

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 1 of 51

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Drought Monitor](#)
- [3- Weather Pages](#)
- [7- Daily Devotional](#)
- [8- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [9- Subscription Form](#)
- [10- News from the Associated Press](#)

## UpComing Events

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

### **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)

“There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. Yet that will be the beginning.”

-Louis L'Amour

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

### **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

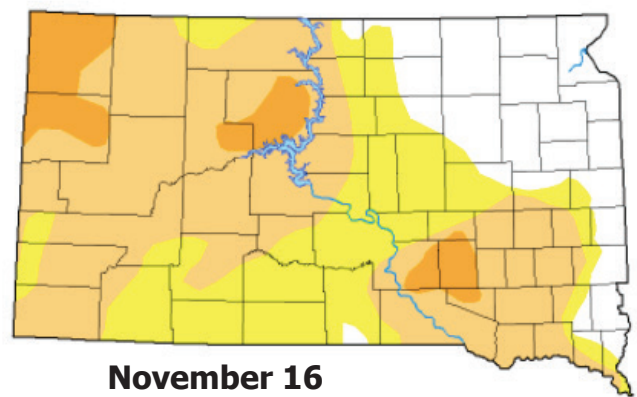
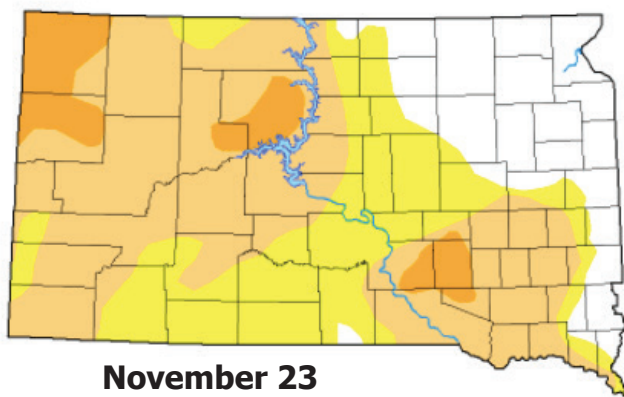
# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 2 of 51

## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



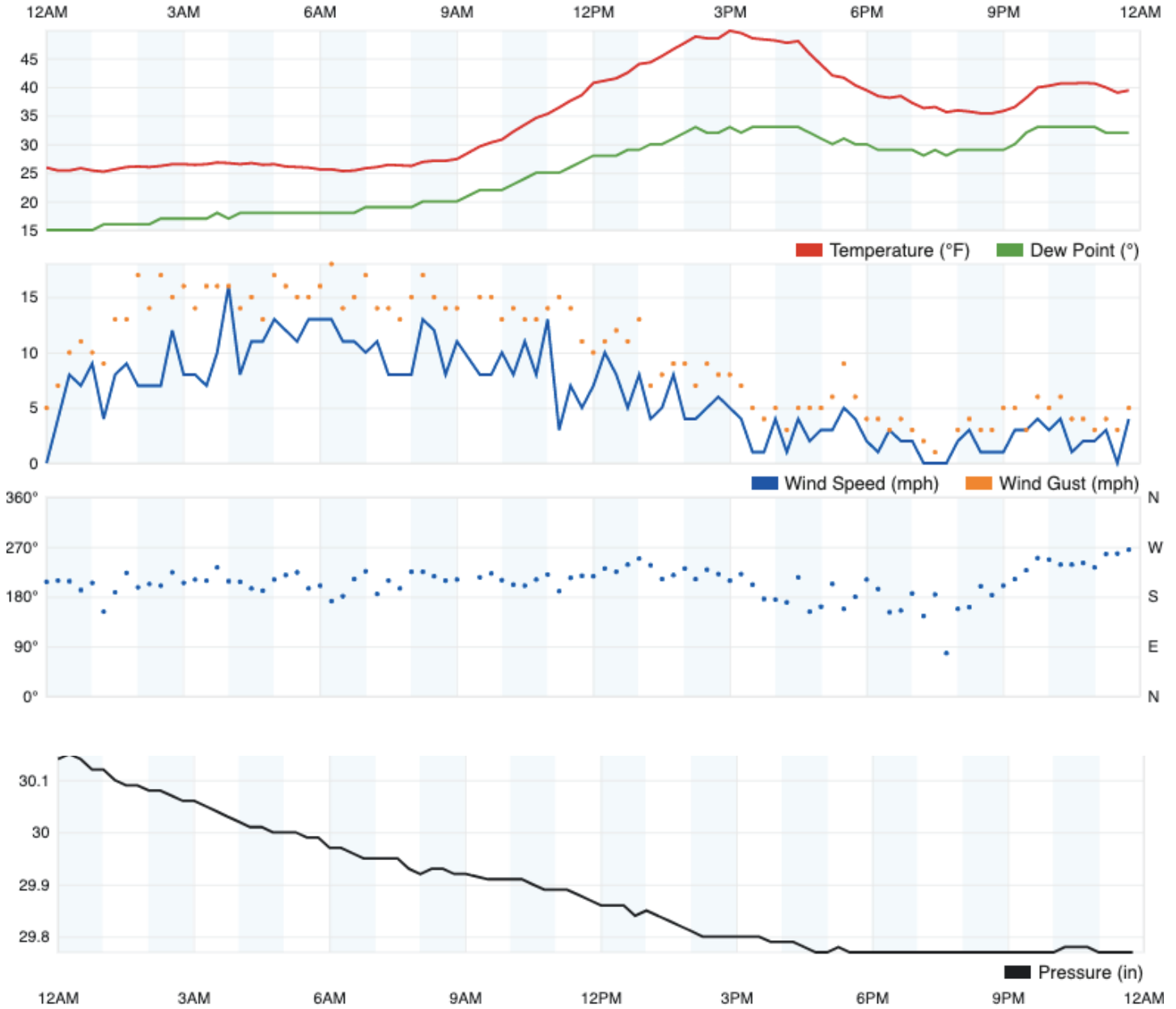
### High Plains

Except for half an inch or more of precipitation over the mountains of northern Colorado and northwest Wyoming, a tenth of an inch to no precipitation was observed across the High Plains region. Drying soils, high evapotranspiration, and worsening SPI and SPEI drought indicators led to expansion of D3 in northeast and southeast Colorado and southwest Kansas, and D0-D2 in eastern portions of Colorado and western portions of Kansas. Decreasing soil moisture, lack of snow, and dry long-term SPI/SPEI indicators prompted expansion of D3 in north central Wyoming and D1 and D2 in southeast Wyoming.

# Groton Daily Independent






Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 3 of 51

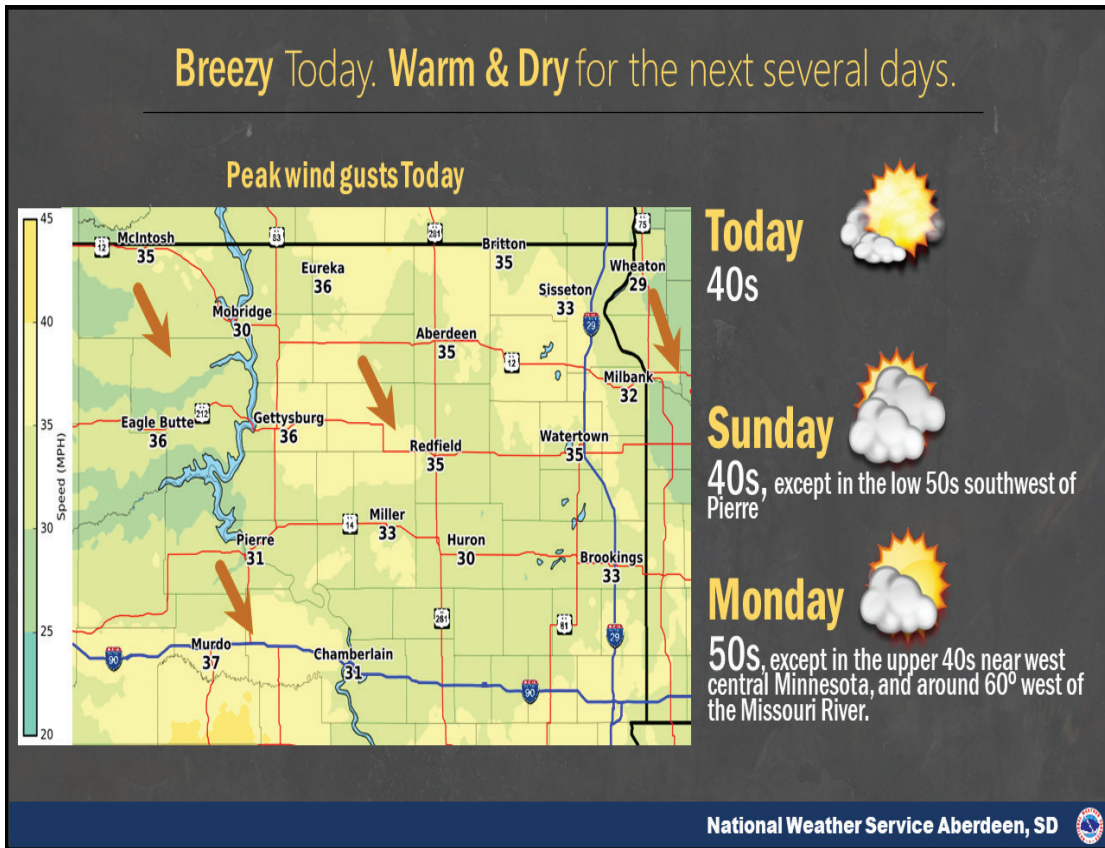
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 4 of 51

Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Breezy. Scattered Sprinkles/Flurries then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Increasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 46 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 44 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 54 °F



Gusty winds, out of the north to northwest, can be expected today ahead of high pressure nearing from Canada and eastern Montana. Temperatures will remain above average over the next several days, along with mainly dry conditions.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 5 of 51

## Today in Weather History

November 27, 1960: An ice storm occurred from 40 miles on either side of a line from Pipestone to Brainerd, Minnesota. Power and communication lines were downed, leaving at least 22 communities isolated. Ice coating reported ranged from one half to three fourth of an inch at Lake Benton. Heavy snow fell in eastern North Dakota with blizzard conditions throughout the state. In South Dakota, this storm began as freezing rain on the 27th and remained largely as such in the southeast quarter of the state. The remainder of the experienced blizzard conditions with 5 to 10 inches of snow and winds gusting to 30 to 60 mph. These horrible caused extensive closing of schools and businesses, blocked highways, and disrupted telephone and power services. Slippery highways caused many auto accidents. Some loss of livestock was reported, such as 1,000 turkeys in Gettysburg. Restoration of telephone service alone was estimated to have cost \$210,000 and required up to three days after the storm.

November 27, 1983: A weekend storm that began with light snow on the 26th continued to gather strength, culminating in a blizzard that was accompanied by thunder and lightning during the evening hours on the 27th. The heaviest snowfall occurred from Marshall County SSE to Gregory County in South Dakota, with the heaviest snow falling as thunder snow showers. Snow amounts ranged from 4 to 18 inches. Strong winds up to 50 mph created near zero visibilities and difficult driving conditions as numerous roads drifted shut with up to eight-foot drifts. Numerous accidents ensued, with many people forced to stay overnight in their stranded vehicles. Airlines were forced to cancel all flights as airports were closed into midday on the 28th. Almost all schools and businesses were closed on the 28th and even on the 29th in many areas. Storm total snowfall amounts included 8 inches at Clark; 7 inches at Artichoke Lake, Bryant 1NE, Clear Lake, Victor 4 NNE, and Browns Valley; 6 inches at Wheaton, Wilmot, and Harrold 12 SSW; 5 inches at Kennebec, Sisseton, and Mellette 4W; 4 inches at Watertown, Highmore 1W, Murdo, Redfield, Waubay, Ashton 2S, and Britton; and 3 inches at Aberdeen, Castlewood, Columbia 8N, Onida 4NW, and Pierre.

November 27, 1994: Low pressure developed over eastern Colorado late Saturday the 26th and strengthened over Kansas early on the 27th. By late in the day on the 27th, the low pressure system had developed into the first winter storm for Minnesota. By the early morning hours of the 28th, a swath of snow in excess of 6 inches had blanketed much of southwest through central into northeast Minnesota.

Snowfalls of 6 inches or more occurred south of a line from Gunflint Lake in Cook County to near Ortonville in Big Stone County and along and north of a line from near Blue Earth in Faribault county to Red Wing in Goodhue county. The snow closed the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport for a short time on the 27th, and contributed to hundreds of accidents and at least three fatalities. The greatest snowfall was 14.1 inches in Duluth. In addition, very strong east winds gusted over 50 mph in Duluth causing blizzard conditions. The high winds brought waves in excess of 16 feet crashing against the Lake Superior shoreline in Duluth, covering the Duluth Canal Park Lake Walk with extensive debris. A buildup of ice and snow in combination with strong winds resulted in numerous downed power lines in southeast Minnesota. Widespread heavy snow fell over mostly the eastern half of South Dakota on November 27-28. Peak accumulations were 10 inches at Sioux Falls and 9 inches at Howard and near Canton. Damage resulted mainly from numerous minor traffic accidents. Storm snowfall amounts in this area included 8 inches at Eureka; 7 inches at Victor 4NNE, Leola, Onaka 2N, Roscoe, Faulkton, Columbia 8N, Aberdeen, and Selby; 6 inches at Redfield, Mellette 4W, Bryant 1NE, Blunt, Wheaton, and Raymond 3NE; 5 inches at Pollock, Miller, Milbank 2SSW, Ipswich, Harrold 12SSW, Eagle Butte, Clark, Artichoke Lake, and Onida 4NW; 4 inches at Mobridge, Timber Lake, McIntosh 6SE, Conde, Clear Lake, Pierre, and Ashton 2S; 3 inches at Sisseton, Webster, Waubay, Summit 1W, Presho 7NW, Kennebec, Highmore 1W, Gann Valley 4NW, Castlewood, Browns Valley, Watertown, and Wilmot.

November 27, 1701: Anders Celsius, the astronomer who invented the Celsius, often called the centigrade thermometer scale was born on this date.

November 27, 1898: A powerful storm, known as the "Portland Gale" impacted the coastal areas of New England on November 26 - 27, 1898. The storm formed when two areas of low pressures merged off the coast of New Jersey and traveled up the east coast. This storm produced hurricane force winds in Nantucket and sank more than 150 boats and ships.



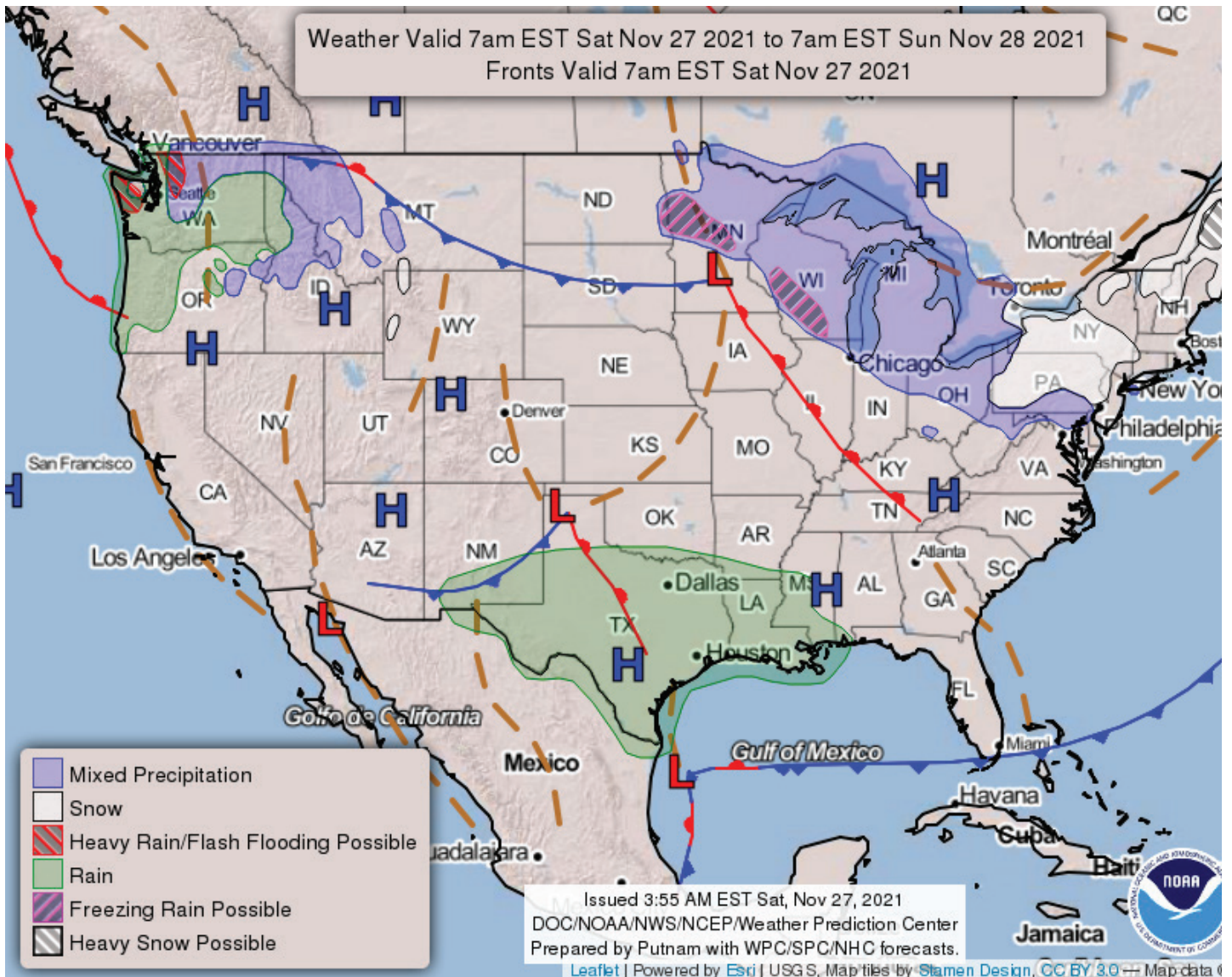
# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 6 of 51

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 49.8 °F at 3:00 PM**  
**Low Temp: 25.2 °F at 1:15 AM**  
**Wind: 18 mph at 6:15 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 70° in 1914**  
**Record Low: -18° in 1985**  
**Average High: 37°F**  
**Average Low: 15°F**  
**Average Precip in Nov.: 0.68**  
**Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.15**  
**Precip Year to Date: 19.88**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:54:21 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:47:12 AM**



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 7 of 51



## QUIET CHRISTIANS

For many years two neighbors rode the same train to work in downtown Chicago. George went to church regularly, and if pressed, would admit to being a Christian. But he never allowed being a Christian to interfere with his life. On the other hand, Will never went to church and had no use for godly things. As they rode the train each day, they discussed business strategies, sports, politics, religion, and current events. They rarely mentioned God.

