Psychedelic therapy begins in Colorado, causing tension between conservatives and veterans

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — As Colorado becomes the second state to legalize psychedelic therapy this week, a clash is playing out in Colorado Springs, where conservative leaders are restricting the treatment over objections from some of the city's 90,000 veterans, who've become flagbearers for psychedelic therapy to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

Colorado residents voted to legalize the therapeutic use of psilocybin, the chemical compound found in psychedelic mushrooms, in a 2022 ballot measure, launching two years of rulemaking before it could be used to treat conditions such as depression and PTSD.

This week, companies and people will be able to apply for licenses to administer the mind-altering drug, though treatment will likely not be available for some months as applications are processed.

Colorado joined Oregon in legalizing psilocybin therapy, though the drug remains illegal in most other states and federally. Over the last year, a growing number of Oregon cities have voted to ban psilocybin. While Colorado metros cannot ban the treatment under state law, several conservative cities have worked to preemptively restrict the so-called "healing centers."

At a city council meeting in Colorado Springs this month, members were set to vote on extending the state prohibition on healing centers from 1,000 feet to 1 mile from certain locations, such as schools. From the lectern, veterans implored them not to.

"We have an opportunity to support veterans, and it's a really easy one to say 'Yes' to," said Lane Belone, a special forces veteran who said he's benefited from his own psychedelic experiences. Belone argued that the restrictions effectively limit the number of centers and would mean longer waiting lists for the treatment.

Veterans have pulled in some conservative support for psychedelic therapy — managing to set it apart from other politically charged drug policies such as legalizing marijuana.

That distinction was made clear by Councilmember David Leinweber, who said at the city council meeting both that marijuana is "literally killing our kids" and that he supported greater access to psilocybin therapy.

Psilocybin is far more restricted in Colorado than marijuana, which the state legalized in 2014. Psilocybin is decriminalized but there won't be recreational dispensaries for the substance, which will be largely confined to licensed businesses and therapy sessions with licensed facilitators.

Patients will have to go through a risk assessment, preliminary meetings, then follow-up sessions and remain with a facilitator while under the drug's influence. The psilocybin will also be tested, and the companies that grow them regulated by a state agency.

Still, allowing broader access to the treatment hasn't been easy for most of the city councilmembers, including three members who are veterans. Colorado Springs is home to two Air Force bases and the U.S. Air Force Academy, and local leaders frequently tout it as an ideal community for retired servicemembers.

"I will never sit up here and criticize a veteran for wanting to find a medical treatment to fix or to help with the issues that they carry," said Council President Randy Helms, a veteran himself.

Still, he continued, "Do I think that it's helpful to not just veterans but to individuals? Probably so. Do I think it still needs to be tested under strict requirements? Yes."

The Colorado Springs city council passed the proposed restrictions.

While research has shown promise for psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin and MDMA, also known as molly, in helping people with conditions such as alcoholism, depression and PTSD, the scientific field remains in its relatively early stages.

"I'm very positive about the potential value, but I'm very concerned that we've gotten too far ahead of our skis," said Jeffrey Lieberman, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, who's been involved in studies of psychedelic drugs' therapeutic efficacy.

The risks, said Lieberman, include customers being misled and paying out of pocket for expensive treatments. He also said there are cases where the drugs can exacerbate some extreme mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia.

In Oregon, where the treatments started in June 2023, costs can reach \$2,000 for one session. Of the over 16,000 doses administered in the state, staff have only called 911 or taken a patient to the hospital five times.

Other Colorado Springs city councilmembers raised concerns that the Food and Drug Administration has not approved psilocybin to treat mental health conditions and, in August, rejected the psychedelic MDMA to treat PTSD. A number of clinical trials are still underway for both drugs.

Some researchers, advocacy groups and veterans worry that waiting on slow-moving bureaucracy — namely the FDA — carries its own risks as people continue to struggle with mental illnesses. Advocates argue that psychedelic therapy offers an option to those for whom talk therapy alone and anti-depressants have not helped.

"This is a crisis that we are in, and this is a tool that we can add to our toolbox," said Taylor West, executive director of the Healing Advocacy Fund, which advocates for psychedelic therapy.

Belone said he's carried his military experience long after leaving the special forces. It started when he first heard artillery sirens wailing in a U.S. base in Iraq, his breath catching with fear for a few thudding moments.

That fear kept him on edge when he returned stateside and found himself always keeping his back to the wall, looking for exits to the room he was in, never quite able to give himself fully to the music at a concert.

A psychedelic experience with psilocybin, said Belone, helped him connect the fear that attached to him in the warzone to the ceaseless anxiety at home — it didn't solve everything overnight, he said, but it allowed him to better identify when that humming fear was getting in the way of a joyful life.

Hundreds apply for restitution for abuse suffered at Florida reform schools

By KATE PAYNE Associated Press/Report for America

Hundreds of people who say they suffered physical or sexual abuse at two state-run reform schools in Florida are in line to receive tens of thousands of dollars in restitution from the state, after Florida lawmakers formally apologized for the horrors they endured as children more than 50 years ago.

At its peak in the Jim Crow 1960s, 500 boys were housed at what is now known as the Dozier School for Boys, most of them for minor offenses such as petty theft, truancy or running away from home. Orphaned and abandoned children were also sent to the school, which was open for more than a century.

In recent years, hundreds of men have come forward to recount brutal beatings, sexual assaults, deaths and disappearances at the notorious school in the panhandle town of Marianna. Nearly 100 boys died between 1900 and 1973 at Dozier, some of them from gunshot wounds or blunt force trauma. Some of the boys' bodies were shipped back home. Others were buried in unmarked graves that researchers only recently uncovered.

Ahead of a Dec. 31 deadline, the state of Florida received more than 800 applications for restitution from people held at the Dozier school and its sister school in Okeechobee, Fla., attesting to the mental, physical and sexual abuse they endured at the hands of school personnel. Last year, state lawmakers allocated \$20 million to be equally divided among the schools' surviving victims.

Bryant Middleton was among those who spoke publicly in 2017, when lawmakers formally acknowledged the abuse. Middleton recalled being beaten six times for infractions that included eating blackberries off a fence and mispronouncing a teacher's name after being sent to Dozier between 1959 and 1961.

"I've seen a lot in my lifetime. A lot of brutality, a lot of horror, a lot of death," said Middleton, who served more than 20 years in the Army, including combat in Vietnam. "I would rather be sent back into the jungles of Vietnam than to spend one single day at the Florida School for Boys."

Allegations of abuse have hung over the Dozier school since soon after it opened in 1900, with reports of children being chained to the walls in irons. When then-Gov. Claude Kirk visited in 1968, he found the institution in disrepair with leaky ceilings, holes in walls, no heating for the winters and buckets used as toilets.

"If one of your kids were kept in such circumstances," Kirk said then, "you'd be up there with rifles."

Florida officials closed Dozier in 2011, following state and federal investigations and news reports documenting the abuses.

As the men who were victimized at the schools wait for restitution, their resilience is being honored in the new film "Nickel Boys", which was adapted from Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. Whitehead has said Dozier served as the model for the book, which he hopes raises awareness "so that the victims and their stories are not forgotten."

Blake Lively sues 'It Ends With Us' director Justin Baldoni alleging harassment and smear campaign

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

Actor Blake Lively sued "It Ends With Us" director Justin Baldoni and several others tied to the romantic drama on Tuesday, alleging harassment and a coordinated campaign to attack her reputation for coming forward about her treatment on the set.

The federal lawsuit was filed in New York just hours after Baldoni and many of the other defendants in Lively's suit sued The New York Times for libel for its story on her allegations, saying the newspaper and the star were the ones conducting a coordinated smear campaign.

The lawsuits are major developments in a story emerging from the surprise hit film that has already made major waves in Hollywood and led to discussions of the treatment of female actors both on sets and in media.

Lively's suit said that Baldoni, the film's production company Wayfarer Studios and others engaged in "a carefully crafted, coordinated, and resourced retaliatory scheme to silence her, and others, from speaking out."

She accuses Baldoni and the studio of embarking on a "multi-tiered plan" to damage her reputation following a meeting in which she and her husband, actor Ryan Reynolds, addressed "repeated sexual harassment and other disturbing behavior" by Baldoni and a producer Jamey Heath, who is also named in both lawsuits.

The plan, the suit said, included a proposal to plant theories on online message boards, engineer a social media campaign and place news stories critical of Lively.

The alleged mistreatment on set included comments from Baldoni on the bodies of Lively and other women on the set. And the suit says Baldoni and Heath "discussed their personal sexual experiences and previous porn addiction, and tried to pressure Ms. Lively to reveal details about her intimate life."

Baldoni's attorney Bryan Freedman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Lively's lawsuit. But he previously called the same allegations "completely false, outrageous and intentionally salacious."

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Lively's lawsuit comes the same day as the libel lawsuit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court by Baldoni and others against the Times seeking at least \$250 million. The Times stood by its reporting and said it plans to "vigorously defend" against the lawsuit.

Others who are defendants in Lively's suit and plaintiffs in the libel suit include Wayfarer and crisis communications expert Melissa Nathan, whose text message was quoted in the headline of the Dec. 21 Times story: "We Can Bury Anyone: Inside a Hollywood Smear Machine."

Written by Megan Twohey, Mike McIntire and Julie Tate, the story was published just after Lively filed a legal complaint with the California Civil Rights Department, a predecessor to her new lawsuit.

The libel lawsuit says the newspaper "relied almost entirely on Lively's unverified and self-serving narrative, lifting it nearly verbatim while disregarding an abundance of evidence that contradicted her claims and exposed her true motives. But the Times did not care."

A spokesperson for the Times, Danielle Rhoades, said in a statement that "our story was meticulously and responsibly reported."

"It was based on a review of thousands of pages of original documents, including the text messages and emails that we quote accurately and at length in the article. To date, Wayfarer Studios, Mr. Baldoni, the other subjects of the article and their representatives have not pointed to a single error," the statement said.

But Baldoni's lawsuit says that "If the Times truly reviewed the thousands of private communications it claimed to have obtained, its reporters would have seen incontrovertible evidence that it was Lively, not Plaintiffs, who engaged in a calculated smear campaign."

Lively is not a defendant in the libel lawsuit. Her lawyers said in a statement that "Nothing in this lawsuit changes anything about the claims advanced in Ms. Lively's California Civil Rights Department Complaint, nor her federal complaint, filed earlier today."

The romantic drama "It Ends With Us," an adaptation of Colleen Hoover's bestselling 2016 novel, was released in August, exceeding box office expectations with a \$50 million debut. But the movie's release was shrouded by speculation over discord between Lively and Baldoni. Baldoni took a backseat in promoting the film while Lively took centerstage along with Reynolds, who was on the press circuit for "Deadpool & Wolverine" at the same time.

Lively came to fame through the 2005 film "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," and bolstered her stardom on the TV series "Gossip Girl" from 2007 to 2012. She has since starred in films including "The Town" and "The Shallows."

Baldoni starred in the TV comedy "Jane the Virgin," directed the 2019 film "Five Feet Apart" and wrote "Man Enough," a book pushing back against traditional notions of masculinity. He responded to concerns that "It Ends With Us" romanticized domestic violence, telling the AP at the time that critics were "absolutely entitled to that opinion."

He was dropped by his agency, WME, immediately after Lively filed her complaint and the Times published its story. The agency represents both Lively and Reynolds.

Baldoni's attorney, Freedman, said in a statement on the libel suit that "the New York Times cowered to the wants and whims of two powerful 'untouchable' Hollywood elites."

