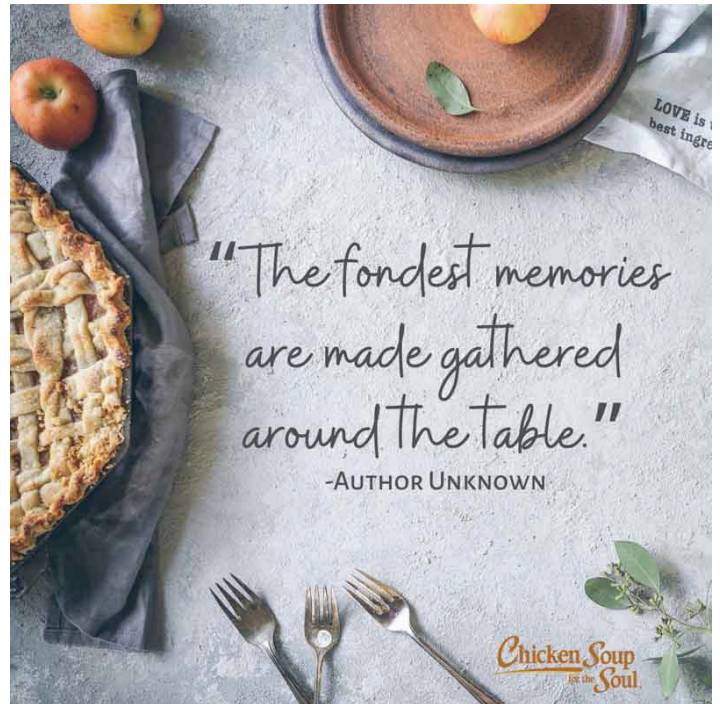


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*"The fondest memories  
are made gathered  
around the table."*

-AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

## 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

### 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

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

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
© 2021 Groton Daily Independent



## Wage Library hosts painting class

The Wage Memorial Library was the site for a canvas painting class held by Jan Hoffman. Pictured in back, left to right, are Laurie LaMee, Sophie Doeden, Becky Hunter and Wynella Abeln; in front, left to right, are Becky Hearnen, Liz Doeden and Jan Hoffman (Photos by Keillie Locke)



## #489 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're up to a seven-day new-case average of 93,878. Total cases for the pandemic are at 47,851,481 tonight, Test positivity nationwide is at 27 percent, which is far above the three percent benchmark; this means we're missing a whole lot of cases and much of the community transmission out there. In short, we're not testing enough, and things are pretty rough. Case rates have been rising for almost a month now, and they continue to do so, particularly in the Upper Midwest, which accounts for almost one-third of new cases with Minnesota and Michigan leading the way, and the Northeast. In addition to Minnesota and Michigan, Wisconsin, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are among the hardest-hit right now. I'm not really crazy about what I'm seeing in Arizona and New Mexico either. New-case numbers are like what we were seeing back in early August, and more than 30 states have sustained increases going.

Cases in children are up 32 percent from two weeks ago, and that's ahead of the rate of increase in adults. There were at least 141,905 new cases in children for last week, which was the 15th consecutive week with child cases over 100,000; children represent more than one-fourth of all new cases, disproportionate to their share of the population. At the beginning of this pandemic, they accounted for only three percent of cases. While children are still far less likely to be hospitalized or to die from this virus, almost 1000 children have, indeed, died so far—and if it's your kid's funeral you're planning, the death rate is 100 percent. Vaccine scientists Dr. Paul Offit and Dr. Jeffrey Gerber wrote in an editorial in Science last week, "Make no mistake—COVID-19 is a childhood illness. Although it is true that most children experience asymptomatic or mild disease, some will get quite sick, and a small number will die. It's why children are vaccinated against influenza, meningitis, chickenpox, and hepatitis—none of which, even before vaccines were available, killed as many as SARS-CoV-2."

We knew this was coming with the cold weather and waning immunity, not to mention a whole lot of virus circulating and 82 million or so people still unvaccinated. While the unvaccinated will bear the brunt of this surge, we want to remember that the more exposure people have, the likelier they are to get infected, even if they're fully vaccinated—no vaccine is 100 percent effective, and it is difficult to overcome massive exposure. It's also challenging to make predictions with this virus, but I'm betting we'll continue to look bad through the winter.

Hospitalizations have begun to rise too, following the rise in cases; we're at 50,255. Right now, three-quarters of ICU beds across the country are full; more than 14 percent of those hold Covid-19 patients. While some states like Idaho have deactivated crisis standards of care, others are approaching the crisis point. Minnesota is utilizing National Guard to supplement staff in some nursing homes.

The latest entrant in the big-trouble category isn't new to the role; Michigan has been in a nation's-worst situation before—and is yet again. They lead the country in seven-day average per capita daily cases at 88 per 100,000 residents; this represents a 78 percent increase over the past two weeks. Pretty much the entire state is an area of high or substantial transmission. Hospitalizations are third in the country at 34 per 100,000 and showing a 44 percent increase over two weeks, so they're catching up to transmission. Hospitals are straining resources as they near capacity; some are adding capacity to meet the new surge. Coupled with a serious staff shortage and a whole lot of folks seeking care for other issues. Dr. Darryl Elmouchi, president of Spectrum Health West Michigan, told the New York Times on Saturday, "We're preparing for the worst." He said staff morale is a huge issue: "It's one thing if you ask people to take extra shifts for a few weeks. It's another thing if you ask people to take extra shifts for months." The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services said burdens on the state's hospitals "have reached a critical point in areas of the state." Bad times ahead there.

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We're at 773,106 total Covid-19 deaths tonight. We continue to lose more than 1000 people per day at 1092, and almost all of those are preventable deaths. I'm not sure how many preventable deaths you find acceptable, but my no-big-deal number is well below 1000. Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, told CNN yesterday that "[p]robably 100,000 of the deaths that have happened this year didn't need to."

By our best current counts, this week we passed last year's total deaths due to Covid-19 in the US. Last year the number was 385,343; and we're now at 773,106. The first deaths were in early February, 2020, so about 11 months of the year were involved in adding to this total; we're about 10 ½ months into this year. In 2020 when we were new at this whole thing, the Northeast was early and hard hit before we understood just what we were dealing with; later, large numbers of deaths occurred in states where mitigation was largely ignored, even though by the time they were hit, we knew a great deal more about how to prevent spread and treat infections. Number 1 on the year 2020 in per capita deaths was New Jersey. It was followed, in order, by North Dakota, South Dakota, and New York. In 2021, the highest per capita deaths were in southern states: Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Florida. Most deaths are in older people, but younger folks are gaining on them in these later, post-vaccine days. People 65 and up comprised 81 percent of deaths last year, but the group is down to just 69 percent of this year's deaths. The number of deaths in people under 45 has doubled this year. And to repeat, a large share of this year's deaths were preventable; we just didn't bother.

Additionally I read an analysis by The Economist which has been tracking the pandemic from the start. They did a worldwide excess deaths analysis from the start of the pandemic through October 22, 2021. We've talked about excess deaths before; you may recall this is the number of deaths that occur in excess of historical trends. For a more thorough explanation of how this works, see my long-ago Update #79 posted May 12, 2020. Here's what the publication says about their analysis: "Our central estimate on October 22nd was of a global total of 16.5m deaths (with a range from 10.2m to 19.2m), which was 3.3 times larger than the official count. Working backwards using assumptions about the share of fatal infections, a very rough estimate suggests that these deaths are the result of 1.5bn-3.6bn infections—six to 15 times the recorded number."

This author also mentioned that this fall 93 percent of adults in Great Britain had antibodies to Covid-19; those antibodies would be due to some combination of infection and/or vaccination. Now, even though immunity acquired through natural infection is not as effective as immunity acquired through vaccination, this combination should still be sufficient to eventually suppress the virus into an endemic, rather than a pandemic, state. Fact is the fatality rate in Great Britain right now is only about a tenth of where it was at the beginning of the year. So it is possible to get enough of a population in a position, one way or another, to show some resistance to severe disease; that appears to be what we're seeing there. This is what will push this pandemic down until we have an endemic virus, one that isn't such an urgent threat—supposing we don't see a new immune escape variant before we all get there. Most experts think we'll be able to respond quickly with modified vaccines if that does happen. We also have treatments now that will likely remain effective against new variants; but consider the human and economic costs of doing this the way we're doing it. Also consider the vast swaths of the world which will not have sufficient vaccine to protect their people until, best case, the middle of next year. Between lack of availability and the same sort of vaccine reluctance we see here, there is a lot to be done across the world. The Economist said, "Livelihoods will be ruined and lives lost all for the lack of a safe injection that costs just a few dollars." That's pretty tragic.

I've read another excess deaths study, this one published by the CDC and dealing with non-Covid excess deaths between July, 2020, and July, 2021, which includes the months during which Delta became the

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predominant variant in the US. The focus here was deaths attributable to hospital strain due to the burdens of Covid-19 patients. Hospital strain was measured by ICU bed occupancy; using data on that from the US Department of Health and Human Services and data from CDC on excess deaths from all causes, the authors used statistical procedures to model estimates.

Here's what the authors say about the estimates: "[t]he model predicted that, if ICU bed use nationwide reached 75% capacity an estimated additional 12,000 excess deaths would occur nationally 2 weeks later, with additional deaths at 4 and 6 weeks. As hospitals exceed 100% ICU bed capacity, 80,000 excess deaths would be expected 2 weeks later with additional deaths at 4 and 6 weeks." They point out that, even before the pandemic, these sorts of strains had adverse outcomes like increased medical errors and reduced quality of care, also treatment delays, medication error, longer stays, and increased mortality. This means even folks who never meet this virus may experience increased mortality from the pandemic. We knew that.

We've discussed the fact that this Thanksgiving travel period—generally from this last Friday through the Sunday after Thanksgiving (November 19 to November 28)—is expected to be very busy. That seems to be what's underway. Most airlines have reported increased volumes in recent days and have so far seen significant increases over 2020 numbers. Delta and United Airlines are anticipating being somewhere around 88 to 89 percent of 2019 (pre-pandemic) numbers; for Delta, this represents about three times the volume from last year. And the TSA reports now that Friday was the busiest travel day since March, 2020, when the pandemic began to show an impact on air travel. The agency screened 2.24 million passengers Friday. I hope this goes well because we're in it now.

If you happen to be among those taking to the skies in the next week or so, CNN pulled together some experts to provide a list of tips for safe travel—including one risk you might not have considered at all. These experts include a public health professional, a flight attendant, and an aerosol transmission researcher. Here's what they recommend:

(1) Get children vaccinated and get a booster. While you should treat partially vaccinated children as unvaccinated when you take steps to protect them, every day after a vaccine has been received is one day safer than the one before. It takes a couple of weeks for a booster to take full effect too, but this one also gets better by the day. Buy yourself and your children every bit of protection you can.

(2) Travel on off-hours and on less busy days. The fewer people you encounter and the less crowded the airports and airplanes, the better able you'll be able to social distance. This matters even more if you travel with people who are unable to be vaccinated or very young children who cannot wear a mask. Peak travel will be between November 24 (the day before Thanksgiving) and November 28 (the Sunday after). Miss those days if you can.

(3) Window seats are safest; there's where you should put your unvaccinated folks. The air vents along the inside panels of most planes will provide the best air circulation in those seats. This also minimizes exposure from all the people walking in the aisles.

(4) Wear the best mask you can find: N95, N95, or KF94. These come in various sizes so you can fit young and old. You do not want air gaps around the edges of the mask; if you feel air leaking out anywhere, try a different size. Air that bypasses your mask is air that's not getting filtered.

(5) Be early to the airport. Apparently, a lot of folks have forgotten how to travel, and they're creating slowdowns. Crowding will also increase wait times. There's also more paperwork for international travelers these days, so they can hold up lines. It is recommended to show up an additional hour earlier than

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you would have two years ago.

(6) Be prepared for security. Check out the airline's website for prohibited items, procedures for screening, and such. Go into security lines with your pockets already empty and your jacket already off. Wear shoes without ties. Take off your watch. Have items like laptops and baggies of liquids pulled out of your bag for screening. Anything you can do to move things along will serve you and all the folks behind you in line as well. This is not the time for a discussion about how dumb the screening rules are; if you want to travel, get over it.

(7) When meals and beverages are served, consider holding off on consuming yours until most other travelers have finished. That will mean you're going to be surrounded by people who are back in their masks when you take yours off to eat and drink. Consider raising your mask between bites and sips to minimize your time of exposure, and don't be a jerk about putting your mask back up when you've finished. Just do what you can to minimize exposing others; even if you're not worried about this virus, there are those near you who are—show some respect.

(8) Stay seated as much as possible. The more you move around, the more folks you're exposed to. Most single exposures are not super-dangerous, but the risk is additive; so the more exposures the greater the risk. And another issue is the risk of being near an unruly passenger who's looking to plant a fist on someone's face. This is a serious and growing problem on airplanes, and frankly, the crew can probably handle whatever arises better than you can. Stay out of things unless there is an immediate threat of someone getting hurt or you are asked to help; sit down and wait it out. Air crews are remarkably well-trained in de-escalation and in how to direct others to help. Trust that.

We talked a few months ago about the fact that immunity derived from having Covid-19 is not as protective as immunity derived from vaccination. At that time, the data were showing that you were more than twice as likely to get sick if you had a prior infection as you would be if you were vaccinated. We now have an update: There's been a new study using data from 190 hospitals in nine states and including about 7000 hospitalized patients. The patients were separated into two groups: (1) fully-vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine and (2) unvaccinated (having received zero doses of vaccine) and with a positive SARS-CoV-2 test 90 or more days prior to hospitalization. Current infections in these hospitalized patients were confirmed with RT-PCR tests. The work compares infection rates among these hospitalized patients for the vaccinated and the previously-infected unvaccinated, finding an adjusted odds ratio of 5.49, which means these unvaccinated people with a prior infection were just about five and a half times more likely to be hospitalized with Covid-19 than vaccinated people without a prior infection. In other words, vaccine is a whole lot more protective than prior infection.

Here's an interesting piece of peer-reviewed research from Brazil and published in the journal *Molecules* a couple of months ago. I was unable to access the paper, so we're working from a summary here. A group of researchers at the University of Sao Paulo has identified a peptide molecule in the venom of the six-foot jararacussu pit viper, which is native to South America. The peptide interferes with a coronaviral enzyme called PLPro that is required for viral replication. This interaction inhibited 75 percent of viral replication in monkey cell culture, and while pit viper venom is highly dangerous for humans, this particular peptide by itself does not appear to be damaging to cells. It can be synthesized in the laboratory, so there's no need to be handling dangerous snakes to obtain it.

It's early times yet for this one. We don't know whether the necessary level of this peptide can be achieved in cells at a dosage that will be safe, so dosing needs to be worked out. It also remains to show this will be effective in human cells and then in actual humans. A concern noted by a herpetologist at the Butantan Institute's collection in Sao Paulo, Guisepe Puerto, is that people might get excited about the

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potential of this substance and head out into the wild to catch themselves some venomous snakes. Not only would that be foolhardy, but your average Joe is not going to have a clue how to get this particular peptide from the venom. No one thinks it's smart to self-administer this venom in the hopes of curing yourself (Spoiler: it wouldn't work that way anyhow), but I think we have amply demonstrated thus far in this pandemic, when it comes to this virus, that people do not always make excellent choices for their own health. We're a long way from an effective therapy here, even if this turns out to work. I'll keep an ear out for more news on this one.

Booster doses are still going out to adults in the US. The current CDC recommendation is that full vaccination requires two doses of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna) or one dose of the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine; but the governors of New Mexico and Connecticut have declared that full vaccination requires the booster dose as well. What you consider fully vaccinated is going to depend on what you think the proper goal of a vaccination campaign is—to protect people from severe disease (in which case boosters are not required) or to slow or stop transmission (in which case the booster are needed). Now that we have some effective therapies either in use or coming soon which can provide reliable protection against the worst outcomes, we have the luxury to make a call about that as time goes along.

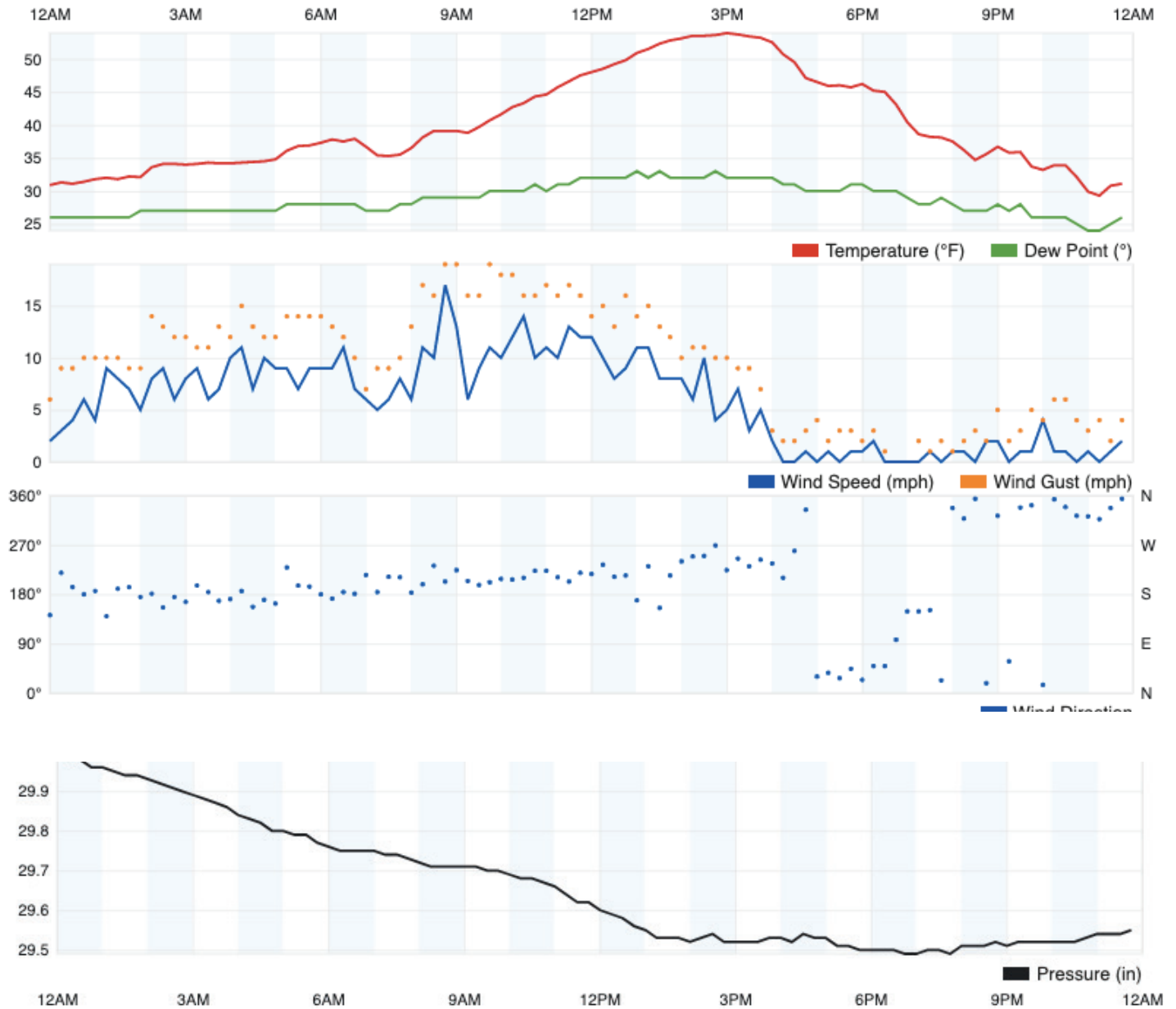
There's word of a new vaccine developed in India which is particularly effective in the elderly, is cheap to produce, and doesn't require special storage conditions. If it works, it's going to be a huge help. The most effective vaccines we've seen so far use the entire viral spike (S) protein to stimulate an immune response. It's far cheaper to produce a vaccine that contains just part of the spike, and that part is temperature stable, so it can be stored at room temperature. Up until now, this fragment wasn't very good at stimulating an immune response; but a group at Harvard went to work on adjuvants. We've talked about adjuvants before; these chemicals are added to a vaccine to enhance the immune response. The Harvard team found something that was exceptionally useful in old mice, helping tis vaccine to work as well as the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. The adjuvant (AH:CpG) combines aluminum hydroxide with a substance called cytosine phosphoguanine (CpG), and the results were stellar. Laboratory testing with the blood of people in their 60s through 80s indicates it may well stimulate a response in humans too. There's a clinical trial underway in India now, so we should hear soon enough how that translates into real life. Estimates are that the cost will be maybe \$3 per dose. Let's hope for good news.

We'll wrap up here tonight. I'm going to take a couple of days off for Thanksgiving. Take care, enjoy the blessings of the holiday, and we'll talk again.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs







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Today	Tonight	Thanksgiving Day	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Partly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 33 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 30 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 48 °F


**Travel Outlook** 


Excellent Road Conditions across the Dakotas and Minnesota


National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD 

 **Today**  
30s

 **Breezy.** Winds out of the north to northwest: 15 to 25 mph with gusts 35 to near 40 mph. A small chance of light snow over mainly north central SD this morning, with the potential for a dusting of snow.

 **Thanksgiving**  
25 to 40°, warmest over central SD

 **Friday**  
40 to 58°, warmest over central SD



First the good news: Road conditions will be excellent across the Dakotas and Minnesota through the weekend! Just don't forget the winter coat. Today will be cool and blustery, with breezy winds out of the north to northwest gusting near 35 to near 40 mph. Combined with temperatures in the 20s to low 30s, wind chills today will be in the teens to near 20 degrees. A weak disturbance could bring a some flurries to a light dusting of snow to portions of north central South Dakota this morning. Otherwise dry conditions return. After another cool day Thursday, high temperatures will rebound into the 40s and 50s for Friday through early next week.