One morning Will became violently ill and was rushed to the hospital. After a series of tests, his physician informed his wife that he would not live longer than a few days - if that long. Frightened, his wife said, "Perhaps we'd better call George and talk about God."

"George? Talk about God? Why George? He rarely mentioned God to me or that he knew Him. So, I doubt that he would be the right person to call," said Will. Without saying another word, he passed into eternity - lost.

When George heard the news, he was stunned and filled with guilt. There was nothing he could do for Will now but go to God and ask for forgiveness for not being a witness and promise to become faithful. The words of the Psalmist echoed loudly in his ears: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

Unfortunately, the Kingdom of God is filled with too many citizens like George. They know the Lord from a distance but are unwilling to speak as His ambassadors. They believe that they have "theirs" and that's all that matters. But there is no denying that if indeed God has redeemed us, we will present Him faithfully to others!

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for our silence and refusal to be faithful in presenting Your message to the lost around us! Give us the courage to be light in this world of darkness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Psalm 107:2a

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 8 of 51

## 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



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 9 of 51

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White ..... \$41.54/year
- Colored ..... \$74.55/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$21.30/year

\* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
- 3 Months..... \$21.30
- 6 Months..... \$26.63
- 9 Months..... \$31.95
- 12 Months..... \$42.60

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Password \_\_\_\_\_

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)



## News from the Associated Press

### Last-minute donation covers holiday meal at Aberdeen shelter

By ELISA SAND Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — With home lives in flux for the families at Safe Harbor, those staying at the local shelter for victims of domestic violence or human trafficking will be celebrating together.

It's a meal prepared by those living at the shelter and supported by local donations. But for one client, whose name is being kept confidential because she's a victim of human trafficking, the meal is a way to celebrate her gratitude in finding a new path.

She recalls arriving at Safe Harbor in a vehicle with brake pads desperately in need of replacement. She had no home and no job and was fleeing an unsafe life.

Today, her vehicle is fixed, she's working and soon she'll be taking steps to find an apartment, the Aberdeen American News reported.

The woman gives credit for her success to the compassion she found at Safe Harbor. At the shelter, she found women supporting each other, encouraging each other and helping each other find their place in the world.

"I'm thankful for Safe Harbor and that they reached their hands out," she said, noting she was in a dark, hopeless place.

The woman thought her stay at Safe Harbor would be temporary, like her stays at other shelters, but instead she found a connection and a path forward.

Safe Harbor Executive Director Gina Karst said this year an unexpected donation to the shelter covered the cost for the entire Thanksgiving meal.

Without the donation, Karst said, Safe Harbor would have paid for the food. But the donation now frees up money for other services, like requests for assistance.

"Every year the community is amazing," she said. "We never feel deprived."

Karst said the support "happens all the time" and, she said, the holidays are an especially busy time of giving.

Work with families continues beyond any stay at the shelter and includes a little holiday help through Blessing Baskets. Karst said the baskets are assembled with the help of the Presentation College campus ministry program.

The program had support from Molded Fiber Glass, a wind turbine blade plant that closed earlier this year. Karst said that Molded Fiber Glass had traditionally purchased the turkeys for the Blessing Baskets.

Just when organizers were wondering where the turkeys would come from this year, Safe Harbor received a \$1,000 donation from Kitchen Tune-Up pay for the birds.

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

07-27-37-42-59, Mega Ball: 2, Megaplier: 2

(seven, twenty-seven, thirty-seven, forty-two, fifty-nine; Mega Ball: two; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$94 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$243 million

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 11 of 51

## Texas A&M regroups in second half, beats South Dakota 58-44

ST. THOMAS, Virgin Islands (AP) — Kayla Wells scored 20 points and No. 23 Texas A&M overcame a nine-point halftime deficit to defeat South Dakota 58-44 on Friday night at the Paradise Jam.

The Aggies (6-0) trailed 30-21 at halftime but blew past South Dakota in the third quarter, outscoring the Coyotes 24-2 in the period. The Coyotes (2-4) made 1 of 12 shots (8%) in the third quarter and it wasn't much better in the fourth as they made 3 of 17 (18%). South Dakota shot 26% for the game.

South Dakota had a strong second quarter, outscoring the Aggies 18-9. The Coyotes made twice as many field goals in the second quarter (8) as they did the entire second half (4).

The Aggies didn't shoot much better, hitting 40% overall. The nation's leading 3-point shooting team at 48% entering the game, Texas A&M made just 5 of 18 (28%).

Jordan Nixon scored 13 points for Texas A&M. She made 4 of 7 3-pointers and the rest of the team was 1-for-11. Wells, who did not attempt a 3-pointer, was 8 of 11 from the field and 4 for 4 from the free-throw line. Destiny Pitts had 10 rebounds.

Liv Korngable scored 11 points and Hannah Sjerven 10 for South Dakota.

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

## Sports betting drives 20% boost for Deadwood casinos

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — The addition of sports betting helped drive a 20% revenue increase for Deadwood casinos in October, according to new state data.

The Rapid City Journal reported Friday that a report from the South Dakota Commission on Gaming shows the casinos generated 20.54% more revenue last month than in October 2020. Gamblers shelled out more than \$116 million for slots, \$8.3 million for table game bets and \$815,036 in sports bets.

Sports betting became legal in South Dakota in July. Betting began in early September after the gaming commission approved a list of sporting events that gamblers can wager on, including the Olympics, professional and college sports. Five Deadwood casinos offered sports betting in October, paying out just over \$98,000. Most bets were placed on professional and college football.

Overall, gamblers spent almost \$1.3 billion in Deadwood casinos through the first 10 months of the year. That's up nearly 40% from 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced casinos to close temporarily.

Slot machines paid out more than \$10.8 million in winnings and table games yielded almost \$1.5 million in winnings, mostly from blackjack and house-banked poker, according to the report.

## Sioux Falls police looking for suspect who left empty-handed

ST. THOMAS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Sioux Falls, South Dakota are looking for a suspect who was left empty-handed after an armed robbery attempt early Friday.

Sioux Falls Police Sgt. Sean Kooistra said the suspect used a handgun to demand money from a store clerk, but after the clerk refused, the robber fled the store on foot. Kooistra said that police do not advise people to refuse demands from armed robbers.

"Right now we don't have that individual identified, but we are currently actively investigating that," he said.

## South Dakota Mines fined for spectators' racist comments

ST. THOMAS, S.D. (AP) — The Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference has fined South Dakota Mines for racist comments made by spectators at a football game this month.

The school said it removed the spectators from the Nov. 13 game against Colorado Mesa University and has banned them from athletic events. Conference commissioner Chis Graham called the slurs directed at the Colorado Mesa team "abhorrent."

The school released few other details about the incident, including how much it was fined, the Rapid City Journal reported. The school's athletic communications coordinator Josh Van Valkenburg-Gernert declined to comment on the incident because an investigation is still ongoing.

"South Dakota Mines has zero tolerance for racism. We apologize to all who were harmed by the unacceptable actions of those individuals. Their behavior goes against the core mission, vision, and values of our institution," said Jim Rankin, the school's president, in a statement.

## Shippers prepare for another pandemic crush of holiday gifts

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The last holiday season was far from the most wonderful time of the year for the U.S. Postal Service: Sick and quarantined workers, a flood of packages from shoppers loath to set foot in stores and a last-minute dump of packages from overwhelmed private shippers.

Postal workers who recall packages and letters piled up in distribution hubs are better prepared this time as they gear up for another pandemic crunch. But low product inventories, and port and supply chain disruptions are creating new uncertainty about getting gifts delivered.

Already, workers are seeing a surge in holiday packages that began several weeks ago.

"A lot of the workers are saying, 'Oh no. Here we go again,'" said Scott Adams, local president of the American Postal Workers Union in Portland.

The U.S. Postal Service and private shippers UPS and FedEx are bolstering their hiring — bringing in about 230,000 temporary workers — and taking other steps to ensure they don't become overwhelmed by packages.

Nearly 3.4 billion parcels are expected to crisscross the country this holiday season, representing an estimated increase of about 400 million compared to last year, said Satish Jindel, from Pennsylvania-based ShipMatrix, which analyzes shipping package data.

When cards and letters are included, the U.S. Postal Service said it'll be delivering more than 12 billion items.

"The pandemic is still here. The supply chain is a challenge that's going to impact how people shop and how products move," said Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, which represents more than 200,000 postal workers.

Despite the precarious situation, the Postal Service, UPS and FedEx are in better shape to handle the peak volume, and several trends could work in their favor, Jindel said.

More people are shopping in stores compared to last year, and people have been placing online orders earlier because they're keenly aware of supply chain problems, Jindel said. Also, with workers returning to offices, there are fewer office supply shipments being made to homes, he said.

Most importantly, the shippers are adapting after their rough-and-tumble experience last year, he said.

U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, who faced withering criticism last year but reported on-time improvements and reduced operating losses this month, says the service is ready for the crunch.

"We are ready, so send us your packages and your mail," he said.

A year ago, more than a third of Postal Service first-class mail was late by the time Christmas arrived.

Tractor-trailers stuffed with mail were left idling outside some postal-sorting facilities. Packages and letters piled up in distribution hubs. Delays grew by days, and then weeks, in many instances.

Two things were painfully obvious. More workers and more space were needed — and both are being addressed.

To get a handle of the volume, the Postal Service is transitioning more than 30,000 non-career employees to the ranks of career employees by peak season, hiring 40,000 seasonal employees, and leasing extra space at more than 100 locations to ensure there's room for parcels.

The Postal Service installed more than 100 new package sorting machines as of early November, part of \$40 billion of planned investment over 10 years. Also, more than 50 package systems capable of sorting large packages are expected to be deployed before December. Combined, these expand capacity by an



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 13 of 51

additional 4.5 million packages per day, officials said.

UPS, for its part, is hiring more than 100,000 seasonal employees across the country and continues to add aircraft and automation. It expects nearly 90% of its packages to flow through automated facilities by year's end.

FedEx, meanwhile, is in the process of boosting its nationwide workforce by 90,000 across its operating companies. Most of those new workers are expected to remain after the holidays, the company said.

Despite all those extra workers, the shippers agree that this is not the year for shoppers to procrastinate. "Complete your holiday shopping as soon as possible," said Jim Mayer, spokesperson for UPS.

## World on alert as UK reports cases of omicron COVID variant

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain became the latest country Saturday to report cases of the new potentially more contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus as world governments sought to shore up their defenses by slapping restrictions on travel from nations in southern Africa.

U.K. Health Secretary Sajid Javid confirmed that two people have tested positive with the omicron variant in the southeastern English town of Chelmsford and in the central city of Nottingham. He said the cases were linked and related to travel from southern Africa.

Javid said the two confirmed cases are self-isolating alongside their households while contact tracing and targeted testing takes place. He also said arrivals from Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia will have to quarantine from Sunday and stressed the importance of booster jabs.

"This is a real reminder that this pandemic is far from over," he said. "If we need to take further action, we will."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, along with his top advisers, will be holding a media briefing later Saturday.

Many countries have slapped restrictions on various African countries over the past couple of days including Australia, Brazil, Canada, the European Union, Iran, Japan, Thailand and the United States, in response to warnings over the transmissibility of the new variant — against the advice of the World Health Organization. Pharmaceutical companies expressed optimism that they could finesse their vaccines to deal with the new variant though that would clearly take some time.

Despite the banning of flights, there are mounting concerns that the variant has already been widely seeded around the world. In addition to the U.K, cases have been reported in travelers in Belgium, Israel and Hong Kong. Germany also said it suspected a positive case and Dutch authorities were testing whether 61 people who arrived on two flights from South Africa with COVID-19 have the omicron variant.

The planes arrived in the Netherlands from Johannesburg and Cape Town shortly after the Dutch government imposed a ban on flights from southern African nations. The 539 travelers who tested negative were allowed to return home or continue their journeys to other countries. Under government regulations, those who live in the Netherlands and are allowed to return home must self-isolate for at least five days.

Meanwhile, a German official said that there's a "very high probability" that the omicron variant has already arrived in the country.

Kai Klose, the health minister for Hesse state, which includes Frankfurt, said in a tweet that "several mutations typical of omicron" were found Friday night in a traveler returning from South Africa, who was isolated at home. Sequencing of the test had yet to be completed.

The global health body has named the new variant omicron, labeling it a variant of concern because of its high number of mutations and some early evidence that it carries a higher degree of infection than other variants. That means people who contracted COVID-19 and recovered could be subject to catching it again. It could take weeks to know if current vaccines are less effective against it.

With so much uncertainty about the omicron variant and scientists unlikely to flesh out their findings for a few weeks, countries around the world have been taking a safety-first approach, in the knowledge that previous outbreaks of the pandemic have been partly fueled by lax border policies.

Nearly two years on since the start of the pandemic that has claimed more than 5 million lives around

the world, countries are on high alert.

The variant's swift spread among young people in South Africa has alarmed health professionals even though there was no immediate indication whether the variant causes more severe disease. In just two weeks, omicron has turned a period of low transmission in the country into one of rapid growth.

A number of pharmaceutical firms, including AstraZeneca, Moderna, Novavax and Pfizer, said they have plans in place to adapt their vaccines in light of the emergence of omicron. Pfizer and its partner BioNTech said they expect to be able to tweak their vaccine in around 100 days.

Professor Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group which developed the AstraZeneca vaccine, expressed cautious optimism that existing vaccines could be effective at preventing serious disease from the omicron variant.

He said most of the mutations appear to be in similar regions as those in other variants.

"That tells you that despite those mutations existing in other variants the vaccines have continued to prevent serious disease as we've moved through alpha, beta, gamma and delta," he told BBC radio. "At least from a speculative point of view we have some optimism that the vaccine should still work against a new variant for serious disease but really we need to wait several weeks to have that confirmed."

He added that it is "extremely unlikely that a reboot of a pandemic in a vaccinated population like we saw last year is going to happen."

Some experts said the variant's emergence illustrated how rich countries' hoarding of vaccines threatens to prolong the pandemic.

Fewer than 6% of people in Africa have been fully immunized against COVID-19, and millions of health workers and vulnerable populations have yet to receive a single dose. Those conditions can speed up spread of the virus, offering more opportunities for it to evolve into a dangerous variant.

"One of the key factors to emergence of variants may well be low vaccination rates in parts of the world, and the WHO warning that none of us is safe until all of us are safe and should be heeded," said Peter Openshaw, a professor of experimental medicine at Imperial College London.

"Global vaccine rollout is vital," he added.

---

Pan Pylas contributed from London. Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

## **Amid immigration debate, some states update migrant term**

By ACACIA CORONADO Report for America/Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Luz Rivas remembers seeing the word on her mother's residency card as a child: "alien."

In the stark terms of the government, it signaled her mother was not yet a citizen of the U.S. But to her young daughter, the word had a more personal meaning. Even though they were going through the naturalization process, it meant the family did not belong.

"I want other children of immigrants, like me, to not feel the same way I did, that my family did, when we saw the word 'alien,'" said Rivas, now an assemblywoman in the California Legislature.

The Democratic lawmaker sought to retire the term and this year authored a bill — since signed into law — that replaces the use of "alien" in state statutes with other terms such as "noncitizen" or "immigrant." Her effort was inspired by a similar shift earlier this year by the Biden administration.

Immigrants and immigrant-rights groups say the term, especially when combined with "illegal," is dehumanizing and can have a harmful effect on immigration policy.

The word became a focal point of debate in several states earlier this year as the number of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border swelled and led to fierce backlash against Biden administration policies by Republican governors and lawmakers.

Lawmakers in at least seven states considered eliminating use of "alien" and "illegal" in state statutes this year and replacing them with descriptions such as "undocumented" and "noncitizen," according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 15 of 51

Only two states, California and Colorado, actually made the change.

"I want all Californians that are contributing to our society, that are small business owners, that work hard, to feel that they are part of California communities," Rivas said of the reason behind her legislation.

State Sen. Julie Gonzales, who co-sponsored the new Colorado law, said during a legislative committee hearing that words such as "illegal" were "dehumanizing and derogatory" when applied to immigrants. Gonzales said the legislation aimed to remove the only place in Colorado statute where "illegal alien" was used to describe people living in the U.S. illegally.

"That language has been offensive for many people," she said. "And some of the rationale behind that is really rooted in this idea that a person can certainly commit an illegal act, but no human being themselves is illegal."

Using "alien" to describe those who are not U.S. citizens has a long history, dating to the nation's first naturalization law, passed while George Washington was president. Fearing a war with France, Congress also passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, which sought to suppress political subversion.

Changing the long-standing government terminology around immigration is not universally accepted as necessary or desirable.

Sage Naumann, spokesperson for the Colorado Senate Republicans, said the Democratic-controlled Legislature should be spending its time on matters of deeper importance to residents, such as taking steps to fight inflation, tackle crime and improve education.

Naumann said he doubted that "the average Coloradan — or American — cares about what semi-controversial words are buried in their state statutes."

The Biden administration also received some pushback after its change in policy.

In April, U.S. Customs and Border Protection ordered employees to avoid using the word "alien" in internal documents and public communications and instead use "noncitizen" or "migrant." "Illegal alien" also was out, to be replaced by descriptions such as "undocumented noncitizen."

"We enforce our nation's laws while also maintaining the dignity of every individual with whom we interact," Troy Miller, acting commissioner, wrote to employees of the largest U.S. law enforcement agency, which includes the Border Patrol. "The words we use matter and will serve to further confer that dignity to those in our custody."

Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott objected, writing to others in the agency that the edict contradicted language in criminal statutes — although Miller made an exception for legal documents — and plunged the agency into a partisan debate. Scott, a Trump-era appointee, refused to sign off on the order and believes his outspokenness on that and other issues contributed to him being forced out of his position in June.

"To change the law is fine, but until then you're really politicizing the mission," Scott said in an interview.

An analysis by The Associated Press (which doesn't refer to people as "aliens" except in direct quotes) found that more than dozen states still use the terms "alien" or "illegal" in statutes referring to immigrants. Among them is Texas, where a legislative attempt to transition to different terminology advanced out of committee with bipartisan backing this year but failed to get a hearing before the full Texas House.

State Rep. Art Fierro, a Democrat, said he expected "kickback" when he originally proposed the change. But following committee discussions, he said that to his surprise the change was seen by both parties as an effort to use more "dignified, respectful" terms. He said he suggested the change because he felt the original terms were belittling to those seeking to work through the immigration process.