"In doing so, they pre-determined the outcome of their story, and aided and abetted their own devastating PR smear campaign designed to revitalize Lively's self-induced floundering public image and counter the organic groundswell of criticism amongst the online public," he added. "The irony is rich."

US and Boeing investigators examine the site of a deadly South Korean plane crash

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A team of U.S. investigators including representatives from Boeing on Tuesday examined the site of a plane crash that killed 179 people in South Korea while authorities were conducting safety inspections on all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines.

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All but two of the 181 people aboard the Boeing 737-800 operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air died in Sunday's crash. Video showed the aircraft, without its landing gear deployed, crash-landed on its belly and overshoot a runway at South Korea's southern Muan International Airport before it slammed into concrete fence and burst into a flame.

The plane was seen having an engine trouble, and preliminary examinations also say the pilots received a bird strike warning from the ground control center and issued a distress signal as well. But many experts say the landing gear issue was likely the main cause of the crash.

The South Korean government has launched safety inspections on all the 101 Boeing 737-800s in the country. The Transport Ministry said authorities are looking at maintenance and operation records during five days of safety checks that are to run until Friday.

The ministry said that a delegation of eight U.S. investigators — one from the Federal Aviation Administration, three from National Transportation Safety Board and four from Boeing — made an on-site visit to the crash site on Tuesday. The results of their examination weren't immediately available.

Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president, told reporters Tuesday that his company will add more maintenance workers and reduce flight operations by 10-15% until March as part of efforts to enhance the safety of aircraft operations.

John Hansman, an aviation expert at MIT, said the crash was most likely the result of a problem with the plane's hydraulic control systems. He said that would be consistent with the landing gear and wing flaps not being deployed "and might indicate a control issue which would explain the rush to get on the ground."

The Boeing 737-800 -- an earlier version of 737 than the Max -- is a widely used plane with a good safety record, according to Najmedin Meshkati, an engineering professor at the University of Southern California who has studied aviation safety.

He said the failure of the plane's system for broadcasting location, operating its landing gear and extending the wing flaps to slow down indicate a widespread problem that affected electrical and hydraulic systems. He is confident that investigators will learn what went wrong by analyzing information from the flight data and cockpit voice recorders.

"These are really the two pillars for accident analysis and accident reconstruction," Meshkati said. Like other aviation experts, Meshkati also questioned the location of a solid wall just a few hundred feet (meters) past the end of the runway, given that planes occasionally do overshoot runways. "Having such a big concrete barrier over there was really very bad luck for this particular airplane," he said.

South Korean officials have said they will look into whether the Muan airport's localizer — a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact.

The crash was the deadliest disaster in South Korea's aviation history in decades. A seven-day national mourning has been declared until Jan. 4.

The Transport Ministry said Tuesday that authorities have identified 175 bodies and are conducting DNA tests to identify the remaining five. Bereaved families said that officials told them that the bodies were so badly damaged that officials need time before returning them to relatives.

On Tuesday, Park Han Shin, a representative of the families, accused the government of failing to provide freezers on time as promised and said there are worries that the bodies could decompose. "The last dignities of the victims are seriously hurt. We strongly criticize authorities for failing to keep its promise," Park said.

Trump calls it the 'center of the universe.' Mar-a-Lago is a magnet for those seeking influence

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The cars begin lining up early in the morning to be screened by Secret Service agents under white tents near the fence that surrounds President-elect Donald Trump's vast south Florida estate.

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Famous figures such as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Tesla and X owner Elon Musk pop up at breakfasts, luncheons and other social gatherings held daily at the opulent Mar-a-Lago club.

Over the weekend, Mike Love, one of the original members of the Beach Boys, performed the band's greatest hits under an outdoor tent there as Trump, trailed by Secret Service agents, wandered through the crowd, swinging his fists to the music, according to videos posted online. At other parts of the evening, he stood next to his wife, Melania, near the pool, bobbing his head to the music.

The resort is the "Center of the Universe," Trump declared on social media Friday, adding, "Bill Gates asked to come, tonight." Representatives for Trump and Gates didn't clarify if the Microsoft co-founder did indeed join the parade of figures making the trip to Mar-a-Lago.

But the president-elect's post reflects the way his resort, where he's largely been holed up since the election, has become a salon and celebration for his movement. For the people he's selected for his administration — and those who seek to get jobs or curry favor with the incoming president — it's the place to be.

Sightings of those turning up there, usually in photos posted online or in the occasional public event, offer a glimpse into the workings of Trump's incoming White House and how he is setting priorities for office.

They are also renewing concerns about transparency as the meetings are largely shrouded in secrecy, and raising questions about how Trump benefits financially as club members seeking to influence the new administration stay and eat there.

"It's kind of unreal," said James Fishback, an investor who has in recent days launched an investment fund in the club's tea room and dined at the courtyard. "This is the power center."

He recalled standing by the pasta table exchanging words with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whom Trump has chosen to lead the Health Department.

The winter holidays have been another occasion for Trump's celebrations and for big names to come visit.

A representative for Zuckerberg confirmed he joined Trump for a dinner the night before Thanksgiving. A Christmas Eve video showed Trump in one of the resort's ballrooms full of guests, dancing to one of his favorite songs, the Village People's "Y.M.C.A.," while his daughter Ivanka sat in a gilded chair nearby.

The club held a New Year's Eve bash Tuesday night that featured Trump, who spoke briefly to reporters near a red carpet rolled out for the occasion. He appeared briefly onstage addressing revelers, who included Love and many of his choices for Cabinet and other posts in his upcoming administration.

Trump said he thought 2025 would be a "great year" and "we're going to do fantastically well as a country."

During dinners with friends and family, Trump uses the Spotify account on his tablet to play many of the same tunes that were ubiquitous at his campaign rallies. One night, his guest of honor was Sara Netanyahu, the wife of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Another night, the honor went to Akie Abe, the widow of slain Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. And, yes, that was Argentine President Javier Milei doing Trump's "Y.M.C.A." dance between the tables at a gala dinner.

During the day, Trump often golfs at his nearby course with friends, relatives and allies, like Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Overall, the vibe is a mix of south Florida's monied social scene overlaid with the power dynamics of an executive job fair.

"He's surrounded by a lot of old friends," Graham said. "I just know that everybody I know wants some job."

Musk has been a constant presence at the club, so much so that Trump's granddaughter, Kai, wrote on X that he was "achieving uncle status." Trump has tasked Musk and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy with leading the Department of Government Efficiency, a nongovernmental task force formed to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and slash federal regulations.

Kevin Roberts, president of the think tank behind Project 2025, spoke at a December event with investors at the club. One of the guests at the small function was health care executive Dr. Peter Lamelas, later tapped by Trump to be U.S. ambassador to Argentina.

Sometimes Trump relaxes for dinner alongside club members and guests under the yellow and white awnings in the courtyard. Other times, he will address large groups for black-tie events in the ballrooms.

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At a recent gala for a nonprofit led by Lt. Gen Michael Flynn, the song "God Bless the U.S.A.," a favorite of Trump's, cued the president-elect's entrance.

"We're off to a really good start," Trump told people gathered for the event. He then inquired about the whereabouts of Tom Homan, whom he has tapped to be border czar, and joked that Homan was from "central casting."

"Just relax, Tom. I want you to relax and get ready for the big push," Trump said.

Trump shared with the party guests that Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, whom he threatened with a 25% tariff on all imported goods unless she does more to tackle illegal border crossings and drug flows, "has made progress."

At another recent event at Mar-a-Lago, this one hosted by the America First Policy Institute, the ballroom was full of recognizable Trump-world figures such as Kellyanne Conway, who served as counselor to the president, and Charlie Kirk, a conservative activist and founder of Turning Point Action. A copy of the president-elect's latest book was sitting on the chairs for guests as they arrived in gowns and tuxedos.

As he entered the ballroom, Musk was swarmed by guests, including Kash Patel, whom Trump would later select to lead the FBI, before the tech billionaire took his seat at the center table of the ballroom. Musk was later joined there by Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance.

"It's the place to be and the place to be seen," said Damian Merlo, a political strategist who advises the Salvadoran president, Nayib Bukele. Merlo was at that event as well as another event hosted by the Conservative Political Action Committee.

At a news conference Trump held recently at Mar-a-Lago, the president-elect noted the changed mood compared with his first term, saying, "Everybody wants to be my friend."

Besides Zuckerberg, Trump has hosted other Silicon Valley executives, including Apple CEO Tim Cook, Google co-founder Sergey Brin, Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

"The top executives, the top bankers, they're all calling," Trump said. "It's like a complete opposite."

Actor Russell Brand traveled this month to the club to speak at an event, where he sat with actor Mel Gibson, former Fox News personality Tucker Carlson and others. Later in the evening, he stood by a palm tree on the lawn, listening to a bagpiper in a kilt.

Brand later posted a video to X about his experience.

"Pretty amazing," he said. "Is this real life, or am I in a dream?"

Nearly all of Puerto Rico is without power on New Year's Eve

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — A blackout hit nearly all of Puerto Rico early on Tuesday as the U.S. territory prepared to celebrate New Year's, leaving more than 1.3 million clients in the dark. Officials said it could take up to two days to restore power.

The outage hit at dawn, plunging the island into an eerie silence as electrical appliances and air conditioners shut down before those who could afford generators turned them on.

"It had to be on the 31st of December!" exclaimed one man, who only gave his name as Manuel, as he stood outside a grocery store in the capital of San Juan, grumbling about the outage that coincided with his birthday. "There is no happiness."

Nearly 90% of 1.47 million clients across Puerto Rico were left in the dark, according to Luma Energy, a private company that oversees electricity transmission and distribution.

By late Tuesday night, more than 700,000 clients, including 16 hospitals and Puerto Rico's water and sewer company, had power back, according to Luma. However, the company's webpage detailing who remained without power was down.

"We understand the deep frustration this outage has caused, especially on a day like today," Luma said in a statement. "We apologize for the disruption to your plans."

Luma said the power outage was likely caused by a failure of an underground power line. It said it's restoring power "in the quickest and safest way possible." Hugo Sorrentini, a Luma spokesman, told The Associated Press that the incident was under investigation.

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Discover Puerto Rico, a not-for-profit organization that promotes the island, warned travelers about the outage on its website and asked that cruise ship passengers contact tour operators directly to determine whether they had generators and were open for the day.

Five cruise ships were scheduled to dock in Puerto Rico on Tuesday. While most hotels were running on generators, short-term rentals lacking them reported cancellations. The main international airport in San Juan remained open.

The blackout fanned simmering anger against Luma and Genera PR, which oversees the generation of power in Puerto Rico, as a growing number of people call for their ouster.

Governor-elect Jenniffer González Colón, who is set to be sworn in on Jan. 2, has called for the creation of an "energy czar" to review potential Luma contractual breaches while another operator is found.

"We can't keep relying on an energy system that fails our people," she wrote on the social media platform X, adding that stabilizing Puerto Rico's energy grid would be her top priority in office.

Meanwhile, Gov. Pedro Pierluisi said he was in touch with Luma and Genera PR, adding on X that "we are demanding answers and solutions."

President Joe Biden spoke with Pierluisi on Tuesday evening about the outage and offered federal assistance. Biden also spoke with U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and directed her to offer any help needed to speed power restoration on the island.

The outage forced businesses, parks and several malls to close, and the government announced limited schedules for some of its agencies. Workers checked on hundreds of bedridden patients and distributed ice for diabetics to keep their insulin cold.

Other Puerto Ricans began to plan ahead.

"I'll go to my balcony. That's where I'll sleep," Raúl Pacheco said with a shrug, as the 63-year-old diabetic sat on a walker nursing an injured foot.

Julio Córdova, a municipal worker, said he got dressed by the light of his cellphone and planned to buy candles.