## Today in Weather History

November 24, 1993: A major slow-moving storm system traveled across the upper Midwest during the Thanksgiving holiday, dumping heavy snow across most of South Dakota and Minnesota from November 24 through the 27th. The highest snowfall amounts of two to three feet occurred in northeast South Dakota. Over a foot of snow accumulated in west central Minnesota, and needless to say, travel became tough across the entire area. Storm total snowfall amounts included 31.8 inches at Westport, 29.5 inches at Leola, 28 inches at Britton, 25.3 inches at Aberdeen, 24.3 inches at Mellette, 24.0 inches at McLaughlin, and 22.0 inches near Victor. The snowfall of 25.3 inches at Aberdeen was a single storm record (that still stands today), and it made November 1993 one of the snowiest months on record in Aberdeen with a total of 30.1 inches of snowfall. Only three months have recorded more snow: November 1898, February 1915, and November 2000. The storm closed numerous schools and offices on November 24th across the area, resulting in an early start to the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Some freezing rain and freezing drizzle preceded the snowstorm in southeast South Dakota from late on the 23rd to the 24th, causing at least 60 vehicle accidents. The heavy snow also clogged roads, causing vehicles to become stuck and resulting in numerous accidents. As a consequence of the heavy snow, low wind chills, and low visibilities, a 23-year old man was stranded in his pickup truck in a snow bank north of Aberdeen for 18 hours on the 23rd and 24th. The weight of snow collapsed many structures in northeast South Dakota from the 25th to the 26th. The roof of a metal barn collapsed two miles northwest of Aberdeen, killing one dairy cow in the barn. In Castlewood, a 100-foot by 40-foot metal pole shed fell in, causing damage to a grain truck inside. A machine shed also caved in on a farm east of Bowdle. During the afternoon of the 26th, part of the roof and wall of the Roscoe Senior Center collapsed, causing a near-total loss to the building. Strong northwest winds followed the snowstorm in western and central South Dakota, causing considerable blowing and drifting snow and wind chills as low as 50 degrees below zero. In North Dakota, over two feet of snow fell over a large part of central and southeastern portions of the state. Most of North Dakota had over a foot of snow from this storm. The greatest snowfall amount was reported at Oakes, in Dickey County where 31 inches fell. At the National Weather Service office in Bismarck, 28.3 inches of snow were measured during the 108-hour snow event. This amount set a new single storm record for snow in Bismarck. The snow began the evening on the 22nd and did not end until the morning of the 27th. Except for about six hours during the day on the 26th, the snow was continuous through this period. Fortunately, the wind was only 10 to 25 mph during this storm, so it was well below blizzard conditions and blowing and drifting of snow was not a problem.

1863: The "battle above the clouds" was fought on Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga. Pre-frontal clouds obscured the upper battlefield aiding a Union victory.

1982: Hurricane Iwa, a Category 1 hurricane, impacted the Hawaii Islands of Ni'ihau, Kaua'i, and O'ahu with gusts exceeding 100 mph and a storm surge of 30 feet. The first significant hurricane to hit the Hawaiian Islands since statehood in 1959, Iwa severely damaged or destroyed 2,345 buildings, including 1,927 houses, leaving 500 people homeless. Damage throughout the state totaled \$312 (\$765 million 2015 USD). One person was killed from the high seas, and three deaths were indirectly related to the hurricane's aftermath.

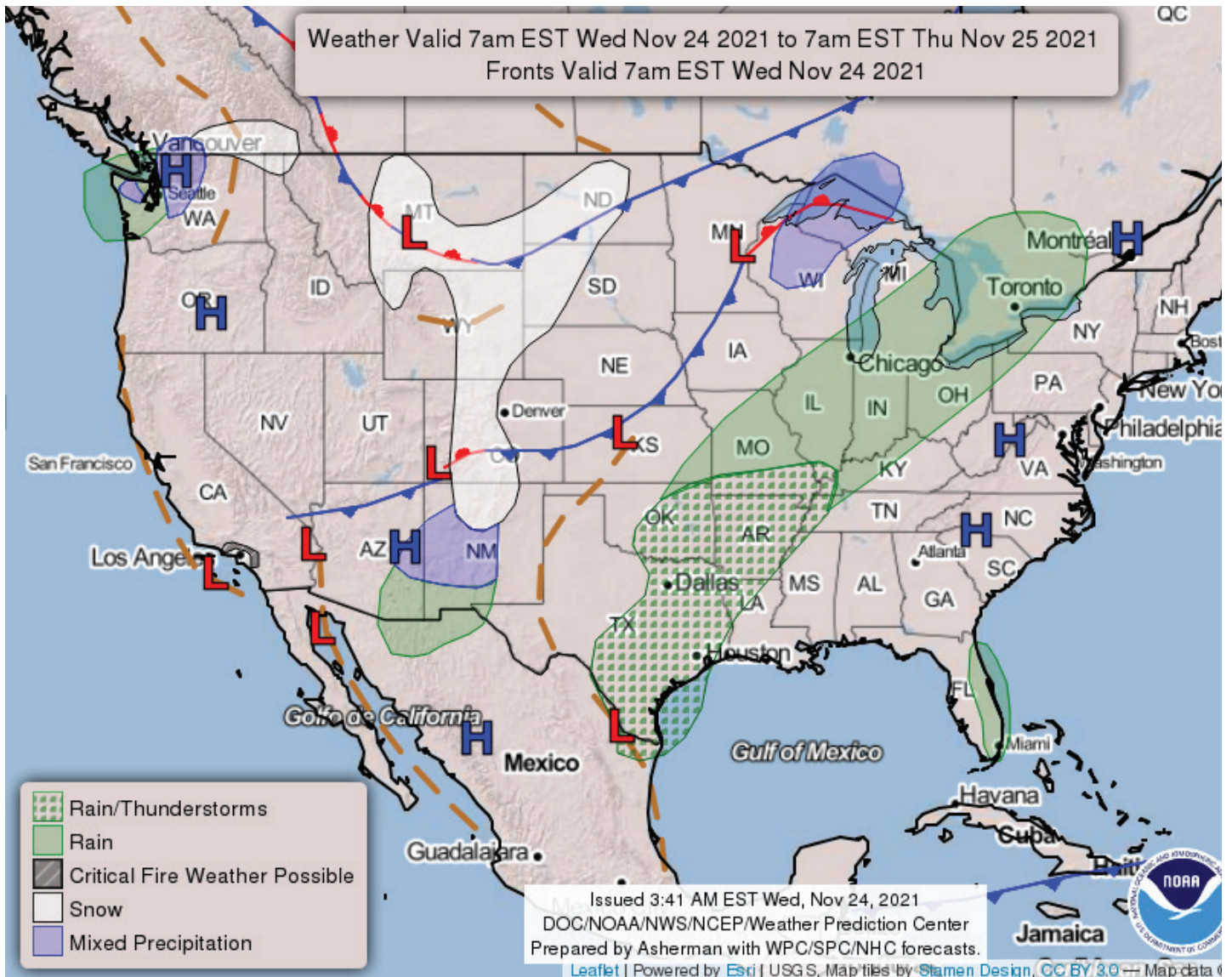
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 53.9 °F at 3:00 PM**  
**Low Temp: 29.3 °F at 11:15 PM**  
**Wind: 19 mph at 9:45 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 65° in 1932**  
**Record Low: -17° in 1996**  
**Average High: 38°F**  
**Average Low: 16°F**  
**Average Precip in Nov.: 0.62**  
**Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.09**  
**Precip Year to Date: 19.88**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:56:10 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:43:31 AM**



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## **AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE**

When days are good and times are trouble-free, we often forget that God is present in our lives and protecting us from possible tragedies. This seems to be a very real fact of history - for individuals and nations.

The children of Israel believed in God. They were aware of His goodness and grace, presence and power and had experienced them on many occasions. But they often left Him out of their plans - as we often do. Then, when times became difficult or when situations became uncontrollable, or beyond their - or our - ability to manage, they called on God to deliver them - like we do.

As they became absorbed in the physical, they would forget the spiritual - like we do. They would major on temporal and ignore the eternal - as we do. God was not at the center of their lives or uppermost in their thoughts. How like us!

So, the Psalmist reminded them that "They soon forgot what He had done" - as we do!

The word forgot is an interesting word. It signifies something that has been "misplaced." In other words, they put God aside. That left a space in their hearts that had to be filled. They needed a god. So, what did they do? They made a calf, and instead of the God who called them His children, they worshiped an idol made of metal.

We were created to worship and have fellowship with the living God. If we forget that and put Him aside, we will "create" another god and put that god in place of the living God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to worship You continually and never forget the good things You do for us constantly. Help us to truly see those things and remember you each time we do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wilderness they put God to the test. Psalm 106:13-15

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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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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

07-24-54-57-58, Mega Ball: 6, Megaplier: 3

(seven, twenty-four, fifty-four, fifty-seven, fifty-eight; Mega Ball: six; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$83 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$224 million

### Brown scores 32, Washington defeats South Dakota State 87-76

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Terrell Brown Jr. scored 32 points, his career high, and Washington defeated South Dakota State 87-76 on Tuesday night in the Crossover Classic.

Brown, in his first season with the Huskies after transferring from Arizona, topped the 31 points he scored four times two seasons ago when he played for Seattle. He made 13 of 18 shots and 6 of 7 from the free-throw line.

Washington led 42-32 at halftime, then the Coyotes closed to within four points with eight minutes to go. Brown scored the next seven Washington points and the Huskies led 72-64. The lead reached 10 when Jamal Bey hit a 3-pointer with 3:29 left. Brown hit two free throws for an 82-70 lead and the Huskies led by double-digits the rest of the way.

PJ Fuller scored 14 points for Washington (4-2). Eddie Matthews Jr. added 13 and Bey 12. The Huskies shot 58% overall.

Noah Freidel led the Jackrabbits (5-2) with 20 points. Douglas Wilson added 18 points and 12 rebounds.

The four teams in the round-robin tournament play three games in three days. On Wednesday, the final day, Washington will play Nevada and South Dakota State will take on George Mason.

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

### Archambault carries South Dakota over Presentation 99-58

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Mason Archambault had 18 points as South Dakota romped past Presentation 99-58 on Tuesday night.

Xavier Fuller added 17 points for the Coyotes, while Kruz Perrott-Hunt chipped in 16. Fuller also had seven rebounds.

Hunter Goodrick had 12 points, eight rebounds and five assists for South Dakota (4-1).

Ian Kelly had 22 points for the Division III Saints. Lavell Brown added 11 points.

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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### Sherfield scores 31 to lead Nevada past George Mason 88-69

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Grant Sherfield had a career-high 31 points, adding six assists, as Nevada beat George Mason 88-69 on Tuesday night.

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Desmond Cambridge Jr. had 21 points for the Wolf Pack (2-4), who ended a four-game losing streak. Kenan Blackshear added 12 points and six assists.

Davonte Gaines had 17 points and seven rebounds for the Patriots (4-3). Josh Oduro added 15 points and Devon Cooper scored 13.

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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## Ex-South Dakota lawmaker eyes 3rd stab at governor's race

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Former Republican state lawmaker Lora Hubbel says she plans to run for South Dakota governor as an independent.

It would be Hubbel's third try at landing the job. She ran for the Republican nomination in 2014 and lost to then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard. She was unsuccessful in her efforts to get on the 2018 ballot as a Constitutional Party candidate.

KELO-AM reported that Hubbel purchased advertising announcing her candidacy.

Hubbel served in the state House of Representatives from 2011 to 2013.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem said via press release in November that she would be seeking a second term. The statement said she has raised \$10 million since she was elected and has more than \$6.5 million in cash on hand.

## Marcella LeBeau, WWII nurse and tribal leader, dies at 102

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Marcella Rose LeBeau, an Army nurse who was honored for her service during World War II and leadership in the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, has died. She was 102.

Family members said she "passed on to journey to the next world" late Sunday in Eagle Butte, South Dakota after experiencing problems with her digestive system and losing her appetite. LeBeau had remained active all of her life and earlier this month traveled to Oklahoma for a ceremony honoring her induction into the National Native American Hall of Fame.

Her daughter, Gerri Lebeau, said the matriarch of her family demonstrated fortitude, as well as an ability to seek healing, as she overcame the abuses she faced at an Indian boarding school during her youth. She went on to treat frontline soldiers as an Army nurse in Europe during the Allied invasion of Normandy. After returning home, she became an outspoken advocate for health in the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

"She was the foundation of our family," said her grandson Ryman LeBeau. "She had a lifetime of good things that she had accomplished."

Lebeau was born in 1919 and grew up in Promise, South Dakota, as a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Her mother died when she was 10 years old, and her grandmother gave her the name Wigmunke' Waste Win', or Pretty Rainbow Woman.

But LeBeau grew up at a time when the government was attempting to eradicate her culture — while her grandmother only spoke the Lakota language, she could be punished for speaking it at the boarding school she attended.

LeBeau's father had instilled the importance of education, and that led her to become a registered nurse, Gerri LeBeau said. At 24 years old, LeBeau served with the Army Nurse Corps' 76th General Hospital based in Minster, England. As Allied forces retook France and Belgium, she treated injured soldiers from medical tents, sometimes with bombs buzzing overhead.

"It was one of my greatest privileges and honor to have cared for those soldiers," LeBeau told the Rapid City Journal in 2004 when she was honored with the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, France's highest



civilian honor.

After the war, LeBeau kept treating patients on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation and with Indian Health Services for over 30 years.

"In addition to keeping her people healthy, she protected their heritage by helping repatriate important cultural items belonging to the tribes," Gov. Kristi Noem said in a statement. "Through it all, it was her joyful spirit that connected her with many in her community."

As a member of the tribal council in the 1990s, LeBeau helped push an ordinance to ban smoking in tribal office buildings, even as she initially faced tribal council meetings that billowed with smoke from her fellow councilmembers.

Ryman LeBeau, who was inspired by his grandmother to become a tribal councilman, said she demonstrated how to stand her ground while keeping relationships intact.

"She never got mad at people, definitely disagreed with people but never in a disrespectful manner," he said.

In recent years, LeBeau also advocated for Congress to rescind the Medals of Honor awarded after the Wounded Knee Massacre on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. When Democratic presidential candidates made their way through Iowa in 2019 for a debate centered around Native American issues, she asked each candidate whether they would support removing the medals and invoked the grief that still pervades Native American communities.

For Ryman LeBeau, it was yet another example of her compassion for others.

"She always supported justice for those that are treated unfairly," he said.

## Germany faces grim COVID milestone with leadership in flux

By DANIEL NIEMANN and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

ESCHWEILER, Germany (AP) — Germany is poised to pass the mark of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 this week, a somber milestone that several of its neighbors crossed months ago but which Western Europe's most populous nation had hoped to avoid.

Discipline, a robust health care system and the rollout of multiple vaccines — one of them homegrown — were meant to stave off a winter surge of the kind that hit Germany last year.

In practice, Germans faced a confusing array of pandemic rules, lax enforcement and a national election — followed by a drawn-out government transition during which senior politicians dangled the prospect of further lifting restrictions even as the infection rate rose.

"Nobody had the guts to take the lead and announce unpopular measures," said Uwe Janssens, who heads the intensive care department at the St. Antonius hospital in Eschweiler, west of Cologne.

"This lack of leadership is the reason we are here now," he said.

Doctors like Janssens are bracing for an influx of coronavirus patients as confirmed cases hit fresh daily highs that experts say is also being fueled by vaccine skeptics.

Resistance to getting the shot — including the one developed by German company BioNTech together with U.S. partner Pfizer — remains strong among a sizeable minority of the country. Vaccination rates have stalled at 68% of the population, far short of the 75% or higher that the government had aimed for.

"We've increasingly got younger people in intensive care," said Janssens. "The amount of time they're treated is significantly longer and it blocks intensive care beds for a longer period."

Older people who got vaccinated early in 2021 are also seeing their immunity wear off, making them vulnerable to serious illness again, he said. Echoing problems seen during the initial vaccine rollout, authorities have struggled to meet demand for boosters even as they tried to encourage holdouts to get their first shot.

Some German politicians are suggesting it's time to consider a vaccine mandate, either for specific professions or for the population as a whole. Austria took that step last week, announcing COVID-19 shots will become compulsory for all starting in February after seeing a similar reluctance to get vaccinated fuel fresh outbreaks and hospitalizations.

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Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said in June that she didn't favor such a measure. Signaling a possible shift in position, Merkel summoned leaders from the three parties negotiating to form the next government for talks Tuesday at the chancellery to discuss the pandemic situation.

Merkel's likely successor, current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats, has refused to be drawn on whether he would back compulsory COVID-19 shots.

Together with the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, his party recently passed a law that replaces the existing legal foundations for pandemic restrictions with narrower measures, starting Wednesday. These include a requirement for workers to provide their employers with proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. But the change also makes it harder for Germany's 16 governors to impose hard lockdowns without getting approval from state assemblies.

Getting those majorities may be particularly tricky in states where case numbers are highest. A recent study found infection rates are higher in areas where the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, is strongest. The party has campaigned against pandemic restrictions and polls show its supporters take a sharply negative view of vaccine mandates, compared to the rest of the voting population.

While AfD is not expected to win any of Germany's four regional elections next year, experts say political campaigns can distract from tough topics like tackling the pandemic.

"Often the focus is on things that will drive voting, rather than unpopular decisions," said Catherine Smallwood, a coronavirus expert at the World Health Organization's office for Europe.

"That can contribute to the virus spreading if measures and decision-making are not taken in a timely and ... concrete manner as they as they have to be," Smallwood said in a recent interview.

Germany's disease control agency on reported a record 66,884 newly confirmed cases Wednesday, and 335 deaths. The total death toll from COVID-19 stood at 99,768 since the start of the pandemic, the Robert Koch Institute said. German weekly Die Zeit, which conducts its own count based on local health authority figures, said the 100,000 threshold had already been passed.

Meanwhile, health authorities in five eastern states and Bavaria have activated an emergency system to coordinate the distribution of 80 seriously ill patients to other parts of the country. Earlier this month, two patients were taken from southern Germany to Italy for treatment, a significant change from last year, when Italian patients were being sent to German hospitals.

Germany boasted almost four times as many intensive care beds per capita as Italy had then, a factor that experts say was key to the low German death toll at the time.

Since January, Germany has had to cut its ICU capacity by 4,000 beds due to lack of staff, many of whom have quit because of the pressure they endured earlier in the pandemic.

"It's hard for people to cope with this, physically and psychologically," Janssens said of the situation doctors and nurses face in the coming months.

"We'll survive, somehow," he added.

The World Health Organization's European office warned this week that availability of hospital beds will again decide how well the region copes with the expected rise in cases over the coming months — along with vaccination rates.

Based on current trends, Europe could see another 700,000 deaths reported across the 53-nation region by next spring, with 49 countries expected to see "high or extreme stress in intensive care units," the agency said Tuesday.

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Jordans reported from Berlin. Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

## Ethiopia says Abiy at war front, handing duties to deputy

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's government said Wednesday that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has gone to the battlefield to take charge in a yearlong war and left the daily work of running the country to his deputy as rival fighters approach the capital, Addis Ababa.

The 45-year-old prime minister, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and former soldier, arrived at the front on

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Tuesday, government spokesman Legesse Tulu told reporters without giving details on the location, and state media did not show images of him. Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen is handling day-to-day government activities, Legesse said.

The war in Africa's second-most populous nation has killed an estimated tens of thousands of people, and countries including France, Germany and Turkey have told their citizens to leave immediately as rival fighters from Ethiopia's northern Tigray region advance.

U.S. envoy Jeffrey Feltman on Tuesday told reporters he fears that "nascent" progress in mediation efforts with the warring sides could be outpaced by the "alarming" military developments. The Tigray forces dominated the previous national government for 27 years before Abiy took office in 2018, and a growing political rift turned to war in November 2020.

"Unless there is some kind of divine intervention, I don't see any chance for a peaceful resolution through dialogue because the positions are highly polarized," said Kassahun Berhanu, professor of political science at Addis Ababa University, who added he believed Abiy's decision to go to the front is "aimed at boosting popular morale."

The Tigray forces have said they want Abiy out. Abiy's government wants the Tigray forces, which it has designated as a terrorist group, to withdraw to their region.

The prime minister this week not only announced he would go to the battlefield but also invited Ethiopians to join him, the latest call for every able citizen in the country of more than 110 million people to join the fight. Hurried military trainings and allegations of forced conscription have occurred in recent months, while analysts have warned of the growing presence of ethnic-based militias as the military was said to be weakened.

Millions of civilians are trapped and going hungry because of the war. Ethiopia's government has blockaded the Tigray region for several months, fearing that humanitarian aid will end up in the hands of fighters, while hundreds of thousands of people in the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions are beyond the reach of significant aid after the Tigray forces retook their region in June and began fighting their way toward the capital.

Another target of the Tigray forces appears to be the supply line from neighboring Djibouti to Ethiopia's capital, and the U.S. envoy on Tuesday in remarks to reporters warned the fighters against cutting off the road to Djibouti or entering Addis Ababa.

That could be "catastrophic" for the country, Feltman said.

African Union envoy Olesegun Obasanjo also has been mediating but has not spoken publicly about his work in recent days.

## On the road again: Travelers emerge in time for Thanksgiving

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Determined to reclaim Thanksgiving traditions that were put on pause last year by the pandemic, millions of Americans will be loading up their cars or piling onto planes to gather again with friends and family.

The number of air travelers this week is expected to approach or even exceed pre-pandemic levels, and auto club AAA predicts that 48.3 million people will travel at least 50 miles from home over the holiday period, an increase of nearly 4 million over last year despite sharply higher gasoline prices.

Many feel emboldened by the fact that nearly 200 million Americans are now fully vaccinated. But it also means brushing aside concerns about a resurgent virus at a time when the U.S. is now averaging nearly 100,000 new infections a day and hospitals in Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado and Arizona are seeing alarming increases in patients.

The seven-day daily average of new reported cases up nearly 30% in the last two weeks through Tuesday, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says unvaccinated people should not travel, although it is unclear whether that recommendation is having any effect.

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More than 2.2 million travelers streamed through airport checkpoints last Friday, the busiest day since the pandemic devastated travel early last year. From Friday through Monday, the number of people flying in the U.S. was more than double the same days last year and only 8% lower than the same days in 2019.

At Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey, Peter Titus, an engineer at the Princeton University plasma physics lab, was heading to visit extended family in Canada with his wife and adult son. He carried a folder with printouts of their vaccination cards and negative COVID-19 tests needed to fly into Canada.

His son, Christian Titus, who works as a voice actor, says he's spent much of the pandemic inside but is willing to risk flying on a crowded airplane because he misses being around his family. He got a booster shot to increase his protection.

"My mental health does better by being around my family during these times," he said. "Yeah, it's dangerous. But you love these people, so you do what you can to stay safe around them."

Meka Starling and her husband were excited for many members of their extended family to meet their 2-year-old son, Kaiden, for the first time at a big Thanksgiving gathering in Linden, New Jersey.