Fierro said he plans to introduce another bill to replace the terms during the state's next regular legislative session, in 2023.

"We are just trying to treat people humanely," he said.

Rosalidia Dardon knows from personal experience why the language surrounding immigration is so important.

After fleeing violence in El Salvador, she spent roughly 16 months in an immigration detention center in California before arriving at a refugee home in Texas in 2016. She was determined to find a job while she sought asylum but had lost her work visa after her protected status expired.

Dardon, 54, blames the ankle monitor she was required to wear and the description of immigrants with

terms such as “illegal” for a job search marked by rejection after rejection.

One specific moment remains frozen in her memory.

“I won’t give you a job because you are a criminal,” Dardon told the AP in Spanish, repeating what a hiring manager in Texas said to her.

“I would ask myself and God why I was given an ankle monitor if my only sin was to go to a country that was not my own,” said Dardon, whose immigration case remains pending. “Without Latinos, this country would spiral downwards. That’s why we should be treated better.”

Associated Press writers Patty Nieberg in Denver and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report. Coronado is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

## Channel migrant deaths: Smugglers net millions per kilometer

By LORI HINNANT and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

CALAIS, France (AP) — The price to cross the English Channel varies according to the network of smugglers, between 3,000 and 7,000 euros.

Often, the fee also includes a very short-term tent rental in the windy dunes of northern France and food cooked over fires that sputter in the rain that falls for more than half the month of November in the Calais region. Sometimes, but not always, it includes a life vest and fuel for the outboard motor.

And the people who collect the money — up to 300,000 euros (\$432,000) per boat that makes it across the narrows of the Channel — are not the ones arrested in the periodic raids along the coastline. They are just what French police call “the little hands.”

Now, French authorities are hoping to move up the chain of command. The French judicial investigation into Wednesday’s sinking that killed 27 people has been turned over to Paris-based prosecutors who specialize in organized crime.

To cross the 33-kilometer (20-mile) narrow point of the Channel, the rubber dinghies must navigate frigid waters and passing cargo ships. As of Nov. 17, 23,000 people had crossed successfully, according to Britain’s Home Office. France intercepted about 19,000 people.

At a minimum, then, smuggling organizations this year have netted 69 million euros for the crossing — that’s 2 million euros per kilometer.

“This has become so profitable for criminals that it’s going to take a phenomenal amount of effort to shift it,” the U.K. Home Office’s Dan O’Mahoney told Parliament on Nov. 17.

Between coronavirus and Brexit, “this is a golden age for the smugglers and organized crime because the countries are in disarray,” said Mimi Vu, an expert on Vietnamese migration who regularly spends time in the camps of northern France.

“Think of it like a shipping and logistics company,” Vu said. The men handling the last leg are essentially just making the final delivery. If they are arrested, they are replaceable, she said.

Frontex, the European border agency, echoed that in a 2021 risk report that describes the operational leaders as managers who “are able to orchestrate the criminal business from a distance, while mostly exposing low-level criminals involved in transport and logistics to law enforcement detection.”

The chain starts in the home country, usually with an agreed-upon price, arranged over social media. That fee tends to shift over the journey, but most willingly pay extra as their destination grows closer, she said. That’s precisely when the logistics grow more complicated.

Channel crossings by sea were relatively rare until a few years ago, when French and British authorities locked down the area around the Eurotunnel entrance. The deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants in the back of a container truck may also have contributed to a new reluctance to use that route.

But the first attempts were disorganized, using small inflatables and even kayaks bought at the local Decathlon sports store.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 17 of 51

"At the beginning, it's always the pioneers," said Nando Sigona, professor of international migration and forced displacement at the University of Birmingham. "But once it started to seem that it was working for a number of people, you could see the bigger players came to be involved."

Police cracked down on local boat purchases, and the larger inflatables started to show up, hauled by the dozens inside cars and vans with German and Belgian tags, police said. France's interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said a car with German tags was seized in connection with the investigation.

Police raids on the camps to pull down tents and disrupt operations have given smugglers yet another chance to make money, said Nikolai Posner, of the aid group Utopia 56. Now, the fee includes a short-term tent rental and access to basic food, usually cooked over an open fire.

"There is one solution to stop all this, the deaths, the smugglers, the camps. Make a humanitarian corridor," said Posner. He said asylum requests should be easier on both sides of the Channel.

In part because of Brexit and coronavirus, expulsions from the U.K. this year dropped to just five people, according to the Home Office. Vu said people who are intercepted at sea or land by British border forces end up in migrant centers, but usually just get back in touch with the smuggling networks and end up working black market jobs.

That's the complaint in France, where the interior minister said British employers appear more than happy to hire under the table, providing yet another financial incentive.

"If they're in Calais, it's to get to Britain, and the only people who can guarantee them passage are these networks of smugglers," said Ludovic Hochart, a Calais-based police officer with the Alliance union. "The motivation to get to England is stronger than the dangers that await."

On Sunday ministers from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and EU officials will meet to search for solutions. But, with France and Britain at sharp odds over migration, fishing and how to rebuild a working relationship after Brexit, there is one notable absence: a British delegation.

For Vu, that's a missed opportunity: "This is transnational crime. It spans many borders and it's not up to only one country to solve it."

Hinnant reported from Paris. Frank Jordans contributed from Berlin.

## **Blaming COVID: Biden sees common culprit for country's woes**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation is soaring, businesses are struggling to hire and President Joe Biden's poll numbers have been in free-fall. The White House sees a common culprit for it all: COVID-19.

Biden's team views the pandemic as the root cause of both the nation's malaise and his own political woes. Finally controlling COVID-19, the White House believes, is the skeleton key to rejuvenating the country and reviving Biden's own standing.

But the coronavirus challenge has proved to be vexing for the White House, with last summer's premature claims of victory swamped by the more transmissible delta variant, stubborn millions of Americans unvaccinated and lingering economic effects from the pandemic's darkest days.

All of that as yet another variant of the virus, omicron, emerged overseas. It is worrying public health officials, leading to new travel bans and panicking markets as scientists race to understand how dangerous it may be.

Although the economy has actually been coming back, there are multiple signs that COVID-19 will leave its scars even if the pandemic fades.

For now, in the administration's view, an intransigent minority that is resisting vaccination is spoiling the recovery for the rest of the country — forcing masks on the vaccinated and contributing to lingering anxiousness everywhere you look.

Asked why Americans aren't getting the message that the economy is improving, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said this past week: "We're still in the middle of fighting a pandemic and people are sick and tired of that. We are, too."

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 18 of 51

The state of affairs, she said, affects everything from how people feel about sending their kids out the door to the price for a gallon of gas.

The administration views vaccination mandates as critical, not only to preventing avoidable illness and death but to safeguarding the economic recovery — and salvaging Biden's political position.

"We have the tools to accelerate the path out of this pandemic widely available," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients told a coronavirus briefing. While he ruled out large-scale lockdowns like the United States experienced in 2020 and like those popping up again across Europe, Zients renewed the administration's appeals for more Americans to get their shots.

But on Friday, the discovery of the new variant in southern Africa had much of the world acting to shut down travel from the region and contain a threat that the World Health Organization suggested could be worse than the ravaging waves from delta.

Inside the White House and among allies of the president, there has been frustration for weeks over the slow government action to approve booster shots for all adults. The regulatory process, they fear, contributed to misinformation and confusion around the boosters and means the nation isn't optimally protected for the holiday season.

Biden on Friday appealed for unvaccinated Americans to be "responsible" and get the shot and for those eligible for a booster to get that, too. "That is the minimum that everyone should be doing. ... We always talk about whether this is about freedom, but I think it's a patriotic responsibility to do that."

Still, for all the hand-wringing over Biden's sagging standing with Americans, Democrats say a turnaround may be within reach.

"From Trump to Biden, people have gone from feeling like it's mourning again in America to feeling on the cusp of morning again in America," said party strategist Jesse Ferguson.

"Getting past the pandemic unlocks the door for the economy, for our way of life and for people feeling less divided," he added.

To Biden's critics, though, it's a stretch to blame all the nation's problems on COVID-19 or to think that containing the virus will solve them.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, in fact, puts the blame for high prices on Biden's big pandemic relief package, saying recently: "There is no question what is keeping working Americans awake at night. Inflation. The runaway prices and unpredictability that Democrats' policies have fueled."

The lingering effects of the virus have taken a toll on the president's approval ratings, even if his handling of the virus has been seen as a relative strength.

In an October AP-NORC poll, 54% of Americans said they approved of Biden's job on the pandemic. That was somewhat higher than his approval rating overall and much higher than approval on his handling of the economy, at 48% and 41%, respectively.

As recently as July, 66% had approved of Biden on COVID-19 and 59% approved of his job performance overall.

In last month's poll, only about one-third of Americans said the nation was heading in the right direction, down from about half in late February.

Views of the economy have dimmed as well, with only about one-third saying conditions are good, compared with close to half in September.

To the White House, fixing blame on the pandemic is emerging as a modern version of the old "It's the economy, stupid" mantra from the Bill Clinton years.

When Psaki was pressed on what the administration was doing to contain higher prices, she replied: "We know what the root causes of those are, right? Global supply chain issues."

"The best thing we can do as the government is to get the pandemic under control. That's what the president's number one focus is."

The same message ripples throughout the administration.

"As long as the pandemic continues, there will be pandemic-driven shortages, which is why the best way to fix that is to end the pandemic," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said recently, stressing

the need for vaccination.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, speaking about the administration's response to spiking gasoline prices, said getting people vaccinated was "the ultimate answer."

Economists largely endorse the sentiment, but caution that the solution is not simple.

"The root of the problems in the economy is the virus," said Harvard economist James Stock, "and the best way to minimize the spread of the virus is to increase vaccinations. It's the number one economic policy in my mind."

But with experts predicting that COVID-19 is becoming endemic, Stock said, "you've got to be realistic that it's not going to go away."

Even if the virus fades, economists warn, there will be harmful lingering effects.

Goldman Sachs noted in a recent analysis that roughly half of the 5 million people who have left the labor force since the pandemic have retired, making it harder for businesses to regain lost jobs. Work by Stanford University economist Nicholas Bloom and others indicates that companies expect more people to keep working from home and shopping online, a problem for local retailers that depend on office workers to buy lunch and people to return to stores.

Just 5% of Americans' total work days were at home pre-pandemic, a figure that is now 25%, according to Bloom. More than three-quarters of workers surveyed by his colleagues and him would prefer to have at least one day a week working from home and nearly one-third would rather work from home for all five days. This could make it harder for employers to evaluate their workers and efficiently use office space.

The administration is also dealing with a global economy, so solving pandemic issues at home has its limits.

Coronavirus outbreaks in Asia shut down computer chip plants, worsening the shortage of semiconductors, one sign that vaccination worldwide could be as critical as the administration's domestic efforts. One of the rationales for Biden's infrastructure spending to strengthen the supply chain is to minimize the damage from these shutdowns.

"If a factory in Malaysia shuts down due to a COVID outbreak — which they have — it causes a ripple effect that can slow down auto manufacturing in Detroit," Biden said in one recent speech. "Why? They can't get the computer chips they need."

---

Associated Press writers Josh Boak and Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

## **Chris Christie aims to shape future for GOP and for himself**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Chris Christie is everywhere.

The former New Jersey governor and onetime Republican presidential candidate denounced "conspiracy theorists" during a September appearance at the Ronald Reagan Library in California. He followed up with a speech this month to influential Republicans in Las Vegas, warning that the party will only succeed if it offers a "plan for tomorrow, not a grievance about yesterday."

In between, he's been interviewed by everyone from Laura Ingraham on Fox News to David Axelrod, a former adviser to President Barack Obama, on CNN.

On its face, Christie's publicity campaign is in service of "Republican Rescue," his new book that offers a simple prescription for his party: stop talking nonsense about 2020 and focus on the future — or keep losing elections. But the frenzied pace of his appearances and the increasingly obvious jabs at Donald Trump suggest Christie is plotting a political comeback with the 2024 campaign in mind.

In a recent interview, Christie said he hadn't made a decision yet about his political future and wouldn't until after next year's elections. But he was blunt in saying he would run if he believes he can be elected.

"If I see a pathway to winning, I'll run," he said. "And I feel like I have the skills and the talent and the ability to be able to make a difference in our party and in the country. And I'm certainly, at 59 years old, not ready to retire. But I'm not going to do it if I don't see a pathway to winning. So that's why I'm not making any decision now."

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 20 of 51

One of the biggest questions that hangs over the 2024 campaign is whether Trump will run again. If the former president does, polls suggest he would easily clinch the nomination. But until that's decided, Christie is testing the openness of GOP voters to someone who largely supports Trump's record but dismisses Trump's lies that the last election was stolen.

It's an approach that pits him against other Republicans who may run in 2024, including Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who have taken high-profile stands against Trump.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Mike Pompeo, Trump's former secretary of state, have pitched themselves as fierce Trump loyalists. Former Vice President Mike Pence has tried to find something of a middle ground, highlighting his work alongside Trump but noting the two hold different views about the circumstances surrounding the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

As candidates largely break into pro- and anti-Trump camps, "there is a thing to being in a unique lane that does in fact endorse some of President Trump's policies but at the same time doesn't hesitate to criticize where Christie would disagree with him," said longtime GOP pollster Adam Geller. He worked on Christie's two winning New Jersey gubernatorial campaigns as well as Christie's 2016 presidential bid, followed by Trump's.

Others aren't so sure, arguing that Christie aligned himself with Trump until it was no longer politically convenient.

"It's clearly disingenuous," said Tim Miller, a former spokesperson for the Republican National Committee and a vocal Trump critic. "Chris Christie enabled Donald Trump maybe more than anyone in the establishment of the Republican Party. And now he wants to get the kudos of saying something that is reality but without any of the reflection about what he did to get us here."

Christie and Trump have had a complicated relationship during the nearly 20 years that they've been "friends."

As a U.S. attorney, Christie successfully prosecuted the father of Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Trump and Christie were fierce competitors for the GOP nomination in 2016. After Christie dropped out of the race, he became the first major elected official to endorse Trump, a move that lent legitimacy to the eventual president's campaign.

"The line of supporting Donald Trump starts behind me," Christie recently told Ingraham.

Christie stood in for Democrat Hillary Clinton during Trump's 2016 debate prep and was rewarded for his loyalty by being tasked with chairing the presidential transition. But after the election, Christie was fired from that role in a move seen as retribution for the elder Kushner's prosecution. Still, Christie ultimately found his way back into Trump's inner circle, heading the administration's commission on opioid misuse, serving as an informal adviser and again helping with debate preparation last year.

But Christie describes Trump's reaction to the 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden as a breaking point. In appearances and interviews, Christie says he was "incredibly disappointed and disillusioned" by Trump's refusal to concede the election, which culminated in his followers' violent storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6 in an effort to halt the certification of Biden's win.

Christie now argues that the party must disavow Trump's lies and move past his grievances if it wants to succeed. Voters, he argues, "want sanity and they want common sense."

"As Republicans, we need to free ourselves from the quicksand of endless grievances. We need to turn our attention to the future and quit wallowing in the past. We need to face the realities of the 2020 election and learn — not hide — from them," he writes in the book, calling on the party to rid itself of conspiracies and focus on providing voters with a positive alternative to Democratic policies.

Trump has started hitting back. In a statement this month, the former president said Christie was "just absolutely massacred by his statements that Republicans have to move on from the past."

Christie dismissed the blowback. "Anybody can say whatever they want. These are my opinions. This is what I believe," he says, and he is already pondering how a 2024 campaign might look different from 2016. His previous bid was heavy on town hall-style events targeted to voters in New Hampshire, home to the nation's first presidential primary. Christie finished sixth there.



A second campaign, he said in the interview, would be different.

"You won't just see me wandering around up there. One of the things that I learned was, when I ran the first time, is motion isn't progress," he said. "I'm going to be very deliberate about what I do, both in the runup to a decision and then certainly if I do decide to run, in how I conduct a campaign and try to make all the time I expend really count."

For now, Christie appears to be reveling in the attention of being back in the political game after a hiatus that included a bout with COVID-19 that landed him in the intensive care unit. He's working on a second book focused on "bringing the country together," co-chairing a national Republican group focused on redistricting strategy and serving as a top fundraiser for the Republican Governors Association, a group he once led, giving him access to some of the party's most consequential donors.

GOP strategist Mike DuHaime, a longtime Christie adviser who worked on Christie's 2016 campaign, said it was too soon to be talking about a race so far off.

"You can only plot so much," he said. "And there are so many other factors outside of our control that you just kind of have to say what you think and do what you think is right."

## Solomon Islands police find 3 bodies after violent protests

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Solomon Islands police found three bodies in a burned-out building and arrested more than 100 people in this week's violence sparked by concerns about the Pacific nation's increasing links with China.

Australian media reported the bodies were recovered late Friday after riots and protests subsided. No other details were given.

Authorities imposed a curfew in the capital Honiara, after a 36-hour lockdown ordered by the embattled Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare ended Friday.

Sogavare blamed outside interference for stirring up the protests calling for his resignation, with a thinly veiled reference to Taiwan and the United States.

Sogavare has been widely criticized by leaders of the country's most populous island of Malaita for a 2019 decision to drop diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of mainland China. Beijing claims the self-ruled island of Taiwan as part of its territory.

His government, meanwhile, has been upset over millions in U.S. aid promised directly to Malaita, rather than through the central government on the largest island of Guadalcanal, where Honiara is located. The two islands have been rivals for decades.

Andrew Yang, a professor at Taiwan's National Sun Yat-sen University and former deputy defense minister, said China's efforts to win diplomatic recognition from the Solomon Islands are part of a competition for regional dominance with the United States and its ally, Australia.

The Solomon Islands, with a population of about 700,000, are about 1,500 kilometers (1,000 miles) northeast of Australia. They are best known for the bloody fighting that took place there during World War II between the United States and Japan.

Riots and looting targeting Honiara's Chinatown and downtown precincts erupted Wednesday out of a peaceful protest in the capital by people from Malaita. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the demonstrators, who set fire to the National Parliament, a police station and many other buildings.

Critics also blamed the unrest on complaints of a lack of government services and accountability, corruption and Chinese businesses giving jobs to foreigners instead of locals.

Since the 2019 shift in allegiance from Taiwan to China, there has been an expectation of massive infrastructure investment from Beijing — locally rumored to be in the range of \$500 million — but with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after the shift, none of that has yet materialized.

Malaita threatened to hold a referendum on independence over the issue, but that was quashed by Sogavare's government.

