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UpComing Events

Saturday, Dec. 11

Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

Wage Memorial Library/Groton City Hall Grand Opening, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. with Mrs. Claus

8 a.m. to Noon: ACT testing at GHS

10 a.m.: Wrestling Tourney at LaMoure

Boys Basketball at Britton-Hecla. JV at 1:30 p.m. followed by varsity game.

Monday, Dec. 13

4:30 p.m.: Junior High Wrestling at Webster

Junior High GBB hosts Warner. (7th at 6 p.m. followed by 8th grade game)

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Thursday, Dec. 16

Basketball Double Header with Hamlin at Groton.

Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5 p.m., Girls Varsity at 6:15 p.m. followed by boys varsity.

Friday, Dec. 17

Brookings Bell Debate

Saturday, Dec. 18

Brookings Bell Debate

10 a.m.: Wrestling at Sioux Valley High School

Boys Basketball at Sioux Falls Lutheran. JV at 3 p.m. with varsity at 4 p.m.



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.
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Mr. & Mrs. Claus are coming to Groton!

**Grand
Opening!**



of Wage Memorial Library and City Hall

120 N Main, Groton

Saturday, Dec. 11, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Mrs. Claus will be at the library and there will be Christmas cookie decorating with Kate's Confections (treats will also be for sale).



**Across the street
Santa will be at
Professional
Management Services
from 9 a.m. to Noon.**

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DACOTAH BANK

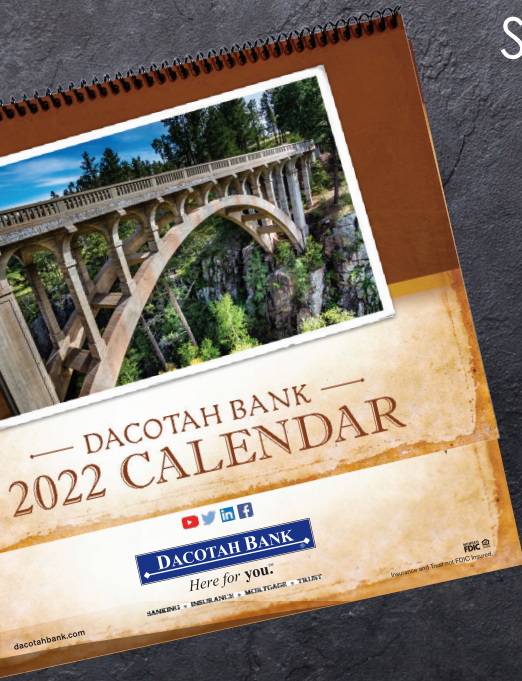
Cookies & Calendar OPEN HOUSE


Stop by the Groton Dacotah Bank
for cookies, coffee, cider
& a calendar

FRI. *December 17*

9:00 am - 5:00 pm

7 East US Hwy 12 • (605) 397-2711



MEMBER  Insurance and Trust
not FDIC Insured.

Lady Tigers hold off Britton-Hecla rally

Groton Area had a 15-point run in the first half to take a 20-8 lead, but in the second half, the Braves staged a comeback that nearly took the win away from Groton Area. Britton-Hecla closed the game to one, 31-30, with 10 seconds left. Brooke Gengerke made two free throws to make it a three-point lead. Britton-Hecla missed a three-point shot at the buzzer and Groton Area hung on for the win, 33-30.

Gracie Traphagen scored 15 of her 17 points in the first half and had nine rebounds, one assist, one steal and one block. Sydney Leicht had seven points, three rebounds, one assist and two steals. Brooke Gengerke had four points, four rebounds and one assist. Allyssa Locke had two points, two rebounds, two assists and one steal. Alyssa Thaler had two points, four rebounds, four assists and one steal. Jerica Locke had one point, five rebounds, one assist and two steals. Aspen Johnson had two rebounds and one steal.

Groton Area made 10 of 28 in field goals for 36 percent, two of 19 three-pointers for 11 percent, seven of 12 free throws for 58 percent, had 29 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 10 assists, eight steals, 11 team fouls and one block shot.

Britton-Hecla was led by Goiuri Sarria with eight points followed by Sterling Brassfield and Alyssa James with six each, Chloe Furman and five points, Jenna Werner three and McKaelyn Zuehlke added two points. The Braves had 11 turnovers, 13 team fouls, made 13 of 51 field goals for 26 percent and one of seven free throws for 14 percent.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Groton Ford, Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and the John Sieh Agency.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 41-5. Jerica Locke led the Tigers with 12 points followed by Kennedy Hansen with 10, Laila Roberts had five, Talli Wright and Brooklyn Hansen each had four points, Jaedyn Penning had three and Faith Traphagen and Rylee Dunker each had two points and Mia Crank had one free throw.

Groton Area, 1-0, will host Hamlin on Thursday as part of a double header.

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

December 13, 2021 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of November 8, 2021 school board meeting and December 6, 2021 special school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of November 2021 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of November 2021 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of November 2021 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of November 2021 School Transportation Report.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Continued discussion and necessary action on District response to COVID-19.
 - a. Local COVID-19 Update
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report
4. Projected 5-Year Capital Outlay Expenditures

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discuss athletics cooperative request from Doland School District.
2. Approve resignation/retirement of Deb Winburn, 3rd Grade Teacher, at end of 2021-22 school year.
3. Approve resignation of Seth Duncan, Head Boys Soccer Coach.
4. Approve work agreement for Damian Bahr, Transportation Director.
5. Approve resignation of Jill Krueger, Special Education Paraprofessional, effective immediately.
6. Approve volunteer assistant coaches for Girls Basketball – Joie Berg and Becky Erickson.

ADJOURN

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

It would be nice to have a few slow news days so I could back off a bit again on these Updates. Alas, that didn't happen this week, so I'm back sooner than expected. Let's get to work.

At midday today we were looking at a seven-day new-case average of 119,778, right about what it was a couple of days ago when we last talked. We're still up 30 percent over two weeks ago, but we may have hit a brief pause in increases for a bit here. I wouldn't count on it lasting, but you never know. We've now reported 49,628,590 cases in the US. We've identified some cases involving the Omicron variant, but it is unclear how rapidly the variant is spreading in this country right now. What we do know is that it has arrived and is transmitting; in another couple of weeks, we should have a better line on how that's going to go.

We've talked many times about how Europe seems to be the harbinger of times to come in the US, and what we're seeing in Europe right now should be making us nervous. The proportion of Omicron cases is doubling every few days, and public health experts are predicting it will be causing the majority of new cases within a few weeks. Although I've learned to be leery of predictions, I suspect that, a few more weeks down the road, that is highly likely to be us.

Hospitalizations continue to rise. No one thinks the cases are getting worse overall, only that the increasing number of cases is going to result in more people sick enough to go to the hospital. We are now at 62,335 hospitalized, up 20 percent from two weeks ago, still lagging new case numbers. There are places across the country with a health care system in serious trouble.

States particularly struggling with these strains as hospitalizations surge include Michigan, which leads the country and has been receiving federal health care workers to help them out; Vermont which has record numbers hospitalized; Connecticut which has seen a 69 percent increase in hospitalizations over the past two weeks; Missouri where hospitalizations increased by 63 percent over the past month, Minnesota which reports a 98 percent occupancy rate for adult ICU beds, and Arizona who got caught in a squeeze between increasing non-Covid patient numbers and new Covid-19 cases. Maine has run out of critical care beds in some facilities and so has activated National Guard to help, as have New Hampshire, which is also drawing on FEMA teams, New York, and Indiana. Massachusetts is winding up to take the same steps, and Kentucky is in trouble too. Pretty sure more will follow.

Deaths have been ticking upward, reflecting new case rates from about three weeks ago; that's the typical lag. Our seven-day average deaths are at 1281 per day, the vast majority of which are unvaccinated people. We're closing in on 800,000 deaths with a current total of 793,227.

Once again, we look at Michigan which has also been struggling with a surge in deaths that came in the wake of that record-breaking surge in hospitalizations. Jim Dover, president and CEO of Sparrow Health System, told CNN, "Since January, we've had about 289 deaths, 75% are unvaccinated people. And the very few (vaccinated people) who passed away all were more than 6 months out from their shot. So we've not had a single person who has had a booster shot die from Covid." The folks dying are younger, previously healthy; they had no idea they could get this sick until they showed up in the hospital frightened, asking whether they were going to die. For too many, the answer's been yes. Dover added, "The problem is, it's not over yet. I don't know if people realize just how critical it still is. But they do realize it when they came into the ER, and they have to wait three days for a bed. And at that point, they realize it."

If you're not an old person, you may wish to rethink your risk profile for Delta. As of Thursday, there

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were 68 people hospitalized in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Eleven of them were under 19, nineteen of them were in their 20s, and 26 of them were in their 30s. That means 56 of the 68 people who were sick enough to require hospitalization for Covid-19 were under 40. This undoubtedly reflects the low vaccination rates in younger people; we old folks didn't suddenly receive divine clemency. South Dakota is not an outlier here.

Way back early in the pandemic, we talked about cities using sewage surveillance to track the appearance and trajectory of Covid-19 in a population. This is because some traces of the virus show up in sewage of areas where there are infected people. Our first conversation on the subject occurred in my Update #60 posted April 23, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3534440883238959&set=a.347346695281743>. Since then we've talked about college campuses and various other entities using this technique. Now with the advent of Omicron, the method has enjoyed a growth in utilization. We're at a point where we can detect concentrations as small as just one or two cases per 100,000 people, so that is very useful. You can't collect nasopharyngeal swabs from everyone in a city, but because pretty much everyone poops and all that sewage goes to a common location, you have a collection at hand of specimens from the entire city on a daily basis when you sample sewage. Cities in California are using this sort of work as an early-warning system for Omicron, which is a very good plan; the sooner we get wind of the variant, the better we can plan to meet the challenge. They are spotting evidence in sewage well before clinical data yields evidence of trends. This is another example of a situation in which the development of some sophisticated techniques well before there was a use for them and before there was a threat has provided public health benefits well beyond the cost of developing the techniques. Another win for basic research—the kind that has no practical application at the time it's done, but often and unexpectedly saves our bacon later.

The FDA extended the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to cover boosters for those aged 16 and 17. The earlier EUA extension only covered boosters for adults, so this includes more people, something on the order of three million who were fully vaccinated at least six months ago. More will become eligible as time goes on and they reach that six-month point. It's going to be a while before children 12 to 15 are six months out from their second doses, and I'm not going to be surprised if the EUA for boosters is extended to them by that time. So far, the companies haven't had any trouble keeping up with whatever increase in demand these additional extensions have created, so supply is not expected to become an issue with this new extension either.

We've talked before about correlates of protection, those laboratory measurements that will tell us whether someone is protected from Covid-19, first in my Update #286 posted December 5, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4234321956584178> and then again in my Update #462 posted August 27, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5043212875695078>. Here's the thing: Once we're this far down the road with a new virus, we don't always have time to do the protracted clinical trials; we need faster answers. Correlates of protection are a valid shortcut to evaluating new vaccines or old ones in new situations like the one in which we currently find ourselves.

A NIH-funded effort to establish correlates for Covid-19 has some information for us that should enhance our ability to evaluate an individual's or a population's level of protection in a given situation, and that's really valuable. The team took a look at blood samples collected from more than 1000 people who were vaccinated with Moderna's vaccine and published their findings last month in Science. They tested blood specimens from participants in Moderna's phase 3 clinical trials at the time of the second vaccine dose and again four weeks later, measuring binding antibodies and neutralizing antibodies to spike proteins.

One thing they noted that should make us all feel better is that it doesn't seem to take much antibody

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to be protective. They found tests for both kinds of antibodies showed consistently higher antibody levels in people who did not develop Covid-19 than in those who did not, that in those with the highest antibody levels the vaccine was about 98 percent effective, and that those with 1000-fold lower antibody levels (this is NOT a typo) were still protected albeit at something more like 78 percent effectiveness. I think it's safe to conclude from this that very low levels of antibody are still highly protective.

The letter says, "Overall, the findings suggest that tests for antibody levels can be applied to make predictions about an mRNA vaccine's efficacy and may be used to guide modifications to the current vaccine regimen." I would say so too. If these folks have truly identified reliable correlates of protection, that's going to make a whole lot of things easier, especially as we deal with new variants like Omicron. What's left to do is perform some studies to verify that the predicted vaccine efficacy matches what happens in real life and to receive FDA approval for the adoption of these correlates of protection in vaccine trials. We should note that the FDA's emergency use authorization (EUA) for vaccinating 5- to 11-year-olds is predicated on neutralizing antibody titers and these titers also played into booster authorizations. This is a start, a good one.

I read a piece about so-called long-haulers, people with Covid-19 symptoms that persist long after their acute infections have resolved. They suffer for months according to this Washington Post piece with "chronic fatigue, shortness of breath, confusion and memory loss, erratic and racing heartbeats, radical spikes in blood pressure, painful rashes, shooting pains and gastrointestinal symptoms." And as many as 750,000 to 1.3 million of them across the country are still too sick to come back to full-time work. How long can employers hold jobs for them? Noto that long apparently: The jobs are disappearing, they can't pay the bills, and they don't have access to social safety net services to help them out. Disability is tough to qualify for, even when you have a disability that's easy to document, a physical failing that shows up on lab tests or x-rays; it's a whole lot tougher when what you're experiencing is memory loss or inability to concentrate for which there's no test. Add in depression and anxiety which frequently accompany long Covid, and you're in real trouble because the disability system simply isn't built to deal with mental illness. Absent disability programs, most of the social services that help people who can no longer earn a living have been eliminated or strictly time-limited. Some of these folks face homelessness as they are unable to pay the rent or the mortgage. Further, if they can't work, many of them they no longer qualify for health insurance, so they can't access the treatment for their long Covid symptoms that might enable them to return to work. Those who still have insurance are having trouble getting their policies to pay for tests and treatments that are not yet proven because this is such a new and little-understood condition. They either have to stop treatment or go farther into debt to cover it. I think we're going to see a wave of serious issues related to these folks, and I'm not sure what we will do to help them. Abandoning them seems pretty cold, but we have nothing in place for them either. In the middle of a crisis, it's difficult to focus on the long term, but these folks don't have the luxury of waiting until we're through our crisis.

I also read a paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the US; it was a report on comprehensive fluid-dynamics modeling of SARS-CoV-2 transmission from a group at the Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization in Germany. They were able to use their model to calculate transmission risk under varying conditions. They used something called the upper bound, the highest-risk condition for transmission. They explained that this way: "[T]he main idea behind the upper bound is that, if a scenario proves to be safe under the upper bounds, there is no question of its effectiveness under real conditions," which tend to be better than highest risk.

The basic finding is this: Masking substantially reduces the risk for transmission. "Considering that the upper bound for infection risk used here is, by definition, extremely conservative, we conclude that universal masking with surgical masks and/or FFP2 [functionally close to N95] masks is a very effective measure to

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minimize the transmission of COVID-19.”

Here is their summary of their findings:

(1) “We find, for a typical SARS-CoV-2 viral load and infectious dose, that social distancing alone, even at 3.0 m [around nine feet] between two speaking individuals, leads to an upper bound of 90% for risk of infection after a few minutes.”

(2) If only the susceptible wears a face mask with infectious speaking at a distance of 1.5 m [around 4.5 feet], the upper bound drops very significantly; that is, with a surgical mask, the upper bound reaches 90% after 30 min, and, with an FFP2 mask, it remains at about 20% even after 1 h.”

(3) “When both wear a surgical mask, while the infectious is speaking, the very conservative upper bound remains below 30% after 1 h, but, when both wear a well-fitting FFP2 mask, it is 0.4%.”

(4) “We conclude that wearing appropriate masks in the community provides excellent protection for others and oneself, and makes social distancing less important.”

In case you were wondering, masks work. They work well, and they work best when everyone’s wearing one. But it’s still worth wearing one when no one around you does.

People have been asking me whether Omicron presents risks for Christmas gatherings. My answer is that I don’t know—don’t think anyone knows yet—depends how widespread it becomes in the next couple of weeks.

I want to add something to that answer though and it is this: I do know that Delta poses a serious risk to Christmas gatherings if you are not fully vaccinated—stark, proven, potentially fatal risks. And if you live in an area of low vaccination and high transmission, i.e., most of the US, or you gather with unvaccinated people, then it poses a risk to the vaccinated too.

Think about risk as a basket. Every time you do something that carries a chance you’ll be exposed to this virus, then you put a little something in the basket. If you do a really risky thing, then you put a lot into the basket. As it fills up, your chance of getting sick increases: Risk accumulates. So the smart money is on balancing the risks you take: To do something really important to you, you may decide to put a larger amount into the basket; but then it makes sense to give up something else risky that isn’t as important to you so your basket doesn’t fill up too fast. Now vaccinated people get bigger baskets, but they are not infinitely large; they can fill up too. And if you’re walking around a low-vaccination, high-transmission community, then every single risk you take puts more in your basket than would happen in a high-vaccination or low-transmission community. So look for ways to lower the risk level associated with the choices you make, and choose your risks wisely. Don’t be so quick to fill up.

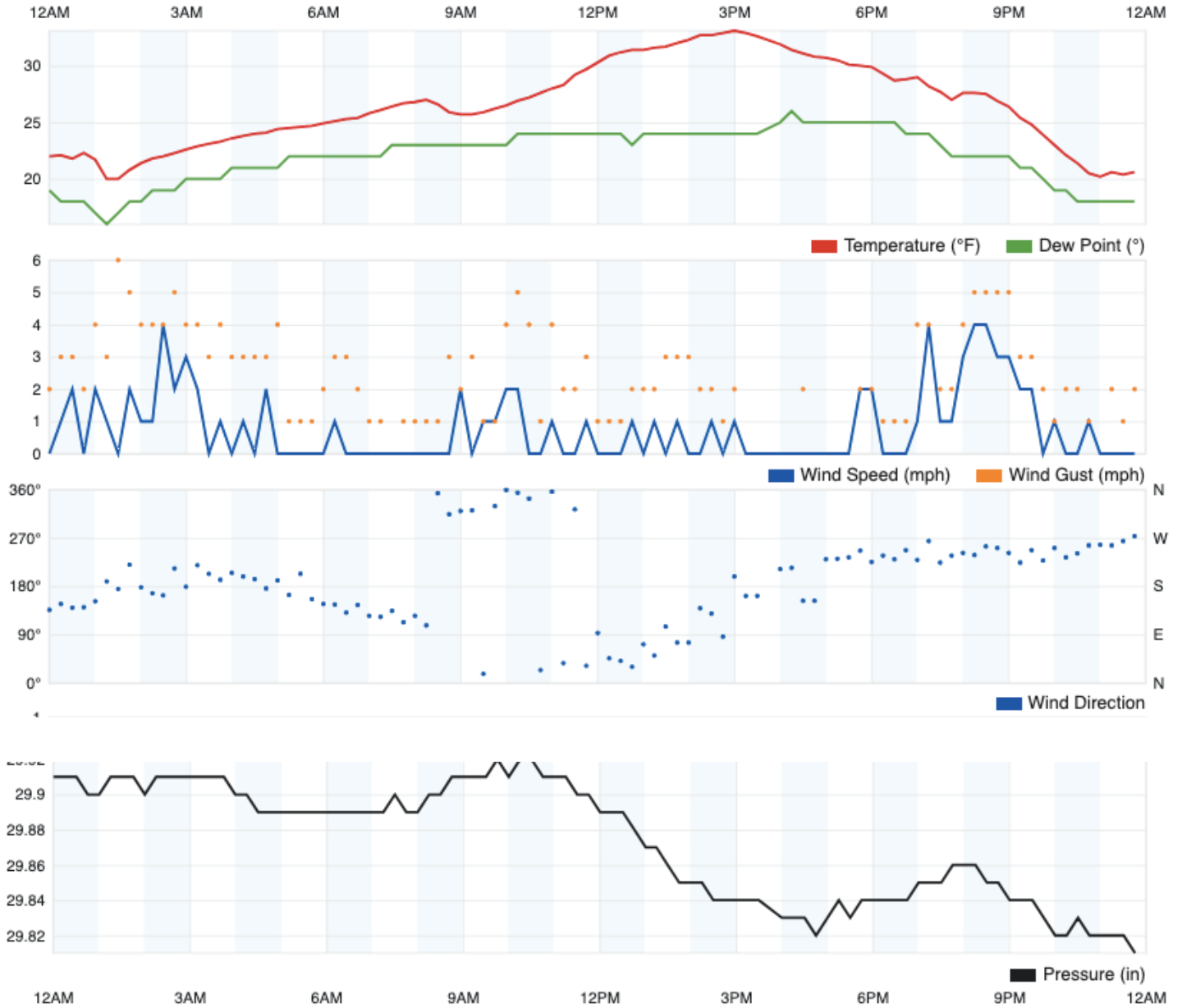
We know what lowers the risk for Delta, but many of us are simply unwilling to do those things—get vaccinated, get boosted, wear masks, distance, stay out of crowds. That has me wondering why folks are worrying about Omicron at all. There’s a large threat right outside the front door, and we’re pretty much ignoring that. If this is how we’re going to live, then it doesn’t make much sense to pay any attention to omicron really. Please carefully consider your choices; no one’s going to do that for you.

That’s it for the day. Exercise some caution and stay well; we’ll talk again.

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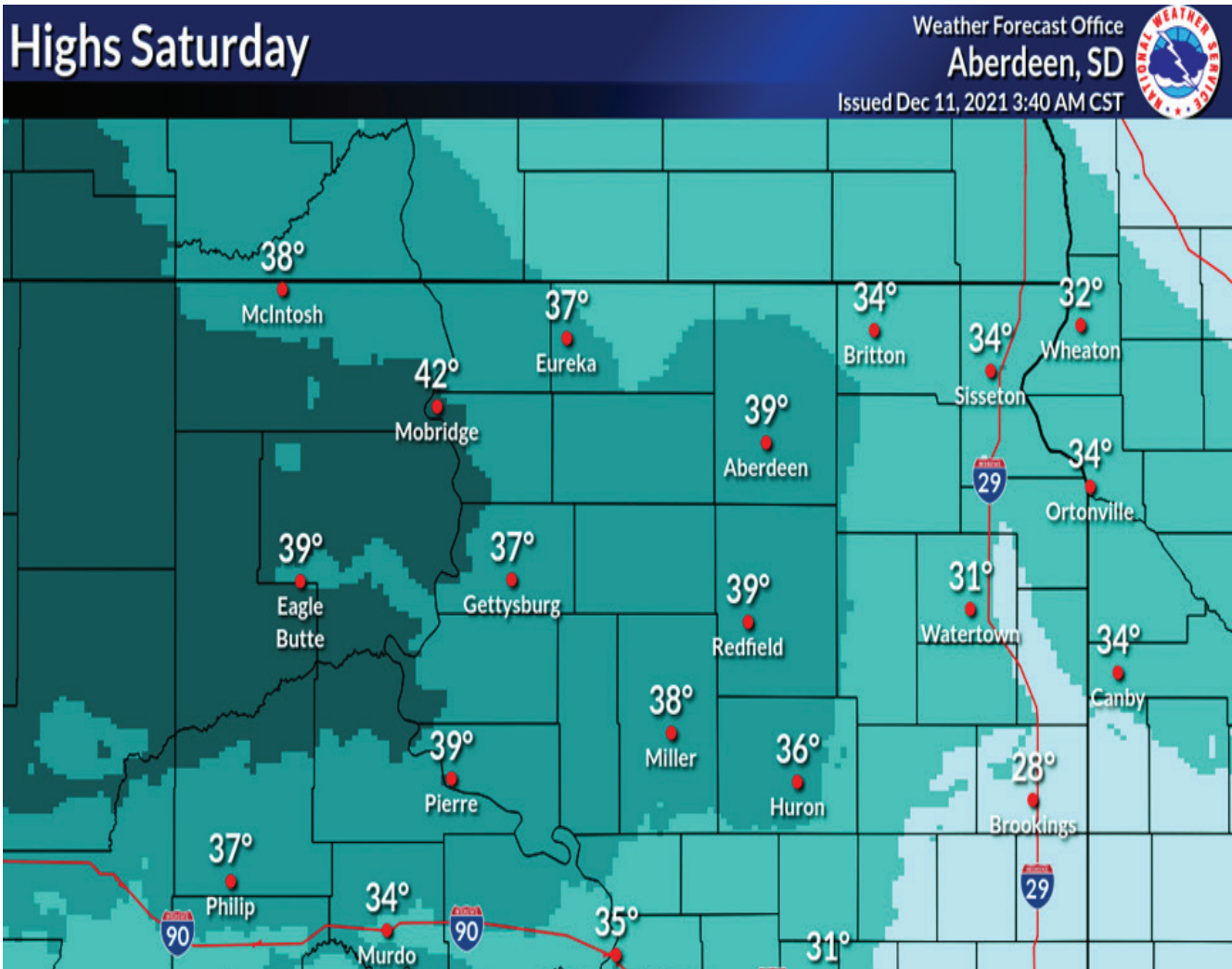
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny
High: 38 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 41 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 39 °F



Temperatures will still end up a few degrees above normal today with sunny skies and a light westerly breeze. Mild temperatures continue well into next week.

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Today in Weather History

December 11, 1965: Ice, up to 3 inches thick, with even more in some locations, accumulated from freezing rain on utility lines and trees in northern South Dakota, causing extensive damage. The damage was estimated at \$1 million each to telephone lines and power lines, with the highest losses in the northeast quarter of the state. The first accumulation of the glaze began as a thick rime due to dense fog and freezing temperatures before the 11th. Freezing rain, which started the afternoon of the 11th and continued into the 12th, formed a coating of ice over the heavy rime accumulation. The glaze remained for a week or more in most areas. In west central Minnesota, freezing drizzle and freezing rain at night on the 11th caused ice accumulations of 1/2 to 1 inch thick on roads, telephone, and electric wires, as well as tree limbs. Power and other services were disrupted over a broad area. Some services were out for up to four days.

December 11, 2004: High winds gusting to around 60 mph caused some spotty damage in northeast South Dakota. In Watertown, some trees were downed. One tree fell onto a house, causing some minor damage. In Milbank, two rail cars were blown down a railroad track and derailed.

December 11, 1905: The highest temperature ever recorded in South America was recorded at Rivadavia, Argentina with a temperature of 120 degrees.

December 11, 1992: A complex storm system moved eastward from the Gulf Coast of Texas to eastern Georgia on December 9 and 10th. In the next 24 hours, the low-pressure system moved to the Chesapeake Bay and rapidly intensified. This system produced gale force winds with gusts exceeding hurricane force affected not only the Mid-Atlantic coastline but also as far southwest as the southern Appalachians where trees were downed and roofs damaged. This storm also produced 20 to 30-foot waves in Massachusetts on December 12 and 13th. Precipitation amounts varied considerably. Rainfall amounts of 8 inches occurred in southeastern Massachusetts, while several areas in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland recorded more than 30 inches of snow. Precipitation ended during the evening hours on the 12th. Ten deaths resulted from the storm with insured losses totaling near \$850 million and non-insured losses near \$2 billion.