"We've put pictures on Facebook so a lot of them have seen pictures of him, but to get to actually touch him and talk to him, I'm excited about it," said Starling, 44, of West Point, Mississippi, who will gather with nearly 40 family members, all of whom agreed to be vaccinated.

For their part, airlines are hoping to avoid a repeat of the massive flight cancellations — more than 2,300 a piece — that dogged Southwest and American Airlines at different times last month.

The breakdowns started with bad weather in one part of the country and spun out of control. In the past, airlines had enough pilots, flight attendants and other workers to recover from many disruptions within a day or two. They are finding it harder to bounce back now, however, because they are stretched thin after pushing thousands of employees to quit when travel collapsed last year.

American, Southwest, Delta and United have all been hiring lately, which gives the airlines and industry observers hope that flights will stay on track this week.

"The airlines are prepared for the holidays," said Helene Becker, an airlines analyst for financial-services firm Cowen. "They cut back the number of flights, the industry has enough pilots, they are putting more flight attendants through their (training) academies, and they are paying flight attendants a premium — what I'm going to call hazardous-duty pay — to encourage people not to blow off work."

The airlines have little margin for error right now. American expected to fill more than 90% of its seats with paying customers on Tuesday. That's a throwback to holiday travel before the pandemic.

"There is not a lot of room to put people on another flight if something goes wrong," said Dennis Tajer, a pilot for the airline and a spokesman for the American pilots' union.

Meanwhile, the Transportation Security Administration is dismissing concern that it might have staffing shortages at airport checkpoints this week because of a requirement that federal employees be vaccinated against COVID-19. White House officials said 93% of TSA employees are in compliance with the mandate, and they don't expect any disruptions.

For holiday travelers going by car, the biggest pain is likely to be higher prices at the pump. The nationwide average for gasoline on Tuesday was \$3.40 a gallon, according to AAA, up more than 60% from last Thanksgiving.

Those prices could be one of several factors that will discourage some holiday travelers. In a survey conducted by Gasbuddy, which tracks pump prices, about half of the app users who responded said high prices will affect their travel plans this week. About two in five said they aren't making as many trips for a variety of reasons.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday ordered 50 million barrels of oil released from America's strategic reserve to help bring down energy costs, in coordination with other major energy consuming nations. The U.S. action is aimed at global energy markets, but also at helping Americans coping with higher inflation and rising prices ahead of Thanksgiving and winter holiday travel.

The price at the pump was a bit of a shock to Tye Reedy, who flew into California from Tennessee and borrowed his friend's truck for some sightseeing. Gas was running \$5 a gallon at the Chevron in Alameda, and it cost \$100 to fill up the truck.

"We did not travel last year because of COVID restrictions and all," Reedy said. "But you know, we're confident enough ... with the vaccine and where things are now with the virus that, you know, we felt comfortable traveling."

AP staff writers Ted Shaffrey, Terry Chea and Seth Wenig in Newark, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

David Koenig can be reached at [twitter.com/airlinewriter](https://twitter.com/airlinewriter)

## Sweden's parliament approves first female prime minister

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Sweden's parliament on Wednesday approved Magdalena Andersson as the country's first female prime minister, tapping the finance minister who recently became the new leader of the Social Democratic party.

Andersson was tapped to replace Stefan Lofven as party leader and prime minister, roles he relinquished earlier this year.

The development marked a milestone for Sweden, viewed for decades as one of Europe's most progressive countries when it comes to gender relations, but which had yet to have a woman in the top political post. Lofven's government describes itself as feminist, putting equality between women and men at the heart of national and international work.

In a speech to parliament, Amineh Kakabaveh, an independent lawmaker who supported Andersson, noted that Sweden is currently celebrating the 100th anniversary of a decision to introduce universal and equal suffrage in the Scandinavian country.

"If women are only allowed to vote but are never elected to the highest office, democracy is not complete," said Kakabaveh who is of Iranian Kurdish descent.

"There is something symbolic in this decision," she added. "Feminism is always about girls and women being complete people who have the same opportunities as men and boys."

"I was really moved by what she said. She pinpointed exactly what I thought," Andersson said after her appointment in parliament where she got a standing ovation and a bouquet of red roses.

"I have been elected Sweden's first female prime minister and know what it means for girls in our country," Andersson said.

In the 349-seat Riksdag, 117 lawmakers voted yes to Andersson, 174 rejected her appointment while 57 abstained and one lawmaker was absent.

Under the Swedish Constitution, prime ministers can be named and govern as long as a parliamentary majority — a minimum of 175 lawmakers — is not against them.

Lofven has been leading the Swedish government in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed, something expected Friday. Andersson likely will form a two-party, minority government with her Social Democrats and the Green Party.

Andersson, 54, sought to secure the backing of the two smaller parties that supported Sweden's previous center-left, minority government led by Lofven — the Left Party and the Center Party. Both abstained from voting against Andersson.

After days of talks, Andersson and the Left Party reached a deal to win the latter's support. The deal focused on pensions, meaning a supplement of up to 1,000 kronor (\$111) for about 700,000 pensioners on low incomes.

Sweden's next general election is scheduled for Sept. 11.

## Many environmentalists back Biden's move to tap oil reserve

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats and climate activists generally supported President Joe Biden's decision

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to release a record 50 million barrels of oil from America's strategic reserve, even as the move appeared to contradict his long-term vision of combating climate change.

The U.S. action, announced Tuesday in coordination with countries such as India, the United Kingdom and China, is aimed at global energy markets and helping lower gasoline prices that have risen more than a dollar per gallon since January. But it could also undermine Biden's climate goals, including a 50% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Some leading climate hawks, however, said they were not concerned by the move because they see it as a short-term fix to meet a specific problem. Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., who has focused on combating climate change, said Biden was "taking effective action to protect Americans from oil price gouging" even as the administration continues to boost renewable energy that it hopes will eventually mean less dependence on fossil fuels.

"This is what reserves are for — defending our economy against disruption," Markey tweeted. "Profiteering can't go unanswered, especially as Big Oil makes billions and fuels the climate crisis through exports."

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is an emergency stockpile to preserve access to oil in case of natural disasters, national security issues and other events. Maintained by the Energy Department, the reserves are stored in caverns created in salt domes along the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coasts. There are roughly 605 million barrels of petroleum in the reserve.

Markey and other Democrats had urged Biden to release oil from the reserve to ease prices on consumers. There have also been calls on the president to reinstate a ban on crude oil exports that was lifted in 2015. Biden has made no move to reimpose the export ban, which was repealed by congressional Republicans in a bid to assert U.S. energy dominance and promote domestic production.

Biden has authority under the legislation to declare an emergency and limit or stop oil exports for up to a year but is not expected to do so.

Kelly Sheehan, senior director of energy campaigns with the Sierra Club, hailed Biden's actions as a way to ease Americans' energy burdens. But she said the current spike in oil prices was a reminder that "the only way to truly achieve energy security is to rapidly transition away from risky fossil fuels like oil and gas and make it easier for more people to access clean energy."

Lorne Stockman, research director of Oil Change International, an environmental group focused on creating a "fossil-free future," said Biden should have acted sooner, if only to counter a barrage of Republican criticism blaming him for high gasoline prices.

"Presidents are always blamed for high gas prices, whether they have anything to do with it or not," Stockman said, calling the measure a small step to bring short-term relief to American consumers.

Speaking at the White House on Tuesday, Biden said the rise in gas prices made the move necessary and that it wouldn't distract from his larger ambitions of moving toward energy independence.

"My effort to combat climate change is not raising the price of gas," Biden said. "What it is doing is increasing the availability of jobs building electric cars like the one I drove ... in a GM factory in Detroit last week."

Americans who buy electric cars will save up to \$1,000 in fuel costs this year, Biden said, "and we're going to put those savings within reach of more Americans and create jobs installing solar panels, batteries and electric heat pumps. We can make our economy and consumers less vulnerable to these sorts of price spikes when we do that."

Biden said the White House was looking into potential price gouging by oil companies squeezing customers while making money off lower costs. And Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said U.S. companies were keeping production below pre-pandemic levels in order to increase profits.

The coronavirus pandemic has roiled energy markets. As closures began in April 2020, demand collapsed and oil futures prices turned negative. Energy traders did not want to get stuck with crude that they could not store. But as the economy recovered, prices jumped to a seven-year high in October.

Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., called Biden's use of the strategic reserve, along with calls for OPEC and Russia to increase production, "desperate attempts to address a Biden-caused disaster" and no substitute for increased American energy production.

Lukas Ross, manager of climate and energy justice at Friends of the Earth, another environmental group, said the spike in gas prices shows that “our continued dependence on a volatile compound that is literally cooking the climate is exactly why we need” Biden’s sweeping social and environmental bill approved as quickly possible.

The \$2 trillion bill, which has been approved in the House and is pending in the Senate, includes about \$550 billion for climate change efforts, including proposals to boost wind and solar power and support electric vehicles. Republicans unanimously oppose the measure.

Biden has said the U.S. needs to transition away from oil dependence, and “now is the moment to keep that promise by urgently speeding the transition to electric cars and a renewable energy grid,” said Kassie Siegel, director of a climate law institute at the Center for Biological Diversity, another environmental group.

“Price volatility will always be part of Big Oil’s playbook,” she added. “Let’s break their stranglehold on our economy once and for all.”

## German parties say deal ready for new coalition government

By FRANK JORDANS and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The three parties negotiating to form Germany’s next government will finalize and present their coalition agreement Wednesday, two of the prospective partners said. The deal paves the way for center-left leader Olaf Scholz to replace longtime Chancellor Angela Merkel in the coming weeks.

The center-left Social Democrats have been negotiating with the environmentalist Green party and the pro-business Free Democrats since narrowly winning a national election on Sept. 26. The latter two parties said the agreement will be presented on Wednesday afternoon.

If party members sign off on it, the three-way alliance — which has never yet been tried in a national government — will replace the current “grand coalition” of the country’s traditional big parties. The Social Democrats have served as the junior partner to Merkel’s center-right Christian Democrats.

Merkel, who didn’t run for a fifth term, is expected to be succeeded by Scholz, 63, who has been her finance minister and vice chancellor since 2018.

The three would-be governing parties have said they hope parliament will elect Scholz as chancellor in the week beginning Dec. 6. Before that can happen, the coalition deal requires approval from a ballot of the Greens’ membership and from conventions of the other two parties.

News of the deal came as Merkel led what was likely to be her last Cabinet meeting. Scholz presented the 67-year-old, who has led Germany since 2005, with a bouquet of flowers.

The negotiations over the three-way alliance were relatively harmonious and speedy compared to previous coalition talks. But the political transition, with Merkel as a lame-duck caretaker, has hampered Germany’s response to the latest rise in coronavirus cases.

Few details have emerged from the closed-doors talks, including how the parties will divide up the ministerial portfolios. The alliance is a potentially uneasy mixture because it brings together two traditionally left-leaning parties with one, the Free Democrats, that has tended to ally with the center-right.

A preliminary agreement last month indicated that Germany would bring forward its deadline for ending the use of coal-fueled power from 2038 to 2030, while expanding the rollout of renewable energy generation.

At the Free Democrats’ insistence, the prospective partners said they won’t raise taxes or loosen curbs on running up debt, making financing a central issue.

Merkel’s Christian Democrats are currently preoccupied with a leadership contest over who will become their next leader and revive the party’s fortunes after it suffered its worst-ever election result.

Follow AP’s coverage of Germany’s transition to a new government at <https://apnews.com/hub/germany-election>

## US to require vaccines for all border crossers in January

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By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will require essential, nonresident travelers crossing U.S. land borders, such as truck drivers, government and emergency response officials, to be fully vaccinated beginning on Jan. 22, the administration planned to announce.

A senior administration official said the requirement, which the White House previewed in October, brings the rules for essential travelers in line with those that took effect earlier this month for leisure travelers, when the U.S. reopened its borders to fully vaccinated individuals.

Essential travelers entering by ferry will also be required to be fully vaccinated by the same date, the official said. The official spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to preview the announcement.

The rules pertain to non-U.S. nationals. American citizens and permanent residents may still enter the U.S. regardless of their vaccination status, but face additional testing hurdles because officials believe they more easily contract and spread COVID-19 and in order to encourage them to get a shot.

The Biden administration pushed back the requirement for essential travelers by more than two months from when it went into effect on Nov. 8 for non-essential visitors to prevent disruptions, particularly among truck drivers who are vital to North American trade. While most cross-border traffic was shut down in the earliest days of the pandemic, essential travelers have been able to transit unimpeded.

Even with the delay, though, Norita Taylor, spokeswoman for the trucking group Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, criticized the vaccination requirement, calling it an example of "how unnecessary government mandates can force experienced owner-operators and independent truckers out of business."

"These requirements are another example of how impractical regulations will send safe drivers off the road," she said.

The latest deadline is beyond the point by which the Biden administration hopes to have large businesses require their employees to be vaccinated or tested weekly under an emergency regulation issued by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. That rule is now delayed by litigation, but the White House has encouraged businesses to implement their own mandates regardless of the federal requirement with the aim of boosting vaccination.

About 47 million adults in the U.S. remain unvaccinated, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Associated Press writer David Koenig in Dallas contributed to this report.

## **NASA launches spacecraft to test asteroid defense concept**

By JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — NASA launched a spacecraft Tuesday night on a mission to smash into an asteroid and test whether it would be possible to knock a speeding space rock off course if one were to threaten Earth.

The DART spacecraft, short for Double Asteroid Redirection Test, lifted off from Vandenberg Space Force Base atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket in a \$330 million project with echoes of the Bruce Willis movie "Armageddon."

If all goes well, in September 2022 it will slam head-on into Dimorphos, an asteroid 525 feet (160 meters) across, at 15,000 mph (24,139 kph).

"This isn't going to destroy the asteroid. It's just going to give it a small nudge," said mission official Nancy Chabot of Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, which is managing the project.

Dimorphos orbits a much larger asteroid called Didymos. The pair are no danger to Earth but offer scientists a way to measure the effectiveness of the collision.

Dimorphos completes one orbit of Didymos every 11 hours, 55 minutes. DART's goal is a crash that will slow Dimorphos down and cause it to fall closer toward the bigger asteroid, shaving 10 minutes off its orbit.

The change in the orbital period will be measured by telescopes on Earth. The minimum change for the



mission to be considered a success is 73 seconds.

The DART technique could prove useful for altering the course of an asteroid years or decades before it bears down on Earth with the potential for catastrophe.

A small nudge "would add up to a big change in its future position, and then the asteroid and the Earth wouldn't be on a collision course," Chabot said.

Scientists constantly search for asteroids and plot their courses to determine whether they could hit the planet.

"Although there isn't a currently known asteroid that's on an impact course with the Earth, we do know that there is a large population of near-Earth asteroids out there," said Lindley Johnson, planetary defense officer at NASA. "The key to planetary defense is finding them well before they are an impact threat."

DART will take 10 months to reach the asteroid pair. The collision will occur about 6.8 million miles (11 million kilometers) from Earth.

Ten days beforehand, DART will release a tiny observation spacecraft supplied by the Italian space agency that will follow it.

DART will stream video until it is destroyed on impact. Three minutes later, the trailing craft will make images of the impact site and material that is ejected.

## Jury in Ahmaud Arbery death set for 2nd day of deliberations

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Jury deliberations were scheduled to resume for a second day Wednesday in the trial of three white men charged with chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery after the 25-year-old Black man was spotted running in their coastal Georgia neighborhood.

The disproportionately white jury received the case around midday Tuesday and spent about six hours deliberating before adjourning without a verdict in the trial of father and son Greg and Travis McMichael and their neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley told jurors to reconvene at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

The McMichaels told police they suspected Arbery was a fleeing burglar when they armed themselves and jumped in a pickup truck to chase him on Feb. 23, 2020. Bryan joined the pursuit when they passed his house and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael blasting Arbery at close range with a shotgun as Arbery threw punches and grabbed for the weapon.

Arbery's killing became part of a larger national reckoning on racial injustice after the graphic video of his death leaked online two months later and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case, quickly arresting the three men. Each of them is charged with murder and other crimes.

Defense attorneys contend the McMichaels were attempting a legal citizen's arrest when they set off after Arbery, seeking to detain and question him as a suspected burglar after he was seen running from a nearby home under construction.

Travis McMichael testified that he shot Arbery in self-defense, saying the running man turned and attacked with his fists while running past the idling truck where Travis McMichael stood with his shotgun.

Prosecutors said there was no evidence Arbery had committed crimes in the defendants' neighborhood. He had enrolled at a technical college and was preparing at the time to study to become an electrician like his uncles.

## Beyond Manchin: Dems' \$2T bill faces Senate gauntlet

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It took half a year but Democrats have driven President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion package of social and climate initiatives through the House. It gets no easier in the Senate, where painful Republican amendments, restrictive rules and Joe Manchin lurk.

Facing unbroken GOP opposition, Democrats finally reached agreement among themselves and eased

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the compromise through the House on Nov. 19. One Democrat voted no in a chamber they control by just three votes.

They're negotiating further changes for a final version they hope will win approval by Christmas in the 50-50 Senate, where they'll need every Democratic vote. House passage of the altered bill would still be needed.

The gauntlet they face:

## BRIGHT SIDE FOR DEMOCRATS

Yes, just weeks ago the bill's price tag was \$3.5 trillion over 10 years. It passed the House at around \$2 trillion and will likely fall further in the Senate.

And yes, Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., have already forced their party to constrain the measure's size and ambition. Manchin, at least, wants to cut still further.

But while they've enraged progressives wanting a more robust measure, neither moderate senator has signaled a desire to blow up the party's top legislative priority. Both have held months of talks with party leaders, suggesting each wants an agreement, though one reflecting their views.

Things can still implode in the Senate, where debate will begin no earlier than the week of Dec. 6. But Democrats retain a strong chance of enacting their plans for spending increases and tax cuts making child care, health coverage, education and housing more affordable and slowing global warming, largely financed with higher levies on the rich and big companies.

## GOP AMENDMENTS

Here's one place where Republicans could cause real problems for Democrats.

After debating the legislation for up to 20 hours, senators can introduce limitless numbers of amendments and force votes with little debate. The so-called vote-a-rama can drag through the night.

GOP goals will be twofold. They can force changes weakening the bill by winning over just one Democrat. And they can offer amendments that lose but gain ammunition for next year's midterm elections by putting Democrats on record against popular-sounding ideas.

The 2,100-page bill offers plenty of targets.

Want to accuse Democrats of driving up gasoline and home-heating prices? Dare them to oppose an amendment blocking new fees on petroleum and natural gas facilities with excessive emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas contributor.

A GOP move to erase the measure's higher tax deductions for state and local taxes could let them accuse Democrats of protecting the rich, the chief beneficiaries of those deductions. Past Republican tax cuts have prominently helped high-end earners.

Amendments could be designed to portray Democrats as offering federal benefits to immigrants in the U.S. without legal authorization, few of whom qualify for such help. Or Republicans could propose giving parents more authority on school curricula, an issue that helped elect Republican Glenn Youngkin in this month's Virginia gubernatorial race.

## SENATE RULES, PESKY BUT DANGEROUS

Democrats are using a special process that would let them approve the bill by simple majority, not the usual 60 votes that would otherwise let Republicans kill the legislation.

But there's a price: Its provisions must be driven chiefly by budgetary considerations, not sweeping policy changes. Opponents can ask the chamber's nonpartisan parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, to decide if a section violates that requirement, and if it does it nearly always falls from the bill.

Democrats' most imperiled priority may be immigration.

The House bill would let millions of migrants in the U.S. since before 2011 without permanent legal status get permits to live and work in the U.S. for up to 10 years. MacDonough has recently said two previous Democratic immigration proposals violated Senate rules.

Republicans might also challenge some provisions letting the government curb prescription drug prices.

## THE MANCHIN FACTOR

Senate changes to the bill seem inevitable, largely thanks to Manchin, one of Congress' more conserva-

tive Democrats.

He's already helped force Biden to drop initial plans to create free community college, provide new dental and vision Medicare benefits and to fine energy producers that don't wean themselves off carbon-heavy fuels. That was the pillar of Biden's blueprint for combating climate change.

Now Manchin seems poised to force removal of the bill's four weeks annually of paid, required leave for family and medical reasons. That \$200 billion item is prized by progressives.

Manchin, whose state is a top coal producer, frowns on some remaining provisions aimed at spurring a switch to green energy. He's questioned providing some new benefits without imposing income limits. Along with his repeated expressions of concern about inflation, which some say the measure's infusion of spending would aggravate, the price tag seems headed downward.

#### THE SINEMA ENIGMA

Sinema helped whittle the package's costs. She's blocked Democrats from raising tax rates on wealthy Americans and corporations, proposals many like as potent revenue raisers and symbols of class equity. Democrats found other ways to boost levies on those groups.

But the Arizonan seldom details her demands publicly, making it hard to read her goals moving forward. She recently told Politico that she opposes tax increases that can hurt the economy, but unlike Manchin considers the bill's environment provisions "its most important part."

#### OTHER SENATE CHANGES

The House raised the current \$10,000 yearly cap on allowable state and local tax deductions to \$80,000, helping win votes from Democrats in high-tax, mostly blue states.

But nonpartisan outside groups calculate that the change would overwhelmingly benefit the wealthiest Americans. Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., have discussed denying the tax break to the very highest earners.

While the House bill strengthens the government's ability to curb pharmaceutical prices, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has talked about going further. The House language is a compromise that's more modest than many Democrats preferred.

The progressive Sanders, Manchin's ideological opposite, says he's still trying to "strengthen" the bill on climate change, Medicare, drug prices and taxing the rich.

With Democrats hoping to finally pass the bill, Wyden's and Sanders' leverage seems limited.

## 'They become our family:' US farming couple rescues Afghans

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

FERGUS FALLS, Minnesota (AP) — The U.S. soldiers called them "Caroline's guys." They transformed farms in a war zone - risking their lives for the program she built, sharing her belief that something as simple as apple trees could change the world.

The university-educated Afghans helped turn land in an overgrazed, drought-stricken and impoverished region in eastern Afghanistan into verdant gardens and orchards that still feed local families today.

In the process, the 12 agricultural specialists, all traditional Afghan men, formed a deep, unexpected bond with their boss, an American woman who worked as a U.S. Department of Agriculture adviser in the region for two years.

Now Caroline Clarin is trying to save them one by one, doing it all from the 1910 Minnesota farmhouse she shares with her wife, drawing from retirement funds to help a group of men who share her love of farming.