A plane carrying Australian police and diplomats are in Honiara to help local police restore order. Up to 50 more Australian police and 43 defense force personnel were also deployed following a request by

Sogavare under a bilateral treaty with Australia. The presence of an independent force, though small, seemed to help quell some of the violence.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been following the protests "with concern," his deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

"(Guterres) calls for an end to the violence and the protection of hard-won peacebuilding gains. He urges dialogue and ceful means to address differences," Haq said in a statement on Friday.

## Workers' paradise? Portugal's new teleworking law takes flak

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Portugal's new law on working from home makes the European Union country sound like a workers' paradise.

Companies can't attempt to contact their staff outside working hours. They must help staff pay for their home gas, electric and internet bills. Bosses are forbidden from using digital software to track what their teleworkers are doing.

There's just one problem: the law might not work. Critics say the new rules are half-baked, short on detail and unfeasible. And they may even backfire by making companies reluctant to allow working from home at all.

"The law is badly written and doesn't meet anybody's needs," says José Pedro Anacoreta, an employment attorney at PLMJ, one of Portugal's main law firms. "It's no good for anyone. ... It doesn't make any sense."

In many places around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a prior trend toward the digitalization of work and more flexible work arrangements. Amid such a sudden and massive shift in the employment landscape, governments are scrambling to accommodate working from home in their employment laws. Those efforts are largely still in their infancy.

Many Europeans have stopped going into the office regularly since March last year to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

In Europe, unlike in the United States, worker protections are widely regarded as cherished entitlements. Laying off a staff member, for instance, can entail substantial severance pay.

Without a promised European Commission directive on how to legally frame the shift to more extensive working from home, governments' legislative responses have been patchy and piecemeal.

During the pandemic some countries have recommended teleworking. Others — like Portugal — have demanded it. Most EU countries have specific legislation on teleworking, though with different approaches, and others are considering it through amendments, extensions or conventions.

As home working grew in recent years, workers' "right to disconnect" — allowing staff to ignore work matters outside formal working hours — was adopted before the pandemic in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Belgium. It is now becoming the standard.

But Portugal is taking that concept a step further, by flipping the onus onto companies. "The employer has a duty to refrain from contacting the employee outside working hours, except in situations of force majeure," meaning an unanticipated or uncontrollable event, states the new law.

Also, parents or caregivers with children up to eight years old have the right to work from home if they choose, as long as the type of work they do is compatible with teleworking.

Fines for companies breaking the law go up to almost 10,000 euros (\$11,200) for each infringement.

The Portuguese rules are meant to address the downside of what has become known as WFH.

The technology that enables working from home has also opened the door to abuses, such as drawn-out workdays as staff remain reachable outside their normal eight-hour shift. The consequences may include attrition between work and private life and a sense of isolation.

But the new law has met with skepticism from those it is intended to protect.

Andreia Sampaio, a 37-year-old who works in communications in Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, agrees with the law's purpose but thinks it is too general and will be "very hard" to enforce.

"We have to have common sense," she says, adding that she doesn't mind being contacted out of hours

if it's an urgent matter. "We have to judge each case by its merits."

And she reckons authorities will mostly only act on employees' complaints — "but people will fear losing their job if they do."

Prompted by the pandemic but designed to apply in the future irrespective of COVID-related measures, the law could come into force as soon as Dec. 1.

It is largely the brainchild of the center-left Socialist Party, which has governed Portugal since 2015. Ahead of an election for a new government on Jan. 30, it is keen to burnish its progressive credentials and hoist a banner about workers' rights.

Nevertheless, practical questions abound: must staff be taken off company email lists when their shift finishes and then put back on when they start work again? What about Europeans who work in financial markets and need to know what's going on in, say, Hong Kong, and have colleagues working in different time zones?

What if an industrial machine that can't be stopped requires the attention of an engineer who's off? Who is it that can't "contact" the employee — the department supervisor? The company CEO? What constitutes "contact" — a phone call, a text message, an email?

"The devil is always in the details ... but also in the implementation," says Jon Messenger, a specialist on working conditions at the International Labor Organization, a United Nations agency based in Geneva.

The Portuguese Business Confederation, the country's largest grouping of companies, wasn't involved in drawing up the new law and thinks it is full of holes.

Teleworking rules need to be flexible, tailored to each sector and negotiated between employers and staff, says Luís Henrique of the confederation's legal department.

"We're treating situations that are completely different as if they were all the same. That's not realistic," Henrique said. "(The law) can't be one-size-fits-all."

Policing and enforcing the new rules may also be challenging in what is one of the EU's economically poorest countries. In Portugal, which is notorious for red tape and slow justice, as well as poorly resourced public services, how long will a complaint take to filter through the system and achieve a result?

Across Europe over the past decade the number of labor inspections has "collapsed," according to data analyzed by the Brussels-based European Trade Union Confederation, which represents 45 million members in 39 European countries.

The country with the biggest drop in the number of inspections since 2010? Portugal, with 55% fewer checks up to 2018.

"Ambitious, progressive laws ... run up against the reality that ways of policing them aren't in place yet," said Henrique of Portugal's business confederation.

## South African scientists brace for wave propelled by omicron

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — As the world grapples with the emergence of the new highly transmissible variant of COVID-19, worried scientists in South Africa — where omicron was first identified — are scrambling to combat its lightning spread across the country.

In the space of two weeks, the omicron variant has sent South Africa from a period of low transmission to rapid growth of new confirmed cases. The country's numbers are still relatively low, with 2,828 new confirmed cases recorded Friday, but omicron's speed in infecting young South Africans has alarmed health professionals.

"We're seeing a marked change in the demographic profile of patients with COVID-19," Rudo Mathivha, head of the intensive care unit at Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital, told an online press briefing.

"Young people, in their 20s to just over their late 30s, are coming in with moderate to severe disease, some needing intensive care. About 65% are not vaccinated and most of the rest are only half-vaccinated," said Mathivha. "I'm worried that as the numbers go up, the public health care facilities will become overwhelmed."

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 24 of 51

She said urgent preparations are needed to enable public hospitals to cope with a potential large influx of patients needing intensive care.

"We know we have a new variant," said Mathivha. "The worst case scenario is that it hits us like delta ... we need to have critical care beds ready."

What looked like a cluster infection among some university students in Pretoria ballooned into hundreds of new cases and then thousands, first in the capital city and then to nearby Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city.

Studying the surge, scientists identified the new variant that diagnostic tests indicate is likely responsible for as many as 90% of the new cases, according to South Africa's health officials. Early studies show that it has a reproduction rate of 2 — meaning that every person infected by it is likely to spread it to two other people.

The new variant has a high number of mutations that appear to make it more transmissible and help it evade immune responses. The World Health Organization looked at the data on Friday and named the variant omicron, under its system of using Greek letters, calling it a highly transmissible variant of concern.

"It's a huge concern. We all are terribly concerned about this virus," Professor Willem Hanekom, director of the Africa Health Research Institute, told The Associated Press.

"This variant is mostly in Gauteng province, the Johannesburg area of South Africa. But we've got clues from diagnostic tests ... that suggest that this variant is already all over South Africa," said Hanekom, who is also co-chair of the South African COVID Variant Research Consortium.

"The scientific reaction from within South Africa is that we need to learn as much as soon as possible. We know precious little," he said. "For example, we do not know how virulent this virus is, which means how bad is this disease that it causes?"

A key factor is vaccination. The new variant appears to be spreading most quickly among those who are unvaccinated. Currently, only about 40% of adult South Africans are vaccinated, and the number is much lower among those in the 20 to 40-year-old age group.

South Africa has nearly 20 million doses of vaccines — made by Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson — but the numbers of people getting vaccines is about 120,000 per day, far below the government's target of 300,000 per day.

As scientists try to learn more about omicron, the people of South Africa can take measures to protect themselves against it, said Hanekom.

"This is a unique opportunity. There's still time for people who did not get vaccinated to go and get the vaccine, and that will provide some protection, we believe, against this infection, especially protection against severe infection, severe disease and death," he said. "So I would call on people to vaccinate if they can."

Some ordinary South Africans have more mundane concerns about the new variant.

"We've seen increasing numbers of COVID-19, so I've been worried about more restrictions," said Tebogo Letlapa, in Daveyton, eastern Johannesburg. "I'm especially worried about closing of alcohol sales because it's almost festive season now."

AP journalist Mogomotsi Magome contributed from Johannesburg.

## Solomon Islands violence recedes but not underlying tension

By DAVID RISING and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Violence receded Friday in the capital of the Solomon Islands, but the government showed no signs of addressing the underlying grievances that sparked two days of riots, including concerns about the country's increasing links with China.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare sought to deflect attention from domestic issues by blaming outside interference for stirring up the protesters, with a thinly veiled reference to Taiwan and the United States.

External pressures were a "very big ... influence. I don't want to name names. We'll leave it there,"



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 25 of 51

Sogavare said.

Honiara's Chinatown and its downtown precinct were focuses of rioters, looters and protesters who demanded the resignation of Sogavare, who has been prime minister intermittently since 2000.

Sogavare has been widely criticized by leaders of the country's most populous island of Malaita for a 2019 decision to drop diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of mainland China. His government, meanwhile, has been upset over millions in U.S. aid promised directly to Malaita, rather than through the central government.

Those issues are just the latest in decades of rivalry between Malaita and Guadalcanal, where the capital, Honiara, is located, said Jonathan Pryke, director of the Sydney-based Lowy Institute think tank's Pacific Islands program.

"Most of the drivers of the tension have been in the country for many decades and generations, and a lot of it is born out of the abject poverty of the country, the limited economic development opportunities and the inter-ethnic and inter-island rivalry between the two most populous islands," he said.

"So everyone's pointing fingers, but some fingers also need to be pointed at the political leaders of the Solomon Islands."

The Solomon Islands, with a population of about 700,000, are located about 1,500 kilometers (1,000 miles) northeast of Australia. Internationally they are probably still best known for the bloody fighting that took place there during World War II between the United States and Japan.

Riots and looting erupted Wednesday out of a peaceful protest in Honiara, primarily of people from Malaita demonstrating over a number of grievances. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the demonstrators, who set fire to the National Parliament, a police station and many other buildings.

Protesters defied a lockdown declared by Sogavare on Wednesday to take to the streets again on Thursday.

Critics also blamed the unrest on complaints of a lack of government services and accountability, corruption and Chinese businesses giving jobs to foreigners instead of locals.

Since the 2019 shift in allegiance from Taiwan to China there has been an expectation of massive infrastructure investment from Beijing — locally rumored to be in the range of \$500 million — but with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after the shift, none of that has yet materialized.

Malaita threatened to hold a referendum on independence over the issue, but that was quashed by Sogavare's government.

Sogavare said Friday that he stood by his government's decision to embrace Beijing, which he described as the "only issue" in the violence, which was "unfortunately influenced and encouraged by other powers."

"I'm not going to bow down to anyone. We are intact, the government's intact and we're going to defend democracy," he said.

More than broad geopolitical concerns, however, Pryke said the demonstrations really boiled down to frustration over the lack of opportunities for a largely young population, and the concentration of much of the country's wealth in the capital.

"I guarantee you the vast majority of the people involved in the rioting and looting couldn't point China or Taiwan out on a map," he said. "They were there as opportunists because they have had very limited economic opportunity. It's a very poor country with high youth unemployment, and this just shows how quickly these things can spiral out of control in a country that's volatile."

Andrew Yang, a professor at Taiwan's National Sun Yat-sen University and former deputy defense minister, said China's efforts to win diplomatic recognition from the Solomon Islands government are part of a competition for regional dominance.

"I think it's part of the power competition between United States and China because China also is extending its influence into the Pacific region and also taking advantage of this opportunity to compromise the U.S. so-called Indo-Pacific security strategy," he said. "So island countries in the South Pacific regions are a vitally important part of the U.S. Indo-Pacific security umbrella."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been following the protests "with concern," said his deputy spokesman Farhan Haq.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 26 of 51

"(Guterres) calls for an end to the violence and the protection of hard-won peacebuilding gains. He urges dialogue and peaceful means to address differences," Haq said in a statement on Friday.

A plane carrying Australian police and diplomats arrived late Thursday in Honiara to help local police restore order.

Up to 50 more Australian police as well 43 defense force personnel with a navy patrol boat were scheduled to arrive on Friday.

They were requested by Sogavare under a bilateral treaty with Australia, and the presence of an independent force, though small, seemed to help quell some of the violence.

Australia has a history of assisting the Solomon Islands, stepping in after years of bloody ethnic violence known as "the tensions" in 2003. The Australian-led international police and military force called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands helped restore the peace and left in 2017.

The Australian personnel are expected to be on hand for "a matter of weeks," according Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne.

Payne told reporters on Friday that she had no indication that other countries had stirred up the unrest. "We have not indicated that at all," Payne said.

Australia is not assisting in the protection of the National Parliament and the executive buildings, in a sign that it was not taking political sides.

"We've been very clear. Our view is we don't want to see violence," Payne said. "We would very much hope for a return to stability."

Local journalist Gina Kekea said the foreign policy switch to Beijing with little public consultation was one of a mix of issues that led to the protests. There were also complaints that foreign companies were not providing local jobs.

"Chinese businesses and (other) Asian businesses ... seem to have most of the work, especially when it comes to extracting resources, which people feel strongly about," Kekea said.

Protesters were replaced by looters and scavengers on Friday in Chinatown, Kekea said.

"It's been two days, two whole days of looting and protesting and rioting and Honiara is just a small city," Kekea said. The capital has 85,000 residents.

"So I think that there's nothing much left for them to loot and spoil now," she said.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison questioned whether Chinese citizens and businesses were being targeted. He described the unrest as "a bit of a mixed story" and noted Chinatown was the scene of rioting before Australia's 2003 intervention.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Friday condemned the violence and stressed Beijing's support for the Solomon Islands government. He said China was taking measures to safeguard the safety and rights of Chinese people and institutions in the country.

"We believe that under the leadership of Prime Minister Sogavare, the Solomon government can restore order and stabilize the internal situation as soon as possible," he said.

The establishment of diplomatic ties with Beijing "has won sincere support of the people," and "any attempts to undermine the normal development of China-Solomon relations are futile," Zhao said.

Rising reported from Bangkok.

## Can Biden find the right balance on immigration?

By COLLEEN LONG and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats wielded demands to fix the nation's broken immigration system as a cudgel against Republicans in the 2020 campaign. Elect us, went the argument, and we'll stop the cruel treatment of migrants at the border, and put in place lasting and humane policies that work.

A year into Joe Biden's presidency, though, action on the issue has been hard to find and there is growing consternation privately among some in the party that the Biden administration can't find the right balance on immigration.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 27 of 51

Publicly, it's another story. Most Washington lawmakers are largely holding their tongues, unwilling to criticize their leader on a polarizing topic that has created divisions within the party — especially as concerns mount over whether Democrats can hold on to power come next year.

It's a hard balancing act to pull off, said Douglas Rivlin, spokesman for America's Voice, an immigration reform group. Especially when Republicans are unrelenting in their negativity toward the president, even a little friendly fire can be a challenge.

"It's hard but they've got to do it," he said. "They're going to face voters next year, all the people on the Hill. Biden isn't, they are. And they have to be clear they're pushing Biden to be the Democratic president we elected, rather than being scared of the issues because the politics are difficult."

Democrats have pointed to the recent House approval of a huge spending bill backed by the White House that would allow for expanded work permits and some other, less ambitious immigration provisions. When Biden took office, he promised a pathway to U.S. citizenship for millions of people in the country illegally. Democrats say the measures in the spending bill are enough to show the party won't shy away from the immigration issue during next year's midterms.

"I don't see it as as the fault of the president per se or ... these challenges that we're facing today, solely falling on the shoulders of the president," said Democratic Rep. Veronica Escobar, who represents a district in El Paso, Texas, across the border from Juarez, Mexico. "It is a collective obligation that we have and I think Democrats have solutions and we need to lean in on them."

Her Democratic colleague, Rep. Joaquin Castro, from San Antonio, ducked a question when asked if House members in swing districts will be forced to run away from Biden in 2022, saying "I'm going to wait on political discussions."

But Castro added that the party had done as much as it could do on immigration this session, given Senate rules that have prevented larger legislation on the issue from advancing with the required minimum of 60 votes in that chamber.

"Right now, Democrats have control of the White House, the Senate and the House and we have pushed as hard as we can with the number that we have in the chambers to get protections from deportation, workplace permits, driver's licenses, travel abilities," Castro said.

Former Democratic Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who recently announced he'd run for Texas governor, has been one of a few Democrats to put the border front and center, heading almost immediately to the U.S.-Mexico border after he announced he was running, where he suggested the White House is doing its party no favors.

"It's clear that Biden could be doing a better job at the border," O'Rourke said during an interview with KTVT TV in Dallas-Fort Worth. "It is not enough of a priority."

Like most top Democrats, O'Rourke will have to counter the narrative pushed by Republicans that an increase in the number of people crossing the border illegally this year has reached "crisis" levels. Incumbent Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's campaign accused O'Rourke of supporting Biden's "open borders" policies and financed billboards along the border featuring O'Rourke's face morphing into that of the president.

Nick Rathod, Rourke's campaign manager, sees "neglect, I think by Democrats across the board, not just the Biden administration, in engaging in an authentic manner in those communities" along the border.

"It's sort of created a vacuum. What we want to do is fill that space."

But immigration is a complex issue, and no administration has been able to fix it. And Biden is trapped between the conflicting interests of showing compassion while dealing with migrants coming to the country — illegally — seeking a better life.

The administration has said it is focusing on root causes of immigration, and working to broker long-term solutions that make migrants want to stay in their homelands. They've pushed through regulations that aim to adjudicate asylum cases faster so migrants don't wait in limbo, and they've worked to diminish the massive backlog of cases.

But mostly, Biden has spent much of the past year undoing Trump-era rules widely viewed as cruel that clamped down on asylum seekers, gutted the number of refugees allowed to the U.S. and then shuttered

the border entirely in the name of COVID-19.

Despite that effort, Biden has faced a heap of criticism from progressives and immigrant advocates who say he is still making too much use of inhumane Trump-era policies.

One of the most criticized is the "Remain in Mexico" program, where migrants are sent to wait for resolution of their immigration claims over the border to Mexico in fetid makeshift refugee camps. It was put on hold after a judge ruled it was improper, but according to court papers, the Biden administration is waiting on final agreements with Mexico to start doing it again.

"We reject a system where people facing life and death consequences are forced to navigate a complex legal system — in a language they may not speak and in a culture which they may not be accustomed to — alone," the Catholic Legal Immigration Network said in a statement.