"This affects me because I had plans. It couldn't have been yesterday or tomorrow?" he said, shaking his head as he raked leaves.

While island-wide blackouts are rare in Puerto Rico, the U.S. territory struggles with chronic power outages blamed on a crumbling power grid that was razed by Hurricane María, a Category 4 storm in September 2017.

The system, however, was already in decline after years of lack of maintenance and investment.

Only recently did crews start making permanent repairs to Puerto Rico's power grid following Hurricane María. The island continues to depend on generators provided by the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency to help stabilize the grid.

In November, Puerto Rico's government asked U.S. officials for permission to keep using more than a dozen portable generators for two additional years.

Some Puerto Ricans took the latest outage in stride.

"They're part of my everyday life," said Enid Núñez, 49, who said she ate breakfast before work thanks to a small gas stove she bought for such events.

Meanwhile, Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority struggles to restructure more than \$9 billion in debt, the largest of the island's government agencies.

Power plants that rely on petroleum generate more than 60% of Puerto Rico's energy, followed by natural gas and coal. Solar rooftops account for only about 7% of electricity consumption on an island with a poverty rate over 40%.

Chief Justice John Roberts defends judicial independence, says it is under threat in several ways

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts issued a defense Tuesday of judicial independence, which he said is under threat from intimidation, disinformation and the prospect of public officials defying court orders.

Roberts laid out his concerns in his annual report on the federal judiciary. It was released after a year where the nation's court system was unusually enmeshed in a closely fought presidential race, with then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump assailing the integrity of judges who ruled against him as he faced criminal charges for which he denied wrongdoing.

Trump won the race following a landmark Supreme Court immunity decision penned by Roberts that, along with another high court decision halting efforts to disqualify him from the ballot, removed obstacles to his election.

The immunity decision was criticized by Democrats like President Joe Biden, who later called for term limits and an enforceable ethics code following criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices.

Roberts, for his part, introduced his letter by recounting a story about King George III stripping colonial judges of lifetime appointments, an order that was "not well received."

Trump is now readying for a second term as president with an ambitious conservative agenda, elements of which are likely to be legally challenged and end up before the court whose conservative majority includes three justices appointed by Trump during his first term.

Roberts and Trump clashed in 2018 when the chief justice rebuked the president for denouncing a judge who rejected his migrant asylum policy as an "Obama judge."

In 2020, Roberts criticized comments made by Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer while the Supreme Court was considering a high-profile abortion case.

Roberts didn't mention Trump, Biden or any other specific leader in this year's annual report. Instead, he wrote generally that even if court decisions are unpopular or mark a defeat for a presidential administration, other branches of government must be willing to enforce them to ensure the rule of law.

He pointed to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that desegregated schools in 1954 as one that needed federal enforcement in the face of resistance from southern governors.

"It is not in the nature of judicial work to make everyone happy," he wrote.

The chief justice also decried elected officials across the political spectrum who have "raised the specter of open disregard for federal court rulings."

"Attempts to intimidate judges for their rulings in cases are inappropriate and should be vigorously opposed," he wrote.

While public officials and others have the right to criticize rulings, they should also be aware that their statements can "prompt dangerous reactions by others."

Threats targeting federal judges have more than tripled over the last decade, according to U.S. Marshals Service statistics. State court judges in Wisconsin and Maryland were killed at their homes in 2022 and 2023, Roberts wrote.

"Violence, intimidation, and defiance directed at judges because of their work undermine our Republic, and are wholly unacceptable," he wrote.

Roberts also pointed to disinformation about court rulings as a threat to judges' independence, saying that social media can magnify distortions and even be exploited by "hostile foreign state actors" to exacerbate divisions.

Against a backdrop of those heightened divisions, Americans' confidence in the country's judicial system and courts has dropped to a record low of 35%, a Gallup poll found.

US imposes sanctions on Russian and Iranian groups over disinformation targeting American voters

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States has imposed sanctions on two groups linked to Iranian and Russian efforts to target American voters with disinformation ahead of this year's election.

Treasury officials announced the sanctions Tuesday, alleging that the two organizations sought to stoke divisions among Americans before November's vote. U.S. intelligence has accused both governments of spreading disinformation, including fake videos, news stories and social media posts, designed to manipulate voters and undermine trust in U.S. elections.

"The governments of Iran and Russia have targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns," Bradley T. Smith, Treasury's acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in a statement.

Authorities said the Russian group, the Moscow-based Center for Geopolitical Expertise, oversaw the creation, financing and dissemination of disinformation about American candidates, including deepfake videos created using artificial intelligence.

In addition to the group itself, the new sanctions apply to its director, who authorities say worked closely with Russian military intelligence agents also overseeing cyberattacks and sabotage against the West.

Authorities say the center used AI to quickly manufacture fake videos about American candidates created scores of fake news websites designed to look legitimate and even paid U.S. web companies to create pro-Russian content.

The Iranian group, the Cognitive Design Production Center, is a subsidiary of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, U.S. officials said, which the United States has designated a foreign terrorist organization. Officials say the center worked since at least 2023 to incite political tensions in the United States.

U.S. intelligence agencies have blamed the Iranian government for seeking to encourage protests in the U.S. over Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. Iran also has been accused of hacking into the accounts of several top current and former U.S. officials, including senior members of Donald Trump's campaign.

In the months ahead of the election, U.S. intelligence officials said Russia, Iran and China all sought to undermine confidence in U.S. democracy. They also concluded that Russia sought to prop up the ultimate victor Trump, who has praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, suggested cutting funds to Ukraine and repeatedly criticized the NATO military alliance.

Iran, meanwhile, sought to oppose Trump's candidacy, officials said. The president-elect's first administration ended a nuclear deal with Iran, reimposed sanctions and ordered the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, an act prompting Iran's leaders to vow revenge.

Russian and Iranian officials have rejected claims that they sought to influence the outcome of the 2024 election.

"Russia has not and does not interfere with the internal affairs of other countries," a spokesperson for Russia's embassy in Washington wrote in an email Tuesday.

A message left with officials from Iran was not immediately returned Tuesday.

Woman burned to death in New York subway is identified as 57-year-old from New Jersey

NEW YORK (AP) — The woman who died after being set on fire in a New York subway train this month was a 57-year-old from New Jersey, police announced Tuesday.

The woman, Debrina Kawam, had worked at the pharmaceutical giant Merck in from 2000 until 2002, but her life at some point took a rocky turn. She had briefly been in a New York homeless shelter after moving to the city recently, the Department of Social Services said. It did not say when.

Police had an address for Kawam in Toms River, a community on the Jersey Shore, and authorities said they notified her family about her Dec. 22 death. The Associated Press left messages Tuesday for pos-

sible relatives.

"Hearts go out to the family — a horrific incident to have to live through," Mayor Eric Adams said at an unrelated news briefing.

It came hours before another harrowing act of violence on the nation's busiest subway system.

A 45-year-old man was pushed onto the tracks ahead of an oncoming train at a station under Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood about 1:30 p.m., police said. The man was taken to a hospital in critical condition, and police said they had a person of interest in custody.

Personal safety in the subways is generally comparable to safety in the city as a whole. But life-threatening crimes such as stabbings and shoves spread alarm about the trains that have carried more than 1 billion riders over the course of this year.

Police figures show major crimes on subways were down this year through November, compared with the same period last year, but killings rose from five to nine.

In Karam's case, prosecutors have said she was asleep on a subway train that was stopped at a station in Brooklyn's Coney Island when her clothes were set ablaze by a stranger, Sebastian Zapeta.

Zapeta, 33, allegedly fanned the flames with a shirt, engulfing her in the blaze, before sitting on a platform bench and watching as she burned.

Identifying the victim proved to be a challenge, and authorities said Friday that they were still using forensics and video surveillance to trace her.

Zapeta has been indicted on murder and arson charges. He has not entered a plea, and his lawyer has declined to comment outside court.

Federal immigration officials say Zapeta is from Guatemala and entered the U.S. illegally. An address for him given by police matches a shelter that provides housing and substance abuse support.

Zapeta was arrested after police circulated images of a suspect and received a tip from a group of high school students.

Prosecutors have said Zapeta subsequently told police that he was the man in surveillance photos and videos of the fire being ignited, but that he drinks a lot of liquor and does not know what happened.

He is currently jailed, and his next court date is Jan. 7.

While it is not clear why Kawam was asleep in a subway car, New York's subways often unofficially function as a refuge for homeless people. In theory, legal settlements give homeless individuals a broad right to shelter in the city, but some turn to the trains if they are unable to stay in shelters or fearful about safety in them.

On the morning of the fire, temperatures were around 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 6.5 Celsius) and had been below freezing for 24 hours, according to data from nearby Brooklyn weather stations.

"No matter where she lived, that should not have happened," the mayor said.

The social services department said it would amplify its efforts to reach and help homeless people on streets and subways and encourage them to use shelters.

The killing of an 18-year-old Ohio woman was solved with DNA technology after 43 years

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A man who was shot dead last month as authorities attempted to serve him an indictment on federal gun charges has been identified as the killer of an 18-year-old Ohio woman in a case that had gone unsolved for 43 years, police announced Monday.

Mansfield Police Chief Jason Bammann said the cold case of Debra Lee Miller, a local waitress beaten to death with an oven grate in her apartment on April 29, 1981, was reopened in 2021 to account for advances in DNA technology and forensic investigative techniques.

"They examined the case as if it had happened yesterday, through an entirely new lens," Bammann said at a news conference. "Their findings were staggering."

The chief said a "firm DNA profile" of James Vanest, at the time Miller's 26-year-old upstairs neighbor,

emerged from evidence left from the room. Vanest had been questioned but never identified as a suspect during the initial investigation, which became mired in allegations of potential police misconduct.

Miller was one of several people from the Mansfield area whose suspicious deaths in the 1980s were examined for possible links to Mansfield police officers.

A special investigation ordered by the mayor concluded in 1989 that there was no evidence linking any officers with the deaths, but the report raised questions about sexual involvement between police officers and homicide victim Miller and about the way police investigated some homicides. The report noted that Miller wrote in her diary that she was sexually involved with several Mansfield police officers.

The local police chief retired in January 1990, after subsequent complaints arose over alleged irregularities in the investigation of the death of the ex-wife of a Mansfield patrolman.

Miller's case was reopened several times during the ensuing years. This time, Richland County Prosecutor Jodie Schumacher said the DNA evidence against Vanest was strong enough that her office was preparing a case against him for the killing to take to a grand jury.

But the case was never able to be presented.

Police had found Vanest living in Canton, about 100 miles (160.93 kilometers) east of Mansfield, in November 2021 and re-interviewed him about Miller's killing. He had admitted to lying to investigators during his first interview in 1981 and investigators sensed this time that he was trying to create an alibi to account for his DNA being present in Miller's apartment, Bammann said.

Mansfield Police Detective Terry Butler sought a second interview in spring 2024, but Vanest refused to speak and requested an attorney. Authorities said he subsequently sold his house in Canton, bought a pickup truck and trailer and fled to West Virginia. He left several firearms at his Canton home and was stopped in West Virginia with two more. He was arrested on state charges and released on bond.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives took over his case and later indicted him on the federal gun charges. On Nov. 18, U.S. Marshals and Canton-area SWAT officers attempted to serve Vanest with that indictment at a North Canton motel where he was holed up.

"It is our understanding that when confronted by Marshals and the Canton Regional SWAT team, Mr. Vanest pointed a gun at them and barricaded himself inside the hotel," Bammann said. "After a short shootout, one Canton SWAT member was shot in the arm, and Mr. Vanest was fatally shot."