Clarin has helped get five of her former employees and their families into the U.S. since 2017, while her wife has helped them rebuild their lives in America.

Since the Taliban seized power in August, texts from those remaining have grown more urgent and Clarin says she can "feel the panic increasing" as winter approaches and food shortages grow. She has stepped up her efforts, working endless hours, diligently tracking their visa applications. She calls senators to apply pressure so they don't languish like the thousands of other visa applications in the backlogged system for

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Afghans who supported the U.S. government during the long war.

She's driven by fear her team will be killed by the Taliban, though the new government has promised not to retaliate against Afghans who helped the U.S.. She also wants to give them a future.

Since U.S. forces withdrew, more than 70,000 Afghans have come to the United States and thousands are languishing at U.S. military bases as resettlement agencies struggle to keep up.

Clarín knows she cannot save everyone, but she's determined to help those she can.

After she left Afghanistan in 2011, she was consumed by anger over her program being gutted as the U.S. government changed its priorities.

"When I got on the plane, it was like leaving my family on the helipad," she said. "I felt like I deserted them."

The most recent of her friends to escape was Ihsanullah Patan, a horticulturist who waited seven years for a special immigrant visa. After he texted her that two of his close friends had just been killed, Clarín withdrew \$6,000 from a retirement fund to get him and his family on a commercial flight to Minnesota before the Taliban took control of the country this summer.

When Clarín picked them up at the airport in Minneapolis at midnight for the three-hour drive back to Fergus Falls, she was consumed with joy.

"It was like my son came home," she said.

Patan arrived in Minnesota with saffron, Afghan almonds, and 5 kilos (11 pounds) of Afghan green tea to share. He also gave Clarín and her wife, Sheril Raymond, seeds of Afghanistan's tender leeks for their garden.

He was the first member to join Clarín's team after she was sent to Paktika province. A confident, young university graduate, Patan spelled out what was needed in the region. It would become the basis of her program: Seeds, trees and the skills to plant gardens and orchards.

Patan considers Clarín and her wife family. His three sons and daughter call them their "aunties."

In fact, he's decided to live in nearby Fergus Falls, a town of 14,000, instead of moving to a larger city with an Afghan transplant community.

Surrounded by farmland stretching to the North Dakota border, the town's skyline is dominated by grain elevators and the spires of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a reflection of the region's Scandinavian roots.

The only other Afghan family in town is his cousin's. Sami Massoodi, who has a degree in livestock management, also worked for Clarín's team in Afghanistan and arrived in 2017. He and his family lived on their farm before they got established in Fergus Falls.

"In Fergus Falls, they have really good people, really friendly people," Patan said as he drives his minivan down the tree-lined streets to pick up his 5-year-old daughter at a Head Start program.

It is a place where neighbors pay unannounced visits to say "hi" and people greet the postmaster by name. It is also staunchly Republican. Fergus Falls is the county seat of Otter Tail County, which voted twice for former President Donald Trump.

But people in town say friendships and family take precedence over political views, and there is broad empathy for the struggle of immigrants since many people's parents, grandparents or great grandparents came from Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

Only months after they arrived, the Patan family already feels at home in large part because of Raymond.

She helped enroll their kids in school, find a dentist for 9-year-old Sala's infected tooth, and sign Patan up for car insurance, something that was new for the 35-year-old.

She lined up English classes and state and federal services for new immigrants. She drove Patan an hour to the nearest testing site for a driver's license. After he failed twice because his English was not proficient enough, he asked if there was a test in his native Pashto language, like in Virginia and California. There wasn't. So Raymond found a site, another hour away, that would allow him to review his errors. On his third try, he passed.

Clarín has tracked down a sheep on craigslist for Eid, while Raymond watched YouTube videos on how to slaughter livestock according to halal principles, since the closest halal butcher is an hour away in Fargo,

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North Dakota.

For Patan, they have been a comfort in a strange place.

"When we are going to their house, we feel like we went to Afghanistan and we are going to meet our close relatives," he said.

He longs for his homeland, the family festivities. Patan's wife makes their traditional dishes still, like Bolani Afghani, a fried, vegetable-filled flatbread that Clarin enjoyed with him in Afghanistan.

Over there, Patan and her team were the ones helping her feel at home.

It was the longest she and Raymond had been apart since they started dating in 1988.

Raymond, who cares for the chickens, pigs and other animals on their farm, would do video calls often, staying online even after Clarin had fallen asleep.

Two years after Clarin returned, they married in August 2013 when same-sex marriage became legal in Minnesota.

Homosexuality is still widely seen as taboo and indecent in Afghanistan, where same-sex relations are illegal.

Yet, none of the Afghan families have asked about their marriage or expressed judgment, the couple said.

Patan calls them his "sisters."

"We have a lot of respect for them," he said.

Both Clarin and Patan speak passionately about farming, describing in detail how to get a good apple crop and ward off disease.

Clarin arranged for the U.S. military to take her team in convoys to remote areas to train farmers, empowering Afghans to teach each other skills. They lined canals to ensure clean water. They worked with farmers to plant trees and build stone barriers to control flooding. They distributed seeds to 1,200 families, who have since shared seeds with more people.

The program trained about 5,000 farmers in Paktika from 2009 to 2011. They provided growers hoop-houses, apple trees, pruning equipment and small grants. They taught farmers tangible solutions, including using buckets with drip lines to irrigate gardens and conserve water.

The Taliban tried to sabotage the trust they built with farmers, Clarin said. Once, an explosive blew up in a red bucket like the ones they used for irrigation.

Patan has stayed in contact with some of the farmers in Paktika and proudly shows photos on his iPhone of the tiny stems he distributed that are now trees several feet tall. One farmer texted him to say his harvest is feeding his family as millions of others in the country face severe hunger.

That offers some solace after seeing his homeland fall to the Taliban. It feels good he said to know his work left something lasting and that "the people can still benefit from it. We educated one generation and those fathers will tell it to their sons."

Patan misses his career back in Afghanistan. Most U.S. employers do not recognize degrees from Afghan universities so he plans to return to school to earn a U.S. degree. For now, he is training to be a commercial truck driver, a field flush with opportunities: There were 21 job openings in the area when he started his classes this month.

He wants a local truck route to stay close to home, but it will still be challenging for his family. His wife, Sediqa, does not speak English, nor does she know how to read or write, and does not feel comfortable going out by herself.

She also does not drive.

When she started learning English online, she was at "ground zero," said her teacher, Sara Sundberg at Minnesota State Community and Technical College.

"When she came, she didn't know what to do with a pencil. We had to show her. She held it kind of like a Henna tube," said Sundberg, holding together her thumb and index finger tightly at the tip as if squeezing something.

Five months later, her handwriting is "meticulous," and her pronunciation is excellent, Sundberg said.

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She's even learning to say Minnesota with the long "ooooo."

"I'm teaching her how to communicate with the community and I want people to understand her," Sunberg said. "Everything is brand new for her."

Sediqa is slowly gaining confidence in speaking with her teacher, but with others she is silent, smiling and staying back with her children.

Everything is new for their children, too. Patan's sons befriended a neighbor boy and jumped for the first time on a trampoline.

His oldest son, Maiwan, decorated his first pumpkin, while his two younger sons wore their traditional Afghan clothes because their teachers told them that on the Friday before Halloween the kids could "dress up," something that was lost in translation but went unnoticed as the other kids excitedly showed them their costumes.

They look forward to the weekends with their "aunties" at the farm.

On a warm October Saturday, Clarin jogged next to 12-year-old Maiwan driving a small tractor as Ali and his 9-year-old brother, Sala, dug in the dirt for worms with their cousins, giggling and chatting incessantly in Pashto.

"They are kinda free," Patan says of his kids now, recalling how bomb blasts in Kabul caused them to miss school more than once.

They still carry the trauma. When fireworks were shot off for Fourth of July this summer, Patan called his cousin in a panic and asked if Fergus Falls was being bombed.

Clarín has vowed to get all her guys out.

Since the Taliban took control of the country in August, she has been starting most days around 3 a.m. when she quietly makes her way to her basement office, hours before she heads to her job in Fergus Falls as a U.S. Department of Agriculture wetlands restoration engineer.

Stacks of passport photos, recommendation letters, visa applications and other paperwork cover the tables, her desk and the top of a freezer. Across the hall, Raymond has prepared a guest room for the next Afghan family they get out.

Besides the guys from her program still in Afghanistan, she is aiding other Afghans, including several women. "Why US government did this to us? Why did they leave us behind?" one texts. Desperate pleas for help from more Afghans keep popping up in her phone as word spreads of her efforts.

"My sister said, 'You got your own little Underground Railroad in the basement,'" Clarin said.

So far, the couple has spent just under \$10,000 since May. That includes the airfare for the Patan family, a contribution toward the family's used minivan, and fees for five applications for humanitarian parole for families still in Afghanistan.

Raymond keeps the tally in a notebook.

"It does make me a little nervous because we've lived on the edge for so long," said 57-year-old Raymond, who sews her dresses, knits hats, and bakes bread.

"So I work another year before retiring," Clarin, 55, answers with a shrug.

Two other Afghan families Clarin helped chose to settle in Austin, Texas, and San Diego, partly because in both places there are mosques, halal butcher shops and established Afghan communities. None of that exists in Fergus Falls. They also wanted to avoid Minnesota's winters where wind chill temperatures a few years ago dropped to as low as 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, (-45 degrees Celsius), something Patan was shocked to learn.

But Patan knows there are drawbacks to cities. Another former member of Clarin's team who moved to California recently returned to Minnesota after complaining about the crime in Sacramento. They now live about an hour away but close to Fargo, where there is a mosque.

Patan, who speaks Dari and Pashto, translates documents for Clarin for the visa applications. He worries about his former colleagues, who remain his close friends.

"I hope that one day they can also come here and we will make a big Afghan kind-of-family over here,"

he said. "All of them want to come here to Fergus."

Raymond worries more than Clarin about money, and she finds the government fee of \$575 per application for humanitarian parole outrageous.

But she also acknowledges they cannot step back now.

"When we bring in a family, they become our family," she said.

## Elizabeth Holmes denies deception at her criminal trial

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Biotechnology entrepreneur Elizabeth Holmes, a former billionaire accused of engineering a massive medical scam, expressed some remorse while on the witness stand Tuesday, but denied trying to conceal that her company's blood-testing methods weren't working as she had promised.

In her third day of testimony during the high-profile criminal trial, Holmes acknowledged making some mistakes as CEO of Theranos, a company she founded in 2003 when she was just 19. But she repeatedly emphasized that she made most of her decisions with the help of other executives and a respected board that included former cabinet members in various presidential administrations.

Holmes, now 37, also made it clear that she never stopped believing that Theranos would revolutionize health care with a technology that was supposed to be able to detect a wide range of diseases and other problems by testing just a few drops of blood.

"It is never smooth," she testified. "There's always challenges."

Theranos eventually collapsed after a series of explosive articles in *The Wall Street Journal* and an audit by federal regulators exposed serious and potentially dangerous flaws in the company's blood tests. The scandal wiped out Holmes' fortune, which was estimated at \$4.5 billion in 2014 when she was the subject of a glowing cover story on *Fortune* magazine.

Holmes denied that she intended to deceive anyone about the workings of its partnership with Walgreens, which aimed to install Theranos testing devices in 3,000 of the drugstore chain's stores. Walgreens terminated that partnership after issues with inaccurate test results and the discovery that Theranos was testing many of its samples on conventional diagnostic equipment -- and not with Theranos' Edison device, which was supposed to provide quicker and less expensive testing.

Holmes said that when Theranos was about to start running tests in Walgreens stores, she intentionally had them sent to a central laboratory for conventional analysis instead. Holmes claimed that the Edison wasn't designed to function in large clusters to process huge numbers of blood samples.

Her testimony is at odds with previous witness testimony and prosecutors' allegations that Theranos switched to conventional testing because of testing failures and other problems with the Edison. Theranos never told its customers that it was using ordinary testing equipment instead of the Edison.

Holmes testified that Theranos stayed silent because it had created an "invention" that could process small blood samples on conventional testing machines. The company didn't tell Walgreens or anyone else to protect that trade secret from possible theft by a larger and established testing company, she claimed. "They had more engineers than we did," Holmes said.

One major question remains in Holmes' testimony — whether she'll address her claim in legal filings that she was being secretly manipulated by her former lover and Theranos' former chief operating officer, Sunny Balwani, into unethical behavior.

In court documents unsealed shortly before the trial began in early September, Holmes' lawyers accused Balwani of subjecting Holmes to "intimate partner abuse." Balwani, who faces a separate fraud trial next year, has denied those allegations through his attorney.

Balwani also drew up a series of financial projections that have been a focal point of the trial, according to Holmes. In documents distributed to prospective investors, Theranos forecast annual revenues of \$140 million in 2014 and \$990 million in 2015. Other evidence presented during the trial showed the company never came remotely close to hitting those targets.

Holmes testified the 2015 revenue prediction was based largely on an anticipated expansion into Wal-

greens stores that never materialized.

The former Theranos CEO did take responsibility for adding the logo of Pfizer, a major drug maker, to a report extolling the effectiveness of Theranos' technology. That decision came after an internal Pfizer report that Holmes said she never saw had expressed doubts about the reliability of Theranos' blood tests.

"I wish I had done it differently," Holmes said. Several investors have testified that seeing Pfizer's logo on the report helped persuade them to invest in Theranos.

Holmes raised nearly \$1 billion after founding Theranos in 2003. She faces allegations of duping investors, patients and business partners while running the Palo Alto, California, company. If convicted, she could face a prison term of up to 20 years.

Holmes has so far spent eight hours on the stand and won't return until Monday, when the trial resumes after a break for the Thanksgiving holiday.

## Child is 6th death in Waukesha parade crash; suspect charged

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

An 8-year-old boy became the sixth person to die Tuesday as a result of a man driving his SUV into a suburban Milwaukee Christmas parade, with a criminal complaint alleging that the suspect in the case steered side-to-side with the intent of striking marchers and spectators.

Darrell Brooks Jr., 39, was charged with five counts of first-degree intentional homicide, a charge that carries a mandatory life sentence if convicted. He rocked back and forth in his seat and cried throughout his court hearing on Tuesday, his attorney's arm on his back, as the charges against him were detailed. His bail was set at \$5 million, and a preliminary hearing was scheduled for Jan. 14.

"The nature of this offense is shocking," said Waukesha Court Commissioner Kevin Costello.

Additional charges related to the sixth death and the more than 60 people injured will be coming later this week or next, said Waukesha County District Attorney Susan Oppen. The criminal complaint said 62 people were injured, up from the 48 previously announced by police.

Brooks is accused of speeding away from police and entering the Waukesha Christmas parade on Sunday night, refusing to stop even as an officer banged on the hood of his SUV. Another officer fired three shots into the vehicle, but it did not stop.

Five people ranging in age from 52 to 81 were pronounced dead within hours. Jackson Sparks, 8, was the first of many injured children to have died. He was walking in the parade with his 12-year-old brother Tucker, who was injured in the crash and was being discharged from the hospital, according to his GoFundMe page.

"This afternoon, our dear Jackson has sadly succumbed to his injuries and passed away," the page's organizer, Alyssa Albro, wrote.

The city's livestream video and bystander video captured the chaotic scene when an SUV sped along the parade route and then into the crowd. Several of those injured remain in critical condition.

According to the criminal complaint, witnesses told police that the vehicle "appeared to be intentionally moving side to side," with no attempt to slow down or stop as it struck multiple people and sent bodies and objects flying.

Brooks ignored several attempts to stop him, according to the criminal complaint.

A detective — wearing police insignia and a neon orange safety vest — stepped in front of Brooks' vehicle and pounded on the hood, shouting "Stop," several times but Brooks drove past him, according to the complaint.

A uniformed police officer who saw Brooks' SUV traveling toward the parade route also tried to get his attention, yelling "Stop, stop the vehicle" several times but was ignored, according to the complaint. The officer "observed the driver looking straight ahead, directly at him, and it appeared he had no emotion on his face," the complaint said.

Brooks braked at one point, but instead of turning away from the parade route, he turned into the crowd and appeared to rapidly accelerate, the complaint said.



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Another police officer shot at the vehicle, striking it three times as it entered the parade route. Brooks was not hit by the bullets, the Waukesha police chief said Monday.

The complaint said one witness who spoke with police said the SUV "continued to drive in a zig zag motion. It was like the SUV was trying to avoid vehicles, not people. There was no attempt made by the vehicle to stop, much less slow down."

Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said Brooks was leaving the scene of a domestic dispute that had taken place just minutes earlier when he drove into the parade route.

He had been free on \$1,000 bail for a case in Milwaukee County earlier in November in which he's accused of intentionally striking a woman with his car. Prosecutors said they're investigating their bail recommendation in that case, calling it inappropriately low.

Brooks has been charged with crimes more than a dozen times since 1999, mostly in Wisconsin but also in Georgia and Nevada, and had two outstanding cases against him at the time of the parade disaster. That included resisting or obstructing an officer, reckless endangering, disorderly conduct, bail jumping and battery for the Nov. 2 incident.

Thompson said that there was no evidence the bloodshed Sunday was a terrorist attack or that Brooks knew anyone in the parade. Brooks acted alone, the chief said.

NBC News published doorbell camera footage that appeared to capture Brooks' arrest. It showed Brooks, shivering in just a T-shirt, knocking on a homeowner's door and asking for help calling for a ride. Moments later, police surrounded the house and shouted, "Hands up!" Brooks, standing on the porch, held up his hands and said, "Whoa whoa whoa!"

Hundreds gathered at a downtown park Monday night in Waukesha, Wisconsin, for a candlelight vigil in honor of those lost and hurt. A pair of clergy solemnly read the names of those who died. Volunteers handed out sandwiches, hot chocolate and candles at the vigil, which was attended by interfaith leaders and elected officials.

"We are parents. We are neighbors. We are hurting. We are angry. We are sad. We are confused. We are thankful. We are all in this together. We are Waukesha Strong," said a tearful Amanda Medina Roddy with the Waukesha school district.

Mayor Shawn Reilly described the parade as a "Norman Rockwell-type" event that "became a nightmare."

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

## New Zealand to start reopening borders to world from January

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand will reopen its borders to the world over the coming months, the government announced Wednesday, allowing for the return of displaced residents from January and tourists from April.

The South Pacific nation imposed harsh border restrictions when the pandemic began, effectively banning tourists and requiring returning residents to spend two weeks in a quarantine hotel run by the military.

At times, demand for quarantine beds has far outstripped supply, causing some displaced residents to wait months for available slots.

For the first 18 months of the pandemic, the border measures were considered vital in keeping New Zealand free from the virus.

But an August outbreak proved impossible to stamp out, prompting New Zealand to abandon its elimination strategy in October. Vaccination rates have also been rising, making the border measures increasingly hard to justify.

COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said the government had made difficult trade-offs to keep New Zealanders as safe as possible throughout the pandemic.

"We acknowledge that it has been very tough. Families have been separated. People have found them-

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selves having to shelter in places they did not expect to stay for prolonged periods of time," Hipkins said. "We are acutely aware of the impact that these restrictions have had on individuals' lives and their livelihoods."

Under the government's plan, all incoming travelers will still be required to isolate themselves for seven days, at least for now.

Hipkins said it wanted to mitigate the virus risk posed by incoming travelers by reopening the border in stages.

Fully vaccinated New Zealanders will be able to return from Australia without staying in quarantine from Jan. 16 and from other countries after Feb. 13. The door will then open in stages to tourists and other travelers from April 30.

New Zealand is also removing a very-high-risk designation from certain countries including Indonesia, India and Brazil, allowing people from those countries to return or visit.

New Zealand announced earlier this week that bars, restaurants and gyms can reopen in Auckland from Dec. 2, removing the last remnants of a lockdown that began in the nation's largest city in August.

It also signaled a new phase in New Zealand's response to the pandemic, in which people around the country will need to be fully vaccinated in order to participate in anything from getting a haircut to watching a concert.

About 69% of New Zealanders are fully vaccinated, including 84% of those aged 12 and over. New Zealand has reported just 40 coronavirus deaths since the pandemic began.

## Jury awards \$26M in damages for Unite the Right violence

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — A jury ordered 17 white nationalist leaders and organizations to pay more than \$26 million in damages Tuesday over the violence that erupted during the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017.

After a nearly monthlong civil trial, the jury in U.S. District Court deadlocked on two key claims but found the white nationalists liable on four other claims in the lawsuit filed by nine people who suffered physical or emotional injuries during the two days of demonstrations.

Attorney Roberta Kaplan said the plaintiffs' lawyers plan to refile the suit so a new jury can decide the two deadlocked claims. She called the amount of damages awarded from the other counts "eye opening."

"That sends a loud message," Kaplan said.

The verdict, though mixed, is a rebuke to the white nationalist movement, particularly for the two dozen individuals and organizations accused in a federal lawsuit of orchestrating violence against African Americans, Jews and others in a meticulously planned conspiracy.

White nationalist leader Richard Spencer vowed to appeal, saying the "entire theory of that verdict is fundamentally flawed."

He said plaintiffs' attorneys made it clear before the trial that they wanted to use the case to bankrupt him and other defendants.

"It was activism by means of lawsuits, and that is absolutely outrageous," he said. "I'm doing fine right now because I had kind of accepted in my heart the worst that could happen. I had hope, of course, but I'm not terribly surprised or crestfallen."

Jurors were unable to reach unanimous verdicts on two pivotal claims based on a 150-year-old federal law passed after the Civil War to shield freed slaves from violence and protect their civil rights. The Ku Klux Klan Act contains a rarely used provision that allows private citizens to sue other citizens for civil rights violations.

Under those claims, the plaintiffs asked the jury to find that the defendants engaged in a conspiracy to commit racially motivated violence and that they knew about the conspiracy but failed to stop it from being carried out. Jurors could not agree on those claims.

The jury did find the defendants liable under a Virginia state law conspiracy claim and awarded \$11

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million in damages to the plaintiffs under that claim. Jurors also found five of the main organizers of the rally liable under a claim that alleged they subjected two of the plaintiffs to intimidation, harassment or violence that was motivated by racial, religious or ethnic animosity. The jury awarded the plaintiffs \$1.5 million in damages on that claim.