Another is a provision, known as Title 42, that gives federal health officials powers during a pandemic to take extraordinary measures to limit transmission of an infectious disease. The White House has appealed a judge's ruling that ended the regulation.

The administration has used the provision to justify the deportation of Haitian migrants who entered Texas. After viral images surfaced of U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics, Biden's team took heat from even the staunchest of allies.

Republicans are hammering border security, intent on keeping the issue in the headlines. The issue remains a high priority to some voters. A CNN poll earlier this month showed 14% of Americans identified immigration as the top issue facing the county, trailing behind the economy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. Border Patrol reported more than 1.6 million encounters with migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border from September 2020 to September 2021, more than quadruple the number in the prior fiscal year and the highest annual total on record.

The number of encounters had dropped over the previous 12 months to around 400,000, as the pandemic slowed global migration. But the rebound is now higher than the previous record set in 2000, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. The tally includes both expulsions when migrants are turned away immediately, and apprehensions when they're detained by U.S. authorities, at least temporarily.

The U.S. system is still ill-equipped to manage such a crush, though career immigration officials warned of a coming surge. Border stations are temporary holding places not meant for long-term care. It's a massive logistical challenge, especially when dealing with children who cross alone and require higher standards of care and coordination across agencies.

---

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

## **World races to contain new COVID threat, the omicron variant**

By RAF CASERT and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world raced Friday to contain a new coronavirus variant potentially more dangerous than the one that has fueled relentless waves of infection on nearly every continent.

A World Health Organization panel named the variant "omicron" and classified it as a highly transmissible virus of concern, the same category that includes the predominant delta variant, which is still a scourge driving higher cases of sickness and death in Europe and parts of the United States.

"It seems to spread rapidly," U.S. President Joe Biden said of the new variant, only a day after celebrating the resumption of Thanksgiving gatherings for millions of American families and the sense that normal life was coming back at least for the vaccinated. In announcing new travel restrictions, he told reporters, "I've decided that we're going to be cautious."

Omicron's actual risks are not understood. But early evidence suggests it carries an increased risk of reinfection compared with other highly transmissible variants, the WHO said. That means people who contracted COVID-19 and recovered could be subject to catching it again. It could take weeks to know if current vaccines are less effective against it.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 29 of 51

In response to the variant's discovery in southern Africa, the United States, Canada, Russia and a host of other countries joined the European Union in restricting travel for visitors from that region, where the variant brought on a fresh surge of infections.

The White House said the U.S. will restrict travel from South Africa and seven other countries in the region beginning Monday. Biden issued a declaration later Friday making the travel prohibition official, with exceptions for U.S. citizens and permanent residents and for several other categories, including spouses and other close family.

Medical experts, including the WHO, warned against any overreaction before the variant was thoroughly studied. But a jittery world feared the worst after the tenacious virus triggered a pandemic that has killed more than 5 million people around the globe.

"We must move quickly and at the earliest possible moment," British Health Secretary Sajid Javid told lawmakers.

Omicron has now been seen in travelers to Belgium, Hong Kong and Israel, as well as in southern Africa.

There was no immediate indication whether the variant causes more severe disease. As with other variants, some infected people display no symptoms, South African experts said. The WHO panel drew from the Greek alphabet in naming the variant omicron, as it has done with earlier, major variants of the virus.

Even though some of the genetic changes appear worrisome, it was unclear how much of a public health threat it posed. Some previous variants, like the beta variant, initially concerned scientists but did not spread very far.

Fears of more pandemic-induced economic turmoil caused stocks to tumble in Asia, Europe and the United States. The Dow Jones Industrial Average briefly dropped more than 1,000 points. The S&P 500 index closed down 2.3%, its worst day since February. The price of oil plunged about 13%.

"The last thing we need is to bring in a new variant that will cause even more problems," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said. Members of the 27-nation EU have experienced a massive spike in cases recently.

Britain, EU countries and some others introduced their travel restrictions Friday, some within hours of learning of the variant. Asked why the U.S. was waiting until Monday, Biden said only: "Because that was the recommendation coming from my medical team."

The White House said government agencies needed the time to work with airlines and put the travel limits into effect.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said flights will have to "be suspended until we have a clear understanding about the danger posed by this new variant, and travelers returning from this region should respect strict quarantine rules."

She warned that "mutations could lead to the emergence and spread of even more concerning variants of the virus that could spread worldwide within a few months."

"It's a suspicious variant," said Frank Vandenbroucke, health minister in Belgium, which became the first European Union country to announce a case of the variant. "We don't know if it's a very dangerous variant."

Omicron has yet to be detected in the United States, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease expert. Although it may be more transmissible and resistant to vaccines than other variants, "we don't know that for sure right now," he told CNN.

Speaking to reporters outside a bookstore on Nantucket Island, where he was spending the holiday weekend, Biden said the new variant was "a great concern" that "should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations."

He called anew for unvaccinated Americans to get their widely available doses and for governments to waive intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines so they can be more rapidly manufactured around the world.

Israel, one of the world's most vaccinated countries, announced Friday that it also detected its first case of the new variant in a traveler who returned from Malawi. The traveler and two other suspected cases were placed in isolation. Israel said all three were vaccinated, but officials were looking into the travelers' exact vaccination status.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 30 of 51

After a 10-hour overnight trip, passengers aboard KLM Flight 598 from Capetown, South Africa, to Amsterdam were held on the edge of the runway Friday morning at Schiphol airport for four hours pending special testing. Passengers aboard a flight from Johannesburg were also isolated and tested.

"It's ridiculous. If we didn't catch the dreaded bug before, we're catching it now," said passenger Francesca de' Medici, a Rome-based art consultant who was on the flight.

Some experts said the variant's emergence illustrated how rich countries' hoarding of vaccines threatens to prolong the pandemic.

Fewer than 6% of people in Africa have been fully immunized against COVID-19, and millions of health workers and vulnerable populations have yet to receive a single dose. Those conditions can speed up spread of the virus, offering more opportunities for it to evolve into a dangerous variant.

"This is one of the consequences of the inequity in vaccine rollouts and why the grabbing of surplus vaccines by richer countries will inevitably rebound on us all at some point," said Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at Britain's University of Southampton. He urged Group of 20 leaders "to go beyond vague promises and actually deliver on their commitments to share doses."

The new variant added to investor anxiety that months of progress containing COVID-19 could be reversed.

"Investors are likely to shoot first and ask questions later until more is known," said Jeffrey Halley of foreign exchange broker Oanda.

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discouraged any travel bans on countries that reported the new variant. It said past experience shows that such travel bans have "not yielded a meaningful outcome."

The U.S. restrictions will apply to visitors from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique, and Malawi. The White House suggested the restrictions will mirror an earlier pandemic policy that banned entry of any foreigners who had traveled over the previous two weeks in the designated regions.

The U.K. banned flights from South Africa and five other southern African countries and announced that anyone who had recently arrived from those countries would be asked to take a coronavirus test.

Canada banned the entry of all foreigners who have traveled to southern Africa in the last two weeks.

The Japanese government announced that Japanese nationals traveling from Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Lesotho will have to quarantine at government-dedicated accommodations for 10 days and take three COVID-19 tests during that time. Japan has not yet opened up to foreign nationals. Russia announced travel restrictions effective Sunday.

---

Woodward reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Lorne Cook in Brussels; Colleen Barry in Milan; Pan Pylas in London; Jamey Keaten in Geneva; Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands; Dave McHugh in Frankfurt, Germany; Carley Petesch in Dakar, Senegal; Andrew Meldrum in Johannesburg; Frank Jordans in Berlin; and Darlene Superville in Nantucket, Massachusetts, contributed to this report.

## **EXPLAINER: What is this new COVID variant in South Africa?**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — WHAT IS THIS NEW COVID-19 VARIANT?

South African scientists identified a new version of the coronavirus this week that they say is behind a recent spike in COVID-19 infections in Gauteng, the country's most populous province. It's unclear where the new variant first emerged, but scientists in South Africa first alerted the World Health Organization and it has now been seen in travelers to Belgium, Botswana, Hong Kong and Israel.

Health Minister Joe Phaahla said the variant was linked to an "exponential rise" of cases in the last few days, although experts are still trying to determine if the new variant is actually responsible.

From just over 200 new confirmed cases per day in recent weeks, South Africa saw the number of new daily cases rocket to 2,465 on Thursday. Struggling to explain the sudden rise in cases, scientists studied virus samples from the outbreak and discovered the new variant.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 31 of 51

In a statement on Friday, the WHO designated it as a "variant of concern," naming it "omicron" after a letter in the Greek alphabet.

After convening a group of experts to assess the data, the U.N. health agency said that "preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with this variant," as compared to other variants.

"The number of cases of this variant appears to be increasing in almost all provinces in South Africa," the WHO said.

## WHY ARE SCIENTISTS WORRIED ABOUT THIS NEW VARIANT?

It appears to have a high number of mutations — about 30 — in the coronavirus' spike protein, which could affect how easily it spreads to people.

Sharon Peacock, who has led genetic sequencing of COVID-19 in Britain at the University of Cambridge, said the data so far suggest the new variant has mutations "consistent with enhanced transmissibility," but said that "the significance of many of the mutations is still not known."

Lawrence Young, a virologist at the University of Warwick, described omicron as "the most heavily mutated version of the virus we have seen," including potentially worrying changes never before seen all in the same virus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S.' top infectious diseases doctor, said American officials had arranged a call with their South African counterparts later on Friday to find out more details and said there was no indication the variant had yet arrived in the U.S.

## WHAT'S KNOWN AND NOT KNOWN ABOUT THE VARIANT?

Scientists know that omicron is genetically distinct from previous variants including the beta and delta variants, but do not know if these genetic changes make it any more transmissible or dangerous. So far, there is no indication the variant causes more severe disease.

It will likely take weeks to sort out if omicron is more infectious and if vaccines are still effective against it.

Peter Openshaw, a professor of experimental medicine at Imperial College London said it was "extremely unlikely" that current vaccines wouldn't work, noting they are effective against numerous other variants.

Even though some of the genetic changes in omicron appear worrying, it's still unclear if they will pose a public health threat. Some previous variants, like the beta variant, initially alarmed scientists but didn't end up spreading very far.

"We don't know if this new variant could get a toehold in regions where delta is," said Peacock of the University of Cambridge. "The jury is out on how well this variant will do where there are other variants circulating." To date, delta is by far the most predominant form of COVID-19, accounting for more than 99% of sequences submitted to the world's biggest public database.

## HOW DID THIS NEW VARIANT ARISE?

The coronavirus mutates as it spreads and many new variants, including those with worrying genetic changes, often just die out. Scientists monitor COVID-19 sequences for mutations that could make the disease more transmissible or deadly, but they cannot determine that simply by looking at the virus.

Peacock said the variant "may have evolved in someone who was infected but could then not clear the virus, giving the virus the chance to genetically evolve," in a scenario similar to how experts think the alpha variant — which was first identified in England — also emerged, by mutating in an immune-compromised person.

## ARE THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS BEING IMPOSED BY SOME COUNTRIES JUSTIFIED?

Maybe. As of noon Friday, travelers arriving in the U.K. from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini and Zimbabwe will have to self-isolate for 10 days. European Union nations also moved quickly on Friday to ban air travel from southern Africa, and the U.S. also said it would ban travel from South Africa and seven other African nations by non-US citizens beginning Monday.

Given the recent rapid rise in COVID-19 in South Africa, restricting travel from the region is "prudent" and would buy authorities more time, said Neil Ferguson, an infectious diseases expert at Imperial College London.

Jeffrey Barrett, director of COVID-19 Genetics at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, thought that the early detection of the new variant could mean restrictions taken now would have a bigger impact than when

the delta variant first emerged

"With delta, it took many, many weeks into India's terrible wave before it became clear what was going on and delta had already seeded itself in many places in the world and it was too late to do anything about it," he said. "We may be at an earlier point with this new variant so there may still be time to do something about it."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **In Nantucket, Biden shops, attends Christmas tree lighting**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NANTUCKET, Mass. (AP) — President Joe Biden appeared on the loose Friday in Nantucket.

Biden spent more than an hour walking around downtown Nantucket's cobblestone streets, popping unannounced into quaint mom-and-pop shops, appearing to make purchases and posing for photos with surprised business owners.

He was accompanied by some of his grandchildren. Biden and his entire family are spending the Thanksgiving holiday on the Massachusetts island, renting a sprawling compound that belongs to his friend and billionaire philanthropist David Rubenstein.

"Hey, Joe," "We love you, Joe," some people shouted as Biden passed by on a cold and rainy day. One man was heard telling the 79-year-old president that he looked younger in person.

It's those kinds of interactions with everyday people that Biden, a back-slapping politician for nearly five decades, absolutely relishes but hasn't done as much because of COVID-19.

Biden set off on the walk after speaking to reporters about a new COVID-19 variant that is circulating in South Africa, and about his decision Friday to have the U.S. join other countries in restricting travel from southern Africa, effective Monday.

The president opened Friday by going to a restaurant for lunch with his wife, Jill, children Hunter and Ashley, and their grandchildren. It's a post-Thanksgiving Day family tradition. They then browsed at a nearby bookstore before Biden went off on the stroll.

He stopped in at a leather goods store and several clothing, gift and home goods stores before the family reunited to participate in another one of their traditions: attending Nantucket's annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Biden's stroll around downtown was reminiscent of a period during Barack Obama's presidency when he rebelled against the limits that come with occupying the Oval Office. Modern presidents generally do not get around on foot.

"The bear is loose!" Obama declared one day in 2014 after he left the White House on foot, instead of in a motorcade, and walked over to the Interior Department, startling ordinary people on the streets of downtown Washington.

Biden did not make a similar declaration.

## **Big flotilla of illegal gold miners splits up in Brazil**

EDMAR BARROS, SILAS LAURENTINO and DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

ON THE RIO MADEIRA, Brazil (AP) — Hundreds of barges of illegal miners dredging for gold were navigating along the Madeira River in the Brazilian Amazon on Friday, and researchers said they posed a threat of pollution — including toxic mercury — for the broader environment.

The barges were spotted this week by the municipality of Autazes, some 120 kilometers (70 miles) from Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state.

Smaller gatherings of barges are common along rivers in the region, but the latest collection drew international attention this week when Greenpeace and news media published images of several rows of rafts.

Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão announced an imminent police operation in the area, prompting



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 33 of 51

the miners to depart early Friday and head elsewhere along the river.

Miner Thiago Bitencourt Gomes, wearing just a pair of shorts and some flip flops, told The Associated Press on Friday that about 400 barges – some 3,000 people – congregated in the area after one miner found gold there and alerted the others.

“Here everybody knows each other. We’re all friends, we’re all related,” said the 28-year-old whose father, uncles, aunts and cousins were also part of the contingent.

The wood-walled rafts, some equipped with satellite internet and air conditioning units, were tied together, forming rows of houses on the wide and muddy Madeira River, a large tributary that flows into the vast Amazon downstream from Manaus. Miners and their families live, eat and work on the barges, some accompanied by their dogs and other pets.

“We know that in the law, we’re illegal. But we all need to provide for our families,” Gomes said, adding that the miners had repeatedly called on politicians to legalize their activity — in vain.

Another miner said a barge collected about 60 grams of gold — worth roughly \$3,500 if pure — over 40 hours of work. Workers often took turns to work 24 hours a day.

Environmentalists are alarmed by the fact miners use mercury to separate gold from the sediment they suck from the river bottom and the process gives off toxic vapors as well as spilling some into the river.

Once in the river, it falls to the bottom and enters the food chain, contaminating fish, shrimp, turtles and other marine life as far as 500 kilometers (about 300 miles) downstream, said Paulo Basta, a researcher at the government’s Fiocruz science center

Basta said there is strong evidence of mercury contamination linked to cognitive problems, alteration of senses and hypertension, and he noted that the miners themselves have high risks of exposure.

“He takes the mercury in his hand, or puts it inside his bag. It leaks, drops on his leg and he gets contaminated through the skin. But the most serious form of contamination is by inhaling mercury vapor, which gets into the lungs,” Basta said.

Miners told the AP they didn’t release mercury, which is expensive, into the water but try to recover and reuse it.

Federal prosecutors in Amazonas state called Wednesday for federal and state authorities to coordinate a response and dismantle the illegal settlement within 30 days.

Federal police responded with a brief statement saying they were aware of the situation and evaluating options.

Miners told the AP on Friday that no authorities had come into contact with them. But fearing an operation, they left Autazes and continued along the river. The barges, pushed along by powerboats, headed off in different directions.

While local media reported tensions between the miners and residents of Autazes, journalists at the scene saw many locals taking advantage of the arrival of hundreds of visitors by selling food, electronics, diesel, clothes and even perfume.

Mining as a whole has become a sensitive issue, especially since President Jair Bolsonaro assumed office in January 2019 vowing to expand development in the Amazon region and to legalize some types of now-banned mining operations.

It is one of several factors driving deforestation, which began an upward trend in 2014 and has accelerated under Bolsonaro, whose father once worked as a wildcat miner.

— Diane Jeantet reported from Rio de Janeiro.

## Ukraine leader alleges Russia-backed coup planned next week

By YURAS KARMANAU The Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday claimed that his country’s intelligence service has uncovered plans for a Russia-backed coup d’etat in the country set for next week that allegedly involves one of Ukraine’s richest oligarchs.

Both the oligarch and the Russian government rejected the allegations. In Nantucket, Massachusetts,

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 34 of 51

where he is spending a holiday weekend, U.S. President Joe Biden expressed concern at the coup talk and renewed U.S. support for Ukraine's sovereignty and self-government.

At a news conference in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, Zelenskyy said he received information that a coup was being planned for next Wednesday or Thursday. He did not give many details to back up his allegation, but pointed to a suspected role of Ukraine's richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov.

The president said that Ukrainian intelligence has audio recordings of an alleged meeting between Russian and Ukrainian officials discussing a plan for a coup allegedly funded by Akhmetov, whose fortune is estimated at \$7.5 billion.

Zelenskyy refused to disclose further details about the alleged coup, saying only that he doesn't plan to flee the country.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected the allegations in comments to journalists in Moscow on Friday. "Russia had no plans to get involved," Peskov said. "Russia never does such things at all."

Akhmetov called Zelenskyy's allegations "an absolute lie." "I am outraged by the spread of this lie, no matter what the President's motives are," Akhmetov said in a statement, relayed to the Associated Press by his spokeswoman Anna Terekhova.

Asked about the alleged coup plans, the U.S. State Department's top official for European and Eurasian affairs, Karen Donfried, said: "We are in touch with the Ukrainian government to discuss this further, and we're working to obtain additional information."