1932 - Very cold weather prevailed along the West Coast. San Francisco received 0.8 inch of snow, and at the airport the temperature dipped to 20 degrees. At Sacramento CA, the mercury dipped to 17 degrees to establish an all-time record low for that location. Morning lows were below freezing from the 9th to the 15th at Sacramento, and the high on the 11th was just 34 degrees. The cold wave dealt severe damage to truck crops and orange groves in the Sacramento Valley. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Low pressure over southwestern Ontario, Canada, brought snow and gusty winds to the North Central U.S. Winds gusted to 62 mph at Riverton WY. Snow and high winds in eastern North Dakota reduced visibilities to less than one hundred feet at times. Warm weather prevailed across the Southern Plains Region. Half a dozen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Del Rio TX with a reading of 89 degrees. Laredo TX and Kingsville TX tied for honors as hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 92 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Arctic cold invaded the central and eastern U.S. Sault Ste Marie MI reported a record low of 14 degrees below zero, and International Falls MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 25 degrees below zero. Temperatures remained below zero all day over parts of eastern Upper Michigan and northern New England. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong Santa Ana winds developed across southern California and parts of central California. Winds in Kern County of central California gusted to 100 mph near Grapevine. The high winds reduced visibilities to near zero in the desert areas, closing major interstate highways east of Ontario CA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2008 - A rare snowstorm swept across parts of south Louisiana and Mississippi, blanketing the area with snow. Nearly 8 inches of snow fell over parts of Louisiana. These conditions caused schools and bridges to close and left thousands of residents without power (Associated Press). (NCDC)

2010 - The "Pineapple Express" - a meteorological event where southwest winds bring warm, moist air to the U.S. West Coast - produced record rainfall to the Pacific Northwest during December 11th-12th. Seattle experienced record daily rainfall two days in a row. The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport recorded 1.42 inches of rain on the 11th, breaking the old daily record of 1.32 inches set in 1955. The next day, 2.19 inches fell, breaking the daily record of 1.70 inches set in 1966. The Stillaguamish River in western Washington state reached 21.06 feet at Arlington, tying the record set in November 2006. Flood stage for the river is 14 feet. The storm system also brought record warmth to the area. On December 14th, the temperature at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport reached 57, breaking the old daily record of 55 set in 2004. (NCDC)

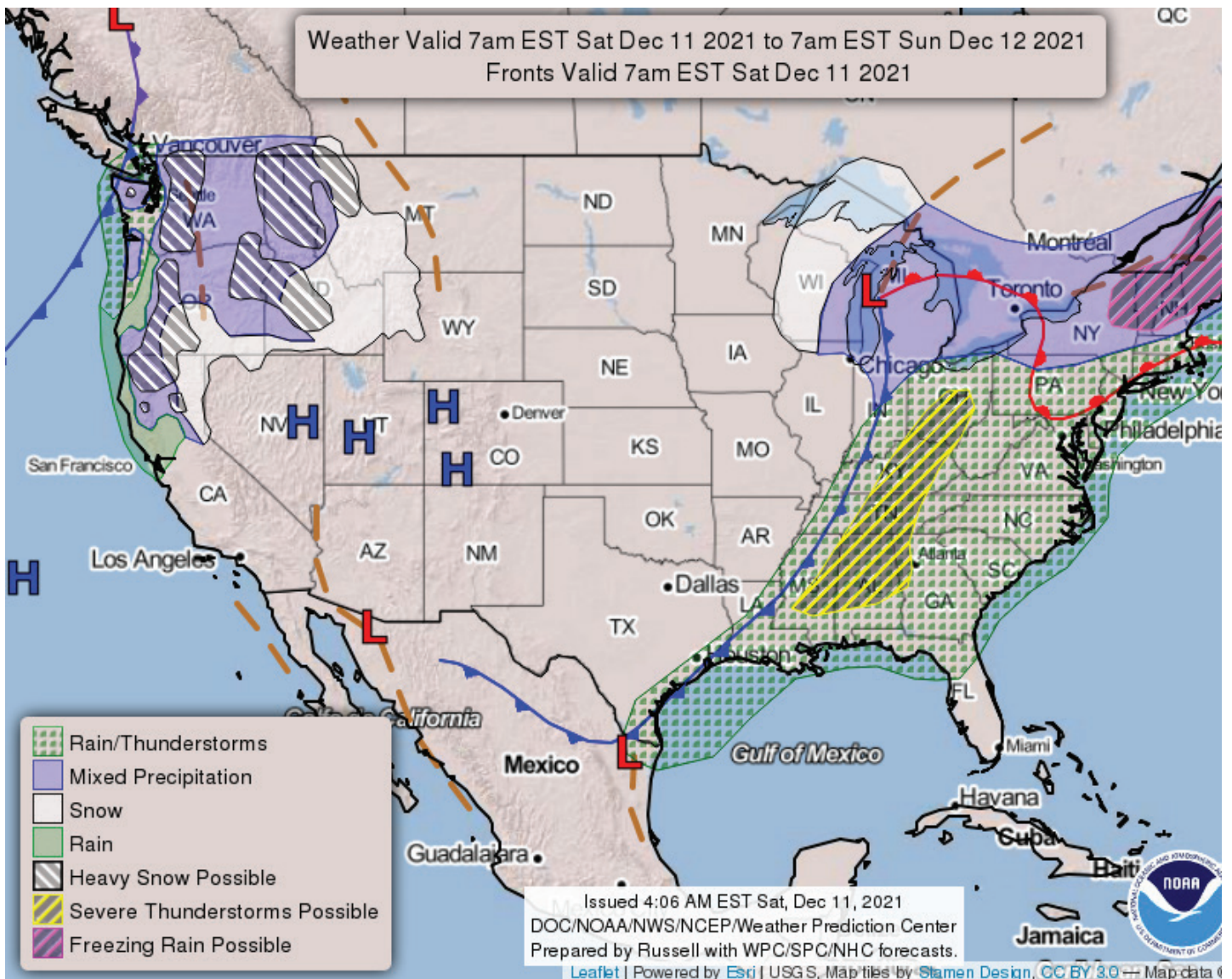
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 33.1 °F at 3:00 PM
Low Temp: 20.0 °F at 1:30 AM
Wind: 6 mph at 1:30 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 59° in 1939
Record Low: -22° in 1927
Average High: 30°F
Average Low: 9°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.22
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11
Average Precip to date: 21.43
Precip Year to Date: 19.97
Sunset Tonight: 4:50:55 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:01:38 AM





WHERE'S JESUS' PRESENT?

It was Christmas Eve. The tree was brightly decorated, the presents were wrapped with beautiful paper and colorful bows, the meal was over, and the family gathered together to read the Story of the Birth of Jesus, followed by a time of prayer. It was a family tradition.

"Now," said Dad, "let each one of us say a prayer and I will end our prayer-time before we go to bed."

After praying, Susie went to the tree and began to look at each present. She looked at the name on each of them very carefully. The family was curious but quiet.

Finally, Susie, looked at each member of the family and asked, "Where's the present for Jesus? What are we giving Him this year?"

Stunned, the family sat in silence. No one had thought about a gift for Jesus.

Paul has a suggestion for the best gift we could give Christ this Christmas. Writing to the Romans he said, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies – your entire self – to God... be a living and holy sacrifice to Him – the kind He will accept."

When we think of giving gifts this Christmas each of us would do well to think first of the gift God wants from us. We need to take Paul's words seriously, and give the most valuable gift – the gift of ourselves – to God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, trouble our hearts with the words of Paul this season, and carefully and prayerfully consider the gift You want most – surrendered lives! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Romans 12:1I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

Volunteers work to improve disabled access to businesses

By ARIELLE ZIONTS South Dakota Public Broadcasting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Americans with Disabilities Act is more than 30 years old but many businesses and tourist attractions remain inaccessible. That can make it tough for disabled people to know where they can easily visit.

Accessible Black Hills is a new volunteer organization that's trying to tackle these issues, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

Kelsey Stine, who founded the group, used her power wheelchair to visit the Dahl Art Center in Rapid City last month.

A long, gradual ramp offers easy access. The entrance has a set of double doors with buttons to help open them.

Stine got through the first set of doors but couldn't reach the button for the second set. She was able to open the second door with her hands but had to move quickly so it wouldn't close on her.

"The only problem for me is specifically, the second button is a little bit higher than I am," Stine said. "And I know all disabilities are different but that can be a deterrent if was alone. Although the second door was lighter so I could open it."

Jeannie Larson is the Assistant Curator at the art center.

"I had never really thought about where the positioning on the handicap buttons were before," she said.

Larson said she'll bring up the issue with museum leadership.

Stine recently started Accessible Black Hills, an organization that rates businesses and tourist attractions across the region.

Volunteers created a master list of local attractions and independent businesses. They then choose or are assigned places to visit.

The volunteers don't call before their visits. But once they arrive, they ask for permission to rate and take notes on the layout.

The information is then uploaded to a website where they also post photos and reviews.

"So that people are not an afterthought with disabilities. Like it just seems like a normal tourism organization and it also happens to show all the accessible areas," Stine said.

The website can help locals, while providing insider knowledge to visitors.

Stine visited a Rapid City restaurant with no ramp in front of the building. That might make it seem inaccessible to first-time visitors.

"If you go to the side or the other side — which you might not right away — there are ramps into the building and then it is very wide concept, accessible bathrooms, just a full, really sweet place to stay," Stine said. "But you might not know approaching here right away."

Accessible Black Hills also has information about businesses that don't have permanent ramps but are happy to provide a portable version.

Once the website is complete, the organization will raise money to provide grants to places like the Dahl Art Center that want to become more accessible.

There are disabled travelers who blog about accessibility as they visit new places, according to Maria Town, president of the American Association of People with Disabilities. But she says there are few websites that provide comprehensive ratings from local residents.

"It seems like what Accessible Black Hills is doing is actually setting up the expectation that it will be sustained and become this widely used resource both locally and beyond, and I think that's really unique and exciting," she said.

Town said the group is also unique since it wants to address one of the key shortfalls of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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"One of the critiques of the ADA is that it was an unfunded mandate," she said.

Town says businesses can improve accessibility with the help of grants or tax credits.

Callie Tysdal, a volunteer with Accessible Black Hills, arrived at the Cave Collective last month with a checklist and measuring tape on hand

"So what I usually do with your permission is go around and take some pictures so we can promote, some other pictures for data collection procedures and then I go around and measure some things," she told co-founder Dexter Carmen.

Tysdal measured the width of doorways and height of sinks while noting the location of any ramps and handicap parking spaces.

The Cave Collective — a music venue and community center — checked all the boxes except one. It doesn't have a bathroom changing station for older kids and adults with disabilities.

The Cave Collective's former location had a stage that was two feet off the ground.

"We had a band come through where the lead singer was in a wheelchair and we were unable to accommodate that so we just ended up lifting the wheelchair onto the stage and it worked out OK but it wasn't ideal," Carmen said.

The Cave Collective learned from that experience and built a new stage that's only two inches off the ground. It's also planning on adding a ramp.

Accessibility is an issue everyone should care about, not just those with permanent disabilities, Stine said. Many people will need accommodations at some point in their life, whether it's due to injury or old age.

Making business and tourist attractions accessible is the right thing to do, Stine added. She says it's also a smart business move since it can help bring in more customers.

Accessible Black Hills has visited more than a dozen establishments. So far, each business has welcomed the rating and review process. The group also has the support of local tourism and economic development organizations.

Accessible Black Hills eventually plans to become a nonprofit. For now, it's partnering with a foundation so it can apply for grants. The group wants to hire someone to manage its rating process, website and future grant program.

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 67, Deuel 35

Florence/Henry 55, Tri-State, N.D. 34

Great Plains Lutheran 61, Northland Lutheran, Wis. 46

Groton Area 33, Britton-Hecla 30

Kadoka Area 38, Philip 30

Mobridge-Pollock 59, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 31

New Underwood 37, Edgemont 29

Rapid City Central 51, Aberdeen Central 28

Rapid City Stevens 61, Pierre 50

Redfield 57, Tiospa Zina Tribal 18

Spearfish 54, Belle Fourche 45

Sully Buttes 63, North Central Co-Op 20

Timber Lake 50, Lemmon 38

Waubay/Summit 56, Ortonville, Minn. 36

Gillette Early Bird Tournament=

Cody, Wyo. 34, St. Thomas More 25

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

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Hot Springs vs. Alliance, Neb., ppd.
Huron vs. Mitchell, ppd.
Kimball/White Lake vs. Burke, ppd.
Lyman vs. Stanley County, ppd.
Valentine, Neb. vs. Todd County, ppd.

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

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 58, Rapid City Central 51
Deuel 70, Aberdeen Roncalli 45
Faith 84, Tiospaye Topa 18
Florence/Henry 46, Tri-State, N.D. 31
Harding County 71, Newell 23
New Underwood 39, Edgemont 25
Northland Lutheran, Wis. 65, Great Plains Lutheran 62
Pierre 68, Rapid City Stevens 38
Sisseton 68, Richland, N.D. 58
Spearfish 65, Belle Fourche 61
Standing Rock, N.D. 79, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 77
Timber Lake 61, Lemmon 49
Tiospa Zina Tribal 60, Redfield 50
Gillette Early Bird Tournament=
St. Thomas More 56, Cody, Wyo. 44
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Hot Springs vs. Alliance, Neb., ppd. to Dec 20th.
Huron vs. Mitchell, ppd.
Jones County vs. White River, ppd.
Lyman vs. Stanley County, ppd. to Feb 21st.
Valentine, Neb. vs. Todd County, ppd.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined
PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:
Mega Millions
23-25-40-42-60, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 2
(twenty-three, twenty-five, forty, forty-two, sixty; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$135 million
Powerball
Estimated jackpot: \$307 million

Secretary of Health to depart Noem's administration

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's Secretary of Health, who helped steer the state's response to the coronavirus pandemic, announced her resignation Friday.

Kim Malsam-Rysdon played a right-hand role as Noem went without most restrictions during the pandemic. Malsam-Rysdon oversaw the state's testing and vaccination efforts, as well as its public health communications.

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"Kim has been a steady hand as our Secretary of Health," Noem said in a statement. "I have appreciated her help and partnership during unprecedented times. We will miss having her on the team, and we wish her all the best."

Malsam-Rysdon is the latest person to exit from the governor's core team in recent weeks. She has also lost her chief of finance and replaced her chief of staff.

Malsam-Rysdon started as a cabinet secretary in 2015 under Noem's predecessor Dennis Daugaard.

"I am thankful for the opportunity to lead the Department of Health the last seven years, and for Governor Noem's leadership, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic," Malsam-Rysdon said in a statement.

The governor named Joan Adam as her Interim Secretary of Health. She previously worked as a division director in the Department of Health, overseeing the state's public health lab, correctional health care services, vital records and health information technology.

AG impeachment committee stalls seeking legal counsel

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The work of a South Dakota House committee considering impeachment of the state's attorney general has stalled since the committee was created last month.

The Republican-dominated House voted Nov. 9 to have a committee investigate whether Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg should be impeached for his conduct surrounding a fatal car crash. He pleaded no contest in August to a pair of misdemeanors in the crash that killed 55-year-old Joseph Boeve.

The committee has met just once and has not scheduled any further meetings. House Speaker Spencer Gosch said the committee is finding legal counsel for the investigation and partially blamed the delay on a separate legal battle over whether he would release the names of lawmakers who petitioned to call the special legislative session last month, KSFY-TV reported.

"In the process of finding special counsel we have run into a few hiccups," Gosch said. "Whether that be frivolous lawsuits from certain media entities, that takes up a ton of our time, or just threats thereof."

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader and the South Dakota Newspaper Association have threatened to sue Gosch, alleging that he is breaking public records laws by keeping the names secret.

Ravnsborg's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Heavy snow, winter storm warning hits Great Plains states

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Heavy snow hit the Great Plains Friday, prompting school closures and warnings to avoid travel.

The National Weather Service forecasted that parts of South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin could see nearly 1 foot (30 cm) of snow, with the most coming later in the day. A winter storm warning was issued for an area stretching across southern South Dakota and upwards into Wisconsin.

Many schools did not wait to see how much snow would pile up and announced that Friday classes would be canceled.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol reported that several vehicles had slid off the road along Interstate 90.

Capitol rioters' social media posts influencing sentencings

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

For many rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, self-incriminating messages, photos and videos that they broadcast on social media before, during and after the insurrection are influencing even their criminal sentences.

Earlier this month, U.S. District Judge Amy Jackson read aloud some of Russell Peterson's posts about the riot before she sentenced the Pennsylvania man to 30 days imprisonment. "Overall I had fun lol," Peterson posted on Facebook.

The judge told Peterson that his posts made it "extraordinarily difficult" for her to show him leniency.

"The 'lol' particularly stuck in my craw because, as I hope you've come to understand, nothing about

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January 6th was funny," Jackson added. "No one locked in a room, cowering under a table for hours, was laughing."

Among the biggest takeaways so far from the Justice Department's prosecution of the insurrection is how large a role social media has played, with much of the most damning evidence coming from rioters' own words and videos.

FBI agents have identified scores of rioters from public posts and records subpoenaed from social media platforms. Prosecutors use the posts to build cases. Judge now are citing defendants' words and images as factors weighing in favor of tougher sentences.

As of Friday, more than 50 people have been sentenced for federal crimes related to the insurrection. In at least 28 of those cases, prosecutors factored a defendant's social media posts into their requests for stricter sentences, according to an Associated Press review of court records.

Many rioters used social media to celebrate the violence or spew hateful rhetoric. Others used it to spread misinformation, promote baseless conspiracy theories or play down their actions. Prosecutors also have accused a few defendants of trying to destroy evidence by deleting posts.

Approximately 700 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. About 150 of them have pleaded guilty. More than 20 defendants have been sentenced to jail or prison terms or to time already served behind bars. Over a dozen others received home confinement sentences.

Rioters' statements, in person or on social media, aren't the only consideration for prosecutors or judges. Justice Department sentencing memos say defendants also should be judged by whether they engaged in any violence or damaged property, whether they destroyed evidence, how long they spent inside the Capitol, where they went inside the building and whether they have shown sincere remorse.

Prosecutors recommended probation for Indiana hair salon owner Dona Sue Bissey, but Judge Tanya Chutkan sentenced her to two weeks in jail for her participation in the riot. The judge noted that Bissey posted a screenshot of a Twitter post that read, "This is the First time the U.S. Capitol had been breached since it was attacked by the British in 1814."

"When Ms. Bissey got home, she was not struck with remorse or regret for what she had done," Chutkan said. "She is celebrating and bragging about her participation in what amounted to an attempted overthrow of the government."

FBI agents obtained a search warrant for Andrew Ryan Bennett's Facebook account after getting a tip that the Maryland man live-streamed video from inside the Capitol. Two days before the riot, Bennett posted a Facebook message that said, "You better be ready chaos is coming and I will be in DC on 1/6/2021 fighting for my freedom!."

Judge James Boasberg singled out that post as an "aggravating" factor weighing in favor of house arrest instead of a fully probationary sentence.

"The cornerstone of our democratic republic is the peaceful transfer of power after elections," the judge told Bennett. "What you and others did on January 6th was nothing less than an attempt to undermine that system of government."

Senior Judge Reggie Walton noted that Lori Ann Vinson publicly expressed pride in her actions at the Capitol during television news interviews and on Facebook.

"I understand that sometimes emotions get in the way and people do and say stupid things, because it was ridiculous what was said. But does that justify me giving a prison sentence or a jail sentence? That's a hard question for me to ask," Walton said.

In the case of Felipe Marquez, the judge found social media posts belied serious mental health issues that needed treatment rather than incarceration. Marquez recorded cellphone videos of himself with other rioters inside the office of Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore. Back at home in Florida, Marquez posted a YouTube video in which he rapped about his riot experience to the tune of Shaggy's "It Wasn't Me." with lyrics that included, "We even fist-bumped police," and "We were taking selfies."

In the video, Marquez wore a T-shirt that said, "Property of FBI."

Prosecutors had recommended a four-month jail sentence, but U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras

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sentenced him instead to three months of home confinement with mental-health treatment, followed by probation. "I do think you have some serious issues you need to address. That played a large role in my sentencing decision," he said.

Prosecutors asked for a one-month jail sentence for Vinson, but the judge sentenced the Kentucky nurse to five years of probation and ordered her to pay a \$5,000 fine and perform 120 hours of community service.

Judge Jackson gave Andrew Wrigley a history lesson before she sentenced the Pennsylvania man to 18 months of probation. Wrigley posted a photo on social media of him holding a 1776 flag during the riot. The judge said the gesture didn't honor the nation's founders.

"The point of 1776 was to let the people decide who would rule them. But the point of the attack on the Capitol was to stop that from happening," Jackson said. "The point of the attack on the Capitol was to subvert democracy, to substitute the will of the people with the will of the mob."

Videos captured New Jersey gym owner Scott Fairlamb punching a police officer outside the Capitol. His Facebook and Instagram posts showed he was prepared to commit violence in Washington, D.C., and had no remorse for his actions, prosecutors said.

Senior Judge Royce Lamberth said other rioters in Fairlamb's position would be "well advised" to join him in pleading guilty.

"You couldn't have beat this if you went to trial on the evidence that I saw," Lamberth said before sentencing Fairlamb to 41 months in prison.

But it worked to the advantage of one. Virginia charter boat captain Jacob Hiles likely avoided a stricter sentence by posting videos and photos of him and his cousin at the Capitol. A day after the riot, Hiles received a private Facebook message from a Capitol police officer who said he agreed with Hiles' "political stance" and encouraged him to delete his incriminating posts, according to prosecutors.

The officer, Michael Angelo Riley, deleted his communications with Hiles, but investigators recovered the messages from Hiles' Facebook account, prosecutors said. Riley was indicted in October on obstruction charges.

On Monday, Jackson sentenced Hiles to two years of probation. Prosecutors said the case against Riley may have been impossible without Hiles' cooperation.

Associated Press writer Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City contributed to this report.

Tornadoes, storms strike US; Kentucky gov fears dozens dead

By JEFF ROBERSON, ROBERT JABLON and JIM SALTER Associated Press

EDWARDSVILLE, Ill. (AP) — Tornadoes and severe weather caused catastrophic damage across multiple states late Friday, killing at least six people overnight as it tore through a candle factory in Kentucky, an Amazon facility in Illinois and a nursing home in Arkansas. The Kentucky governor said he feared dozens more could be dead.

Many people were feared dead at the factory in Mayfield, Kentucky, where Gov. Andy Beshear called the situation "tragic" at a news conference Saturday morning.

"There were about 110 people in it at the time that the tornado hit it," Beshear said. "We believe our death toll from this event will exceed 50 Kentuckians and probably end up 70 to 100."

The governor added, "It's very hard, really tough, and we're praying for each and every one of those families."

At least one person died after severe weather struck an Amazon facility in Edwardsville, Illinois, police Chief Mike Fillback told reporters Saturday morning. The roof of the building was ripped off and a wall about the length of a football field collapsed.

Two people at the facility were taken by helicopter to hospitals in St. Louis for treatment, Fillback said. The chief did not know which hospitals the two had been taken to, or their conditions. Edwardsville is about 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of St. Louis.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the damage was caused by straight-line storms or a tornado, but the

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National Weather Service office near St. Louis reported "radar-confirmed tornadoes" in the Edwardsville area at around the time of the collapse.

About 30 people who were in the building were taken by bus to the police station in nearby Pontoon Beach for evaluation.

Early Saturday, rescue crews were still sorting through the rubble. Fillback said the process could take several more hours. Cranes and backhoes were brought in to help move debris.

The Belleville News-Democrat reported that the Amazon fulfillment center in Edwardsville opened with two warehouses in 2016, with 1.5 million square feet of space. The warehouses are used to store items until they are shipped to mail-order customers.

"The safety and well-being of our employees and partners is our top priority right now," Amazon spokesperson Richard Rocha said in a written statement Friday night. "We're assessing the situation and will share additional information when it's available."

Workers at a National Weather Service office had to take shelter as a tornado passed near their office in Weldon Spring, Missouri, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of St. Louis. One person died and two others were injured in building collapses near the towns of Defiance and New Melle, both just a few miles from the weather service office.

A tornado struck the Monette Manor nursing home in Arkansas on Friday night, killing one person and trapping 20 people inside as the building collapsed, Craighead County Judge Marvin Day told The Associated Press.

Five people had serious injuries, and a few others had minor ones, he said. The nursing home has 86 beds.

Day said another nursing home about 20 miles (32 kilometers) away in Truman was badly damaged but no injuries were reported. The residents were being evacuated because the building is unsafe.

Three storm-related deaths were confirmed in Tennessee, said Dean Flener, spokesman for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. Two of the deaths occurred in Lake County, and the third was in Obion County — both in the northwestern corner of the state.

In Kentucky, several buildings collapsed during the severe weather that struck Mayfield, said Sarah Burgess, a trooper with the Kentucky State Police.

She said several people were trapped inside a damaged candle factory and that a shift was ongoing when the storm hit.

"The entire building is essentially leveled," she said.

Farther east in Bowling Green, Western Kentucky University said on Twitter that emergency crews were assessing significant storm damage and that no injuries were immediately reported. However, the school called off commencement ceremonies that were planned for Saturday because the campus was without power.

"It's obvious we had major wind damage," said Ronnie Ward, a Bowling Green police spokesman, in a telephone interview.

Rescue efforts in Bowling Green and elsewhere were hampered by debris strewn across roads. Ward said numerous apartment complexes in Bowling Green had major structural damage, and some factories had collapsed during the storms.

"Right now we're focusing on the citizens, trying to get to everybody that needs us," Ward said.

Jablon reported from Los Angeles; Salter reported from O'Fallon, Missouri. Associated Press journalists Bruce Schreiner in Frankfort, Kentucky, John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia, and Jeff McMurray in Chicago contributed to this report.

UK seeks unity at G7 meeting over Russia's 'malign behavior'

By JILL LAWLESS and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

LIVERPOOL, England (AP) — Top diplomats from the Group of Seven industrialized nations gathered

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beside the River Mersey in Liverpool, with host country Britain seeking "a show of unity against global aggressors" amid a crisis over Russia's intentions towards Ukraine.

The U.K. is seeking elusive consensus from the wealthy nations' club in response to what it calls "malign behavior" by Russia, and over tensions with China and Iran.