The final two claims were made against James Alex Fields Jr., an avowed Hitler admirer who intentionally drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others. The jury found Fields, who is serving life in prison for murder and hate crimes, liable on an assault or battery claim and awarded six plaintiffs just under \$6.8 million in damages. The jury awarded the same plaintiffs nearly \$6.7 million on a claim that Fields intentionally inflicted emotional distress on them.

Heyer's mother, Susan Bro, said the verdict "sends a very clear message that hate speech put into action has consequences."

"The defendants were convicted with their own words that showed months of planning went into the rally. This was not a spontaneous event," said Bro, who was not a plaintiff in the lawsuit.

Hundreds of white nationalists descended on Charlottesville for the Unite the Right rally on Aug. 11 and 12, 2017, ostensibly to protest city plans to remove a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. During a march on the University of Virginia campus, white nationalists chanted "Jews will not replace us," surrounded counterprotesters and threw tiki torches at them.

Then-President Donald Trump touched off a political firestorm when he failed to immediately denounce the white nationalists, saying there were "very fine people on both sides."

The lawsuit funded by Integrity First for America, a nonprofit civil rights organization formed in response to the violence in Charlottesville, accused some of the country's most well-known white nationalists of plotting the violence, including Jason Kessler, the rally's main organizer; Spencer, who coined the term "alt-right" to describe a loosely connected band of white nationalists, neo-Nazis and others; and Christopher Cantwell, a white supremacist who became known as the "crying Nazi" for posting a tearful video when a warrant was issued for his arrest on assault charges for using pepper spray against counterdemonstrators.

Joshua Smith, an attorney for defendants Matthew Heimbach, Matthew Parrott and the far-right Traditionalist Worker Party, said he will ask the court to reduce the punitive damages awards against his clients under U.S. Supreme Court precedent that places limitations on how much larger punitive damages can be than compensatory damages. Smith described the verdict as a "big win" for his clients due to the relatively modest amount of compensatory damages awarded by the jury.

The trial featured emotional testimony from people struck by Fields' car or who witnessed the attacks as well as plaintiffs who were beaten or subjected to racist taunts.

Melissa Blair, who was pushed out of the way as Fields' car slammed into the crowd, described the horror of seeing her fiancé bleeding on the sidewalk and later learning that her friend Heyer had been killed.

"I was confused. I was scared. I was worried about all the people that were there. It was a complete terror scene. It was blood everywhere. I was terrified," said Blair, who became tearful during her testimony.

During their testimony, some of the defendants used racial epithets and defiantly expressed their support for white supremacy. They also blamed one another and the anti-fascist political movement known as antifa for the violence that erupted that weekend.

In closing arguments to the jury, the defendants and their lawyers tried to distance themselves from Fields and said the plaintiffs had not proved that they conspired to commit violence at the rally.

Before the trial, Judge Norman Moon issued default judgments against another seven defendants who refused to respond to the lawsuit. The court will decide damages against those defendants.

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AP reporter Mike Kunzelman contributed from College Park, Maryland. AP reporter Sarah Rankin contributed from Richmond.

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This story has been corrected to show that the damages total more than \$26 million.

## President, VP and spouses assist food kitchen for holiday

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NANTUCKET, Mass. (AP) — President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, helped a Washington food kitchen prepare Thanksgiving meals for the needy before they left town — like millions of other Americans — to resume their family tradition of spending the holiday on tiny Nantucket island in Massachusetts.

The first family, including children and grandchildren, arrived on the island Tuesday night and were staying at the home of billionaire businessman David Rubenstein, a family friend, as they have previously. The president was expected to return to the White House on Sunday.

Earlier in the day Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, joined the Bidens at DC Central Kitchen, which serves cooked-from-scratch meals alongside training for culinary jobs.

Decked out in DC Central Kitchen aprons, the four dished out turkey, gravy, sweet potato casserole and green beans into trays to be packed up for needy D.C. residents.

Jill Biden kicked off the holiday season at the White House on Monday when she received the official White House Christmas tree — an 18 1/2-foot (5.6 meter) Fraser fir cut from a North Carolina farm that she declared “magnificent.” The tree is destined for the Blue Room as the showstopper of Christmas at the White House — Biden’s first as president.

The first lady also joined the president on a visit to the Army’s Fort Bragg in North Carolina later Monday for an early Thanksgiving with service members and their families.

The Bidens were still dating when they first visited Nantucket, with Biden’s sons, Beau and Hunter, in the mid-1970s. The couple was looking for a way out of choosing which of their families to spend Thanksgiving with, the first lady wrote in her memoir.

Biden was a U.S. senator back then and his chief of staff suggested they go to Nantucket.

“And although neither Joe nor I had ever been, we decided that sounded as good as anywhere,” she wrote. So they packed a cooler with sandwiches and sodas, loaded the boys into the station wagon and drove six hours to the Cape, where a ferry chugged them over to the island.

Thanksgiving on “Nana-tucket” — as their grandchildren call the island in a play on their “Nana” nickname for their grandmother — became the family tradition for the next several decades, though with a few exceptions, the first lady wrote.

Last fall, Biden put tradition on hold over COVID-19 concerns, when people were being told to avoid traveling and gathering indoors in large groups for the holidays. Instead, the then-president-elect hunkered down for Thanksgiving with just his wife, their daughter and her husband.

Both the president and first lady since have received the main two-dose course of the Pfizer vaccine, as well as the third booster shot recommended by public health officials to provide more enduring protection against the coronavirus.

Some Biden family members were at the White House this week. Hunter, his wife, Melissa, and their toddler son, Beau, watched Monday as the official Christmas tree was delivered. Hunter’s daughter, Finnegan, later was seen on one of the balconies, holding brother Beau and watching as their grandparents departed for North Carolina. All joined the trip to Nantucket.

The White House has not said how Biden, who turned 79 last Saturday, plans to spend his time on Nantucket.

In her memoir, the first lady named a favorite restaurant where they would eat lunch and said they would gather on cobblestone Main Street on Friday evenings to see Santa Claus, watch the Christmas tree lighting ceremony and sing carols.

Biden also attends Catholic Mass every weekend.

Asked during her Tuesday briefing about the trip, White House press secretary Jen Psaki defended the president’s decision to leave Washington for the holiday by saying that Thanksgiving “is a time to put politics aside, spend time with your loved ones and talk about what you’re grateful for.”

She also noted that Biden is president wherever he is.

## It's not just Peng. China is cracking down on MeToo movement

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Huang Xueqin, who publicly supported a woman when she accused a professor of sexual assault, was arrested in September. Wang Jianbing, who helped women report sexual harassment, was detained along with her. Neither has been heard from since. Meanwhile, several other women's rights activists have faced smear campaigns on social media and some have seen their accounts shuttered.

When tennis star Peng Shuai disappeared from public view this month after accusing a senior Chinese politician of sexual assault, it caused an international uproar. But back in China, Peng is just one of several people — activists and accusers alike — who have been hustled out of view, charged with crimes or trolled and silenced online for speaking out about the harassment, violence and discrimination women face every day.

When Huang helped spark a grassroots #MeToo movement in China in 2018, it gained fairly wide visibility and achieved some measure of success, including getting the civil code to define sexual harassment for the first time. But it was also met with stiff resistance from Chinese authorities, who are quick to counter any social movement they fear could challenge their hold on power. That crackdown has intensified this year, part of wider efforts to limit what's acceptable in the public discourse.

"They're publicly excluding us from the legitimacy, from the legitimate public space," said Lu Pin, an activist who now lives in the U.S. but is still active on women's rights issues in China. "This society's middle ground is disappearing."

In a sign of how threatening the #MeToo movement and activism on women's rights is to Chinese authorities, many activists have been dismissed as tools of foreign interference — a label used to discredit their concerns as fabrications by China's enemies meant to destabilize it.

The ongoing crackdown has mostly targeted activists with little fame or clout and who often worked with marginalized groups.

Huang and Wang both had a history of advocating for disadvantaged groups, and have been charged with subversion of state power, according to a friend of both activists who saw a notice sent to Wang's family. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of police retaliation. Police in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou where the two were arrested did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

The charge is vague and often used against political dissidents. Huang's and Wang's families have not heard from them since they were detained and are not able to contact them — another tactic often deployed in political cases.

The #MeToo movement burst into view in China, when Huang helped a woman named Luo Xixi to publicly accuse her professor at Beihang University of trying to force her to have sex with him. The university conducted an investigation and fired the scholar, who it said had violated professional ethics.

Luo's account inspired dozens of other women to come forward — all online. Thousands of students signed petitions and put pressure on their universities to address sexual violence. Women in other industries spoke up, leading to public discussions about the power imbalances between the sexes in many workplaces, the lack of justice for survivors of sexual violence, and the way gender can determine how one is treated in Chinese society.

While that national conversation was unsettling for authorities from the beginning, efforts to counter activism on women's issues have increased this year, including by nationalist, pro-government influencers, some of who seem to have the blessing of authorities and have been praised by state media.

In a span of a few weeks in the spring, influencers with millions of followers launched a wave of attacks against women's rights activists on Weibo, one of China's leading social media platforms. They accused them of being anti-China and of being backed by foreign forces, without evidence. Such allegations have often been leveled at protest movements, including the pro-democracy one in Hong Kong that Beijing has relentlessly tried to stamp out.

By late April, roughly a dozen activists and nonprofits found their accounts restricted from posting temporarily or permanently suspended. It's not clear why in all cases, but one activist who had lost her

account, Liang Xiaowen, shared a notice from Weibo that said her account had "shared illegal and harmful information."

Even Zhou Xiaoxuan, who accused well-known state TV host Zhu Jun of groping her when she was an intern and was once praised for her courage in speaking up, faced a campaign of harassment and can no longer post on her public-facing accounts.

On Weibo, users send her private messages such as, "Get out of China, I feel disgusting living with a type of person like you, on the same piece of land." Another called her a piece of "toilet paper" that "foreigners would use and then throw away."

The effect is such that any discussion about the harassment, violence or inequalities that women face has been increasingly shielded from the public view.

"Now, the situation on social media is such that you have been completely sealed off, you have no way to speak," said Zhou.

The attacks have not been limited to the digital space. In September, when Zhou went to a court hearing in the civil case where she was suing Zhu for damages and an apology, a group of aggressive bystanders yelled at her and tried to prevent her from speaking to reporters. Police at the scene did not stop them.

Late that night, when Zhou left the courthouse and headed for home, she said she was followed by men in two cars. The men waited outside her residential complex for half an hour before leaving.

The pressure campaign also forced a low-profile group called Hot Pepper Tribe, which worked with female migrant workers, to shut down in August. The group had tried to raise awareness of the hardships faced by women who work in factories, construction and other manual labor fields. It had come under pressure from authorities, though it's not clear why it was singled out.

Still, activists are hopeful that the #MeToo movement has opened a door that cannot be shut.

"This is not so simple that you find a few feminist bloggers and you shut down their accounts," said Zhou. "Becoming a feminist comes from discovering what kind of problems you face. And once you become a feminist, then it's very hard to give it up. And #MeToo's very important meaning is that it has inspired a broad feminist community."

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Associated Press news assistant Caroline Chen in Beijing contributed to this report.

## Jury gets case of white men charged in Ahmaud Arbery's death

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Jurors in the case of three white men charged with killing Ahmaud Arbery deliberated for about six hours Tuesday without reaching a verdict as they weighed prosecution arguments that the defendants provoked the fatal confrontation against defense attorneys' insistence that their clients acted in self-defense.

After initially indicating they wanted to work into the evening, the jurors were soon dismissed by the judge with instructions to resume deliberations Wednesday morning.

"We are in the process of working to reach a verdict," the foreperson told Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley.

After more than two weeks of testimony and closing arguments, the prosecution got the last word because it carries the burden of proving its case beyond a reasonable doubt.

Prosecutor Linda Dunikoski spent two hours Tuesday morning hammering at defense attorneys' attempts to blame the 25-year-old Black man for his own death. Defense attorneys said Arbery lashed out violently with his fists to resist a lawful citizen's arrest by the defendants.

"You can't claim self-defense if you are the unjustified aggressor," Linda Dunikoski told jurors in her final statement. "Who started this? It wasn't Ahmaud Arbery."

Dunikoski said Arbery's pursuers had "no badge, no uniform, no authority" and were "just some strange guys in a white pickup truck." And she cited their own words to police immediately after the shooting, when they said they saw Arbery running but were unsure if he had committed a crime.

"You can't make a citizen's arrest because someone's running down the street and you have no idea

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what they did wrong," Dunikoski said.

Once the prosecution wrapped up, Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley gave instructions to the disproportionately white jury on how to apply the law before the panel started deliberations at the Glynn County courthouse in the port city of Brunswick.

Arbery's killing became part of a larger national reckoning on racial injustice after a graphic video of his death leaked online two months later.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael grabbed guns and pursued Arbery in a pickup truck after spotting him running through their subdivision on Feb. 23, 2020. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, joined the chase and recorded the video of Travis McMichael opening fire as Arbery threw punches and grabbed for McMichael's shotgun.

No one was charged in the killing until Bryan's video leaked and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police. All three men are charged with murder and other offenses.

Dunikoski said Tuesday that the McMichaels and Bryan threatened Arbery both with their pickup trucks and by pointing a shotgun at him before the final confrontation in which Arbery threw punches and grabbed for the gun.

She noted that Bryan told police he used his truck to run Arbery into a ditch and cut off his route, while Greg McMichael told officers they had him "trapped like a rat." The actions of both men, she said, directly contributed to Arbery's death.

"It doesn't matter who actually pulled the trigger," Dunikoski said. "Under the law, they're all guilty."

She also said there was no evidence Arbery had committed crimes in the defendants' neighborhood. She said he was never seen stealing anything the five times he was recorded by security cameras in an unfinished home under construction from which he was seen running.

"You've got lumber, you've got all this stuff," Dunikoski said. "Mr. Arbery never shows up with a bag. He doesn't pull up with a U-haul. ... All he does is wander around for a few minutes and then leave."

The prosecutor told jurors someone can only make a citizen's arrest in "emergency situations" where a crime is happening "right then and there."

Defense attorneys objected to Dunikoski's explanation of citizen's arrest because they contend the McMichaels had reason to suspect Arbery had stolen items from the home. They said the owner discovered the items missing before he installed security cameras.

"This is a misstatement of the law and the argument is improper," Franklin Hogue, an attorney for Greg McMichael, told the judge. "There's no way we can fix it" before the jury, he said, because defense attorneys finished their closing arguments Monday.

Attorney Jason Sheffield said his client, Travis McMichael, fired his shotgun in self-defense after Arbery charged at him, threw punches and tried to grab the weapon. Sheffield called Arbery's death a tragedy, but one that was his own fault.

Attorneys for the other two defendants blamed Arbery as well. Laura Hogue, an attorney for Greg McMichael, said Arbery "chose to fight." Kevin Gough, who represents Bryan, questioned why Arbery didn't call for help if he was in danger.

"Maybe that's because Mr. Arbery doesn't want help," Gough said.

Arbery had enrolled at a technical college and was preparing at the time to study to become an electrician like his uncles.

## Vaccines making Thanksgiving easier, but hot spots remain

By ED WHITE Associated Press

The U.S. is facing its second Thanksgiving of the pandemic in better shape than the first time around, thanks to the vaccine, though some regions are seeing surges of COVID-19 cases that could get worse as families travel the country for gatherings that were impossible a year ago.

Nearly 200 million Americans are fully vaccinated. That leaves tens of millions who have yet to get a shot in the arm, some of them out of defiance. Hospitals in the cold Upper Midwest, especially Michigan and Minnesota, are filled with COVID-19 patients who are mostly unvaccinated.

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Michigan hospitals reported about 3,800 coronavirus patients at the start of the week, with 20% in intensive care units, numbers that approach the bleakest days of the pandemic's 2020 start. The state had a seven-day new-case rate of 572 per 100,000 people Tuesday, the highest in the nation, followed by New Hampshire at 522.

In the West, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah and Montana also ranked high. Some Colorado communities, including Denver, are turning to indoor mask orders to reduce risk, a policy that has also been adopted in the Buffalo, New York, area and Santa Cruz County, California.

The statistics in Michigan are "horrible," said Dr. Matthew Trunsky, a respiratory specialist at Beaumont Health in suburban Detroit.

"We got cold and moved indoors and have huge pockets of unvaccinated people," he said. "You can't have pockets of unvaccinated people who don't want to be masked and not expect to get outbreaks, not expect to lose parents, not expect to lose teachers."

During a recent office visit, he encouraged a patient who uses oxygen to get vaccinated. The patient declined and now is in the hospital with COVID-19, desperately relying on even more oxygen, Trunsky said.

He said he continues to encounter patients and their family members espousing conspiracy theories about the vaccine.

"We've had several people in their 40s die in the last month — 100% unvaccinated," Trunsky said. "It's just so incredibly sad to see a woman die with teenagers. Especially with that age group, it's nearly 100% preventable."

In Detroit, where less than 40% of eligible residents were fully vaccinated, Mayor Mike Duggan said hospitalizations have doubled since early November.

"We have far too many people in this country that we have lost because they believed some nonsense on the internet and decided not to get the vaccine," said Duggan, a former hospital executive.

Despite hot spots, the outlook in the U.S. overall is significantly better than it was at Thanksgiving 2020.

Without the vaccine, which became available in mid-December 2020, the U.S. a year ago was averaging 169,000 cases and 1,645 deaths per day, and about 81,000 people were in the hospital with COVID-19. The U.S. now is averaging 95,000 cases, 1,115 deaths and 40,000 in the hospital.

Airports have been jammed. More than 2.2 million people passed through security checkpoints on Friday, the busiest day since the pandemic shut down travel early in 2020. On some recent days, the number was twice as high as Thanksgiving a year ago.

Sarene Brown and three children, all vaccinated, were flying to Atlanta from Newark, New Jersey, to see family. People close to them have died from COVID-19.

"I'm thankful that I'm here, and I'm not in heaven, and I'm thankful for my family and that God helped me survive," said Neive Brown, 7, who got her first dose.

More than 500,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 since the last Thanksgiving, for an overall death toll of over 770,000.

"We would encourage people who gather to do so safely after they've been fully vaccinated, as we've been saying for months now," said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "I do think that this is very different because we actually have the tools to prevent the vast majority of cases."

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said his optimism is tempered by the delta variant's ability to jump from person to person, especially among the millions who are unvaccinated or are due for a booster.

"That equals very high vulnerability," Topol said.

Denver's public hospital, Denver Health, is sending people elsewhere because of a lack of beds. Staff members were exhausted from treating COVID-19 patients and others who had postponed other medical needs, chief executive Robin Wittenstein said.

"Our system is on the brink of collapse," she said.

Arizona reported at least 2,551 COVID-19 patients in hospitals, far below the peak of last winter but still



reason for concern. Officials said beds were limited.

AP reporters Colleen Slevin in Denver, Corey Williams in Detroit, Ted Shaffrey in Newark, New Jersey, and AP medical writer Carla K. Johnson contributed to this story.

## **Oath Keepers, Proud Boys subpoenaed by Jan. 6 House panel**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection issued more subpoenas Tuesday, this time to extremist organizations, including the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers as well as their leaders, in an attempt to uncover the plotting and execution of the deadly attack.

"The Select Committee is seeking information from individuals and organizations reportedly involved with planning the attack, with the violent mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6th, or with efforts to overturn the results of the election," Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the Democratic chairman of the panel, said in a statement.

The subpoenas are the latest in a wide net the House panel has cast in an effort to investigate the riot, when supporters of former President Donald Trump, fueled by his false claims of a stolen election, assaulted police and smashed their way into the Capitol to interrupt the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

The committee has already interviewed more than 150 people across government, social media and law enforcement, including some former Trump aides who have been cooperative. The panel has subpoenaed more than 20 witnesses, and most of them, including several who helped plan the "Stop the Steal" rally the morning of Jan. 6, have signaled they will cooperate.

The latest subpoenas were issued to the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys and 1st Amendment Praetorian organizations as well as their members, requesting documents and testimony.

Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, chairman of the Proud Boys, was among those subpoenaed. He hasn't been charged in the riot as he wasn't there on Jan. 6. He'd been arrested in an unrelated vandalism case as he arrived in Washington two days earlier and was ordered out of the area by a judge. Law enforcement later said Tarrío was picked up in part to help quell potential violence.

But despite him not being physically present, the committee believes he may have been involved in the Proud Boys' preparation for the events at the Capitol.

The committee highlighted a line from another Proud Boys leader's podcast shortly before Jan. 6 in which he said, "When police officers or government officials are breaking the law, what are we supposed to do as people? Discourse? What are we supposed to do debate? No, we have to use force."

Jason Lee Van Dyke, a lawyer previously affiliated with the Proud Boys and subpoenaed as part of the congressional investigation, said he would give the committee records that aren't protected by attorney-client privilege, but emphasized that his affiliation with the Proud Boys International LLC ended in November 2018.

Van Dyke added that he didn't have any records from November 2020 through the present that the subpoena seeks. "I can't give them what I don't have," Van Dyke said.

More than 30 Proud Boys leaders, members or associates are among those who have been charged in connection with the attack. The group of self-described "Western chauvinists" emerged from far-right fringes during the Trump administration to join mainstream GOP circles, with allies like longtime Trump backer Roger Stone. The group claims it has more than 30,000 members nationwide.

The committee on Tuesday also subpoenaed the Oath Keepers — a militia group founded in 2009 that recruits current and former military, police and first responders — and its founder and leader Elmer Stewart Rhodes. The panel says Rhodes may have suggested members should engage in violence to ensure their preferred election outcome and that he was in contact with several of the more than a dozen indicted Oath Keepers members before, during and after the Capitol attack, including meeting some of them outside the Capitol.

Rhodes has said there were as many as 40,000 Oath Keepers at its peak, but one extremism expert estimates the group's membership stands around 3,000 nationally. Rhodes didn't immediately respond to

a request for comment that was left on the organization's website.

The last organization on the committee's list Tuesday was the 1st Amendment Praetorian, founded by a QAnon believer, which claims to provide free security for "patriotic and religious events across the country."

Its chairman, Robert Patrick Lewis, is wanted by the committee after being listed as a speaker on the permit for a Jan. 5 rally on Freedom Plaza in downtown Washington. On the day of the attack, Lewis tweeted: "Today is the day that true battles begin."

The subpoenas narrowing in on the organizations come one day after the panel issued subpoenas to five more people, including Stone and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones.

Some Trump allies have not cooperated. Steve Bannon, a longtime ally, was indicted on Nov. 12 on two counts of criminal contempt of Congress after he defied a subpoena from the House committee. The committee is giving former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows more time to comply with a subpoena before moving forward with a contempt vote.

