

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

**Wed-Fri., Nov. 24-26:** No School - Thanksgiving Vacation

### Thursday, Nov. 25

Community Thanksgiving Dinner, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

### Tuesday, Nov. 30

Groton Novice Debate  
JH GBB hosting Clark/Willow Lake (7th at 6 p.m. with 8th to follow)

### Wednesday, Dec. 1

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

### Thursday, Dec. 2

LifeTouch Pictures Retake at Elementary, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

JH GBB at Northwestern (7th at 6:30 p.m. followed by 8th)

### Friday, Dec. 3

State Oral Interp at Huron

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

### Saturday, Dec. 4

State Oral Interp at Huron

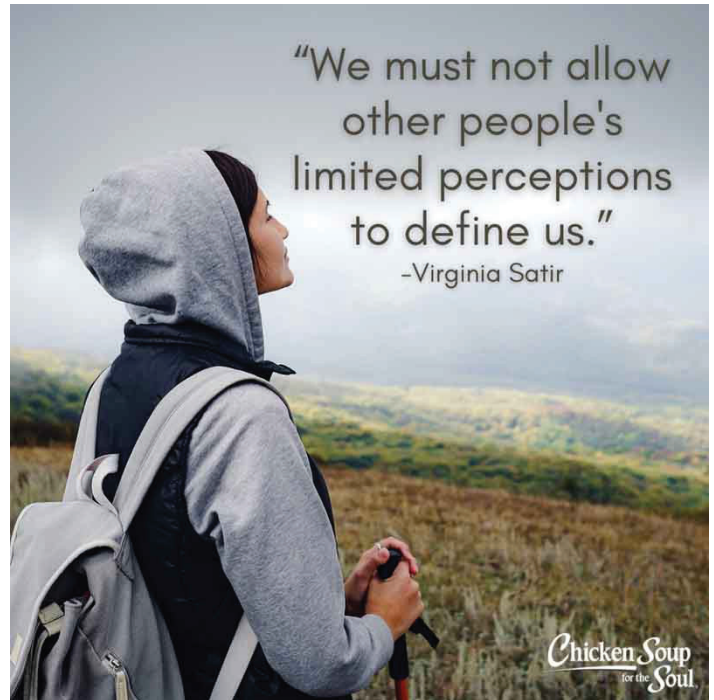
10 a.m.: JH GBB Jamboree in Groton

10 a.m.: Wrestling Invite at Clark-Willow Lake

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



### Monday, Dec. 6

4 p.m.: School Board planning/work session  
JH GBB hosts Langford. 7th at 6 p.m. with 8th to follow

### Tuesday, Dec. 7

GBB at Flandreau Indian. JV at 5 p.m. with varsity to follow

JHGBB at Tiospa Zina (7th at 4 p.m. with 8th to follow)

### Thursday, Dec. 9

7 p.m.: MS/HS Christmas Concert

### Friday, Dec. 10

GBB hosts Britton-Hecla. JV at 6 p.m. with Varsity to follow

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

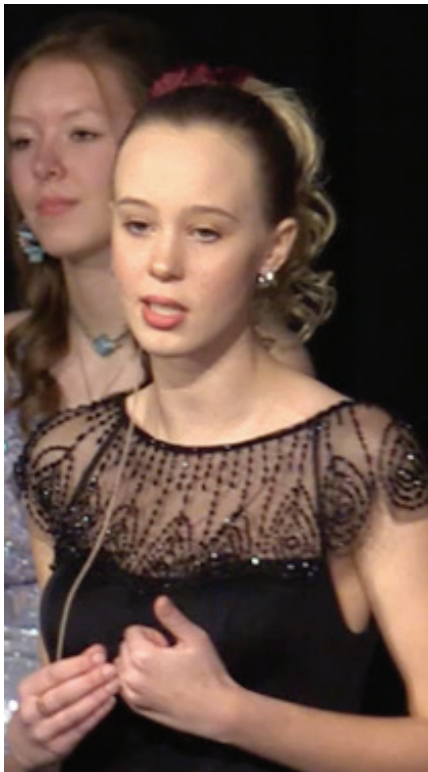
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
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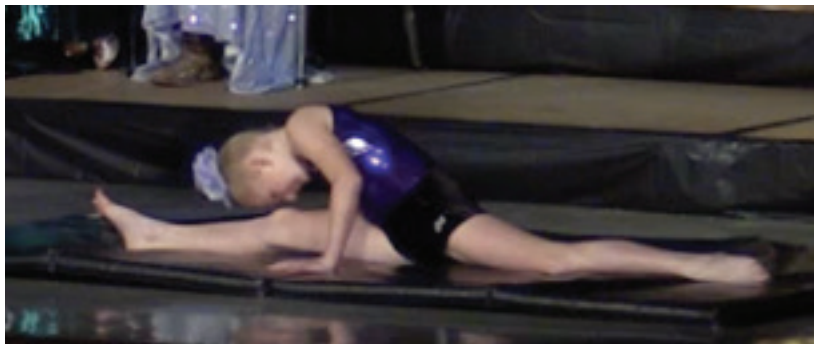
Ashtyn Bahr competed in the senior talent contest.



Anna Bisbee won the junior talent contest.

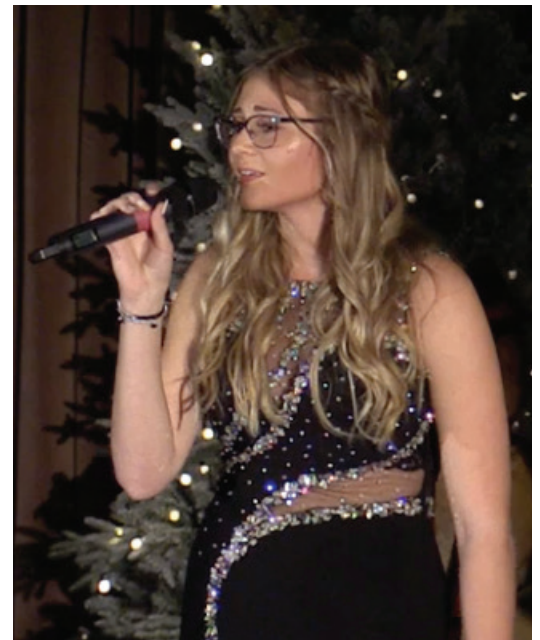


Jordan Kjellsen was the master of ceremony.



Kyrie Yeigh competed in the junior talent contest.

## 2022 Groton Area Snow Queen Contest



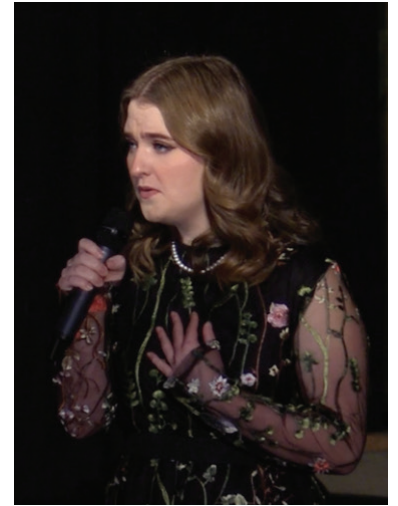
Julianna Kosel competed in the senior talent contest.

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**Camryn Kurtz competed in the senior talent contest.**



**Cadance Tullis won the senior talent contest.**

**Kaitlyn O'Neill, the Groton 2015 Snow Queen and the current reigning Miss South Dakota, was a special guest. She tried out for the Miss South Dakota five times and this was her final year of trying out and she got it.**



**The Snow Queen Prince and Princess candidates were interviewed.**



## Groton Area Snow Queen Winners

Christina Zoellner, daughter of Bill Zoellner, was chosen as the Senior Snow Queen winner. Gretchen Dinger, daughter of Elizabeth Bahr and Emily and Weston Dinger, was chosen as the Junior Snow Queen winner. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Here are the candidates and winners from the 2022 Groton Area Snow Queen Contest. Left to right they are Julianna Kosel, Trinity Smith, Miss Groton and Miss Congeniality Christian Zoellner, Gretchen Dinner, Junior Snow Queen winner; Emma Kutter, junior first runner-up; Kala Lehr, Emily Overacker and Ashley Johnson. In front is Snow Prince Jagger Penning, son of Brad and Janel Penning; and Snow Princess Baylin Taylor, daughter of Ross and Amanda Taylor. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Left: 2021 Senior  
Snow Queen  
Tiara DeHoet**

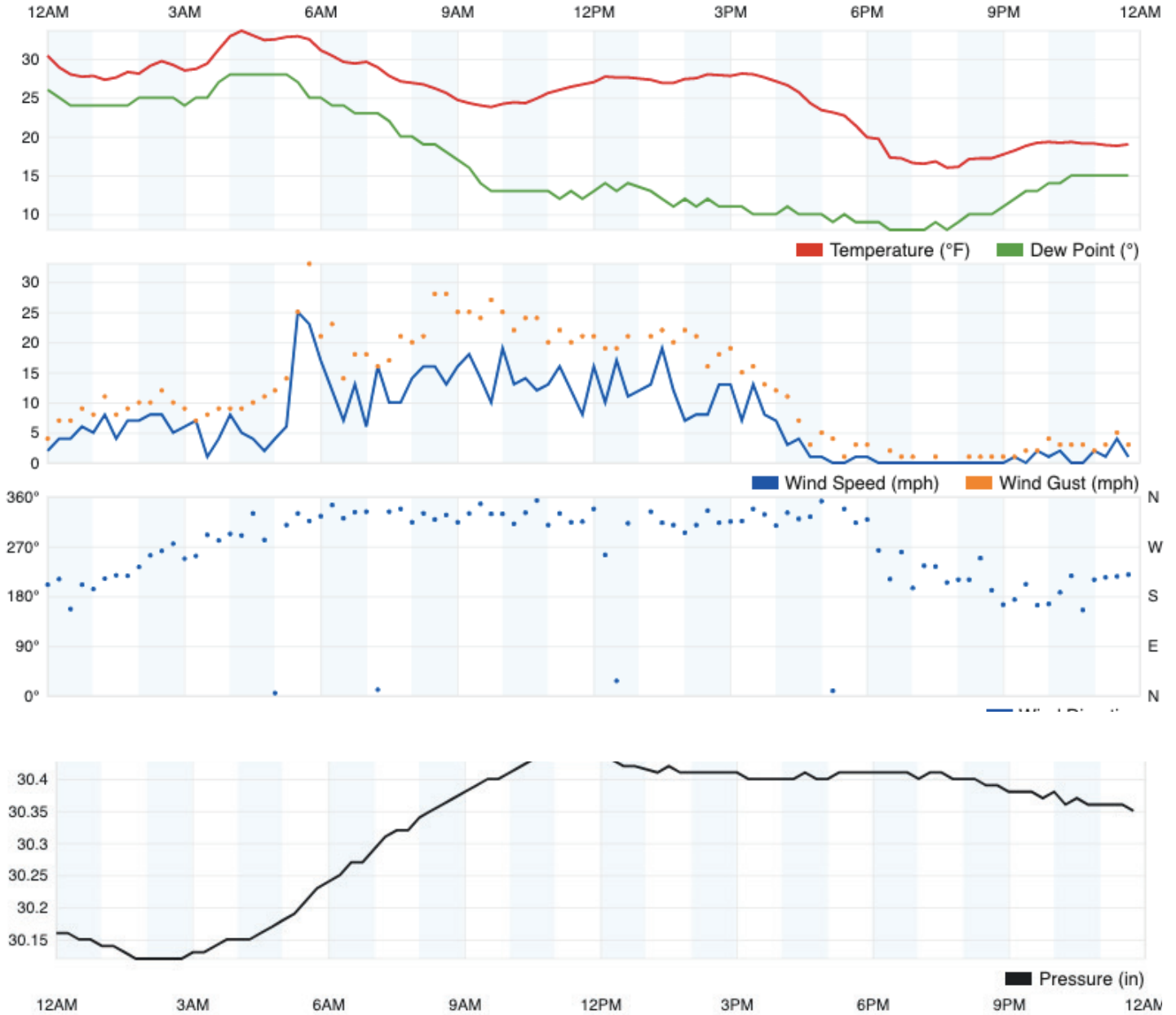
**Right: 2021  
Junior Snow  
Queen Lydia  
Meier**



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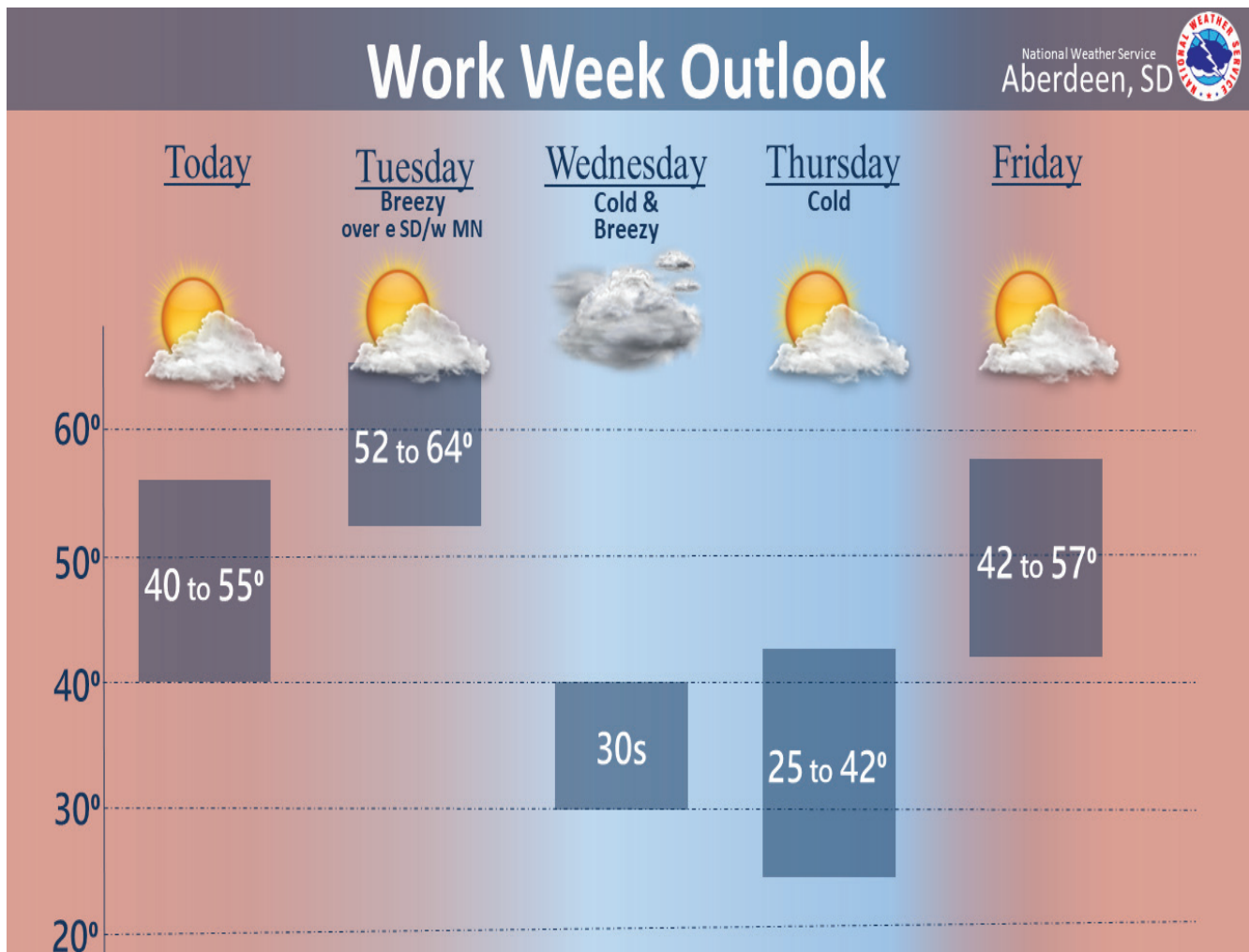
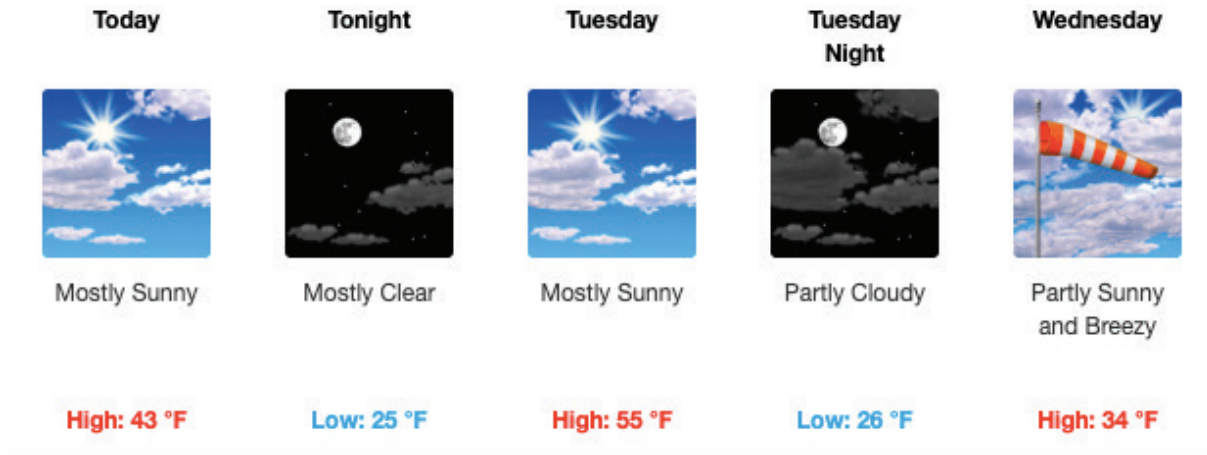
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Dry weather continues, with a dip in temperatures mid-week. Expect breezy and cold conditions Wednesday.

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## Today in Weather History

November 22, 1979: Snow began falling during the morning hours on the 21st and continued until the evening hours on the 22nd. Snowfall totals were in the 6 to 13-inch range with thirteen inches at Sioux Falls being the largest amount reported. Moderate winds of 20 to 35 mph made travel tough. Approximately 50 percent of the corn remained in the fields. The snow did not harm the corn, so most of it was still harvested.

November 22, 1985: Extreme cold temperatures occurred over South Dakota from November 22nd through the 28th, with low temperatures dropping well below zero. Record low temperatures were set in most areas, and Aberdeen set a record low for five of the seven days. Three of those five record lows still stand today: -17 on the 23rd, -18 on the 27th, and -21 on the 28th. The other records set at the time (-16 on both the 24th and 26th), were both broken in November 1996.

November 22, 2003: Heavy snow of 6 to 10 inches fell across Big Stone and Traverse counties in Minnesota, as well as northeastern South Dakota, from the evening of the 22nd to the afternoon of the 23rd. Dumont received 6 inches of snow, with 10 inches reported in Ortonville. Six inches of snow was also reported in Wilmot, White Rock, Estelline, and near Stone Bridge; 7 inches was reported Toronto; 8 inches in Big Stone City; and 9 inches at Clear Lake. Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches also fell in Corson and Lyman counties in South Dakota. Some other snowfall amounts included 8 inches northwest of Presho, Kennebec, and near Iona; and 9 inches southwest of Keldron.

1992: 45 tornadoes touched down in the Tennessee and Ohio Valleys. Georgia was hard hit with two F4, one F3 and three F2 tornadoes that killed six people and injured 144. Indiana had a total of 15 tornadoes on this day to set a record for an outbreak in November and for the month of November. One, an F4 multiple-vortex type, cut a 22-mile path through extreme southeastern Indiana and northern Kentucky. This tornado debunked the myth that twisters don't cross rivers, as this devastating tornado crossed the Ohio River twice. Indiana had a total of 15 tornadoes on this day to set two state records, the largest November tornado outbreak, and the most tornadoes in November. This tornado outbreak made a significant contribution to what was to become the biggest November ever for the U.S. concerning the number of tornadoes.

2010: A rare November ice storm prompts Fairbanks officials to advised residents to stay off the roads. Ice storm advisories are hoisted across a 950 mile stretch of the state that extends from Anchorage to Nome. The 0.39 inches of rain which fall at Fairbanks rates as that city's greatest November rainfall since November 1936.

2010: A strong cold front sweeping through the Midwest brought severe storms, including tornadoes to northern Illinois and southwest Wisconsin. Caledonia, Illinois was hit hard by an EF2 tornado.