The chief said the department considers the case closed and hopes identifying Miller's killer will bring her family some closure.

Butler said his great-uncle was one of the first officers on the scene of Miller's killing in 1981. He said he feels fortunate to get the chance to solve a homicide that happened when he was just 10 years old. People should know, he said, "we don't give up, we keep digging."

Stock market today: Wall Street indexes lose ground as market closes another record-breaking year

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

Stock indexes closed mostly lower Tuesday as the market delivered a downbeat finish on the final day of another milestone-shattering year on Wall Street.

The S&P 500 gave up an early gain to finish down 0.4%. The benchmark index, which set 57 record highs in 2024, racked up a 23.3% gain for the year. This was its second straight year with a gain of more than 20%. The last time the index had as big a back-to-back annual gain was 1998.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite lost 0.9%.

Big Tech stocks led this year's rally, pushing the Nasdaq to a yearly gain of 28.6%. The Dow, which is far less weighted with tech, rose 12.9% for the year.

The stock market's record-breaking turn in 2024 was "certainly much better than what most people on Wall Street, myself included, thought we would get this year," said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA.

U.S. markets' stellar run was driven by a growing economy, solid consumer spending and a strong jobs

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market.

Skyrocketing prices for companies in the artificial-intelligence business, such as Nvidia and Super Micro Computer, helped lift the market to new heights.

Solid corporate earnings growth also helped. Wall Street expects companies in the S&P 500 to report broad earnings growth of more than 9% for the year, according to FactSet. The final figures will be tallied following fourth-quarter reports that start in a few weeks.

Another boost for the market: The economy avoided a recession that many on Wall Street worried was inevitable after the Federal Reserve hiked its main interest rate to a two-decade high in hopes of slowing the economy to beat high inflation.

Receding inflation, which has gotten closer to the Fed's 2% target, helped energize Wall Street, raising hopes that the central bank would deliver multiple interest rate cuts into next year, which would ease borrowing costs and fuel more economic growth.

Still, after three interest rate cuts in 2024, the Fed has signaled a more cautious approach heading into 2025 with inflation remaining sticky as the country prepares for President-elect Donald Trump to transition into the White House. Trump's threats to hike tariffs on imported goods have raised anxiety that inflation could be reignited as companies pass along the higher costs from tariffs.

This year's market rally went beyond stocks. Bitcoin, which was below \$17,000 just two years ago, climbed above \$100,000 for the first time. And gold also shattered records on its way to a 27.4% gain for the year.

Only about 38% of the stocks in the S&P 500 fell Tuesday, but a slide in technology stocks outweighed gains elsewhere in the market.

Semiconductor giant Nvidia, whose enormous valuation gives it an outsize influence on indexes, fell 2.3%. Apple dropped 0.7%, and Advanced Micro Devices gave up 1.3%.

Gains in energy stocks helped temper some of the declines. Exxon Mobil rose 1.7% and Chevron gained 1.2%.

VeriSign rose 0.9% after Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway disclosed it had increased its stake in the internet domain registry services company.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 25.31 points to 5,881.63 on Tuesday. The Dow lost 29.51 points to close at 42,544.22, and the Nasdaq slid 175.99 points to finish at 19,310.79.

The market's mini post-Christmas slump doesn't bode well for a 'Santa Claus' rally, the term for when U.S. stock indexes get a boost in the last five trading days of a year, plus the first two in the new year. Such a rally correlates closely with positive returns in January and the upcoming year. Even so, missing out on the Santa Rally isn't necessarily a negative omen.

"Historically, a negative Santa Claus rally still resulted in an average gain of almost 6% in the subsequent year," Stovall said.

Bond yields were mixed. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.57% from 4.54% late Monday. The yield on the two-year Treasury held steady at 4.24%.

Crude oil prices rose 1%.

Indexes in Europe mostly rose. Asian markets ended mixed, with exchanges in Tokyo and Seoul closed for New Year holidays.

Markets will be closed on Wednesday for the New Year's Day holiday. On Thursday, investors will get an updated snapshot of U.S. construction spending for November. On Friday, Wall Street will receive an update on manufacturing for December.

Meanwhile, the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq will close their equity and options markets on Jan. 9 in observance of a National Day of Mourning for former President Jimmy Carter, continuing a long-held Wall Street tradition in mourning the nation's leaders. The 39th U.S. president and global humanitarian died on Sunday at his home in Plains, Georgia. He was 100 years old.

Fumes in the cockpit prompts Hawaiian flight's return to Seattle

SEATTLE (AP) — A Hawaiian airlines flight bound for Honolulu was forced to return to the Seattle airport shortly after takeoff due to reports of fumes in the cockpit, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The agency previously said the crew reported smoke on the flight deck but later changed that to fumes.

Hawaiian Airlines Flight 21, an Airbus A330, took off at about 1 p.m. Monday from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport carrying 273 passengers and 10 crew members.

It was heading to Daniel K. Inouye International Airport in Honolulu when the crew reported the fumes, airline spokesperson Marissa Villegas told The Associated Press in an email.

"The captain declared an emergency to obtain priority handling and the Airbus A330 landed at SEA without incident," Villegas said, and fire and medical personnel met the aircraft at the gate as a precaution and everyone onboard safely deplaned.

Once the aircraft was cleared, the Port of Seattle Fire Department boarded to investigate and did not find any smoke or smell, airport spokesperson Perry Cooper said via email.

Flight 21 left Seattle on Tuesday morning in a new aircraft, according to Villegas.

"Safety is our priority, and we sincerely apologize for this event," she said.

The FAA is investigating.

Former CNN anchor Aaron Brown, who helped viewers through the Sept. 11 attacks, has died

By JIM SALTER and R.J. RICO Associated Press

Aaron Brown, a veteran television news anchor whose steady hand helped guide CNN viewers through the unfolding tragedy of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, has died.

Brown died Sunday of pneumonia in Washington, D.C., where he lived, family spokesperson Molly Levinson said. He was 76.

Brown began his career in Minneapolis as a radio talk show host. His career in TV began in Seattle before he was named the founding anchor of ABC's "World News Now." He also anchored "ABC's World News Tonight Saturday," and was a reporter for "World News Tonight with Peter Jennings," "Nightline," and other ABC news programs.

But it was at CNN where he made a lasting mark — even before he was supposed to be on the air.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Brown started his career at the network earlier than expected, anchoring from a Manhattan rooftop as the attacks were happening. When the second tower fell that morning, Brown responded with the horror most viewers no doubt felt.

"Good lord," he said. "There are no words."

His coverage of the attacks earned Brown the Edward R. Murrow Award. He also won three Emmy awards during his career, along with other honors.

Brown's quirky, cerebral 10 p.m. CNN newscast "NewsNight" had a following with fans who enjoyed his commentaries and "The Whip," a quick review of top international stories, but he lost ratings ground to Greta Van Susteren of Fox News.

Brown left CNN during a shakeup in November 2005, when his time slot went to rising star Anderson Cooper.

Looking back at this time at CNN, Brown said he was confronted by the challenge of doing serious journalism while also being in a "very ratings-driven environment."

"I don't want to get into the business of indicting cable TV, but some of what went on was just television, not journalism," he told The Associated Press in 2008.

"I didn't practice the 'high church' of journalism all the time, but I think there was some sense that I was uncomfortable in that other, tabloidy world, and I think viewers knew that and I couldn't pull it off," Brown said in that 2008 interview.

After leaving CNN, Brown taught for years at Arizona State University as its first Walter Cronkite professor of journalism. In 2008, he came back to TV on PBS' "Wide Angle," a weekly public affairs show.

"Aaron got to do the work that he loved - and he felt lucky to do that work as part of a community of people who were dedicated to good journalism and who became good friends," Brown's wife, Charlotte Raynor, said in a statement.

She noted that Brown worked varying shifts over his career, but "he always found a way to make both ordinary and special times with our daughter Gabby and me."

Brown is survived by his wife, Charlotte Raynor, a daughter, two grandchildren, a sister and a brother.

The Pentagon chief loses bid to reject 9/11 plea deals

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A military appeals court has ruled against Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's effort to throw out the plea deals reached for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and two other defendants in the 9/11 attacks, a U.S. official said.

The decision puts back on track the agreements that would have the three men plead guilty to one of the deadliest attacks on the United States in exchange for being spared the possibility of the death penalty. The attacks by al-Qaida killed nearly 3,000 people on Sept. 11, 2001, and helped spur U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in what the George W. Bush administration called its war on terror.

The military appeals court released its ruling Monday night, according to the U.S. official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Military prosecutors and defense attorneys for Mohammed, the accused mastermind of the attacks, and two co-defendants reached the plea agreements after two years of government-approved negotiations. The deals were announced late last summer.

Supporters of the plea agreements see them as a way of resolving the legally troubled case against the men at the U.S. military commission at Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba. Pretrial hearings for Mohammed, Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi have been underway for more than a decade.

Much of the focus of pretrial arguments has been on how torture of the men while in CIA custody in the first years after their detention may taint the overall evidence in the case.

Within days of news of the plea deal this summer, Austin issued a brief order saying he was nullifying them.

He cited the gravity of the 9/11 attacks in saying that as defense secretary, he should decide on any plea agreements that would spare the defendants the possibility of execution.

Defense lawyers said Austin had no legal authority to reject a decision already approved by the Guantanamo court's top authority and said the move amounted to unlawful interference in the case.

The military judge hearing the 9/11 case, Air Force Col. Matthew McCall, had agreed that Austin lacked standing to throw out the plea bargains after they were underway. That had set up the Defense Department's appeal to the military appeals court.

Austin now has the option of taking his effort to throw out the plea deals to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Separately, the Pentagon said it had repatriated one of the longest-held detainees at the Guantanamo military prison, a Tunisian man who U.S. authorities approved for transfer more than a decade ago.

Ridah bin Saleh al-Yazidi's return to Tunisia leaves 26 men at Guantanamo. That's down from a peak population of about 700 Muslim men detained abroad and brought to the prison in the years after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Al-Yazidi's repatriation leaves 14 men awaiting transfer to other countries after U.S. authorities waived any prosecution and cleared them as security risks.

The Biden administration, pressed by rights groups to free remaining Guantanamo detainees held without charge, transferred out three other men this month. The U.S. says it is searching for suitable and stable countries willing to receive the remaining 14.

In a statement, the U.S. military said it had worked with authorities in Tunisia for the "responsible transfer" of al-Yazidi. He had been a prisoner at Guantanamo since 2002, when the U.S. began sending Muslim

detainees taken abroad there.

Al-Yazidi is the last of a dozen Tunisian men once held at Guantanamo.

Of those remaining at Guantanamo, seven — including Mohammed and his 9/11 co-defendants — face active cases. Two others of the 26 total have been convicted and sentenced by the military commission.

The dill of a lifetime? In a nation that's enduring its own sour patch, the pickle dominated 2024

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

SHARPSBURG, Pa. (AP) — When did we know for sure?

Was it April, when Nature Made introduced its pickle-flavored gummy vitamins? Was it November, when Petco's "Pickle Mania" promotion offered 26 different pickle-themed toys for dogs and cats? Maybe it was the December day that a food scholar was heard to utter, "Everyone can kind of see their needs met by pickles."

Or perhaps it was just a couple weeks ago, when Instagram chef *itsmejuliette* (no stranger to online pickle activities) posted a cheeky challenge on her "cooking with no rules" feed: "this is your sign to surprise your neighbor with a pickle wreath." More than 70,000 people liked her style, or at least her post.