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Associated Press writer Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix contributed to this report.

## **Biden aims to do what presidents often can't: Beat inflation**

By PAUL WISEMAN, CATHY BUSSEWITZ and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — LBJ tried jawboning. Richard Nixon issued a presidential edict. The Ford administration printed buttons exhorting Americans to "Whip Inflation Now."

Over the years, American presidents have tried, and mostly floundered, in their efforts to quell the economic and political menace of consumer inflation.

Now, President Joe Biden is giving it a shot.

Confronting a spike in gasoline and other consumer prices that's bedeviling American households, Biden on Tuesday ordered the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the U.S strategic petroleum reserve. The move, done in coordination with several other major nations, is intended to contain energy costs. Oil markets, having anticipated the move, were unimpressed with the details: Oil prices actually rose on the news.

It was just the latest step Biden has taken to show he is doing everything he can to combat inflation as gasoline and food prices, in particular, have imposed a growing burden on American households. On Monday, he announced that he would reappoint Jerome Powell as chair of the Federal Reserve, a move meant in part to reassure financial markets that Washington is serious about containing consumer prices. Last month, he announced a deal to ease supply backlogs at the Port of Los Angeles by extending operations there to 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Yet none of the president's actions is considered likely to make a meaningful dent in surging prices anytime soon.

"I don't think the president has many levers to pull to bring down the rate of inflation any time soon," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "The things he is doing are positive, and there's no downside to them ... but they are on the margins. They're not going to move the dial very much."

Inflation is always a tough foe, made even more complicated by the unusual recovery from the pandemic recession, with shortages of supplies and workers and shipping bottlenecks forcing up prices.

**WHAT IS HAPPENING TO CONSUMER PRICES?**

The government's consumer price index skyrocketed 6.2% in the 12 months that ended in October — the sharpest such jump since 1990.

Coming after nearly four decades of more or less stable prices, the CPI news represents a "once-in-a-generation uptick in inflation," said Sarah Binder, a George Washington University political scientist who studies the Fed. "The problem is pretty stark because it's something that voters notice. It's hard to escape the impact of a spike in inflation on your daily life, whether it's buying milk or buying gas."

The average price of regular gasoline has shot up to \$3.40 a gallon from \$2.11 a year ago, according to AAA.

Compounding the pain and heightening the pressure on Biden, inflation has been outpacing Americans'

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income. Adjusted for price increases, average hourly wages were actually down 1.2% last month compared with a year earlier.

"Inflation is painful, and it's always political," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at the accounting and consulting firm Grant Thornton.

## WHAT'S BEHIND THE PRICE SPIKE?

It's partly the consequence of very good news. The world economy — and America's in particular — rebounded with unexpected speed and strength from last year's brief but intense recession. It was a result of super-low interest rates, massive government spending and, eventually, the broad rollout of vaccines that allowed more of the economy to reopen.

The swiftness of the rebound caught businesses off guard. A year and a half ago, they were bracing for the worst — laying off workers, letting shelves and warehouses go bare, reducing investment and factory output.

And energy companies did the same: They cut production of oil and gas as demand for transportation fuels plummeted. Once demand came roaring back, they were unprepared. They found themselves scrambling to call back workers and buy enough to fill customer orders. Ports and freight yards couldn't handle the traffic. Countries competed over boatloads of overpriced liquid natural gas. Periodic COVID-19 outbreaks shut down Asian ports and factories. Global supply chains broke down.

As costs rose, many businesses found that they could pass the burden along to consumers in the form of higher prices. In the meantime, many families had banked their government relief checks and built up their savings. Some critics also blamed Biden's \$1.9 trillion emergency aid package for overheating the economy and contributing to inflation pressures.

Economists are divided over how long the inflation spike will last. Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial, predicts that inflationary pressures will ease as supply chains sort themselves out.

"I expect to see inflation slow in 2022," he said.

## WHAT CAN PRESIDENTS DO?

The White House has limited tools for reversing higher prices. That task belongs more to the Fed, which can raise borrowing costs to cool a sizzling economy. During the 1960s and 1970s, though, presidents increasingly felt pressure to do something about inflation because it had become a serious political threat.

President Lyndon Johnson tried to persuade companies to forgo price increases and labor unions to limit wage demands — a practice known as "jawboning." When Bethlehem Steel raised steel prices in 1965, Johnson criticized its executives as unpatriotic, and they backed down, according to Robert Samuelson's book, "The Great Inflation and Its Aftermath." When egg prices rose in 1966, Johnson ordered America's surgeon general to highlight the health hazards of cholesterol in eggs, with the intent of lowering egg sales and therefore prices.

Nixon imposed wage and price controls in 1971 and 1973, which briefly stifled inflation, only to see prices soar once the controls were lifted.

Gerald Ford's "Whip Inflation Now" program encouraged Americans to grow their own vegetables, reduce their food waste and consume less. Americans responded mostly by mocking the program. Some wore the president's WIN buttons upside down, explaining that the resulting NIM stood for "No Immediate Miracles."

## WHAT HAS BIDEN DONE?

Biden last week signed into a law a \$1 trillion public works program, which pours money into fixing roads, bridges and ports, potentially easing the supply chain backlogs that have contributed to rising prices. Untangling shipping bottlenecks would be doubly helpful: It would ease inflationary pressures and boost the economy by increasing the flow of goods to customers.

Last week, Biden sent a letter to the Federal Trade Commission asking the FTC chair to consider investigating whether higher gasoline prices were the result of "illegal conduct." The White House is also stepping up anti-trust enforcement of the meatpacking industry, seeking to increase competition and drive down meat prices.

His decision to re-nominate Powell to lead the Fed was meant, in part, to reassure the financial mar-

kets of Washington's resolve to prevent consumer prices from spiraling out of his control. The other likely contender for the job — Lael Brainard, a member of the Fed's Board of Governors — was perceived as less hawkish toward inflation.

## WHY DID BIDEN TAP THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE TUESDAY?

The idea was that by putting more oil on the market, prices would fall. That hasn't happened. But depending on what happens in the rest of the world, there's still a chance it could work.

America's petroleum reserve holds about 605 million barrels of oil in underground caves in Texas and Louisiana. It was designed in the 1970s in response to the Arab oil embargo to store oil in case there was a supply disruption or emergency. But the dynamics of the global oil industry changed dramatically in recent years, and now the U.S exports more oil than it imports.

The 50 million barrels that Biden promised to release will likely be sold slowly, at a rate of about 1 million barrels per day, meaning that the new influx of oil could last about two months. Adding even a small amount of oil to the market can tip it into surplus, and potentially lower the price, said Jim Burkhard of IHS Markit.

"The immediate price reaction is not the final judgment on the effectiveness of this of the effort," he added. "It will really be in the months ahead."

Bussewitz reported from New York.

AP Economics Writer Martin Crutsinger contributed to this report.

## Officials: Brian Laundrie fatally shot himself in the head

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Brian Laundrie, who was found dead last month in a Florida swamp, shot himself in the head, officials announced Tuesday.

Laundrie had been the subject of a manhunt for more than a month as investigators searched for clues in the slaying of his girlfriend, Gabby Petito, during their cross-country van trip together.

The medical examiner in Sarasota County, where Laundrie's body was found, said in a news release that the cause of death was a gunshot wound to the head, and the manner of death was suicide.

Attorney Steve Bertolino, who represents Laundrie's parents, said in a statement that the family had been informed about the autopsy results.

"Chris and Roberta are still mourning the loss of their son and are hopeful that these findings bring closure to both families," Bertolino said.

Found in a Florida nature preserve, Laundrie's skeletal remains were positively identified last month using dental records.

The discovery of the remains concluded a massive search involving federal, state and local law enforcement that began shortly after Laundrie disappeared Sept. 14, two weeks after the 23-year-old returned alone to his parents' home in North Port, Florida.

The investigation into Petito's slaying, however, has not yet concluded. But only Laundrie was ever identified by law enforcement officials as a person of interest in the case.

Petito's family reported the 22-year-old woman missing Sept. 11, launching a search that garnered worldwide media attention and, in Laundrie's case, focused largely on the Carlton Reserve wilderness park near the Laundrie home. It is a densely wooded, swampy area that's home to alligators, coyotes, bobcats, snakes and numerous other creatures.

Petito's remains were discovered Sept. 19 on the edge of Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, one of the places the young couple had visited on the trip they documented through social media videos. Authorities said the body had been there for about a month.

An autopsy in Wyoming concluded Petito died by strangulation and that it was a homicide. Laundrie was listed as a "person of interest" in her killing but he was charged only with fraudulent use of a debit card that was not his.

Richard Stafford, attorney for Petito's family, said they would have no immediate comment on Laundrie's cause of death.

## World Cup host Qatar used ex-CIA officer to spy on FIFA

By ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The tiny Arab nation of Qatar has for years employed a former CIA officer to help spy on soccer officials as part of a no-expense-spared effort to win and hold on to the 2022 World Cup tournament, an investigation by The Associated Press has found.

It's part of a trend of former U.S. intelligence officers going to work for foreign governments with questionable human rights records that is worrying officials in Washington and prompting calls from some members of Congress for greater scrutiny of an opaque and lucrative market.

The World Cup is the planet's most popular sports tournament. It's also a chance for Qatar, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, to have a coming-out party on the world stage.

The AP's investigation found Qatar sought an edge in securing hosting rights by hiring former CIA officer turned private contractor Kevin Chalker to spy on rival bid teams and key soccer officials who picked the winner in 2010. Chalker also worked for Qatar in the years that followed to keep tabs on the country's critics in the soccer world, the AP found.

The AP's investigation is based on interviews with Chalker's former associates as well as contracts, invoices, emails, and a review of business documents.

The surveillance work included having someone pose as a photojournalist to keep tabs on a rival nation's bid and deploying a Facebook honeypot, in which someone posed online as an attractive woman, to get close to a target, a review of the records show. Operatives working for Chalker and the Persian Gulf sheikhdom also sought cell phone call logs of at least one top FIFA official ahead of the 2010 vote, a review of the records show.

Chalker also promised he could help the country "maintain dominance" over its large population of foreign workers, an internal document from one of Chalker's companies reviewed by the AP shows. Qatar — a country with a population of 2.8 million, of whom only 300,000 are citizens — is heavily reliant on foreign-born labor to build the stadiums and other infrastructure needed for the tournament.

Qatari government officials did not respond to requests for comment. FIFA also declined to comment.

Chalker, who opened an office in Doha and had a Qatari government email account, said in a statement provided by a representative that he and his companies would not "ever engage in illegal surveillance."

Chalker declined requests for an interview or to answer detailed questions about his work for the Qatari government. He also claimed that some of the documents reviewed by the AP were forgeries.

The AP reviewed hundreds of pages of documents from Chalker's companies, including a 2013 project update report that had several photos of Chalker's staff meeting with various soccer officials. Multiple sources with authorized access provided documents to the AP. The sources said they were troubled by Chalker's work for Qatar and requested anonymity because they feared retaliation.

The AP took several steps to verify the documents' authenticity. That includes confirming details of various documents with different sources, including former Chalker associates and soccer officials; cross-checking contents of documents with contemporaneous news accounts and publicly available business records; and examining electronic documents' metadata, or digital history, where available, to confirm who made the documents and when. Chalker did not provide to the AP any evidence to support his position that some of the documents in question had been forged.

Many of the documents reviewed by the AP outlining work undertaken by Chalker and his companies on behalf of Qatar are also described in a lawsuit filed by Elliott Broidy, a one-time fundraiser for former U.S. President Donald Trump. Broidy is suing Chalker and has accused him of mounting a widespread hacking and spying campaign at Qatar's direction that includes using former western intelligence officers to surveil FIFA officials. Broidy's lawyers did not respond to requests for comment. Chalker's legal team has argued the lawsuit is meritless.

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Former associates say Chalker's companies have provided a variety of services to Qatar in addition to intelligence work. His company Global Risk Advisors bills itself as "an international strategic consultancy specializing in cybersecurity, military and law enforcement training, and intelligence-based advisory services" and its affiliates have won small contracts with the FBI for a rope-training course and tech consulting work for the Democratic National Committee.

Chalker worked at the CIA as an operations officer for about five years, according to former associates. Operations officers typically work undercover trying to recruit assets to spy on behalf of the United States. The CIA declined to comment and does not usually discuss its former officers.

Chalker's background in the CIA was attractive to Qatari officials, said former associates.

"That was part of his mystique. All these young wealthy Qataris are playing spy games with this guy and he's selling them," said one former associate, who like others interviewed by the AP, spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retribution for revealing the spying efforts of Qatar.

The private surveillance business has flourished in the last decade in the Persian Gulf as the region saw the rise of an information war using state-sponsored hacking operations that have coincided with the run-up to the World Cup.

Three former U.S. intelligence and military officials recently admitted to providing hacking services for a UAE-based company, which was called DarkMatter, as part of a deferred prosecution agreement with the Justice Department. A Reuters investigation from 2019 reported that DarkMatter hacked phones and computers of Qatar's Emir, his brother, and FIFA officials.

Work abroad by ex-U.S. intelligence officials has not always aligned with U.S. interests. The United States was Qatar's biggest rival to win the 2022 World Cup, and former U.S. President Bill Clinton and other celebrities were part of the bid effort. One Global Risk Advisors document lists the United States as a "threat" to Qatar while Russia, one of the U.S.'s biggest geopolitical rivals and the host of the 2018 World Cup, was listed as an "opportunity."

The Sunday Times of London previously reported that unnamed ex-CIA agents helped Qatar's 2010 bid team. But the AP's investigation is the most detailed to date of Qatar's use of former U.S. spies and provides a rare look into the world of former Western spies working in the Gulf for autocratic governments.

"This is a problem for U.S. national security," John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab, a watchdog group that tracks cyber-surveillance companies. "It's a really dangerous thing when people who handle the most sensitive secrets of our country are thinking in the back of their mind, 'Man, I could really make a lot more money taking this technical knowledge that I've been trained in and putting it in the service of whoever will pay me.'"

When Qatar was picked as the surprise winner in 2010, there was jubilation in the country. Sheik Youssef al-Qaradawi, a prominent Islamic scholar said he was "filled with joy" at the announcement and said Qatar had humbled the United States.

But Qatar's successful bid has long been dogged by allegations of corruption. U.S. prosecutors said last year that bribes were paid to FIFA executive committee members to gain their votes for Qatar.

Qatar has denied wrongdoing but has also had to fend off allegations by labor watchdogs of worker abuses, and an effort by neighboring countries to isolate, weaken and embarrass it through an economic boycott and informational warfare.

Chalker has pitched his companies, including Global Risk Advisors, as an aggressive private intelligence and security agency Qatar needs to fulfill its ambitions.

"The time for half-measures is over and serious consideration needs to be given to how important the 2022 World Cup is to Qatar," one of Global Risk Advisors' project documents from 2014, which also promised a "full-court press utilizing unique, non-traditional capabilities against a wide-ranging set of targets."

Chalker also promised the Qataris the use of I.T. and "technical collection specialists" as well as top field operatives with backgrounds in "highly sensitive U.S. intelligence and military operations" who could "spot, assess, develop, recruit, and handle assets with access to persons and topics of interests" on Qatar's behalf, company materials show.

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He also emphasized aggression and discretion, saying his plans included “patsies,” and “lightning rods,” psychological operations, and “persistent and aggressive distractions and disruptions” aimed at Qatar’s enemies all while giving the country “full deniability,” company records show.

“The greatest achievement to date of Project MERCILESS ... have come from successful penetration operations targeting vocal critics inside the FIFA organization,” Global Risk Advisors said in one 2014 document describing a project whose minimum proposed budget was listed at \$387 million over nine years. It’s unclear how much the Qataris ultimately paid the company.

Records show Chalker sometimes subcontracted with Diligence, a well-known private investigative firm in London founded by former western intelligence officers.

Diligence conducted surveillance in 2010 on the U.S. bid team by having a fake photojournalist secretly report back on what was happening as FIFA officials toured stadiums in the U.S. and met with the officials from the country’s bid team, a review of the records show. Tasked with getting close to one unnamed individual, Diligence use a fake Facebook profile of an attractive young woman to communicate with the target, records show.

Just ahead of the 2010 bid, Chalker tasked Diligence to obtain communications and financial records of FIFA officials Jack Warner and Chuck Blazer, a review of the records show. Blazer, a former top U.S. soccer official who pleaded guilty to FIFA-related corruption charges and worked as an informant for the FBI, died in 2017.

Diligence did not respond to requests for comment. Its Swiss affiliate recently settled a lawsuit with Ghanem Nuseibeh, a London consultant who said his mail was stolen and his emails were hacked after he wrote a report critical of Qatar hosting the World Cup. Diligence previously said in court records that it only conducted lawful surveillance on Nuseibeh.

David Downs, who was the executive director of the U.S. bid effort in 2010, said he’s not surprised to learn that Qatar was spying on its rivals given how weak their bid was compared to others.

“It’s very telling that they would be hiring ex-CIA operatives to get inside information,” Downs said. “A lot of what they did was either bending the rules or outright breaking the rules.”

Global Risk Advisor documents also highlight the company’s efforts to win over Jordan’s Prince Ali Bin Al-Hussein, a key figure in the soccer world who ran unsuccessfully to be FIFA’s president in 2015 and 2016. In a 2013 document, GRA recommended the Qataris give money to a soccer development organization run by Ali, saying it would “help solidify Qatar’s reputation as a benevolent presence in world football.”

A representative for Ali said the prince “has always had a direct good personal relationship with Qatar’s rulers. He certainly wouldn’t need consultants to assist with that relationship.”

Qatar has a long history of providing favors and family benefits to key influencers within FIFA and European soccer.

Top European soccer official Karl-Heinz Rummenigge paid a massive fine for failing to declare two Rolex watches on his return to Germany from Qatar in 2013 — two years after he suggested there were “questions about the Qatari World Cup.” And the son of a top FIFA official, Belgium’s Michel D’Hooghe, was offered and accepted a job in Qatar shortly after the 2010 vote. A FIFA ethics investigator did not connect the job offer to Qatar’s winning hosting rights and both Rummenigge, and D’Hooghe have denied any wrongdoing.

Swiss prosecutors are currently pursuing corruption charges against Jerome Valcke — FIFA’s CEO-like secretary-general from 2007 to 2015 — in a case that involves his acquiring use of a Qatari-owned luxury villa on the Italian island of Sardinia.

Valcke, who has denied wrongdoing, oversaw or had input into all aspects of the soccer body’s dealings with Qatar for several years. He was listed as a “potential threat” in GRA documents from 2013.

The Broidy lawsuit also alleges that Valcke was one of several FIFA officials Chalker targeted for hacking and surveillance. Valcke told the AP there “was no reason” for Qatar to identify him in such a way and said he never felt “any direct threats or pressure” in his dealings with the country.

In early 2017, the Qataris sent a request that Chalker submit a proposal to provide staff for a cybersecurity unit, as well as training to protect the royal family, conduct intelligence work and provide security

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in other areas, emails and other records show.

Chalker signed a master services agreement, a copy of which was reviewed by the AP, with Qatar in August 2017. The signed agreement specified that Chalker's company could provide consulting on surveillance, counter-surveillance, and other areas to "intelligence collection organizations."

Publicly available annual reports and balance sheets filed in Gibraltar show Chalker-owned shell companies saw large deposits that year and ended 2017 with about \$46 million in funds.

The full scope of his work for Qatar is unclear but the AP reviewed a variety of projects Global Risk Advisors proposed between 2014 and 2017 show proposals not just directly related to the World Cup.

They included "Pickaxe," which promised to capture "personal information and biometrics" of migrants working in Qatar. "Falconeye" was described as a plan to use drones to provide surveillance of ports and borders operations, as well as "controlling migrant worker populations centers."

"By implementing background investigations and vetting program, Qatar will maintain dominance of migrant workers," one company document said.

Qatar relied heavily on foreign workers to build stadiums and the necessary infrastructure for the tournament. It's faced criticism for how the workers have been treated and has not provided full details and data on worker deaths.

Another project, "Viper" promised on-site or remote "mobile device exploitation," which Global Risk Advisors said would deliver "critical intelligence" and enhance national security. The use of such technology provided by private firms is well documented by autocratic countries around the world, including the Gulf.

In July 2017, a month after Qatar's neighbors cut diplomatic ties and began a years-long boycott of the country, Chalker authored a proposal for "Project Deviant." It called for Global Risk Advisors to provide a robust spying and hacking training program for employees at Qatar's Ministry of Interior "based on the elite training undertaken by (Global Risk Advisors) officers from the U.S. military and intelligence agencies." Deviant included a 47-week "field operations tradecraft course" that would include training on surveillance, disguises, interrogation techniques, asset recruitment, hand-to-hand combat, and other areas, a GRA proposal shows.

The 26-week "technical operations tradecraft course" promised to teach Qataris with just even just a basic IT background to become world-class hackers with the "necessary knowledge, skills and techniques to use highly restricted, cutting-edge tools to penetrate target systems and devices, collect and analyze bulk signals data, and to track and locate targets to ultra-precise locations," records show.

The Broidy lawsuit also alleged that Chalker provided similar training to Qatar, noting that former intelligence officers are typically prohibited from sharing such skills with foreign governments.

Specific spying and hacking methods the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies teach their officers are classified and divulging techniques would be against the law. But there's no general ban on working for foreign governments, and distinctions are not always clear between what methods are classified and what are not.

"That line can be hard to draw when it comes to tradecraft that is commonly used," said Bobby Chesney, a professor at the University of Texas School of Law who specializes in national security issues.

Wealthy countries in the Gulf have proven eager to hire ex-U.S. intelligence officials. A private company started by retired Gen. Keith Alexander, who once led the National Security Agency, signed a contract in 2018 with the Prince Mohammed bin Salman College of Cyber Security, Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies. The country's leader — and the school's namesake — has been accused of using spyware against critics, journalists and others. Brian Bartlett, a spokesman for Alexander, said the contract has expired and was "focused on the development of the college's educational efforts and its cybersecurity curriculum."

The CIA sent a letter to former employees earlier this year warning of a "detrimental trend" of foreign governments hiring former intelligence officers "to build up their spying capabilities," according to a copy of the letter obtained by the AP and first reported by the New York Times.

"We ask that you protect yourself and the CIA by safeguarding the classified tradecraft that underpins your enterprise," wrote Sheetal Patel, the agency's assistant director for counterintelligence.