1641 - An observer at Boston, MA, recorded a great tempest of wind and rain from the southeast all night, as fierce as a hurricane, and thereupon followed the highest tide which we have seen since our arrival here . (David Ludlum)

1957 - Extremely destructive Santa Ana winds blew from Oxnard to San Diego and inland parts of southern California. The high winds produced a 28,000 acre brush fire on a 40-mile front west of Crystal Lake. People were ordered off streets in some areas due to flying debris. (21st-22nd) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Eight cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Elkins, WV, reported a low of 5 degrees above zero. Gale force winds continued along the Northern Atlantic Coast. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Wet and windy weather prevailed across the western U.S., with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. Winds gusted to 62 mph at Vedauwoo WY, and reached 75 mph at Tillamook OR. Shelter Cove CA was drenched with 4.37 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northerly winds produced squalls along the shore of Lake Michigan, with heavy snow in extreme southeastern Wisconsin. Milwaukee WI received nine inches of snow, and in Racine County there were more than one hundred automobile accidents. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



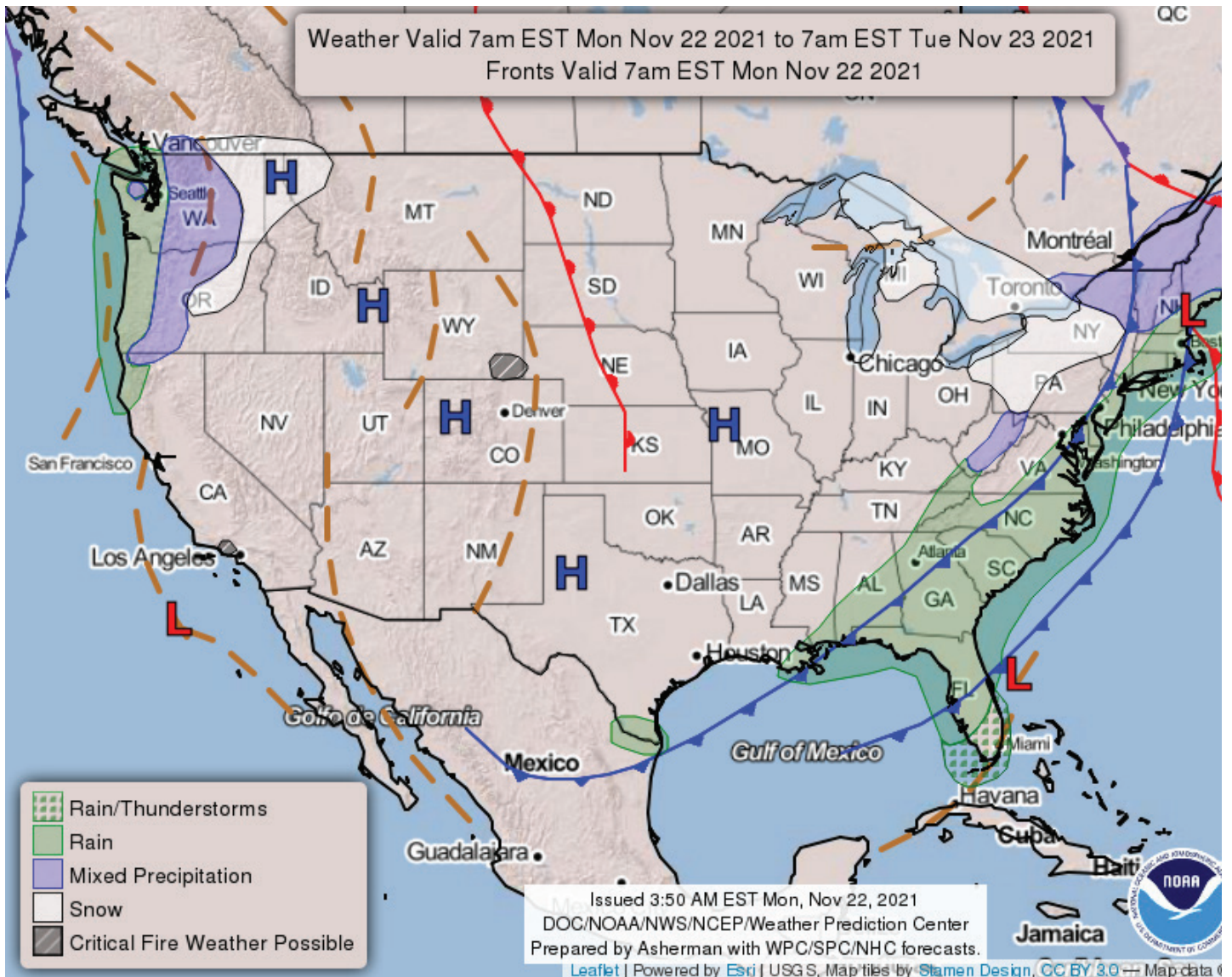
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 34 °F at 4:12 AM**  
**Low Temp: 16 °F at 7:45 PM**  
**Wind: 35 mph at 5:36 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 66° in 1904**  
**Record Low: -14° in 1895**  
**Average High: 39°F**  
**Average Low: 17°F**  
**Average Precip in Nov.: 0.58**  
**Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.05**  
**Precip Year to Date: 19.88**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:57:36 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:40:59 AM**





## Waiting For Wisdom

"You know," he said stroking his beard, "I have a problem learning from my past sins."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Most people say they learn from previous experiences - including sins."

"Well," he said with confidence, "I can prove them all wrong."

"How can you do that?" I asked.

"Well," he said, stroking his beard once again. "It's easy. Have you ever committed the same sin twice?"

"Unfortunately, I have," I replied.

And before I could explain what I was talking about, he said with great confidence, "I rest my case."

Repeating the same sin more than once is common in the lives of many Christians. Others often lose sight of what living the Christian life is all about and are not even aware of sinning. Some become careless about their responsibility to live in obedience to God's laws and are unconcerned about their lifestyle. We forget that we are accountable to God for everything we have and do. Perhaps it would be helpful if we took some time to do an inventory of the sins we know we frequently commit. To reflect on our past and its problems may keep us close to God and avoid repeating our sins!

The children of Israel had this problem. Listen to the Psalmist: "But they soon forgot what He had done and did not wait for His counsel." If we focus on the great things God has done for us, and if we seek His counsel and wait for His guidance, we can avoid repeating our sins.

Prayer: Lord, we want to live a life that honors You and is free from sin. Our habits and misconceptions often derail our efforts. May we look to You for Your guidance. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But they soon forgot what He had done and did not wait for His counsel. Psalm 106:13

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## 2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)  
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)  
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS  
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.  
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament  
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon  
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament  
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament  
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament  
**Cancelled** Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/29/2021 Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/29/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/11/2021 Veteran's Day Program at the GHS Arena  
11/21/2021 Groton Area Snow Queen Contest  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
11/30/2021 James Valley Telecommunications Holiday Open House 10am-4pm  
12/04/2021 Olive Grove Tour of Homes  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## News from the Associated Press

### Law enforcement agency psychologist answers high-risk calls

By SHANNON MARVEL Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The duties of one unique yet highly valuable employee at the Pennington County Sheriff's Office seems straight out of a crime drama series, but Dr. Roger Belisle's educational background and training as a licensed clinical psychologist caters to the world of law enforcement.

Belisle started working in the position three years ago, noting that there were very few job openings for the position of a psychologist in a law enforcement agency.

With 25 years of experience in the field under his belt, Belisle conducts psychological assessments, investigative and interrogative assistance, psychological profiles, hostage negotiations case reconstruction, psychological autopsies, threat assessments and training for the Pennington County Sheriff's Office.

He is also dispatched alongside the joint special response team in various situations, such as a standoff earlier this month which ended peacefully after an armed man spent nearly half the day barricaded in his home after law enforcement officers attempted to take him into custody while serving an arrest warrant, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"I work as just one cog in a collaborative tea," Belisle said. "I rely on multiple data points. I go in with an open mind. Often times I'm using incomplete data and I connect the dots the best I can and make inferences based on my education experience to help maximize the outcomes of the encounter."

Belisle negotiated with a 34-year-old man who was armed with had three large knives and threatened to kill himself during the standoff, eventually coaxing him to willingly and peacefully be taken into custody. The man was taken to a hospital for a mental health hold following the standoff for evaluation.

It's not the first critical incident he has been called out to, Belisle said.

Almost any high risk incident response includes Belisle, who is one of only a few individuals employed by a law enforcement agency in South Dakota to provide mental health services.

The former psychological professor and supervisory clinical psychologist for the U.S. Department of Defense at Fort Hood in Texas said he also responded to help assess the psychological profile of the suspect in the bomb threat incident at the South Dakota Mines that led to a evacuation and sweep of the campus on Oct. 29.

The suspect called in the threat to dispatch, stating that several bombs were placed throughout the school's campus, though an extensive search yielded no explosive devices.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is leading the investigation but have yet to make any arrests in the case.

There's not a murder case Belisle can recall that he hasn't used conducting psychological profiles to help aid investigators in determining how the events played out and the best interrogation methods based on a person's personality.

He also performs psychological assessments for every new hire at the Pennington County Sheriff's Office to help make sure those entrusted to serve and protect have their hearts and minds in the right place.

"The collaboration between law enforcement and psychology is really a newer one," Belisle said. "There is really still a stigma and resistance and lack of knowledge about the use of psychology in law enforcement."

At the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, Belisle said law enforcement offices have embraced the services he provides, especially when it comes to enhancing wellness for everyone on staff and offering psychological services within a law enforcement setting. For instance, Belisle leads debriefings for first responders and law enforcement officers following critical incidents.

"Several years ago when I looked for a position like this there were only about a half dozen open positions, but this one really had exactly what I wanted," he said. "They're really open to doing the best we can to maximize law enforcement encounters and employ wellness."

## **New government project promotes Indigenous food, agriculture**

By DAN GUNDERSON Minnesota Public Radio News

MOORHEAD, Minn. (AP) — The USDA Office of Tribal Relations announced this week that it will partner with several Native-led organizations on projects to raise awareness of Indigenous perspectives about food and agriculture.

"The United States government hasn't always incorporated Indigenous views and values into our work. And that's particularly true within the food and agricultural space," said Heather Dawn Thompson, director of the Office of Tribal Relations and a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe.

"We're taking this moment to rethink how the United States Department of Agriculture interacts with and thinks about Indigenous foods and Indigenous farming and ranching techniques," said Thompson.

Two regional seed processing centers will be created through the Minnesota-based Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, Minnesota Public Radio News reported.

USDA will help fund equipment for the facilities, one in Minnesota and one in the southwestern U.S.

"Some of this equipment is quite pricey and difficult for the average producer or seed saver to acquire on their own," said Thompson. "So these will become regional hubs that will be available to Native producers to share and use in a cooperative fashion, in order to process their seeds and save them."

Minneapolis-based North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems will develop recipes using traditional Indigenous foods and foods provided to tribal communities through the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program, said co-founder and executive director Dana Thompson.

Sean Sherman, founder of the Sioux Chef, will create a series of healthy recipes and cooking videos, and California chef Crystal Wahpepah will create recipes and videos with ingredients from the west and southwestern United States.

"We are honored to participate in this exciting initiative and see this as a positive step toward increasing food security and food sovereignty in tribal communities," said Thompson.

There will also be a video series on wild food foraging and sustainable gathering practices produced by Linda Black Elk, food sovereignty coordinator at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Lisa Iron Cloud, Oglala Lakota from Rapid City, South Dakota.

Other projects will expand a program to help market Indigenous foods and create guidance to help tribes transition to bison production.

The University of Arkansas-based Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative will create a report on regulatory changes needed at the USDA to empower tribal self-governance of federal food programs.

The projects are small, with funding coming from the USDA internal budget, but Thompson said the plan is to build on what's learned over the next couple of years and to expand the tribal initiatives.

"We're really excited about this," said Thompson. "It's possibly, hopefully, reversing 200 years of federal policy."

## **Perrott-Hunt propels South Dakota over Tennessee St 83-66**

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Kruz Perrott-Hunt had a career-high 25 points as South Dakota topped Tennessee State 83-66 on Sunday.

Perrott-Hunt made 15 of 16 from the free-throw line for the Coyotes (3-1). Mason Archambault had 16 points and Hunter Goodrick added 12 points and 11 rebounds.

Carlos Marshall Jr. had 16 points for the Tigers (1-3). Jalen Dupree added 12 points, while Marcus Fitzgerald Jr. scored 10.

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For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and [http://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](http://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

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## Dems confident on methane fee as budget bill moves to Senate

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Democratic plan to impose a fee on methane emissions from oil and gas wells has cleared a key hurdle, but it faces strong opposition from the oil and gas industry and criticism by centrist Sen. Joe Manchin.

The proposed fee on methane — a powerful pollutant that contributes to global warming — was included in a huge social and environmental policy bill passed by House Democrats last Friday.

As the bill moves to the Senate, attention again will focus on Manchin, a West Virginia moderate who has already forced fellow Democrats to abandon one of their biggest climate proposals: a clean-electricity program that would boost wind and solar power while phasing out coal- and gas-fired power plants.

Manchin, whose state is a leading producer of coal and natural gas, has said he worries a methane tax could be used to drive energy companies out of business. He said before the House vote that he wants to make sure the fee is structured to incentivize innovation and not just “punish” energy companies “for the sake of punishing” them.

A spokeswoman for Manchin declined to comment after the House vote, but Democrats in the House and Senate said they are confident the fee will remain in the Senate bill, despite a 50-50 split in the chamber that gives every Democrat veto power. Republicans unanimously oppose the bill.

Language approved by the House represents a compromise that would slap a rising fee on excess emissions at oil and gas facilities, reaching \$1,500 per ton in 2025, along with \$775 million in subsidies for companies that take steps to reduce emissions.

Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he and other Democrats have been working with senators on the methane fee, including Manchin, who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

“We have this very important provision with regard to methane emissions that was worked on with the senators and was also worked on with House members over the last few weeks,” Pallone said at a news conference Friday. “So I believe this is pretty much it. I mean, there may be some additional changes, but ... in terms of the actual substantive authorizing language, I think we’re pretty solid at this point.”

While the Senate may make minor revisions over the next few weeks, “nothing major, in my opinion,” will be changed or taken out, Pallone said.

Delaware Sen. Tom Carper, a Democrat who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, also is optimistic that the methane fee — formally known as the Methane Emissions Reduction Program — will be included in the final bill.

“Instead of punishing industry, our program incentivizes good behavior, phases in over time, and ramps up (fees) over time as well,” Carper said in a statement. “It’s good for the planet and good for job creation — a win-win in my book.”

The proposed methane tax comes as President Joe Biden launches a wide-ranging plan to reduce methane emissions, which pack a stronger short-term punch on climate than even carbon dioxide.

Biden pledged at a U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, earlier this month to work with the European Union and dozens of other nations to reduce global methane emissions by 30% by 2030.

The centerpiece of U.S. actions is a long-awaited rule by the Environmental Protection Agency to tighten methane regulations for the oil and gas sector. The proposed rule would for the first time target reductions from existing oil and gas wells nationwide, rather than focus only on new wells as previous regulations have done.

The new U.S. rule, along with the global pledge, should “make a huge difference,” not only in fighting climate change, but in improving health and reducing asthma and other respiratory problems, Biden said.

Once finalized, the proposed requirements should reduce methane emissions from U.S. drilling operations and equipment by approximately 75% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels, the White House said.

The oil and natural gas industry, the nation’s largest industrial source of methane emissions, supports

methane regulation but opposes the congressional fee as an unnecessary tax that could drive up energy costs and result in the loss of thousands of jobs.

"This is a tax on American natural gas that makes us less competitive," said Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of the American Petroleum Institute, the industry's top lobbying group.

"At a time of rising energy costs, it's a flawed policy to raise costs on energy producers," he said, adding that he is hopeful the Senate will eliminate the fee.

"Sen. Manchin is a supporter of American energy, so it makes sense for him to take a close look" at the methane fee, Macchiarola said.

Environmental groups call methane reduction the fastest and most cost-effective action to slow the rate of global warming. Current rules for methane emissions from U.S. oil and gas wells only apply to sources that were built or modified after 2015, leaving more than 90% of the nation's nearly 900,000 well sites unregulated. Many of those sites are smaller, low-producing wells.

A group of Texas Democrats in the House initially opposed the methane fee, but ended up supporting the compromise. Only one Democrat, Maine Rep. Jared Golden, opposed the House legislation.

"No bill is perfect," said Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, who voted for the measure despite misgivings over methane. The House bill would improve access to affordable child care and pre-kindergarten, boost Medicaid coverage and provide billions of dollars to combat the climate crisis, he said.

Even so, Cuellar said he would continue lobbying the Senate to strip the methane fee from the legislation.

## 5 dead, 40 injured after SUV speeds into Christmas parade

By SCOTT BAUER and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

WAUKESHA, Wis. (AP) — A joyous scene of marching bands and children dancing in Santa hats and waving pompoms turned deadly in an instant, as an SUV sped through barricades and into a Christmas parade in suburban Milwaukee, killing at least five people and injuring more than 40 others.

One video showed a woman screaming, "Oh my God!" repeatedly as a group of young dancers was struck Sunday. A father talked of going "from one crumpled body to the other" in search of his daughter. Members of a "Dancing Grannies" club were among those hit.

The city of Waukesha posted on its social media accounts late Sunday that it could confirm at least five died and more than 40 were injured, while noting that it was still collecting information. The city's statement also noted that many people took themselves to hospitals. The city did not release any additional information about those who died.

A "person of interest" was in custody, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said, but he gave no details about the person or any possible motive. The investigation was ongoing, with assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

"What took place in Waukesha today is sickening, and I have every confidence that those responsible will be brought to justice," Attorney General Josh Kaul, the state's top law enforcement officer, tweeted.

The horror was recorded by the city's livestream and onlookers' cellphones. One video shows the moment the SUV broke through the barricades and the sound of what appears to be several gunshots. Thompson said a Waukesha police officer fired his gun to try to stop the vehicle. No bystanders were injured by the gunfire, and Thompson said he did not know if the driver was struck by the officer's bullets.

Another video shows a young child dancing in the street as the SUV speeds by, just a few feet from her, before it hurtles into parade participants a few hundred feet ahead. One video, of dancers with pompoms, ends with a group of people tending to a girl on the ground.

"There were pompoms and shoes and spilled hot chocolate everywhere. I had to go from one crumpled body to the other to find my daughter," Corey Montiho, a Waukesha school district board member, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "My wife and two daughters were almost hit. Please pray for everybody. Please pray."

The Milwaukee Dancing Grannies posted on its Facebook page that "members of the group and volunteers were impacted and we are waiting for word on their conditions." The group's profile describes them



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as a "group of grannies that meet once a week to practice routines for summer and winter parades."

A Catholic priest, multiple parishioners and Waukesha Catholic schoolchildren were among those injured, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee spokeswoman Sandra Peterson said.

Chris Germain, co-owner of the Aspire Dance Center studio, had about 70 people in the parade ranging from as young as 2 being pulled in wagons to age 18. Germain, whose 3-year-old daughter was in the parade, said he was driving at the head of their entry when he saw a maroon SUV that "just blazed right past us." A police officer ran past in chase. Germain said he jumped out of his own SUV and gathered the girls who were with him to safety.

Then he walked forward to see the damage.

"There were small children laying all over the road, there were police officers and EMTs doing CPR on multiple members of the parade," he said.

Angelito Tenorio, a West Allis alderman who is running for Wisconsin state treasurer, said he was watching the parade with his family when they saw the SUV come speeding into the area.

"Then we heard a loud bang," Tenorio said. "And after that, we just heard deafening cries and screams from the crowd, from the people at the parade. And people started rushing, running away with tears in their eyes, crying."

The Waukesha school district canceled classes Monday and said in a notice on its website that extra counselors would be on hand for students and staff. The parade's list of entries included cheer, dance and band entries associated with district schools.

Gov. Tony Evers said he and his wife, Kathy, were "praying for Waukesha tonight and all the kids, families, and community members affected by this senseless act."

President Joe Biden was briefed Sunday night, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Twitter. Assistance is being offered to local officials, she said, and "Our hearts are with the families and the entire community."

The parade, held each year on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, is sponsored by the city's Chamber of Commerce. This year's, the 59th, had the theme of "comfort and joy."

Waukesha is a western suburb of Milwaukee, and about 55 miles (90 kilometers) north of Kenosha, where Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted Friday of charges stemming from the shooting of three men during unrest in that city in August 2020.

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Bauer reported from Madison, Wis. Associated Press writer Doug Glass contributed from Minneapolis.

## In Africa, Blinken sees limits of US influence abroad

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Traveling across Africa, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken saw firsthand the limits of America's influence abroad.

Blinken confronted authoritarianism, growing threats from newly energized extremists, and persistent challenges posed by COVID-19 and climate change, all of which have stubbornly resisted various U.S. interventions.

And, nowhere on his three-nation tour last week — to Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal — was he able to escape obvious signs of the intense competition between the U.S. and China: a geopolitical power struggle that has been playing out largely in China's favor for the past two decades, especially in Africa.

Before leaving the continent at his last stop in Senegal, Blinken said he had been well received by all three leaders he met. But, he allowed that "we have to be judged on what we do, not simply on what I say."

The limits of Washington's reach have been evident for some time but have been highlighted in recent months as President Joe Biden has promoted an "America is back" narrative, intended to signal a U.S. return to the international arena and institutions that his predecessor had eschewed.

In Nairobi, much of the secretary's visit and drives through the Kenyan capital took place in the shadow of or literally underneath a massive, Chinese-financed elevated expressway construction project.

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In Abuja, Blinken's motorcade from the airport passed the giant and unmissable headquarters building of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria, where a top official spoke only partially in jest of playing the U.S. and China off of each other and China's attractiveness as a partner.

And, in Senegal, the capital, Dakar, was gearing up to host a major China-Africa trade and investment event less than 10 days after Blinken's departure on Saturday.