At the intersection of health and edginess, traditionalism and hipsterism, global culture and the American stomach, the pickle in 2024 found itself caught in a mealstrom of words like "viral" and "trending" just as its food-as-fetish-object cousins — bacon and ranch dressing, notably — experienced in years past. Prepared Foods, an industry newsletter, said it outright in September: "The pickle obsession is at an all-time high."

Tangy Pickle Doritos. Grill Mates Dill Pickle Seasoning for your steak. Portable pouches of pickles. Pickle mayonnaise, pickle hummus, pickle cookies, pickle gummies. Spicy pickle challenges. Pickleback shots at the bar. Pickle juice and Dr. Pepper, heaven help us. Corn puffs colored and flavored like pickles and called, naturally, Pickle Balls. In Pittsburgh, the cradle of the modern American pickle (talkin' to you, H.J. Heinz), a summer festival called Picklesburgh that draws aficionados of the sour and the puckery from several states away for copious amounts of pickle beer washed down by brine, or vice versa.

As 2025 begins, two possible conclusions present themselves. First: The previously nobrow pickle has embedded its sour self at the nucleus of the American gastro-zeitgeist for the foreseeable future. Second: This maybe has played itself out, and the pickle has (to mix a metaphor) jumped the shark.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

More of us are living the life of brine

"I think pickling in general has had a resurgence," says Emily Ruby, who would know. She is a curator and expert on the history of the Heinz company for the Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, a couple miles downriver from this industrial borough where Henry J. Heinz churned out his first packaged pickles in the 19th century. Indeed, pickles are now a \$3.1 billion annual market in the United States and growing consistently.

Let's dispense with the obvious hanging question. In short: Sour nation, sour mood, sour foods? Maybe just a little.

"It's been a scary few years for a lot of people. In 2024 we needed something we could agree on. Maybe it's pickles," says Alex Plakias, an associate professor at Hamilton College in New York who teaches the philosophy of food.

"I was surprised at how the pickle could be all things to all people," says Plakias, whose most recent book is about awkwardness. "All these different food identities in 2024, and no matter who you think of, pickles can be for them."

To see how that might have happened, we can look to the potent pathways of marketing and social media.

The garden-variety American cucumber pickle is crunchy and sour, with an aggressive taste of its own but a clear elasticity that accommodates other "flavor profiles" (Ghost pepper pickles! Garlic pickles! Horseradish pickles! Bread and butter chips!). They're also absurdly low fat — the rare food trend that's not outright bad for you — and some offer the probiotic benefits of fermentation. Key marketing points all.

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From a positioning perspective, somehow the pickle exists at the crossroads of homey-slash-traditional (Mom, Lower East Side, preserves, harvests) and edgy-slash-slightly subversive (sour, intense flavors, startup pickle factories in reclaimed industrial neighborhoods).

"It's not like I come from a long line of picklers. But I realized that a cucumber is a blank slate and you get to paint it with all kinds of different brines and spices and salts and sugars," says John Patterson, who founded Pittsburgh Pickle with his brothers out of a church kitchen a decade ago.

"A pickle is something you can rely on and count on," he says. "A pickle is always funny, for some reason. A pickle is never nefarious or mean. It's a peaceful, wholesome business to be in."

(Of the cucumber itself, he has this to say: "It's almost like God intended them to be pickled.")

The pickle is becoming an immersive experience

The pickle is also, let's be candid, usually green and bumpy and intrinsically unattractive. That means even social-video newbies don't need precision lighting to crank out reasonably compelling pickle content.

Credit — or blame — TikTok for some of the frenzy. Watching the meticulous chronicling of pickle-cake baking, pickle-wreath making and pickle-pizza crafting, you get the sense the social platform was made as much for dills as for dancing. Pickle videos there regularly top 2 million viewers, and as of this week TikTok reported more than 251 million pieces of pickle content for the snacking.

Then there is the Great Glickle Surge of 2024 — another social media oddity that involves someone pouring "edible glitter" (who knew?) into a jar of pickles and making "glickles" — ostensibly a sexier, blingier, even Instagrammier version of pickles (again, who knew?).

Finally, COVID likely played a pivotal role. After years of rising locavore ethos, the pandemic's forced inward focus in 2020 and 2021 led many Americans to revisit DIY approaches to food, including baking sourdough bread and, yes, pickling things. It's what Nora Rubel, who researches food and culture, calls "an embrace of 'grandmothercore' culture" by, well, grandchildren. "Gen Z is taking pickles as their thing. This is the new avocado toast," says Rubel, a professor of Jewish studies at the University of Rochester.

"Pickles are also kind of funny. They're just sort of goofy. You can make a lot of puns about pickles. It's intense flavor, but there's also a kind of silliness about them," Rubel says. (She also was heard to say: "The sweet pickle is something that's very deceptive and upsetting to me.")

If you're seeing a thread emerging, it's this — not entirely new, but worth repeating: Packaged food is no longer positioned as merely something to eat. Instead, like the most immersive restaurants, these days it often presents itself as a multimedia experience — something to be talked about and reveled in, to join likeminded communities over, to incorporate into your own personality. Lifestyle pickles, as it were.

"It symbolizes how we engage with food in daily life and with each other in 2024," says MinJi (MJ) Kim, an assistant professor of communication at Flagler College in Florida who studies how media affects people's food choices.

"Sour has duality. When milk or meat or vegetables develop a sour smell, it signals spoilage. It's a natural warning system. We equate sourness with risk," Kim says. "On the other hand, when sourness is intentional — lemons, cider vinegar, greek yogurt — it becomes a marker of health and appeal. It shifts the perception of sourness from risk to something acceptable."

There you have it: sourness as acceptable, delicious, even worthy of obsession.

So as the popularity of pickleball — no direct relation — continues to spike, as fried pickles transcend their novelty status and become bar-food stalwarts across the land, and as someone's pet plays with one of 26 pickle holiday toys, we'll leave you with two dueling thoughts as America crunches its way into a new year.

From Rubel, this: "You can get pickle everything now. This is really my time."

And from Delish, the food website, this: "Can we give pickles a break in 2025? They're tired. And we're tired for them."

A new year dawns on a Middle East torn by conflict and change

By GHAITH ALSAYED, WAFAA SHURAFU and LUJAIN JO Associated Press

DAMASCUS (AP) — In Damascus, the streets were buzzing with excitement Tuesday as Syrians welcomed in a new year that seemed to many to bring a promise of a brighter future after the unexpected fall of Bashar Assad's government weeks earlier.

While Syrians in the capital looked forward to a new beginning after the ousting of Assad, the mood was more somber along Beirut's Mediterranean promenade, where residents shared cautious hopes for the new year, reflecting on a country still reeling from war and ongoing crises.

War-weary Palestinians in Gaza who lost their homes and loved ones in 2024 saw little hope that 2025 would bring an end to their suffering.

The last year was a dramatic one in the Middle East, bringing calamity to some and hope to others. Across the region, it felt foolish to many to attempt to predict what the next year might bring.

In Damascus, Abir Homsy said she is optimistic about a future for her country that would include peace, security and freedom of expression and would bring Syrian communities previously divided by battle lines back together.

"We will return to how we once were, when people loved each other, celebrated together whether it is Ramadan or Christmas or any other holiday — no restricted areas for anyone," she said.

But for many, the new year and new reality carried with it reminders of the painful years that came before.

Abdulrahman al-Habib, from the eastern Syrian city of Deir el-Zour, had come to Damascus in hopes of finding relatives who disappeared after being arrested under Assad's rule. He was at the capital's Marjeh Square, where relatives of the missing have taken to posting photos of their loved ones in search of any clue to their whereabouts.

"We hope that in the new year, our status will be better ... and peace will prevail in the whole Arab world," he said.

In Lebanon, a tenuous ceasefire brought a halt to fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group a little over a month ago. The country battered by years of economic collapse, political instability and a series of calamities since 2019, continues to grapple with uncertainty, but the truce has brought at least a temporary return to normal life.

Some families flocked to the Mzaar Ski Resort in the mountains northeast of Beirut on Tuesday to enjoy the day in the snow even though the resort had not officially opened.

"What happened and what's still happening in the region, especially in Lebanon recently, has been very painful," said Youssef Haddad, who came to ski with his family. "We have great hope that everything will get better."

On Beirut's seaside corniche, Mohammad Mohammad from the village of Marwahin in southern Lebanon was strolling with his three children.

"I hope peace and love prevail next year, but it feels like more (challenges) await us," he said.

Mohammad was among the tens of thousands displaced during more than a year of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. Now living in Jadra, a town that was also bombarded during the conflict, he awaits the end of a 60-day period, after which the Israeli army is required to withdraw under the conditions of a French and U.S.-brokered ceasefire.

"Our village was completely destroyed," Mohammad said. His family would spend a quiet evening at home, he said. This year "was very hard on us. I hope 2025 is better than all the years that passed."

In Gaza, where the war between Hamas and Israel has killed more than 45,500 Palestinians, brought massive destruction and displaced most of the enclave's population, few saw cause for optimism in the new year.

"The year 2024 was one of the worst years for all Palestinian people. It was a year of hunger, displacement, suffering and poverty," said Nour Abu Obaid, a displaced woman from northern Gaza.

Obaid, whose 10-year-old child was killed in a strike in the so-called "humanitarian zone" in Muwasi, said she didn't expect anything good in 2025. "The world is dead," she said. "We do not expect anything, we expect the worst."

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The war was sparked by the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack on southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others.

Ismail Salih, who lost his home and livelihood, expressed hopes for an end to the war in 2025 so that Gaza's people can start rebuilding their lives.

The year that passed "was all war and all destruction," he said. "Our homes are gone, our trees are gone, our livelihood is lost."

In the coming year, Salih said he hopes that Palestinians can "live like the rest of the people of the world, in security, reassurance and peace."

Jimmy Carter is being mourned in his tiny hometown and around the world

By RUSS BYNUM, SHARON JOHNSON and BILL BARROW Associated Press

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Johnny Jones found out about Jimmy Carter's death within a matter of minutes. That's how it works in a small town, even for a former U.S. president and Nobel Peace Prize winner known throughout the world.

"Somebody texted my wife and told her about it — that's when I found out," Jones said Monday, a day after the 39th president died at the age of 100, surrounded by family in the one-story house he and his late wife, Rosalynn, built before he launched his first political campaign more than 60 years ago.

"His presence here in Plains has really boosted the morale of everyone who lives here," said Jones, 85, as he recalled warm exchanges with "Mr. Jimmy" and "Ms. Rosalynn," who died in November 2023.

Indeed, the Carters put this town of fewer than 700 people — not much bigger than when Carter was born Oct. 1, 1924 — on the world stage. His remarkable rise to the White House, landslide defeat in 1980 and rehabilitation thereafter as a freelance diplomat and global humanitarian were reflected Monday in tributes from Plains' residents and around the world.

Not far from where Jones sat on his front porch, black ribbons hung alongside U.S. flags flying in front of the souvenir shops and cafes that make up the nucleus of Plains' main street, which spans just a few blocks from Carter's 1976 presidential campaign headquarters — the old train depot — to where the family once operated its peanut warehouses. TV cameras and news trucks lined the street that runs in front of the old gas station where the former president's late brother, Billy Carter, once would hold court with national journalists who covered his older brother.

Across the railroad tracks, Philip Kurland stood in his political memorabilia shop, which he opened years after the Carters returned from Washington, and recalled the former president not as a famous figure but an approachable neighbor who once prayed with him when he was sick.

"We're in a state of denial," he said. "I was telling people: Let's start planning for his 101st birthday."

At Maranatha Baptist Church, where the Carters long taught Sunday school, a handful of residents trickled in for a silent vigil Monday evening. A piano played softly as people lit candles at the altar, with lighted Christmas trees standing on either side.