As a Salvation Army band played Christmas carols, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss greeted U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other G-7 counterparts with fist bumps in the rotunda of the modernist Museum of Liverpool at the start of the two-day talks.

"We need to defend ourselves against the growing threats from hostile actors," Truss said as she opened the meeting of foreign ministers from the U.K., the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. "And we need to come together strongly to stand up to aggressors who are seeking to limit the bounds of freedom and democracy."

Truss and Blinken met late Friday and "expressed deep concern about a buildup of Russian troops on Ukraine's border," the British government said. The two politicians said "any incursion by Russia would be a strategic mistake for which there would be serious consequences."

The U.S. and its NATO allies are concerned the movement of Russian troops and weapons to the border region may be a prelude to invasion and have said they would inflict heavy sanctions on Russia's economy if that happens.

Moscow denies planning to attack Ukraine and accuses Kyiv of its own allegedly aggressive designs.

Truss warned before the meeting that "free democratic nations" must wean themselves off Russian gas and Russian money to preserve their independence.

She said she wanted to work with other countries "to make sure that free democratic nations are able to have an alternative to Russian gas supplies," a reference to the contentious Nord Stream 2 pipeline that was built to carry gas from Russia to Germany.

Truss met on the sidelines of the gathering with Germany's new foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, a politician from the environmentalist Greens who previously opposed Nord Stream 2.

Britain, which is not very dependent on Russian gas, is a critic of the pipeline. But London's financial district and property market are major hubs for Russian money, and U.K. authorities have long been accused of turning a blind eye to ill-gotten funds from around the world.

Truss insisted Britain is willing to consider new economic measures to protect its "core values."

"There have been decisions made by the free world...in the short term to obtain cheap energy or cheap financing, and that has a long-term cost for freedom and democracy," she said. "And we can't make that mistake again."

The weekend meeting is the final major event of Britain's year-long G-7 presidency. The diplomats in Liverpool also plan to discuss lagging efforts to vaccinate the world against the coronavirus, tensions in the western Balkans, Afghanistan and North Korea and China's muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region.

The gathering is taking place as negotiators meet in Vienna to try to revive an ailing international deal on Iran's nuclear ambitions. Blinken met German, French and British diplomats in Liverpool to discuss next steps over Iran, and the Biden administration's special envoy on Iran, Robert Malley also stopped in the city on his way to Vienna.

Truss warned this week that the Vienna talks are "the last chance for Iran to sign up" again to the deal, which was meant to rein in Tehran's nuclear program in return for loosened economic sanctions. It faltered after then-President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the agreement in 2018 and Iran began ramping up its uranium enrichment.

Truss also has invited ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to the Liverpool meeting, though many will be joining remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. Delegates and journalists face daily virus tests and mask mandates at the conference, as Britain records more cases of the omicron virus variant.

Britain is keen to work more closely with Asian nations as part of an "Indo-Pacific tilt" following the U.K.'s departure from the European Union last year — both to boost U.K. trade and as a counterweight to China's dominance.

Truss told her G-7 counterparts that democracies needed to fight “economic coercion” and “win the battle of technology” — both pointed references to Beijing’s growing influence around the globe. The G-7 has launched a “Build Back Better World” initiative to offer developing nations funding for big infrastructure projects as an alternative to money from China that, the West argues, often comes with strings attached.

The U.K. chose a setting steeped in British history and culture for the G-7 event. Liverpool’s docklands, once a symbol of Britain’s global reach and economic might, came to represent the country’s post-industrial decline.

Now, the area on the River Mersey is an example of 21st century urban renewal as a leisure and cultural district, complete with a museum dedicated to the city’s most famous sons, The Beatles.

This version has been corrected to show that Truss and Blinken met late Friday, not Saturday.

Indian farmers end yearlong protests and return home

By RISHI LEKHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Tens of thousands of jubilant Indian farmers on Saturday cleared protest sites on the capital’s outskirts and began returning home, marking an end to their yearlong demonstrations against agricultural reforms that were repealed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government in a rare retreat.

Farmers dismantled their makeshift accommodations at multiple protest sites and started to vacate long stretches of highways ringing New Delhi where they have camped since November last year. Hundreds of them waved green and white flags and danced to celebrate their victory as they rode tractors, jeeps and cars.

“Farmers have saved the democracy. It was a fight for justice,” said farmer Nagendra Singh.

After a year of insisting that the new measures would benefit farmers, Modi made a surprise announcement to withdraw them last month. A bill to repeal the laws was officially passed in Parliament on Nov. 30. But the farmers did not immediately vacate the protest sites and said they would continue to demonstrate until the government agreed to other demands, including guaranteed prices for key crops and the withdrawal of criminal cases against protesters.

On Thursday, the government set up a committee to consider those demands.

Modi’s government had insisted that the laws were necessary reforms to modernize Indian farming and would lead to a deregulated market with more private-sector control of agriculture.

The farmers said the laws would drastically shrink their incomes and leave them at the mercy of big corporations. In protest, they pressed for the complete repeal of the laws.

They also demanded the government guarantee prices for certain essential crops such as wheat and rice. Currently, an overwhelming majority of farmers sell only to government-sanctioned marketplaces at fixed prices.

Farmers form one of India’s most influential voting blocs and Modi’s decision to scrap the laws came ahead of elections early next year in key states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, both significant agricultural producers and where his Bharatiya Janata Party is eager to shore up its support.

Political analysts say the upcoming elections are a major reason behind the surprise move, but that it’s too early to say whether it will work.

“Modi apologized to farmers but only after resorting to dictatorship. We were called terrorists. He bowed to protests because of the upcoming elections,” said Jaigran, another farmer who uses just one name.

Initially, Modi’s government had tried to discredit the protestors — mostly Sikh farmers — by dismissing their concerns as motivated by religious nationalism. Some leaders in Modi’s party called them “Khalistanis,” a reference to a movement for an independent Sikh homeland in India.

Such allegations backfired, further angering the farmers and their supporters.

The protests drew international support and were the biggest challenge Modi’s government faced since coming to power in 2014.

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They were largely peaceful but violence erupted on Jan. 26 when thousands of farmers briefly took over New Delhi's historic Red Fort in a deeply symbolic move. At least one farmer died and a number of protesters and police were injured.

Farmers' leaders say more than 500 protesters have died due to suicide, cold weather and COVID-19 since November last year and they insist the government should pay 500,000 rupees (\$6,750) in compensation per family. But the government says it has no figures on the number of deaths during the movement.

The leaders said they will review next month the steps taken by the government and decide their future course of action.

Taiwan records first omicron case in traveler from Africa

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan has recorded its first case of the omicron variant in a passenger who recently traveled to the southern African country of Eswatini, health officials said Saturday.

The passenger, a Taiwanese woman in her 30s who returned on Dec. 8, is now in quarantine in hospital, according to the Central Epidemic Command Center, which is in charge of the island's pandemic response. Passengers who sat near her on the plane have tested negative so far.

Taiwan reported 10 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, all of which were identified in travelers entering from abroad.

The self-ruling island has a strict two-week quarantine on arrival and has sealed its borders off to all but residents and citizens, with few exceptions. There is little community transmission within its borders of the disease and there has been few restrictions on movement internally in recent months. Mask wearing is nearly universal.

While the omicron variant is called a "variant of concern" by the World Health Organization, scientists are still working to determine how it may compare with the predominant delta variant in terms of transmissibility and severity.

Taiwan has reported 16,731 COVID-19 cases in total and 848 deaths.

Cuban family finds welcome, refugee status in distant Serbia

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

LAJKOVAC, Serbia (AP) — Belquis Gonzales and her family enjoy something close to celebrity status in a small town in Serbia, where they live after fleeing Cuba five years ago.

While most emigrants from the Caribbean island go to the United States or Spanish-speaking countries, Gonzales and her husband chose Serbia — a rare country in Europe for which Cubans do not need visas - and arrived there via Russia.

"We didn't know anything about Serbia," Gonzales told The Associated Press at the family's home in Lajkovac, a town about 80 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the Serbian capital, Belgrade. "We had many doubts and many fears as well, but things have been a lot better than we had expected."

Still struggling with the aftermath of wars and sanctions in the 1990s, Serbia is far from a promised land for people seeking to build new lives after fleeing violence, repression or poverty at home.

While over a million refugees and migrants have arrived since the big migration wave into Europe in 2015-16, most were only on their way toward wealthy European Union nations further north and west.

Mirjana Milenkovski, who works in Serbia for the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR, said just 3,700 people have formally applied for asylum in the country since 2008, while 212 have received it.

Among them are seven Cubans, including Gonzales, her husband, Yordelis Pimienta, and their 11-year-old daughter, Islena Danay Pimienta.

They are a "very good example of integration," Milenkovski said. "This is one of the greatest success stories that we have here."

Even as Serbians have emigrated in large numbers for more prosperous countries, Gonzales said her family is happy with its new life.

Gonzales said the family left Cuba because of both political problems and lack of opportunities.

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Though Cuba resembles a Caribbean paradise to outsiders, life there is difficult and the system does not "favor the people at all. It rather limits them," Gonzales said.

Once in Serbia, the family stayed in a center for asylum-seekers before being granted refugee status in 2019. UNHCR and Serbian authorities helped the couple find jobs in Lajkovac and move there.

Settled in a small apartment, Gonzales works at a nearby butcher shop and her husband at construction sites in the area. She didn't even seem to miss the Caribbean sunshine on a cold, windy day in late November.

"What I like most about this country is that you see all the seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter," Gonzales said.

Unfamiliar with the ways of life in Europe, the Cuban family initially worried whether they would find acceptance. Gonzales said they faced no rejection or racism though "people do stare at you, but it's like out of curiosity."

They have managed to make friends and socialize despite long hours at work — and Gonzales also has taken accounting and Serbian language classes.

"We have our friends and we enjoy each other's company or birthday parties....We get along with everyone," she said. "Everyone knows that we are 'the Cubans.'"

Some locals have commented on the traditionally good relations between Serbia and Cuba that date back to the era when Serbia was part of Communist-run Yugoslavia.

Unused to newcomers and astonished that someone actually moved from Cuba to their drab-looking town of several thousand people, residents of Lajkovac have stopped by the butcher's shop just to see Gonzales, or "Belka," as she is nicknamed here.

"They want to know if the weather in Cuba is nice and if she would take them there," said Gonzales' employer, Dragana Isailovic.

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Stay French, or not? New Caledonia holds independence vote

By CHARLOTTE ANTOINE-PERRON Associated Press

NOUMEA, New Caledonia (AP) — Voters in the South Pacific archipelago of New Caledonia are set to decide Sunday whether to break away from France, a referendum that is important for French geopolitical ambitions and is being closely watched amid growing Chinese influence in the region.

But pro-independence forces are refusing to take part, accusing the French government of trying to rush through the vote.

The COVID-19 crisis complicated the campaign for the referendum, the third and last such vote foreseen as part of decades of decolonization efforts. The process is aimed at settling tensions between native Kanaks seeking independence and those who want the territory to remain part of France.

When polls open at 7 a.m. in New Caledonia — a vast archipelago east of Australia that is 10 time zones ahead of Paris — voters will be asked to vote yes or no on the question: "Do you want New Caledonia to achieve full sovereignty and become independent?"

The territory of 270,000 people won broad autonomy after violence in 1988 led to a political process known as the Noumea Agreement. The accord provided for the "progressive, accompanied and irreversible transfer of powers from the French state to New Caledonia," except in the areas of defense, public security, justice, foreign affairs and currency.

In the first such referendum in 2018, 43.6% of voters supported independence, and 46.7% favored it in a second vote held in 2020. While support for a "yes" vote seemed to be growing, the region's first coronavirus outbreak in September threw the political debate into disarray. Until then, New Caledonia had been one of the few virus-free places left on the planet.

By November, the archipelago had reported 271 COVID-19 deaths, and the regional Senate decreed a year of traditional Kanak mourning. Independence activists felt they couldn't campaign out of respect for

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their dead, and demanded that the referendum be postponed.

But pro-France groups insisted the vote should take place as scheduled on Dec. 12 to end uncertainty over New Caledonia's future and to boost its economic prospects. After military medics were sent from the mainland, the virus situation stabilized, and the French government decided to stick to the planned date.

Pro-independence activists announced they would refuse to take part in the vote, accusing the government in Paris of imposing the referendum date and violating neutrality by publishing a document seen as casting the consequences of independence in a negative light.

The boycott has made for a strange campaign: empty billboards, no flags in the street, unusual calm. "It is indeed difficult to prepare and play a match when the opponent announces that they will not come," the pro-France Voices of "No" Collective said. But the group still called for a "massive vote turnout, so as not to be robbed of the result."

What's at stake in the referendum goes beyond the future of Caledonians alone. France is trying to cement its presence in the Indo-Pacific region after it lost a multi-billion submarine contract because of a partnership Australia formed with the United States and the U.K. The secretly negotiated project, announced in September, was a huge blow to France.

Unlike in previous votes, this time "the question of New Caledonia's strategic positioning is addressed. This novelty comes in the context of (the submarine partnership) and the assertion of Chinese-American rivalry in the Pacific," University of New Caledonia law professor Caroline Gravelat said.

New Caledonia hosts one of two French military bases in the Pacific, which allows France to contribute to regional security. It currently cooperates with the U.S., Australia and New Zealand on maritime surveillance, search and rescue at sea, ocean demining and the fight against illegal fishing.

The potential independence of New Caledonia "raises the question of the already very strong Chinese influence in Oceania, a major subject of concern for Western partners," Gravelat said.

New Caledonia became French in 1853 under Emperor Napoleon III — Napoleon's nephew — and was used for decades as a prison colony. It became an overseas territory after World War II, with French citizenship granted to all native Kanaks in 1957. Today, its population includes Kanaks and descendants of European colonizers, among others.

The U.N. has supported New Caledonia's decolonization process and sent electoral observers to monitor Sunday's vote. The Pacific Islands Forum is also watching closely, and sent a delegation to observe the vote.

Even if the territory votes to stay French, the process started by the Noumea Agreement does not end with the referendum. The state, separatists and non-separatists would have 18 months to negotiate a new status for the territory and its institutions within France.

South African doctors see signs omicron is milder than delta

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — As the omicron variant sweeps through South Africa, Dr. Unben Pillay is seeing dozens of sick patients a day. Yet he hasn't had to send anyone to the hospital.

That's one of the reasons why he, along with other doctors and medical experts, suspect that the omicron version really is causing milder COVID-19 than delta, even if it seems to be spreading faster.

"They are able to manage the disease at home," Pillay said of his patients. "Most have recovered within the 10 to 14-day isolation period." said Pillay.

And that includes older patients and those with health problems that can make them more vulnerable to becoming severely ill from a coronavirus infection, he said.

In the two weeks since omicron first was reported in Southern Africa, other doctors have shared similar stories. All caution that it will take many more weeks to collect enough data to be sure, their observations and the early evidence offer some clues.

According to South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases:

— Only about 30% of those hospitalized with COVID-19 in recent weeks have been seriously ill, less than half the rate as during the first weeks of previous pandemic waves.

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— Average hospital stays for COVID-19 have been shorter this time - about 2.8 days compared to eight days.

— Just 3% of patients hospitalized recently with COVID-19 have died, versus about 20% in the country's earlier outbreaks.

"At the moment, virtually everything points toward it being milder disease," Willem Hanekom, director of the Africa Health Research Institute, said, citing the national institute's figures and other reports. "It's early days, and we need to get the final data. Often hospitalizations and deaths happen later, and we are only two weeks into this wave."

In the meantime, scientists around the world are watching case counts and hospitalization rates, while testing to see how well current vaccines and treatments hold up. While delta is still the dominant coronavirus strain worldwide, omicron cases are popping up in dozens of countries, with South Africa the epicenter.

Pillay practices in the country's Gauteng province, where the omicron version has taken hold. With 16 million residents, It's South Africa's most populous province and includes the largest city, Johannesburg, and the capital, Pretoria. Gauteng saw a 400% rise in new cases in the first week of December, and testing shows omicron is responsible for more than 90% of them, according to health officials.

Pillay says his COVID-19 patients during the last delta wave "had trouble breathing and lower oxygen levels. Many needed hospitalization within days," he said. The patients he's treating now have milder, flu-like symptoms, such as body aches and a cough, he said.

Pillay is a director of an association representing some 5,000 general practitioners across South Africa, and his colleagues have documented similar observations about omicron. Netcare, the largest private healthcare provider, is also reporting less severe cases of COVID-19.

But the number of cases is climbing. South Africa confirmed 22,400 new cases on Thursday and 19,000 on Friday, up from about 200 per day a few weeks ago. The new surge has infected 90,000 people in the past month, Minister of Health Joe Phaahla said Friday.

"Omicron has driven the resurgence," Phaahla said, citing studies that say 70% of the new cases nationwide are from omicron.

The coronavirus reproduction rate in the current wave - indicating the number of people likely to be infected by one person — is 2.5, the highest that South Africa has recorded during the pandemic, he said.

"Because this is such a transmissible variant, we're seeing increases like we never saw before," said Waasila Jassat, who tracks hospital data for the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

Of the patients hospitalized in the current wave, 86% weren't vaccinated against the coronavirus, Jassat said. The COVID-patients in South Africa's hospitals now also are younger than at other periods of the pandemic: about two-thirds are under 40.

Jassat said that even though the early signs are that omicron cases are less severe, the volume of new COVID-19 cases may still overwhelm South Africa's hospitals and result in a higher number of severe symptoms and deaths.

"That is the danger always with the waves," she said.

Dole's last Kansas journey honors service, political career

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Bob Dole made a final journey back to the prairie state that shaped him for memorials in his western Kansas hometown and at the Statehouse to honor the military service that left him severely wounded and the distinguished political career that followed his recovery.

Honors Saturday for the late former U.S. Senate majority leader and presidential candidate will begin with a public viewing of his casket and a memorial service at a Roman Catholic church in Russell, the small town some 240 miles (386 kilometers) west of Kansas City where he grew up during the Great Depression. Dole died Sunday at the age of 98 after serving nearly 36 years in Congress and running as the GOP nominee for president in 1996.

Another memorial was to follow Saturday afternoon in the state capital of Topeka, where Dole briefly

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served in the Kansas House in the 1950s. The list of speakers was bipartisan, including Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly and Kansas' two Republican U.S. senators, Roger Marshall and Jerry Moran.

Dole was honored Friday during a service at Washington National Cathedral as a senator who could practice bare-knuckle partisan politics without losing civility and as a patriot whose grit overcame serious wounds from combat in World War II in Italy in 1945. He was known for a caustic wit that he sometimes turned on himself.

"God, what courage Bob Dole had," President Joe Biden said during Friday's service in Washington National Cathedral. The Democratic president served with Dole in the Senate for more than 20 years and had a 50-year friendship with him.

Another tribute followed at the World War II Memorial in Washington — a monument to Dole's generation that he worked to get built. Among the speakers was actor Tom Hanks.

Dole will be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, but his casket was flown to Salina, Kansas, then transported 70 miles (113 kilometers) west to his boyhood hometown, which now has about 4,400 residents.

Oil production allowed Russell to boom when Dole was growing up, even during the Great Depression, with the first local well drilled in 1923, the year he was born. In accepting his 1996 presidential nomination, Dole recalled a town surrounded by wheat and oil wells where "no one grows up without an intimate knowledge of distance."

"And the first thing you learn on the prairie is the relative size of a man compared to the lay of the land," he said.

Also contributing were Will Weissert and Colleen Long in Washington, and Charlie Riedel in Salina, Kan.

Follow John Hanna on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/apjdhanna>

New inflation number feeds angst about Democrats' \$2T bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Government reports on rising inflation and the potential costs of President Joe Biden's social and environment legislation raised fresh questions Friday about the bill's fate, with both sides hoping the new numbers would influence pivotal Sen. Joe Manchin.

The moderate Manchin, D-W.Va., has spent months forcing Democrats to trim the 10-year, \$2 trillion package, arguing it's too expensive and at times citing growing inflation as a reason to slow work on the bill. On Friday, the Labor Department said consumer prices grew last month at an annual rate of 6.8%, the highest in 39 years.

A separate report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said that if many of the bill's temporary spending boosts and tax cuts were made permanent, it would add \$3 trillion to the price tag. That would more than double its 10-year cost to around \$5 trillion. Democrats called the projections from the Republican-requested report fictitious.

Manchin aides did not respond to requests for comment. Manchin said in a brief interview Thursday that he wanted to know "where we are in inflation and where we are on the true price" of the bill, adding he was "very concerned."

The latest inflation figures prompted Biden to use some of his strongest language yet, telling reporters at the White House on Friday, "I think this is the peak of the crisis." While the numbers illustrate a clear political danger for the administration, the recent performance of financial markets suggests investors don't see inflation as a long-term problem.

Friday's reports popped out two weeks before Christmas, by when Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., hopes to end months of talks among Democrats and finally push a compromise bill through the Senate. The House approved an initial version last month.

With Manchin still seeking cuts in a measure that originally cost \$3.5 trillion, the day's reports at the least increased his leverage in a tortuous process that's already seen several near-death moments caused by

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Democratic infighting. At worst, the numbers fueled worries that Manchin might abandon the package, sinking it.

"I don't know the answer to that," Biden said at the White House when asked if he could win Manchin's support. He said he'd talk to the lawmaker early next week.

Every Democrat in the 50-50 chamber will have to back the bill so Vice President Kamala Harris can cast a tie-breaking vote to approve it.

The political sensitivity of inflation and its impact on the Democratic bill, a collection of family services, health care and climate change priorities, was illustrated as leaders of both parties tried to spin the numbers to their advantage.

Democrats argued that the inflation report intensified the need to approve the measure. They said the legislation's spending and tax credits for health care, children's costs, education and other programs would help families cope with rising prices. Most of the bill is paid for with tax boosts on the wealthy and big corporations.

The legislation's impact will be "reducing costs for ordinary people," Biden said.

Republicans said the legislation's expenditures would further feed inflation, which has been driven by supply chain delays making products less available and spending prompted by a strong underlying economy.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said inflation means "the average American has gotten a pay cut," adding, "It is unthinkable that Senate Democrats would try to respond to this inflation report by ramming through another massive socialist spending package in a matter of days."

Possibly mitigating the political impact of Friday's inflation numbers was that they were expected and represented a modest rise from October's 6.2%.

Adding any additional juice to the economy might worsen inflation. But the extra fiscal stimulus over the next several years in Democrats' bill would be less than 1% the size of the entire U.S. economy, making its likely inflationary impact mild, said the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Democrats limited the duration of many initiatives in their package to help contain the bill's price tag. That includes extending enhancements to the child tax credit for just one year and free, universal pre-school for only six years.

It's an accounting move both parties have used to make their budget plans seem more affordable — even though they would like their proposals to be permanent and some may be extended because they are popular. Republicans used such phaseouts robustly for their big tax cuts in 2001 and 2017.

"If you believe these programs go away after one, two or three years, you shouldn't have a driver's license," said Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, top Republican on the Senate Budget Committee, who requested the CBO estimates. He said the bill's higher price tag and rising inflation meant Democrats' legislation would be "lethal to the economy and lethal to your paycheck."

Democrats argued the estimated added \$3 trillion cost was bogus because if they decided to seek any future extensions of their initiatives, they would propose savings to pay for them.

As if sharing a script, Psaki called the GOP claims "fundamentally dishonest" and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Republicans were using "fake scores based on mistruths." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called the numbers "a phony score of an imaginary bill."

Outside groups have produced similar estimates about the legislation's cost if its programs were permanent. CBO numbers usually have more clout in Congress because the agency's impartiality is respected.

Much about the legislation remains in play. Manchin still wants to remove a paid family leave program and curb or eliminate some tax breaks aimed at encouraging a shift to cleaner energy. Moderate Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., has also pushed to trim the measure.

Democrats have also had differences over how to ease limits on federal tax deductions that people can take on state and local taxes. In addition, the Senate parliamentarian must decide whether some provisions — including a top party priority of letting millions of migrants remain in the U.S. — violate the chamber's rules and should be removed.

That's left it unclear whether Schumer will be able to meet his Christmas deadline.

AP reporter Josh Boak contributed to this report.

Biden will award Medal of Honor to three US soldiers

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will award the Medal of Honor next week to three U.S. soldiers who fought in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the White House said Friday.

The soldiers are Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Celiz, an Army Ranger who died after stepping between Taliban fighters and a U.S. helicopter evacuating wounded in 2018; Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee, a Special Forces soldier who fought off Taliban insurgents after massive attack in Afghanistan in 2013; and Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, 35, who suffered fatal injuries in Iraq while rescuing fellow soldiers from a burning vehicle in 2005.

The three will be recognized at a White House ceremony on Dec. 16.

Cashe will become the first Black U.S. service member to receive the Medal of Honor for actions since Vietnam, according to the White House.

He was on patrol near Samarra, Iraq in October 2005 when the Bradley Fighting Vehicle he was commanding was attacked with small arms fire and a roadside bomb that set it flame. Cashe pulled six fellow soldiers from the burning wreckage and suffered devastating burns himself.

Cashe, who grew up in Oviedo, Florida, died from his burns at a Texas hospital the following month. Three of the soldiers he pulled from the flaming vehicle also perished.

Celiz, 32, was leading an operation to clear an area of enemy forces in Paktia Province, Afghanistan, when his team came under attack.

As a medical evacuation helicopter arrived to recover a casualty, it came under sustained sustained enemy fire.

Celiz exposed himself to heavy fire as he led the evacuation. As the casualty was loaded into the helicopter and his team returned to cover, Celiz remained at the chopper, returning fire and constantly repositioning himself to shield to the aircraft and its crew.

As the helicopter lifted off, Celiz was hit by enemy fire. Though injured, he motioned to the aircraft to depart rather than remain to load him and risk further casualties.

Celiz was a South Carolina native and had enlisted in the Army in 2006.

Plumlee was serving at a base in Ghazni, Afghanistan, when it came under massive attack, with insurgents blowing a sixty-foot breach in the base's perimeter wall.

Ten insurgents wearing Afghan National Army uniforms and suicide vests poured through the breach. Plumlee and five Special Operations members mounted two vehicles and raced toward the site of the detonation.

He killed two insurgents, one with a well-placed grenade and the other by using precision sniper fire to detonate the insurgent's suicide vest. He engaged several others at close range.

At one point in the battle, an insurgent detonated his suicide vest, mortally wounding a fellow U.S. soldier. Plumlee ran to the wounded soldier, carried him to safety and rendered first aid.

He is currently serving with the 1st Special Forces Group at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Battered survivors tell of Mexico truck crash that killed 55

By MANUEL DE LA CRUZ and EDGAR H. CLEMENTE Associated Press

TUXTLA GUTIERREZ, Mexico (AP) — Simply counting up the human cost of the horrifying truck crash that killed 55 migrants and injured over 100 is chilling, even for those who survived the disaster on a highway in southern Mexico.