US lawmakers too, are taking notice. Congress is advancing legislation that would put new reporting requirements on former U.S. intelligence officers working overseas.

Congressman Tom Malinowski, a Democrat from New Jersey, said it was “absurd” that Qatar and the UAE had former U.S. officials working the front lines of their information war and said it’s part of a broader problem about how influential those wealthy countries are in U.S. politics and policymaking.

“There’s so much Gulf money flowing through Washington D.C.,” he said. “The amount of temptation there is immense, and it invariably entangles Americans in stuff we should not be entangled.”

Graham Dunbar contributed reporting from Geneva. Nomaan Merchant contributed from Washington.

[Click here](#) for the statements provided by representatives of Kevin Chalker in response to questions submitted by The Associated Press for this article.

## The Santa experience this year is a mix of laps, distancing

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Santa is back this year, but he pleads caution as he continues to tiptoe through the pandemic.

“Be smart. Be caring. If you have the tiniest tickle in your throat, the tiniest feeling, worry about yourself and worry about everybody else, and know Santa will always be there next year,” said 57-year-old Kevin Chesney, who’s been donning the big red suit since he was a kid.

Amid a downturn in Jolly Old Elves — about 15 percent fewer in one large database — Chesney is busier than ever from his North Pole in Moorestown, New Jersey. The photo studio where he works quickly sold out its 4,500 appointments to sit with him and the seven other Santas in the studio’s stable.

They’re among the brave in Santa’s ranks with full-contact visits, lap sitting included, though Chesney wears a mask until just before the photos are taken.

Other Santas might not be wearing masks or plastic face shields, or hanging out in protective snow globes like many did last year, but it seems 50-50 this season that they’re not quite ready for hugs, whispers in their ears for secret wishes, and kids smiling or sobbing on their knees.

Some Santas will remain behind barriers that popped up last year for safety. At Minnesota’s Mall of America, the big man will be housed in a log cabin behind a window with guests seated on benches in front of him. At 169 locations for the outdoor retailers Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s, benches will also be used, with plastic partitions deployed at some stores for Santa’s photo ops.

Other retailers and Santa hosts are offering the option of no or full contact, even when mandates to distance aren’t in place. And many require or encourage reservations online to cut down on the number of people waiting.

More than 10 million U.S. households visited Santa in a mall or store in 2019, according to GlobalData Retail’s managing director, Neil Saunders. Nearly 73% of them also spent money at nearby restaurants or stores, he said. Last year, the company’s research found that 6.1 million households visited Santa, with fewer retailers and malls offering the holiday star in person. Of those visitors, 62% ate or shopped nearby.

Saunders said projections this year have about 8.9 million households expected to visit Santa in person, with virtual visits still a big option.

“Lingering concerns about the virus and ongoing restrictions in some states and localities continue to act as a brake on visiting Santa in person,” he said.

Chris Landtroop, a spokeswoman for Santa vendor Cherry Hill Programs, is optimistic. The new rollout of vaccinations for children 5 to 11 will certainly help.

“Santa is so back and we are super excited about that. Last year was incredibly tough,” Landtroop said.

The company has been sourcing Santas all year for the 800 malls, big-box stores and other locations it serves, with options for no-contact visits, too. Cherry Hill requires its Santas and other employees to be vaccinated and those with exemptions to be tested regularly.

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"At the end of the day, we want guests to feel comfortable," Landtroop said.

Luther Landon has been providing the Santa Experience at Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, for nearly two decades. Last year, he hit on the log cabin idea but was shut down after a day due to the pandemic. He pivoted to virtual Santa and this year will offer both.

"We think that it would be very irresponsible of us to just ignore it and pretend like everything's back to normal," he said of the pandemic. "We've hidden some microphones so Santa can hear just fine. I know from our Santa community and knowing so many other Santas that the majority of them are reluctant, highly reluctant, to go back to the way it was before the pandemic. But we also have some who are just like, you know what, I don't care. Having both of those groups is what's happening in the country, too."

Russell Hurd in Royse City, Texas, has been playing Santa since 2017, after he retired from the Army. He'll be in his red suit to go with his long — and very real — white beard at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center near Dallas. His visits with the throngs are distanced and masks are required. He longs for that to end.

"The way it used to be, it's meaningful for us Santas, too. I mean, we're human beings. We crave that interaction, but for now we do what we can," Hurd said.

Hurd is unvaccinated and tests regularly for COVID.

"I know a lot of unvaxxed Santas across the country. I mean, it's not just Texas," he said.

Count American Dream, a mega mall of 3 million square feet in East Rutherford, New Jersey, among retailers offering distanced Santa. He'll be on ice, skating the indoor rink with visitors, and also tooling around with guests in hot pink golf carts.

At Macy's stores, Santa will be making his list and checking it twice from behind a desk, with guests seated on the other side.

"We're encouraging everyone to maintain masking throughout their visits," said Kathleen Wright, senior manager at Macy's Branded Entertainment. "Santa has been a part of the Macy's tradition since 1862 so we're overjoyed that we can safely continue the tradition this year."

At Oakbrook Center, a mall in suburban Chicago owned by Brookfield Properties, Santa's spot is a tricked-out motorhome with his fans allowed inside. Santa will be happening at 117 of 132 malls Brookfield owns in 43 states. The company is following local mandates on safety protocols but will distance anyone who asks. The same goes for CBL Properties, which owns 63 malls in 24 states and offered Santa visits from a safe distance last year.

"We're bringing back a more traditional Santa experience this year," said CBL spokeswoman Stacey Keating. "Visitors who wish to do so will be able to sit on Santa's lap or on Santa's bench. Masks will not be required at the set or during photos unless there's a local mandate in place."

And, bonus: "We're also bringing back pet photo nights with Santa," she said, "as well as Santa Cares, a reservation-only event that caters to those with sensory sensitivities and for whom the traditional experience may be too overwhelming."

The pandemic has taken its toll on Santa in other ways.

Stephen Arnold, the 71-year-old head of IBRBS (formerly the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas) said his organization of about 2,000 Santas and Mrs. Clauses has lost 57 Santas to COVID.

"Most of us are overweight, diabetic, with heart conditions," said Arnold, a long-time Santa working this year both virtually and in person in Memphis, Tennessee. "I mean, we're prime targets for a disease like COVID."

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Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

## Immigrant parents complain of language barriers in schools

By CLAUDIA LAUER and VANESSA A. ALVAREZ Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Philadelphia parents who don't speak English say they've long been excluded from parts of their children's education because of language barriers, an issue that's only been exacerbated by

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the pandemic and the return to in-person learning.

Parents told The Associated Press stories of students being used as translators despite federal prohibitions, incorrect telephone translations or poor communication when their children were being bullied. Philadelphia is not alone, experts said, noting many school districts have lagged in creating systems that treat non-English speakers equally, rather than responding to complaints.

Philadelphia school district officials said the district has made a lot of progress in recent years, including sending communication in parents' languages and hiring dozens of additional in-school interpreters called bilingual cultural assistants, or BCAs. They said the district has policies against using children as translators and robust guidance on how to request language help.

Still, problems persist.

Mandy, who asked the AP not to use her last name, has a 10-year-old son with special needs. She struggled with whether to return him to in-person schooling, but ultimately decided the virtual option didn't offer enough support for parents who don't speak English.

Mandy said her biggest struggle with language access has been during special education meetings at her son's previous school. Even though things have improved since she transferred him to another school in 2020, she still spends hours translating documents into Mandarin because the district provides very few fully translated documents.

During one meeting, a telephone translator said she didn't know anything about special education and refused to translate, so Mandy started bringing a bilingual friend as a backup. Another time, a translator told Mandy the district was going to teach her son to "eat meat," which her friend quickly corrected, explaining the specialist was talking instead about goals for feeding therapy.

"It sounds like a comical incident, but it was really frustrating," Mandy said in Mandarin through a translator. "It feels like immigrant parents are deliberately excluded and pushed to the margins."

Jenna Monley, deputy chief of the district's Office of Family and Community Engagement, said the office has issued guidance to school and district staff to transition to in-person interpreters for individualized education plan meetings when possible.

"I think that you are always going to find pockets of success. But there are some areas where things need to grow and improve," Monley said.

The Philadelphia school district saw an increase of nearly 40% to more than 16,500 English learners in 2020 from around 12,000 in 2013, and census numbers show nearly a quarter of people in Philadelphia older than 5 speak a language other than English at home.

A U.S. Department of Education report from last year showed the number of English learners increased nationally by about 28% between the 2000-01 school year and the 2016-17 school year. The report showed 43 states had increases in English learners.

Nationally, the census showed the number of people who speak languages other than English at home increased by more than 8 million over the last decade, to almost 22% from about 20.6%.

Juntos, a Latinx immigrant advocacy group in South Philadelphia, did a phone survey of families around March 2020 asking about their concerns related to the pandemic. Executive Director Erika Guadalupe Núñez said that, after basic needs, 99% listed schooling as their next concern, including how to get a school laptop or how to communicate with teachers who only spoke English.

"It was food, shelter, health — the key things they needed to feel safe and whole, and the very next thing was education," said Guadalupe Núñez.

She added that Juntos members have long talked about their children being pulled from class by teachers or principals to help translate at schools, which is against school policy and against federal rules.

"It's frustrating for so many reasons. We just want kids to be kids. And we want them to stay in class and have the same opportunities to learn that English-speaking children have," Guadalupe Núñez said.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which receives dozens of parental language complaints each year, issued guidance in 2015 on the legal obligation to communicate with parents in languages they understand, saying neither students nor untrained bilingual staff should translate. It also says translators should know any specialized terms or concepts in both languages.

The federal guidelines don't specifically mandate how districts must parental language needs or how

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many staff members need to be hired. They require clear policies on how to obtain language help and on how to count and track the needs of parents, informing parents in their own language about that process, and providing written and oral communication in parents' language about their children's education.

Federal complaints from parents are largely redacted to protect student privacy. But some of the complaints over the past decade from other districts included parents objecting that information on joining groups like local PTAs excluded non-English-speaking parents, along with requests that information be provided, in languages they understand, about the assessment tools for their children's English proficiency or math skills.

Monley said the Philadelphia district meets those guidelines. She said it provides school and district staff with guidance on when and how to use BCAs or the other contracted translation options. Annual refresher trainings are required only for "key staff," which doesn't include most teachers.

Philadelphia City Councilmember Helen Gym, who has spent years advocating for education and immigration issues, said she wants interpreters in every school every day, as well as more multilingual staff including counselors and nurses, saying there are still parents being left out.

"We have a long way to go to enforce the language access mandates that are clearly in the legal books and were in fact the source of many different lawsuits and consent decrees," she said.

Gym said immigrant families often seem like an afterthought.

"This was a city a decade ago that was on the brink of walking away from its public schools. And that would have been devastating for immigrant communities," she said, referring to deep budget cuts around 2011 after changes to the state's education funding formula.

She said the district closed nearly 30 schools and barely escaped financial crisis, but the number of BCAs — which are the district's main resource for parents who speak languages other than English — was cut in half.

BCAs were created during the implementation of a settlement in a lawsuit filed by Asian American students in the 1980s demanding better resources for Asian English learners who had been largely left out. Gym, who served on the commission appointed to implement the settlement, said the changes benefited all immigrant communities.

But BCAs are still the only designated bilingual staff in school buildings, Gym said, and they often serve as cultural brokers connecting parents with important resources outside of school. Yet they're paid a starting salary of about \$24,000, she said.

Philadelphia has implemented the required components of the federal guidelines. And while parents say they are grateful for BCAs that often serve as a lifeline, there aren't enough of them to meet the growing need for language help. The lawsuit settlement did not create a formula to limit how many parents each BCA can handle or trigger hiring as the population grows.

Monley said the district has 101 BCAs after hiring about 45 over the last few school years. She said they serve in 108 schools with the greatest needs for language help out of about 220 total schools. Many BCAs float between multiple schools every week.

Even with the hiring, the district has close to the same number of BCAs it had a decade ago for thousands more students and families, Gym said.

Olivia Ponce said she was frustrated by a language barrier when both her children, who are nearly a decade apart in age, were in school. The 46-year-old single mother recalled trying to talk to a school counselor when her daughter, Olivia Vazquez, was hit by another student.

An interpreter was only available once a week, so the counselor pulled a student out of class to translate. Ponce said the student wasn't translating accurately, and she became so frustrated she shouted, then kept her daughter home for a week.

Another time, Ponce rushed to her son's school when another mother saw him in the principal's office crying. A student had bitten him, and the teacher had planned to send a note home in English rather than calling Ponce.

"I didn't know we had rights and that they couldn't take students out of class to help translate for us.

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And that they were obligated to get someone on the line to help us. They never told us this," Ponce said in Spanish. "What I want is for parents to know that when their children start an education, they have a right to be a part of it."

Vazquez, now 27, is finishing up her last semester at Swarthmore College and hoping to help make sure immigrant students arriving in Philadelphia have a more supportive experience in school. She student-teaches in South Philadelphia in a fourth grade classroom — about the same age she was when she came to the U.S. from Mexico.

"(Education is) something that I want to do because of my experience and because I needed someone who looked like me and somebody who would tell me that it was OK and make me feel proud of my roots," Vazquez said.

Experts said that many districts, not just in urban areas, have seen increases in students and parents who speak languages other than English, and that many are not doing a great job of increasing needed resources for those parents. Dominic J. Ledesma, an educational justice researcher, said many districts try to provide what's necessary under the law without thinking about making schools an inclusive place for immigrant families.

"Legal compliance and civil rights compliance are just as important as the equity issues at stake. Those issues are really pervasive and systemic in nature and not limited to Philadelphia. It's everywhere," said Ledesma.

BCAs or their equivalent in other districts are important positions, Ledesma said, because studies show parents who speak other languages are not as likely to know how to assert themselves, or to seek out information.

"These positions are used as a Band-aid over a flat tire, if you will, to be able to do everything," Ledesma said. "And the administration rarely understands what they do or how much they do. But for an equitable system, there should be more than one person responsible for all of those functions in a district."

With the language barrier, many parents said they had to work harder than English-speaking parents to be involved.

Lucia Altamirano remembered having to find someone who spoke English to come to school with her when her oldest son was being bullied.

"They called me from the school, but they asked for someone who spoke English because they needed to tell me something. And so, I found someone, and we went, and she told me that Alexis had fallen down the stairs," Altamirano said in Spanish. "They didn't tell me he had been thrown down the stairs, but that he had fallen down the stairs."

Her son, who was 8 at the time, had tried to report the bullying, but Altamirano said the teacher told her there were too many students and "she couldn't take care of them all."

She transferred her son to a different school, where the bullying stopped. But the language issues continued because there was no dedicated interpreter and the school used an eighth grade girl to translate, Altamirano said.

She said her two younger children were fluent in English and had an easier time. The district also made improvements that made things easier for her, like assigning a BCA who spoke Spanish to the school and sending report cards home in Spanish, she said.

Monley and other district staff said they couldn't comment on individual allegations, partly because many of the parents had not filed official complaints through their office.

Many of the parents said the school-level officials they complained to did not make them aware there was an official process.

Meanwhile, Gym has been holding meetings in the community with other councilmembers, asking what parents want to see improve as the district searches for a new superintendent. She advocated for a full review of whether the district is in compliance with civil rights requirements for language and if needed, more litigation to push it into compliance.

"I don't believe anyone can be at the forefront by meeting the bare minimum standards," she said. "And

I don't think the school district is meeting that bare minimum for these parents."

## **Bus crashes, catches fire in Bulgaria; at least 45 dead**

By VESELIN TOSHKOV and STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — A bus carrying tourists back to North Macedonia crashed and caught fire in western Bulgaria early Tuesday, killing at least 45 people, including a dozen children, authorities said. DNA tests were being carried out to identify the victims.

The bus apparently ripped through a guardrail on a highway, though authorities said the cause was still under investigation. Photos taken shortly after the crash showed the vehicle engulfed in flames as plumes of thick, black smoke rose. Daylight revealed a burned-out shell with all of its windows blown out, sitting in the median. A portion of the guardrail was lying in the road.

Seven survivors were hospitalized after the crash, which took place as a group of buses was returning from a trip to Turkey. Twelve children were among the dead, according to the North Macedonia chief prosecutor, Ljubomir Joveski.

Bulgarian Interior Minister Boyko Rashkov told reporters at the crash site that he had "never in my life seen something more horrifying" and that the identification process would take time.

"The people who were on the bus are turned to charcoal," Rashkov said. "There were four buses that traveled together, and it is possible that passengers changed buses during the stops."

Borislav Sarafov, chief of Bulgaria's national investigation service, confirmed that 52 people were on the bus that crashed.

Among the survivors were five North Macedonia citizens, one Serb and one Belgian, according to North Macedonia's Foreign Ministry. Albanian Foreign Minister Olta Xhaka said almost all of the dead were ethnic Albanians, but it was not clear if they were also citizens of North Macedonia.

Blagoj Bocvarski, North Macedonia's transport minister, told reporters in the capital of Skopje late Tuesday that officials have started a procedure to revoke the transportation license of the travel company that owns the bus. He said the company has four buses licensed to carry passengers internationally, but for the bus involved in the accident "there was no record in the ministry that it possessed the license."

News of the crash hit hard in the small Balkan country of 2 million people. The North Macedonia government observed a minute of silence Tuesday and declared three days of mourning. Flags will be lowered to half-staff, and all public events will be canceled. The country's prime minister traveled to Bulgaria, as did its chief prosecutor, who visited the crash site.

Azem Sadiki, mayor of Studenicani municipality near Skopje told reporters that 20 of the crash victims were local residents. He said the dead included a mother and her four children as well as the woman's sister and her two children.

"We are very sad. This is a huge loss for us all, and the whole country," Sadiki said.

Outside the government building in Skopje, Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani told The Associated Press that authorities are "trying their best to identify the victims as soon as possible."

"The identification of the victims has started," he said. "The autopsy and also the DNA identification, because for some of the victims that is the only way they can be identified."

Osmani added: "Two things are important for us now, first the identification to finish as soon as possible, and second, to find the cause of the accident."

The country's prime minister, Zoran Zaev, who visited survivors in the hospital, told Bulgarian television channel bTV that one said he was awoken by an explosion.

In Skopje earlier, relatives gathered outside the travel company believed to have organized the trip but the office appeared closed.

"Now we are waiting for bad news," a distraught Bekim Aliti told reporters outside the building. He said his wife and his brother's wife were on the trip.

Eldin Shiroki said his cousin was a tour guide for the company. "We still don't have any accurate information — so we are waiting," he said.

In 2019, Bulgaria had the second-highest road fatality rate in the 27-nation European Union, with 89 people killed per million, according to European Commission data.

"Let's hope we learn lessons from this tragic incident, and we can prevent such incidents in the future," said Bulgarian caretaker Prime Minister Stefan Yanev.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed her condolences to the families and friends of those who died and said "in these terrible times, Europe stands in solidarity with you."

In response to the deadly crash, the Bulgarian government declared Wednesday a national day of mourning for the bus victims. The occasion will also mark the deaths of nine people who died in a nursing home fire Monday in the eastern Bulgarian village of Royak.

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of the North Macedonia chief prosecutor's last name. It is Joveski, not Jovevski.

McGrath reported from Bucharest, Romania. Konstantin Testorides in Skopje, North Macedonia, contributed.

## **EXPLAINER: The Missouri law that led to Strickland decision**

By MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

LIBERTY, Mo. (AP) — A judge's decision on Tuesday to release longtime inmate Kevin Strickland, of Kansas City, was made possible by a new Missouri law intended to free people who were imprisoned for crimes they didn't commit.

Strickland, 62, was convicted in 1979 of a triple murder in Kansas City. He always maintained that he wasn't at the crime scene, and Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker announced in May that her office's review of case convinced her that Strickland was telling the truth.

After the Missouri Supreme Court in June declined to hear Strickland's petition for release, Peters Baker used the new state law to seek an evidentiary hearing, which was held in early November. Judge James Welsh ruled Tuesday that Strickland had been wrongfully convicted and ordered him released.

### **WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?**

The law, which was a provision of a larger crime bill, gives prosecutors the authority to seek a hearing if they have new evidence that the convicted person might have been wrongfully convicted.

The hearings are held in the county where the inmate was convicted and the decision whether to release the inmate is up to the judge.

### **WHAT PROMPTED THE LAW?**

The case of Lamar Johnson, a longtime inmate in St. Louis, prompted lawmakers to pass the new law. Johnson has spent 26 years behind bars for a murder he says he didn't commit.

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner sought a new trial for Johnson, saying she had a duty to correct past wrongs, including what she believes was Johnson's wrongful conviction. But the state Supreme Court in March refused to grant Johnson a new trial after Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt argued that Gardner didn't have the authority to seek a new trial so many years after the case was decided.

The court said its ruling wasn't about whether Johnson was innocent, but was intended to address only whether prosecutors could appeal the dismissal of a motion for a new trial years after an inmate was convicted.

State Sen. John Rizzo, a Democrat from Kansas City, said that ruling pushed him and other lawmakers to write the law with input from prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement officers and representatives from groups that work to free prisoners.

Rizzo said supporters of the law were concerned that the state had no mechanism for prosecutors to help an inmate even when evidence showed the person was innocent.

"The common theme for everyone was that ethically we have an obligation, if we know someone is in jail and they shouldn't be, to remedy that situation," Rizzo said.

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Rizzo said Lamar Johnson's attorneys are closely following the proceedings and will decide whether to proceed with an evidentiary hearing after Strickland's case is decided.

Rizzo stressed that the new law sets a high bar for evidence that is necessary before a prisoner can be released. He said the law includes safeguards to prevent prosecutors from using it to pick "winners and losers."

**DID THE NEW LAW WORK AS PLANNED DURING ITS FIRST CASE?**

Peters Baker became the first prosecutor to use the law when she filed a motion on Aug. 28 — the day the law took effect — seeking a hearing for Strickland. The hearing was quickly scheduled for Sept. 2, with a second hearing scheduled for the next day, prompting many to believe Strickland was about to be released.

Schmitt, a Republican running for Senate who has said he thinks Strickland is guilty, successfully filed an emergency motion to stop the hearing, arguing that his office didn't have time to prepare. He filed subsequent motions seeking to intervene in the case, including one that argued all judges in the 16th Circuit Court, which includes Jackson County, should be recused from the case because of a perceived bias in Strickland's favor.