In Washington, plans continued for the state rites that will affirm Carter's global status. President Joe Biden confirmed that Jan. 9, 2025, will be a day of national mourning, with federal offices closed for Carter's state funeral at the National Cathedral. Biden, a longtime Carter friend and political ally, will deliver a eulogy for his fellow Democrat. Congressional leaders have confirmed to the Carter family that the former president will lie in state from Jan. 7 to Jan. 9, when his remains will be transported to the cathedral for the state funeral.

In New York, the 15 members of the U.N. Security Council stood in silent tribute to the Nobel Peace Prize winner. U.S. deputy ambassador Dorothy Shea read a statement from the U.N.'s most powerful body at the start of an emergency meeting on Yemen.

"President Carter was a peacemaker who worked tirelessly and effectively in support of conflict mediation, the furtherance of human rights and the strengthening of democracy, both while he was in office and during his many years of service thereafter," the Security Council statement said.

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China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Geng Shuang, remembered Carter as "a driving force" in establishing relations between Beijing and Washington. "We highly commend his achievements," Geng said, stating that Carter "made great contribution over the years to ... cooperation between the two countries."

Prominent Egyptian rights defender Hossam Bahgat, a fierce critic of the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government, said Carter was among the first to warn of "Israeli apartheid" against Palestinians — a position that put Carter at odds with much of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

"Such a profile of courage," Bahgat wrote on Facebook. "He warned of Israeli apartheid as early as 2007. He stood by his principles and moral standards because he understood his mission and stayed true to his beliefs without seeking to placate donors or please hedge-funder packed boards."

Back in Georgia, neighbors of the Carter Center in Atlanta congregated near the grounds where Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter would redefine what a post-presidency can be. The Carters established the Carter Center in 1982 and for four decades oversaw diplomatic missions, election monitoring and public health programs with operations that spanned five continents.

"I really appreciate him as an ex-president, what he's done since" leaving office, said Richard Hopkins, an Atlanta resident.

Hopkins said Carter's public service went beyond elected office. A Korean War veteran, Hopkins noted that Carter, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a submarine officer after World War II. He also highlighted the Carters' work with Habitat for Humanity, which builds houses for low-income people. The Carters' Habitat involvement came in addition to their Carter Center work; they headlined their own annual builds into their early 90s.

Habitat for Humanity CEO Jonathan Reckford said the Carters were integral to Habitat's growth.

"Most people think President Carter started and ran Habitat, which is not actually true," he said Monday. "But what is true is Habitat was founded in 1976, and it was a tiny organization in 1984 when President and Mrs. Carter famously rode a bus up from south Georgia to spend a week sleeping in a church basement and rehabbing a tenement building on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. That's when the world found out about Habitat."

Jason Carter, the former president's grandson who now chairs the Carter Center's governing board, said in a recent interview that the former president formed that lifelong commitment to service because of Plains.

"My grandfather could go to a village anywhere in the world," the younger Carter said, and help people without patronizing them. "Because he was from a village like that himself."

Some residents like Jones are worried about their small town now that the Carters are gone.

"Interest in Plains will dwindle," he predicted.

Jill Stuckey, a longtime Carter friend who oversees the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park for the National Park Service, is more optimistic. She expressed personal sadness but commended the Carters for ensuring a lasting impact in Plains, just as they have globally through the Carter Center.

"Since the moment Rosalynn passed, he wanted to be with her. So knowing that he's finally reunited with Rosalynn is a wonderful thing. But those of us who selfishly wanted to keep him here forever, I'm in that camp," Stuckey said.

But the Carters, she emphasized, planned long ago to be buried in the same town where they were born, married and spent most of their lives. Rosalynn Carter already is buried in a plot visible from the front porch of the family home. The house and gravesite eventually will be added to the National Park.

Said Stuckey: "I think they've kind of set us up for success."

How to catch the Quadrantids, the first meteor shower of 2025

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When the Quadrantid meteor shower peaks on Friday, it will be the year's first chance to see fireballs in the sky.

A waning crescent moon means good visibility under clear and dark conditions.

Most meteor showers are named for the constellations where they appear to originate from in the night

sky. But the Quadrantids “take their name from a constellation that doesn’t exist anymore,” said NASA’s William Cooke.

These meteors usually don’t have long trains, but the heads may appear as bright fireballs. The peak may reveal as many as 120 meteors per hour, according to NASA.

Viewing lasts until Jan. 16. Here’s what to know about the Quadrantids and other meteor showers.

What is a meteor shower?

As the Earth orbits the sun, several times a year it passes through debris left by passing comets — and sometimes asteroids. The source of the Quadrantids is debris from the asteroid 2003 EH1.

When these fast-moving space rocks enter Earth’s atmosphere, the debris encounters new resistance from the air and becomes very hot, eventually burning up.

Sometimes the surrounding air glows briefly, leaving behind a fiery tail — the end of a “shooting star.”

You don’t need special equipment to see the various meteor showers that flash across annually, just a spot away from city lights.

How to view a meteor shower

The best time to watch a meteor shower is in the early predawn hours, when the moon is low in the sky.

Competing sources of light — such as a bright moon or artificial glow — are the main obstacles to a clear view of meteors. Cloudless nights when the moon wanes smallest are optimal viewing opportunities.

And keep looking up, not down. Your eyes will be better adapted to spot shooting stars if you aren’t checking your phone.

The Quadrantids will peak on a night with a slim crescent moon, just 11% full.

When is the next meteor shower?

The next meteor shower, the Lyrids, will peak in mid-April.

Russian missile and drone attack on Ukraine hits multiple targets, including Kyiv

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched an aerial attack on Ukraine on Tuesday, striking the capital and other regions with multiple missiles and drones.

Ukraine’s air force reported a ballistic missile threat at 3:00 a.m. (0100 GMT), with at least two explosions heard in Kyiv minutes later. Another missile alert was issued at 8:00 a.m. followed by at least one explosion in the city. Missile debris fell in the Darnytskyi district of the capital with no reports of casualties or damage, the local administration said.

Authorities in the northeastern Sumy region reported strikes near the city of Shostka, where the mayor, Mykola Noha, said 12 residential buildings had been damaged as well as two educational facilities. He said some “social infrastructure objects” were destroyed, without providing detail.

The air force also reported missiles and drones targeting several other regions of Ukraine.

In Moscow, the Russian Defense Ministry said that its forces successfully struck a Ukrainian air base and a gunpowder factory.

Around half of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure has been destroyed during the war, and rolling electricity blackouts are common and widespread.

Kyiv’s Western allies have provided air defense systems to help Ukraine protect critical infrastructure, but Russia has sought to overwhelm its air defenses with combined strikes involving large numbers of missiles and drones.

Russian attacks come as uncertainty looms over the course of the nearly three-year conflict. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office next month, has vowed to end the war and has thrown into doubt whether vital U.S. military support for Kyiv will continue.

On Monday, President Joe Biden announced that the United States will send an additional \$2.5 billion in weapons to Ukraine as his administration works quickly to spend all the money it has available to help

Kyiv fight off Russia before Trump takes office.

Ukraine has struck back at Russia with a steady barrage of missile and drone attacks throughout the year.

Early Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses shot down 68 Ukrainian drones over several regions early Tuesday and sank eight uncrewed boats in the Black Sea.

Head of the Smolensk region in western Russia, Vasily Anokhin, said drone fragments fell on the territory of an oil depot, sparking a blaze.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, the Moscow-appointed head of the city of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, said that Russian defenses downed four aerial drones attacking the city and sank two uncrewed boats near the shore.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate, known under its acronym GUR, claimed that one of its naval drones on Tuesday shot down a Russian helicopter with a missile, marking the first time when an aerial target was destroyed by an uncrewed vessel.

It said a MaguraV5 naval drone downed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter with an R-73 missile near Cape Tarkhankut, the westernmost point of the Crimean peninsula. Another Russian helicopter was damaged but managed to reach an airfield, GUR said.

Russia has held the initiative this year as its military has steadily rammed through Ukrainian defenses in the east in a series of slow but steady offensives.

Still, in August, Ukraine launched a raid into Russia's Kursk region that caught Moscow by surprise, dealing a significant blow to the Kremlin's prestige. The Russian army has been able to reclaim some territory of the area there from Ukrainian forces but has failed to fully dislodge them.

South Korea to inspect Boeing aircraft as it struggles to find cause of plane crash that killed 179

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean officials said Monday they will conduct safety inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines, as they struggle to determine what caused a plane crash that killed 179 people a day earlier.

Sunday's crash, the country's worst aviation disaster in decades, triggered an outpouring of national sympathy. Many people worry how effectively the South Korean government will handle the disaster as it grapples with a leadership vacuum following the recent successive impeachments of President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's top two officials, amid political tumult caused by Yoon's brief imposition of martial law earlier this month.

New acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday presided over a task force meeting on the crash and instructed authorities to conduct an emergency review of the country's aircraft operation systems.

"The essence of a responsible response would be renovating the aviation safety systems on the whole to prevent recurrences of similar incidents and building a safer Republic of South Korea," said Choi, who is also deputy prime minister and finance minister.

The Boeing 737-800 plane operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air aborted its first landing attempt for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Then, during its second landing attempt, it received a bird strike warning from the ground control center before its pilot issued a distress signal. The plane landed without its front landing gear deployed, overshot the runway, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into a fireball.

Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines and now a consultant, said the Boeing 737-800 is a "proven airplane" that belongs to a different class of aircraft than the Boeing 737 Max jetliner that was linked to fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

But South Korea's Transport Ministry said Monday it plans to conduct safety inspections of all of the 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners operated by the country's airlines as well as a broader review into safety standards at Jeju Air, which operates 39 of those planes. Senior ministry official Joo Jong-wan said representatives from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing were expected to arrive in South Korea

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on Monday to participate in the investigation.

Ministry officials also said they will look into whether the Muan airport's localizer — a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact.

Joo said the ministry has determined that similar concrete structures are in other domestic airports, including in Jeju Island and the southern cities of Yeosu and Pohang, as well as airports in the United States, Spain and South Africa.

Video of the crash indicated that the pilots did not deploy flaps or slats to slow the aircraft, suggesting a possible hydraulic failure, and did not manually lower the landing gear, suggesting they did not have time, said John Cox, a retired airline pilot and CEO of Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Despite that, the jetliner was under control and traveling in a straight line, and damage and injuries likely would have been minimized if not for the barrier being so close to the runway, Cox said.

Other observers said the videos showed the plane was suffering from suspected engine trouble but the landing gear malfunction was likely a direct reason for the crash. They said there wouldn't likely be a link between the landing gear problem and the suspected engine issue.

Earlier Monday, another Boeing 737-800 plane operated by Jeju Air returned to Seoul's Gimpo International Airport shortly after takeoff when the pilot detected a landing gear issue. Song Kyung-hoon, a Jeju Air executive, said the issue was resolved through communication with a land-based equipment center, but the pilot decided to return to Gimpo as a precautionary measure.

Joo said officials were reviewing whether there might have been communication problems between air traffic controllers and the pilot. "Our current understanding is that, at some point during the go-around process, communication became somewhat ineffective or was interrupted, ahead of the landing and impact," he said.

Ministry officials said Monday the plane's flight data and cockpit audio recorders were moved to a research center at Gimpo airport ahead of their analysis. Ministry officials earlier said it would take months to complete the investigation of the crash.

The Muan crash is South Korea's deadliest aviation disaster since 1997, when a Korean Airlines plane crashed in Guam, killing 228 people on board.