About 40 of the survivors were listed with "multiple contusions" at local hospitals late Friday, and they were the least injured.

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Nearly 20 others had fractured bones, often their arms and wrists, suggesting they tried to break the force of the impact when the semi-trailer packed with smuggled migrants tipped over and smashed into a pedestrian bridge.

The worst were those with brain injuries or severe internal damage, often crushed chests, abdomens or pelvises. The force of the crash slammed migrants against each other, bashed them into the steel sides of the trailer and threw some onto the roadway.

Enmanuel Ramón Hernández was one of the local residents who rushed to help after the crash. He said the crushing weight of the migrants themselves might have caused many deaths.

"The majority (of the injuries) were from contusions or internal injuries, blows," Hernández said. But of the first 45 dead that were laid out, he added, "they didn't have any evidence of broken bones or visible fractures. They were asphyxiated among themselves."

Survivors recounted from their hospital beds how their location inside the trailer determined who lived and who died.

Those unlucky enough to be riding jammed against the fragile walls of the freight container almost certainly died, survivors said. Those in the middle of the packed group survived, cushioned by their fellow migrants as the container flipped onto the road.

"The ones who died were the ones who were up against the walls of the trailer," said one young migrant from Guatemala being treated for a broken arm. "Thank God, we were in the middle. But the ones on the sides, they died."

The migrant, who did not want to give his name because he did not have proper documents in Mexico, described a gruesome scene of screaming and blood in the moments after the truck crashed into the base of the steel pedestrian bridge Thursday. He estimated about 250 migrants were on board.

The living had to extricate themselves from the tangled pile of dead and dying bodies.

"They fell on top of me, there were like two or three fellow migrants on top of me," the youth said.

Then came the grim task of trying to pull the wounded out.

"When I got out, another fellow migrant was shouting," the survivor said. "He was shouting to me, I pulled at him and got him out and put him on the side of the road, but he died."

The youth said the truck's driver, whose whereabouts were unknown, had entered a sharp curve at a high rate of speed and lost control on a road leading to Tuxtla Gutierrez, capital of Mexico's Chiapas state.

While the Mexican government is trying to appease the United States by stopping caravans of walking migrants and allowing the reinstatement of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, it has been unable to stanch the flood of migrants stuffed by the hundreds into trucks operated by smugglers who charge thousands of dollars to take them to the U.S. border.

Guatemalan Foreign Minister Pedro Brolo called Friday for tougher sentences for immigrant trafficking.

"We have to toughen the punishment for those who profit off our people," Brolo said.

Survivors said most of those crammed into the trailer were from Guatemala and Honduras. Authorities said migrants from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Mexico were also aboard.

Those who spoke to survivors said they told of boarding the truck in Mexico, near the border with Guatemala, and of paying between \$2,500 and \$3,500 to be taken to Mexico's central state of Puebla. Once there, they would presumably have contracted with another set of smugglers to take them to the U.S. border.

Despite the cautionary tale, more migrants continued on the move toward the United States. On Thursday, after the accident, a group of almost 400 mainly Central American migrants walked down a highway leading to Mexico City, ignoring entreaties from immigration agents and National Guard troops to turn themselves in.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador blamed poverty and lack of jobs that force people to migrate.

"We have been insisting that the causes that originate these unfortunate events must be addressed," said López Obrador, who has called on the United States to invest in development programs for Central America. He said the U.S. government is moving slowly on the issue.

Pope Francis, who visited Chiapas in 2015 and has made the plight of migrants a hallmark of his papacy,

sent a telegram of condolences Friday to the archbishop of Tuxtla Gutierrez, offering prayers for the dead and their families, and for the injured.

'The internet's on fire' as techs race to fix software flaw

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — A critical vulnerability in a widely used software tool — one quickly exploited in the online game Minecraft — is rapidly emerging as a major threat to organizations around the world.

"The internet's on fire right now," said Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. "People are scrambling to patch," he said, "and all kinds of people scrambling to exploit it." He said Friday morning that in the 12 hours since the bug's existence was disclosed that it had been "fully weaponized," meaning malefactors had developed and distributed tools to exploit it.

The flaw may be the worst computer vulnerability discovered in years. It was uncovered in a utility that's ubiquitous in cloud servers and enterprise software used across industry and government. Unless it is fixed, it grants criminals, spies and programming novices alike easy access to internal networks where they can loot valuable data, plant malware, erase crucial information and much more.

"I'd be hard-pressed to think of a company that's not at risk," said Joe Sullivan, chief security officer for Cloudflare, whose online infrastructure protects websites from malicious actors. Untold millions of servers have it installed, and experts said the fallout would not be known for several days.

Amit Yoran, CEO of the cybersecurity firm Tenable, called it "the single biggest, most critical vulnerability of the last decade" — and possibly the biggest in the history of modern computing.

The vulnerability, dubbed 'Log4Shell,' was rated 10 on a scale of one to 10 the Apache Software Foundation, which oversees development of the software. Anyone with the exploit can obtain full access to an unpatched computer that uses the software,

Experts said the extreme ease with which the vulnerability lets an attacker access a web server — no password required — is what makes it so dangerous.

New Zealand's computer emergency response team was among the first to report that the flaw was being "actively exploited in the wild" just hours after it was publicly reported Thursday and a patch released.

The vulnerability, located in open-source Apache software used to run websites and other web services, was reported to the foundation on Nov. 24 by the Chinese tech giant Alibaba, it said. It took two weeks to develop and release a fix.

But patching systems around the world could be a complicated task. While most organizations and cloud providers such as Amazon should be able to update their web servers easily, the same Apache software is also often embedded in third-party programs, which often can only be updated by their owners.

Yoran, of Tenable, said organizations need to presume they've been compromised and act quickly.

The first obvious signs of the flaw's exploitation appeared in Minecraft, an online game hugely popular with kids and owned by Microsoft. Meyers and security expert Marcus Hutchins said Minecraft users were already using it to execute programs on the computers of other users by pasting a short message in a chat box.

Microsoft said it had issued a software update for Minecraft users. "Customers who apply the fix are protected," it said.

Researchers reported finding evidence the vulnerability could be exploited in servers run by companies such as Apple, Amazon, Twitter and Cloudflare.

Cloudflare's Sullivan said there was no indication his company's servers had been compromised. Apple, Amazon and Twitter did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Navy blames Hawaii water contamination on jet fuel spill

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and MARK THIESSEN undefined

HONOLULU (AP) — The Navy believes that contaminated tap water that went to Hawaii military households came from a one-time spill of jet fuel last month and was not caused by a leak from aging underground

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fuel storage tanks above an aquifer, a top Navy official told state lawmakers on Friday.

Rear Adm. Blake Converse said Navy officials are very confident that the contamination happened on Nov. 20, when 14,000 gallons (52,995 liters) of jet fuel spilled at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility inside an access tunnel that provides fire suppression and service lines for the complex. The complex supplies fuel for many military planes and ships that operate in the Pacific and its use has been suspended.

The spill was cleaned up, Converse said, but people have complained for weeks of foul-smelling water and some have said they have gone to hospitals because of cramps or vomiting after they drank the water.

Converse said it appears that some of the jet fuel was sent through the Navy's water distribution system that serves about 93,000 people, including those in military housing.

Converse also told state lawmakers that Navy officials have moved more than 3,000 families to hotels on the island of Oahu and that they will stay there until the problem is solved.

The overall water system and water systems in all homes and facilities that have been impacted will be flushed with clean water and Navy officials said they hope to complete that process by Christmas.

"The Navy is responsible for this crisis. We are taking ownership of the solutions, and we are going to fix it," Adm. Sam Paparo, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, told the lawmakers.

Before Navy officials divulged the likely cause of the contamination, a U.S. senator called on the Environmental Protection Agency to take the lead in testing to determine whether the Navy's water is safe to drink.

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz said the EPA should step in after the Navy disputed the Hawaii Department of Health's analysis of fuel contamination at a well for drinking water to the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam's water system.

Testing last week showed the presence of petroleum in water that comes from a well near the underground fuel tank complex that has been the source of multiple fuel leaks over the years.

The state health department said the Navy reported diesel fuel levels more than double Hawaii health limits for drinking water in samples collected at another one of the Navy's shafts that provide water to the drinking water system.

But the Navy said the sample didn't come directly from the Navy's well and that Navy officials don't believe it indicated contamination.

After receiving results Friday from a California lab, the health department said samples collected from a ground water source called the Red Hill shaft had tested positive on Sunday for "high levels" of gasoline.

Schatz wants the EPA to be the lead agency handling collection, testing, analysis and public communication of the water crisis.

"We can't afford another day of the Navy and the state and county agencies disagreeing on the basic question of whether the drinking water is safe," he said in a statement Thursday.

The EPA is not independently testing the water, but is reviewing Navy test results, Julia Giarmoleo, an agency spokesperson, told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

Thiessen reported from Anchorage, Alaska.

FAA: No more commercial astronaut wings, too many launching

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Heads up, future space travelers: No more commercial astronaut wings will be awarded from the Federal Aviation Administration after this year.

The FAA said Friday it's clipping its astronaut wings because too many people are now launching into space and it's getting out of the astronaut designation business entirely.

The news comes one day ahead of Blue Origin's planned liftoff from West Texas with former NFL player and TV celebrity Michael Strahan. He and his five fellow passengers will still be eligible for wings since the FAA isn't ending its long-standing program until Jan. 1.

NASA's astronauts also have nothing to worry about going forward — they'll still get their pins from the space agency.

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All 15 people who rocketed into space for the first time this year on private U.S. flights will be awarded their wings, according to the FAA. That includes Blue Origin founder Jeff Bezos and Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson, as well as the other space newbies who accompanied them on their brief up-and-down trips. The companies handed out their own version of astronaut wings after the flights.

All four passengers on SpaceX's first private flight to orbit last September also qualified for FAA wings. Adding Blue Origin's next crew of six will bring the list to 30. The FAA's first commercial wings recipient was in 2004.

Earlier this year, the FAA tightened up its qualifications, specifying that awardees must be trained crew members, versus paying customers along for the ride. But with the program ending, the decision was made to be all-inclusive, a spokesman said.

Future space tourists will get their names put on a FAA commercial spaceflight list. To qualify, they must soar at least 50 miles (80 kilometers) on an FAA-sanctioned launch.

"The U.S. commercial human spaceflight industry has come a long way from conducting test flights to launching paying customers into space," the FAA's associate administrator Wayne Monteith said in a statement. "Now it's time to offer recognition to a larger group of adventurers daring to go to space."

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Jan. 6 panel subpoenas 6 who helped plan Trump rallies

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection is subpoenaing six people who the panel says were involved in the organization and planning of rallies that aimed to overturn Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 presidential election.

The committee chairman, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said some worked to stage the events and "some appeared to have had direct communication" with then-President Trump as they were planning the rallies.

The subpoenas were issued to Robert "Bobby" Peede Jr. and Max Miller, who the committee says met with Trump in his private dining room on Jan. 4; Brian Jack, Trump's political director at the time; and rally organizers Bryan Lewis, Ed Martin and Kimberly Fletcher.

The subpoenas come as the rallies before and during the Jan. 6 riot have become a major focus of the committee's investigation. Lawmakers on the panel have said they want to know who financed the events and whether organizers were in close touch with the White House and members of Congress as they planned the events.

At the largest Jan. 6 rally, on the Ellipse near the White House, Trump riled up the crowd and told them to "fight like hell." He said he would march to the Capitol with them, but he eventually returned to the White House.

Hundreds of his supporters who did proceed to the Capitol violently pushed past police, broke through windows and doors and interrupted the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's White House victory.

Miller, a former Trump aide who is running for Congress in Ohio, said on Twitter Thursday that he had received notice he would be subpoenaed and would accept it but that he would also "defend my rights."

"Upon taking office, I will make sure one of my first votes is to disband this partisan committee that has weaponized its powers against innocent Americans," Miller tweeted.

The committee has already subpoenaed more than a dozen other rally organizers, including several who have complied with the panel's demands for documents and sat for depositions. But the panel is linking the witnesses subpoenaed on Friday more directly to Trump and the White House.

In letters accompanying the subpoenas to Miller and Peede, Thompson says that documents obtained by the committee show that the two men had lunch on Jan. 4 with Trump and Katrina Pierson, a former Trump campaign official who has already been subpoenaed by the panel, in the president's private dining

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room.

"The discussion centered on who the president wanted to speak at the rally," Thompson wrote.

In the letter to Jack, who is now a political aide to House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, Thompson writes that Jack reached out on behalf of Trump to several members of Congress to ask them to speak at the rally. One of those members, Alabama Rep. Mo Brooks, accepted and spoke.

The committee has now announced almost 50 subpoenas, and has issued an unknown number more subpoenas privately. Most of those witnesses have complied, so far, and the panel has interviewed almost 300 people who are somehow connected to the violent siege.

A handful of Trump's closest allies have refused to comply, however, or have said they will plead their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination. The committee will vote Monday to recommend contempt charges against former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows after he reversed an initial effort to comply and said he would defy his subpoena.

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Lisa Mascaro and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

New York's COVID surge is back — and so is its mask mandate

By KAREN MATTHEWS, MARINA VILLENEUVE and MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Facing a cold-weather surge in COVID-19 infections, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Friday that masks will be required in all indoor public places unless the businesses or venues implement a vaccine requirement.

Hochul said the decision to reinstitute a mask mandate was based on a rising number of cases and hospitalizations, which has been especially pronounced in parts of upstate New York.

New York enacted a mask mandate at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020 that ended in June 2021 for vaccinated individuals. The new mask mandate applies to both patrons and staff and will be in effect from Monday to Jan. 15, after which the state will reevaluate.

"We're entering a time of uncertainty and we could either plateau here or our cases could get out of control," Hochul warned at a public appearance in New York City.

New York joins several states with similar indoor mask mandates, including Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada and Hawaii.

Mask mandates have become a hot-button issue. For weeks, Hochul has said local governments will decide whether to reimpose COVID-19 protocols. She's expressed caution about whether resistant communities would follow stricter rules.

Hochul's announcement Friday was cheered by some fellow Democrats and a union representing retail and grocery workers, even as Republicans called it an overreach and an unnecessary burden on businesses.

Violators could face civil and criminal penalties, including a maximum fine of \$1,000. While Hochul said local health departments will be in charge of enforcing the requirements, Republican Rockland County Executive Ed Day said the governor's staff was unable to provide detailed information about the new requirement.

"I told the governor's staff that we cannot and will not enforce this requirement as it currently stands," Day said in a prepared release.

Niagara County Legislature Chair Becky Wydysh, a Republican, said local officials don't believe a mandate is the best use of resources. The county will take an "educate to cooperate approach" to enforcement, Wydysh said in a statement.

News of the mandate was welcome at the Lake Placid Christmas Company, a shop on Main Street in the tourist-friendly Adirondack village.

"Our employees all wear masks, but we stopped requiring all of our customers to wear masks because it was too hard to enforce," said manager Scott Delahant. "Quite frankly, I got sick of arguing with people."

He said many shoppers browse barefaced, despite a sign on the door encouraging mask wearing and a basket of free disposable masks.

Hochul announced the mask mandate at a social service agency in Manhattan, where most people already wear masks. New York City requires vaccinations for indoor restaurant dining, entertainment and gyms, and those vaccine-requiring venues will be unaffected by the new rule.

The state recorded more than 68,000 positive tests for the virus in the seven-day period that ended Wednesday. That's the most in any seven-day stretch since the start of February, and rates are rising in nearly all counties.

"We are heading upward in a direction that I no longer find sustainable," Hochul said.

Nearly 3,500 people are hospitalized with confirmed COVID-19 cases in New York — nearly double from 1,794 on Nov. 7.

The surge is especially pronounced in some areas of upstate New York, which has accounted for nearly three-fourths of confirmed COVID-19 deaths in hospitals since August. Several upstate counties have recently enacted mask mandates, including Erie County, which includes Buffalo.

In Sullivan County in the mid-Hudson Valley, public health director Nancy McGraw said people have become complacent about the virus and she supports the mask mandate. She said vaccination rates are disappointingly low in remote areas including Woodbourne, where only 36% of roughly 3,000 residents are fully vaccinated.

"We have very limited resources for enforcement and people need to do the right thing," McGraw said. "Public responsibility is key here."

New York has the seventh highest rate of fully vaccinated residents: 70.1% as of federal data updated Friday. But fewer than 60% of residents are fully vaccinated in more than 500 zip codes throughout New York, according to data for about 1,300 zip codes provided by the state health agency.

Thirty-two upstate hospitals in Niagara and elsewhere had to limit performing nonessential elective surgeries starting Thursday because of capacity issues.

One of the state's worst hit hospitals, Glen Falls Hospital in Warren County, said 50 out of 165 patients had COVID-19 as of Wednesday. That's the most infected patients the hospital's ever reported, according to state data.

"We remain very busy across all units in the hospital," hospital spokesperson F. Raymond Agnew said. He said 70% of COVID-19 admissions are unvaccinated people.

Villeneuve and Hill reported from Albany, New York.

Court won't stop Texas abortion ban, but lets clinics sue

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday left in place Texas' ban on most abortions, offering only a glimmer of daylight for clinics in the state to challenge the nation's most restrictive abortion law.

The decision, little more than a week after the court signaled it would roll back abortion rights and possibly overturn its landmark Roe v. Wade decision, was greeted with dismay by abortion rights supporters but praise by opponents.

Five conservative justices, including three appointed by former President Donald Trump, formed a majority to limit who can be sued by the clinics, a result that both sides said probably will prevent federal courts from effectively blocking the law.

Texas licensing officials may be sued, but not state court judges, court clerks or state Attorney General Ken Paxton, the court ruled. That seems to leave people free, under the unusual structure of the Texas law, to sue abortion clinics and anyone else who "aids or abets" an abortion performed after cardiac activity is detected in an embryo, around six weeks and before some women know they're pregnant.

"The Supreme Court has essentially greenlit Texas's cynical scheme and prevented federal courts from blocking an unconstitutional law," the Center for Reproductive Rights, which represents the Texas clinics, said on Twitter.

The court acted more than a month after hearing arguments over the law, which makes no exceptions

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for rape or incest.

The law has been in place for about three months, since Sept. 1. The Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion nationwide has stood since 1973.

President Joe Biden voiced concern over the high court decision to keep the Texas law in effect and restated his support for legislation that has cleared the House of Representatives and would codify in federal law the abortion right now at risk.

"We have more work to do, but I will always stand with women to protect and defend their long-recognized, constitutional right under Roe v. Wade," Biden said in a statement.

Justice Neil Gorsuch, who has consistently voted against abortion rights, did not mention Roe in his main opinion for the court Friday. Gorsuch is one of the Trump appointees, along with Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett.

Abortion providers will now attempt to run the same legal gantlet that has previously frustrated them. The federal judge who already has once blocked the law, known as S.B. 8, almost certainly will be asked to do so again. Then his decision would be reviewed by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has twice voted to allow enforcement of the abortion ban.

In any case, it all could return to the justices, and so far there have not been five votes on the nine-member court to put the law on hold while the legal fight plays out.

"The Court should have put an end to this madness months ago, before S. B. 8 first went into effect. It failed to do so then, and it fails again today," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in a separate opinion Friday.

The court's conservative majority also seems likely to roll back abortion rights in a Mississippi case that was argued last week, although that decision is not expected until spring.

If Roe is overruled, the fight over the Texas law would be largely beside the point because Texas is one of 12 states with a trigger law that would ban abortion in a post-Roe world.

Friday's high court ruling came a day after a state court judge in Texas ruled that the law's enforcement, which rewards lawsuits against violators by awarding judgments of \$10,000, is unconstitutional yet left the law in place.

Critics of the decision also said it would encourage other states to adopt copycat laws on abortion and allow for attacks on other constitutional rights.

The legal fight over the Texas law is focused on its unusual structure and whether it improperly limits how the law can be challenged in court. Texas lawmakers handed responsibility for enforcing the law to private citizens, rather than state officials.

The law authorizes lawsuits against clinics, doctors and others who perform or facilitate a banned abortion. The case raised a complex set of issues about who, if anyone, can sue over the law in federal court, the typical route for challenges to abortion restrictions. Indeed, federal courts routinely put a hold on similar laws, which rely on traditional enforcement by state and local authorities.

The Supreme Court voted Friday 8 to 1 in favor of allowing the clinics' lawsuit against the ban to proceed, with only Justice Clarence Thomas voting the other way. But the court was sharply divided, 5-4, on the knotty issue of whom to target with a court order that ostensibly tries to block the law. The justices ruled that Texas licensing officials may be sued, but dismissed claims against state court judges, court clerks and the state attorney general.

Gorsuch wrote that abortion providers have to follow the same rules that apply to people asserting other constitutional rights. "The Court has consistently applied these requirements whether the challenged law in question is said to chill the free exercise of religion, the freedom of speech, the right to bear arms or any other right. The petitioners are not entitled to a special exemption," Gorsuch wrote.

Chief Justice John Roberts and the three liberal justices dissented from that part of the decision in an opinion that said the purpose of the Texas law was "to nullify this court's rulings" on abortion.

The same four justices were in dissent in September when the court declined to block the law once before.

"The nature of the federal right infringed does not matter; it is the role of the Supreme Court in our constitutional system that is at stake," Roberts wrote.

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Roberts called on U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman, whose earlier order blocking the law was overturned by the appeals court, to "enter appropriate relief without delay."

Sotomayor also chastised her colleagues for their part in the "catastrophic consequences for women seeking to exercise their constitutional right to an abortion in Texas." She said the court's decision closed off the most direct route to challenging the law and would "clear the way" for other states to "reprise and perfect Texas' scheme in the future to target the exercise of any right recognized by this court with which they disagree."

Since it took effect in September, the law has imposed the most restrictive abortion curbs in the nation since the Supreme Court first declared a woman's right to an abortion in its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

In the Texas law's first month, a study published by researchers at the University of Texas found, the number of abortions statewide fell by 50% compared with September 2020. The study was based on data from 19 of the state's 24 abortion clinics, according to the Texas Policy Evaluation Project.

Some residents who left the state seeking abortions have had to travel well beyond neighboring states, where clinics cannot keep up with the increase in patients from Texas, according to a separate study by the Guttmacher Institute.

Following the court's September vote, the Justice Department filed its own lawsuit over the Texas law. The justices on Friday dismissed that suit, which raised a separate set of thorny legal issues.

Biden says hard work ahead to bolster democracies

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday wrapped up his two-day democracy summit, an event that was more about starting a global conversation about how best to halt backsliding than producing immediate results or expanding democracy's reach.

Biden and fellow leaders announced initiatives to stem autocracies from misusing big tech to stifle dissent, enhance election integrity, bolster independent media and other modest efforts that the president said would "seed fertile ground for democracies to bloom around the world."

But the U.S. president also acknowledged the path ahead was difficult for democracies amid a rise of authoritarianism around the globe.

"We know how hard the work is that's going to be ahead of us. but we also know that we are up to the challenge," Biden said in remarks to close the virtual meeting.

All told, Biden pledged the U.S. would spend up to \$424 million in the next year around the world to support independent media, anti-corruption work and more.

The administration sought to frame the virtual summit — a gathering Biden had made a priority during his first year in office — as a launching point for the more than 100 nations invited to collaborate at a difficult moment for democracies. Biden said he wants to reconvene a follow-up gathering in person next year.

Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the summit was a good "starting point" for a "year of action."

"I hope the 110 leaders will rally around some basic principles for democratic societies, and the aim should be to strengthen our voice and our efforts to counter the advancing autocracies like China, Russia and other autocrats," Rasmussen said.

The president has repeatedly made a case that the U.S. and like-minded allies need to show the world that democracies are a far better vehicle for societies than autocracies. It is a central tenet of Biden's foreign policy outlook — one he vowed would be more outward looking than his predecessor Donald Trump's "America First" approach.

But his first year in office has been a period that he says has been marked by a "backward slide" for democracy around the globe.

In recent months, Sudan's prime minister was ousted in a military coup, Cuba tightened control of the internet after some of the biggest protests on the island in years, and Myanmar's military toppled the civilian government and imprisoned leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Biden has repeatedly taken China and Russia to task for squelching the voices of democratic activists and

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committing human rights abuses. He avoided direct mention of both nations in interactions with leaders during the summit, but their presences loomed large.

The summit was held as the Biden administration has been pressing Russia's Vladimir Putin to step back after a massive buildup of troops on the Ukraine border that has created growing concern in Washington and European capitals.

Biden earlier this week said he warned Putin of "severe consequences" if Russia invaded.

Both China and Russia fiercely criticized the summit, with their ambassadors writing a joint essay ahead of the gathering. They wrote the Biden administration's decision to hold the summit reflected a "Cold-War mentality" that would "stoke up ideological confrontation and a rift in the world."

The United States, along with Australia, Denmark and Norway, on Friday announced the launch of a joint effort that aims to stem the misuse of technology by authoritarian powers to stifle dissent and seeks to help develop new tech innovations that support human rights.

The initiative, in part, calls for establishing a voluntary written code of conduct that's meant to guide government and tech companies on human rights criteria for export and licensing policy. Under the global charter for digital public goods, governments, civil society groups, software engineers and tech companies would declare principles for open source tech products.

"The United States will take greater responsibility for the digital tools we export," U.S. Agency for International Development administrator Samantha Power said. "All too often, technology originates in a hub of innovation like the United States and is exported to countries that use that technology to enable human rights abuses."

The White House also faced scrutiny for whom it invited to the summit. Only 5% of the population of the 111 countries represented live in countries where the right to free speech, right to protest and other core civic rights are fully respected, according to CIVICUS Monitor, a group that monitors civic freedoms.

Several countries — including India, Iraq, Pakistan, Poland and the Philippines — were given invitations despite concerns raised by civil society groups and the U.S. State Department about serious anti-democratic trends or human rights concerns in those nations.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the invitations were not meant to be intended as a "stamp of approval" and the administration was seeking a "diverse range of voices and faces and representatives at the discussion."

Biden said it was also a moment for the United States to look inward about shoring up its own democratic institutions, and called on U.S. lawmakers to pass voting rights legislation, including the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. The legislation is largely backed by Democrats in Congress but stalled by Republicans in the Senate.

"What's true around the world is also true in the United States," Biden said. "The sacred right to vote, to vote freely, the right to have your vote counted is the threshold liberty for democracy."

— Associated Press journalist Tracy Brown contributed reporting.

Prosecution rests in sex-abuse trial of Ghislaine Maxwell

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prosecutors completed presenting their case against Ghislaine Maxwell on Friday, after a key accuser at the British socialite's sex-abuse trial testified that Maxwell and her companion, Jeffrey Epstein, forced themselves on her when she was just 16.