While the Biden administration's efforts to help African nations combat the coronavirus pandemic and encourage climate-friendly policies appear to be making some initial progress, the broader picture is less encouraging.

A new wave of authoritarianism has reversed some positive democratization trends despite very public U.S. appeals and protests that have been ignored or only partially heeded by leaders in Ethiopia, Sudan and elsewhere, who have appeared unconvinced or uninterested in the administration's message.

"Governments are becoming less transparent," Blinken said in the Nigerian capital on Friday. "We see this happening across Africa — leaders ignoring term limits, rigging or postponing elections, exploiting social grievances to gain and maintain power, arresting opposition figures, cracking down on the media, and allowing security services to enforce pandemic restrictions brutally."

He cited Ethiopia and Sudan as prime examples.

While Blinken did not go to either country on his trip, he raised the crises at each of his stops and, while he was traveling, top American envoys visited both Khartoum and Addis Ababa to press authorities there to back down on anti-democratic actions.

And yet, despite an agreement in Sudan announced on Sunday after Blinken returned to Washington, neither yielded unvarnished success.

In Sudan, conversations between military leaders and the top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Molly Phee, were followed by a new and deadly crackdown on opposition protesters that Blinken was compelled to formally condemn in a statement.

In a hopeful sign, the country's deposed prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, then signed a deal with the military that will see him reinstated almost a month after a military coup put him under house arrest. But a key pro-democracy group dismissed it as "a form of betrayal" and Blinken himself was cautious, saying he was "encouraged" but still wanted to see more.

"I urge all sides to further talks and redouble efforts to complete key transitional tasks on a civilian-led path to democracy in Sudan," Blinken said in a Tweet. "I also reiterate our call for security forces to refrain from excessive force against peaceful protesters."

In Ethiopia, the U.S. special envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, was rebuffed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in calls for an end to a humanitarian blockade of the northern Tigray region, home to rebels who are now advancing on the capital.

Meanwhile, perennial corruption, abuses of power and a lack of transparency continue to hobble African infrastructure, development and poverty alleviation initiatives championed by the United States.

And, although Biden has spoken of returning Africa to a place of prominence in U.S. foreign policy, other priorities and urgent developments, including pressing matters in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, have often crowded it out in the administration's first 10 months in office.

On Friday, the White House announced that Biden would convene a U.S.-Africa leaders' summit next year "to strengthen ties with African partners based on principles of mutual respect and shared interests and values." But the announcement was short on key details such as who would be attending and when it would occur.

And, it came as Blinken reached Senegal, the third and final stop on his first official trip to sub-Saharan Africa, which had been postponed from August, in a telling sign of priorities, during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Apart from the attention it absorbed in Washington, the implications of the Afghan exit have left some of America's friends, including in Africa, wondering about the resiliency of their relations with Washington. That has been a particular concern as China has swept in to fill a perceived void in U.S. interest in Africa and a preoccupation with other parts of the world.

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That perception, fueled by the Trump administration's indifference to Africa except through the prism of China's rapidly expanding power, is something Biden and Blinken are hoping to change. For example, Blinken did not once mention China by name in what was billed as a major speech on Biden administration policy toward Africa that he delivered on Friday.

Yet China was never far from the top of the agenda.

"Our engagement in Africa, with Africa, is not about China or any other third party," Blinken said in Nigeria. "It's about Africa."

"Our purpose is not to make our partners choose, it is to give them choices," he said in Senegal. "And when people have choices, they usually make the right one."

Senegalese Foreign Minister Aissata Tall Sall, who will co-host the Nov. 29-30 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation with her Chinese counterpart, nodded approvingly at Blinken's remark.

"We have a diplomacy of sovereignty from which we do not exclude anyone," she said. "There is not only one choice. We have many choices."

And, as Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama pointed out, his country and others want the best deals they can get, and often that means looking to China.

"We saw a great opportunity with the Chinese," he said of several major infrastructure projects now underway in Nigeria. "I mean, they're used to a lot of these huge capital projects and infrastructure projects. We would have gone with anybody else that was providing something at a competitive rate for us, but in many areas they were.

"It's not a question of one country or the other per se; it's really a question of the best deal that we can strike," he said, comparing Nigeria to a woman being wooed by various suitors.

"Regarding U.S.-Chinese competition in Africa, I mean, I don't want to sound cynical, almost, about it, but sometimes it's a good thing for you if you're the attractive bride and everybody is offering you wonderful things. You take what you can from each of them."

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This story has been corrected to show the spelling of the Ethiopian prime minister's surname is Ahmed, not Ahmedr.

## Vermont Democratic US Rep. Peter Welch to seek Senate seat

By LISA RATHKE and WILSON RING Associated Press

Vermont's sole member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Democratic Rep. Peter Welch, announced Monday that he will run for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy.

Welch's decision comes a week after the 81-year-old Leahy's announcement that he will not seek reelection to the seat he first won in 1974.

The 74-year-old Welch said the 2022 election will determine control of the Senate and, with it, what he can accomplish for Vermont families.

"We are at a pivotal moment," Welch said in a statement distributed by his campaign. "Vermont families are struggling through multiple crises: a global pandemic, the consequences of climate change, and a racial reckoning generations in the making."

He said that if elected he would be ready to fight for progressive change from the first day in office.

He promised to continue to fight to ensure working families have access to child care and paid family leave. He said he also would work to pass a Green New Deal to protect the environment, lower the cost of health care and prescription drug costs, ensure that women have control over their own health care decisions and protect voting rights and American democracy.

The decisions by Leahy and now Welch will create the first open seats in Vermont's three-member congressional delegation since 2006, when independent Bernie Sanders moved to the Senate and Welch took his seat in the House.

While the Senate seat will be open, Welch, who during his years in the House has been consistently one of Vermont's top vote-getters, would have an instant advantage.

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Vermont's popular Republican governor, Phil Scott, has said he is not interested in running for the Senate. It's unclear whom the state GOP will find to run for either the Senate seat or the House seat.

Vermont has never sent a woman or a member of a racial minority community to Washington. Several female politicians have expressed interest in running for a vacant seat, but the only person who has said she would run for the House if Welch ran for the Senate is Democratic state Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale.

Welch, of Norwich, was first elected to the U.S. House in 2006.

During his years in the House, he has worked for energy efficiency, cutting the prices of prescription drugs, investing in infrastructure and expanding broadband into rural areas of Vermont and the country.

As of this year, Welch served as a chief deputy whip of the House Democratic Caucus and a member of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.

In the House, he has served on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Committee on Oversight and Reform.

Welch has developed a spot for himself in the House and is well liked there, said Linda Fowler, professor emerita of government at Dartmouth College.

Welch was born in Springfield, Massachusetts. He moved to Vermont in the early 1970s after graduating from law school. He served as a public defender and founded his own law firm.

He was elected to the Vermont Senate in 1980 and became the first Democrat elected as Senate president pro tempore in 1985. He was reelected to the state Senate in 2002 and served in that role until he was elected to the House four years later.

Welch said even though the country is facing extreme challenges he is optimistic.

"I've seen Vermonters come together to solve problems," he said. "We focus on solutions, not who gets credit. That's the Vermont way. That's how I've gotten things done as Vermont's congressman and how I will get things done if I am elected to the U.S. Senate."

## Former Netanyahu aide testifies in ex-PM's corruption trial

JERUSALEM (AP) — A one-time confidante to Benjamin Netanyahu began testifying against him Monday in the former Israeli prime minister's corruption trial in Jerusalem.

Nir Hefetz, a former spokesman for Netanyahu, is a key prosecution witness expected to deliver critical testimony in the trial, which revolves around accusations that Netanyahu committed fraud, breach of trust and accepted bribes. The former premier, now opposition leader, denies any wrongdoing.

Hefetz left a long career in journalism in 2009 to work as a spokesman for Netanyahu's government, and in 2014 became the Netanyahu family's spokesman and adviser. In 2018, after he was arrested in connection with one of Netanyahu's corruption cases, Hefetz signed a state's witness deal and provided investigators with recordings of conversations with Netanyahu and his family.

His testimony was delayed by a week after Netanyahu's defense attorneys requested time to review new evidence. The information presented last week alleged that Netanyahu's wife, Sara, had accepted an expensive bracelet as a gift from two billionaire friends, Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer.

Netanyahu appeared in the Jerusalem District Court Monday morning flanked by fellow Likud party politicians.

He's the defendant in three separate cases. The first alleges that Netanyahu received gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy friends, including Milchan and Packer.

In the second case, Netanyahu is accused of orchestrating positive coverage in a major Israeli paper in exchange for promoting legislation that would have harmed the news outlet's chief rival, a free pro-Netanyahu daily.

The third, nicknamed Case 4000, alleges that Netanyahu promoted legislation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of Israeli telecom giant Bezeq in exchange for positive coverage on its Walla news site.

In his opening testimony, Hefetz said that Netanyahu was a "control freak" when it comes to his public

image, and that "his control over everything relating to media matters and in his social media channels could not be higher."

The former prime minister long rejected calls to step down from the country's leadership after he was indicted in 2019. He used the podium as prime minister to repeatedly lash out at law enforcement, the media and the courts for launching a "witch-hunt" against him.

His trial formally began in 2020, while the country was embroiled in a two-year-long political crisis that saw four repeated elections, with voters deadlocked over Netanyahu's leadership and indictment. The trial is expected to take years.

Earlier this year, Netanyahu and his long-ruling Likud party were ousted from power after a coalition united in their opposition to the long-serving prime minister formed a government.

## **IOC interview with Peng Shuai raises even more questions**

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

Out of public view for almost three weeks, Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai has appeared in a video call with International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach.

The IOC and the Chinese government would like this to be the end of the Peng saga, which has run since Nov. 2 when she accused former vice premier Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault.

That may be wishful thinking on their part.

The interview offered few details, no follow-ups on her allegations, and invited more questions for the IOC, Peng, and China.

It seems unlikely to satisfy Steve Simon, the chairman and CEO of the Women's Tennis Association, who has been blunt in criticizing China and has threatened to pull all top-tier WTA events from the country.

Even after the IOC video was published Sunday, the WTA repeated what Simon has been saying for more than a week, calling for a full, fair, and transparent investigation "without censorship."

According to the IOC, Peng held a 30-minute call with Bach, and he recounted in a statement that she is "safe and well, living at her home in Beijing, but would like to have her privacy respected at this time."

The IOC said Bach invited Peng, a former No. 1-ranked doubles player and a three-time Olympian, to dinner when he is town to oversee the troubled Beijing Winter Olympics that open on Feb. 4.

Not only is the IOC now embroiled in this scandal, it has also been widely criticized for going ahead with the Olympics despite alleged crimes against humanity taking place against Uyghur Muslims, Tibetans, and other minorities.

Yaqiu Wang, a China-born spokeswoman for Human Rights Watch, tweeted that the IOC is now "actively playing a role in the Chinese government's enforced disappearance, coercion and propaganda machinery."

The concerns for Peng from the WTA and so many of its top and retired players — Naomi Osaka, Serena Williams, and Martina Navratilova — and global attention on the WhereIsPengShuai social media movement have put pressure on China, even if the news of her allegations is blacked out at home.

CNN reported that its signal in China had been blocked around reporting on Peng.

A search for her name Monday on Weibo, one of China's leading social media platforms, produced only a few posts about her, and they don't refer to the sexual assault allegation or the questions about her whereabouts.

China Open posted a photo with her at Sunday's youth tournament, but did not mention her in the caption.

Still missing is Zhang. He left public life about three years ago after being one of seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee — the apex of political power in China.

The effort to silence Peng reflects the ruling Communist Party's determination to squelch criticism of its leaders. Athletes are especially sensitive politically because they are well-known, admired for their achievements, and used to promote the party's success.

A three-time Olympian, Peng accused Zhang of sexual assault on social media in China, which was immediately taken down on its heavily censored internet. She also described having a consensual relation-

ship with the Chinese official.

She wrote in part: "I know that to you, vice minister Zhang Gaoli, a person of high status and power, you've said you're not afraid. With your intelligence, you certainly will deny it or you can even use it against me, you can dismiss it without a care. Even if I'm destroying myself, like throwing an egg against a rock, or a moth flying into a flame, I will still speak out the truth about us."

The IOC can argue that it's "quiet diplomacy" worked, and gave China a way to save face. On the other hand, it makes the IOC an active partner in delivering Beijing's message, without subjecting Peng to an open interview about her allegations.

Although the IOC casts itself as a non-governmental organization, it's a sports business — like the WTA or NBA — that generates 91% of its income from sponsors and selling broadcast rights.

The WTA is the first sports body to defiantly stand up to China's financial clout, a sharp contrast to the IOC, which says it is powerless to intervene in China's internal policies.

"The statements make the IOC complicit in the Chinese authority's malicious propaganda and lack of care for basic human rights and justice," Global Athlete, a lobby group for athletes, said in a statement.

"The IOC showed a complete disregard for allegations of sexual violence and abuse against athletes," the statement said. "By taking a nonchalant approach to Peng Shuai's disappearance and by refusing to mention her serious allegations of sexual assault, IOC President Thomas Bach and the IOC Athletes' Commission demonstrate an abhorrent indifference to sexual violence and the well-being of female athletes."

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More AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

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More AP Winter Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/winter-olympics> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Sailboats packed with migrants seek Italy in latest tactic

By TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

ROCCELLA JONICA, Italy (AP) — When the Taliban took Kabul in August, Zakia was six months pregnant and in her first year of university while her husband, Hamid, was working as an auditor. They decided to flee, and along with five relatives, began a two-month odyssey that took them through Iran and Turkey.

When it was time to cross the Mediterranean, they did so on an expensive sailboat that came ashore this month on a beach in the southern Italian region of Calabria.

They were dehydrated, but relieved to have survived a lesser-known migration route to Europe that is increasingly being used by wealthier Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians and Kurds. Entire families are paying top price for passage from Turkey aboard new or nearly new sailboats that can more easily avoid detection by authorities. Investigators say they are captained by smugglers, often Ukrainians, who may be in cahoots with Turkish mobsters and Italian 'ndrangheta clans on shore.

While aid workers call these "1st class" crossings, there is nothing elite about them. Hamid and Zakia were packed with 100 people below deck for a week as food supplies dwindled. After two days without fresh water, Zakia couldn't feel the baby moving inside her anymore.

"It was the worst experience of my life," Hamid said in an Italian gym as he and his wife waited to be processed for COVID-19 quarantine locations after their sailboat, "Passion Dalaware," came ashore Nov. 10.

For years, most political, humanitarian and media attention has focused on the hundreds of thousands of migrants, most of them Africans, who cross the central Mediterranean aboard unseaworthy vessels launched by smugglers from Libya and Tunisia.

The Calabrian route, which brings the migrants from Turkey to the "toe" of boot-shaped Italy rather than Sicily and its islands further south, has seen a nearly four-fold increase in arrivals in 2021 and now accounts for 16% of the sea arrivals in Italy this year.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is monitoring the situation closely, though the increase in Calabrian arrivals is mirrored by a similarly sharp increase in migrants arriving in Sicilian ports. Overall, sea arrivals in Italy this year are up to 59,000 compared with 32,000 at this point last year. The Calabrian

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route has seen 9,687 arrivals as of Nov. 14, compared with 2,507 last year.

"We are seeing Afghans. We are seeing Iraqis. We are seeing Iranians, Kurds," said Chiara Cardoletti, the UNHCR representative in Italy. Whereas single men used to account for most migrants, "right now on all the routes what you are seeing is an increase in the number of families arriving with lots of children. And that is true also for the route to Calabria."

The Calabrian route is just one of the myriad ways that would-be refugees from the Middle East, South-east Asia and Africa try to reach Europe, a steady crisis that has fueled anti-immigrant sentiment on the continent and strained European Union solidarity.

Hamid and Zakia had a fraught odyssey that cost far more than most: After escaping Kabul with Hamid's sister, her husband and their three children, the family arrived in Turkey and paid 8,500 euros (\$9,600) for each adult and 4,000 euros (\$4,500) for each child to get to Calabria. Hamid's parents in Sweden helped finance the trip.

Hamid's 29-year-old sister, Tooba, who speaks good English, said the family decided to risk their lives on the journey because life in Afghanistan under Taliban rule was no longer safe, especially given her work as a lawyer.

"I cannot live in Kabul, and because of them I must leave Afghanistan," Tooba said, as she cradled a sleeping child.

Like Hamid and Zakia, she asked that her last name not be used for safety reasons.

Hamid said the smugglers provided enough water for the first four or five days, but that after it ran out, the passengers drank seawater with sugar for the final two days.

When the sailboat approached shore, the passengers came up on deck only to see the two smugglers who had captained the ship, both wearing ski masks, fleeing the scene in a black boat.

"The traffickers, who obviously have no concept of human scruples, are now even squashing 100 people in each sailboat," said Vittorio Zito, the mayor of Roccella Jonica, a small town on the Calabrian coast that has been a prime destination for smugglers.

The sailboats are difficult to intercept since even to aerial patrols, they look like normal pleasure boats. The "Passion Dalaware" was even flying a plastic American flag from its sail.

Zito said smugglers can make about 500,000 euros (\$565,000) per trip on a stolen sailboat that costs around 100,000 euros (\$113,000). Red Cross officials counted 101 people on Hamid's boat, whose smugglers stood to pocket 858,500 euros (\$969,000).

There have been so many of these deserted sailboats recently that their carcasses line the Calabrian coast. Others are piled up in a boat cemetery near the port in Roccella Jonica.

The route is also being used by smugglers bringing fishing boats from Libya. On Nov. 14, 550 migrants arrived in Roccella Jonica, the highest number in one day. The migrants, including at least 100 Egyptian minors, were rescued from two fishing boats off the coast that had departed from Tobruk, a town in Libya near the Egyptian border.

Italian police have arrested several Ukrainian smugglers who have been sentenced for aiding and abetting illegal migration, but they are just small cogs in the wheel of a larger criminal operation.

"We have to go beyond the individual boats and arrests of smugglers to understand the reason behind the exponential increase," said Giovanni Bombardieri, chief prosecutor in the Calabrian capital of Reggio Calabria, who is leading the migration investigation.

"It is clear that our work requires an evaluation of the possible involvement of clans of the 'ndrangheta," the Calabrian-based organized crime syndicate, he told the AP.

Hamid and Zakia's odyssey isn't over. The extended family has been put in different locations in Calabria to complete two weeks of virus quarantine. After that they can begin the process of requesting asylum or can try to reach relatives in Sweden.

There is also some good news.

"I am very happy," said Zakia. "The Italian doctors checked and my baby is OK."

Follow all AP stories on global migration at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>.

## Interpol election raises rights concerns about fair policing

By BARBARA SURK Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Human rights groups and Western lawmakers are warning that Interpol's powerful network of global police officers could end up under the sway of authoritarian governments, as the world police agency meets in Istanbul this week to elect new leadership.

Representatives of countries like China and the United Arab Emirates are bidding for top posts in the France-based policing body when its general assembly convenes in Turkey on Tuesday.

Interpol says it refuses to be used for political ends. Critics contend that if these candidates win, instead of hunting down drug smugglers, human traffickers, war crimes suspects and alleged extremists, their countries would use Interpol's global reach to apprehend exiled dissidents and even political opponents at home.

Two candidates have drawn special criticism: Maj. Gen. Ahmed Naser al-Raisi, inspector general at the UAE's interior ministry, who is seeking to be elected Interpol's president for a four-year term; and Hu Binchen, an official at China's ministry of public security, expected to be up for a vacant spot on Interpol's executive committee.

A vote is expected Thursday. Interpol's president and executive committee set policy and direction. They also supervise the body's secretary-general who handles the day-to-day operations and is its public face. That post is filled by German official Juergen Stock.

Al-Raisi is accused of torture and has criminal complaints against him in five countries, including in France, where Interpol has its headquarters, and in Turkey, where the election is taking place.

And Hu is backed by China's government, which is suspected to have used the global police agency to hunt down exiled dissidents and of disappearing its citizens.

Appointing Hu could be fraught with peril — including, possibly, for himself. Meng Hongwei of China was elected Interpol president in 2016, only to vanish on a return trip to China two years later. He is now serving a 13½-year jail sentence for corruption, charges that his wife Grace Meng, now living in France with her children under police protection, insisted in an interview with The Associated Press were trumped up and politically motivated.

Al-Raisi, already a member of Interpol's executive committee, contended in a LinkedIn post Saturday that the UAE prioritizes "the protection of human rights at home and abroad."

But a recent report by the MENA Rights Group describes routine rights violations by the UAE security system, in which lawyers, journalists and activists have been forcibly disappeared, tortured, arbitrarily detained, and intimidated for peacefully asking for basic rights and freedoms.

Matthew Hedges, a British doctoral student who was imprisoned in the UAE for nearly seven months in 2018 on spying charges, visibly struggled at a news conference in Paris as he described torture and months of being held in solitary confinement with no access to a lawyer.

"I was given a cocktail of medication ... to alter my mental state," Hedges said. "I am still dependent on most of this medication now. I would hear screams coming from other rooms, and there was evidence on the floor of torture, physical torture, beatings."