Biden told U.S. reporters he expected to talk to Putin and Zelenskyy, "in all probability."

Volodymyr Fesenko, a Kyiv-based political analyst and head of the Penta Center think tank, told the AP that Zelenskyy targeted Akhmetov after a "proper information war" was waged against the president over the last two months on TV channels the oligarch owns.

A mass protest in front of the president's office is also being planned for Dec. 1.

The analyst pointed to great discontent among Ukrainian oligarchs, including Akhmetov, over a law pushed by Zelenskyy that limits their influence on politics.

Fesenko called Zelenskyy's reference to Akhmetov in connection with the alleged coup "a pre-emptive signal" for the oligarch not to get involved in "risky political ventures, cross the 'red lines' and negotiate with Moscow."

In recent weeks, Ukrainian and Western officials have expressed concern that a Russian military buildup near Ukraine could signal plans by Moscow to invade its ex-Soviet neighbor. The Kremlin insists it has no such intention and has accused Ukraine and its Western backers of making the claims to cover up their own allegedly aggressive designs.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine has full control of its borders and is ready for any escalation of the conflict with Russia. But he noted that the media are engaged in fearmongering over the possibility of such a conflict.

He also said that the head of his office, Andriy Yermak, will soon be in contact with the Russian authorities at the request of the European Council President Charles Michel and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

"They want contacts between our administration and the Russian administration. I think that in the near future Yermak will contact them. We are absolutely not against" this, Zelenskyy said.

National Security Writer Robert Burns in Washington and Darlene Superville in Nantucket, Mass. contributed to this report.

## Black Friday is back but it's not what it used to be

By TALI ARBEL and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — On this year's Black Friday, things almost seem normal.

Malls and stores report decent-sized crowds, if not the floods of people that used to fight over the latest toys and electronics — online shopping is much too common for that now, and discounts are both more subdued and spread out over the weeks leading up to Christmas, on both websites and in stores.

Out-of-stock items due to supply crunches, higher prices for gas and food, and labor shortages that make it more difficult to respond to customers are also causing frustrations for shoppers.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 35 of 51

Christian MacDonald, the first person in a line of about 75 people waiting for a Costa Mesa, California Target store to open, came away empty-handed.

"I came here because I figured since it was Black Friday, they'd have the new Switch OLED in stock, but they didn't," said MacDonald, who waited an hour and a half to get in for the sought-after Nintendo video game console. "So I'm just going to go home, I guess."

The country's largest mall, the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, said nearly 100,000 people had come as of early afternoon Friday, more than double last year but a bit shy of 2019 numbers.

"We had a fantastic start," said Mall of America senior vice president Jill Renslow.

The staffing issues that have hit many retailers and restaurants, however, also affected Mall of America. It had to trim the hours it was open.

Still, Black Friday retail sales surged 29.8% through mid-afternoon, according to Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all types of payments, including cash and credit cards. That was above its 20% growth forecast for the day. Steve Sadove, senior adviser for Mastercard, says the numbers speak to the "strength of the consumer."

Overall holiday sales are expected to grow this year. The National Retail Federation predicts a sales increase of 8.5% to 10.5% for all of November and December, after 8% growth in those months in 2020.

While Black Friday has a strong hold on Americans' imaginations as a day of crazed shopping, it has lost stature over the last decade as stores opened on Thanksgiving and shopping shifted to Amazon and other online retailers. Stores diluted the day's importance further by advertising Black Friday sales on more and more days.

The pandemic led many retailers to close stores on Thanksgiving Day and push discounts on their websites, starting as early as October. That's continuing this year, although there are deals in stores as well.

At the Fashion Centre mall in the northern Virginia suburbs, window signs advertised 50% off boots at Aldo, 40% off full price items at J.Crew, and 30% off at Forever 21. At the Capital Mall in Olympia, Washington, stores advertised sales of 35% to 50% off.

Big box retailers like Walmart, however, aren't blasting "doorbuster" deals in their ads, said DealNews.com analyst Julie Ramhold. And clothing chains like Victoria's Secret and Gap are having harder time managing supply issues. Victoria's Secret said recently that 45% of its holiday merchandise is still stuck in transit.

Supply chain hold-ups are a major concern this year, and both stores and shoppers are trying to find workarounds. Some of the biggest U.S. retailers are rerouting goods to less congested ports, even chartering their own vessels.

Macy's CEO Jeff Gennette said the company is prepared. "We are deep and we are ready," he said, noting inventory levels are up 20% compared to last year.

But many sales floors looked different than in years past, when tall piles of merchandise used to be on display. At Macy's in Manhattan, gone were the shoes stacked so high shoppers couldn't reach them.

In the Willowbrook Mall in Wayne, New Jersey, lines formed outside Pandora and Bath & Body Works around noon, while some small shops were largely empty. At Fashion Centre mall in the D.C. suburbs in the afternoon, Macy's was jammed with people, making it difficult to move around the store, while Forever 21 security guards had to help clear congestion.

Tim Clayburn was shopping at Fashion Centre Friday morning because he wanted to make sure he could get the gifts he wanted for his relatives.

"Everyone is so worried about not having things shipped to you on time," he said. "I'd rather just get stuff in person so I don't have to worry about the shipping."

Across the country, there were roughly three dozen people in line at a Denver-area Best Buy when doors opened at 5 a.m., said shopper Edmond Kunath, which he found underwhelming.

"It is amazing how small the crowd is here this morning," said Kunath, who was looking for deals on Apple AirPods headphones and a hard drive.

Retail workers are worried about their safety because of frustrated shoppers and thin staffing, said Stuart Applebaum, president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, who said stores should

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 36 of 51

provide security and training on how to handle irate shoppers.

One employee at the Zara in Fashion Centre, who declined to give his name, said the store seemed understaffed and he had been stressed all morning. "This is the craziest I've seen things in a long time," he said.

At Macy's in Manhattan, the pandemic remained in sight — employees wore masks and many shoppers did too — but there was also a sense of celebrating the fun of shopping, of things returning to how they used to be.

Carol Claridge of Bourne, England, has been coming to New York for Thanksgiving-week shopping for 15 years, but skipped it last year because of the pandemic. The U.S. reopened to travelers from the U.K. earlier in November when it lifted pandemic travel bans.

"We had to wait a long time to do this," said Claridge, who was looking at beauty gift sets on the first floor of Macy's with a friend. "We are picking up anything we see that we like. We call it our annual shopping outing."

Shoppers are expected to pay on average between 5% to 17% more for toys, clothing, appliances, TVs and others purchases on Black Friday this year compared with last year, according to Aurelien Duthoit, senior sector advisor at Allianz Research, with the biggest price increases on TVs. That's because whatever discounts available will be applied to goods that already cost more.

Aniva Pawlowski, who was looking for shoes and coats Friday at Macy's in Manhattan, plans to spend \$1,000 on holiday shopping, similar to years past, even though she's concerned about gas, food and other costs rising.

"Everything is expensive," she said.

Online shopping remains huge, and sales are expected to rise 7% for the week after the massive 46% gain a year ago, when many shoppers stayed home, according to Mastercard. For the overall holiday season, online sales should increase 10% from a year ago, compared with a 33% increase last year, according to Adobe Digital Economy Index.

"What the pandemic did for retail was, it forced them to be better digital retailers," said Marshal Cohen of market research firm NPD Group.

That means the day after Thanksgiving is no longer what it was.

David Zalubowski from Lone Tree, Colorado; Parker Purifoy from Arlington, Virginia; Manuel Valdes in Olympia, Washington; Bryan Gallion from Wayne, New Jersey; and Eugene Garcia from Costa Mesa, California contributed to this report.

## Stocks sink on new COVID variant; Dow loses 905 points

By KEN SWEET and PAUL WISEMAN undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks sank Friday, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average briefly falling more than 1,000 points, as a new coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa appeared to be spreading across the globe. Investors were uncertain whether the variant could potentially reverse months of progress at getting the COVID-19 pandemic under control.

The S&P 500 index dropped 106.84 points, or 2.3%, to close at 4,594.62. It was the worst day for Wall Street's benchmark index since February.

The index was dragged lower by everything from banks, travel companies and energy companies as investors tried to reposition to protect themselves financially from the new variant. The World Health Organization called the variant "highly transmissible."

The price of oil fell about 13%, the biggest decline since early in the pandemic, amid worries of another slowdown in the global economy. That in turn dragged down energy stocks. Exxon shares fell 3.5% while Chevron fell 2.3%.

The blue chips closed down 905.04 points to end the day at 34,899.34. The Nasdaq Composite lost 353.57 points, or 2.2%, to 15,491.66.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 37 of 51

"Investors are likely to shoot first and ask questions later until more is known," Jeffrey Halley of Oanda said in a report. That was evident from the action in the bond market, where the yield on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 1.48% from 1.64% on Wednesday. As a result, banks took some of the heaviest losses. JPMorgan Chase dropped 3%.

There have been other variants of the coronavirus — the delta variant devastated much of the U.S. throughout the summer — and investors, public officials and the general public are jittery about any new variant that's spreading. It's been nearly two years since COVID-19 emerged, killing more than 5 million people around the globe so far.

Cases of the new variant were found in Hong Kong, Belgium and Tel Aviv as well as major South African cities like Johannesburg.

The economic impacts of this variant were already being felt. The European Union and the U.K. both announced travel restrictions from southern Africa on Friday. After the market closed, the U.S. also put travel restrictions on those coming from South Africa as well as seven other African nations.

Airline stocks quickly sold off, with United Airlines dropping 9.6% and American Airlines falling 8.8%.

"COVID had seemingly been put in the rear-view mirror by financial markets until recently," Douglas Porter, chief economist at BMO Capital Markets. "At the least, (the virus) is likely to continue throwing sand in the gears of the global economy in 2022, restraining the recovery (and) keeping kinks in the supply chain."

Even Bitcoin got caught up in the selling. The digital currency dropped 8.4% to \$54,179, according to CoinDesk.

In Nantucket, Massachusetts, where he is spending a holiday weekend, President Joe Biden said he wasn't concerned about the market's decline.

"They always do when there's something on COVID (that) arises," Biden said.

One sign of Wall Street's anxiety was the VIX, the market's measurement of volatility that is sometimes referred to as its "fear gauge." The VIX jumped 53.6% to a reading of 28.54, its highest reading since January before the vaccines began to be widely distributed.

Fearful of more lockdowns and travel bans, investors moved money into companies that largely benefited from previous waves, like Zoom Communications for meetings or Peloton for at-home exercise equipment. Shares in both companies rose nearly 6%.

The coronavirus vaccine manufacturers were among the biggest beneficiaries of the emergence of this new variant and the subsequent investor reaction. Pfizer shares rose more than 6% while Moderna shares jumped more than 20%.

Merck shares fell 3.8%, however. While U.S. health officials said Merck's experimental treatment of COVID-19 was effective, data showed the pill was not as effective at keeping patients out of the hospital as originally thought.

Investors are worried that the supply chain issues that have impacted global markets for months will worsen. Ports and freight yards are vulnerable and could be shut by new, localized outbreaks.

"Supply chains are already stretched," said Neil Shearing, an economist with Capital Economics in London. "A new, more dangerous, virus wave could cause some workers to temporarily exit the workforce, and deter others from returning, making current labor shortages worse."

The variant also puts more pressure on central banks that are already faced with a dilemma: whether and when to raise interest rates to combat rising inflation. "The threat of a new, more serious, variant of the virus may be a reason for central banks to postpone plans to raise interest rates until the picture becomes clearer," Shearing said.

Stock trading the Friday after Thanksgiving is typically the slowest day of the year, with the market closing at 1 p.m. Eastern. However volume on Friday was much higher than it would typically be for a holiday-shortened day. Roughly 3.4 billion shares exchanged hands on the New York Stock Exchange, which is only modestly below the 4 billion shares traded on an average day.

Wiseman reported from Washington.

## Biden sets out oil, gas leasing reform, stops short of ban

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Friday recommended an overhaul of the nation's oil and gas leasing program to limit areas available for energy development and raise costs for oil and gas companies to drill on public land and water.

The long-awaited report by the Interior Department stops short of recommending an end to oil and gas leasing on public lands, as many environmental groups have urged. But officials said the report would lead to a more responsible leasing process that provides a better return to U.S. taxpayers.

"Our nation faces a profound climate crisis that is impacting every American," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement, adding that the new report's recommendations will mitigate worsening climate change impacts "while staying steadfast in the pursuit of environmental justice."

The report completes a review ordered in January by President Joe Biden, who directed a pause in federal oil and gas lease sales in his first days in office, citing worries about climate change.

The moratorium drew sharp criticism from congressional Republicans and the oil industry, even as many environmentalists and Democrats said Biden should make the leasing pause permanent.

The new report seeks a middle ground that would continue the multibillion-dollar leasing program while reforming it to end what many officials consider overly favorable terms for the industry.

The report recommends hiking federal royalty rates for oil and gas drilling, which have not been raised for 100 years. The federal rate of 12.5% that developers must pay to drill on public lands is significantly lower than many states and private landowners charge for drilling leases on state or private lands.

The report also said the government should consider raising bond payments that energy companies must set aside for future cleanup before they drill new wells. Bond rates have not been increased in decades, the report said.

The Bureau of Land Management, an Interior Department agency, should focus leasing offers on areas that have moderate to high potential for oil and gas resources and are close to existing oil and gas infrastructure, the report said.

The White House declined to comment Friday, referring questions to Interior.

The federal leasing program has drawn renewed focus in recent weeks as gasoline prices have skyrocketed and Republicans complained that Biden policies, including the leasing moratorium, rejection of the Keystone XL oil pipeline and a ban on oil leasing in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, contributed to the price spike.

Biden on Tuesday ordered a record 50 million barrels of oil released from America's strategic reserve, aiming to bring down gas prices amid concerns about inflation. Gasoline prices are at about \$3.40 a gallon, more than 50% higher than a year ago, according to the American Automobile Association. Oil prices dropped about 13% Friday as a new coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa appeared to be spreading across the globe.

The Biden administration conducted a lease sale on federal oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico last week, after attorneys general from Republican-led states successfully sued in federal court to lift the suspension on federal oil and gas sales that Biden imposed when he took office.

Energy companies including Shell, BP, Chevron and ExxonMobil offered a combined \$192 million for offshore drilling rights in the Gulf, highlighting the hurdles Biden faces to reach climate goals dependent on deep cuts in fossil fuel emissions.

The leases will take years to develop, meaning oil companies could keep producing crude long past 2030, when Biden has set a goal to lower greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50%, compared with 2005 levels. Scientists say the world needs to be well on the way to that goal over the next decade to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Yet even as Biden has tried to cajole other world leaders into strengthening efforts against global warming, including at this month's U.N. climate talks in Scotland, he's had difficulty gaining ground on climate

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 39 of 51

issues at home.

The administration has proposed another round of oil and gas sales early next year in Wyoming, Colorado, Montana and other states. Interior Department officials proceeded despite concluding that burning the fuels could lead to billions of dollars in potential future climate damages.

Emissions from burning and extracting fossil fuels from public lands and waters account for about a quarter of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Environmentalists hailed the report's recommendation to raise royalty rates, but some groups said the report falls short of action needed to address the climate crisis.

"Today's report is a complete failure of the climate leadership that our world desperately needs," said Taylor McKinnon of the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group.

The report "presumes more fossil fuel leasing that our climate can't afford" and abandons Biden's campaign promise to stop new oil and gas leasing on public lands, McKinnon said.

The American Petroleum Institute, the top lobbying group for the oil industry, said Interior was proposing to "increase costs on American energy development with no clear roadmap for the future of federal leasing."

Other groups were more upbeat.

"This report makes an incredibly compelling case both economically and ecologically for bringing the federal oil and gas leasing program into the 21st century," said Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation. "Enacting these overdue reforms will ensure taxpayers, communities and wildlife are no longer harmed by below-market rates, insufficient protections and poor planning."

The wildlife federation and other groups urged the Senate to include reforms to the oil and gas program in Biden's sweeping social and environmental policy bill. Many reforms, including a royalty rate increase and bans on drilling in the Arctic refuge and along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, were included in a House version of the bill approved last week.

Jennifer Rokala, executive director of the left-leaning Center for Western Priorities, said the report "provides a critical roadmap to ensure drilling decisions on public lands take into account (climate) impacts on our land, water and wildlife, while ensuring a fair return for taxpayers."

Republicans said the report was a continuation of what they call Biden's war on domestic energy production.

While the report hides behind language of "necessary reforms" and royalty rate adjustments, "we know the real story," said Arkansas Rep. Bruce Westerman, the top Republican on the House Natural Resources Committee.

The Biden administration "will bog small energy companies down in years of regulatory gridlock, place millions of acres of resources-rich land under lock and key (and) ignore local input," Westerman said. "Ultimately, the American consumer will pay the price. Look no further than the skyrocketing prices you are already paying at the gas pump."

Experts say economic factors, including a slow rebound from the pandemic, are tamping down U.S. oil and gas production. As the economy recovered, production lagged and prices jumped to a seven-year high in October.

## Activists block Amazon warehouses in Europe on Black Friday

by KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

Climate activists blockaded Amazon warehouses in three European countries on Friday, part of a global effort to pressure the ecommerce giant on one of its busiest days of the year to improve working conditions and end business practices that hurt the environment.

Members of Extinction Rebellion targeted 13 Amazon fulfillment centers in the United Kingdom with the aim of disrupting 50% of the company's deliveries on Black Friday, which marks the unofficial start to the holiday shopping season. They staged similar protests in Germany and the Netherlands.

"The action is intended to draw attention to Amazon's exploitative and environmentally destructive busi-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 40 of 51

ness practices, disregard for workers' rights in the name of company profits, as well as the wastefulness of Black Friday," the group said. It vowed to remain at the scene

At least 30 people were arrested at multiple U.K. locations, with some held on suspicion of aggravated trespass or public nuisance, police forces said.

Extinction Rebellion and dozens of other activist groups in the U.S. and around the world are organizing a day of global protests and strikes on Friday against Amazon to demand the company provide better working conditions, commit to operating sustainably, and pay its fair share of tax.

In the U.S., labor activists planned a small protest at Amazon's fulfillment center on Staten Island, New York.

Activists in the U.K. blocked the entrance to Amazon's warehouse in Tilbury, just east of London, with an effigy of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos sitting on top of a rocket.

At Amazon's distribution center in Dunfermline, Scotland, about 20 Extinction Rebellion members strung banners across the entrance road that said "Make Amazon Pay" and locked themselves together, stopping trucks from entering and some from leaving.

Amazon did not directly address the protests in response to a request for comment, but said the company takes its responsibilities "very seriously."