The crash left many South Koreans shocked and ashamed, with the government announcing a seven-day national mourning period through Jan. 4. Some questioned whether the crash involved safety or regulatory issues, such as a 2022 Halloween crush in Seoul that killed 160 people and a 2014 ferry sinking that killed 304 people.

The Transport Ministry said authorities have identified 146 bodies and are collecting DNA and fingerprint samples from the other 33.

Park Han Shin, a representative of the bereaved families, said they were told that the bodies were so badly damaged that officials need time before returning them to their families.

"I demand that the government mobilize more personnel to return our brothers and family members as intact as possible more swiftly," he said, choking down tears.

The crash was yet more major news for South Koreans already reeling from a political crisis set off by Yoon's martial law decree, which brought hundreds of troops into Seoul streets and revived traumatic memories of past military rule in the 1970-80s.

The political tumult resulted in the opposition-controlled National Assembly impeaching Yoon and Han. The safety minister stepped down and the police chief was arrested over their roles in the martial law enforcement.

The absence of top officials responsible for managing disasters has led to concerns.

"We are deeply worried whether the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters really can handle the disaster," the mass-circulation JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said in an editorial Monday.

The rise in mail voting comes with a price, as mismatched signatures lead to ballot rejections

By AUDREY McAVOY and AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — As with many voters on Maui, Joshua Kamalo thought the race for president wasn't the only big contest on the November ballot. He also was focused on a hotly contested seat for the local governing board.

He made sure to return his ballot in the virtually all vote-by-mail state early, doing so two weeks before Election Day. A week later, he received a letter telling him the county couldn't verify his signature on the return envelope, jeopardizing his vote.

And he wasn't the only one. Two other people at the biodiesel company where he works also had their ballots rejected, as did his daughter. In each case, the county said their signatures didn't match the ones on file.

"I don't know how they fix that, but I don't think it's right," said Kamalo, a truck driver who persevered through traffic congestion and limited parking options to get to the county office so he could sign an affidavit affirming that the signature was indeed his.

He said he probably wouldn't have bothered to fix it if the South Maui county council race wasn't so close. The co-founder of his employer, Pacific Biodiesel, was the candidate who ended up on the losing side.

Kamalo's experience is part of a broader problem as mail voting rises in popularity and more states opt to send ballots to all voters. Matching signatures on returned mail ballot envelopes to the official ones recorded at local voting offices can be a tedious process, sometimes done by humans and sometimes through automation, and can lead to dozens, hundreds or even thousands of ballots being rejected.

If the voter can't correct it in time, the ballot won't count.

"There's been a big push toward mail voting over the last few years, and I think the tradeoffs aren't always clear to voters," said Larry Norden, an elections and government expert at the Brennan Center for Justice.

He said it's important for states and local governments to have procedures that ensure large numbers of eligible mail ballot voters aren't being disenfranchised.

The use of mail ballots exploded in 2020 as states looked for ways to accommodate voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eight states and the District of Columbia now have universal mail voting, in which all active registered voters are mailed a ballot unless they opt out.

At least 30 states require election officials to notify voters if there is a problem with their mail ballot and give them a chance to fix — or "cure" — it. Some have complained that the timeframe allowed to do that is too short.

Nevada, a key presidential battleground, is among the states that mails a ballot to all registered voters. In November, county election offices rejected about 9,000 mail ballots primarily because of signature problems.

That didn't affect the outcome of the state's presidential race, which Donald Trump won by 46,000 votes, but it could have changed the outcome in some down ballot races. Some state legislative seats in Clark County, which includes Las Vegas and had more than half of the rejected mail ballots, were decided by just several hundred votes. The North Las Vegas City Council race, also in Clark County, was decided by just nine votes.

"We've had signature curing problems since we adopted universal mail-in voting during the pandemic in 2020, and it seems to be getting worse," said Sondra Cosgrove, history professor at the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas and executive director of Vote Nevada, a civic organization. "This is something that's a crisis level that needs to get fixed."

The potential for signature match problems to affect close races has led some voting rights groups in the the state to call for an overhaul of the verification process.

"We have to find the best option going forward for people that is more accessible, that gets their votes and ballots counted on time, because it's crazy when you think about the difference-maker being eight or nine votes," said Christian Solomon, the state director of Rise Nevada, a youth-led civic engagement group.

Nevada voters already took one step toward a potential fix in November when they approved — by 73%

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— a constitutional amendment that will require voters to present identification to vote. When voting with a mailed ballot, a driver's license or Social Security number will be required in addition to the signature. Voters will need to approve the amendment a second time in two years for it to take effect.

Dave Gibbs, president of the Repair the Vote PAC, which wrote the amendment, said he was inspired by a law passed in 2021 in another presidential swing state, Georgia.

That state ended its signature check process and instead now requires voters to submit their driver's license number or state identification card number when returning a mailed ballot, said Mike Hassinger, spokesman for the Georgia Secretary of State's office. Most voting there is done early but in-person.

Critics say such ID requirements would be too burdensome for states, like Hawaii, where mailed ballots account for the vast majority of voting.

On Maui, the number of rejected mail ballots prompted a lawsuit challenging the results of the local county council election, where the winning margin was just 97 votes.

The lawsuit alleges that hundreds of ballots weren't counted because the county clerk wrongly claimed they arrived in envelopes with signatures that didn't match the one on file. Attorney Lance Collins said his clients wanted a new election in the race between Tom Cook and his client, Kelly King.

Six voters submitted declarations saying they were told their ballot envelope signature was deficient when, in their view, there was nothing wrong with it.

Collins said under the state's administrative rules, a returned ballot envelope is presumed to be that of the voter and should be counted unless there is evidence to suggest it's not the voter's. He also said the county's rejection rate was significantly higher than the national average.

Maui County's attorneys responded in a court filing that its signature verification process followed the law. On Dec. 24, the state Supreme Court unanimously agreed and declared Cook the winner. The justices said the clerk provided voters with reasonable notice and opportunity to correct the deficiency on their ballot envelopes.

Even so, many voters on Maui have shared similar stories about being informed their signatures didn't match. Resident Grace Min, who was not part of the lawsuit, was among those who received one of the letters.

"I just find it highly unusual that my (ballot) signature would not have matched my signature," she said.

She had been paying particular attention to the county government race that she knew would be close, so it was important for her to make sure her vote was counted. She emailed an affidavit confirming the ballot was hers, but also had questions about the verification process and was concerned the time allowed for curing ballots was so short.

"I just have to imagine there had to have been people who didn't fix their signature," Min said, "and that doesn't seem very fair."

Today In History, January 1 Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 1, the first day of 2025. There are 364 days left in the year. This is New Year's Day.

Today in history:

On Jan. 1, 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War, declaring that all enslaved people in rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

Also on this date:

In 1804, Haiti declared itself independent from France, becoming the world's first Black-majority republic.

In 1808, the federal law prohibiting the importation of enslaved people to the United States took effect.

In 1818, Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus" was first published in London, when Shelley was 20 years old.

In 1892, the Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York formally opened, processing nearly 700 im-

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migrants on its first day; nearly 12 million immigrants would ultimately pass through the station before its closure in 1954.

In 1959, Fulgencio Batista resigned as Cuban president and fled the country, marking victory for Fidel Castro's rebel troops and the end of the Cuban Revolution.

In 2000, an anxious world held its breath as computers silently switched to the year 2000, but the dreaded "Y2K bug" caused few serious issues.

Today's Birthdays: Filmmaker Frederick Wiseman is 95. Actor Frank Langella is 87. Musician Country Joe McDonald is 83. Actor-comedian Don Novello is 82. DJ Grandmaster Flash is 67. Actor Morris Chestnut is 56. Rapper Ice Spice is 25.

#592 and last in a series: Covid-19 Update:

by Marie Miller

Well, folks, it's been a long time since we last talked; and it is my most sincere hope that this will be these Covid-19 Updates' swan song. I mean to close out this year with this final Update and let this project go. We've tapered off to the extent that I've only provided five of these posts this year, so it's time to close it out. I did promise I wouldn't just disappear, that I'd tell you when we got there, and I believe we're there. I thought today was fitting for that because the first December 30 was nearly a year into this thing, and I have provided you an Update on every December 30 since 2020. That's right, this will be the fifth annual pre-New Year's Eve Update. Seemed like a good place to call lit quits. And so this is it.

If you're interested in a trip down memory lane, here's a link to each of the prior December 30 posts. If you choose to look back, I think you will be surprised at all the places we've been together over the years.

Update #311 - December 30, 2020: [https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02C83Vz-Ga9tR5PhMYiREWqzCRkez7Fdo9fksaXMi5JdMCMnMpdSF4gqs6VtDhrsTgMI?_cft_\[0\]=AZUSg2NG8VWwF7q0fOCy_9qmGk5X1HI2hT6y5_B--aRcBNieGNDW6KTCLjrd2b0MHjGhFgudm2xOcetcS47COeDDnmOMR-Unxl7mpgZ-DjzbcNYkI3bMWsXnsofMQU9oY&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02C83Vz-Ga9tR5PhMYiREWqzCRkez7Fdo9fksaXMi5JdMCMnMpdSF4gqs6VtDhrsTgMI?_cft_[0]=AZUSg2NG8VWwF7q0fOCy_9qmGk5X1HI2hT6y5_B--aRcBNieGNDW6KTCLjrd2b0MHjGhFgudm2xOcetcS47COeDDnmOMR-Unxl7mpgZ-DjzbcNYkI3bMWsXnsofMQU9oY&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

Update #500 - December 30, 2021: [https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid0CiLUDtpSzCAKzxbCuBDtY1oEDjN7r634Yp-DXJi2RkVtWpU1BzNWLWjjm3YqMuVvxI?_cft_\[0\]=AZUAcoAXzGQGvaPEVNSSHf2Gg--co6_EbPxBPSX-ule5JrLbQ6kS6KoTu9QHq-j8bSStDJTU6uAOvz3rYIV5xUgHM-Gz-ISrZV-Tj7tqJnrR93oqnvq-g23rCoLbi324i-co&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid0CiLUDtpSzCAKzxbCuBDtY1oEDjN7r634Yp-DXJi2RkVtWpU1BzNWLWjjm3YqMuVvxI?_cft_[0]=AZUAcoAXzGQGvaPEVNSSHf2Gg--co6_EbPxBPSX-ule5JrLbQ6kS6KoTu9QHq-j8bSStDJTU6uAOvz3rYIV5xUgHM-Gz-ISrZV-Tj7tqJnrR93oqnvq-g23rCoLbi324i-co&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

Update #569 - December 30, 2022: [https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02tWpTuu9TGn7d8m3KtmJchqvYdUCNdM-koFzxV2k7PdKZxqHpHnEkhDUgmoVxsFJDJI?_cft_\[0\]=AZWT3Ax_TEvC0JcP5jFyK3ppKm5sP_xzrukE-S14ynGL-3A2vbsFI76MvEIDRFettu48fksOEmX7zC64zPGBfIEwjOMielXKqgkAD_1c6iQGy3Y4tyAi8a_eCMe_S5N_TDDw&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02tWpTuu9TGn7d8m3KtmJchqvYdUCNdM-koFzxV2k7PdKZxqHpHnEkhDUgmoVxsFJDJI?_cft_[0]=AZWT3Ax_TEvC0JcP5jFyK3ppKm5sP_xzrukE-S14ynGL-3A2vbsFI76MvEIDRFettu48fksOEmX7zC64zPGBfIEwjOMielXKqgkAD_1c6iQGy3Y4tyAi8a_eCMe_S5N_TDDw&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

Update #587 - December 30, 2023: [https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid09DRaQaAHv2rW4mS99UzS9tc9bJgZz73E9c-g9KC6nVcrDcPvXrrdvB8kpomVkrUXQI?_cft_\[0\]=AZV1IWTtjv0woej-2p2MhXDcFq4X1jNX9SOAV8Irfu1ai3j6n8hnOWxxVMAhROBaThan3nI5SiqpvYXyw2ADiy68iyDgAc5xnSoWYYQXEmX4x82JZicWoyWzKd-7wrHNEy8&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid09DRaQaAHv2rW4mS99UzS9tc9bJgZz73E9c-g9KC6nVcrDcPvXrrdvB8kpomVkrUXQI?_cft_[0]=AZV1IWTtjv0woej-2p2MhXDcFq4X1jNX9SOAV8Irfu1ai3j6n8hnOWxxVMAhROBaThan3nI5SiqpvYXyw2ADiy68iyDgAc5xnSoWYYQXEmX4x82JZicWoyWzKd-7wrHNEy8&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

I want to leave you with a strong caution that this isn't over. I don't think "over" is a reasonable expectation; it will never be over. It's better: We no longer have people dropping in droves, pages and pages of newspaper obituaries every single damned day, refrigerated trucks backed up to hospitals to serve as makeshift morgues, funeral homes running full-tilt and working 24-hour shifts. We have long since ended our state of emergency.