Hedges was pardoned by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, but Emirati officials still insist Hedges was spying for Britain's MI6 intelligence agency, without offering definitive proof to support their claims. He, his family and British diplomats have repeatedly denied the charges.

"There is no way that a country's police force that is willing to do this to foreign citizens, let alone their own, should be given the honor of holding one of the highest positions at Interpol," Hedges said.

"Electing al-Raisi, the man responsible for what was happening to me, would be a slap in the face of justice and an embarrassment to other police forces who believe in upholding the rule of law."

He and fellow Briton Ali Issa Ahmad, a soccer fan who says he was tortured by UAE security agents during the 2019 Asia Cup soccer tournament, have filed a lawsuit against al-Raisi and other Emirati security



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officials in the U.K. They also filed criminal complaints in Norway, Sweden and in France.

If French prosecutors decide to pursue the case, al-Raisi could be detained and questioned about alleged crimes committed in another country if he enters France or French territory.

Ahmad said he was attacked by plainclothes UAE security agents at a match between Iraq and Qatar in Abu Dhabi. He was wearing a fan T-Shirt with a Qatari flag at a time of bitter diplomatic dispute between Qatar and other Gulf countries.

He said the agents attacked him on the beach, threw him in a car, handcuffed him and put a plastic bag over his head. Using pocketknives, they carved the outlines of the Qatari flag on his chest as they cut out the emblem from his T-shirt, he said. Ahmad was jailed for two weeks and was released only after pleading guilty to the charge of "wasting police time." Police say he already was hurt when he presented himself to a police station in Sharjah.

Another torture complaint under the principle of universal jurisdiction is pending in France against al-Raisi, filed in June over the alleged torture of prominent Emirati human rights defender and blogger Ahmed Mansoor, currently serving a 10-year sentence for charges of insulting the "status and prestige of the UAE" and its leaders in social media posts.

A major concern for dissidents is potential abuse of the Interpol red notice — the equivalent of putting someone on a global "most-wanted" list, meaning a suspect could be arrested anywhere they travel.

Interpol insists that any country's request for a red notice is verified for compliance with its constitution, "under which it is strictly forbidden for the organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character." But critics say Interpol has been used in the past by its member governments for political ends, and that this could get worse under new leadership.

Al-Raisi has run a slick campaign for the presidential post, traveling the world to meet lawmakers and government officials and boasting academic degrees from the U.K. and the U.S. and years of experience of policing.

In an opinion piece for the government-run newspaper in Abu Dhabi, al-Raisi said he wants to "modernize and transform" Interpol, drawing on "the UAE's role as a leader in tech-driven policing and a bridge builder in the international community."

The UAE, particularly the skyscraper-studded city-state of Dubai, long have been identified as a major money-laundering hub for both criminals and rogue nations. But in recent months, the Emirati police have announced a series of busts targeting suspected international drug dealers and gangsters living there. Residents also note low reported levels of street crime and harassment, likely an effect of residency visas all being tied to employment.

Prominent French human rights lawyer William Bourdon said UAE officials can't hide behind a facade of modernity and progress.

"Behind the beaches and the palm trees," he said, "there are people, and they are screaming because they are being tortured."

John Leicester contributed to this story from Lyon, France.

## Rittenhouse tells Fox News 'not a racist person,' backs BLM

NEW YORK (AP) — Kyle Rittenhouse, who was acquitted on charges stemming from killing two men and wounding another during the unrest that followed the shooting of a Black man by a white police officer, says in a new interview that he's "not a racist person" and supports the Black Lives Matter movement.

"This case has nothing to do with race. It never had anything to do with race. It had to do with the right to self-defense," the 18-year-old tells Fox News host Tucker Carlson in an interview set to air Monday night. Rittenhouse is white, as were the men he shot.

Rittenhouse was 17 last year when he traveled 20 miles (32 kilometers) from his home in Antioch, Illinois, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, which had been racked with protests in the wake of the Aug. 23 shooting of Jacob Blake. That shooting and the response in Kenosha — protests that turned destructive — became

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part of the national reckoning over police use of force against Black people following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis the previous May at the hands of police.

Rittenhouse, armed with an AR-style semiautomatic rifle, joined others who said they were intent on protecting private property from potential damage on Aug. 25. During his trial, prosecutors argued that the teenager as a "wannabe soldier" who went looking for trouble that night. Rittenhouse countered that he fired in self-defense after he was attacked and in fear for his life.

The shootings quickly made Rittenhouse a rallying cry for supporters of Second Amendment rights and those angered by the sometimes violent protests seen in some American cities after Floyd's death.

Rittenhouse was photographed in a bar before the trial with apparent members of the far-right Proud Boys. Rittenhouse's attorneys have said he is not a white supremacist.

"I'm not a racist person. I support the BLM movement, I support peacefully demonstrating," Rittenhouse tells Carlson in excerpts of the interview released by Fox News ahead of its airing.

A jury last Friday found Rittenhouse not guilty on charges of homicide, attempted homicide and reckless endangering in the deaths of Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and the wounding of Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28.

## Jobs lost, middle class Afghans slide into poverty, hunger

By LEE KEATH Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Not long ago, Ferishta Salihi and her family had enough for a decent life. Her husband was working and earned a good salary. She could send several of her daughters to private schools.

But now, after her husband lost his job following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, she was lined up with hundreds of other Afghans, registering with the U.N.'s World Food Program to receive food and cash that her family desperately needs just for survival.

"We have lost everything. We've lost our minds," Salihi said after her registration was complete. With her was her eldest daughter, 17-year-old Fatima, whom she had to take out of school. She can't afford to pay the fees at a private school, and the Taliban so far are not allowing teenage girls to go to public schools.

"I don't want anything for myself, I just want my children to get an education," Salihi said.

In a matter of months as Afghanistan's economy craters, many stable, middle-class families like Salihi's have plummeted into desperation, uncertain of how they will pay for their next meal. That is one reason the United Nations is raising alarm over a hunger crisis, with 22% of the population of 38 million already near famine and another 36% facing acute food insecurity - mainly because people can't afford food.

The economy was already in trouble under the previous, U.S.-backed government, which often could not pay its employees. The situation was worsened by the coronavirus pandemic and by a punishing drought that drove up food prices. Already in 2020, nearly half of Afghanistan's population was living in poverty.

Then the world's shutdown of funding to Afghanistan after the Taliban's Aug. 15 seizure of power pulled the rug out from under the country's small middle class. International funding once paid for much of the government budget — and without it, the Taliban have largely been unable to pay salaries or provide public services. The international community has not recognized Taliban rule, demanding the militants form a more inclusive government and respect human rights.

International aid also fueled projects around the country that provided jobs, most of which are now on hold. The country's banks are cut off from the international banking system, further snarling the private sector. The country's economy is estimated to have contracted 40% in just three months.

Hospitals are seeing increasing numbers of emaciated, malnourished children, mostly from the country's poorest families who were already barely getting by.

Now families that have seen their once-stable livelihoods wrecked also find themselves with nothing and must scrape for ways to cover costs of food, rent and medical expenses.

Salihi's husband once made around 24,000 Afghanis (\$264) a month working in the logistics department at the World Bank's office in Kabul. But after the Taliban took power, the World Bank halted its projects.

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The 39-year-old Salihi said her husband was told not to come to the office and he hasn't received his salary since.

Now she is the family's only source of income. One of her neighbors has a business selling nuts, so they give her bags of nuts to shell at home and she then sells the shells to people who use them to burn for fuel.

Her husband, she said, spends his day walking around the district looking for work. "All he can do is measure the streets with his steps," she said, using an expression for someone with nothing to do.

The U.S. and other international donors are funneling money to Afghanistan for humanitarian aid through U.N. agencies, which ensure the money doesn't go into the coffers of the Taliban government. The main focus has been on two tracks. The U.N. Development Program, World Health Organization and UNICEF are working to directly pay salaries to doctors and nurses around the country to keep the health sector from collapsing. The WFP, meanwhile, is providing direct cash aid and food to families, trying to keep them above water.

The WFP has had to ramp up its program dramatically. In 2020, it provided aid to 9 million people, up from the year before. So far this year, that number has risen to nearly 14 million, and the rate has risen sharply each month since August. Next year, the agency aims to provide for more than 23 million people, and it says it needs \$220 million a month to do so.

It's not just the poorest of the poor, usually based in rural areas, who need help. "There's a new urban class of people who up until the summer would have been drawing a salary ... and now are facing hunger for the first time," said Shelley Thakral, the WFP spokesperson for Afghanistan.

"People are now having to scavenge for food, they're skipping meals and mothers are forced to reduce portions of food," she said.

Last week, hundreds of men and women lined up in a gymnasium in a west Kabul neighborhood to receive a cash distribution - 3,500 afghanis a month, about \$38.

Nouria Sarvari, a 45-year widow who was waiting in line, used to work at the Higher Education Ministry. After the Taliban came to power, they told most women government employees to stay home. Sarvari said she hasn't received a salary since and she's struggling to keep food on the table for her three children still living with her.

Her 14-year-old son, Sajjad, sells plastic bags in the market for a little cash. Sarvari says she depends on help from neighbors. "I buy from shopkeepers on credit. I owe so many shopkeepers, and most of what I receive today will just go to paying what I owe."

Samim Hassanzwai said his life has been overturned completely over the past year. His father and mother both died of COVID-19, he said. His father was an officer in the intelligence agency and his mother was a translator for an American agency.

Hassanzwai, 29, had been working in the Culture Ministry but hasn't gotten a salary since the Taliban came to power. Now he's jobless with his wife and three children as well as his four younger sisters all dependent on him.

"I had a job, my mother had a job, my father had his duties. We were doing fine with money," he said. "Now everything is finished."

## After slow starts, some Asian vaccination rates now soaring

By DAVID RISING and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — When Cambodia rolled out COVID-19 vaccines, lines stretched down entire streets and people left their shoes out to save their places as they sheltered from the sun. But three months into its campaign, just 11% of the population had received at least one dose. In far wealthier Japan, it took two weeks longer to reach that level.

Now both countries boast vaccination rates that rank among the world's best. They are two of several nations in the Asia-Pacific region that got slow starts to their immunization campaigns but have since zoomed past the United States and many nations in Europe.

The countries with high rates include both richer and poorer ones, some with larger populations and some

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with smaller. But all have experience with infectious diseases, like SARS, and strong vaccine-procurement programs, many of which knew to spread their risk by ordering from multiple manufacturers.

Most started vaccinating relatively late due to complacency amid low infection rates, initial supply issues and other factors. But by the time they did, soaring death tolls in the United States, Britain and India helped persuade even the skeptical to embrace the efforts.

"I did worry, but at the moment we are living under the threat of COVID-19. There is no option but to be vaccinated," said Rath Sreymom, who rushed to get her daughter, 5-year-old Nuth Nyra, a shot once Cambodia opened its program to her age group this month.

Cambodia was one of the earlier countries in the region to start its vaccination program with a Feb. 10 launch — still two months after the United States and Britain began theirs. As elsewhere in the region, the rollout was slow, and by early May, as the delta variant started to spread rapidly, only 11% of its 16 million people had gotten at least their first shot, according to Our World in Data. That's about half the rate reached in the United States during the same timeframe and a third of the U.K.'s.

Today Cambodia is 78% fully vaccinated — compared to 58% in the U.S. It is now offering booster shots and looking at extending its program to 3- and 4-year-olds.

From the beginning, it has seen strong demand for the vaccine, with the rollout to the general public in April coinciding with a massive surge of cases in India, from which grim images emerged of pyres of bodies outside overwhelmed crematoria.

Prime Minister Hun Sen leveraged his close ties with Beijing to procure nearly 37 million doses from China, some of which were donated. He declared last week that Cambodia's "victory of vaccination" could not have happened without them. The country also received large donations from the U.S., Japan, Britain and from the international COVAX program.

Still, it took time to get sufficient supplies, and many countries in the region that started their programs later struggled even more, especially when the region's major producer, India, suspended vaccine exports during its spring surge.

"Certainly getting the supply in place was really important for the countries that have done particularly well," said John Fleming, the Asia-Pacific head of health for the Red Cross. "Then there's the demand creation side — clearly this is about getting a buy-in from the population and also reaching out to marginalized groups."

Early in the pandemic, many Asian countries imposed strict lockdown and travel rules that kept the virus largely at bay. As vaccines rolled out in force elsewhere, those low rates sometimes worked against them, giving some people the impression that getting the shot wasn't urgent.

But when the virulent delta variant began ripping through the region, cases rose, encouraging people to sign up.

Some countries, like Malaysia, made extra efforts to ensure that even the hardest-to-reach groups were offered the vaccine. It enlisted the Red Cross's help to give shots to people living in the country illegally and other groups that may have feared showing up for a government-sponsored vaccination.

"We made the vaccine accessible to all, with no questions asked," said Professor Sazaly Abu Bakar, director of the Tropical Infectious Diseases and Research Education Center.

As with Cambodia and Japan, Malaysia plodded along in its first three months, giving less than 5% of its 33 million people their first dose in that time, according to Our World in Data.

When cases surged, however, Malaysia bought more doses and established hundreds of vaccination centers, including mega hubs capable of providing up to 10,000 shots a day. The country now has 76% of its population fully vaccinated.

To date, about a dozen countries in the Asia-Pacific region have vaccinated more than 70% of their populations or are on the cusp of doing so, including Australia, China, Japan and Bhutan. In Singapore, 92% are fully vaccinated.

Some countries in Asia, however, have continued to struggle. India celebrated giving its billionth COVID-19 vaccine dose in October, but with a population of nearly 1.4 billion, that translates to a fully vaccinated

rate of 29%. Indonesia started earlier than most but has also stumbled, largely due to the challenge of expanding its campaign across the thousands of islands that make up its archipelago.

Japan's vaccine program was notoriously slow — inching along while the world wondered if it would be able to hold the Summer Olympics. It didn't start until mid-February because it required additional clinical testing on Japanese people before using the vaccines — a move that was widely criticized as unnecessary. It was also initially hit with supply issues.

But then it turned a corner. Then-Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga brought in military medical staff to operate mass inoculation centers in Tokyo and Osaka and bent laws to allow dentists, paramedics and lab technicians to give shots alongside doctors and nurses.

The number of daily doses given rose to about 1.5 million in July, and the country is now at about 76% fully inoculated. A large part of Japan's success is due to the public's response, said Makoto Shimoaraiso, a senior official in charge of the country's COVID-19 response.

Many in Japan are skeptical in general about vaccines, but after seeing deaths soar around the world, it has not been an issue.

In fact, retiree Kiyoshi Goto is already clamoring for his next shot, as he looks warily at rising case in Europe.

"I want to get a booster shot as our antibody levels are going down," the 75-year-old said.

In Phnom Penh, Nuth Nyra was just happy to get her first, saying she was afraid of COVID-19 before — but no more.

"I felt a little bit of pain when I got the shot," the young girl said in a soft voice at a vaccination center on the outskirts of Cambodia's capital. "But I didn't cry."

Rising reported from Bangkok. Associated Press writers Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea; Eileen Ng in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

## Police: 'Some' killed when SUV hits Christmas parade

By SCOTT BAUER and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

WAUKESHA, Wis. (AP) — An SUV sped through barricades and into a parade of Christmas marchers in suburban Milwaukee on Sunday, killing multiple people as it hit more than 20 adults and children in a horrifying scene captured by the city's livestream and the cellphones of onlookers.

Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said "some" people had been killed but would not give an exact number. A person was in custody, as was the SUV, he said, but he did not give any indication of motive.

One video shows a woman screaming, "Oh my God!" repeatedly after a group of girls wearing Santa hats and dancing with white pompoms is struck. Another shows the SUV plowing into members of a marching band, their music replaced with terrified screams.

Fire Chief Steven Howard said 11 adults and 12 children were injured and transported to hospitals by his department. It was unknown how many people were taken to hospitals by others. Children's Hospital of Wisconsin said it received 15 patients from the parade and no reported fatalities as of 8 p.m.

A Catholic priest, multiple parishioners and Waukesha Catholic schoolchildren were among those injured, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee spokeswoman Sandra Peterson said.

Police had custody of the vehicle, Thompson said. The investigation was ongoing, with assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

"What took place in Waukesha today is sickening, and I have every confidence that those responsible will be brought to justice," tweeted the state's top law enforcement officer, Attorney General Josh Kaul.

As the SUV broke through barricades at the annual parade, a Waukesha police officer fired his gun in an attempt to stop the vehicle, Thompson said. No bystanders were injured and Thompson said he did not know if the driver was struck by the officer's bullets.

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One video shows the moment the SUV broke through the barricades and the sound of what appears to be several gunshots. Another video shows a young child dancing in the street as the SUV speeds by, just a few feet from her, before it hurtles into parade participants a few hundred feet ahead.

The video of the pompom dancers ends with a group of people tending to one of the girls who is on the ground.

Corey Montiho, a Waukesha school district board member, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that his daughter's dance team was hit by the SUV.

"There were pompoms and shoes and spilled hot chocolate everywhere. I had to go from one crumpled body to the other to find my daughter," he said. "My wife and two daughters were almost hit. Please pray for everybody. Please pray."

One entry in the parade, the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, posted on its Facebook page that "members of the group and volunteers were impacted and we are waiting for word on their conditions." The group's profile describes them as a "group of grannies that meet once a week to practice routines for summer and winter parades."

Chris Germain, co-owner of the Aspire Dance Center studio, had about 70 girls in the parade ranging from as young as 2 being pulled in wagons to age 18. Germain, whose own 3-year-old daughter was in the parade, said he was driving at the head of their entry when he saw a maroon SUV that "just blazed right past us." A police officer came by on foot chasing after, he said. Germain said he jumped out of his own SUV and gathered the girls who were with him.

"There were small children laying all over the road, there were police officers and EMTs doing CPR on multiple members of the parade," he said.

Angelito Tenorio, a West Allis alderman who is running for Wisconsin state treasurer, said he was watching the parade with his family when they saw the SUV come speeding into the area.

"Then we heard a loud bang," Tenorio said. "And after that, we just heard deafening cries and screams from the crowd, from the people at the parade. And people started rushing, running away with tears in their eyes crying."

The Waukesha school district canceled classes Monday and said in a notice on its website that extra counselors would be on hand for students and staff. The parade's list of entries included cheer, dance and band entries associated with district schools.

Gov. Tony Evers said he and his wife, Kathy, were "praying for Waukesha tonight and all the kids, families, and community members affected by this senseless act."

The parade is sponsored by the city's Chamber of Commerce. This year's edition was the 59th of the event that's held each year the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

Waukesha is a western suburb of Milwaukee, and about 55 miles (90 kilometers) north of Kenosha, where Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted Friday of charges stemming from the shooting of three men during unrest in that city in August 2020.

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Bauer reported from Madison, Wis. Associated Press reporter Doug Glass contributed from Minneapolis.

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The first paragraph of this story has been corrected to reflect that the SUV sped through barricades, not a police line.

## Austrian lockdown dampens holiday mood to contain virus

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Austrians savored one last mulled wine in packed Christmas markets before the curtain came down on the holiday season that was just getting underway, plunging the country that gave the world "Silent Night" into its fourth lockdown of this pandemic on Monday.

The capital, Vienna, awoke groggily to the new restrictions, with people heading to work, to bring children to school or to exercise outdoors, more or less as usual.

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This was not the draconian lockdown of the pandemic's dawn in 2020, when movements were strictly monitored and discouraged. Police cars circulated, in keeping with government promises to step up controls, but no spot checks were being made.

"I am particularly annoyed by the lockdown," said Georg Huber, a lawyer on his way to the office. "One should have done more research in, I don't know, summer? One should have implemented a mandatory vaccination in the summer, when it turned out it would not be enough to hope that people get there without any coercion. I think the government just overslept."

Austria has one of the lowest vaccination rates in western Europe, coming in at around 66% of the population of 8.9 million people. There is a vocal minority who refuse to be inoculated.

The government announced the nationwide lockdown on Friday, as the average daily deaths tripled in recent weeks and hospitals in hard-hit states warned that intensive care units were hitting capacity.

The renewed restrictions will be in place for at least 10 days, but are likely to be extended for a further 10, after which the government has indicated plans to open up so Austrians can celebrate Christmas normally. Restrictions, however, will remain for the unvaccinated.

As of Monday, people can leave their homes only for specific reasons, including buying groceries, going to the doctor or exercising. Kindergartens and schools will remain open for those who need them, but all parents were asked to keep their children at home if possible.

Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein said the lockdown was necessary to bring down the number of new daily infections, which have spiked to as many as 15,000 a day, and to reduce the number of virus patients in intensive care, currently at 531. But most of all, he said, it was needed to bring relief "to the people who work in this sector, the nurses and doctors who cannot take it anymore."

"It is a situation where we have to react now. The only way is with a lockdown, a relatively hard method, to lower the numbers with a wooden hammer," Mueckstein told national broadcaster ORF on Sunday night.

Political analysts say the government did not effectively communicate the necessity of the vaccinations early enough, and that many Austrians did not take the campaign seriously enough after former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz declared the pandemic "over" last summer. Kurz was forced out in a corruption scandal last month, replaced by his foreign minister, Alexander Schallenberg, who inside of a week expanded the controversial lockdown on the unvaccinated to a lockdown for everyone.