Annie Farmer told jurors she accepted an invitation to the financier's sprawling New Mexico ranch in 1996 hoping that Maxwell and Epstein would help her with academic endeavors. Instead, she said, Maxwell ended up massaging her breasts and Epstein climbed into bed without her permission.

Three others have asserted at the trial that began two weeks ago that Maxwell recruited them to give Epstein massages meant as a ruse for sexual abuse.

Maxwell, 59, has denied charges she groomed underage girls for Epstein, who killed himself in jail in 2019. Her lawyers say the government is making her a scapegoat for alleged sex crimes committed by her onetime boyfriend and moved immediately for a judgment of acquittal after prosecutors rested Friday

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afternoon.

U.S. District Judge Alison J. Nathan heard brief arguments and rejected the request that she acquit Maxwell without the jury ever getting the case.

The judge told the jury they will return Thursday to hear the defense case, which an attorney estimated would likely last two to three days. The judge has suggested that closing arguments — at a trial originally projected to last six weeks — might occur as early as Dec. 20 if the defense presentation next week only lasts a day or two.

In her testimony, Farmer recalled the unwanted physical contact making her feel like she “just wanted the weekend to be over. ... I wanted to be done with it.”

She added: “All these experiences made me feel like they had a very different interest in me.”

Asked by a prosecutor at the start of her testimony if she saw anyone in the courtroom who had ever given her a massage, Farmer identified Maxwell, who was sitting at the defense table looking at Farmer.

Farmer, now 42, took the stand using her true identity — a departure from the decision by three other accusers with similar stories who testified under pseudonyms or first names only to protect their privacy.

Two of the others who testified said they were just 14 when the abuse started and that Maxwell sometimes participated in the encounters.

Farmer testified that she met Epstein at age 16 on a 1996 trip to New York City to visit her older sister, who was working for him at his Manhattan mansion. When they visited him at the home, he “seemed very friendly and down to earth,” and even offered to mentor her, she said.

She said that during an outing to the movies with Epstein, he reached over to hold her hand and caress her leg.

“I felt sick to my stomach,” she said. “It was not something I was expecting at all.”

When Farmer returned home, she stayed in touch with the wealthy financier and accepted an invitation to travel to New Mexico with a plane ticket he paid for even though, she said, “after what happened in the movie theater, I didn’t want to be alone with him.”

She said she initially felt more comfortable because Maxwell was there. But when they took her to the movies, he “right away began to hold my hand” and rub her foot and arm throughout the film with no effort to hide the behavior from Maxwell, she said.

Once home, Maxwell insisted on giving Farmer a massage and told her to take off her clothes, Farmer testified. Maxwell “pulled down the sheet and exposed my breasts and starting rubbing on my breasts,” Farmer said.

“It didn’t make sense to me that would happen,” she said. “I so badly wanted to get off the table and have the massage be done.”

Farmer accepted \$1.5 million from a fund set up to compensate Epstein victims, she testified.

The encounters occurred in New Mexico, which did not have a specific age of consent statute, although its laws criminalized all sexual contact of a minor under the age of 13 when coercion or force is involved.

On cross examination, a defense lawyer repeatedly emphasized through her questions that Maxwell was not involved in the most egregious behavior described by Farmer and elicited that Farmer was not sure she was naked during her massage, although she was certain that her breasts were exposed.

Prosecutors also called Farmer’s former boyfriend and her mother as witnesses to support her testimony.

David James Mulligan, 42, testified that Farmer told him that she was “touched on the breast” when she was massaged in New Mexico.

“She told me that she felt fearful and awkward and helpless,” he said.

Janice Swain, 71, Farmer’s mother, testified that Epstein told her before the New Mexico trip that her daughter would be joined by 20 to 25 other students there.

Swain said when Farmer arrived home from the trip, she was “quiet and withdrawn.” When Farmer finally did say something at a later date, she said: “I don’t want to talk about it and I’m not going to let it ruin my life,” the mother recalled.

The Associated Press does not identify people who say they were victims of sexual abuse unless they

come forward publicly. Although Farmer was not identified by name in court documents, the practicing psychologist has been outspoken in describing her experiences in interviews with ABC and The New York Times.

Maxwell has been jailed since she was arrested in New Hampshire in July 2020. When she sought bail, Farmer asked the judge to deny it, calling her a "psychopath."

Survivors recall horror of Mexico truck crash that killed 55

By MANUEL DE LA CRUZ and EDGAR H. CLEMENTE Associated Press

TUXTLA GUTIERREZ, Mexico (AP) — Survivors of the horrific truck crash in Mexico that killed 55 migrants and injured more than a hundred recounted from their hospital beds how their location inside the truck determined who lived and who died.

Those unlucky enough to be riding jammed against the fragile walls of the freight container almost certainly died, survivors said. Those in the middle of the packed group survived, cushioned by their fellow migrants as the container flipped onto the road.

"The ones who died were the ones who were up against the walls of the trailer," said one young migrant from Guatemala, who was being treated for a broken arm at a local hospital. "Thank God, we were in the middle, but the ones on the sides, they died."

The migrant, who did not want to give his name because he did not have proper documents in Mexico, described a gruesome scene of screaming and blood in the moments after the truck crashed into the base of a steel pedestrian bridge Thursday evening. He said about 250 migrants were on board.

First, the living had to extricate themselves from the tangled pile of dead and dying bodies.

"They fell on top of me, there were like two or three fellow migrants on top of me," the youth said.

Then came the grim task of trying to pull the wounded out.

"When I got out, another fellow migrant was shouting," the survivor said. "He was shouting to me, I pulled at him and got him out and put him on the side of the road, but he died."

The youth said the truck's driver, whose whereabouts are unknown, had entered a sharp curve at a high rate of speed and lost control.

It was one of the deadliest days for migrants in Mexico since the 2010 massacre of 72 people by the Zetas drug cartel in the northern state of Tamaulipas.

While the Mexican government is trying to appease the United States by stopping caravans of walking migrants and allowing the reinstatement of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, it has been unable to stanch the flood of migrants stuffed by the hundreds into trucks operated by smugglers who charge thousands of dollars to take them to the U.S. border — trips that all too often lead them only to their deaths.

The head of Mexico's National Guard, Luis Rodriguez Bucio, said the truck had somehow managed to avoid passing through any of the roadside checkpoints operated by the Guard and immigration authorities to catch such smuggling operations.

Sitting stunned beside the overturned trailer moments after the crash, migrant Celso Pacheco of Guatemala said the truck felt like it was speeding and then seemed out of control.

Most aboard were from Guatemala and Honduras, he said, estimating eight to 10 young children among them. He said he was trying to reach the United States but now expects to be deported to Guatemala. Authorities said migrants from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Mexico were also aboard.

Those who spoke to survivors said they told of boarding the truck in Mexico, near the border with Guatemala, and of paying between \$2,500 and \$3,500 to be taken to Mexico's central state of Puebla. Once there, they would presumably have contracted with another set of smugglers to take them to the U.S. border.

Andrés, a migrant from Izabal, Guatemala, said he and his brother-in-law had decided together to make the dangerous trip north to the United States. Andrés was tossed from the truck as it rolled and broke apart; his brother-in-law died in the wreckage.

"We made the decision to come together, and we cheered each other on," Andrés said. "But now, it's terrible he's not going to come back with me alive."

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Despite the cautionary tale, more migrants continued on the move toward the United States. On Thursday, after the accident, a group of almost 400 mainly Central American migrants walked down a highway leading to Mexico City, ignoring entreaties from immigration agents and National Guard troops to turn themselves in. They

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador blamed the poverty and lack of jobs that force people to migrate.

"We have been insisting that the causes that originate these unfortunate events must be addressed," said López Obrador, who said he has been pressing the U.S. government to invest in development programs for Central America. López Obrador said the U.S. government is moving slowly on the issue.

After the crash in the southern state of Chiapas, the most severely injured from the accident were carried to plastic sheets on the road. Those who could walk were led, stunned, to the same sheets. Ambulances, cars and pickup trucks were pressed into ferrying the injured to hospitals. Later, the dead were covered in white sheets, side by side, on the highway.

Rescue workers said other migrants who had been on the truck when it crashed fled for fear of being detained by immigration agents. One paramedic said some of those who hurried into surrounding neighborhoods were bloodied or bruised but still limped away in their desperation to escape.

Pope Francis, who visited Chiapas in 2015 and has made the plight of migrants a hallmark of his papacy, sent a telegram of condolences Friday to the archbishop of Tuxtla Gutierrez, offering prayers for the dead and their families, and for the injured.

In October, in one of the largest busts in recent memory, authorities in the northern border state of Tamaulipas found 652 mainly Central American migrants jammed into a convoy of six cargo trucks heading toward the U.S. border.

Migrants involved in serious accidents are often allowed to stay in Mexico at least temporarily because they are considered witnesses to and victims of a crime, and Mexico's National Immigration Institute said it would offer humanitarian visas to the survivors.

The agency also said the Mexican government will help identify the dead and cover funeral costs or repatriation of the remains.

Pandemic mystery: Scientists focus on COVID's animal origins

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the origin of the virus tormenting the world remains shrouded in mystery.

Most scientists believe it emerged in the wild and jumped from bats to humans, either directly or through another animal. Others theorize it escaped from a Chinese lab.

Now, with the global COVID-19 death toll surpassing 5.2 million on the second anniversary of the earliest human cases, a growing chorus of scientists is trying to keep the focus on what they regard as the more plausible "zoonotic," or animal-to-human, theory, in the hope that what's learned will help humankind fend off new viruses and variants.

"The lab-leak scenario gets a lot of attention, you know, on places like Twitter," but "there's no evidence that this virus was in a lab," said University of Utah scientist Stephen Goldstein, who with 20 others wrote an article in the journal *Cell* in August laying out evidence for animal origin.

Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona who contributed to the article, said he always thought zoonotic transmission was more likely than a lab leak but had signed a letter with other scientists last spring saying both theories were viable. Since then, he said, his own and others' research has made him even more confident about the animal hypothesis, which is "just way more supported by the data."

Last month, Worobey published a COVID-19 timeline linking the first known human case to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China, where live animals were sold.

"The lab leak idea is almost certainly a huge distraction that's taking focus away from what actually

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happened," he said.

Others aren't so sure. Over the summer, a review ordered by President Joe Biden showed that four U.S. intelligence agencies believed with low confidence that the virus was initially transmitted from an animal to a human, and one agency believed with moderate confidence that the first infection was linked to a lab.

Some supporters of the lab-leak hypothesis have theorized that researchers were accidentally exposed because of inadequate safety practices while working with samples from the wild, or perhaps after creating the virus in the laboratory. U.S. intelligence officials have rejected suspicions China developed the virus as a bioweapon.

The continuing search for answers has inflamed tensions between the U.S. and China, which has accused the U.S. of making it the scapegoat for the disaster. Some experts fear the pandemic's origins may never be known.

FROM BATS TO PEOPLE

Scientists said in the Cell paper that SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is the ninth documented coronavirus to infect humans. All previous ones originated in animals.

That includes the virus that caused the 2003 SARS epidemic, which also has been associated with markets selling live animals in China.

Many researchers believe wild animals were intermediate hosts for SARS-CoV-2, meaning they were infected with a bat coronavirus that then evolved. Scientists have been looking for the exact bat coronavirus involved, and in September identified three viruses in bats in Laos more similar to SARS-CoV-2 than any known viruses.

Worobey suspects raccoon dogs were the intermediate host. The fox-like mammals are susceptible to coronaviruses and were being sold live at the Huanan market, he said.

"The gold-standard piece of evidence for an animal origin" would be an infected animal from there, Goldstein said. "But as far as we know, the market was cleared out."

Earlier this year, a joint report by the World Health Organization and China called the transmission of the virus from bats to humans through another animal the most likely scenario and a lab leak "extremely unlikely."

But that report also sowed doubt by pegging the first known COVID-19 case as an accountant who had no connection to the Huanan market and first showed symptoms on Dec. 8, 2019. Worobey said proponents of the lab-leak theory point to that case in claiming the virus escaped from a Wuhan Institute of Virology facility near where the man lived.

According to Worobey's research, however, the man said in an interview that his Dec. 8 illness was actually a dental problem, and his COVID-19 symptoms began on Dec. 16, a date confirmed in hospital records.

Worobey's analysis identifies an earlier case: a vendor in the Huanan market who came down with COVID-19 on Dec. 11.

ANIMAL THREATS

Experts worry the same sort of animal-to-human transmission of viruses could spark new pandemics — and worsen this one.

Since COVID-19 emerged, many types of animals have gotten infected, including pet cats, dogs and ferrets; zoo animals such as big cats, otters and non-human primates; farm-raised mink; and white-tailed deer.

Most got the virus from people, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which says that humans can spread it to animals during close contact but that the risk of animals transmitting it to people is low.

Another fear, however, is that animals could unleash new viral variants. Some wonder if the omicron variant began this way.

"Around the world, we might have animals potentially incubating these variants even if we get (COVID-19) under control in humans," said David O'Connor, a virology expert at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "We're probably not going to do a big giraffe immunization program any time soon."

Worobey said he has been looking for genetic fingerprints that might indicate whether omicron was

created when the virus jumped from humans to an animal, mutated, and then leaped back to people.

Experts say preventing zoonotic disease will require not only cracking down on illegal wildlife sales but making progress on big global problems that increase risky human-animal contact, such as habitat destruction and climate change.

Failing to fully investigate the animal origin of the virus, scientists said in the Cell paper, "would leave the world vulnerable to future pandemics arising from the same human activities that have repeatedly put us on a collision course with novel viruses."

'TOXIC' POLITICS

But further investigation is stymied by superpower politics. Lawrence Gostin of Georgetown University said there has been a "bare-knuckles fight" between China and the United States.

"The politics around the origins investigation has literally poisoned the well of global cooperation," said Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on National and Global Health Law. "The politics have literally been toxic."

An AP investigation last year found that the Chinese government was strictly controlling all research into COVID-19's origins and promoting fringe theories that the virus could have come from outside the country.

"This is a country that's by instinct very closed, and it was never going to allow unfettered access by foreigners into its territory," Gostin said.

Still, Gostin said there's one positive development that has come out of the investigation.

WHO has formed an advisory group to look into the pandemic's origins. And Gostin said that while he doubts the panel will solve the mystery, "they will have a group of highly qualified scientists ready to be deployed in an instant in the next pandemic."

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Accidental shooting leads police to home with over 70 cats

KENSINGTON, N.H. (AP) — An accidental shooting led police in New Hampshire to a house that was overrun with more than 70 cats and was declared uninhabitable because it was covered with feline feces and urine.

Police in Kensington got a call from a hospital on Wednesday that a man was admitted to the emergency room with a gunshot wound to the abdomen. Police went to the hospital and spoke to the man, who said he was cleaning a rifle and put it on a workbench when it fell to the floor and discharged a round, injuring him. Police concluded it was an accidental shooting.

Police also went to the home, where they initially found at least 30 cats.

"There was an overwhelming odor coming from inside the residence," Kensington Police Chief Scott Cain said in a news release Friday. "It was discovered (the) inside was completely covered in feline feces and urine."

Police called the New Hampshire Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which removed 67 black and white cats on Wednesday. Five more were found on Friday.

Cain said that ammonia levels tested in the house were much higher than what is considered safe. A health officer was contacted, and "it was determined the residence was uninhabitable and was condemned immediately," Cain said.

He said the cats' health will be determined before any criminal charges would be brought forward. He said the man would face a charge related to the rifle discharge.

Based on preliminary exams of the cats, "they are in pretty good shape," Lisa Dennison, executive director of the SPCA in Stratham, said on Friday. "Some were thinner, some were chunkier ... you can imagine with 72 cats fighting over food, there'll be winners and losers, just in terms of individuality and competing."

She said the cats, who range in age from kittens to adults, are scared but friendly.

Dennison said the organization just cut the ribbon on a campus expansion last Saturday, and a week later,

"we are using every single inch of that new space to quarantine and isolate this very large volume of cats."
She directed adoption inquiries to the organization's website.

EXPLAINER: What's behind dual defense in Potter trial?

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

Lawyers for the suburban Minneapolis police officer on trial for killing Black motorist Daunte Wright are arguing that she made a mistake by drawing her handgun instead of her Taser before she fatally shot him. But they're also arguing that she would have been justified in shooting him anyway.

Legal experts and attorneys following the case say it can be a bad idea to offer two defenses that may seem at odds — but not in this case. Lawyers for former Brooklyn Center Officer Kim Potter — she resigned two days after killing Wright — have said repeatedly that Potter didn't consciously intend to pull her handgun from her holster. Their other argument is that Potter, 49, was entitled to use deadly force in order to prevent the 20-year-old Wright from driving off and potentially dragging one of her fellow officers with him.

"There's an old saying with attorneys that the only thing worse than one bad defense is two defenses," said Joe Friedberg, a Minneapolis defense attorney who isn't involved in the case. "Ordinarily, one defense detracts from each other, but I don't think this one does."

Friedberg said the defense team would have to use careful wording so as not to confuse or frustrate the jury, but that the two defense arguments are consistent with one another and could provide multiple rebuttals to the charges.

Prosecutors are trying to convict Potter of first- and second-degree manslaughter. The most serious charge requires prosecutors to prove recklessness, while the lesser requires them to prove culpable negligence, meaning that Potter "caused an unreasonable risk and consciously took a chance of causing death or great bodily harm" to Wright.

Potter, who is white, killed Wright, who wasn't armed, during an April 11 traffic stop in Brooklyn Center in a shooting that was recorded by police cameras.

"The theory of the defense is that it was a mistake. The evidence shows that clearly," said Joseph Daly, an emeritus professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

Right after the shooting, Potter is captured on body camera footage saying "I just shot him. ... I grabbed the wrong (expletive) gun!"

But Daly pointed out there was a problem with solely relying on that argument because police department policy bars officers from using a Taser on someone who is driving a vehicle, so Potter could still be found reckless or culpably negligent.

"How do you deal with that reality?" Daly said. "If you are trying to stop a fleeing felon or trying to save the life of a person, then you can shoot him. You have permission under the law to shoot him."

In court, Potter's attorney Paul Engh has asserted that the other officers who were trying to arrest Wright were partially in the car as he attempted to drive away.

"You're in a vulnerable position if he drives away? If he takes off, you could be seriously injured? Or die?" Engh asked one of the officers, Anthony Luckey, during cross-examination.

"Yes," Luckey answered to each question. Another officer at the scene who was on the passenger side of Wright's car, then-Sgt. Mychal Johnson, testified that he could have been dragged.

Daly said the dual defense strategy can be risky because posing two arguments in court generally "weakens both theories" before the jury. In Potter's case, he felt it was necessary, especially if jurors' feelings about her were affected by emotional testimony from Wright's mother and girlfriend.

Engh has also worked to humanize Potter, describing her as a wife and mother, and a 26-year police veteran who had never fired her gun or Taser while on duty until she made a mistake by grabbing her handgun.

"He's obviously trying to personalize her and make her likable to the jury," said Mike Brandt, a Minneapolis defense attorney who has been following the trial. "He wants the jury to have sympathy for her."

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But prosecutors say Potter had extensive training that included explicit warnings about confusing a handgun with a Taser and that directed officers "to learn the differences between their Taser and firearm to avoid such confusion."

"This is exactly what she had been trained for years to prevent," prosecutor Erin Eldridge told the jury. "But on April 11, she betrayed her badge and she failed Daunte Wright."

"Even though she made a mistake, that mistake is beyond reasonable," said Daly, summarizing the prosecution's argument. "It's just simple recklessness because of her training and background and understanding of what the difference is between a Taser and a Glock."

To counter that argument, Potter's lawyers plan to call a police psychologist, Laurence Miller, to testify about so-called slip-and-capture errors — a psychological condition in high-stress situations where an officer performs the direct opposite of their intended actions. The "slip-and-capture error" explanation has been used in previous trials over police killings, including the trial of a transit officer who killed 22-year-old Oscar Grant in 2009 after responding to a fight at a train station in Oakland, California.

Some police use-of-force experts have expressed skepticism about the slip-and-capture theory, saying it hasn't been proven.

The judge in Potter's trial, Hennepin County District Judge Regina Chu, has ruled that Miller can explain the concept of slip-and-capture but cannot opine on whether it explains what happened to Potter.

After watching the first few days of proceedings, Daly said the trial posed difficult questions for the jury on a shooting that unfolded in seconds.

"Will the jury beyond a reasonable doubt find she was reckless or was culpably negligent?" he said. "Or was it simply a human mistake?"

Find the AP's full coverage of the Daunte Wright case at <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-daunte-wright> and follow Stephen Groves on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/stephengroves>.

Final goodbye: Recalling influential people who died in 2021

By BERNARD McGHEE Associated Press

They both carved out sterling reputations as military and political leaders over years of public service. But both also saw their legacies tarnished by their actions in the long, bloody war in Iraq.

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld are among the many noteworthy people who died in 2021.

Powell, who died in October, was a trailblazing soldier and diplomat. He rose to the rank of four-star general in the Army before becoming the first Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And under former President George W. Bush, he became the nation's first Black secretary of state.

Rumsfeld, who died in June, had a storied career in government under four U.S. presidents and was seen as a visionary of a modern military.

Rumsfeld was secretary of defense and shouldered some of the blame as Iraq sank into chaos after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime. In the leadup to the war, Powell cited faulty information during a United Nations Security Council address while claiming Hussein had secretly stashed weapons of mass destruction.

Others political figures the world said goodbye to this year include former U.S. Vice President Walter F. Mondale, former South African President F.W. de Klerk, former Sen. Bob Dole, former South Korean President Roh Tae-woo, talk radio host Rush Limbaugh, former Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, former Danish Prime Minister Poul Schlueter and Iranian ambassadors Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour and Ardeshtir Zahedi.

Also among those who died this year was a man who held the title of baseball's home run king for years. Hank Aaron, who died in January, endured racist threats on his path to breaking Babe Ruth's record and is still considered one of the game's greatest players.

Other sports figures who died in 2021 include Los Angeles Dodgers Manager Tommy Lasorda, college football coach Bobby Bowden, Olympic swimmer Clara Lamore Walker, NBA players Paul Westphal and Elgin

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Baylor, auto racer Bobby Unser, golfer Lee Elder, track and field star Milkha Singh and boxer Leon Spinks.

Among the entertainers who died this year was a children's author whose books were enjoyed by millions around the world. Beverly Cleary, who died in March, channeled memories from her youth in Oregon to create beloved characters such as Ramona Quimby, her sister Beatrice "Beezus" Quimby and Henry Huggins.

Others from the world of arts and entertainment who died this year include actors Cicely Tyson, Ed Asner, Cloris Leachman, Christopher Plummer, Olympia Dukakis, Ned Beatty, Jane Powell, Sonny Chiba, Gavin MacLeod, George Segal, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Johnny Briggs and Dustin Diamond; magician Siegfried Fischbacher; Bollywood star Dilip Kumar; Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts; theater songwriter Stephen Sondheim; ballerina and actress Carla Fracci; rappers DMX and Biz Markie; artist Arturo Di Modica; telenovela writer Delia Fiallo; authors Eric Carle and Norton Juster; reggae musician Bunny Wailer; comedians Norm Macdonald and Paul Mooney; singers Pervis Staples and Sabah Fakhri; ZZ Top bassist Dusty Hill; and filmmaker Richard Donner.

Here is a roll call of some influential figures who died in 2021 (cause of death cited for younger people, if available):

JANUARY

George Whitmore, 89. A member of the first team of climbers to scale El Capitan in Yosemite National Park and a conservationist who devoted his life to protecting the Sierra Nevada. Jan. 1.

Paul Westphal, 70. A Hall of Fame NBA player who won a championship with the Boston Celtics in 1974 and later coached in the league and in college. Jan. 2.

Brian Urquhart, 101. The British diplomat was an early leader of the United Nations and played a central role in developing the U.N. practice of peacekeeping. Jan. 2.

Gerry Marsden, 78. The lead singer of the 1960s British group Gerry and the Pacemakers that had such hits as "Ferry Cross the Mersey" and the song that became the anthem of Liverpool Football Club, "You'll Never Walk Alone." Jan. 3.

Eric Jerome Dickey, 59. The bestselling novelist who blended crime, romance and eroticism in "Sister, Sister," "Waking With Enemies" and dozens of other stories about contemporary Black life. Jan. 3. Cancer.

Tanya Roberts, 65. She captivated James Bond in "A View to a Kill" and appeared in the sitcom "That '70s Show." Jan. 4.

Tommy Lasorda, 93. The fiery baseball Hall of Fame manager who guided the Los Angeles Dodgers to two World Series titles and later became an ambassador for the sport he loved. Jan. 7.

Meredith C. Anding Jr., 79. A member of the "Tougaloo Nine," who famously participated in a library "read-in" in segregated Mississippi about 60 years ago. Jan. 8.

Sheldon Adelson, 87. He rose from a modest start as the son of an immigrant taxi driver to become a billionaire Republican powerbroker with a casino empire and influence on international politics. Jan. 11.

Siegfried Fischbacher, 81. He was the surviving member of the magic duo Siegfried & Roy who entertained millions with illusions using rare animals. Jan. 13. Pancreatic cancer.

Phil Spector, 81. The eccentric and revolutionary music producer who transformed rock music with his "Wall of Sound" method and who later was convicted of murder. Jan. 16.

Hank Aaron, 86. He endured racist threats with stoic dignity during his pursuit of Babe Ruth's home run record and gracefully left his mark as one of baseball's greatest all-around players. Jan. 22.

Larry King, 87. The suspenders-sporting everyman whose broadcast interviews with world leaders, movie stars and ordinary people helped define American conversation for a half-century. Jan. 23.

Walter Bernstein, 101. The screenwriter was among the last survivors of Hollywood's anti-Communist blacklist whose Oscar-nominated script for "The Front" drew upon his years of being unable to work under his own name. Jan. 23.

Sifis Valyrakis, 77. A former minister and resistance fighter against Greece's 1967-74 military dictatorship

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who twice made daring escapes. Jan. 24.

Carlos Holmes Trujillo, 69. As Colombia's defense minister, he was one of the country's most recognized conservative politicians. Jan. 26. Complications of COVID-19.

Cloris Leachman, 94. An Oscar-winner for her portrayal of a lonely housewife in "The Last Picture Show" and a comedic delight as the fearsome Frau Blücher in "Young Frankenstein" and self-absorbed neighbor Phyllis on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." Jan. 27.

Cicely Tyson, 96. The pioneering Black actor who gained an Oscar nomination for her role as the sharecropper's wife in "Sounder," won a Tony Award in 2013 at age 88 and touched TV viewers' hearts in "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman." Jan. 28.