The Missouri Court of Appeals and the state Supreme Court ruled in Schmitt's favor.

Rizzo said proponents of the law intended for prosecutors to be in "the driver's seat" during the hearings and for the attorney general's office to be only "an active observer," that was allowed to petition if it felt the law was being abused or if it had its own evidence to bring forward.

Rizzo said the Missouri Court of Appeals ruling "created law out of thin air" and gave the attorney general "way more responsibility" in the process than ever intended.

Chris Nuelle, a spokesman for Schmitt, declined to answer questions about the attorney general's interpretation of the new law.

## **Musician Jon Batiste leads Grammy Award nominations with 11**

By JONATHAN LANDRUM JR. AP Entertainment Writer

Jon Batiste might be the Grammys biggest surprise: The multi-genre performer and recent Oscar winner made such an impression on voters that he scored the most nominations with 11 on Tuesday.

Batiste earned an album of the year nod for "We Are" along with record of the year with "Freedom," a feel-good ode to the city of New Orleans. His nominations span several genres including R&B, jazz, American roots music, classical and music video.

"Oh my goodness. I'm still in a state of astonishment and shock," Batiste told The Associated Press moments after learning of the nominations. "I'm just really happy that we were able to make something in complete artistic integrity and have it be recognized."

Justin Bieber, Doja Cat and H.E.R. each came away with the second-most nominations with eight by the time the Recording Academy was done announcing its nominees for its Jan. 31 show. Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo both had seven nods.

Along with Batiste's surprise domination, another shock was The Weeknd nabbing three nominations after the pop star claimed he would not allow his label to submit his music. Earlier this year, he angrily slammed the Grammys, calling them "corrupt" after he received zero nominations despite 2020's biggest single, "Blinding Lights."

Even though The Weeknd said he would boycott future Grammys, he still became a nominee for his work on album of the year projects, including Doja Cat's deluxe edition "Planet Her" and Kanye West's "Donda." His third nomination was for his appearance on West's single "Hurricane," which also features Lil Baby.

"What I like is the fact that no one is thinking about what happened before, what was the controversy, what was the noise, or where was this artist making music last year," said Harvey Mason jr., the Recording Academy's CEO. He said voters focused on the "excellence of music" while considering nominees like Batiste and Kacey Musgraves, whose work also crosses over into different categories.

"The voters are truly evaluating music and not getting caught up in the reputations of any other outside



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noise or any history of artists," he continued. "With that in mind, I think they're voting for things that they are acknowledging as excellence."

Mason said he was pleased with the new peer-driven voting system after seeing the list of nominees. He instituted the 10-3 initiative — which allows the academy's more than 11,000 members to vote for up to 10 categories in three genres. All voters can vote for the top four awards.

The new system replaced the anonymous nominations review committee — a group that determined the contenders for key awards. Some claimed committee members favored projects based on personal relationships and promoted projects they favored and worked on.

Harvey knows the new voting system might not be perfect at first, but he believes the initiative will produce fair results in the long run.

"I know we didn't get every single one perfect," Harvey said. "I know there will be some people that feel left out or that we missed a nomination here or there. That makes me sad because I don't want anybody to have that feeling. But I do feel like we're heading in the right direction. I'm pleased with the way our voters did the work."

Batiste credited the changes to his nominations: "I really just want to give props to the Grammys. They tried this year to make the process more inclusive and be about the music first. Other creators listened to the music and decided to give me these nominations and I'm so grateful for that."

For the first time, the academy expanded the number of nominees in the general field categories from eight to 10. The change impacts categories such as record, album, song of the year and best new artist.

Harvey said the academy increased slots in the general field categories after seeing an uptick voting participation over the past year along with the acceptance of new membership invitations and a high number of more than 21,730 entries submitted for Grammy consideration.

"We thought the timing was right," he said. "We saw an opportunity to do what the academy does — which is to highlight music, highlight the industry and highlight excellence in a bigger way. With the change in our voting structure, we don't have the nomination review committee. This gives our voters an opportunity to have their voice heard, but also gives them a chance to have a bigger pool to draw from when it comes time to that one winner that takes home the Grammy."

Other album of the year nominees include: Bieber's "Justice (Triple Chucks Deluxe)," Eilish's "Happier Than Ever," West's "Donda," Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga's "Love for Sale," Olivia Rodrigo's "Sour," Taylor Swift's "evermore" and Lil Nas X's "MONTERO."

Batiste, the bandleader of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," picked up a bid in the best score soundtrack for visual media category for his work on Pixar's "Soul," which won him an Oscar for best score earlier this year. Coming into Tuesday, he had three Grammy nominations but no wins yet.

Batiste will compete for record of the year against a bevy of candidates including Bennett & Gaga's "I Get a Kick Out of You," ABBA's "I Still Have Faith in You," Bieber's "Peaches" featuring Daniel Caesar and Giveon, Brandi Carlile's "Right on Time," Doja Cat's "Kiss Me More" with SZA, Lil Nas X's "MONTERO (Call Me by Your Name)," Rodrigo's "drivers license," Eilish's "Happier Than Ever" and "Leave The Door Open" by Silk Sonic — the super duo of Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak.

Jay-Z, who was nominated for three Grammys on Tuesday, now has the most nominations of all time with 83. The 23-time Grammy-winning rapper moved past Quincy Jones, who has been nominated 80 times.

AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton contributed to this report.

## UN nuclear watchdog chief presses for more access in Iran

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The head of the United Nations' atomic watchdog met Tuesday with Iranian officials to press for greater access in the Islamic Republic ahead of diplomatic talks restarting over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency yet again faces tightrope-style talks

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with Iranian officials as his inspectors remain unable to access surveillance footage and face greater challenges in trying to monitor Tehran's rapidly growing uranium stockpile. In the wake of then-President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal from Iran's deal, the Islamic Republic now enriches small amounts of uranium up to 60% purity — its highest ever and close to weapons-grade levels of 90%.

While Iran maintains its program is peaceful, regional rival Israel has repeatedly warned it won't allow Tehran to build a nuclear weapon and is suspected of launching attacks targeting its program as part of a wider regional shadow war playing across the Mideast in recent years. The U.S. under President Joe Biden, meanwhile, has said it's willing to return to the deal, but has warned time is running out.

All this raises the risk of a wider confrontation with Iran, which has taken a harder tack ahead of the talks under new President Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Writing on Twitter on Monday, Grossi said he hoped to "address outstanding questions" with Iranian officials.

"I hope to establish a fruitful and cooperative channel of direct dialogue so the (IAEA) can resume essential verification activities in the country," Grossi wrote.

On Tuesday, Grossi went to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the country's civilian nuclear agency, for his third-such visit since February. He spoke with Mohammad Eslami, the new head of the organization. The U.N. in 2008 sanctioned Eslami for "being engaged in, directly associated with or providing support for Iran's proliferation sensitive nuclear activities or for the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems."

After their talk, Eslami gave a news conference in which he described the ongoing issues as "technical" and not governed by the "political issues and conspiracies" of Iran's enemies.

"Some parts are yet to be answered and some parts have to do with issues that have already been closed in the past," he said. "They have been addressed in the nuclear deal and have been closed. Today, we agreed to put an end to them."

Eslami did not elaborate.

Grossi for his part described the talks as "intense" and was not as definitive as Eslami.

"We are continuing at this point our negotiations with a view to finding common ground," Grossi said.

He later met Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, who said Iran was determined for "constructive engagement" with the IAEA to "improve mutual trust and cooperation," according to a report by the state-run IRNA news agency.

Under a confidential agreement called an "Additional Protocol" with Iran, the IAEA collects and analyzes images from a series of surveillance cameras installed at Iranian nuclear sites. Those cameras helped it monitor Tehran's program to see if it is complying with the nuclear deal.

Iran's hard-line parliament in December 2020 approved a bill that would suspend part of U.N. inspections of its nuclear facilities if European signatories did not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions by February. Since February, the IAEA has been unable to access imagery from those cameras.

Under the deal, the IAEA also placed around 2,000 tamper-proof seals on nuclear material and equipment. Those seals communicated electronically to inspectors. Automated measuring devices also provided real-time data from the program. Inspectors as well haven't been able to access that data, making the task of monitoring Iran's enriched uranium stockpile that much more difficult.

The agency also has sought monitoring of activities at a centrifuge parts production site near northern city of Karaj. The IAEA has had no access there since June after Iran said a sabotage attack by Israel considerably damaged the facility and an IAEA camera there.

In a separate report to IAEA member states earlier this month, the agency said Grossi also was concerned about inspectors "being subjected to excessively invasive physical searches by security officials at nuclear facilities in Iran."

Tuesday's meeting comes ahead of a wider meeting of the IAEA member states. Iran avoided facing a censure vote at the board with a similar Grossi visit in September.

Meanwhile in Israel, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett described Iran's nuclear program as being in a "very advanced stage," without providing details. Ahead of the resumption of nuclear talks between global powers and Iran, Bennett said he expects "disagreement with our greatest of friends."

"Either way, even with the return to an agreement, Israel is of course not part of the agreement. Israel is not bound by it," he told a security conference in Herzliya. "We will maintain our freedom to act."

Associated Press writer Tia Goldenberg in Tel Aviv, Israel, contributed to this report. Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

## **NBA in the 60s: Embry details indignities, little support**

By WAYNE EMBRY For The Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — (EDITOR'S NOTE: Hall of Famer Wayne Embry, a five-time NBA All-Star and the first African American general manager in sports when the Milwaukee Bucks named him to that position in 1972, shares some of his experiences of playing in the league during the 1960s. The demand for Civil Rights and the Vietnam War were among the issues dividing the country and the foundation was being formed in the NBA that league and players stand on today.)

The Sixties were a turbulent time in our country — and in the NBA — as the battle for Civil Rights raged.

That battle reached my hotel room in Philadelphia in the spring of 1965, when my wife Terri called from Cincinnati to tell me she and Oscar Robertson's wife Yvonne were going to join Dr. Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery.

"Are you crazy?" I asked. This was less than two weeks after Bloody Sunday, when Alabama state troopers on horseback attacked the nonviolent marchers with tear gas, clubs and dogs after they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.

Of course, I admired their courage and sympathized with the cause. But league executives made it clear they didn't want us to get involved and insecurity about our jobs kept us sidelined — and glued to the television.

What a wonder 55 years later to watch with pride as NBA players not only participated in but led marches in the protests that erupted after the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. The Milwaukee Bucks, upset over the shooting of African-American Jacob Blake by a white police officer in nearby Kenosha, Wisconsin, were ready to boycott a first-round playoff game and with five other teams ready to join the boycott, the league postponed all the games in support.

But things were so different in the NBA in the 1960s. The league was so insignificant that my aspiration was to play for the Harlem Globetrotters — or go to business school. I wasn't sure there was a place for me in the NBA. If not for Joe Lapchick, the first coach of the New York Knicks. He pulled me aside at a college All-Star game, gave me insight about the league and told me I could have a bright future in the NBA.

In 1958, I was drafted by the St. Louis Hawks, who had no Black players, and was almost immediately traded to the Cincinnati Royals, who had one — Si Green. And he was traded on opening night, leaving me as the only Black until Oscar arrived two years later. My first contract was for \$6,300 a year — not guaranteed — which I signed without hesitation.

There were rumors of a quota system in the league — and I can tell you the rumors were true. Veteran Earl Lloyd, the first African American to play a game in the league, once told me to always play my best so my team couldn't cut me.

The league consisted of eight teams, with 10 players each. We often drove to road games, three or four of us packed into the car. Back then, there still were hotels who wouldn't house Black players or restaurants that wouldn't serve us. Often, when playing in Boston, we would eat at Bill Russell's house. In other cities, we'd have dinner at the homes of other Black players, or get recommendations where we could eat.

After the initial efforts of Lapchick to integrate what would become the NBA were thwarted in 1947, progress was being made in the 1960s.

The Celtics started five black players, and Russell became the first Black coach in the league. My Royals were providing a beautiful illustration of race relations every day when the white Jack Twyman and his family became the primary caregivers for Black teammate Maurice Stokes, a powerful player cut down by a traumatic brain injury suffered in a fall during a game. He emerged from a coma paralyzed and unable to speak. Twyman and Stokes were an inseparable example of love and friendship.

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We had all learned things from the nonviolent movement going on around us, and we put them to good use before the 1964 All-Star Game in Boston – the first to be nationally televised. At a players' only meeting called by Boston's Tommy Heinsohn, we voted not to play the game unless the owners recognized our newly formed union.

After some tense moments as tipoff approached, the owners finally agreed. Our bold move established a path for the future that benefited players and owners.

Progress was being made in the country, too, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. We thought that might help ease the pain in the wake of the assassination of President John Kennedy in 1963, but not even five years later King was assassinated, as was Kennedy's brother Robert, the former attorney general who was running for president in 1968.

By then, I was playing for the Celtics, who were en route to the 1968 NBA championship. After King's assassination in April, riots broke out again. As players, we were inclined not to play out of respect for Dr. King. But word came down from the league office that the mayors of Boston and Philadelphia (our opponent in the Eastern Division Finals) were pleading for us to play in an effort to keep people home and off the streets. So we played that game and postponed the next one, resuming the playoffs after Dr. King's funeral.

After winning the NBA title in 1968, I was selected by Milwaukee in the expansion draft, played one season and retired. My salary that season went to \$40,000 – almost seven times more than my first season. There had been so many changes in the league and out, on the court and off, progress and setbacks. The next decade would bring new challenges – and new celebrations – for me, the league and the country.

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Wayne Embry was the NBA Executive of the Year in 1992 and 1998. The 6-foot-8 forward/center was named to the Hall of Fame in 1999. Since 2004, the 84-year-old Embry has been the Senior Basketball Adviser for the Toronto Raptors.

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More on the NBA At 75: <https://apnews.com/hub/nba-at-75>

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## German soldiers face vaccine mandate as COVID cases rise

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The German military is making coronavirus shots compulsory for troops amid a growing debate in the country about whether to introduce a general vaccine mandate to counter rising infection and hospitalization rates.

The Defense Ministry on Tuesday confirmed a report in the German military blog Augen Geradeaus that officials and soldiers' representatives agreed late Monday to add the coronavirus shot to the list of vaccines soldiers must get. The measure still needs to be formally added to military regulations, the ministry said in a statement.

There were 1,215 reported active coronavirus cases as of Monday within the military and the ministry's civilian staff. Two soldiers have died of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

The nationwide tally of newly confirmed cases rose by 45,326 in the past 24 hours, the country's disease control agency said Tuesday. A further 309 deaths from COVID-19 were also reported, taking the total toll since the start of the outbreak to 99,433.

On Monday, the U.S. State Department urged Americans not to travel to Germany because of rising case numbers, and to ensure they are fully vaccinated if they do.

Some German states have tightened rules for unvaccinated people in recent days and urged people who haven't done so yet to get the shot.

But a sizeable minority has resisted calls to do so, prompting a stark warning from the country's health minister about the consequences of not getting vaccinated.

"By the end of this winter pretty much everyone in Germany (...) will have been vaccinated, recovered or died," health minister Jens Spahn said Monday.

About 68% of Germany's population of 83 million has been fully vaccinated, far below the minimum threshold of 75% that the government is aiming for.

An association representing doctors in Berlin said Tuesday that coronavirus vaccines should be made compulsory for all — a step already taken in neighboring Austria.

"The time has come for a vaccine mandate," KV Berlin said in a statement, adding that unvaccinated people should also be made to pay part of the cost of their treatment if they fall ill with COVID-19.

Some politicians in Germany, including the conservative state governors of Bavaria and Hesse, have backed the idea of compulsory vaccinations. But a spokesman for outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel made clear Monday that she will leave that thorny issue to the next federal government.

In a rare interview, Merkel's husband, Joachim Sauer, expressed surprise and upset that so many people remained opposed to the vaccine in Germany, blaming it on German "laziness" and anti-vaccine ideology that crosses all levels of education.

Speaking to Italian daily La Repubblica, the 72-year-old chemist said it was "amazing that a third of the German population doesn't pay attention to science."

Asked how that could be explained, Sauer reportedly replied: "In part by a certain laziness and complacency among the German people."

"There has probably always been this attitude among some people, but it has never been so evident as in this period," La Repubblica quoted him as saying Tuesday. "And yet it's precisely now that we're living the great success of science."

Sauer was in Turin to receive a diploma as a new member of the Academy of Sciences.

Nicole Winfield contributed to this report from Rome.

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

## WHO Europe warns of possible surge in COVID deaths ahead

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization's Europe office says projections show its 53-country region could face another 700,000 deaths in the coronavirus pandemic by next spring, topping 2 million in total.

WHO Europe, which is based in Copenhagen, Denmark, also cited growing evidence of a decline in protection against infection and mild disease through vaccines, and said a "booster dose" should be given as a priority to the most vulnerable populations — including people with weakened immune systems — as well as people over age 60 and health care workers.

The U.N. health agency's international headquarters in Geneva, however, has repeatedly called for a moratorium on the use of boosters through year-end so that doses can be made available for many developing countries that have faced a severe lack of the COVID-19 vaccines compared to the rich world.

WHO Europe called on people to get vaccinated and respect proper hygiene and practice social distancing to help stop the spread of the virus.

"Today, the COVID-19 situation across Europe and Central Asia is very serious. We face a challenging winter ahead, but we should not be without hope, because all of us — governments, health authorities, individuals — can take decisive action to stabilize the pandemic," said Dr. Kluge, the regional director for WHO Europe, in a statement.

The European region, which stretches deep into central Asia, reported that deaths due to COVID-19 rose to nearly 4,200 per day last week — a doubling of levels recorded at the end of September. Cumulative deaths have now reached 1.5 million in the region.

The three factors driving the increase are the highly transmissible delta variant of the virus, an easing of restrictive measures like requirements for mask-wearing and physical distancing in places, and large swaths of the European population that remain unvaccinated, WHO Europe said.

"We can expect that there will be high or extreme stress on hospital beds in 25 countries, and high or

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extreme stress in intensive care units (ICUs) in 49 out of 53 countries between now and 1 March 2022," a WHO Europe statement said. "Cumulative reported deaths are projected to reach over 2.2 million by spring next year, based on current trends."

It said the region could face a cumulative 2 million deaths due to the pandemic by March 1.

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## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 24, the 328th day of 2021. There are 37 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 24, 1963, Jack Ruby shot and mortally wounded Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, in a scene captured on live television.

On this date:

In 1859, British naturalist Charles Darwin published "On the Origin of Species," which explained his theory of evolution by means of natural selection.

In 1941, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Edwards v. California*, unanimously struck down a California law prohibiting people from bringing impoverished non-residents into the state.

In 1947, a group of writers, producers and directors that became known as the "Hollywood Ten" was cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to answer questions about alleged Communist influence in the movie industry. John Steinbeck's novel "The Pearl" was first published.

In 1950, the musical "Guys and Dolls," based on the writings of Damon Runyon and featuring songs by Frank Loesser (LEH'-suh), opened on Broadway.

In 1971, a hijacker calling himself "Dan Cooper" (but who became popularly known as "D.B. Cooper") parachuted from a Northwest Orient Airlines 727 over the Pacific Northwest after receiving \$200,000 in ransom; his fate remains unknown.

In 1974, the bone fragments of a 3.2 million-year-old hominid were discovered by scientists in Ethiopia; the skeletal remains were nicknamed "Lucy."

In 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on terms to scrap shorter- and medium-range missiles. (The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty was signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev the following month.)

In 1991, rock singer Freddie Mercury died in London at age 45 of AIDS-related pneumonia.

In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court stepped into the bitter, overtime struggle for the White House, agreeing to consider George W. Bush's appeal against the hand recounting of ballots in Florida.

In 2012, fire raced through a garment factory in Bangladesh that supplied major retailers in the West, killing 112 people; an official said many of the victims were trapped because the eight-story building lacked emergency exits.

In 2014, it was announced that a grand jury in St. Louis County, Missouri, had decided against indicting Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson in the death of Michael Brown; the decision enraged protesters who set fire to buildings and cars and looted businesses in the area where Brown had been fatally shot.

In 2017, militants attacked a crowded mosque in Egypt with gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades, killing more than 300 people in the deadliest-ever attack by Islamic extremists in the country.

Ten years ago: In the first NFL game featuring brothers as opposing head coaches, the Baltimore Ravens, led by John Harbaugh, beat the San Francisco 49ers, 16-6, under rookie coach Jim Harbaugh.

Five years ago: A car bomb tore through a gas station south of Baghdad, killing at least 92 people in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group. Florence Henderson, who went from Broadway star to one of America's most beloved television moms in "The Brady Bunch," died in Los Angeles at age 82.

One year ago: Pennsylvania officials certified Joe Biden as the winner of the presidential vote in the state;

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the Trump campaign had gone to court trying to prevent the certification. The Nevada Supreme Court made Biden's win in the state official. County election workers across Georgia began an official machine recount of the roughly 5 million votes cast in the presidential race in the state; certified results had shown Biden winning in Georgia by 12,670 votes. Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty to three criminal charges, formally taking responsibility for its part in the opioid epidemic. The Dow closed above 30,000 for the first time amid progress in the development of coronavirus vaccines. Beyoncé led the way with nine Grammy nominations, including bids for song and record of the year with "Black Parade."

Today's Birthdays: Basketball Hall of Famer Oscar Robertson is 83. Country singer Johnny Carver is 81. Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue (TAG'-lee-uh-boo) is 81. Rock drummer Pete Best is 80. Actor-comedian Billy Connolly is 79. Former White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater is 79. Former congressman and Motion Picture Association of America Chairman Dan Glickman is 77. Singer Lee Michaels is 76. Actor Dwight Schultz is 74. Actor Stanley Livingston is 71. Rock musician Clem Burke (Blondie; The Romantics) is 67. Actor/director Ruben Santiago-Hudson is 65. Actor Denise Crosby is 64. U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas is 62. Actor Shae D'Lyn is 59. Rock musician John Squire (The Stone Roses) is 59. Rock musician Gary Stonadge (Big Audio) is 59. Actor Conleth Hill is 57. Actor-comedian Brad Sherwood is 57. Actor Garret Dillahunt is 57. Actor-comedian Scott Krinsky is 53. Rock musician Chad Taylor (Live) is 51. Actor Lola Glaudini is 50. Actor Danielle Nicolet is 48. Actor-writer-director-producer Stephen Merchant is 47. Actor Colin Hanks is 44. Actor Katherine Heigl (HY'-guh) is 43. Actor Sarah Hyland is 31.