Schallenberg also has pledged to make vaccinations mandatory by Feb. 1, with details still to be hammered out. Experts have speculated that it could be limited to certain age groups or even tied to employment, as Italy has done. In Italy, health passes are required to access places of employment, and can be obtained with a negative test good for 48 hours in addition to the vaccination or proof of having recovered from the virus.

On the eve of Austria's latest lockdown, people flocked to Christmas markets for one last night of public socializing, and many spent the weekend getting a leg up on holiday shopping before stores closed. The Austrian Trade Association said sales were up 15% on Saturday, when lines formed to take advantage of "Black Friday" deals, compared with the same day in 2019, before the pandemic.

But many feared the last-minute boost would not be enough to salvage the season for businesses that rely on the holiday season.

Sophie Souffle, who sells upcycled jewelry at markets all year round, said she makes most of her money over the six-week Christmas market period. Any promised help from the government will be enough to get by, she said, "but it won't be enough to invest for future business."

She looked around as people trawled stands, eyeing wares more than buying them, and gathering in small groups to enjoy the company of others before gatherings were restricted. She sensed more desperation than holiday spirit.

"The mood is pre-apocalyptic," she said.

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Follow all AP stories on the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

## Ex-protester, far-right lawmaker to meet in Chilean runoff

By EVA VERGARA and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — A conservative lawmaker with a history of defending Chile's military dictatorship and a former student protest leader were headed to a polarizing presidential runoff after both failed to garner enough votes to win the South American country's election outright.

José Antonio Kast finished Sunday's presidential election first with 28% of the vote compared to 26% for Gabriel Boric following a bruising campaign that laid bare deep social tensions in the region's most economically advanced country.

In a speech to supporters late Sunday, Kast doubled down on his far right rhetoric, framing the Dec. 19 runoff as a choice between "communism and liberty." He blasted Boric as a puppet of Chile's Communist Party — a member of the broad coalition supporting his candidacy — who would pardon "terrorists," be soft on crime and promote instability in a country that has recently been wracked by protests laying bare deep social divisions.

"We don't want to go down the path of Venezuela and Cuba," Kast, speaking from a lectern draped with a Chilean flag, told supporters in the capital. "We want a developed country, which is what we were aiming to become until we were stopped brutally by violence and the pandemic."

In sharp contrast, Boric refrained from attacking Kast by name, accepting the results with humility and urging his supporters to listen to and convince doubters who voted for other candidates.

"Our crusade is for hope to defeat fear," said Boric, speaking through a mask to supporters in his home town at the southern tip of the vast Patagonia region. "Our duty today is to convince others that we offer the best path to a more fair country."

A candidate who ran virtually from the U.S. without stepping foot in Chile led the pack of five other candidates trailing far behind. In Chile's electoral system, if no candidate secures a 50% majority, the two top finishers compete in a runoff.

The vote followed a bruising campaign that laid bare deep social tensions in the country. Also up for grabs is Chile's entire 155-seat lower house of Congress and about half the Senate.

Boric, 35, would become Chile's youngest modern president. He was among several student activists elected to Congress in 2014 after leading protests for higher quality education. If elected he says he will raise taxes on the "super rich" to expand social services and boost protections of the environment.

He's also vowed to eliminate the country's private pension system — one of the hallmarks of the free market reforms imposed in the 1980s by Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

Kast, 55, from the newly formed Republican Party, emerged from the far right fringe after having won less than 8% of the vote in 2017 as an independent. But he's been steadily rising in the polls this time with a divisive discourse emphasizing conservative family values as well as attacking migrants — many from Haiti and Venezuela — he blames for crime.

A fervent Roman Catholic and father of nine, Kast has also taken aim at the outgoing President Sebastian Pinera for allegedly betraying the economic legacy of Pinochet, which his brother helped implement as the dictator's central bank president.

Sebastian Sichel, a center right candidate who took around 12% of the vote, was the first among the losing candidates to position themselves in what's likely to be a heated runoff, telling supporters that under no circumstances would he vote for "the candidate from the left," a reference to Boric.

Meanwhile, Yasna Provoste, who finished with a similar amount, told her supporters on the center left that she could never be neutral in the face of a "fascist spirit that Kast represents."

Whoever wins will take over a country in the grips of major change but uncertain of its future course after decades of centrist reforms that largely left untouched Pinochet's economic model.

Pinera's decision to hike subway fares in 2019 sparked months of massive protests that quickly spiraled into a nationwide clamor for more accessible public services and exposed the crumbling foundations of Chile's "economic miracle."

Gravely weakened by the unrest, Pinera begrudgingly agreed to a plebiscite on rewriting the Pinochet-



era constitution. In May, the assembly charged with drafting the new magna carta was elected and is expected to conclude its work sometime next year.

Goodman reported from Miami

## **Jury in Ahmaud Arbery death trial to hear closing arguments**

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Attorneys were scheduled to give closing arguments Monday in the murder trial of three white men charged in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, whose death became part of a broader reckoning on racial injustice in the criminal legal system.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys were expected to spend hours making their final cases to the disproportionately white jury. The jurors heard 10 days of trial testimony that concluded last week, not long after the man who shot Arbery testified he pulled the trigger in self-defense.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael grabbed guns and pursued Arbery in a pickup truck after spotting the 25-year-old Black man running in their neighborhood on Feb. 23, 2020. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, joined the chase and recorded video of Travis McMichael opening fire as Arbery threw punches and grabbed for his shotgun.

No one was charged in the killing until Bryan's video leaked online two months later and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police. All three men face counts of murder and other charges.

Defense attorneys say the men suspected Arbery had burglarized a house under construction and intended to hold him until police arrived. Prosecutors say there's no evidence Arbery committed any crimes in the neighborhood. They say the men chased Arbery for five minutes and used their trucks to prevent him from fleeing before McMichael shot him.

Arbery had enrolled at a technical college and was preparing to study to become an electrician like his uncles when he was killed. The McMichaels told police they suspected Arbery was a burglar because security cameras had recorded him several times in the unfinished house on their street.

## **Kidnappers release 2 of 17 missionaries abducted in Haiti**

By HAROLD ISAAC Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Two of 17 members of a missionary group who were kidnapped more than a month ago are safe and "in good spirits" after being freed in Haiti, their U.S.-based church organization announced.

Christian Aid Ministries issued a statement Sunday saying it could not give the names of those released, why they were freed or other information.

"While we rejoice at this release, our hearts are with the 15 people who are still being held," the Ohio-based group said.

The missionaries were kidnapped by the 400 Mawozo gang on Oct. 16. There are five children in the group of 16 U.S. citizens and one Canadian, including an 8-month-old. Their Haitian driver also was abducted, according to a local human rights organization.

The leader of the 400 Mawozo gang has threatened to kill the hostages unless his demands are met. Authorities have said the gang was demanding \$1 million per person, although it wasn't immediately clear that included the children in the group.

The spokesman for Haiti's National Police, Gary Desrosiers, confirmed to The Associated Press that two hostages were released on Sunday.

The FBI, which is helping Haitian authorities recover the captives, declined to comment.

The release comes as Haiti struggles with a spike in gang-related violence and kidnappings, with the U.S. government recently urging U.S. citizens to leave Haiti amid deepening insecurity and a severe lack of fuel blamed on gangs blocking gas distribution terminals. On Friday, Canada announced it was pulling

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all but essential personnel from its embassy.

The fuel shortage has forced hospitals to turn away patients and paralyzed public transportation, with some schools closing and businesses shortening their work hours.

Haiti also is trying to recover from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck in mid-August, killing more than 2,200 people and destroying tens of thousands of homes.

## Hitmakers BTS stamp their authority on American Music Awards

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — South Korean superstars BTS were crowned artist of the year at the American Music Awards on Sunday, brushing aside challenges from Taylor Swift, Drake and The Weeknd as they took home a total of three awards and teamed up with Coldplay for a raucous "My Universe" and closed the show with "Butter."

"Seven boys from Korea, united by love for music, met the love and support from all the armies all over the world," said BTS' RM after the group won their artist of the year for the first time. "This whole thing is a miracle. Seriously, we would never take this for granted."

The band was also named favorite pop duo or group and got the favorite pop song award for "Butter."

The show celebrated the best popular music for a second pandemic year with a mix of live and pre-taped performances. Silk Sonic's Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak kicked off the awards on a funky, R&B and pre-taped note with their "Smokin Out the Window" and Jennifer Lopez pre-taped her "On My Way" from her upcoming romantic comedy "Marry Me."

An earlier scheduled performance of "Butter" by BTS and Megan Thee Stallion was scrapped after the rapper cited personal reasons for dropping out Saturday. She turned out to be a big winner: named favorite female hip-hop artist, her "Good News" winning for favorite hip-hop album and her "Body" was crowned favorite trending song, a new award this year.

Olivia Rodrigo came into the night with a leading seven nominations but only took home the crown for favorite new artist of the year. "Writing songs is my favorite thing in the whole world and I am so grateful for everyone who has embraced my music," she said.

Rodrigo lost favorite pop album to Taylor Swift's "evermore." In a taped speech, Swift told her fans: "I'm so lucky to be in your life." Swift also won for favorite female pop artist, giving her a career total of 34, the record for the most awarded artist in AMA history.

Rodrigo performed her hit "traitor" live on a stage covered with flowers and Carrie Underwood and Jason Aldean brought a little country to the stage when they sang their pre-taped duet "If I Didn't Love You." With a little help from Julieta Venegas and Tainy, Bad Bunny performed their hit "Lo Siento BB :/."

Among live performances, Italian band Måneskin made their U.S. awards show debut with their viral hit "Beggins." Chlöe of Chloe x Halle floated down onto the stage to perform her hit debut single as a soloist "Have Mercy," swinging her hair and twerking. Mickey Guyton got loud cheers while singing her patriotic song "All American" in a silvery dress, periodically screaming out "How y'all doing?"

The fan-voted awards show aired live from Los Angeles on ABC. Nominees were based on streaming, album and digital sales, radio airplay and social activity, and reflect the time period of Sept. 25, 2020, through Sept. 23, 2021.

Becky G won for favorite female Latin artists and thanked the Latinx community. "You are not alone," she said. "We are the American dream."

Machine Gun Kelly grabbed the favorite rock artist award. "I want to accept this for all the aspiring musicians, the one who desires to play an instrument, wants to rap, wants to sing — not just the rock artists, but all the artists," he said.

Earlier Sunday, in awards announced before the show, Swift was named favorite female pop artist, Ed Sheeran got the favorite male award and Doja Cat featuring SZA on "Kiss Me More" was named collaboration of the year. Kanye West was named favorite gospel artist.

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Underwood won for favorite inspirational artist and favorite female country artist and Doja Cat also won two other awards: favorite female R&B artist and her "Planet Her" was named favorite R&B album.

Luke Bryan was named favorite country artist and Bad Bunny was the favorite male Latin artist. The Weeknd was crowned favorite male R&B artist and Drake won the favorite male hip-hop artist. Gabby Barrett took home the favorite country album for "Goldmine" and favorite country song for "The Good Ones."

For the older viewers, New Edition and New Kids on the Block performed together. The Boston-based groups took turns with the hits, trading hits: "You Got It (The Right Stuff)," "Candy Girl," "Step By Step," "Mr. Telephone Man" and uniting for "Can You Stand the Rain," "Is This the End," "Hangin' Tough" and "If It Isn't Love."

The favorite Latin album went to Bad Bunny's "El Último Tour Del Mundo."

Host Cardi B, wearing a constant stream of new outfits, revved up the crowd. Later her song "Up" was named favorite hip-hop song. The Associated Press was not able to transmit images of Cardi B while she was onstage because her representatives required approval, a restriction the AP would not accept.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

## Tens of thousands protest Belgium's tighter COVID-19 rules

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Tens of thousands of people demonstrated through central Brussels on Sunday to protest reinforced COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Belgian government to counter the latest spike in coronavirus cases.

Many among the police estimate of 35,000 at the rally had already left for home when the demonstration descended into violence as several hundred people started pelting police, smashing cars and setting garbage bins ablaze. Police, responded with tear gas and water cannons and sought to restore order as dusk settled on the Belgian capital.

Three police officials and one demonstrator were injured in the clashes. In addition, 42 protesters were detained and two were arrested and charged in the violent spree that followed the march, said police spokesperson Ilse Vande Keere.

The marchers came to protest the government's strong advice to get vaccinated and any possible moves to impose mandatory shots.

Shouting "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" and singing the anti-fascist song "Bella Ciao," protesters lined up behind a huge banner saying "Together for Freedom" and marched to the European Union headquarters. Amid the crowd, the signs varied from far-right insignia to the rainbow flags of the LGBT community.

The World Health Organization said last week that Europe was the hot spot of the pandemic right now, the only region in which COVID-19 deaths were rising. The autumn surge of infections is overwhelming hospitals in many Central and Eastern European nations, including Ukraine, Russia, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Over the past several days, there have been many anti-vaccination marches in European nations as one government after another tightened measures. Dutch police arrested more than 30 people during unrest in The Hague and other towns in the Netherlands on Saturday, following much worse violence the previous night.

Austria is going into a 10-day national lockdown on Monday for everyone after first imposing a lockdown on the unvaccinated. Christmas markets in Vienna were packed Sunday with locals and tourists taking in the holiday sights before shops and food stalls are forced to close.

Follow AP coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

## Protesters trace route Rittenhouse took in Kenosha

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Several dozen people gathered below the wind-whipped Wisconsin flag at Keno-

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sha's Civic Center Park on Sunday and warmed up with chants for justice before taking to the streets in protest of the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse.

Demonstrators traced the route Rittenhouse took the night in August last year when he shot and killed two people and wounded a third during protests over police brutality. They carried signs that said "Reject Racist Vigilante Terror" and "THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS GUILTY!" A couple of protesters carried long guns.

Protesters regularly chanted, "No justice, no peace" and "Anthony and Jo Jo," the latter referring to Anthony Huber and Joseph Rosenbaum, both of whom were shot and killed by Rittenhouse.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, 80, who walked the first leg of a protest march in Chicago on Saturday, was scheduled to appear in Kenosha, but did not come. Organizers said he instead was working with congressional leaders to ask that the Department of Justice investigate the case for further prosecution. A release from Jackson's Rainbow PUSH Coalition earlier Sunday said the Justice Department should also consider aiding and abetting charges for Rittenhouse's mother.

"The verdict of not guilty is very revealing of the state of criminal justice in America," Bishop Grant, the Rainbow PUSH Coalition National Field Director, said in a statement.

While Grant's statement said Rittenhouse violated federal laws, he did not explain further and experts say Rittenhouse is unlikely to face federal charges because federal law applies only in very limited cases for homicides.

Rittenhouse, a then-17-year-old former police youth cadet from Antioch, Illinois, said he went to Kenosha with an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle to protect property from rioters but that he came under attack and feared for his life.

The shootings happened during a tumultuous night of protests over the shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake, by a white Kenosha police officer.

Rittenhouse is white, as were those he shot, and his acquittal led to new debates over racial justice, vigilantism and policing in America.

Derrick Johnson, NAACP president and CEO, said Sunday that the verdict was hard for African Americans to reconcile.

"Here you have a 17-year-old who illegally purchased a gun, traveled across state lines to protect property that was not his, for owners who did not invite him, and he put himself in harm's way based on the rhetoric that he's seen on social media platforms," Johnson told CBS' "Face the Nation." He called it "a warning shot that vigilante justice is allowed in this country or in particular communities."

Rittenhouse's lawyers described him as a scared teenager who shot to save his life.

"I didn't intend to kill them," Rittenhouse testified. "I intended to stop the people who were attacking me."

Find AP's full coverage on the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse at: <https://apnews.com/hub/kyle-rittenhouse>

## Far-right lawmaker, ex-protester to meet in Chilean runoff

By EVA VERGARA and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Two onetime outsiders hailing from opposite extremes of the political spectrum received the most votes Sunday in Chile's presidential election but failed to garner enough support for an outright win, setting up a polarizing runoff in the region's most advanced economy.

José Antonio Kast, a lawmaker who has a history of defending Chile's military dictatorship, finished first with 28% of the vote compared to 26% for former student protest leader Gabriel Boric.

Kast, in a victory speech, doubled down on his far right rhetoric, framing the Dec. 19 runoff as a choice between "communism and liberty." He blasted Boric as a puppet of Chile's Communist Party — a member of the broad coalition supporting his candidacy — who would pardon "terrorists," be soft on crime and promote instability in a country that has recently been wracked by protests laying bare deep social divisions.

"We don't want to go down the path of Venezuela and Cuba," Kast, speaking from a lectern draped with a Chilean flag, told supporters in the capital. "We want a developed country, which is what we were aiming to become until we were stopped brutally by violence and the pandemic."

In sharp contrast, Boric refrained from attacking Kast by name, accepting the results with humility and

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urging his supporters to listen to and convince doubters who voted for other candidates.

"Our crusade is for hope to defeat fear," said Boric, speaking through a mask to supporters in his home town at the southern tip of the vast Patagonia region. "Our duty today is to convince others that we offer the best path to a more fair country."

A candidate who ran virtually from the U.S. without stepping foot in Chile led the pack of five other candidates trailing far behind. In Chile's electoral system, if no candidate secures a 50% majority, the two top finishers compete in a runoff.

The vote followed a bruising campaign that laid bare deep social tensions in the country. Also up for grabs is Chile's entire 155-seat lower house of Congress and about half the Senate.

Boric, 35, would become Chile's youngest modern president. He was among several student activists elected to Congress in 2014 after leading protests for higher quality education. If elected he says he will raise taxes on the "super rich" to expand social services and boost protections of the environment.

He's also vowed to eliminate the country's private pension system — one of the hallmarks of the free market reforms imposed in the 1980s by Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

Kast, 55, from the newly formed Republican Party, emerged from the far right fringe after having won less than 8% of the vote in 2017 as an independent. But he's been steadily rising in the polls this time with a divisive discourse emphasizing conservative family values as well as attacking migrants — many from Haiti and Venezuela — he blames for crime.

A fervent Roman Catholic and father of nine, Kast has also taken aim at the outgoing President Sebastian Pinera for allegedly betraying the economic legacy of Pinochet, which his brother helped implement as the dictator's central bank president.

Sebastian Sichel, a center right candidate who took around 12% of the vote, was the first among the losing candidates to position themselves in what's likely to be a heated runoff, telling supporters that under no circumstances would he vote for "the candidate from the left," a reference to Boric.

Meanwhile, Yasna Provoste, who finished with a similar amount, told her supporters on the center left that she could never be neutral in the face of a "fascist spirit that Kast represents."

Whoever wins will take over a country in the grips of major change but uncertain of its future course after decades of centrist reforms that largely left untouched Pinochet's economic model.

Pinera's decision to hike subway fares in 2019 sparked months of massive protests that quickly spiraled into a nationwide clamor for more accessible public services and exposed the crumbling foundations of Chile's "economic miracle."

Gravely weakened by the unrest, Pinera begrudgingly agreed to a plebiscite on rewriting the Pinochet-era constitution. In May, the assembly charged with drafting the new magna carta was elected and is expected to conclude its work sometime next year.

Meanwhile, in a fresh sign of the tensions Pinera will leave behind, the billionaire president was impeached in the lower house before dodging removal by the Senate over an offshore business deal in which his family a decade ago sold its stake in a mining project while he was serving the first of two non-consecutive terms.

Goodman reported from Miami

## US missionaries say 2 of 17 abductees freed in Haiti

By HAROLD ISAAC Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Two of 17 members of a missionary group who were kidnapped more than a month ago have been freed in Haiti and are safe, "in good spirits and being cared for," their Ohio-based church organization announced Sunday.

Christian Aid Ministries issued a statement saying it could not give the names of those released, why they were freed or other information.

"While we rejoice at this release, our hearts are with the 15 people who are still being held," the group said.

The missionaries were kidnapped by the 400 Mawozo gang on Oct. 16. There are five children in the

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group of 16 U.S. citizens and one Canadian, including an 8-month-old. Their Haitian driver also was abducted, according to a local human rights organization.

The leader of the 400 Mawozo gang has threatened to kill the hostages unless his demands are met. Authorities have said the gang was demanding \$1 million per person, although it wasn't immediately clear that included the children in the group.

The spokesman for Haiti's National Police, Gary Desrosiers, confirmed to The Associated Press that two hostages were released on Sunday.

The FBI, which is helping Haitian authorities recover the captives, declined to comment.

The release comes as Haiti struggles with a spike in gang-related violence and kidnappings, with the U.S. government recently urging U.S. citizens to leave Haiti amid deepening insecurity and a severe lack of fuel blamed on gangs blocking gas distribution terminals. On Friday, Canada announced it was pulling all but essential personnel from its embassy.

The fuel shortage has forced hospitals to turn away patients and paralyzed public transportation, with some schools closing and businesses shortening their work hours.

Haiti also is trying to recover from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moise and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck in mid-August, killing more than 2,200 people and destroying tens of thousands of homes.

## **Sudan military leaders reinstate deposed prime minister**

By SAMY MAGDY and NOHA ELHENNAWY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's deposed prime minister signed a deal with the military on Sunday that will see him reinstated, almost a month after a military coup put him under house arrest. A key pro-democracy group that has mobilized dozens of protests had dismissed the deal as "a form of betrayal."

