

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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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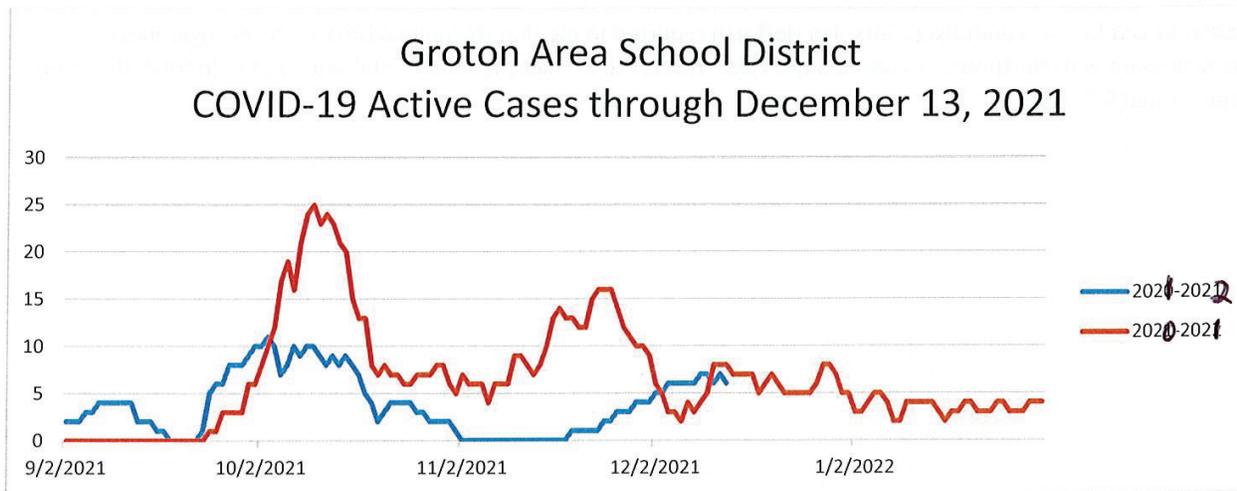
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Superintendent's Report to the Groton Area School District 06-6 Board of Education December 13, 2021

COVID-19 Case Count.

To date, we've had 39 students or staff members test positive for COVID-19. From those, we've sent 155 notifications to families regarding their child meeting the definition of close contact in the school setting. Two of those students (1.29%) subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. *Note: 55 notices were sent today.*



COVID-19 Testing. At-home testing supplies continue to be available for students and staff as requested. This week we're anticipating receiving 12 boxes (45 kits each) of tests that will allow us to send test kits home with families this week, next week (2 kits), and the week we return from Christmas break.

State Fire and Life Safety Survey. The State Fire Marshal inspector was onsite last week Thursday (December 9, 2021) to complete routine bi-annual inspection of district facilities. There were findings from both buildings as is typical in these inspections. Also, as anticipated, there are more findings at the MS/HS facility. Findings include incorrect use of extension cords, maintaining appropriate paths to egress, and identifying power outlets in need of replacement. As required, we will be preparing and submitting our plan for compliance within 30 calendar days from the date of inspection.

Civil Rights Data. The bi-annual Civil Rights Data Collection is now open. We are required to submit this extensive data survey from the 2020-2021 school year to the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. There are components to be completed by the Elementary Principal, MS/HS Principal, Business Manager, and Superintendent.

State Budget Address. Governor Noem gave her budget address on Tuesday, 12/7 where she proposed a 6% increase to state aid for education. In her address and subsequent publications has indicated the desire for the increase to go toward teacher and other school staff salaries and wages (acknowledging the impact of a competitive workforce market on auxiliary staff wages). An increase of 6% to the target teacher salary would bring the target to \$55,756.31. The legislature will make the final budget decisions during their upcoming session.

Fiscal Year		Local Tax Revenue	Collected Other Revenues	Miscellaneous Revenues	Calculated Need	State Aid	Total Revenue	Fiscal Year New Revenue
FY23	2023 Half	\$1,441,564						
	2022 Half	\$1,488,701						
		\$2,930,265	\$990,000	\$1,030,410	\$3,928,558	\$8,293	\$4,958,968	-\$256,001

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We do not currently receive any state aid for education and money allocated through the funding formula, does little to help our district unless there is a correlated increase to the general education property tax levy. Please note, the chart above includes a couple major assumptions, specifically property valuation projections and general education tax levy projections.

Round 14 Clean Diesel Application. I submitted an application for round 14 of the clean diesel grant program to replace older school buses. Grant awards will be announced in January. If awarded/accepted, the grant would fund 25% of the purchase price of a new bus and require the disposal of the bus being replaced.