Paul J. Crutzen, 87. A Dutch scientist who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry for his work understanding the ozone hole and is credited with coining the term Anthropocene to describe the geological era shaped by mankind. Jan. 28.

John Chaney, 89. One of the nation's leading basketball coaches and a commanding figure during a Hall of Fame career at Temple. Jan. 29.

Hilton Valentine, 77. He was the founding guitarist of the English rock and roll band The Animals who is credited with coming up with one of the most famous opening riffs of the 1960s in "The House of the Rising Sun." Jan. 29.

Sophie, 34. She was the Grammy-nominated Scottish disc jockey, producer and recording artist who had worked with the likes of Madonna and Charli XCX. Jan. 30. Accidental fall.

Abraham J. Twerski, 90. An esteemed Hassidic rabbi and acclaimed psychiatrist who championed treatment for substance abuse and authored over 80 books on subjects both spiritual and scientific. Jan. 31.

FEBRUARY

Dustin Diamond, 44. An actor best known for playing Screech on the hit '90s sitcom "Saved by the Bell." Feb. 1. Cancer.

Jack Palladino, 76. The flamboyant private investigator whose clients ranged from presidents and corporate whistleblowers to celebrities, Hollywood moguls and sometimes suspected drug traffickers. Feb. 1. Injuries suffered in an attack.

Rennie Davis, 80. He was one of the "Chicago Seven" activists who was tried for organizing an anti-Vietnam War protest outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago in which thousands clashed with police. Feb. 2. Lymphoma.

Millie Hughes-Fulford, 75. A trailblazing astronaut and scientist who became the first female payload specialist to fly in space for NASA. Feb. 2.

Tony Trabert, 90. A five-time Grand Slam singles champion and former No. 1 player who went on to successful careers as a Davis Cup captain, broadcaster and executive. Feb. 3.

Jim Weatherly, 77. The Hall of Fame songwriter who wrote "Midnight Train to Georgia" and other hits for Gladys Knight, Glen Campbell and Ray Price. Feb. 3.

Christopher Plummer, 91. The dashing award-winning actor who played Captain von Trapp in the film "The Sound of Music" and at 82 became the oldest Academy Award acting winner in history. Feb. 5.

Leon Spinks, 67. He won Olympic gold and then shocked the boxing world by beating Muhammad Ali to win the heavyweight title in only his eighth pro fight. Feb. 5.

George P. Shultz, 100. The former secretary of state was a titan of American academia, business and diplomacy who spent most of the 1980s trying to improve Cold War relations with the Soviet Union and forging a course for peace in the Middle East. Feb. 6.

Mary Wilson, 76. The longest-reigning original Supreme. Feb. 8.

Marty Schottenheimer, 77. He won 200 regular-season games with four NFL teams thanks to his "Martyball" brand of smash-mouth football but regularly fell short in the playoffs. Feb. 8.

Chick Corea, 79. He was a towering jazz pianist with a staggering 23 Grammy Awards who pushed the boundaries of the genre and worked alongside Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock. Feb. 9. Cancer.

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Larry Flynt, 78. He turned his raunchy Hustler magazine into an empire while fighting numerous First Amendment court battles. Feb. 10.

Johnny Pacheco, 85. A salsa idol who was a co-founder of Fania Records, Eddie Palmieri's bandmate and backer of music stars such as Rubén Bladés, Willie Colón and Celia Cruz. Feb. 15.

Bernard Lown, 99. A Massachusetts cardiologist who invented the first reliable heart defibrillator and later co-founded an anti-nuclear war group that was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. Feb. 16.

Rush Limbaugh, 70. The talk radio host who ripped into liberals and laid waste to political correctness with a merry brand of malice that made him one of the most powerful voices on the American right. Feb. 17.

Arturo Di Modica, 80. The artist who sculpted Charging Bull, the bronze statue in New York which became an iconic symbol of Wall Street. Feb. 19.

Ahmed Zaki Yamani, 90. A long-serving oil minister in Saudi Arabia who led the kingdom through the 1973 oil crisis, the nationalization its state energy company and once found himself held hostage by the assassin Carlos the Jackal. Feb. 23.

Michael Somare, 84. A pivotal figure in Papua New Guinea's independence and the South Pacific island nation's first prime minister. Feb. 26.

Kenneth C. Kelly, 92. A Black electronics engineer whose antenna designs contributed to the race to the moon, made satellite TV and radio possible and helped NASA communicate with Mars rovers and search for extraterrestrials. Feb. 27.

Johnny Briggs, 85. A British actor best known for his role as businessman Mike Baldwin in the long-running TV soap opera "Coronation Street." Feb. 28.

MARCH

Vernon Jordan, 85. He rose from humble beginnings in the segregated South to become a champion of civil rights before reinventing himself as a Washington insider and corporate influencer. March 1.

Bunny Wailer, 73. A reggae luminary who was the last surviving founding member of the legendary group The Wailers. March 2.

Carla Wallenda, 85. A member of "The Flying Wallendas" high-wire act and the last surviving child of the famed troupe's founder. March 6.

Lou Ottens, 94. The Dutch inventor of the cassette tape, the medium of choice for millions of bedroom mix tapes. March 6.

Sister Janice McLaughlin, 79. A Maryknoll Sisters nun who was jailed and later deported by white minority-ruled Rhodesia for exposing human rights abuses. March 7.

Norton Juster, 91. The celebrated children's author who fashioned a world of adventure and punning punditry in the million-selling classic "The Phantom Tollbooth." March 8.

Roger Mudd, 93. The longtime political correspondent and anchor for NBC and CBS who once stumped Sen. Edward Kennedy by simply asking why he wanted to be president. March 9.

James Levine, 77. The conductor ruled over the Metropolitan Opera for more than four decades before being eased aside when his health declined and then was fired for sexual improprieties. March 9.

Luis Palau, 86. An evangelical pastor who was born in Argentina and went on to work with Billy Graham before establishing his own powerhouse international ministry. March 11.

Ronald DeFeo, 69. The man convicted of slaughtering his parents and four siblings in a home that later inspired the "The Amityville Horror" book and movies. March 12.

King Goodwill Zwelithini, 72. The traditional leader of South Africa's Zulu nation, he reigned for more than 50 years, making him the longest-serving Zulu monarch. March 12.

Yaphet Kotto, 81. The commanding actor who brought tough magnetism and stately gravitas to films including the James Bond movie "Live and Let Die" and "Alien." March 15.

Elsa Peretti, 80. She went from Halston model and Studio 54 regular in the 1960s and '70s to one of the world's most famous jewelry designers with timeless, fluid Tiffany & Co. collections. March 18.

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Elgin Baylor, 86. The Lakers' 11-time NBA All-Star who soared through the 1960s with a high-scoring style of basketball that became the model for the modern player. March 22.

George Segal, 87. The banjo player turned actor who was nominated for an Oscar for 1966's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and worked into his late 80s on the ABC sitcom "The Goldbergs." March 23. Complications from bypass surgery.

Jessica Walter, 80. Her roles as a scheming matriarch in TV's "Arrested Development" and a stalker in "Play Misty for Me" were in line with a career that drew on her astringent screen presence. March 24.

Beverly Cleary, 104. The celebrated children's author whose memories of her Oregon childhood were shared with millions through the likes of Ramona and Beezus Quimby and Henry Huggins. March 25.

Larry McMurtry, 84. The prolific and popular author who took readers back to the old American West in his Pulitzer Prize-winning "Lonesome Dove" and returned them to modern-day landscapes in works such as his emotional "Terms of Endearment." March 25.

Bill Brock, 90. A former senator from Tennessee whose long career in Washington included a key role in rebuilding the Republican Party after the Watergate scandal. March 25.

Bobby Brown, 96. An infielder who played on five World Series champions with the New York Yankees and later became a cardiologist and president of the American League. March 25.

G. Gordon Liddy, 90. A mastermind of the Watergate burglary and a radio talk show host after emerging from prison. March 30.

APRIL

Clara Lamore Walker, 94. She swam for the U.S. at the 1948 Olympic Games in London, won three national championships, and later in life set hundreds of national and world swimming records in several masters age groups. April 2.

Sugako Hashida, 95. She was a renowned Japanese scriptwriter best known for the internationally popular TV drama series "Oshin." April 4.

Hans Kueng, 93. A Roman Catholic theologian who was an early colleague and friend of the future Pope Benedict XVI but later fell foul of the Vatican for challenging church doctrine and became a vocal critic of the pontiff. April 6.

Anne Beatts, 74. A groundbreaking comedy writer with a taste for sweetness and the macabre who was on the original staff of "Saturday Night Live" and later created the cult sitcom "Square Pegs." April 7.

John Naisbitt, 92. The author whose 1982 bestselling book "Megatrends" was published in dozens of countries. April 8.

Prince Philip, 99. The irascible and tough-minded husband of Queen Elizabeth II who spent more than seven decades supporting his wife in a role that both defined and constricted his life. April 9.

DMX, 50. The iconic hip-hop artist behind the songs "Ruff Ryders' Anthem" and "Party Up (Up in Here)" whose distinctively gruff voice and thoughtful messages in his rhymes made him one of rap's biggest stars. April 9.

Bernard Madoff, 82. The infamous architect of an epic securities swindle that burned thousands of investors, outfoxed regulators and earned him a 150-year prison term. April 14.

Charles "Chuck" Geschke, 81. The co-founder of the major software company Adobe Inc. who helped develop Portable Document Format technology, or PDFs. April 16.

Walter F. Mondale, 93. The former U.S. vice president was a liberal icon who lost one of the most lopsided presidential elections after bluntly telling voters to expect a tax increase if he won. April 19.

Jim Steinman, 73. The Grammy-winning composer who wrote Meat Loaf's best-selling "Bat Out Of Hell" debut album as well as hits for Celine Dion, Air Supply and Bonnie Tyler. April 19. Kidney failure.

Shock G, 57. He blended whimsical wordplay with reverence for '70s funk as leader of the off-kilter Bay Area hip-hop group Digital Underground. April 22.

Christa Ludwig, 93. The mezzo-soprano was a renowned interpreter of Wagner, Mozart and Strauss who starred on the world's great stages for four decades. April 24.

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Michael Collins, 90. An Apollo 11 astronaut who orbited the moon alone while Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin made their historic first steps on the lunar surface. April 28. Cancer.

Jason Matthews, 69. An award-winning spy novelist who drew upon his long career in espionage and his admiration for John le Carre among others in crafting his popular "Red Sparrow" thrillers. April 28. Corticobasal degeneration.

Eli Broad, 87. The billionaire philanthropist, contemporary art collector and entrepreneur who co-founded homebuilding pioneer Kaufman and Broad Inc. and launched financial services giant SunAmerica Inc. April 30.

MAY

Olympia Dukakis, 89. The veteran stage and screen actor whose flair for maternal roles helped her win an Oscar as Cher's mother in the romantic comedy "Moonstruck." May 1.

Bobby Unser, 87. A beloved three-time winner of the Indianapolis 500 and part of the only pair of brothers to capture "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing." May 2.

Jacques d'Amboise, 86. Grew up on the streets of upper Manhattan to become one of the world's premier classical dancers at New York City Ballet and spent the last four and a half decades providing free dance classes to city youth. May 2.

Lloyd Price, 88. The singer-songwriter was an early rock 'n' roll star and enduring maverick whose hits included such up-tempo favorites as "Lawdy Miss Clawdy," "Personality" and the semi-forbidden "Stagger Lee." May 3.

Paulo Gustavo, 42. A popular comedian whose character Dona Herminia dealt with everyday family and LGBTQ issues in some of Brazil's biggest-box office movies and television shows. May 4. COVID-19.

Mohammed Ashraf Sehrai, 78. A prominent politician in Kashmir who challenged India's rule over the disputed region for decades. May 5. Died while in police custody.

Pervis Staples, 85. His tenor voice complimented his father's and sisters' in the legendary gospel group The Staple Singers. May 6.

Norman Lloyd, 106. His role as kindly Dr. Daniel Auschlander on TV's "St. Elsewhere" was a single chapter in a distinguished stage and screen career. May 11.

Charles Grodin, 86. The actor and writer who scored as a caddish newlywed in "The Heartbreak Kid" and later had roles ranging from Robert De Niro's counterpart in the comic thriller "Midnight Run" to the bedeviled father in the "Beethoven" comedies. May 18. Bone marrow cancer.

Paul Mooney, 79. A boundary-pushing comedian who was Richard Pryor's longtime writing partner and whose sage, incisive musings on racism and American life made him a revered figure in stand-up. May 19. Heart attack.

Lee Evans, 74. The record-setting sprinter who wore a black beret in a sign of protest at the 1968 Olympics then went onto a life of humanitarian work in support of social justice. May 19.

Alix Dobkin, 80. The lesbian singer and feminist activist who appeared in an iconic and recently resurgent 1975 photo wearing a T-shirt that read "The Future is Female." May 19. Brain aneurysm and stroke.

Yuan Longping, 90. A Chinese scientist who developed higher-yield rice varieties that helped feed people around the world. May 22.

Max Mosley, 81. Shook off the stigma of his family's links to fascism to become international motorsport's top administrator and later made a stand as a privacy campaigner in response to tabloid stories about his sex life. May 23.

Eric Carle, 91. A beloved children's author and illustrator whose classic "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and other works gave millions of kids some of their earliest and most cherished literary memories. May 23.

John Warner, 94. He served for 30 years in the U.S. Senate and was a longtime military expert who became famous as the sixth man to walk down the aisle with movie star Elizabeth Taylor. May 25.

Lois Ehlert, 86. Her cut-and-paste shapes and vibrant hues in books including "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" put her among the most popular illustrators of books for preschoolers of the late 20th century. May 25.

Kay Lahusen, 91. A pioneering gay rights activist who chronicled the movement's earliest days through

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her photography and writing. May 26.

Carla Fracci, 84. An Italian cultural icon and former La Scala prima ballerina renowned for romantic roles alongside such greats as Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov. May 27.

Poul Schlüter, 92. Denmark's prime minister for over a decade who negotiated exemptions for his country to a key European Union treaty after Danes rejected the initial text in a referendum. May 27.

B.J. Thomas, 78. The Grammy-winning singer who enjoyed success on the pop, country and gospel charts with such hits as "I Just Can't Help Believing," "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" and "Hooked on a Feeling." May 29.

Gavin MacLeod, 90. The veteran supporting actor who achieved fame as sardonic TV news writer Murray Slaughter on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and stardom playing cheerful Capt. Stubing on "The Love Boat." May 29.

JUNE

F. Lee Bailey, 87. The celebrity attorney who defended O.J. Simpson, Patricia Hearst and the alleged Boston Strangler, but whose legal career halted when he was disbarred in two states. June 3.

John Patterson, 99. A former Alabama governor who entered politics as a reformer after his father's assassination but was criticized for failing to protect the Freedom Riders from angry white mobs. June 4.

Clarence Williams III, 81. Played the cool undercover cop Linc Hayes on the counterculture series "The Mod Squad" and Prince's father in "Purple Rain." June 4.

David Dushman, 98. The last surviving Soviet soldier involved in the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. June 5.

Chief Leonard Crow Dog, 78. A renowned spiritual leader and Native American rights activist who fought for sovereignty, language preservation and religious freedom. June 6.

Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, 74. A Shiite cleric who as Iran's ambassador to Syria helped found the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and lost his right hand to a book bombing reportedly carried out by Israel. June 7. COVID-19.

Ned Beatty, 83. The Oscar-nominated character actor who in half a century of American movies, including "Deliverance," "Network" and "Superman," was a booming, indelible presence in even the smallest parts. June 13.

Yang Huaiding, 71. A former factory worker known as "China's First Shareholder" after he amassed a fortune trading in the country's infant financial markets starting in the 1980s. June 13.

Enrique Bolaños Geyer, 93. The former Nicaraguan president was a businessman who led the country from 2002 to 2007, saw his predecessor and old running mate locked up for corruption and pushed for the country's economic development. June 14.

Jack B. Weinstein, 99. A former federal judge who earned a reputation as a tireless legal maverick while overseeing a series of landmark class-action lawsuits and sensational mob cases in New York City like that of the "Mafia Cops." June 15.

Frank Bonner, 79. He played a brash salesman with an affection for polyester plaid suits on the TV comedy "WKRP in Cincinnati." June 16. Complications of Lewy body dementia.

Consuewella Dotson Africa, 67. A longtime member of the Black organization MOVE and mother of two children killed in the 1985 bombing of the group's home in Philadelphia. June 16.

Merle Smith Jr., 76. The first Black cadet to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy. June 16. Complications from Parkinson's disease and COVID-19.

Kenneth Kaunda, 97. Zambia's founding president and a champion of African nationalism who spearheaded the fights to end white minority rule across southern Africa. June 17.

Milkha Singh, 91. One of India's first sport superstars and ace sprinter who overcame a childhood tragedy to become the country's most celebrated athlete. June 18. Complications from COVID-19.

Mike Gravel, 91. A former U.S. senator from Alaska who read the Pentagon Papers into the Congressional

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Record and confronted Barack Obama about nuclear weapons during a later presidential run. June 26.

Greg "Da Bull" Noll, 84. He became a surfing legend by combining a gregarious, outsized personality with the courage and skill to ride bigger, more powerful waves than anyone had ever attempted. June 28.

Donald Rumsfeld, 88. The two-time defense secretary and one-time presidential candidate whose reputation as a skilled bureaucrat and visionary of a modern U.S. military was unraveled by the long and costly Iraq war. June 29.

Delia Fiallo, 96. She was considered the mother of Latin America's telenovelas and wrote dozens of the popular television soap operas. June 29.

JULY:

William H. Regnery II, 80. The heir to a family publishing fortune who was known for his quiet but influential support of extreme right-wing causes in the United States. July 2.

Raffaella Carra', 78. One of Italian television's most beloved entertainers for decades and affectionately nicknamed the "queen of Italian TV." July 5.

Richard Donner, 91. The filmmaker who helped create the modern superhero blockbuster with 1978's "Superman" and mastered the buddy comedy with the "Lethal Weapon" franchise. July 5.

Father Stan Swamy, 84. A jailed Jesuit priest and longtime Indian tribal rights activist. July 5.

Dilip Kumar, 98. Bollywood icon hailed as the "Tragedy King" and one of Hindi cinema's greatest actors. July 7.

Jovenel Moïse, 53. The Haitian president was a former banana producer and political neophyte who ruled for more than four years as the country grew increasingly unstable. July 7. Assassinated at his home.

Edwin Washington Edwards, 93. The high-living, quick-witted four-term governor who reshaped Louisiana's oil revenues and dominated the state's politics for decades, a run all but overshadowed by scandal and eight years in federal prison. July 12.

Kurt Westergaard, 86. A Danish cartoonist whose image of the Prophet Muhammad wearing a bomb as a turban was at the center of widespread anti-Danish anger in the Muslim world in the mid-2000s. July 14.

Gloria Richardson, 99. An influential civil rights pioneer whose determination not to back down while protesting racial inequality was captured in a photograph as she pushed away the bayonet of a National Guardsman. July 15.

Biz Markie, 57. A hip-hop staple known for his beatboxing prowess, turntable mastery and the 1989 classic "Just a Friend." July 16.

Floyd Cooper, 65. An award-winning illustrator and author of children's books whose mission to offer candid and positive images of Black history included subjects ranging from Frederick Douglass to Venus and Serena Williams. July 16.

Tolis Voskopoulos, 80. A popular Greek folk singer, songwriter and actor whose career spanned more than six decades. July 19.

Phyllis Gould, 99. One of the millions of women who worked in defense plants in World War II and who later relentlessly fought for recognition of those "Rosie the Riveters." July 20. Complications of a stroke.

Gloria Ratti, 90. A champion of women's running who rose from a finish line volunteer at the Boston Marathon to vice president of the race's organizing body. July 24.

Robert Parris Moses, 86. A civil rights activist who was shot at and endured beatings and jail while leading Black voter registration drives in the American South during the 1960s and later helped improve minority education in math. July 25.

Mike Enzi, 77. The retired U.S. senator and Wyoming Republican was known as a consensus-builder in an increasingly polarized Washington. July 26. Died after breaking his neck in a bicycle accident.

Joey Jordison, 46. A founding member of Slipknot, who drummed for the influential metal band in its most popular period and helped write many of its best-known songs. July 26.

Dusty Hill, 72. The long-bearded bassist for the Texas blues rock trio ZZ Top. July 28.

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Ron Popeil, 86. The quintessential TV pitchman and inventor known to generations of viewers for hawking products including the Veg-O-Matic, the Pocket Fisherman, Mr. Microphone and the Showtime Rotisserie and BBQ. July 28.

Richard "Dick" Lamm, 85. A former Colorado Democratic governor who successfully fought to stop the 1976 Winter Olympics from being held in Colorado even though they had been awarded to the state. July 29.

Carl Levin, 87. A powerful voice on military issues in Washington and a staunch supporter of the auto industry back home in Michigan during his tenure in the U.S. Senate. July 29.

AUGUST:

The Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, 78. He came to the United States as a childhood refugee from war-torn Poland and later became a leader in cross-church cooperation and the first Eastern Orthodox president of the National Council of Churches. Aug. 3. Heart attack.

Richard Trumka, 72. The powerful president of the AFL-CIO who rose from the coal mines of Pennsylvania to preside over one of the largest labor organizations in the world. Aug. 5.

Donald Kagan, 89. A prominent classical scholar, contentious defender of traditional education and architect of neo-conservative foreign policy. Aug. 6.

Markie Post, 70. She played the public defender in the 1980s sitcom "Night Court" and was a regular presence on television for four decades. Aug. 7.

Dennis "Dee Tee" Thomas, 70. A founding member of the long-running soul-funk band Kool & the Gang known for such hits as "Celebration" and "Get Down On It." Aug. 7.

Bobby Bowden, 91. The folksy Hall of Fame coach who built Florida State into an unprecedented college football dynasty. Aug. 8.

Walter Yetnikoff, 87. The rampaging head of CBS Records who presided over blockbuster releases by Michael Jackson, Billy Joel and many others and otherwise devoted his life to a self-catered feast of "schmoozing, shmingling and bingling." Aug. 9.

Maki Kaji, 69. The creator of the popular numbers puzzle Sudoku whose life's work was spreading the joy of puzzles. Aug. 10.

Gino Strada, 73. An Italian surgeon who co-founded the humanitarian group Emergency to provide medical care for civilian victims of war and poverty in many countries, and was a fierce critic of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. Aug. 13.

Nanci Griffith, 68. The Grammy-winning folk singer-songwriter from Texas whose literary songs like "Love at the Five and Dime" celebrated the South. Aug. 13.

James Hormel, 88. The first openly gay U.S. ambassador and a philanthropist who funded organizations to fight AIDS and promote human rights. Aug. 13.

Sonny Chiba, 82. The Japanese actor who wowed the world with his martial arts skills in more than 100 films. Aug. 19.

James W. Loewen, 79. His million-selling "Lies My Teacher Told Me" books challenged traditional ideas and knowledge on everything from Thanksgiving to the Iraq War. Aug. 19.

Tom T. Hall, 85. The singer-songwriter who composed "Harper Valley P.T.A." and sang about life's simple joys as country music's consummate blue collar bard. Aug. 20.

Don Everly, 84. He was one-half of the pioneering Everly Brothers whose harmonizing country rock hits affected a generation of rock 'n' roll music. Aug. 21.

Charlie Watts, 80. The self-effacing Rolling Stones drummer who helped anchor one of rock's greatest rhythm sections and used his "day job" to support his enduring love of jazz. Aug. 24.

Hissene Habre, 79. Chad's former dictator, he was the first former head of state to be convicted of crimes against humanity by an African court after his government was accused of killing 40,000 people. Aug. 24.

Akis Tsochadzopoulos, 82. A once prominent Greek socialist politician who held nearly a dozen ministerial positions over two decades but later fell from grace, was convicted and imprisoned in one of Greece's highest profile corruption trials. Aug. 27.

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Ed Asner, 91. The burly and prolific character actor who became a star in middle age as the gruff but lovable newsman Lou Grant, first in the hit comedy "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and later in the drama "Lou Grant." Aug. 29.

Michael Constantine, 94. An Emmy Award-winning character actor who reached worldwide fame playing the Windex bottle-toting father of the bride in the 2002 film "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." Aug. 31.

SEPTEMBER

Syed Ali Geelani, 91. An icon of disputed Kashmir's resistance against Indian rule and a top separatist leader who became the emblem of the region's defiance against New Delhi. Sept. 1.

Mikis Theodorakis, 96. The beloved Greek composer whose rousing music and life of political defiance won acclaim abroad and inspired millions at home. Sept. 2.

George M. Strickler Jr., 80. A civil rights attorney who fought to desegregate Southern schools in the 1960s and was pushed out of his University of Mississippi teaching job amid uproar over his work on behalf of Black clients. Sept. 2.

Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammed Saeed al-Hakim, 85. One of Iraq's most senior and influential Muslim Shiite clerics. Sept. 3.

Willard Scott, 87. The beloved weatherman who charmed viewers of NBC's "Today" show with his self-deprecating humor and cheerful personality. Sept. 4.

Jean-Paul Belmondo, 88. Star of the iconic French New Wave film "Breathless," whose crooked boxer's nose and rakish grin went on to make him one of the country's most recognizable leading men. Sept. 6.

Sunil Perera, 68. A singer and musician who entertained generations of Sri Lankans with captivating songs, but won their minds and hearts with his outspoken comments against social injustice, corruption, racism and suppression of democracy. Sept. 6. Complications from COVID—19.

Elizabeth Ireland McCann, 90. A Tony Award-winning producer who helped mount an astounding array of hits on Broadway and in London, including "The Elephant Man," "Morning's at Seven," "Amadeus," "The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby" and "Copenhagen." Sept. 9. Cancer.

Abimael Guzmán, 86. The leader of the brutal Shining Path insurgency in Peru who was captured in 1992. Sept. 11.

The Rev. Cho Yong-gi, 85. His founding of South Korea's biggest church was a symbol of the postwar growth of Christianity in the country before that achievement was tainted by corruption and other scandals. Sept. 14.

Norm Macdonald, 61. A comedian and former "Saturday Night Live" writer and performer who was "Weekend Update" host when Bill Clinton and O.J. Simpson provided comic fodder during the 1990s. Sept. 14.

Jane Powell, 92. The bright-eyed, operatic-voiced star of Hollywood's golden age musicals who sang with Howard Keel in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and danced with Fred Astaire in "Royal Wedding." Sept. 16.

Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 84. A former Algerian president who fought for independence from France, reconciled his conflict-ravaged nation and was then ousted amid pro-democracy protests in 2019 after two decades in power. Sept. 17.