So can we forget about this virus? Well, not exactly. It's still killing folks—more than 50 a day in the past

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two weeks in the US and more than we'd been seeing even a week earlier. While it is no longer the third leading cause of death in the US, it still rounds out the Top 10 in the #10 spot. It's still not just like the flu (remember those claims?): Depending on the year, influenza kills around 20,000 to 30,000 of us a year; Covid-19 killed 73,000 in 2023, the last year for which we have final data.

A lot of those people who are dying are old, which if you're not old, doesn't sound like that big a deal I'll remind you though that, to old people like me who have a reasonable expectation of quite a number of good years ahead of us and things we'd still like to do, that still feels like a pretty big deal.

Additionally, we're seeing a lot of deaths that are likely attributable to Covid-19 which have not been identified as such. Recent work has turned up a bunch of those, for example, total all-cause mortality in the US increased 18.5% from 2019 to 2020, and that increase wasn't all people whose death certificates listed Covid-19, not even close. That increased mortality has tapered off, but we're still well ahead of 2019 yet today. While Covid-19 deaths are a fraction of the numbers in 2020, all-cause mortality is up by way more than Covid-19 can explain. Deaths from heart disease spiked in 2020, stayed high through 2022 and then tapered, but they're still substantially higher than 2019. Stroke deaths and deaths from diabetes have followed similar trajectories, stroke more markedly than diabetes. Those cardiovascular deaths track well with all of the evidence we've discussed over the past five years showing SARS-CoV-2 infects and/or damages the heart and blood vessels, also causing abnormal blood clots.

Of course, with the end of reporting and the widespread use of home testing (if folks are bothering to test at all), we have no idea how many new cases there are at any point. Hospitalizations are not being routinely reported either, so all we have is anecdotal reports from this or that hospital system saying they've had a spike or things are settling down. Anecdotes don't have any real evidentiary value except as a note on trends in a particular region served by a hospital or a system.

What we do have, however, are wastewater surveillance data. The CDC continues to collect and analyze these, and after an unusually low transmission period throughout the fall, they're seeing a sharp increase over the past 14 days and expect these to rise in coming weeks. The CDC's map for the week ending December 21 shows "very high" or "high" viral activity of SARS-CoV-2 in 28 states, highest in the Midwest and Plains, while I count fewer than 10 states with "minimal" or "low" levels. Nationally as of December 26, the activity levels are "high," whereas they were "moderate" a week earlier and "low" at the beginning of the month. That's a spike for sure.

That's considerably worse than we looked at the beginning of the month. This means we're very likely moving into a surge of transmission with "a good chance that a lot of people are going to get sick in the next couple of weeks and be unaware of it," according to Michael Hoerger, associate professor at Tulane University School of Medicine and public health expert on Covid-19 trends, director of the Pandemic Mitigation Collective (PMC), speaking with TODAY.com. The PMC forecasts that we're looking at 900,000 new infections daily by next month—you know the one that's just two days away. Thing is, the currently-circulating variants are highly transmissible. They are not causing more severe disease, but they're going to spread like crazy.

Now, folks aren't going to start wearing masks again. Frankly, I doubt they're going to stay home either; I think they'll just go to work, the store, and New Year's Eve parties just as they would if they had a cold. In fact, they're probably not going to even test, so they can tell themselves it's just a cold and feel completely guilt-free over it too.

In fact, Hoerger tweeted out an interesting data analysis based on the PMC model, showing your chance of encountering an infectious person at a New Year's Eve gathering. Here are some highlights from the

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table: If you attend a party with 20 people, the odds 1 in 4 that you'll be exposed to Covid-19. With 40-50 people, the odds go to 1 in 2. If you hit up a big venue with 300 people, you are virtually certain to be exposed. Does this mean you shouldn't go to a party? Nope, unless you're at high risk for severe disease. But be aware that, if you were planning to spend time in the New Year with Grandma, you might be bringing an unwelcome hitchhiker with you and maybe rethink that.

This virus is now generally acknowledged to be endemic, that is, a constant in the population. It's not going away, ever. We're going to have to live with it if we can. Some of us won't. What can you do about that? Not much in the big picture, but you can do a fair amount to protect yourself and others on an individual level. What does that look like? I think it looks like these things:

(1) Get vaccinated. Everyone six months and older is eligible to be vaccinated; there is no excuse not to be. There is no single step you can take that will be more helpful to you and to society. The new vaccine formulation that came out this fall is expected to do very well against current variants, mostly an Omicron offshoot called XEC and another Omicron subvariant, KP.3.1.1, as well as an up-and-comer, MC.1, a descendant of KP.3.1.1. We're never going to get a 100% match between vaccine and current variants, no more than we do with influenza, but this one looks pretty good because the mRNA vaccines targeted KP.2 (dominant in the spring when vaccine decisions were being made), which is closely related to all of the current variants. The vaccine is not going to prevent all infections, although it prevents many; but importantly, it will show effectiveness in keeping you out of hospital beds and coffins, two places I presume you are not eager to end up. I wouldn't dawdle about getting vaccinated; you need a couple of weeks after vaccination for the full effects of the protection. Even if you're not worried about getting sick yourself, being vaccinated can make you less likely to (a) get infected so you shed virus, and (2) shed virus even if you do get infected. That can protect the people around you, especially important if you interact with elderly or immunocompromised people—and you do, in the grocery store even if not in your personal life.

(2) Test. If you get sick with a respiratory infection, one with any of the following signs and symptoms: cough, congestion, sore throat, runny nose, nausea or loss of appetite, diarrhea, fatigue, headache and body aches, fever or chills, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, get tested. The tests available detect all currently-circulating variants, so they're useful. Home testing kits are easy to find and no longer stupid-expensive. In fact, there are still four free tests per household available from the government at <https://covidtests.gov/>. Get them.

(3) Isolate. Even if you don't test, if symptoms like those described above develop, get responsible. Current isolation guidelines aren't particularly onerous: Isolate at home until you've been fever-free without medication for at least 24 hours and your symptoms have been improving for 24 hours. If you have a fever, you probably don't feel like going places anyhow, right? After that, mask when you go out through Day 5 (remembering that we count from first day of symptoms, which is Day 0). These are the same guidelines as for influenza, so we're truly treating Covid-19 as an endemic virus now. And if you get worse after you were better—fever goes back up, symptoms worsen—go back to square one and isolate again. Please.

(4) Mask. If you are at high risk for severe disease or immunocompromised, you're going to want to mask in public indoor spaces during surges like the one we're embarking on right now. Masks do provide an added degree of safety from transmission.

(5) Get treated. If you are at high risk for severe disease, ask your doctor for Paxlovid after a positive test. I'm not certain of this, but it does appear doctors are more well-informed about indications for prescribing this drug than they were earlier in the year. If you are at risk and your physician doesn't want to prescribe it, I would suggest you see someone else. Do remember however that this drug interacts (in a bad way) with a fair list of other prescription drugs, so there can be a good reason not to prescribe it

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for some patients. Your physician should be able to explain this to you if that's the case. This is still our best means for preventing severe disease and death in those at risk, and it definitely saves lives. Also remember it must be started within the first five days of symptoms to be effective at all, so don't delay.

I'm going to note here that not all experts are on board with the relaxed guidelines for isolation, saying this disregards public health. Thing is other experts are saying it's time to stop treating Covid-19 as something different. The arguments in favor of relaxed guidance center around its simplicity. With the same rules for all respiratory viruses, influenza and Covid-19 in particular, it's easy to remember what you should do, which makes guidance easier to follow. The argument goes that having perfect guidance no one follows is worse than having poorer guidance people will follow. The opposed argument centers on the fact that Covid-19 has not yet established a clear pattern of seasonality and still kills a whole lot more folks than influenza, so it should not be treated like influenza. I'm neither an epidemiologist nor a public health specialist, so I'm not going to weigh in on this one.

I have one last note on long-Covid (PASC or post-acute sequelae of Covid), the prolonged constellation of symptoms that persist long, even for months, after the acute infection has cleared. Estimates are that currently 6% to 11% of adults in the US who've had Covid-19 now have long-Covid; since much of the time long-Covid resolves within a year or so, there are many more who have had it during the course of this disease's existence. There are more than 200 individual symptoms that can occur with long-Covid, cardiovascular, respiratory, mental health, gastrointestinal, neurologic, and metabolic.

We should note up front that you do not need a confirmed positive test in order to qualify for a diagnosis of long-Covid. The risk increases with the severity of the disease, but even people with mild disease can develop long-Covid. Because the number of people who had mild disease is so large, these folks make up the majority of sufferers. This can be debilitating, significantly interfering with activities of daily living. There still is no cure, only attempts at management of symptoms, and in some people the condition lasts well past the 12 months we see in many. This all means we still don't have much to offer these folks. Work on it continues.

I think that's it, not just for tonight, but forever. This project has been difficult, even painful, at times. In the 2020-2021 period when things were really ugly, there was a stretch where I realized it had been months since I'd gone a day without typing the word death multiple times. I couldn't always just see numbers as only numbers; sometimes I saw dads and sisters and grandmas and uncles in those death numbers. That gets to you. At the same time, I felt useful, something retired people don't always get. I enjoyed my interactions with this little community that grew up around these Updates, and I've appreciated all of you and your support in the dark times. I will miss you.

Those who've been around for a while know that this started out as a single, stand-alone post to answer questions some of my friends were asking me about this virus thing that was out there. I remember well the first such: We were at a fund-raiser for the college where I had taught, and she said to me, "This virus thing. It's not a big deal, right?" And I said, "Oh, yes, it's a big deal." That was in late February, 2020. Soon other questions came in from other people I knew, so I decided to write up a Facebook post explaining what this "virus thing" is and why it's a big deal. That's all. One and done. About 10 or so posts in, I realized this might go on a while and went back and numbered them from the beginning with no idea at all we'd get to 100, much less this close to 600 before calling it quits.

I remember one day, probably along about 2021 when someone said to me, "This is the worst thing we've ever lived through," and I replied, "Not yet we haven't." But now I can say we did. Even if I one day die from Covid-19, I think we can accurately say I didn't die in a Covid-19 pandemic. Not anymore.

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I'm going back to my cooking experiments and my family. I hope you find yourself engaging in pursuits that are meaningful to you as well. Please remember that, if the world doesn't look the way you think it should, you have a responsibility to do something about that, even if you only ever make it a better place for one other person.

And so we've reached the coda. Thanks for everything. Be well.