The deal, announced in a ceremony broadcast live on Sudan state TV, envisages an independent technocratic Cabinet to be led by Abdalla Hamdok until elections can be held. It remains unclear how much power the government would hold. It would still remain under military oversight.

It also remains unclear whether any political parties or pro-democracy groups have signed off on the agreement.

The deal expects the military to release government officials and politicians arrested since the Oct. 25 coup.

The coup, more than two years after a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist government, has drawn international criticism.

"The signing of this deal opens the door wide enough to address all the challenges of the transitional period," said Hamdok, speaking at the signing ceremony.

Sudanese have been taking to the streets in masses since the military takeover, which upended the country's fragile transition to democracy. The agreement comes just days after doctors said at least 15 people were killed by live fire during anti-coup demonstrations. Hamdok has been held under house arrest by military leaders for weeks.

The deal also stipulates that an investigation shall be conducted to identify those responsible for the killing and injuring of civilians and troops that marred protests following the coup.

Hamdok thanked Sudan's "regional and global friends" who helped in reaching this agreement but he did not name the countries.

The 14-clause deal also stressed that power should be handed over to an elected civilian government after the end of the transitional period.

"By signing this declaration, we could lay a genuine foundation to the transitional period," said Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the country's top military leader. "We want to establish a true partnership with all national forces so that we can eventually build institutions that can take us forward."

The Sudanese Professionals' Association, a group that played a key role in the uprising against Bashir, voiced their vehement opposition to the agreement, accusing Hamdok of committing "political suicide."

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"This agreement only concerns its signatories and it is an unjust attempt to bestow legitimacy on the latest coup and the military council," tweeted the group shortly after the deal was signed.

Several Western nations welcomed the agreement while noting challenges ahead. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was encouraged by the reports and urged all sides "to further talks and redouble efforts to complete key transitional tasks on a civilian-led path to democracy in Sudan." He also called on security forces "to refrain from excessive force against peaceful protesters."

Earlier, the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change, an umbrella of many political parties and pro-democracy groups, objected to any deals with the military.

In a statement Sunday, the group reiterated its opposition to any new political partnership with the military, insisting the perpetrators of the coup should be brought to justice.

"We are not concerned with any agreements with this brute junta and we are employing all peaceful and creative methods to bring it down," the statement said.

The largest of the political parties said to be included in the deal, the Umma Party, had also issued a statement implying that it did not sign off on it.

Cameron Hudson, a former U.S. State Department official and Sudan expert at the Atlantic Council's Africa Center, said the deal allows the generals to largely retain their control and avoid accountability for the coup and the deaths of dozens of protesters.

"This is a deal among elites that largely seems to prioritize their preservation over the demands of the street," he said.

Thousands had taken to the streets in the capital of Khartoum on Sunday, shortly before the signing ceremony, to denounce the coup and demand the immediate transfer of power to civilians. Protesters waved the Sudanese flag and chanted "Power to the people! The military belong in their barracks." Activists have circulated on videos on social media showing tear gas being fired at protestors.

Also earlier, military and government officials who spoke of the deal on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information, said that the U.N., the U.S. and others had played "crucial roles" in crafting the agreement.

The United States, its allies and the United Nations have condemned the use of excessive force against anti-coup protesters.

The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan, or UNITAMS, welcomed the agreement and urged both parties to "urgently address unresolved issues to complete the political transition in an inclusive manner, with respect for human rights and the rule of law."

## **In Kenosha and beyond, guns become more common on US streets**

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

As Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted in two killings that he said were self-defense, armed civilians patrolled the streets near the Wisconsin courthouse with guns in plain view.

In Georgia, testimony in the trial of Ahmaud Arbery's killers showed that armed patrols were commonplace in the neighborhood where Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, was chased down by three white men and shot.

The two proceedings sent startling new signals about the boundaries of self-defense as more guns emerge from homes amid political and racial tensions and the advance of laws that ease permitting requirements and expand the allowable use of force.

Across much of the nation, it has become increasingly acceptable for Americans to walk the streets with firearms, either carried openly or legally concealed. In places that still forbid such behavior, prohibitions on possessing guns in public could soon change if the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down a New York law.

The new status quo for firearms outside the home was on prominent display last week in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Local resident Erick Jordan carried a rifle and holstered handgun near the courthouse where Rittenhouse was tried for killing two men and wounding a third with an AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle during a protest last year.

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"I got a job to do — protect these people. That's it," said Jordan, referring to speakers at a news conference that was held in the hours after the verdict.

Speakers included an uncle of Jacob Blake, the Black man who was paralyzed in a shooting by a white police officer that touched off tumultuous protests across the city in the summer of 2020.

"This is my town, my people," Jordan said. "We don't agree on a lot of things, but we fight, we argue, we agree to disagree and go home safe, alive."

"That's real self-defense."

The comments were a counter punch to political figures on the right who welcomed the Rittenhouse verdict and condemned his prosecution.

Mark McCloskey, who pleaded guilty in June to misdemeanor charges stemming from when he and his wife waved a rifle and a handgun at Black Lives Matter protesters outside their St. Louis home in 2020, said the verdict shows that people have a right to defend themselves from a "mob." He currently is a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Missouri.

The verdict arrived as many states are expanding self-defense laws and loosening the rules for carrying guns in public. Both gun sales and gun violence have been on the rise.

At the same time, six more states this year removed requirements to get a permit to carry guns in public, the largest number in any single year, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. In all, 30 states have enacted "stand your ground" laws, which remove a requirement to retreat from confrontations before using deadly force.

Wisconsin has a tougher standard for claiming self-defense, and Rittenhouse was able to show the jury that he reasonably believed his life was in danger and that the amount of force he used was appropriate.

Ryan Busse, a former firearms-industry executive who now supports moderate gun control as an author and consultant, said the case reinforced the normalization of military-style weapons on city and suburban streets.

"Reasonable gun owners are freaked out by this," he said. "How is it that we see this and people are just like, 'There's a guy with an AR-15.' That happens in third-world countries."

He highlighted that a lesser charge against Rittenhouse as a minor in possession of a dangerous weapon was dropped before the verdict.

"There's a facet of Wisconsin law that allows kids to take their hunting rifle out with their dad or uncle," Busse said. "Well he's not hunting. ... The old gun culture is being used to cover up for this new, dangerous firearms culture."

Gun-rights advocates seeking greater access to weapons and robust self-defense provisions argue that armed confrontations will remain rare.

Republicans including former President Donald Trump have been quick to applaud the verdict. They stand by Rittenhouse as a patriot who took a stand against lawlessness and exercised his Second Amendment rights.

Discord over the right to carry guns in public places spilled over into state legislatures in the aftermath of a 2020 plot to storm the Michigan Capitol, the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and other threats. States including Michigan and New Mexico this year banned guns at their capitols, while Montana and Utah shored up concealed-carry rights.

At the Supreme Court, justices are weighing the biggest guns case in more than a decade, a dispute over whether New York's gun permitting law violates the Second Amendment right to "keep and bear arms."

Defenders of the law say that striking it down would lead to more guns on the streets of cities, including New York and Los Angeles.

During oral arguments this month, justices also appeared to worry that a broad ruling might threaten gun restrictions on subways and at bars, stadiums and other gathering places.

New York's law has been in place since 1913. It says that to carry a concealed handgun in public for self-defense, an applicant has to demonstrate an actual need for the weapon.



This story has been edited to correct that Jacob Blake was paralyzed, not killed, in a shooting by a police officer.

Find AP's full coverage on the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse at: <https://apnews.com/hub/kyle-rittenhouse>

## US Rhodes scholars for 2022 include record number of women

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press/Report for America

The class of U.S. Rhodes scholars for 2022 includes the largest number of women ever selected for the scholarship in one year, the Rhodes Trust announced Sunday.

Of the 32 students chosen to study at the University of Oxford in England, 22 are women, the office of the American secretary of the trust said in a statement.

One of the women selected is Louise Franke, a 21-year-old senior studying biochemistry at South Carolina's Clemson University. Franke said she hopes to merge her interests in science and public policy through a career in health care policy. She intends to study politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford.

Franke, of Spartanburg, South Carolina, is also the first Clemson student elected to a Rhodes class. She cited her mentors and various academic programs at the school as integral to her success.

"It feels amazing to be part of this historic moment, as a woman and as a woman from the South," Franke said. "I don't really have the words for it."

Also among the winners is Devashish Basnet, a senior studying political science at New York City's Hunter College. Basnet arrived in the United States as a 7-year-old asylum seeker from Nepal and spent much of his childhood in immigration courts, an experience he says helped turn his interests toward immigration policy.

Basnet, now 22, of Hicksville, New York, said he was proud to represent the communities he came from, especially as a product of New York City public schools.

"I definitely blacked out. It didn't feel real," Basnet said of the moment he learned he had won the prestigious honor over Zoom.

The selection process was completed virtually for the second year in a row due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an otherwise empty classroom at Princeton University, Josh Babu began crying when he heard his name read aloud. The 21-year-old from Scottsdale, Arizona, had planned to go to medical school next year to become a doctor serving LGBTQ populations, a calling he found in college after growing up gay in what he described as a conservative environment.

But a Rhodes scholarship will help Babu embark on a policy career that will touch the lives of many more queer and transgender people, he said. His senior thesis explores the health benefits of gender-affirming medical care for transgender children. That kind of research is necessary, Babu said, because some state lawmakers have sought to limit such care.

"I was hoping to just be a doctor for queer, trans patients," Babu said. "This now gives me an opportunity to be in health policy and actually affect change at that level" that is "far more widespread and far-reaching."

Three schools — Claremont McKenna College, Mount Holyoke College and Union College — have a recipient for the first time in at least 25 years.

All 32 scholars were expected to start at Oxford in October. The scholarship covers financial expenses to attend the school.

Applicants must be endorsed by their college or university. Selection committees from 16 U.S. districts then choose and interview finalists before electing two students from each district.

## 'I lost everything': Guadeloupe riots overtake COVID protest

BY ELODIE SOUPAMA AND SYLVIE CORBET

LE GOSIER, Guadeloupe (AP) — Residents in the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, an overseas territory

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of France, expressed dismay Sunday after protests against COVID-19 restrictions erupted into rioting and looting for the third day in a row, prompting French authorities to send in police special forces.

Road blockades by protesters made traveling across the island nearly impossible Sunday. Firefighters reported 48 interventions overnight into Sunday morning. The island of 400,000 people has one of the lowest vaccination rates in France at 33%, compared with 75% across the country.

In Pointe-a-Pitre, the island's largest urban area, clashes left three people injured, including a 80-year-old woman hit by a bullet while on her balcony. A firefighter and a police officer were also injured and several shops were looted there and in other towns. A police station in Morne-à-l'Eau was set on fire.

Guadeloupe Prefect Alexandre Rochatte, who has imposed a nightly curfew from 6 p.m. to 5 a.m., said Sunday that 38 people were arrested overnight and denounced the "organized groups now seeking to sow chaos."

Emilie Guisbert, a 47-year-old Pointe-a-Pitre resident, was sleeping in her home in the building owned by her father when it was set on fire on Thursday evening. Her friend woke her up and she just had time to dress and run out with her dogs, she told The Associated Press.

"I lost everything. Everything. I went out with my cellphone and what I was wearing," she said, adding that personal belongings of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were in the house. "It's 100 years of memory of a Guadeloupean family that went up in smoke in 15 minutes."

She said she did not receive help from authorities yet. "We are completely left to ourselves. I don't know who is clearing (the house). Is it us, the insurance, the city hall?"

The protests were called for by unions to denounce France's COVID-19 health pass, which is required to access restaurants and cafes, cultural venues, sport arenas and long-distance travel. Demonstrators were also protesting France's mandatory vaccinations for health care workers. In recent days, they broadened their demands to include a general salary increase, higher unemployment benefits and the hiring of more teachers.

Gregory Agapé, 30, who also lives in a Pointe-à-Pitre neighborhood where violence has repeatedly taken place, said he cannot sleep at night.

"We are always upset by the noises, bangs, all the bustle around so nights are very complicated, very short," he said.

Agapé said he has contradictory thoughts about the COVID-19 protest movement. "I'm well aware of economic, social, cultural difficulties ... but its quite complicated, because I think (the protests) are making Guadeloupean society even more fragile."

Jacques Bertili, a 49-year-old Le Gosier resident, said "I'm not against nor for the vaccine. But what makes me upset is looting. Because we need to work."

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin denounced the violence as "unacceptable" in an interview Sunday with Le Parisien newspaper. He said 50 officers from police special forces were arriving Sunday in Guadeloupe, in addition to 200 other police sent earlier.

Darmanin said following an emergency meeting Saturday in Paris that "some shots have been fired against police officers" in Guadeloupe. He also said road blockades created a "very difficult situation for a few hours" during which patients and supplies couldn't reach hospitals.

Rochatte said some electrical facilities near dams have been damaged, which has caused some power outages, and urged people not to go near downed electrical cables.

Follow AP coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

## 'Tiger King' Joe Exotic moved to North Carolina facility

BUTNER, N.C. (AP) — The former Oklahoma zookeeper known as "Tiger King" Joe Exotic, a prominent figure in a Netflix documentary series, has been transferred to a medical facility in North Carolina for federal inmates after a cancer diagnosis, according to his attorney.

Joe Exotic, whose real name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage, was flown on a plane to be transferred from

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a federal medical center in Fort Worth, Texas, to a federal medical center in Butner, North Carolina, late Tuesday or early Wednesday, defense attorney John Phillips said in a statement. Phillips, who tweeted his statement on Saturday, said Maldonado-Passage originally was scheduled to be transferred later this month.

Phillips said Maldonado-Passage told him that he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and was getting medical treatment and tests "for a host of issues." Phillips said prison medical care "isn't the best and justice is slow."

"It's a competition of life and liberty no one wants any part of," he added.

In July, a federal appeals court ruled that Maldonado-Passage should get a shorter prison sentence for his role in a murder-for-hire plot and violating federal wildlife laws.

He was sentenced in January 2020 to 22 years in federal prison after being convicted of trying to hire two different men to kill Florida animal rights activist Carole Baskin. A three-judge panel of the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver found that the trial court wrongly treated those two convictions separately in calculating his prison term under sentencing guidelines.

The appeals court panel said his advisory sentencing range should be between 17 1/2 years and just under 22 years rather than between just under 22 years and 27 years in prison, as the trial court calculated.

Maldonado-Passage and his blond mullet were featured in the Netflix documentary "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."

Meanwhile, Baskin, of Tampa's Big Cat Rescue sanctuary, lost an effort to stop Netflix and a production company from using previously recorded video of her and her husband in the "Tiger King" sequel, which began airing Nov. 17.

A federal magistrate judge issued a recommendation Friday denying the Baskins' bid to block use of the footage as an impermissible prior restraint under the First Amendment.

## Libyan interim PM aims for presidency, despite rules

CAIRO (AP) — Libya's interim prime minister filed a request Sunday to run for president, despite being barred from elections next month under the current rules.

Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah is meant to lead the country until a winner is declared following presidential elections on Dec. 24. He is the latest high-profile candidate to emerge in the race. He submitted his application a day before the Nov. 22 deadline. It remains unclear whether the country's electoral commission will accept his candidacy.

Dbeibah is barred from running under Libya's current election laws. He promised he would not seek office in the vote as a condition to taking on his caretaker role earlier this year. In order to be eligible, he also would have needed to have suspended himself from governmental duties at least three months before the polling date, which he did not.

Steps away from the electoral commission's office in Tripoli, Dbeibah told journalists he felt responsible for the continued reconstruction of the country, torn apart by years of civil war.

"Despite all the accompanying difficulties and ambiguous circumstances that accompanied the election journey, I invite you to never lose hope, as it has become clear, and obvious. The beginning of the right path," he said at a press conference held after submitting his papers.

The vote faces growing uncertainty. Libya has been wracked by chaos since a NATO-backed uprising toppled the late dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. The country had for years been split between authorities in the east and a U.N.-supported administration in Tripoli, aided by nearby militias. Each side in the civil war has also had the support of mercenaries and foreign forces from Turkey, Russia and Syria and other regional powers.

Earlier this month, several controversial candidates came forward, including Seif al-Islam, the son and one-time heir apparent of Gadhafi. Powerful military commander Khalifa Hifter, who besieged the capital of Tripoli for nearly a year in 2019, is also running.

Dbeibah, a powerful businessman from the western city of Misrata, was appointed during U.N.-led talks in April to lead the executive branch of the interim government that also included a three-member Presi-

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dential Council chaired by Mohammad Younes Menfi, a Libyan diplomat from the country's east. Before he took the position, he signed a pledge that he would not seek office in the next elections.

His government was meant to replace the rival administrations based in east and west that had ruled Libya for years. But it also faced significant obstacles, including the reunification of the country's central banking system and equal distribution of revenue from country's oil and gas production.

His appointment to the premiership was confirmed despite allegations of corruption at meetings of the U.N.-picked 75-member political dialogue forum that appointed him. Then, Dbeibah denied the allegations and called for the U.N. to reveal the conclusions of its investigations.

Last week, Dbeibah told a youth rally that he would put his name forward for president if that's what the people want.

## Expect to pay more for Christmas trees, experts say

HUNTINGTON, N.Y. (AP) — Add Christmas trees to the list of items facing shortages and higher prices this year.

Several factors are driving the trend, Newsday reported, including over-the-top sales last year during the first Christmas during the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain issues this year.

Experts said tree buyers should expect to pay between 10% and 30% more for both live trees and artificial trees this year and also have a smaller selection to choose from.

"Prices have gone up significantly," John Mohlenhoff, secretary of the hook and ladder company for the Huntington fire department, told the newspaper. "We've had to compromise on what types of trees we're getting, sizes, everything."

The Huntington fire department sold out its trees in 48 hours last year in what is normally a week-long fundraising sale, Mohlenhoff said. This year, prices have been raised about \$5, the first time that's been done in a decade. The department has had to pay higher prices to the farm in Pennsylvania that supplies the trees.

Darts Christmas Tree Farm in Southold sold out of mature trees last year for the first time in 50 years, and also sold many that weren't mature yet, leaving the farm with fewer large trees this year, owner Ed Dart said.

Several factors are at work. Farmers struggling after the economic recession in 2009 planted fewer trees for several years, and demand has been rising in the last several years, experts told Newsday. It takes eight to 10 years for a tree to reach maturity.

Shipments of artificial trees have been delayed this year due to supply chain issues including a shortage of truck drivers to make deliveries.

"Some of the major retailers say they have about 43 percent of their inventory right now when it should be closer to 70 percent at this time of the year," Jami Warner, executive director of the American Christmas Tree Association, which represents Christmas tree retailers, told the newspaper.

Costello's Ace Hardware, which sells artificial trees at 22 locations on Long Island, has raised prices as much as 25 percent, category manager Andy Pergament told the newspaper. The chain normally has Christmas merchandise set up in stores by late October but is still waiting for some artificial trees being shipped from China that are supposed to arrive next week, he said.

## Olympic officials: Chinese tennis star Peng says she is safe

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Missing Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai told Olympic officials in a video call from Beijing that she was safe and well, the International Olympic Committee said Sunday after Peng reappeared in public at a youth tournament in Beijing, according to photos released by the organizer.

The 30-minute call came amid growing global alarm over Peng after she accused a former leading Communist Party official of sexual assault. China's ruling Communist Party has tried to quell fears abroad while suppressing information in China about Peng.

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Sunday's call — with IOC president Thomas Bach, athletes commission chair Emma Terho and IOC member Li Lingwei, a former vice president of the Chinese Tennis Association — appears to be Peng's first direct contact with sports officials outside China since she disappeared from public view on Nov. 2.

Peng "thanked the IOC for its concern about her well-being," the Switzerland-based Olympic body said in a statement.

"She explained that she is safe and well, living at her home in Beijing, but would like to have her privacy respected at this time. That is why she prefers to spend her time with friends and family right now," the statement said.

Peng, who played for China at three Olympics from 2008 to 2016, made the sexual assault allegation on Chinese social media three weeks ago against a former member of the Communist Party's ruling Standing Committee, Zhang Gaoli.

That post was removed within minutes and the former top-ranked doubles player went missing from public view. She did not respond publicly to calls for information to show she was safe.

Peng adds to a growing number of Chinese businesspeople, activists and ordinary people who have disappeared in recent years after criticizing party figures or in crackdowns on corruption or pro-democracy and labor rights campaigns.

Some reemerge weeks or months later without explanation, suggesting they are warned not to disclose they were detained or the reason.

Bach, the IOC president, has invited Peng to join him at a dinner when he arrives in Beijing in January "which she gladly accepted," the IOC said Sunday. Terho and Li were also invited.

"I was relieved to see that Peng Shuai was doing fine, which was our main concern," Terho said in the IOC statement. The hockey player from Finland represents athletes on the IOC executive board.

"She appeared to be relaxed," Terho said. "I offered her our support and to stay in touch at any time of her convenience, which she obviously appreciated."

The photos of Peng posted Sunday by the China Open on the Weibo social media service made no mention of her disappearance or her accusation. The former Wimbledon champion was shown standing beside a court, waving and signing oversize commemorative tennis balls for children.