George Holliday, 61. The Los Angeles plumber who shot grainy video of four white police officers beating Black motorist Rodney King in 1991. Sept. 19. Complications of COVID-19.

Hussein Tantawi, 85. The Egyptian general who took charge of the country when longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down amid the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Sept. 21.

Melvin Van Peebles, 89. The groundbreaking filmmaker, playwright and musician whose work ushered in the "blaxploitation" wave of the 1970s and influenced filmmakers long after. Sept. 21.

Theoneste Bagosora, 80. A former Rwandan army colonel regarded as the architect of the 1994 genocide in which more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and Hutus who tried to protect them were killed. Sept. 25.

George Frayne, 77. As leader of Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen, he enjoyed a cult follow-

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ing in the 1970s with such party and concert favorites as "Hot Rod Lincoln" and "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)." Sept. 26.

Bobby Zarem, 84. A tireless, relentless entertainment publicist, with a client list that read like a Who's Who of a certain era: Cher, Diana Ross, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Costner, Michael Douglas, Ann-Margret, Al Pacino, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and more. Sept. 26.

Michael Renzi, 80. During a storied musical career, he worked with Peggy Lee, Mel Tormé, Lena Horne and some of the other biggest names in jazz and pop, and for years was also the musical director of "Sesame Street." Sept. 29.

OCTOBER

Umar Sharif, 66. One of Pakistan's most beloved comedians. Oct. 2.

Todd Akin, 74. A conservative Missouri Republican whose comment that women's bodies have a way of avoiding pregnancies in cases of "legitimate rape" sunk his bid for the U.S. Senate and became a cautionary tale for other GOP candidates. Oct. 3.

Bernard Tapie, 78. A flamboyant businessman who was beloved by sports fans for leading French soccer club Marseille to glory but also dogged by legal battles and corruption investigations. Oct. 3.

Lars Vilks, 75. A Swedish artist who had lived under police protection since making a sketch of the Prophet Muhammad with a dog's body in 2007. Oct. 3. Killed in a car crash along with two police bodyguards.

Alan Kalter, 78. The quirky, red-headed announcer for David Letterman for two decades who frequently appeared in the show's comedy bits. Oct. 4.

Abolhassan Banisadr, 88. Iran's first president after the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution who fled Tehran after being impeached for challenging the growing power of clerics as the nation became a theocracy. Oct. 9.

Abdul Qadeer Khan, 85. A controversial figure known as the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb. Oct. 10.

Megan Rice, 91. A nun and Catholic peace activist who spent two years in federal prison while in her 80s after breaking into a government security complex to protest nuclear weapons. Oct. 10.

Eddie Jaku, 101. A Holocaust survivor who published his best-selling memoir, "The Happiest Man on Earth." Oct. 12.

Hubert Germain, 101. The last of an elite group of decorated French Resistance fighters who helped liberate France from Nazi control in World War II. Oct. 12.

Ronnie Tutt, 83. A legendary drummer who spent years playing alongside Elvis Presley and teamed up with other superstars ranging from Johnny Cash to Stevie Nicks. Oct. 16.

Betty Lynn, 95. The film and television actor who was best known for her role as Barney Fife's sweetheart Thelma Lou on "The Andy Griffith Show." Oct. 16.

Colin Powell, 84. The trailblazing soldier and diplomat whose sterling reputation of service to Republican and Democratic presidents was stained by his faulty claims to justify the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq. Oct. 18.

Jerry Pinkney, 81. A prize-winning children's book illustrator known for his richly textured images of Black life, fables and fairy tales in works ranging from "The Lion and the Mouse" to "The Sunday Outing." Oct. 20.

Peter Scolari, 66. A versatile character actor whose television roles included a yuppie producer on "Newhart" and a closeted dad on "Girls" and who was on Broadway with longtime friend Tom Hanks in "Lucky Guy." Oct. 22.

Sunao Tsuboi, 96. A survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bombing who made opposing nuclear weapons the message of his life, including in a meeting with President Barack Obama in 2016. Oct. 24.

Roh Tae-woo, 88. The former South Korean president was a major player in a 1979 coup who later became president in a landmark democratic election before ending his tumultuous political career in prison. Oct. 26.

Mort Sahl, 94. A satirist who helped revolutionize stand-up comedy during the Cold War with his running commentary on politicians and current events and became a favorite of a new, restive generation of Americans. Oct. 26.

A. Linwood Holton Jr., 98. Virginia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction and a crusader against racial discrimination. Oct. 28.

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NOVEMBER

- Aaron T. Beck, 100. A groundbreaking psychotherapist regarded as the father of cognitive therapy. Nov. 1.
- Sabah Fakhri, 88. One of the Arab world's most famous singers, he entertained generations with traditional songs and preserved nearly extinct forms of Arabic music. Nov. 2.
- Ruth Ann Minner, 86. A sharecropper's daughter who became the only woman to serve as Delaware's governor. Nov. 4.
- Marília Mendonça, 26. She was one of Brazil's most popular singers and a Latin Grammy winner. Nov. 5.
- Airplane crash. Nov. 5.
- Dean Stockwell, 85. A top Hollywood child actor who gained new success in middle age in the sci-fi series "Quantum Leap" and in a string of indelible performances in film, including David Lynch's "Blue Velvet," Wim Wenders' "Paris, Texas" and Jonathan Demme's "Married to the Mob." Nov. 7.
- Max Cleland, 79. He lost three limbs to a hand grenade in Vietnam and later became a groundbreaking Veterans Administration chief and U.S. senator from Georgia until an attack ad questioning his patriotism derailed his reelection. Nov. 9.
- Congestive heart failure. Nov. 9.
- Jakucho Setouchi, 99. A Buddhist nun and one of Japan's best-known authors famous for novels depicting passionate women and her translation of "The Tale of Genji," a 1,000-year-old classic, into modern language. Nov. 9.
- Jerry Douglas, 88. He played handsome family patriarch John Abbott on "The Young and the Restless" for more than 30 years. Nov. 9.
- F.W. de Klerk, 85. He shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Nelson Mandela and as South Africa's last apartheid president oversaw the end of the country's white minority rule. Nov. 11.
- William Sterling Cary, 94. A pioneering minister and civil rights activist who was the first Black person in prominent church leadership roles, including president of the National Council of Churches. Nov. 14.
- Ardeshir Zahedi, 93. Iran's flamboyant ambassador to the United States during the rule of the shah who charmed both Hollywood stars and politicians with his lavish parties until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Nov. 18.
- Chun Doo-hwan, 90. A former South Korean military strongman who seized power in a 1979 coup and brutally crushed pro-democracy protests before going to prison for misdeeds while in office. Nov. 23.
- Stephen Sondheim, 91. The songwriter who reshaped the American musical theater in the second half of the 20th century with his intelligent, intricately rhymed lyrics, his use of evocative melodies and his willingness to tackle unusual subjects. Nov. 26.
- Phil Saviano, 69. A clergy sex abuse survivor and whistleblower who played a pivotal role in exposing decades of predatory assaults by Roman Catholic priests in the United States. Nov. 28.
- Lee Elder, 87. He broke down racial barriers as the first Black golfer to play in the Masters and paved the way for Tiger Woods and others to follow. Nov. 28.
- Virgil Abloh, 41. A leading designer whose groundbreaking fusions of streetwear and high couture made him one of the most celebrated tastemakers in fashion and beyond. Nov. 28.
- Cancer. Nov. 28.
- David Gulpilil, 68. Australia's most acclaimed Indigenous actor. Nov. 29.
- Arlene Dahl, 96. The actor whose charm and striking red hair shone in such Technicolor movies of the 1950s as "Journey to the Center of the Earth" and "Three Little Words." Nov. 29.

DECEMBER

- Antony Sher, 72. One of the most acclaimed Shakespearean actors of his generation. Dec. 2.
- Bob Dole, 98. He overcame disabling war wounds to become a sharp-tongued Senate leader, a Republican presidential candidate and then a symbol of his dwindling generation of World War II veterans. Dec. 5.
- Lina Wertmüller, 93. Italy's provocative filmmaker whose mix of sex and politics in "Swept Away" and "Seven Beauties" made her the first woman nominated for an Academy Award for directing. Dec. 9.

Al Unser, 82. One of only four drivers to win the Indianapolis 500 a record four times. Dec. 9.
Michael Nesmith, 78. The singer-songwriter, author, actor-director and entrepreneur who will likely be best remembered as the wool-hatted, guitar-strumming member of the made-for-television rock band The Monkees. Dec. 10.

After Jussie Smollett verdict, more court cases await

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A jury's guilty verdict that Jussie Smollett faked a racist and homophobic attack isn't the end of legal proceedings for the former "Empire" actor or others.

Smollett, 39, was convicted Thursday of five counts of disorderly conduct for lying to Chicago police about being the victim of a racist, anti-gay attack near his home in downtown Chicago. He maintains his innocence, and his attorney has said he will appeal the verdict.

While the charges carry a possible sentence of three years in prison, legal experts have said Smollett is unlikely to get prison time for the low-level felonies, and is more likely to be sentenced to probation and ordered to perform community service. Judge James Linn didn't set a sentencing date, but scheduled a Jan. 27 hearing for post-trial motions and said he would schedule sentencing after that.

Meanwhile, lawsuits that were on hold pending the outcome of the criminal case may now move forward. They include a lawsuit the city of Chicago filed against Smollett to recoup over \$130,000 it spent investigating what police initially believed was a terrible hate crime.

Here's a look at some remaining cases:

CITY OF CHICAGO VS. SMOLLETT

Chicago sued Smollett in April 2019, after he refused to pay \$130,106.15 to reimburse the city for police overtime and other costs spent on the investigation.

The city demanded the payment shortly after the Cook County State's Attorney's office dropped the original charges against Smollett for lying to police about the attack. The move by State's Attorney Kim Foxx infuriated then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who lashed out at Smollett for dragging the city's reputation "through the mud" and wasting police resources on a hoax.

The lawsuit says the city "incurred significant costs" investigating the high-profile alleged hate crime, and seeks reimbursement from Smollett for 1,836 hours of police overtime.

A federal judge stayed proceedings pending the outcome of the criminal case after a special prosecutor investigated and new charges were filed against Smollett in February 2020.

In April 2020, U.S. District Court Judge Virginia Kendall also dismissed a countersuit filed by Smollett against the city, former Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson, detectives on the case and two brothers who told police he recruited them for the fake attack.

His attorneys said Chicago couldn't go after Smollett for the cost of the investigation because the city accepted his \$10,000 bail as "payment in full in connection with the dismissal of the charges against him" when the original charges were dropped in 2019.

Smollett's countersuit also said he was the victim of a malicious prosecution that caused him humiliation and extreme distress. They said Chicago police didn't have probable cause to arrest him for lying based off of "unreliable" accounts from Abimbola and Olabingo Osundairo, the brothers who testified last week that Smollett paid them \$3,500 to help him with the hoax, and because police didn't pursue other evidence.

Kendall said in her ruling that Smollett could refile his suit if he was found not guilty in the criminal case.

In a statement after Thursday's guilty verdict, the city's law department said the decision "confirms that the City was correct" in suing Smollett.

"The City intends to continue to pursue its lawsuit to hold Smollett accountable for his unlawful actions and to demand that he compensate the City for costs incurred by the Chicago Police Department which took his false claims of harm seriously," the statement read.

A status hearing is scheduled for Dec. 16 in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

OSUNDAIRO BROTHERS' LAWSUIT

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The Osundairo brothers, who were star witnesses for the prosecution at Smollett's trial, filed their own lawsuit in April 2019 accusing Smollett's attorneys of defamation and seeking unspecified financial damages.

They claimed that the attorneys accused the brothers of leading "a criminally homophobic, racist and violent attack" against Smollett, destroying their personal and professional reputations. The lawsuit named as defendants celebrity attorney Mark Geragos, lawyer Tina Glandian and Geragos' Los Angeles-based law firm.

The lawsuit also stated that Glandian made public statements that Abimbola Osundairo is gay and participated in sex acts with Smollett. Osundairo said that was untrue, and noted that he has family in Nigeria and travels often to the country, where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by years in prison or even death. Osundairo said the lawyer's statements put his life and the lives of his family in danger.

In a statement issued after the lawsuit was filed, Geragos and Glandian called it "ridiculous" and "a desperate attempt" by the brothers "to stay relevant and further profit from an attack they admit they perpetrated."

A federal judge in Chicago put the case on hold until the completion of the Smollett trial and asked the parties to file a status report with the court by Feb. 1, 2022.

Check out the AP's complete coverage of the Jussie Smollett case.

EXPLAINER: Why US inflation is so high, and when it may ease

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation is starting to look like that unexpected — and unwanted — houseguest who just won't leave.

For months, many economists had sounded a reassuring message that a spike in consumer prices, something that had been missing in action in the U.S. for a generation, wouldn't stay long. It would prove "transitory," in the soothing words of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and White House officials, as the economy shifted from virus-related chaos to something closer to normalcy.

Yet as any American who has bought a carton of milk, a gallon of gas or a used car could tell you, inflation has settled in. And economists are now voicing a more discouraging message: Higher prices will likely last well into next year, if not beyond.

On Friday, the government reinforced that message with its report that the consumer price index soared 6.8% last month from a year earlier — the biggest 12-month jump since 1982.

And the sticker shock is hitting where families tend to feel it most. At the breakfast table, for instance: Bacon prices are up 21% over the past year, egg prices 8%. Gasoline has surged 58%. Furnishing your living room, dining room or kitchen will set you back 14% more than it would have a year ago. Used cars? Up 31%.

And though pay is up sharply for many workers, it isn't nearly enough to keep up with prices. Last month, average hourly wages in the United States, after accounting for inflation, actually fell 2.4% compared with November 2020.

Economists at Wells Fargo have joked grimly that the Labor Department's CPI — the Consumer Price Index — should stand for "Consumer Pain Index." Unfortunately for consumers, especially lower-wage households, it's all coinciding with their higher spending needs right before the holiday season.

The price squeeze is escalating pressure on the Fed to shift more quickly away from years of easy-money policies. And it poses a threat to President Joe Biden, congressional Democrats and their ambitious spending plans.

WHAT CAUSED THE PRICE SPIKES?

Much of it is the flipside of very good news. Slammed by COVID-19, the U.S. economy collapsed in the spring of 2020 as lockdowns took effect, businesses closed or cut hours and consumers stayed home as a health precaution. Employers slashed 22 million jobs. Economic output plunged at a record-shattering 31% annual rate in last year's April-June quarter.

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Everyone braced for more misery. Companies cut investment. Restocking was put off. And a brutal recession ensued.

Yet instead of sinking into a prolonged downturn, the economy staged an unexpectedly rousing recovery, fueled by massive government spending and a bevy of emergency moves by the Fed. By spring, the rollout of vaccines had emboldened consumers to return to restaurants, bars and shops.

Suddenly, businesses had to scramble to meet demand. They couldn't hire fast enough to plug job openings — a near record 11 million in October — or buy enough supplies to fill customer orders. As business roared back, ports and freight yards couldn't handle the traffic. Global supply chains became snarled.

Costs rose. And companies found that they could pass along those higher costs in the form of higher prices to consumers, many of whom had managed to sock away a ton of savings during the pandemic.

"A sizeable chunk of the inflation we're seeing is the inevitable result of coming out of the pandemic," said Jason Furman, an economic adviser in the Obama White House now at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Furman suggested, though, that misguided policy played a role, too. Policymakers were so intent on staving off an economic collapse that they "systematically underestimated inflation," he said.

"They poured kerosene on the fire."

A flood of government spending — including President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, with its \$1,400 checks to most households in March — overstimulated the economy, Furman said.

"Inflation is a lot higher in the United States than it is in Europe," he noted. "Europe is going through the same supply shocks as the United States is, the same supply chain issues. But they didn't do nearly as much stimulus."

Biden has acknowledged that inflation hurts Americans' pocketbooks and said that containing inflation is a priority. But he said his \$1 trillion infrastructure package, including spending on roads, bridges and ports, will help ease supply bottlenecks and therefore inflationary pressures.

HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Consumer price inflation will likely endure as long as companies struggle to keep up with consumers' prodigious demand for goods and services. A resurgent job market — employers have added 6.1 million jobs this year — means that Americans can continue to splurge on everything from lawn furniture to new cars.

"The demand side of the U.S. economy will continue to be something to behold," says Rick Rieder, chief investment officer for global fixed income at Blackrock, "and companies will continue to have the luxury of passing through prices."

Megan Greene, chief economist at the Kroll Institute, suggested that inflation and the overall economy will eventually return to something closer to normal.

"I think it will be 'transitory,'" she said of inflation. "But economists have to be very honest about defining transitory, and I think this could last another year easily."

"We need a lot of humility talking about how long this lasts," Furman said. "I think it's with us for a while. The inflation rate is going to come down from this year's blistering pace, but it's still going to be very, very high compared to the historical norms we have been used to."

WILL WE SUFFER A RETURN OF 1970'S-STYLE 'STAGFLATION'?

The run-up in consumer prices has raised the specter of a return to the "stagflation" of the 1970s. That was when higher prices coincided with high unemployment in defiance of what conventional economists thought was possible.

Yet today's situation looks very different. Unemployment is relatively low, and households overall are in good shape financially. The Conference Board, a business research group, found that consumers' inflation expectations last month were the highest they'd been since July 2008. But their overall confidence remains at high levels.

Economic growth, after slowing from July through September in response to the highly contagious delta variant, is thought to be bouncing back in the final quarter of 2021.

"Most economists are expecting growth to accelerate in the fourth quarter," Greene said. "So it doesn't

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suggest that we're facing both a tanking of growth and higher inflation. We're just facing higher inflation."

WHAT SHOULD POLICYMAKERS DO?

The pressure is on the Fed, which is charged with keeping a lid on inflation, to control prices.

The central bank has begun to counter inflation pressures by reducing its \$120 billion in monthly bond purchases by \$15 billion a month. Those purchases, launched last summer, were intended to hold down long-term interest rates to spur borrowing and spending.

But with inflation pressures persisting longer than the Powell Fed had expected, the central bank is widely expected to announce as soon as next week that it will accelerate its pullback of the bond purchases.

Doing so would put the Fed on a path to begin raising its key short-term interest rate as early as the first half of next year. That rate has been pegged at nearly zero since March 2020, when the coronavirus sent the economy into a deep recession. Raising rates that soon would be much earlier than was expected as recently as this summer, when Fed policymakers forecast that they wouldn't do so until late 2023.

"We've been fighting non-existent inflation since the 1990s," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at the accounting and consulting firm Grant Thornton, "and now we're talking about fighting an inflation that is real."

AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber contributed to this report.

UK opens door to Assange extradition to US on spying charges

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A British appellate court opened the door Friday for Julian Assange to be extradited to the United States on spying charges by overturning a lower court decision that the WikiLeaks founder's mental health was too fragile to withstand incarceration in America.

The High Court in London ruled that U.S. assurances about Assange's detention, received after the lower court decision, were enough to guarantee he would be treated humanely. Assange's lawyers say they will ask to appeal.

In the ruling, the High Court directed the lower court judge to send the extradition request to Home Secretary Priti Patel, who would make the final decision on whether to send Assange to the U.S. for trial.

"There is no reason why this court should not accept the assurances as meaning what they say," a two-judge panel of the High Court said in its ruling.

Since WikiLeaks began publishing classified documents more than a decade ago, Assange has become a lightning rod for both criticism and veneration.

Some see him as a dangerous secret-spiller who endangered the lives of informers and others who helped the U.S. in war zones. Others say WikiLeaks has publicized official malfeasance that governments wanted to keep secret.

Both views have been debated as Assange has sought his freedom — and to evade the Americans.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse linked to WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of leaked military and diplomatic documents.

Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, called Friday's decision a "grave miscarriage of justice" that threatens the rights of journalists everywhere to do their jobs without fear of retaliation by governments that don't like what they publish. She said Assange's lawyers would seek to appeal.

"We will fight," Moris said outside the court, where supporters chanted and waved banners demanding Assange's release. "Every generation has an epic fight to fight and this is ours, because Julian represents the fundamentals of what it means to live in a free society."

Assange, 50, is currently being held at the high-security Belmarsh Prison in London. The High Court ordered that he remain in custody pending the outcome of the extradition case.

Assange has been in detention since he was arrested in April 2019 for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years holed up inside Ecuador's Embassy in London. Assange

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sought protection in the embassy in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

In January, District Judge Vanessa Baraitser rejected the U.S. request to extradite Assange, saying the Australian citizen was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions.

U.S. authorities later provided assurances that Assange would not face the severely restrictive conditions that his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk.

If convicted, Assange won't be imprisoned at the "supermax" penitentiary in Florence, Colorado, the highest-security prison in the United States, American authorities promised the court. They also pledged that he wouldn't be held under "special administrative measures," which can include segregation from other prisoners and the loss of privileges such as visits, correspondence and use of the telephone.

They also said he would be eligible to serve any prison sentence in his native Australia.

American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

The charges Assange faces carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison, though lawyers for the U.S. have told British courts that the longest sentence ever imposed for such an offense was five years and three months.

Lawyers for Assange argue that their client shouldn't have been charged because he was acting as a journalist and is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of the press. The documents he published exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan, they say.

Barry J. Pollack, a lawyer for Assange in the U.S., called Friday's decision "highly disturbing," citing unfounded allegations that the U.S. plotted to kidnap or kill his client.

"The U.K. court reached this decision without considering whether extradition is appropriate when the United States is pursuing charges against him that could result in decades in prison, based on his having reported truthful information about newsworthy issues such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," he said.

Human rights advocates argue that the U.S. government wants to stifle its critics. While the British High Court was not ruling on the merits of the charges, the extradition proceedings have opened a broader discussion about Assange's case.

Amnesty International's Europe director, Nils Muižnieks, said the indictment "poses a grave threat to press freedom both in the United States and abroad."

"If upheld, it would undermine the key role of journalists and publishers in scrutinizing governments and exposing their misdeeds — and would leave journalists everywhere looking over their shoulders," Muižnieks said Friday.

But so far, the court has opted to ignore these issues all together, said Nick Vamos, the former head of extradition at the U.K.'s Crown Prosecution Service. Now that the American assurances, have been accepted, Assange would have to base his appeal on other matters he raised in the district court — all of which had been rejected in the past.

"All of the political heat is interesting for the media, but for the extradition court, they don't seem to be concerned about it," Vamos told the BBC.

Vamos said that if Assange is given permission to appeal, the case could go on for another six months. If the courts decide he has no grounds for appeal, it could be over as soon as January.

"We had a phrase when I was working on the extradition team at the CPS ... that extradition isn't over until the wheels are up on the plane," he said. "Anything can happen, even at the last second."

2 stars of 'It's a Wonderful Life' look back at a classic

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It was just another job for child actor Carolyn Grimes. She was 6 and had already done four movies by the summer of 1946 when filming began on "It's a Wonderful Life." The only thing she recalls about the biggest movie of her career was being delighted to play in snow on the set.

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That single job would become very memorable to a lot of other people. "It's a Wonderful Life," which marks its 75th anniversary this year, is now a beloved holiday tradition across the globe.

"It's a once-a-year pick-me-up for the humanity of America and the world," Grimes told The Associated Press. "It's a good impetus to really keep us going in a positive direction."

"It's a Wonderful Life" was released in late 1946, produced and directed by Frank Capra and starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. It takes place on Christmas Eve in a small town.

The film centers on the character of George Bailey, played by Stewart, who considers suicide until his guardian angel intervenes and shows him all the people whose lives he has touched and the difference he has made in the community.

One memorable character is Zuzu, played by Grimes. She gets to say, "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings." And the petals from Zuzu's rose — stuffed into a pants pocket by Stewart's Bailey as he comforts his sickly daughter — become a symbol of life.

If Grimes is sort of fuzzy on the filming details, Jimmy Hawkins, another former child actor who played Tommy in the film, is the opposite. He recalls as a 4-year-old getting up while it was dark and taking buses and streetcars to Culver City to film his scenes.

"I have vivid memories of doing that film," he says. "On the set, Capra would squat down, eye-to-eye, tell me what he wanted me to do and did I understand it. I said, 'Oh, yes, sir.'"

Grimes and Hawkins are the last surviving members of the cast and have chosen to represent the film's legacy and spread its lesson of doing good.

"We feel we're lucky to have played those parts and carry Frank Capra's message. He's not around to do it, and he gave us a great part and a lot of wonderful memories, so we just naturally do it, says Hawkins.

"We want to carry on that message, whether it's to inmates at Attica or ringing the bell at the Stock Exchange. We talk to everybody to keep it going."

Paramount Home Entertainment has released a limited-edition two-disc Blu-ray set with a colorized version of the film in high definition as well as the original, digitally remastered black-and-white movie in high definition. The set includes over 45 minutes of bonus content.

The movie was nominated for five Oscars and has been recognized by the American Film Institute as one of the 100 best American films ever made. The movie also earned first place for most inspirational American Film of All Time by the AFI.

"It gives us such an optimistic view of what our lives can be. And we have the power to make that. We can make a difference and we can make things happen," said Grimes.

Hawkins recalls Capra with a strong vision for the film — faith, hope and life renewed. The movie he made might be sentimental, but on the set, the director was not at all.

"It was his movie," he says. "People fell by the wayside because it was his vision. If you didn't have his vision, you weren't making his move. He was very precise, very nice to everybody on the set. But now it's a job."

The film — now closely associated with Christmas — wasn't initially intended to be released over the holidays. But RKO's scheduled Christmas movie in 1946 — "Sinbad the Sailor" — wasn't ready so the studio asked Capra to rush production of "It's a Wonderful Life." It was released Dec. 20 at the Globe Theatre in New York, a little late for a traditional Christmas rollout.

"They did a beautiful job of getting it out there and then it bombed more or less. It was not a hit," says Grimes. "But then in the early '70s, it became public domain and it was on every channel every year."

Grimes still gets letters from all over the globe and from generations of viewers. "I get a lot of fan mail from Great Britain and even the Mideast and all kinds of places," she says. "It's reaching a lot of people, and I think people will want to make a difference."

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

Rastafari want more legal marijuana for freedom of worship

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By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and KWASI GYAMFI ASIEDU Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Mosiyah Tafari banged on drums and chanted psalms with other Rastafari in a ballroom where the smoke of frankincense mixed with the fragrant smell of marijuana — which his faith deems sacred.

The ceremony in Columbus, Ohio marked the 91st anniversary of the coronation of the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, whom Rastafari worship as their savior. For hours, the group played traditional Nyabingi music on their most important holy day.

“Cannabis is something that puts you in contact with the spiritual aspect of life in the physical body,” said Tafari, a member of the Columbus-based Rastafari Coalition, which organized the event.

“It’s important for Rastafari because we follow the traditions of the Scriptures and we see that cannabis is good.”