"That includes our commitment to be net zero carbon by 2040 — 10 years ahead of the Paris Agreement — providing excellent pay and benefits in a safe and modern work environment, and supporting the tens of thousands of British small businesses who sell on our store," the company said.

Extinction Rebellion activists also blocked an Amazon logistics center in the central German town of Bad Hersfeld by erecting a makeshift bamboo scaffold that they used to suspend themselves in the air. Authorities later removed them with the help of a fire department ladder truck, according to video posted on the group's German Facebook page.

The group staged a similar protest at an Amazon facility at Amsterdam's Schipol airport.

## Maxwell's brother says US prosecutors seeking to 'break' her

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

The brother of a British socialite charged with helping Jeffrey Epstein exploit underage girls says her prosecution is "the most over-hyped trial of the century," designed to break a woman targeted by authorities desperate to blame someone for the late financier's crimes.

Ghislaine Maxwell continues to have the backing of her family, and a family member will be in court at all times to show support, Ian Maxwell said in an interview ahead of the trial, which is set to begin Monday in the U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

This is "the most over-hyped trial of the century without a doubt," Ian Maxwell told the Associated Press. "This is designed to break her; I can't see any other way to read it. ... And she will not be broken because she believes completely in her innocence and she is going to give the best account she can."

Prosecutors allege Ghislaine Maxwell, 59, groomed girls as young as 14 to have sex with Epstein and lied about her knowledge of his crimes when she testified in an earlier case. She has been in custody for almost 17 months, after Judge Alison J. Nathan repeatedly denied requests for bail.

Prosecutors held a press conference when they announced the charges against Maxwell, saying she lured young girls into a trap that she and Epstein had set for them.

"Ms. Maxwell chose to blatantly disregard the law and her responsibility as an adult, using whatever means she had at her disposal to lure vulnerable youth into behavior they should never have been exposed to, creating the potential for lasting harm," FBI Assistant Director William Sweeney said at the time.

But Ian Maxwell says his sister is being blamed by U.S. authorities who are intent on holding someone responsible for Epstein's crimes.

Epstein killed himself in jail in 2019 before he could face trial.

"This is not quite a put-up job, but nonetheless has been cobbled together so that Ghislaine is made to face the charges that Epstein never faced," Ian Maxwell said.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 41 of 51

Ghislaine Maxwell is the youngest of the late media mogul Robert Maxwell's nine children. The tycoon was once one of the richest men in Britain, but that wealth evaporated after he drowned in 1991 and investors discovered he had siphoned hundreds of millions of pounds from employee pension funds to prop up his empire.

The children supported each other after Robert Maxwell died and Ian and his brother were charged with financial crimes related to their father's actions. Both were acquitted.

Now they are rallying around Ghislaine, who dated Epstein and was his frequent companion on trips around the world.

The family continues to demand that Maxwell be released on bail, arguing that the conditions of her detention are tantamount to torture and prevent her from assisting her defense attorneys. The six remaining siblings this week asked the United Nations to investigate Ghislaine Maxwell's "inhumane" treatment.

Ian Maxwell says his sister is in "effective isolation" at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, where she is being held in a 6- by 9-foot (1.8- by 2.7-meter) cell that has no natural light and is equipped with a toilet and a concrete bed. She is unable to sleep because she is watched around the clock by four guards and 10 cameras due to unwarranted concerns that she is a suicide risk, he said.

Earlier this month, a judge again refused to let Epstein's former girlfriend trade her jail cell for home detention, citing the serious nature of the charges and her risk of flight.

"The denial of bail is wholly inappropriate," Ian Maxwell said. "Some very famous, infamous people were granted bail as most recently the killer of George Floyd, a murderer. John Gotti, another murderer, a mobster. Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Bernie Madoff. These are all men, of course, who got bail. Ghislaine is a woman who somehow doesn't get bail."

Americans who are interested in justice should be worried, because anyone could be accused of a crime and be held under the same conditions, he said.

"The authorities are feeling under pressure ... because they lost (Epstein) and they're feeling under the public's pressure, and that combination of pressure is keeping Ghislaine inside," her brother said. "But it still doesn't make it right."

## **New variant hits sports just as they were nearing normality**

By GERALD IMRAY AP Sports Writer

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Golf, cricket and rugby became the first major sports to be affected by the new COVID-19 variant on Friday, prompting fears of renewed travel restrictions and disrupted events just as they were returning to normal nearly two years into the pandemic.

European golfers withdrew midway through the season-opening DP World Tour tournament in Johannesburg and were scrambling to catch flights out of South Africa. Visiting cricket and rugby teams were doing the same.

Golf was the first to be hit by the emergence of the new B.1.1.529 variant that was initially identified in South Africa and is causing concern over fears that it may be more transmissible than current variants and resistant to vaccines.

It has already been detected in Israel, Hong Kong and Belgium as well as several other countries in southern Africa.

While the start of the World Tour was ruined, rugby games in South Africa in a new European-South African tournament were postponed "due to the sudden developments," organizers said. A tour to South Africa by India's cricket team next month was likely to be reconsidered, although there was no official comment yet.

The Dutch cricket team, already in South Africa for a series, was considering whether to cancel its remaining games and return home early. The Royal Netherlands Cricket Federation said it was looking at options but was "unlikely" to be able to find flights at short notice.

"The physical and mental health of the players is the first priority," the federation said.

Organizers of golf's Joburg Open, which started Thursday, said it would continue even after at least 23

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 42 of 51

mostly European players pulled out in the hours after South African health authorities announced they had detected the new variant. The tournament was later reduced to a 54-hole, three-round event ending on Saturday "to help non-South African resident players, caddies and tournament support staff return to their home countries," the organizers said.

The Joburg Open was scheduled to be the first of three events in South Africa to start the new season on the circuit formerly known as the European Tour. But next week's South African Open will now only be a South African tour event with international players likely to head home to beat travel restrictions. The Alfred Dunhill Championship set for Dec. 9-12 was canceled.

Many of the players who withdrew from the Joburg Open were from Britain or Ireland and reacted following the British government's announcement that it would re-impose a ban on visitors from South Africa and five other southern African countries from 4 a.m. Sunday. Returning residents would have compulsory 10-day quarantine periods in designated hotels.

The European Union and the United States later said they also would stop air travel from the southern African region as countries across the world began putting in place new travel restrictions.

Irish golfer Paul Dunne, one of those to withdraw, told RTE Radio that he had managed to get a flight home via Dubai and the only ones now available went through Ethiopia, where a yearlong conflict now threatens to reach the capital, Addis Ababa.

"Nobody fancies traveling through there either," Dunne said. "Bit of a minefield at the minute."

Not all were leaving. Scottish golfer David Drysdale said he had decided to keep playing in the Joburg Open and then stay in South Africa with his wife, who is also his caddy, and make a vacation of it.

"Most of the British players have all decided to head home and that's totally understandable if you've got a wife and kids at home," Drysdale told the Scotsman newspaper. "There wasn't a (plane) seat to be had by the time we found out what had happened. A lot of the guys were panicking, but we thought, 'what's the point?'"

"We are staying with a mate in Joburg and our plan is to still stay until Christmas then return home. Hopefully this variant is not as bad as they are fearing ... it's not even been 24 hours since we heard about this."

Four rugby teams — two from Wales, one from Ireland and one from Italy — were also trying to return home from South Africa before they even had the chance to play after their games were postponed by the United Rugby Championship.

"With the situation in South Africa having changed so quickly, we are now looking to repatriate our staff ASAP," Welsh club Cardiff said.

There was bound to also be repercussions for other events in other countries, like the women's cricket World Cup qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe, another southern African nation listed on new travel bans. Nine national teams, including the United States, are playing in that tournament, which runs until Dec. 5.

The African Cup of Nations, Africa's premier soccer tournament, is just over a month away and looming as a possible problem after having already been postponed for a year because of the pandemic.

The 24-team tournament will be played in Cameroon and only two southern African nations, Malawi and Zimbabwe, have qualified. But the African Cup would be hard-hit if European countries extend travel restrictions across Africa.

Top European soccer teams, and especially those in the Premier League, have previously prevented their African players from traveling and playing for their countries because of the risks and quarantine periods imposed on them when they return.

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

## NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 43 of 51

them out. Here are the facts:

Posts falsely claim vaccinated American Airlines pilots died in flight

CLAIM: In two recent incidents during flights departing from the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, American Airlines pilots died from myocarditis caused by the COVID-19 vaccine.

THE FACTS: These incidents didn't happen, a spokesperson for American Airlines confirmed in an email to The Associated Press. Thousands of social media users this week shared a fearmongering article that falsely claimed to provide evidence for why "vaxxed pilots should not fly." The article shared two examples of incidents it said took place on American Airlines flights traveling from DFW to Fort Myers, Florida, and from DFW to Los Angeles. It claimed that one pilot experienced cardiac arrest in flight, and the other "started convulsing and vomiting" in flight, and both died before the planes landed. The article attributed both the deaths to myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart muscle that has very rarely been linked to the COVID-19 vaccines. It said both pilots had recently received their second COVID-19 vaccine doses. In a final claim attributed to an anonymous source, the article said there had been "at least 12 non-fatal incidents involving pilots that had recently taken the jab." These claims are "all false," American Airlines spokesperson Whitney Zastrow confirmed in an email to the AP. An internet search reveals the claims surfaced last month on RealRawNews, a website that includes a disclaimer that it contains "humor, parody, and satire." A similar story circulating last month falsely claimed a Delta Airlines pilot who had recently been vaccinated died in flight. Both Delta Airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration confirmed they were not aware of any incidents matching this description. Very rarely, teens and young adults given the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines have experienced the serious side effect of myocarditis. It's mostly in young men and teenage boys, and usually after the second dose. Even when individuals have developed myocarditis after receiving the vaccine, their condition has typically been mild and their recovery quick, the AP has reported.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report

Priest in widely shared video collapsed, but did not die

CLAIM: A video shows a priest who has been vaccinated against COVID-19 suddenly dying during a livestream.

THE FACTS: The priest did collapse while performing a Mass, but he did not die, according to Facebook videos posted by the church in Acapulco, Mexico. The priest stood in front of his congregation the following day and later in the month, additional videos from the church showed. Social media posts falsely claimed that a minutelong video clip showed the priest abruptly dying from vaccine side effects while leading a religious service. The clip of the priest collapsing has circulated online since at least Sept. 3, and appeared in several Spanish-language news reports on Sept. 4. The church livestreams some of its religious services on its Facebook page. While the church, called Parroquia Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Reina de México, does not appear to have a video on its page dating Sept. 3, it does have a video from Sept. 4, in which the same priest appears before his congregation. In the video, the priest addresses the congregation in Spanish, referring to "yesterday's incident." He thanks God for the fact that he is standing, and says that on the recommendation of doctors, he will take a few days off to see what is going on with his health. Videos posted by the church later in September show the same priest standing before his congregation once again. It was not immediately clear whether the priest had been vaccinated for COVID-19. The church did not respond to an email requesting more information.

— Associated Press writers Ali Swenson in New York and Abril Mulato in Mexico City contributed this report.

Pelosi didn't purchase \$25 million mansion in Florida

CLAIM: Photo shows a \$25 million home that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has purchased in Florida.

THE FACTS: Pelosi's office said there is "no such pending sale" and the brokerage that listed the property also confirmed that the buyer is not the speaker. Various posts spreading widely on Facebook and Twitter

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 44 of 51

falsely claimed to show a photo of a \$25 million home in Florida that Pelosi purchased. The photo comes from a listing for an oceanfront, 10,000-square-foot property on South Beach Road on Jupiter Island. A spokesman for Pelosi refuted the claim and denied that she is considering moving to Florida. "This information is inaccurate," Drew Hammill, Pelosi's deputy chief of staff, said in an email to The Associated Press. "There's no such pending sale nor is the family looking or interested." Beth Bourque, owner of Southern Shore Properties, the brokerage that listed the property, said the house is under contract and confirmed the buyer is not Pelosi or her family. "It's a rumor that's been floating around and it's just gotten bigger and bigger," Bourque said. A representative for the person purchasing the property also told the AP that the buyer is not Pelosi, but someone who lives nearby. Nor, he added, is Pelosi buying another high-end home on South Beach Road that also recently sold. "She's totally unrelated to any of the buyers or any of the sellers," said Rob Thomson, owner of Waterfront Properties.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

---

Fox News wasn't banned from UK, contrary to false claims online

CLAIM: Fox News was banned from operating in the United Kingdom for promoting right-wing "propaganda."

THE FACTS: U.K. regulators did not ban Fox News from operating in the region. Fox News voluntarily stopped broadcasting in the U.K. in 2017 after failing to cultivate a sufficient audience. Posts claiming that Fox News was "banned" from the U.K. for being "propaganda" have circulated widely on Twitter. But these claims are false, according to both Fox News and U.K. officials. Fox News' former parent company, 21st Century Fox, announced in August 2017 that Fox News would stop broadcasting in the U.K. due to the channel's low viewership there. A spokesperson for Fox News referred The Associated Press to a statement that 21st Century Fox released at the time. 21st Century Fox has since been acquired by Disney. "Fox News is focused on the U.S. market and designed for a U.S. audience and, accordingly, it averages only a few thousand viewers across the day in the U.K.," the statement reads. "We have concluded that it is not in our commercial interest to continue providing Fox News in the U.K." Ofcom, the agency that regulates communications industries in the U.K., confirmed that Fox News was not banned from the region. Months after Fox News withdrew from the U.K., Ofcom determined in November 2017 that the channel had breached its impartiality rules earlier that year. Ofcom cited coverage from January 2017 of former President Donald Trump's ban on travel from several Muslim-majority countries on the program "Hannity," according to an agency bulletin. "Tucker Carlson Tonight" also violated the same rules while covering the May 2017 terrorist attack in Manchester, the agency ruled. Once again, though, that determination by the regulator was unrelated to Fox News pulling out of the region, which had happened earlier.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report

---

Posts falsely conflate civil lawsuit with Ghislaine Maxwell criminal case

CLAIM: Recently unsealed court documents show a list of defendants, including some celebrities, named as "co-conspirators" in Ghislaine Maxwell's criminal case.

THE FACTS: The list of defendants is not part of the ongoing criminal case against Maxwell. It comes from a since-dismissed civil lawsuit that is separate from Maxwell's upcoming trial. Social media users are circulating a months-old list of names and companies, falsely claiming they are co-conspirators in Maxwell's criminal case as she prepares to face trial on charges she groomed underage victims to have unwanted sex with the late disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein, her former boyfriend. But the list originated in a separate civil lawsuit that was filed in August 2020 and dismissed as "frivolous" less than a month later. The dismissed civil case had named nearly 40 defendants, including Epstein, Jay-Z, Beyonce, Kanye West, Disney and Universal Music Group. Maxwell was included as the 31st defendant on the list. The lead plaintiff alleged that over the course of 30 years, the defendants conspired to "unlawfully surveil, drug and abduct" them "for sexual assault, sex trafficking, and other exploitative abuse" and conspired to transact a "purchase agreement" to buy the plaintiff from their mother. U.S. District Judge Louis L. Stanton for the Southern



District of New York dismissed the lawsuit on the grounds that it did not have a legal or factual basis, and that the plaintiff, who did not appear to be an attorney, made claims on behalf of others, according to the dismissal order. Some social media users have circulated excerpts from the court documents, erroneously asserting that they were recently unsealed documents from Maxwell's criminal case. But two different cases — the civil lawsuit and Maxwell's criminal case — are being conflated. Maxwell was arrested in July 2020 after a grand jury indicted her on multiple federal charges. U.S. District Judge Alison J. Nathan is set to preside over Maxwell's criminal trial in Manhattan federal court. Further, no such list of "co-conspirators" has been released in Maxwell's case. And Nathan has made clear there will be no name-dropping at trial, saying only certain pages of an address book that investigators seized — showing a section naming the alleged victims — will come into evidence, according to previous reporting by the AP. The trial is expected to begin Nov. 29. Maxwell has pleaded not guilty to her charges and denied wrongdoing. Epstein killed himself in a federal detention center in August 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

Find AP Fact Checks here: <https://apnews.com/APFactCheck>

Follow @APFactCheck on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/APFactCheck>

## Russia names 51 people presumed dead in coal mine accident

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian authorities on Friday released the names of 51 people presumed dead after a devastating methane explosion in a coal mine in Siberia, believed to be the deadliest since 2010.

The list with names of 46 miners and five rescuers was published online by the government of the Kemerovo region in southwestern Siberia, where the mine is located. Authorities had initially reported 52 possible fatalities, but search teams on Friday found a survivor in what officials described as a "miracle."

A total of 285 miners were in the Listvyazhnaya mine at the time of explosion on Thursday morning that quickly filled the mine with toxic smoke. A total 239 people were rescued shortly after the blast, and more than 60 sought medical assistance for an assortment of injuries.

Officials on Thursday confirmed 14 fatalities — 11 miners and three rescuers who perished while searching for others trapped in a remote section of the mine. Rescuers were forced to halt several hours into their search because of a buildup of methane and carbon monoxide gas.

Rescuer Alexander Zakovryashin was pulled out of the rubble Friday morning still conscious. He was hospitalized with moderate carbon monoxide poisoning, according to emergency officials.

"I can consider it a miracle," acting Emergency Minister Alexander Chupriyan said.

Kemerovo Governor Sergei Tsivilyov admitted on Friday morning that finding other survivors was highly unlikely.

It was the deadliest mine accident in Russia since 2010, when two methane explosions and a fire killed 91 people at the Rospadskaya mine in the same Kemerovo region.

In 2016, 36 miners were killed in a series of methane explosions in a coal mine in Russia's far north. In the wake of the incident, authorities analyzed the safety of the country's 58 coal mines and declared 20 of them potentially unsafe. Media reports say the Listvyazhnaya mine wasn't among them, however in 2004 a methane explosion in the mine killed 13 people.

Russia's top independent news site, Meduza, reported that this year authorities suspended the work of certain sections of the mine nine times and fined the mine more than 4 million rubles (roughly \$53,000) for safety violations.

Law enforcement officials also said Friday that miners had complained about the high level of methane in the mine.

Regional officials have declared three days of mourning while Russia's Investigative Committee has launched a criminal probe into potential safety violations. The director of the mine and two senior manag-

ers were detained.

A separate criminal probe was launched Friday into allegations that state officials who inspected the mine earlier this month were negligent.

## France, Britain spiral into crisis in wake of migrant deaths

By DANICA KIRKA and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

CALAIS, France (AP) — The already fractious relationship between France and Britain spiralled further downward into anger and incomprehension Friday, with the two erstwhile European partners at loggerheads about how to stop migrants from embarking on dangerous crossings of the English Channel that killed at least 27 people in a sinking this week.