Peng's disappearance and official silence in response to appeals for information prompted calls for a boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February, a prestige event for the Communist Party. The women's professional tour threatened to pull events out of China unless the safety of the former No. 1 doubles player was assured.

The IOC had previously remained quiet about the status of Peng, helping to contribute to the IOC's multimillion-dollar revenue from broadcasting and sponsorships.

The Olympic body's stated policy is "quiet diplomacy." The IOC had said Saturday it would "continue our open dialogue on all levels with the Olympic movement in China."

Discussion of Peng's accusation has been deleted from websites in China. A government spokesman on Friday denied knowing about the outcry. The ruling party's internet filters also block most people in China from seeing other social media abroad and most global news outlets.

Comments on Chinese social media on Sunday criticized the Women's Tennis Association and others who spoke up about Peng. Comments in Chinese on Twitter poked fun at the awkward release of photos and video of Peng by employees of state media this weekend while the government stayed silent.

"When will the WTA get out of China?" said a comment on the Sina Weibo social media service, signed "Sleep Time."

Peng's appearance Sunday was mentioned in the final sentence of a report about the tournament on the website of the English-language Global Times, a newspaper published by the ruling party and aimed at foreign readers, but not immediately reported by other media within China.

The Global Times editor, Hu Xijin, said Saturday on Twitter, which can't be seen by most internet users in China, that Peng "stayed in her own home freely" and would "show up in public" soon.

The Global Times is known for its nationalistic tone. Hu uses his Twitter account to criticize foreign gov-

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ernments and point out social and economic problems abroad.

A comment on Twitter signed bobzhang999 said, "Hu Dog, with so many photos, why don't you let Peng Shuai talk?"

Another, signed Magician, said, "Let Peng Shuai's parents hold a news conference."

Tennis stars and the WTA have been unusually vocal in demanding information about Peng. Other companies and sports groups are reluctant to confront Beijing for fear of losing access to the Chinese market or other retaliation.

The ruling party has given no indication whether it is investigating Peng's accusation against Gao, 75, who left the Communist Party's ruling Standing Committee in 2018 and has largely disappeared from public life.

Even if Peng's accusation is deemed valid, people in China often are jailed or face other penalties for embarrassing the party by publicizing complaints about abuses instead of going through the secretive, often unresponsive official system.

The status of star athletes such as Peng is especially sensitive. State media celebrate their victories as proof the party is making China strong. But the party is vigilant about making sure they cannot use their prominence and public appeal to erode its image.

Steve Simon, the WTA's chairman and CEO, expressed concern for Peng's safety after Hu, the newspaper editor, posted two videos Saturday that appeared to show her in a restaurant.

"While it is positive to see her, it remains unclear if she is free and able to make decisions and take actions on her own, without coercion or external interference. This video alone is insufficient," Simon said. "Our relationship with China is at a crossroads."

The IOC said Saturday it would "continue our open dialogue on all levels with the Olympic movement in China."

Asked two weeks ago about human rights in China, senior IOC member Juan Antonio Samaranch said "we are not discussing with the Chinese government anything" about that subject.

The IOC has previously said its partner in organizing the Winter Games is the local organizing committee, not the Chinese state. That committee is controlled by the Communist Party.

Emma Terho, the newly elected head of the IOC's Athletes' Commission that is charged with representing the interests of Olympic athletes, said in a statement Saturday "we support the quiet diplomacy" approach favored by the IOC.

Last week, the foreign arm of state TV issued a statement in English attributed to Peng that retracted her accusation against Zhang. The WTA's Simon questioned its legitimacy while others said it only increased their concern about her safety.

AP Sports Writer Graham Dunbar in Geneva contributed to this report.

## 'Ghostbusters: Afterlife' captures \$44 million in theaters

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Busting ghosts is still a fairly lucrative business after almost 40 years.

Heading into Thanksgiving weekend, the latest attempt to revive "Ghostbusters" drew a sizable audience to theaters, while the awards darling "King Richard," like most dramas in the pandemic era, is struggling.

With a reverence for nostalgia and a few high-profile cameos in its arsenal, "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" opened above industry expectations with \$44 million in ticket sales from 4,315 locations, according to studio estimates Sunday. The Sony movie directed by Jason Reitman and starring Paul Rudd, Finn Wolfhard and McKenna Grace is playing exclusively in theaters.

"Afterlife's" first weekend is actually trailing that of Paul Feig's "Ghostbusters" with Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wiig, which had a \$46 million opening in June 2016. Aside from the somewhat unpredictable pandemic-era moviegoing habits, the crucial difference is that "Afterlife" cost about half as much to make.

"It's a really solid number," said Paul Dergarabedian, Comscore's senior media analyst. "Part of that is the theatrical exclusive release. This shows that this brand is really powerful even some 37 years after

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the original became a cultural phenomenon.”

The weekend’s other high-profile offering didn’t fare as well. “King Richard,” the well-reviewed drama starring Will Smith as the father of tennis greats Venus and Serena Williams, earned \$5.7 million from 3,302 locations, missing its modest expectations by almost half. The Warner Bros. film was released simultaneously on HBO Max and in theaters.

“It really is have and have nots,” said Jeff Goldstein, Warner Bros. head of domestic distribution. “Clearly the avid moviegoers are starting to come back, but more casual moviegoers are more reluctant.”

Although traditional blockbusters have managed to draw decent audiences, dramas have disproportionately struggled during the pandemic. Most have debuted in the \$3 million range. One of the more successful launches was the Aretha Franklin biopic “Respect,” which opened to \$8.8 million.

But the outlook could be promising for “King Richard” with its 92% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes, A CinemaScore from audiences and long awards season runway. In 2018, “Green Book” opened on Thanksgiving weekend to only \$5.5 million, but by the end of awards season it had grossed \$85 million.

Meanwhile, in limited release from A24, Mike Mills’ “C’mon C’mon” had the best limited platform debut since February 2020 with \$134,447 from five screens. The film stars Joaquin Phoenix as man looking after his 9-year-old nephew.

The box office is still far from where it was pre-pandemic. The weekend leading into Thanksgiving usually usually gets around \$200 million in ticket sales, but this weekend will net out around \$83 million.

At this point, the 2021 North American box office could net out with around \$4 billion. In 2019 it was \$11.4 billion. And there are still some major movies on the horizon in December, like “West Side Story,” “Spider-Man: No Way Home” and “The Matrix Resurrections.”

“Thanksgiving and the holidays are usually a really good time at the box office. The marketplace every week is a building block in that road to recovery for movie theaters,” Dergarabedian said. “These last six weeks are going to be critical. This is a final push.”

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. “Ghostbusters: Afterlife,” \$44 million.
2. “Eternals,” \$10.8 million.
3. “Clifford The Big Red Dog,” \$8.1 million.
4. “King Richard,” \$5.7 million.
5. “Dune,” \$3.1 million.
6. “Venom: Let There Be Carnage,” \$2.8 million.
7. “No Time to Die,” \$2.7 million.
8. “The French Dispatch,” \$970,000.
9. “Belfast,” \$940,000.
10. “Ron’s Gone Wrong,” \$888,000.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/ldbahr](https://www.twitter.com/ldbahr)

## Poland: Belarus eyes using Afghan migrants as border pawns

By LIUDAS DAPKUS Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Poland’s leader on Sunday warned against more possible migrant pressures on the European Union’s border with Belarus, this time coming from Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki spoke in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, following talks with Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte about ways of solving the “very difficult situation” at the borders of EU members with Belarus. He was on a one-day tour of meetings with the prime ministers of EU members Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which have also been hit by the migrant pressures.

All leaders stressed the need for acting jointly and said the border crisis created by Belarus has strengthened their cooperation.

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The EU says the new surge of migrants on its eastern borders has been orchestrated by Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko's regime in retaliation for EU sanctions placed on Belarus after its crackdown on peaceful democracy protesters. It calls the move "a hybrid attack" on the entire 27-nation bloc. Belarus denies the charge.

Poland's Border Guard said Sunday it prevented a forceful illegal entry by some 100 "very aggressive foreigners" on Saturday who had been brought to the fenced border near the village of Czeremcha by Belarus forces.

Morawiecki said he expected the migrant pressures on Poland and the EU to continue, but now from a different region, claiming knowledge of "diplomatic" contacts that Belarus and Russia had with Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

"There is a threat of an even more difficult scenario," Morawiecki said. "There will most probably be an attempt at using the crisis in Afghanistan as a new act in the migration crisis, putting to use the West's remorse related to the disorderly pullout from Afghanistan."

In Latvia's capital of Riga, Morawiecki said "only the full pullback of the migrants and steps toward de-escalation can lead back to any kind of a constructive scenario with Lukashenko."

Earlier in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, Morawiecki said Poland was ready to contribute financially to return flights home for migrants who have been stranded at the border's damp forest for weeks. He said Warsaw was also ready to close all border crossings with Belarus to step up the economic pressure on Lukashenko's regime. The Polish road crossing near Kuznica was closed last week.

Lithuania's Simonyte stressed that the EU should coordinate all further actions on Belarus with countries at the forefront of these attacks — Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

"The European Commission has now taken over the technical talks with Minsk. It is very important that no decisions are taken that will not allow the situation to be resolved," Simonyte told reporters, warning against any separate Poland-Belarus discussions.

Poland is pushing the migrants back, saying it is protecting the border for all of Europe and NATO. It has received words of support from the EU, NATO and the U.S.

A few migrants have died in the forests straddling the border. Others have abandoned hopes of reaching Europe and were flown back to their home countries last week.

Poland's Tatar community in the eastern village of Bohoniki on Sunday held a third funeral for a migrant, burying a 37-year-old Yemeni, Mustafa Mouhamad Murshid al-Raimi, who was found Sept. 19 in the forest with hypothermia.

The EU Commission on Sunday leveled further accusations against Lukashenko.

"In the crisis, Lukashenko behaved like an unlicensed tour operator who sold expensive travel packages to the EU, only for them to collapse on arrival," EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson told Germany's Welt am Sonntag newspaper. "Families and children were deceived and lured into a tragedy that meant a lot of suffering,"

Poland's Border Guard says it has registered over 34,000 attempts at illegally crossing into Poland this year, including over 17,000 in October and over 6,000 in November so far. Germany has registered a few thousand who have reached its territory from Belarus.

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Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, Jari Tanner in Tallinn and Monika Scislawska in Warsaw contributed.

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Follow all AP stories on global migration at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>.

## **IOC says Peng Shuai has told Olympic officials she is safe**

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai has taken part in a 30-minute video call from Beijing with IOC officials and told them she was safe and well, the Olympic body said on Sunday.

The call came amid growing global alarm over Peng. Her appearance at a youth tennis event Sunday in Beijing and social media posts on her behalf did not fully convince people outside China that she has



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freedom to act, after she alleged a sexual assault against a former leading Communist Party official.

The call — with IOC president Thomas Bach, athletes commission chair Emma Terho and IOC member Li Lingwei, a former vice president of the Chinese Tennis Association — appears to be Peng's first direct contact with sports officials outside China since she disappeared from public view on Nov. 2.

Peng "thanked the IOC for its concern about her well-being," the Switzerland-based Olympic body said in a statement.

"She explained that she is safe and well, living at her home in Beijing, but would like to have her privacy respected at this time. That is why she prefers to spend her time with friends and family right now," the statement said.

Peng, who played for China at three Olympics from 2008 to 2016, made a sexual assault allegation on social media three weeks ago against a former member of the Communist Party's ruling Standing Committee, Zhang Gaoli.

The post was removed within minutes and the former top-ranked doubles player went missing from public view. She did not respond publicly to calls for information to show she was safe.

The International Olympic Committee has been criticized for being relatively silent in public as concern for Peng grew in the past week. It has pursued a "quiet diplomacy" policy with the 2022 Olympics host nation. The Beijing Winter Games open on Feb. 4.

Bach has now invited Peng to join him at a dinner when he arrives in Beijing in January "which she gladly accepted," the IOC said. Terho and Li were also invited.

"I was relieved to see that Peng Shuai was doing fine, which was our main concern," Terho said in the IOC statement. The hockey player from Finland represents athletes on the IOC executive board.

"She appeared to be relaxed," Terho said. "I offered her our support and to stay in touch at any time of her convenience, which she obviously appreciated."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## El Salvador to build cryptocurrency-fueled "Bitcoin City"

By DAVID BARRAZA Associated Press

LA LIBERTAD, El Salvador (AP) — In a rock concert-like atmosphere, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele announced that his government will build an oceanside "Bitcoin City" at the base of a volcano.

Bukele used a gathering of Bitcoin enthusiasts Saturday night to launch his latest idea, much as he used an earlier Bitcoin conference in Miami to announce in a video message that El Salvador would be the first country to make the cryptocurrency legal tender.

A bond offering would happen in 2022 entirely in Bitcoin, Bukele said, wearing his signature backwards baseball cap. And 60 days after financing was ready, construction would begin.

The city will be built near the Conchagua volcano to take advantage of geothermal energy to power both the city and Bitcoin mining — the energy-intensive solving of complex mathematical calculations day and night to verify currency transactions.

The government is already running a pilot Bitcoin mining venture at another geothermal power plant beside the Tecapa volcano.

The oceanside Conchagua volcano sits in southeastern El Salvador on the Gulf of Fonseca.

The government will provide land and infrastructure and work to attract investors.

The only tax collected there will be the value-added tax, half of which will be used to pay the municipal bonds and the rest for municipal infrastructure and maintenance. Bukele said there would be no property, income or municipal taxes and the city would have zero carbon dioxide emissions.

The city would be built with attracting foreign investment in mind. There would be residential areas, malls, restaurants and a port, Bukele said. The president talked of digital education, technology and sustainable public transportation.

"Invest here and earn all the money you want," Bukele told the cheering crowd in English at the closing of the Latin American Bitcoin and Blockchain Conference being held in El Salvador.

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Bitcoin has been legal tender alongside the U.S. dollar since Sept. 7.

The government is backing Bitcoin with a \$150 million fund. To incentivize Salvadorans to use it, the government offered \$30 worth of credit to those using its digital wallet.

Critics have warned that the currency's lack of transparency could attract increased criminal activity to the country and that the digital currency's wild swings in value would pose a risk to those holding it.

Bitcoin was originally created to operate outside government controlled financial systems and Bukele says it will help attract foreign investment to El Salvador and make it cheaper for Salvadorans living abroad to send money home to their families.

Concern among the Salvadoran opposition and outside observers has grown this year as Bukele has moved to consolidate power.

Voters gave the highly popular president's party control of the congress earlier this year. The new lawmakers immediately replaced the members of the constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court and the attorney general, leaving Bukele's party firmly in control of the other branches of government.

The U.S. government in response said it would shift its aid away from government agencies to civil society organizations. This month, Bukele sent a proposal to congress that would require organizations receiving foreign funding to register as foreign agents.

## Tunisian trial shines light on use of military courts

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — A few days after Tunisia's president froze parliament and took on sweeping powers in July, a dozen men in unmarked vehicles and civilian clothes barged into politician Yassine Ayari's family home overnight and took him away in his pajamas.

"These men weren't wearing uniforms and they didn't have a warrant," Ayari told The Associated Press. "It was violent. My 4-year-old son still has nightmares about it."

A 40-year-old computer engineer-turned-corruption fighter, Ayari will stand trial again in a military court on Monday, accused of insulting the presidency and defaming the army. It is the latest in a series of trials that shine a light on Tunisia's use of military courts to push through convictions against civilians. Rights groups say the practice has accelerated since President Kais Saied's seizure of power in July, and warn that its use further threatens hard-won freedoms amid Tunisia's democratic backsliding.

The charges Ayari faces relate to Facebook posts in which he criticized Saied, calling him a "pharaoh" and his measures a "military coup." Ayari intends to remain silent in court to protest the whole judicial process, according to his lawyer, Malek Ben Amor.

Amnesty International is warning of an "alarming increase" in Tunisian military courts targeting civilians: In the past three months, it says, 10 civilians have been investigated or prosecuted by military tribunals, while four civilians are facing trial for criticizing the president.

That's especially worrying because Tunisia was long considered the only democratic success story to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings a decade ago, and was long seen as a model for the region.

Most countries in the Middle East are now ruled by authoritarian governments, where military courts — ostensibly tasked with targeting threats to stability — are a tool for crushing dissent. Jordan and Egypt are among countries with a military court system, while Israel has established a separate military court system for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

An independent member of parliament, Ayari is known for criticizing Tunisia's army and government and for his corruption investigations. One led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh in 2020 after Ayari published documents proving the leader had a conflict of interest.

Ayari says he has been tried by a military tribunal nine times, leading to three sentences.

"There is no law in military courts, no independence," he said.

He is among the Tunisian legislators whose employment status was suspended after Saied dismissed the government and froze parliament on July 25.

"I have to figure out how I'm going to pay my bills. Now I'm asking my wife for 10 dinars (\$3.50) to even

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go out and buy a pack of cigarettes," Ayari said.

The Tunisian president's surprise measures followed nationwide anti-government protests and rising frustrations with the North African nation's political elite, who are widely perceived as corrupt and inefficient in the face of Tunisia's growing coronavirus crisis and its economic and political woes.

Saied also revoked the immunity of lawmakers like Ayari, who was swiftly arrested. He was jailed in July for a 2018 charge of defaming the army in a Facebook post and sentenced to two months in prison.

Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's leader after independence from French rule, established a military justice code that gave military courts the right to try civilians for crimes that included insulting "the flag or the army." Efforts to reform the military justice code since the 2011 revolution have stalled.

"Military courts are still under the undue control of the executive branch, as the president of the republic has exclusive control over the appointment of judges and prosecutors in these courts," read a recent Amnesty report.

Saied's critics say the army has become a political tool since July, noting that troops secured parliament when the government was dismissed, drawing comparisons with Egypt's military coup in 2013. Tunisia's army enjoys a high level of popularity and has traditionally played an apolitical role in the nation's affairs.

The president ordered the army to take charge of the nation's COVID-19 vaccination campaign, using their "image of strength and efficiency" to bolster his standing, political analyst Sharan Grewal said.

Saied is also "trying to get quick wins by using the military courts, which are in theory more reliable in the prosecution of certain members of parliament," he said.

In September, Saied partially suspended the country's 2014 constitution, giving himself the power to rule by decree. Saied has also taken aim at the country's judiciary, whose ranks he claims are filled with corrupt judges who must "be cleansed." Observers have called Tunisia's political crisis a step back in the country's democratic transition.

During his recent sentence, Ayari says he was filmed with video cameras in his cell and denied access to correspondence. Despite acute stomach ulcers, guards gave him cold food — contrary to medical advice. In protest, Ayari went on a two-week hunger strike.

Representatives of Tunisia's National Body for the Prevention of Torture shared a report with the AP that corroborates some of Ayari's claims, including rights violations and evidence of "humiliating and degrading" treatment that posed a risk to his health.

The Ministry of Justice didn't respond to the AP's requests for comment.

Ayari is now preparing for a possible new stint behind bars.

"I'm trying to eat as much as possible and sleep, because those two things are difficult to do in prison," Ayari says. "This whole thing is not easy for my children. It is bad for their education: How are they supposed to tell the difference between right and wrong, justice and injustice, when they see their father get taken to prison?"

## Dinner on the patio? First, hold the stench

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Parts of downtown Des Moines have been so transformed in the past decade by new apartments, trendy shops and microbreweries, it's sometimes hard to reconcile the present with the not-so-distant past.

But one strong reminder of the city's heritage remains: the stench. A pungent smell of rancid meat regularly wafts through all the shiny new development, a reminder of the region's less polished history as a pork processing center.

"You can't escape it," said Brandon Brown, president of the Des Moines Downtown Neighborhood Association, calling it "very frustrating."

Many cities eager for new investment and vitality have welcomed urban housing and entertainment venues into older sections of town that housed grittier industries, only to be stumped by what happens when someone like Brown, who moved into an upscale downtown apartment, actually wants to enjoy a

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latte or meal at an outdoor patio.

After decades of downplaying or simply ignoring the problem, Des Moines officials recently began a comprehensive study that will lead to tighter regulations on some smelly manufacturing plants to finally clear the air.

Similar difficulties are cropping up in other cities with smelly businesses, especially rendering plants that are common in agricultural regions and even some big cities. Angry residents are deluging officials with complaints and filing lawsuits, while some leading companies are installing new equipment, making payments to neighbors or even closing down.

No one tracks such disputes, but Iowa State University professor Jacek Koziel, who studies air quality and livestock odors, said he thinks the conflicts may be increasing. Sometimes, as in Des Moines, it's because more noses are nearer the bad smells, but in other spots, it's that residents are simply pushing harder for changes.

"It's very common in this juncture of animal agriculture in general and meat packing plants or feed processing plants," Koziel said. "It's very tough. For us engineers, we know there are technologies to minimize the impact but then come all the fiscal realities of doing that."

In Des Moines, residents and workers have for decades complained about the smells from an industrial area little more than a mile from downtown, describing the scent as putrid or akin to animal waste. Brown takes a more charitable view, labeling the smell "yeasty."