For Rastafari, the ritualistic smoking of marijuana brings them closer to the divine. But for decades, many have been incarcerated because of their use of cannabis. As public opinion and policy continues to shift in the U.S. and across the world toward legalization of the drug for both medical and recreational purposes, Rastafari are clamoring for broader relaxation to curtail persecution and ensure freedom of worship.

“In this system, they’re very focused on, ‘Oh, we can make a lot of money, we can sell these medicinal cards, we can sell this ganja,’ but what of the people who have been persecuted? What of the people who have been sent to jail, imprisoned, even killed,” said Ras Nyah, a music producer from the U.S. Virgin Islands and a Rastafari Coalition member.

“We must address these things before we get too ahead of ourselves,” said Nyah, who attended the ceremony wearing a tracksuit in the Rastafari colors of red, green and gold.

The Rastafari faith is rooted in 1930s Jamaica, growing as a response by Black people to white colonial oppression. The beliefs are a melding of Old Testament teachings and a desire to return to Africa. Rastafari followers believe the use of marijuana is directed in biblical passages and that the “holy herb” induces a meditative state. The faithful smoke it as a sacrament in chalice pipes or cigarettes called “spliffs,” add it to vegetarian stews and place it in fires as a burnt offering.

“Ganja,” as marijuana is known in Jamaica, has a long history in that country, and its arrival predates the Rastafari faith. Indentured servants from India brought the cannabis plant to the island in the 19th century, and it gained popularity as a medicinal herb.

It began to gain wider acceptance in the 1970s when Rastafari and reggae culture was popularized through music icons Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, two of the faith’s most famous exponents. Tosh’s 1976 hit “Legalize It” remains a rallying cry for those pushing to make marijuana legal.

Rastafari adherents in the U.S., many of them Black, say they have endured both racial and religious profiling by law enforcement agencies due to their ritualistic use of cannabis.

Tosh’s youngest son, Jawara McIntosh, a singer and marijuana activist who performed under the stage name Tosh1, was serving a six-month sentence for possession after police said they found over 65 pounds in his rental car, when he was attacked in a New Jersey jail in 2017 and was left in a coma. He died last year.

The attack prompted his sister Niambe McIntosh, Peter Tosh’s youngest daughter, who was a teacher in Boston at the time, to become an advocate for criminal justice reform and launch a campaign to fight the stigma surrounding cannabis and support those affected by its prohibition.

“I realized that his story had to be shared because no family should ever ... face these harsh consequences over a plant,” said McIntosh, who also heads The Peter Tosh Foundation, which advocates for legalization.

The so-called war on drugs declared by President Richard Nixon more than five decades ago prompted a rise in anti-possession laws including stricter sentencing.

The negative impacts of the drug war have, for years, drawn calls for reform and abolition from mostly left-leaning elected officials and social justice advocates. Many of them say that in order to begin to unwind or undo the war on drugs, all narcotics must be decriminalized or legalized, with science-based regulation.

“We had founded the Peter Tosh Foundation originally with the ‘Legalize It’ initiative geared at promoting the science, the spiritual benefits of cannabis,” McIntosh said, “but also recognizing that those that have

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been harmed by prohibition should most be at the forefront of this new booming business.”

The concern is shared by other U.S.-based Rastafari as corporations look to invest in and profit from recreational and medical cannabis.

“Maybe take some of those finances, those many millions and billions and trillions of dollars, and invest them back into brothers and sisters who have been incarcerated over a long period of time,” Tafari said.

“Invest in our communities that have been damaged ... maybe allow some of the Rastafari to be a part of those business endeavors as well.”

Shifting public opinion and policy on cannabis has led countries including Canada, Malawi and South Africa to ease laws in recent years.

While it remains illegal on the federal level in the United States, lawmakers from Oregon to New York have passed a raft of legislation legalizing cannabis in a third of U.S. states.

A Gallup Poll released last year indicated that 68% of Americans favor legalizing marijuana — double the approval rate in 2003. In mid-November of this year, Republican lawmaker Nancy Mace of South Carolina introduced legislation in Congress that, if passed, would decriminalize cannabis federally — an impediment cited in many states that have opted not to pursue legalization on their own. But it would not change local-level restrictions, meaning that states would still determine their own marijuana statutes.

In Jamaica, authorities gave the green light to a regulated medical cannabis industry and decriminalized possession of small amounts of weed in 2015. The country also recognized the sacramental rights of Rastafari to their sacred plant.

“We are able to access a certain kind of connection with creation, and that is ultimately the sacramental gift that we seek to defend,” said Jahlni Niaah, a lecturer in Cultural and Rastafari Studies at Jamaica’s University of the West Indies.

Jamaicans are now allowed up to five plants per household for personal use only. But Niaah said this has not stopped run-ins with police.

“Rastafari have had various challenges where they’ve had herbs confiscated and disappeared in police custody and continue to be abused in relation to claiming a sacramental right,” he said.

“There’s really a slip between the pen and the practice.”

Jamaican Minister of Justice Delroy Chuck said in a statement that “instances of perceived discrimination are unfortunate” but the government continues to facilitate equality and inclusion in the legal regime.

“In fact, there has been and continue to be several sensitization sessions undertaken since the establishment of the legislation,” Chuck said. “These include sensitization sessions with our law enforcement agencies.”

Other Jamaican Rastafari are concerned that they have been left out of the burgeoning business.

“The people who went to prison, who had to run up and down from police and police helicopters, they financially could not afford to get involved in the medical ganja industry,” said Ras Iyah V, a Rastafari advocate and former member of Jamaica’s Cannabis Licensing Authority. In 1982, he was convicted, served a short sentence and paid a fine for cannabis possession.

When the Jamaican government launched a program in 2017 aimed at helping “traditional” ganja farmers transition into the legal industry, he was hopeful that it could help the Rastafari community. But today he is “very disappointed in terms of how it is going. The vast majority of our ganja farmers are not able to participate because they don’t have any land.”

Setting up a 1-acre cannabis farm following the guidelines established by Jamaican law can cost thousands of dollars, he said.

“The cannabis industry has now been taken out of the hands of Rastafari and the traditional ganja farmers and placed in the hands of rich people,” he said. “It makes us very bitter because we don’t see any justice in that.”

AP journalist Emily Leshner contributed to this report.

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Al Unser, a four-time winner of Indianapolis 500, dies at 82

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

Al Unser, one of only four drivers to win the Indianapolis 500 a record four times, died Thursday following a long illness. He was 82.

Unser died at his home in Chama, New Mexico, with his wife, Susan, by his side, Indianapolis Motor Speedway said early Friday. He had been battling cancer for 17 years.

"My heart is so saddened. My father passed away last night," son Al Unser Jr., himself a two-time Indy 500 winner, posted on social media. "He was a Great man and even a Greater Father. Rest In Peace Dad!"

Unser is the third member of one of America's most famed racing families to die in 2021. His oldest brother, three-time Indy 500 winner Bobby Unser, died in May, and Bobby Unser Jr. passed six weeks after his father.

Known as "Big Al" once his own son made a name for himself in racing, Unser is part of an elite club of four-time winners of "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing." Unser won the Indy 500 in 1970, 1971, 1978 and 1987, and is the only driver in history to have both a sibling and a child also win one of the biggest races in the world.

His final victory at age 47 made him the oldest winner in Indy 500 history. He dominated in his first Indy win in 1970 by starting from the pole and leading all but 10 of the 200 laps. Unser beat runner-up Mark Donohue by 32 seconds that year.

Unser led over half the laps in three of his Indy 500 victories, and his 644 total laps led at Indianapolis is most in race history. He made 27 starts in the Indy 500, third most in history, and qualified once on the pole and five times on the front row.

Unser won three Indy car national championships over his career, and his total of 39 victories is sixth on the all-time list.

He and son Al Jr. were the first father-son pairing at Indianapolis, and in 1985 they battled one another for the CART championship. A pass in the closing laps of the race gave Unser a fourth-place finish in the season finale at Miami's Tamiami Park road course, and it was enough for him to beat Al Jr. for the championship by a single point. He fought back tears while describing the "empty feeling" of defeating his son.

Unser also ran five NASCAR races in his career, finishing fourth in the 1968 Daytona 500. He earned three top-10 finishes in NASCAR. He also won three times in the International Race of Champions, an all-star series that pitted the top drivers from various disciplines against each other.

Unser won the Indy car "Triple Crown" by winning all three of the 500-mile races on the 1978 schedule, which included stops at Pocono Raceway and in Ontario, California. He's the only driver in history to win all three of those races in the same season.

The Unser family combined for a record nine wins in the Indy 500; Al Jr. won the Indy 500 twice — in 1992 and 1994. Coincidentally, Al Unser, Al Unser Jr. and Bobby Unser all won their final Indy 500s driving for Roger Penske. Helio Castroneves won his first three Indy 500s driving for Penske.

"Al was the quiet leader of the Unser family, a tremendous competitor and one of the greatest drivers to ever race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway," Penske said. "We were honored to help Al earn a place in history with his fourth Indy victory ... and he will always be a big part of our team. Our thoughts are with the Unser family as they mourn the loss of a man that was beloved across the racing world and beyond."

Unser earlier this year was at Indianapolis Motor Speedway to welcome Castroneves as the newest member of the four-time winners club. Unser achieved the feat after A.J. Foyt, and Rick Mears won his fourth in 1991. Castroneves won in May to become the first new member in 30 years.

"Some days the race track smiles on you and some days, you got it the other way," Unser said during the July celebration. "It's not always that you're going to think you're going to win because your chances are very slim. There's 32 other guys who want it as bad as you do."

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Unser received his Baby Borg — the 18-inch replica of the Indy 500 winner's Borg-Warner Trophy that lives onsite in the speedway's museum — during a celebration in May with family and friends. He was set to be honored in 2020 on the the 50th anniversary of his 1970 victory at Indianapolis, but the celebration was postponed because of the pandemic.

Both Castroneves and two-time Indy 500 winner Takuma Sato lauded Unser, with Sato calling Unser's speech at the May winner's ceremony "very funny and so charming."

"I will always remember Big Al welcoming me to the speedway," Castroneves told The Associated Press on Friday. "He and Johnny Rutherford were the two helping me with my rookie orientation. He will be missed."

The youngest of four racing brothers, Unser was born in in Albuquerque in 1939 to a family of hardcore racers. His father Jerry Unser and two uncles, Louis and Joe, were also drivers. Beginning in 1926 the family began competing in the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, an annual road race held in Colorado.

Al's oldest brother, Jerry, became the first Unser to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 in 1958; he was killed in a crash during practice the following year.

Unser began racing himself in 1957 when he was 18, but competed mostly in sprint cars. He made it to Indy in 1965 driving in a car owned by Foyt and was part of a rookie class with future Indy 500 winners Mario Andretti (1969) and Gordon Johncock (1973, 1982).

"Al was one of the smartest drivers I ever raced against," Andretti said. "I often said that I wished I could have had some of his patience."

The Unser family combined for 73 career starts in the Indy 500 — a number bettered only by the 76 starts by the Andretti family. The Unser participation spans Al (27 races), Bobby (19), and Al Jr. (19), as well as Johnny (five), Robby (two) and Jerry (one).

Unser was inducted into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame in 1986 and the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1998. His collection of trophies and cars is housed at the Unser Racing Museum in Albuquerque.

Unser is survived by wife, Susan, and son, Al Jr. He was preceded in death by daughters Mary and Deborah.

More AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/hub/auto-racing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Nationwide 'silent strike' in Myanmar protests military rule

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Opponents of military rule in Myanmar on Friday held one of their biggest nationally coordinated protests in months, successfully calling on people across the country to shut their businesses and stay at home on International Human Rights Day.

The "silent strike" was staged in cities and towns from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and came at a time of increasing violence in the political crisis triggered by the army's seizure of power in February and ouster of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

On Tuesday, there was a widely reported massacre in the country's northwestern Sagaing region in which soldiers were accused of rounding up and killing 11 civilians whose charred bodies were later discovered by fellow villagers. The military-installed government has denied its soldiers were involved, but it is staging an offensive in northwestern Myanmar against persistent resistance from anti-military militias.

In Yangon, the country's largest city, and elsewhere, photos on social media showed normally busy streets empty of traffic on Friday. Usually crowded markets and plazas were quiet hours before the official start of the strike, which reaffirmed the widespread opposition to the army's rule and its disregard for human rights.

Min Han Htet, co-founder and spokesperson of the Alliance of Student Unions Yangon, said the strike by itself might not make a significant difference.

"But by showing their unity, the strike is a success for the people who are waging psychological warfare

against the military dictatorship," he said.

Solidarity appeared strong among operators of even the smallest shops in Yangon, but at least a few apparently paid a price for their defiance, as photos posted on social media showed fittings such as tables and chairs confiscated by security forces from some.

Since Thursday, authorities had announced in some neighborhoods that action would be taken against shops which close without an acceptable reason.

A shopkeeper from the market in Muse in northern Shan state said the official Township Development Committee threatened over a loudspeaker on Friday morning that it would take action against closed shops.

"They announced in the town that they would shut down our shops for a month if we went ahead and closed the shops and markets without any reason. But we don't care. It is the time to show our unity," said the vendor, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution from the authorities.

Protesters wearing black attire, as suggested by strike organizers, marched silently in Shwebo in Sagaing region. People at home, also dressed in black, posted selfies showing them holding small handmade posters.

"We own our town. Our city, our rules. Staying silent or active is our choice. Never be allowed to rule," was written on one. "Take back our human rights by revolution," read another.

People also held up three fingers, the resistance salute adopted from "The Hunger Games" movie series.

There was at least one pro-military march in Yangon, according to photos on social media that showed about 100 demonstrators holding small flags and posters reading "Counter-Terrorism and Support the Military."

Companies rethink return-to-office plans amid omicron cases

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Companies of all sizes are rethinking their plans to send workers back to the office as the new omicron variant adds another layer of uncertainty.

Alphabet's Google and the nation's second largest automaker Ford Motor Co. are among those once again delaying their return-to-office plans, while other businesses whose employees have already returned are considering adding extra precautions like requiring masks. Officials in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway and Sweden also have asked people in recent days to work from home if they can because of concerns about the variant.

Meta, formerly known as Facebook, and ridesharing company Lyft separately announced Tuesday that they're letting workers delay their return when offices fully reopen early next year. Meta still plans to open its headquarters at the end of January but will allow workers to delay their return as late as June. Lyft says it won't require workers to come back to its offices for all of next year, though they will fully reopen as planned in February.

Janelle Gale, vice president of human resources for Meta, said the latest decision recognizes "some aren't quite ready to come back."

The moves are the latest indication of how difficult it is for companies to set firm plans for their employees' mandatory return as worries about a spike in new cases or new variants keep shifting deadlines. This fall, the delta variant spurred many big companies to postpone a mandatory return to early next year.

"A year and a half ago, we thought this would be for a very short time," said Jeff Levin-Scherz, population health leader at Willis Towers Watson, a global advisory firm. "But the pandemic has thrown us many curves, and employers need to continue to be nimble."

The firm's survey of 543 employers with 5.2 million workers showed on average 34% of remote-capable employees remain remote, but that would decline to 27% by the first quarter of 2022. However, the survey was conducted before news of omicron surfaced.

The delayed plans are yet another blow to already struggling restaurants, bars, dry cleaners and other businesses that rely on office workers as patrons. Particularly hard-hit are those in downtown or midtown areas of cities like New York dominated by office buildings that remain largely empty.

The delays come even as U.S. health officials say early indications suggest omicron may be less danger-

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ous than delta, which continues to fuel hospitalizations.

Lawrence Gostin, a public health expert at Georgetown University, doesn't believe there's enough scientific information on omicron to warrant companies delaying their return-to-office plans.

"There will be a constant stream of new variants as well as surges and waning of cases," Gostin said. "We shouldn't disrupt normal business activity at every possible trigger."

He noted that layered protection like masks, vaccinations and ventilation are highly effective at preventing virus spread in a workplace.

Still, the stream of new variants is having a psychological impact on business owners.

"Omicron has made me realize work life will never return to the way it was pre-COVID," said Gisela Girard, president of advertising agency Creative Civilization, whose 12 employees have been working remotely since March 2020. "It made me realize how working from home is likely to keep employees, their families and also our clients safe."

This summer, Girard's company aimed for a mandatory hybrid work plan to start in fall, but delta pushed back those plans to early next year. Now, omicron has her reconsidering not only those plans but whether employees should return at all. She renewed the office lease last year but said she's rethinking the physical office space.

For companies that have already brought workers back to the office, it's harder to retreat and allow them to be remote again. Still, some are considering new safety measures.

Kent Swig, president of Swig Equities LLC, a privately owned real estate investment and development company in Manhattan, said its 65 employees returned to the office in fall 2020 on a hybrid basis and went to five days a week in the office in May, after all were vaccinated.

However, Swig says he's now closely monitoring the new variant and will consider mandating masks and even requiring COVID-19 testing a few times a week if the threat increases. He said he will reverse course and start hybrid or remote work if the situation gets worse.

"My first and foremost job is to protect all my staff," Swig said. "I am going to err on the side of caution."

Levin-Scherz noted many employers have set multiple dates for return to the workplace over the past year, and at this point are looking to resolve more uncertainty before they set new dates.

Target CEO Brian Cornell recently told The Associated Press that it's "avoiding putting dates on the calendar" for a mandated return to its Minneapolis headquarters. Target started gradually opening collaboration areas and workspaces in the fall for employees who wanted an option to work on-site.

"We're going to learn along the way and make sure we make the right steps for our team," Cornell said.

Lyft said the decision to let workers choose to work remotely for all of 2022 wasn't tied exclusively to omicron but said new variants are a factor contributing to uncertainty.

"We've heard from our team members that they value continued flexibility in determining where they work and would benefit from additional time to plan," said Ashley Adams, a Lyft spokeswoman.

Meanwhile, Google is indefinitely delaying the mandatory return to its offices. A company spokesperson said in an email that the update was in line with its earlier guidance that a return would start no sooner than Jan. 10 and depend on local conditions. The company said it safely opened more than 90% of its U.S. offices and nearly 40% of U.S. workers came into the office in recent weeks.

Ford said Monday that it will delay plans for hybrid work at its Dearborn, Michigan, headquarters until March and plans to start a pilot phase for select employees in February. It had previously said it wouldn't start the hybrid work model before January.

Ford said that the hybrid work model affects approximately 18,000 employees in North America. Hourly manufacturing employees returned to work in May 2020.

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

Jussie Smollett guilty verdict latest in polarizing case

By DON BABWIN and SARA BURNETT Associated Press

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CHICAGO (AP) — Jussie Smollett's conviction for lying to police about a racist, homophobic attack came nearly three years after his report of a horrifying hate crime quickly became part of a polarized political landscape, with people — including the president of the United States — weighing in from all over.

A prosecutor said Thursday's verdict was "a resounding message by the jury that Mr. Smollett did exactly what we said he did" — recruit two brothers to fake an attack so it could be recorded by a surveillance camera and posted on social media for publicity.

The brothers testified that the former "Empire" actor paid them \$3,500 for the hoax and gave them lines to yell, including about "MAGA country," an apparent reference to then-President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

The report made headlines around the world and prompted a massive manhunt in Chicago, with roughly two dozen police joining the investigation. It also drew criticism from Trump, who called the police department's handling of the case "an absolute embarrassment to our country."

"Not only did Mr. Smollett lie to the police and wreak havoc here in the city for weeks on end for no reason whatsoever, but then he compounded the problem by lying under oath to a jury," special prosecutor Dan Webb said after Thursday's verdict.

Smollett, who is Black and gay, maintained throughout the nearly three-year legal battle that he was attacked in downtown Chicago in January 2019 by people who yelled racist and anti-gay slurs and put a noose around his neck.

His attorney declared Smollett's innocence again Thursday after the jury found him guilty on five of six counts of disorderly conduct for lying to police. Nenyé Uche said Smollett would appeal the conviction, and is "100% confident" his name will be cleared by an appellate court.

"Unfortunately we were facing an uphill battle where Jussie was already tried and convicted in the media and then we had to somehow get the jury to forget or unsee all the news stories that they had been hearing that were negative for the last three years," Uche told reporters after the verdict.

The jury convicted the 39-year-old on five counts of disorderly conduct — for each separate time he was charged with lying to police in the days after the alleged attack. He was acquitted on a sixth count, of lying to a detective in mid-February, weeks after Smollett said he was attacked.

Smollett stood and faced the jury, showing no visible reaction as the verdict was read. He and his family later left the courthouse without comment.

Judge James Linn set a post-trial hearing for Jan. 27, and said he would schedule Smollett's sentencing at a later date. Disorderly conduct is a class 4 felony that carries a prison sentence of up to three years, but experts have said if convicted, Smollett would likely be placed on probation and ordered to perform community service.

The damage to his personal and professional life may be more severe. Smollett lost his role on the TV program "Empire," which was filmed in Chicago, after prosecutors said the alleged attack was a hoax, and he told jurors earlier this week, "I've lost my livelihood."

The jury deliberated for just over nine hours Wednesday and Thursday after a roughly one-week trial.

Smollett testified that he was the victim of a real hate crime, telling jurors "there was no hoax." He called the brothers who testified against him "liars" and said the \$3,500 check he wrote them was for meal and workout plans.

His attorneys argued that the brothers attacked the actor because they are homophobic and didn't like "who he was." They also alleged the brothers made up the story about the attack being staged to get money from Smollett, and that they said they wouldn't testify against him if Smollett paid them each \$1 million.

Asked Thursday if Smollett could be charged with perjury for lying on the witness stand, Webb said perjury charges "generally" don't happen after a defendant is convicted, but that it was unclear what would happen in Smollett's case.

He also said the Chicago Police Department was vindicated by the jury's verdict.

"A lot of times people say, 'Well, police officers sweep things under the rug.' This police department

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responded by absolutely testifying in this trial that they took it seriously," Webb said. "They believed he was a victim of a crime and they worked so hard for the next three weeks."

But Uche said Chicago police should have investigated the case "much more," and that there were some witnesses who were never interviewed.

He called the jury's split verdict "inconsistent," saying it made no sense for Smollett to be convicted of five counts but not the sixth charge, since "everything stems from one incident."

David Erickson, a former state appellate judge who teaches at Chicago Kent College of Law, said he thinks the acquittal on the sixth charge may be as simple as the jury's decision not to "pile on."

"They've already convicted him of five counts so they're thinking, 'Do we really want to convict him again because he said the same lie a sixth time?'" Erickson said.

An attorney for Abimbola and Olabingo Osundairo, the brothers who testified against Smollett, said her clients "could not be more thrilled and pleased with the results."

Chicago police "got this one right," Gloria Rodriguez said.

Associated Press reporter Sophia Tareen contributed to this report.

Check out the AP's complete coverage of the Jussie Smollett case.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 11, the 345th day of 2021. There are 20 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 11, 1972, Apollo 17's lunar module landed on the moon with astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt aboard; they became the last two men to date to step onto the lunar surface.

On this date:

In 1816, Indiana became the 19th state.

In 1910, French inventor Georges Claude publicly displayed his first neon lamp, consisting of two 38-foot-long tubes, at the Paris Expo.

In 1936, Britain's King Edward VIII abdicated the throne so he could marry American divorcee Wallis Warfield Simpson; his brother, Prince Albert, became King George VI.

In 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States; the U.S. responded in kind.

In 1946, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation creating a \$1.6 billion environmental "superfund" to pay for cleaning up chemical spills and toxic waste dumps. "Magnum P.I.," starring Tom Selleck, premiered on CBS.

In 1997, more than 150 countries agreed at a global warming conference in Kyoto, Japan, to control the Earth's greenhouse gases.

In 1998, majority Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee pushed through three articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton, over Democratic objections.

In 2001, in the first criminal indictment stemming from 9/11, federal prosecutors charged Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee), a French citizen of Moroccan descent, with conspiring to murder thousands in the suicide hijackings. (Moussaoui pleaded guilty to conspiracy in 2005 and was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2002, a congressional report found that intelligence agencies that were supposed to protect Americans from the Sept. 11 hijackers failed to do so because they were poorly organized, poorly equipped and slow to pursue clues that might have prevented the attacks.

In 2008, former Nasdaq chairman Bernie Madoff was arrested, accused of running a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme that wiped out the life savings of thousands of people and wrecked charities. (Madoff died

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in April 2021 while serving a 150-year federal prison sentence.)

In 2018, a Virginia jury called for a sentence of life in prison plus 419 years for the man who killed a woman when he rammed his car into counterprotesters at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. (James Alex Fields Jr. received that sentence in July, 2019.)

Ten years ago: Former military strongman Manuel Antonio Noriega was flown from France to Panama to face additional punishment in his home country after spending more than 20 years in U.S. and French prisons for drug trafficking and money laundering. A U.N. climate conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, reached a hard-fought agreement on a far-reaching program meant to set a new course for the global fight against climate change.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump called a recent CIA assessment of Russian hacking in the U.S. election "ridiculous" and said he wasn't interested in getting daily intelligence briefings, telling "Fox News Sunday," "I get it when I need it."

One year ago: The Supreme Court rejected a lawsuit backed by President Donald Trump to overturn Joe Biden's election victory, ending a desperate attempt to get legal issues that were rejected by state and federal judges before the nation's highest court. The Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of the nation's first COVID-19 vaccine, developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech; the decision came as the U.S. recorded a new daily high in the number of coronavirus deaths, at 3,309, and a new high in daily confirmed infections with more than 231,000. (Hours before the FDA action, according to two administration officials, a high-ranking White House official told the FDA's chief that he could face firing if the vaccine was not cleared by day's end.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jean-Louis Trintignant is 91. Actor Rita Moreno is 90. Pop singer David Gates (Bread) is 81. Actor Donna Mills is 81. Former Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., is 80. Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is 78. Singer Brenda Lee is 77. Actor Lynda Day George is 77. Music producer Tony Brown is 75. Actor Teri Garr is 74. Movie director Susan Seidelman is 70. Actor Bess Armstrong is 68. Singer Jermaine Jackson is 67. Rock musician Mike Mesaros (The Smithereens) is 64. Rock musician Nikki Sixx (Motley Crue) is 63. Rock musician Darryl Jones (The Rolling Stones) is 60. Actor Ben Browder is 59. Singer-musician Justin Currie (Del Amitri) is 57. Rock musician David Schools (Hard Working Americans, Gov't Mule, Widespread Panic) is 57. Actor Gary Dourdan (DOOR'-dan) is 55. Actor-comedian Mo'Nique is 54. Actor Max Martini is 52. Rapper-actor Mos Def is 48. Actor Rider Strong is 42. Actor Xosha (ZOH'-shah) Roquemore is 37. Actor Karla Souza is 35. Actor Hailee Steinfeld is 25.