Even as the British government insisted that the two countries “remain close friends and partners,” their words, acts and disputes over migration, fishing and how to rebuild a working relationship in the wake of Britain’s exit from the EU increasingly suggested otherwise.

President Emmanuel Macron scolded Prime Minister Boris Johnson for making public a letter that the British leader sent to the French leader on Thursday. Most notably, Johnson proposed that France take back migrants who illegally cross the Channel from French to British shores. Macron’s spokesman quickly and summarily dismissed the idea, and the French president made his displeasure clear that Johnson posted the letter — addressed “Dear Emmanuel” — on Twitter.

“I am surprised by methods when they are not serious,” Macron said on a visit to Italy. “You don’t communicate from a leader to another on these matters via tweets and letters that are made public. We are not whistleblowers.”

“Come on, come on,” Macron added.

The letter and France’s response were the latest crossing of swords between two nations with a storied history of break-ups, make-ups and, not infrequently, of revelling in rubbing each up in the wrong way. The economic, political, social and psychological earthquake of Britain’s divorce from the EU has made cross-Channel cooperation harder still, and further complicated the long love-hate relationship between Paris and London.

Even in the wake of the deadliest migration accident to date in the Channel, Macron and Johnson appeared increasingly to be talking past each other — or, in Paris’ case, barely willing to talk at all. Macron’s government spokesman, Gabriel Attal, said Johnson’s point-person on immigration, Home Secretary Priti Patel, was no longer welcome at a meeting Sunday of European ministers who’ll explore ways to crack down on migrant-smuggling networks.

Attal described Johnson’s letter as “fundamentally mediocre and totally uncalled-for in its manner.” Suggesting British duplicity, Attal also said it “doesn’t correspond at all” with discussions that Johnson and Macron had Wednesday after the sinking of an inflatable craft laden with migrants off the northern French coast.

“We are sick of double-speak,” Attal said.

And he dismissed Johnson’s proposal that France take back migrants who cross illegally to British shores as “clearly not what we need to solve this problem.”

Ever-increasing numbers of people fleeing conflict or poverty in Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, Eritrea or elsewhere are risking the perilous journey from France, hoping to win asylum or find better opportunities in Britain. More than 23,000 people have already entered the U.K. on largely unseaworthy small boats this year, up from 8,500 in 2020 and just 300 in 2018, according to data compiled by the British Parliament.

In London, Johnson’s spokesman Jamie Davies said the prime minister had no regrets about tweeting the letter “written in the spirit of partnership and cooperation.”

He expressed hope for a French U-turn on the decision to un-invite Patel to Sunday’s ministerial meeting on the migration crisis, saying: “Friends and neighbors need to work together to address this global challenge collectively, and we have been clear that we need to do more.”

A French judicial investigation into Wednesday’s sinking has been turned over to Paris-based prosecutors who specialize in complex cases of organized crime. The prosecutors’ office said it wouldn’t comment on

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 47 of 51

whether investigators are making progress on identifying victims' nationalities or causes of the tragedy. A French fisherman who said he was first to spot and raise the alarm about bodies in the water on Friday described the scene as "a horror movie." Karl Maquinghen said he is haunted by the thought that people might still be alive had he and his shipmates reached them sooner.

"To see so many bodies like that, next to us. Children. I don't know how to explain it. Horrific," Maquinghen said, voice cracking with emotion, in comments broadcast by French coastal radio Delta FM.

"The sight of them like that, heads in the water, will stick with us," he said. "We tell ourselves: 'Had we got there five or ten minutes earlier, we could perhaps have saved them.' We can't sleep."

While the sinking has brought long-simmering French-British tensions to a head, it's not their only issue of discord.

Adding to the climate of tension: French fishing crews on Friday briefly blocked French ports, ferry traffic across the English Channel and the freight entrance to the undersea Eurotunnel. The aim of the protest over post-Brexit fishing licenses was to disrupt flows of Britain-bound goods and travelers and signal that greater disturbance could follow amid the Christmas shopping rush.

"The British have access to the European market, while we do not have access to British waters. This is not normal, the British government must respect the agreement," Olivier Lepretre, president of the regional fishing committee, said in the port of Calais.

He described the blockades as "a warning shot."

Calais — a major jump-off point for migrants aiming to reach Britain — is also where ministers from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and EU officials will meet on Sunday.

Without the British minister.

"The ministers will work seriously to resolve a serious matter with people who are serious," Macron said. "Afterwards, we will see with the British how to act effectively, if they decide to be serious."

Leicester reported from Le Pecq, France. Also contributing were Pan Pylas and Jill Lawless in London, Oleg Cetinic in Calais and Thomas Adamson in Paris.

## **FDA: Merck COVID pill effective, experts will review safety**

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

Federal health regulators say an experimental COVID-19 pill from Merck is effective against the virus, but they will seek input from outside experts on risks of birth defects and other potential problems during pregnancy.

The Food and Drug Administration posted its analysis of the pill ahead of a public meeting next week where academic and other experts will weigh in on its safety and effectiveness. The agency isn't required to follow the group's advice.

The FDA scientists said their review identified several potential risks, including possible toxicity to developing fetuses and birth defects that were identified in studies of the pill in animals.

Given those risks the FDA will ask its advisers next Tuesday whether the drug should never be given during pregnancy or whether it could be made available in certain cases.

Under that scenario, the FDA said the drug would carry warnings about risks during pregnancy, but doctors would still have the option to prescribe it in certain cases where its benefits could outweigh its risks for patients.

Given the safety concerns, FDA said Merck agreed the drug would not be used in children.

Other side effects were mild and rare, with about 2% of patients experiencing diarrhea.

Regulators also noted that Merck collected far less safety data overall on its drug than was gathered for other COVID-19 therapies.

"While the clinical safety data base was small, there were no major safety concerns identified," FDA reviewers concluded.

Additionally, the FDA flagged a concern that Merck's drug led to small changes in the coronavirus' sig-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 48 of 51

nature spike protein, which it uses to penetrate human cells. Theoretically, FDA cautioned, those changes could lead to dangerous new variants.

FDA will ask its independent advisers to discuss all those issues and then vote on whether the drug's overall benefits outweigh its risks.

All COVID-19 drugs currently authorized by the FDA require an injection or IV and can only be given by health professionals. If authorized, Merck's drug would be the first that U.S. patients could take at home to ease symptoms and speed recovery. It is already authorized for emergency use in the U.K.

The meeting marks the first time regulators have publicly reviewed a new drug for COVID-19, reflecting the intense interest and scrutiny of a pill that could be soon used by millions of Americans.

The drug, molnupiravir, has been shown to significantly cut the rate of hospitalizations and deaths among people with mild-to-moderate coronavirus infections.

Merck's drug uses a novel approach to fight COVID-19: it inserts tiny mutations into the coronavirus' genetic code to stop the virus from reproducing.

But that genetic effect has raised concerns that in rare cases the drug could cause birth defects or even spur more virulent strains of the virus.

Pregnant women were excluded from Merck's study, and both women and men in the study were instructed to use contraception or abstain from sex.

For its part, Merck says results from two company studies in rodents show the drug does not cause mutations or damage to DNA at the doses studied .

FDA reviewers also confirmed previously reported interim results from Merck that the pill cut the rate of hospitalization and death by about half among patients with early symptoms of COVID-19 who faced increased risk due to health problems.

However, on Friday morning Merck announced updated results from the same study that showed a smaller benefit from the drug. The FDA said it is still reviewing the updated data and would present a new assessment of the drug's effectiveness next Tuesday.

Among more than 1,400 adults in a company study, molnupiravir reduced the combined risk of hospitalization and death by 30%, less than the 50% initially reported based on incomplete results.

Nearly 7% of patients who received Merck's drug within five days of COVID-19 symptoms ended up in the hospital and one died. That compared to 10% of patients hospitalized who were taking the placebo and nine deaths.

Merck didn't study its drug in people who were vaccinated for COVID-19. But the FDA will ask advisers to recommend which patients may stand to benefit the most from the drug, based on vaccination status and underlying health problems.

While Merck's drug is likely to be the first pill for coronavirus in the U.S., more are expected to follow.

Rival drugmaker Pfizer has submitted its own antiviral for FDA review after initial study results showed it cut the combined rate of hospitalization and death by nearly 90%.

Pfizer's drug is part of a decades-old family of antiviral pills known as protease inhibitors, which revolutionized the treatment of HIV and hepatitis C. They work differently than Merck's pill and haven't been linked to the kind of mutation concerns that have been raised with Merck's drug.

---

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Hondurans weary of corruption look for change in election

By MARLON GONZÁLEZ and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — For many Hondurans, Sunday's election will be about stripping power from a party whose successive administrations are widely seen as having deepened corruption and driven tens of thousands to flee the country, many toward the United States.

Expelling President Juan Orlando Hernández's National Party after 12 years is more important to them



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 49 of 51

than who takes power when it's gone. The animosity toward Hernández is such that for several years, migrants walking out of Honduras have chanted "Get out J.O.H.!" referring to his initials.

Complaints against Hernández and his party are multiple. An already difficult life has gotten even harder for many. Honduras was hit by two devastating hurricanes in 2020. The pandemic raised unemployment to 10.9% last year, according to the National Statistics Institute. The economy shrank by 9%, according to the World Bank. And street gangs rule swaths of territory through terror.

Hernández has also become a national embarrassment. U.S. federal prosecutors in New York have accused him of running a narco state and fueling his own political rise with drug money. Hernández has denied it all and has not been formally charged, but that could change once he leaves office.

And many believe Hernández isn't legitimately their president. A friendly court sidestepped the constitutional ban on reelection and Hernández won a 2017 contest filled with irregularities that nonetheless was quickly recognized by the Trump administration.

So the National Party's candidate in Sunday's election, Tegucigalpa Mayor Nasry Asfura, has faced significant headwinds as Hernández's chosen successor.

Honduran prosecutors also accuse him of diverting more than \$1 million in public funds to personal use, but the Supreme Court has put the case on hold until a sort comptroller court investigates.

Try as he might, Asfura hasn't been able to shake Hernández's stigma. At a recent rally in Tegucigalpa, Asfura pleaded, "I am different."

The National Party's strength is its ability to distribute benefits and mobilize voters, including some 200,000 government employees, and Asfura is still in the race. Whichever of the 14 candidates gets the most votes Sunday wins; there is no runoff.

Polls give Xiomara Castro the best chance of beating Asfura. This is Castro's third try. She lost to Hernández in his first run and then dropped out in 2017 when she joined the coalition backing television personality Salvador Nasralla, who this year dropped out to back her.

The 62-year-old candidate of the leftist Liberty and Refoundation party is the wife of former President Jose Manuel Zelaya, who had aggravated both the U.S. and Honduran establishments by building close ties with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. He was ousted by the military in a coup in 2009. Officials justified his ouster by alleging he planned to violate the same constitutional ban on reelection that Hernández later ignored.

He too has faced corruption allegations. When a Honduran drug trafficker was sentenced to life in prison in the United States in 2019, U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman said he had paid millions in bribes to government officials, including \$2 million to Zelaya, an accusation Zelaya denied.

Castro's campaign has focused on the need to remove the existing power structure, and tying Asfura to Hernández at every opportunity.

"They call Honduras a narco state because of this mafia that governs us and because of which they also say we're the most corrupt country in Latin America," Castro said at a recent campaign event. "This is the moment to say enough of the misery, the poverty and the exclusion that our country experiences now."

For years, the U.S. relationship with Honduras has been governed by Honduras' willingness to cooperate in the war on drugs as a key transshipment point for cocaine headed north and in helping to stem migration?. But U.S. prosecutors have shown that while the government was assisting in interdiction, its politicians were benefitting from drug proceeds and helping protect other shipments, most notably in the case of former lawmaker Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernández, the president's brother, who was sentenced to life in prison in the United States.

The Biden administration has continued to struggle with Central American migrants arriving at the Southwest border, many of them from Honduras. Vice President Kamala Harris has said corruption in the region as one of the key problems driving that movement.

According to the Vanderbilt University's Americas' Barometer Pulse of Democracy 2021 report released this month, more than half of the those polled in the nation of 9.3 million expressed a desire to live or work abroad — 30 percentage points higher than in 2004.

In addition to president, Hondurans will elect a new congress and their representatives for the Central

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 50 of 51

American Parliament.

Luis Vásquez, a 43-year-old systems technician in Tegucigalpa, said he was underwhelmed by all of the candidates.

"There isn't an option of proposals that we can trust; it's just more of the same," he said. But he was sure his vote would not go to the National Party, "because of the high level of corruption it has shown."

Sherman reported from Mexico City.

## Protesters break into Lebanese ministry as crisis deepens

BEIRUT (AP) — A small group of protesters broke into a ministry building in Beirut early on Friday and removed a photo of the president from one of its main rooms, as the Lebanese pound hit a new low amid a worsening economic and political stalemate.

The protesters who entered the Ministry of Social Affairs said conditions in crisis-hit Lebanon have become unbearable as a result of the rapid economic collapse and ongoing crash of the pound, which reached 25,100 to the dollar. The previous record was 25,000.

Prices have been skyrocketing in recent weeks as the government lifted subsidies on fuel and some medicines, making them out of reach for many in Lebanon. Some three quarters of the population of 6 million, including a million Syrian refugees, now live in poverty. The minimum monthly wage is now worth about \$27.

Protesters have blamed the ministry for sluggishness in issuing ration cards that are supposed to give poor families monthly financial aid.

The protesters broke into the meeting room at the ministry and turned a framed picture of President Michel Aoun upside down before removing it. They replaced it with a banner in Arabic that read "revolutionaries of October 17."

The protesters were referring to the start of nationwide protests in October 2019 against the country's ruling class. They are blamed for decades of corruption and mismanagement that threw the small nation into the worst economic and financial crisis in its modern history.

"Those who usurped public money cannot conduct reforms," shouted one of the protesters before leaving the building following police intervention. "We have hit rock bottom. Things cannot get worse."

The crisis has been made worse by the coronavirus and the August 2020 explosion in Beirut's port that killed 216 people, injured more than 6,000 and destroyed parts of the capital.

The Cabinet, formed in September after a 13-month vacuum, has not met in more than six weeks amid deep divisions between rival groups over the judge leading the investigation into the port blast. Comments by a government minister that triggered a diplomatic row with oil-rich Gulf Arab nations have added to the acrimony.

In other parts of the country, protesters placed posters that read "the mafia that destroyed the Lebanese pound" outside some branches of local banks, the state-run National News Agency said.

For the past two years, local lenders have imposed informal capital controls that prevent many people from accessing their savings.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Nov. 27, the 331st day of 2021. There are 34 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 27, 1978, San Francisco Mayor George Moscone (mah-SKOH'-nee) and City Supervisor Harvey Milk, a gay-rights activist, were shot to death inside City Hall by former supervisor Dan White. (White served five years for manslaughter; he took his own life in October 1985.)

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 143 ~ 51 of 51**

On this date:

In 1901, the U.S. Army War College was established in Washington, D.C.

In 1924, Macy's first Thanksgiving Day parade — billed as a "Christmas Parade" — took place in New York.

In 1942, during World War II, the Vichy French navy scuttled its ships and submarines in Toulon (too-LOHN') to keep them out of the hands of German troops.

In 1953, playwright Eugene O'Neill died in Boston at age 65.

In 1962, the first Boeing 727 was rolled out at the company's Renton Plant near Seattle.

In 1967, the Beatles album "Magical Mystery Tour" was released in the United States by Capitol Records.

In 1970, Pope Paul VI, visiting the Philippines, was slightly wounded at the Manila airport by a dagger-wielding Bolivian painter disguised as a priest.

In 1973, the Senate voted 92-3 to confirm Gerald R. Ford as vice president, succeeding Spiro T. Agnew, who'd resigned.

In 1998, answering 81 questions put to him three weeks earlier, President Bill Clinton wrote the House Judiciary Committee that his testimony in the Monica Lewinsky affair was "not false and misleading."

In 2000, a day after George W. Bush was certified the winner of Florida's presidential vote, Al Gore laid out his case for letting the courts settle the nation's long-count election.

In 2007, a Somali immigrant (Nuradin Abdi) was sentenced to 10 years in prison for plotting to blow up an Ohio shopping mall.

In 2015, a gunman attacked a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado, killing three people and injuring nine. (Suspect Robert Dear was sent to a psychiatric hospital after being deemed incompetent for trial; he was charged in federal court after his prosecution in state court stalled.)

Ten years ago: In an unprecedented move against an Arab nation, the Arab League approved economic sanctions against Syria, to pressure Damascus to end its deadly suppression of an 8-month-old uprising against President Bashar Assad.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump claimed that "millions" had voted illegally in the national election, scoffing at Hillary Clinton's nearly 2 million-vote edge in the popular vote and returning to his campaign mantra of a rigged race even as he prepared to enter the White House in less than two months.

One year ago: President Donald Trump's legal team suffered another defeat as a federal appeals court in Philadelphia roundly rejected the campaign's latest effort to challenge Pennsylvania's election results; Judge Stephanos Bibas, a Trump appointee, wrote that "calling an election unfair does not make it so." The coronavirus pandemic kept crowds thin at stores across the country on Black Friday, but a surge in online shopping offered a small beacon of hope for struggling retailers. Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, the Iranian scientist who founded that country's military nuclear program in the early 2000s, was killed in an attack on the outskirts of Tehran; Iran said Israel was responsible. California Gov. Gavin Newsom reversed parole for Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten, marking the fourth time a governor had blocked her release.

Today's Birthdays: Footwear designer Manolo Blahnik is 79. Academy Award-winning director Kathryn Bigelow is 70. TV host Bill Nye ("Bill Nye, the Science Guy") is 66. Actor William Fichtner (FIHK'-nuhr) is 65. Caroline Kennedy is 64. Academy Award-winning screenwriter Callie Khouri is 64. Rock musician Charlie Burchill (Simple Minds) is 62. Actor Michael Rispoli is 61. Jazz composer/big band leader Maria Schneider is 61. Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty is 61. Rock musician Charlie Benante (Anthrax) is 59. Rock musician Mike Bordin (Faith No More) is 59. Actor Fisher Stevens is 58. Actor Robin Givens is 57. Actor Michael Vartan is 53. Actor Elizabeth Marvel is 52. Rapper Skoob (DAS EFX) is 51. Actor Kirk Acevedo is 50. Rapper Twista is 49. Actor Jaleel White is 45. Actor Arjay Smith is 38. Actor Alison Pill is 36. Actor Lashana Lynch (TV: "Still Star-Crossed") is 34.