People typically blame two companies: pork processor Pine Ridge Farms and rendering plant Darling Ingredients. Although the city created an odor board and odor hotline, its efforts were ineffective and largely abandoned until recently, when people who moved into expensive apartments that had replaced warehouses and scrap yards complained of nauseating smells periodically settling over their neighborhoods.

City officials agree there's a problem, but say they need more data before deciding what to do.

"You've got to know what is the truth that's out there, and then make the plans work for each of the industries," said SuAnn Donovan, deputy director of Des Moines' Neighborhood Services Department. The new study will take air samples and figure out a baseline for air quality.

Iowa is an agricultural powerhouse and Donovan is quick to note that the city wants to work with Pine Ridge, Darling and other companies.

Darling didn't respond to an inquiry about its Des Moines operations.

Pine Ridge Farms is owned by meat industry giant Smithfield, which said in a statement that its pork plant, which employs about 1,000 people, opened in 1937 and slaughters about 4,000 hogs daily. As more people moved nearby, the company said, it had invested millions of dollars on new technology, such as air treatment equipment, to reduce odors.

"We also follow a rigorous daily cleaning schedule during and after each production run," the statement said. "At the end of each week, we perform a top-to-bottom deep cleaning to keep odor to a minimum."

Even with efforts to reduce smells, rendering is an especially pungent business. The plants use heat, centrifuges and other techniques to convert waste animal tissue into fats and proteins for many uses, including as animal feed, fertilizer and cosmetics. There are more than 200 plants in the U.S. and Canada, according to recent estimates.

In Fresno, California, a citizens group filed a lawsuit against a Darling rendering plant that produced a stench so strong that residents complained of health problems. Last year, the company agreed to close the plant. Another rendering plant near the Sacramento suburb of Rancho Cordova that had operated for more than 50 years also opted to close after concluding it couldn't coexist with new nearby housing.

Rendering plants in an industrial area of Los Angeles have been ordered to abide by strict new rules. And in Denver, where new urban development has been especially extensive, there have been sharp clashes between new residents and old industries.

"People moving in are savvy and they're not afraid to complain," said Greg Thomas, the city's director of environmental quality.

Residents in South St. Paul, Minnesota, filed a class action lawsuit over fumes from a rendering plant, and neighbors received up to \$1,000 payments as part of a \$750,000 settlement.

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Still, though, smells of rancid meat remain.

"The lawsuit didn't seem to make a difference," said Chris Robinson, who lives less than a mile from the plant. "Just last night, my husband couldn't sit out on the deck. It's still really bad."

Brown, of Des Moines, said with new outdoor projects underway, from a soccer stadium to a whitewater rafting course, the city has little option but to clear the air.

"You don't want the smell to contaminate the experience," Brown said.

Follow Scott McFetridge on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/smcfetridge>

## Trial takeaways: Arbery's killer testifies; pastors rally

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — The man who fatally shot Ahmaud Arbery took the witness stand to tell jurors he pulled the trigger fearing for his own life. But he also said Arbery didn't threaten him during the five-minute chase before the shooting.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Black pastors rallied outside the Glynn County courthouse in coastal Georgia to show support for the slain 25-year-old Black man's family, compelled by a defense attorney's failed efforts to get prominent civil rights figures barred from the court.

The trial of father and son Greg and Travis McMichael and their neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan is nearing an end, with closing arguments by prosecutors and defense attorneys scheduled for Monday. Both sides rested after 10 days of trial testimony.

Each of the defendants is charged with murder and other crimes in the death of Arbery, who was fatally shot last year after he was spotted running in their neighborhood outside the port city of Brunswick. Bryan's cellphone video of the shooting — leaked online two months after Arbery's death — dramatically raised the killing's profile, making it part of a larger national outcry over racial injustice.

Here are some key moments from the trial's second week.

### SHOOTER TESTIFIES

The star defense witness turned out to be the shooter himself. Travis McMichael gave his account of Arbery's death and the pursuit that led up to it for the first time. He choked up on the witness stand as he described making a split-second decision to pull the trigger as Arbery punched him and grabbed for his shotgun.

"It was obvious that he was attacking me," he testified. "That if he would have gotten the shotgun from me, then this was a life or death situation, and I'm going to have to stop him from doing this so I shot."

Questioned on cross-examination by prosecutor Linda Dunikoski, McMichael admitted his testimony didn't always match up with what he told police the day of the shooting on Feb. 23, 2020. He said he had been scared and nervous after "the most traumatic event of my life."

McMichael also acknowledged to Dunikoski that Arbery never threatened him or showed a weapon during the five-minute pursuit that ended in the shooting.

"All he's done is run away from you," Dunikoski said. "And you pulled out a shotgun and pointed it at him."

### BLACK PASTORS RALLY

A week after a defense attorney said he didn't want to see "any more Black pastors" in the courtroom, hundreds of them turned out on the courthouse steps.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Jesse Jackson led a group of mostly Black ministers Thursday in a rally outside the Glynn County courthouse as trial testimony continued inside.

Dressed in dark suits and white collars, the clergymen flocked to the courthouse after defense attorney Kevin Gough objected to Sharpton and other prominent civil rights figures sitting with Arbery's parents in the courtroom. He said their presence could influence the jury. The judge at one point called his argument "reprehensible."

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"No lawyer can knock us out. Because no matter where you are, God is there," Sharpton told the crowd outside the courthouse. "We are going to keep coming until we get justice."

## GAPING, FATAL WOUNDS

Jurors saw graphic, close-up photos of Arbery's shotgun wounds as the medical examiner who performed the autopsy testified that the injuries were so grievous no one could have saved him.

Dr. Edmund Donoghue of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said two of the three shotgun blasts fired struck Arbery. The first tore open his wrist and punched a gaping hole in his chest, unleashing severe bleeding. The second severed an artery near his left armpit and fractured his arm.

"Is there anything law enforcement or EMS could have done to save his life at the scene?" prosecutor Dunikoski asked.

"I don't think so, no," Donoghue replied.

## PROSECUTOR ADMONISHED

A prosecutor's pointed question to a minor witness prompted outrage from defense attorneys and a rebuke from the judge.

Defense attorneys called Lindy Cofer to the witness stand Thursday to ask her about neighbors discussing crime on a Facebook page for residents of Satilla Shores, the subdivision where the defendants lived and Arbery was killed.

On cross-examination, prosecutor Larissa Ollivierre asked Cofer: "Do you believe that stealing is deserving of the death penalty?"

Defense attorneys objected loudly and the judge had the jury leave the courtroom. Bryan's attorney asked for a mistrial, which the judge rejected. But he agreed with a request from attorneys for the McMichaels to admonish Ollivierre, saying she should have known the question was out of bounds.

"The court does find that the question that was presented was inflammatory and irrelevant and completely unnecessary," Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley said.

When jurors returned, the judge instructed them to ignore her question.

## Biden's political standing fuels Democratic worry about 2024

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — It was supposed to be a moment of triumph for Joe Biden.

The Democratic president had just signed into law the most significant infrastructure package in generations. And he had done it by bringing Democrats and Republicans together, just as he promised during last year's campaign. But when Biden arrived in New Hampshire last week to promote the \$1 trillion package at the foot of a crumbling bridge, not all of his VIP guests were in the mood to celebrate.

"Democrats are concerned," former state House Speaker Steve Shurtleff, a longtime Biden supporter who attended the ceremony, told The Associated Press when asked about Biden's political standing. "I'm concerned about where we may be in another couple of years when people really start to gear up and start making trips to New Hampshire."

Shurtleff was openly saying what a growing number of Democrats have been whispering for months: Biden's political standing is so weak less than a year into his presidency that he may not be able to win reelection in 2024 if he were to run again. Such anxiety-fueled parlor games are common among Washington's political class, but this one has spread to the states and constituencies that will play a central role in the next presidential election.

Vice President Kamala Harris is facing her own political conundrum with polls suggesting she may be less popular than her unpopular boss. A dynamic leader who made history by becoming the first Black woman and first person of South Asian descent to step into her office, Harris has been given few opportunities by the Biden White House to shine.

She delivered her first solo speech to promote the new infrastructure law on Friday in Ohio's capital city,

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addressing a mostly empty union hall largely absent of political dignitaries at roughly the same time Biden was issuing the White House's annual turkey pardon in Washington.

"In America, we have the courage to see beyond the crisis — to believe that the future and a future we imagine is possible — and then, to build it," Harris said to a smattering of polite applause in Columbus.

At least for now, there's little to suggest the legislation, which will strengthen infrastructure in every state and potentially create hundreds of thousands of jobs, will quickly improve Democrats' political standing.

As Biden struggles, speculation has intensified about the short list of would-be successors should Biden not seek reelection, although the 79-year-old president has said publicly and privately that he will. The list is led by Harris, of course, but includes other 2020 presidential candidates such as Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker. Just last week, Booker announced plans to appear at a party fundraiser next month in New Hampshire, which traditionally hosts the nation's first presidential primary election.

Booker's team sought to tamp down chatter that he was positioning himself to run in 2024, and allies say he is very close to Harris and would not challenge her in the event Biden retires. Still, the mere existence of such conversations so soon into a new presidency is unusual.

The frustrations boiling over now may be long forgotten by the time Biden — or another Democrat — leads the party in the 2024 presidential election. The truth is, no one knows what the standing of Biden or Harris will be next year, never mind in three years. While Biden's approval ratings are hovering in the low 40s, they are better than Donald Trump's at the same time of his presidency.

Barack Obama also faced headwinds at the end of the first year of his presidency. His party would go on to suffer historic losses in the 2010 midterm elections. But Obama recovered in time to win a second term. Bill Clinton similarly overcame setbacks, including a devastating midterm cycle in 1994, to win reelection in 1996.

Democratic strategist Bill Burton, who worked in the Obama White House, noted that any number of factors could completely upend the political climate, such as Trump's reemergence, a Supreme Court decision ending or dramatically limiting abortion rights, an improving economy and the end of the pandemic.

"There's such a unanimity around the idea that Democrats are completely doomed. These are the same people who brought us President Hillary Clinton," Burton said. "Maybe things aren't as bad as the entire chattering class seems to think they are."

The White House is working to quash speculation that Biden may not seek reelection in 2024 given his current struggles.

Noting that Biden has declared his intent to run publicly and privately, his aides say the Democratic National Committee and Biden's political team inside the White House are actively moving forward with the assumption he will seek a second term.

They believe Biden's position will improve as voters digest the new infrastructure law and the \$2 trillion social spending and climate bill currently moving through Congress. Already, the DNC and its allies are focusing significant resources on selling the Democrats' accomplishments in key states before the 2022 midterm elections — states such as Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin that will also be top battlegrounds in the 2024 presidential election.

Despite their optimism, tensions inside the White House are real as the new leadership team learns to work together.

Harris' allies are especially frustrated that Biden seems to have limited the vice president to a low-profile role with a difficult policy portfolio — led by voting rights and immigration.

She was traveling with reporters in Ohio on Friday when Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted of all charges in last year's deadly shootings in Kenosha, Wisconsin, that became a flashpoint in the debate over guns, vigilantism and racial injustice. But she had to wait until Biden had addressed the case before she could weigh in, saying "the verdict really speaks for itself."

And when she delivered her speech on the infrastructure law, there was little sign of Democratic enthusiasm.

The crowd of invited guests barely filled one-quarter of a local union hall. Almost none of Ohio's top

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Democrats attended the event, including Sen. Sherrod Brown or the high-profile Democrats running for governor. Rep. Joyce Beatty, who represents the district where Harris spoke, was the only member of Congress in attendance.

"Because of our work together, America is moving forward," Harris declared, explaining that the infrastructure law would "make the most significant investment to fix our road and bridges in 70 years."

But just as in New Hampshire, the White House's message was clouded by frustration over Biden's presidency.

Ohio Democrat Nina Turner, who served as co-chair of Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential campaign, said "very little has changed" for the poor and middle-class since Biden replaced Trump. The infrastructure bill does not change that, she said, and she blasted Biden's social spending package as "build back less better."

"The question becomes, 'Why am I helping you to hold to power, when the power you have right now you're not using on my behalf?'" Turner said of Biden. "That's called insanity — asking me to vote for you, asking the Black community to come out for you in 2022 or 2024 when you ain't doing nothing in 2021."

Indeed, Rev. Al Sharpton, a civil rights activist who attended the White House signing ceremony for the infrastructure bill, warned that Biden was approaching "the red zone" with Black voters.

At the end of the infrastructure event, Sharpton said he urged Biden to use his bully pulpit to fight harder to enact a policing overhaul and protect voting rights that are under attack in Republican-led states.

"They've got to between now and the end of January crank it up or they're going to have real problems," Sharpton said.

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Associated Press writer Julie Carr Smyth contributed to this report.

## Cap on drug price hikes for privately insured sparks battle

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Workers and families with private health insurance would reap savings on prescription drugs from a little-noticed provision in President Joe Biden's sweeping social agenda bill. It's meant to break the cycle of annual price increases for widely used medicines.

That provision would require drug companies to pay rebates to Medicare if they increase prices above the rate of inflation. Drugs sold to private plans would count in calculating the penalty, like a tax on price increases. The issue is dividing business groups in a fierce lobbying battle.

Corporate groups focused on affordable employee benefits want to keep the language as is so it would provide price-increase protection for companies and their workers and not just Medicare enrollees. Other groups such as the influential U.S. Chamber of Commerce are backing the pharmaceutical industry's drive to block restraints on pricing, including inflation caps, saying they would stifle innovation.

House Democrats passed the roughly \$2 trillion social agenda legislation on Friday and sent it to the Senate. The bill resets national priorities on issues from climate to family life and faces more scrutiny in that evenly divided chamber. Prescription drugs are but one component, and most of the attention has focused on Medicare provisions to slash out-of-pocket costs for seniors and allow the program to negotiate prices for a limited number of medicines.

But the inflation caps would have far-reaching impact for as many as 180 million Americans with private insurance.

"A lot of people don't realize that the bill applies to, and will help, privately insured people," said Shawn Gremminger, health policy director at the Purchaser Business Group on Health. "But that isn't a sure thing. As currently structured, that would be the case. But we have been worried and continue to be worried that will change." His coalition represents nearly 40 large employers that cover more than 15 million workers, retirees and their families.

Inflation caps would be a "game changer," said James Gelfand, a vice president of ERIC, a group that represents major national companies as providers of employee benefits.

Earlier legislation would have based the "inflation rebates" on sales to Medicare plans, but the House-



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passed bill broadens the formula to include private plans.

"If they raise prices in private markets faster than the economy grows, they will be required to pay that money back to the government," Gelfand said. The goal is to deter drug companies from extravagant price increases.

Polls show that Americans across the political spectrum overwhelmingly favor government action to reduce drug prices. The chief cost complaints are: high out-of-pocket costs for patients, high and rising list prices, and high launch prices for new medicines. The Biden package would tackle the first two issues, but Democrats were unable to agree on authorizing Medicare to negotiate prices of new drugs.

Annual price increases for established prescription drugs usually outpace inflation, although there have been periods of moderation in recent years.

Gremminger said his group estimates that the privately insured market could save \$250 billion over 10 years under the inflation caps currently in the bill. Without them, Gelfand estimates that employers could face an additional 3.7% annual increase in health care costs over the usual medical inflation because drug companies could in effect raise prices on privately insured patients to make up for rebates paid on behalf of Medicare enrollees.

"It's true that not all the business groups are in the same place," Gelfand said of divisions in the business community. "If you look at groups on either side of the issue, there are groups that protect the business interests of pharma, and then there's everybody else."

The main drug industry lobbying group, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, says inflation rebates would undermine innovation that continues after medicines are approved.

The generic drug industry wants their products exempted. Dan Leonard, president of the generic lobbying group Association for Accessible Medicines, said he fears his members will be penalized for price increases that amount to pennies on the dollar. "When generics are not exempted ... they'll get caught up in the jet wash," he said.

In the Senate, Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who has taken a lead role on prescription drugs, supports keeping the inflation caps for privately insured people.

Opponents could pursue a parliamentary challenge under Senate rules, arguing that penalizing price increases by one private company on another has no bearing on federal budgetary issues. If the challenge succeeds, costs to private insurance plans would be stripped from the inflation rebates. Supporters of the caps say they do have a budgetary purpose because they would raise revenue and generate savings for Medicare.

Katie Mahoney, the top health policy expert for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said her organization has "very real concerns" that the drug pricing provisions would undermine incentives for industry to develop new medicines, and is pressing that point in the Senate.

"We continue to hammer on the damage that such policies would do," she said. "We feel that message is making headway with senators and with some members of Congress."

Asked about other business groups that are supporting inflation caps, Mahoney said they don't reflect private enterprise generally.

"When you look at those other organizations, first of all they're significantly smaller and their policy focus is very narrow," she said. "They don't represent business across the board, they represent a very discreet and narrow slice of issues."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Nov. 22, the 326th day of 2021. There are 39 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 22, 1963, John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, was shot to death during a motorcade in Dallas; Texas Gov. John B. Connally, riding in the same car as Kennedy, was seriously wounded. Suspected gunman Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was

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sworn in as president.

On this date:

In 1718, English pirate Edward Teach — better known as “Blackbeard” — was killed during a battle off present-day North Carolina.

In 1906, the “S-O-S” distress signal was adopted at the International Radio Telegraphic Convention in Berlin.

In 1914, the First Battle of Ypres (EE’-pruh) during World War I ended with an Allied victory against Germany.

In 1935, a flying boat, the China Clipper, took off from Alameda, California, carrying more than 100,000 pieces of mail on the first trans-Pacific airmail flight.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek (chang ky-shehk) met in Cairo to discuss measures for defeating Japan.

In 1967, the U.N. Security Council approved Resolution 242, which called for Israel to withdraw from territories it had captured the previous June, and implicitly called on adversaries to recognize Israel’s right to exist.

In 1977, regular passenger service between New York and Europe on the supersonic Concorde began on a trial basis.

In 1990, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, having failed to win reelection to the Conservative Party leadership on the first ballot, announced she would resign.

In 1995, acting swiftly to boost the Balkan peace accord, the U.N. Security Council suspended economic sanctions against Serbia and eased the arms embargo against the states of the former Yugoslavia.

In 2005, Angela Merkel (AHN’-geh-lah MEHR’-kuhl) took power as Germany’s first female chancellor.

In 2010, thousands of people stampeded during a festival in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, leaving some 350 dead and hundreds injured in what the prime minister called the country’s biggest tragedy since the 1970s reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge.

In 2014, a 12-year-old Black boy, Tamir (tuh-MEER’) Rice, was shot and mortally wounded by police outside a Cleveland recreation center after brandishing what turned out to be a pellet gun. (A grand jury declined to indict either the patrolman who fired the fatal shot or a training officer.)

Ten years ago: Baseball players and owners signed an agreement for a new labor contract, a deal making baseball the first North American professional major league to start blood tests for human growth hormone and expanding the playoffs to 10 teams by 2013. Ryan Braun was voted the NL MVP after helping the Milwaukee Brewers win their first division title in nearly 30 years.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama awarded the nation’s highest civilian honor to 21 groundbreaking actors, musicians, athletes and others; among those receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom were Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro, Robert Redford, Michael Jordan, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bruce Springsteen, Diana Ross, Bill and Melinda Gates, Ellen DeGeneres and broadcaster Vin Scully.

One year ago: President Donald Trump appealed a federal judge’s dismissal of his campaign’s effort to block the certification of votes in Pennsylvania; the judge had rejected claims of widespread irregularities with mail-in ballots. Michigan’s House speaker said Trump did not ask Michigan Republican lawmakers to “break the law” or “interfere” with the election when he met with seven GOP state legislators at the White House two days earlier. Taylor Swift won her third consecutive artist of the year prize at the American Music Awards.

Today’s Birthdays: Actor Michael Callan is 86. Animator and movie director Terry Gilliam is 81. Actor Tom Conti is 80. Singer Jesse Colin Young is 80. Astronaut Guion (GEYE’-uhn) Bluford is 79. International Tennis Hall of Famer Billie Jean King is 78. Rock musician-actor Steve Van Zandt (a.k.a. Little Steven) is 71. Rock musician Tina Weymouth (The Heads; Talking Heads; The Tom Tom Club) is 71. Retired MLB All-Star Greg Luzinski is 71. Rock musician Lawrence Gowan is 65. Actor Richard Kind is 65. Actor Jamie Lee Curtis is 63. Alt-country singer Jason Ringenberg (Jason & the Scorchers) is 63. Actor Mariel Hemingway is 60. Actor Winsor Harmon is 58. Actor-turned-producer Brian Robbins is 58. Actor Stephen Geoffreys is 57. Rock musician Charlie Colin is 55. Actor Nicholas Rowe is 55. Actor Mark Ruffalo is 54. International Tennis

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Hall of Famer Boris Becker is 54. Actor Sidse (SIH'-sa) Babett Knudsen is 53. Country musician Chris Fryar (Zac Brown Band) is 51. Actor Josh Cooke is 42. Actor-singer Tyler Hilton is 38. Actor Scarlett Johansson is 37. Actor Jamie Campbell Bower is 33. Singer Candice Glover (TV: "American Idol") is 32. Actor Alden Ehrenreich is 32. Actor Dacre Montgomery is 27. Actor Mackenzie Lintz is 25.