October Breast Cancer Fundraiser. Mrs. Jan Hoffman reported to me that the annual Breast Cancer Awareness volleyball event with Northwestern raised \$4,424.88. This is the 2nd highest annual total since 2011. In total, this event has generated \$32,384.90.

DACOTAH BANK

Cookies & Calendar OPEN HOUSE

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

FRI. December 17

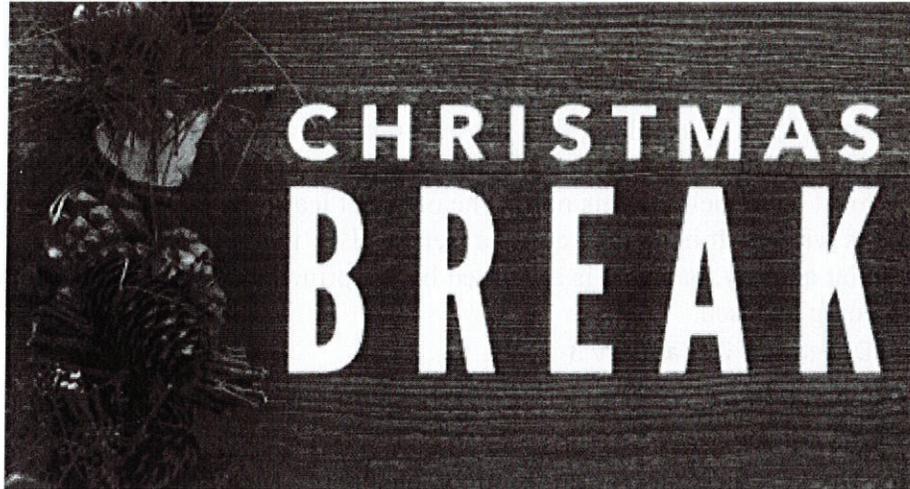
9:00 am - 5:00 pm

7 East US Hwy 12 • (605) 397-2711

DACOTAH BANK
2022 CALENDAR

Here for you!
SANDWICH • BURLINGTON • MOUNTAIN VIEW • PALMYRA

MEMBER FDIC Insurance and Trust not FDIC Insured.



December 22, 2021

Principal's Report

MS/HS Building

Mrs. Sombke

1) Merry Christmas- Almost!

- December 22: Last Day of 1st Semester
- Early Dismissal @ 2:00pm
- Shortened Class Schedule, please see below:

1st 8:30-9:17am

2nd 9:21-10:08am

3rd 10:12-10:59am

1st Lunch 11:03-11:26am

1st 4th 11:03-11:42am

2nd 4th 11:26-12:05pm

2nd Lunch 11:42-12:05pm

5th 12:09-12:42pm

6th 12:46-1:19pm

7th 1:23-2:00pm

Information in the Student Bulletin regarding attending the Elementary Christmas Program:

- **If you plan to go to the Elementary Christmas Program (Wednesday, December 22) you must follow School Board Policy:**
- Students are not allowed to attend regular school activities which are held during the school day unless they are watching a sibling, they are accompanied by a parent, and are not on the ineligibility list. All students meeting the aforementioned criteria and who are planning on attending must have their parents notify the office at least one day in advance. Any violations will result in an unexcused absence. This includes any K-12 classroom or co-curricular activity, unless it is approved by the principal. All work must be completed prior to being excused.
- Christmas Break from December 23-January 3
- School resumes on January 4, 2022
- 2) Dual Credit Registrations**
- Nearing the end of the Dual Credit Registration Window, please see Mrs. Schwan if you or your student has questions
- 3) E-Learning Registrations and Local Registrations**
- Most E-Learning Registrations are now closed, please contact Mrs. Schwan if you have questions regarding adding or dropping a class for 2nd semester, Spring 2022
- December 17th and December 20th are the days for schedule changes other than Dual Credit; please see Mrs. Schwan with questions
- 4) Mrs. Hubsch- Grant Writing Success!**
- Turpen Legacy Grant- more about this grant at January Meeting
- Big Idea: See Below!



2021 BIG Idea Competition
Partners in Business Award Teacher Entry Form
Sponsored by



The BIG Idea Partners in Business Award emphasizes the importance of networking in the business world by recognizing teachers who incorporate BIG Idea and other networking experiences in the classroom.

To be considered for the Partners in Business Award, please complete the following questions.
Up to three teachers will be selected and each will receive a \$100 cash prize each at the BIG Idea Competition Awards Ceremony.

Teacher Name: Becky Hubsch School: Groton Area High School, Groton South Dakota

1. Besides BIG Idea resources, what other resources do you bring into your classroom? Ex. people, software, programs, etc.

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Elementary Principal Report

Brett Schwan

December 13, 2021

Enrollment:

PS-10

JK-16

KG-43

1st-35

2nd-46 (-1)

3rd-47

4th-40 (-2)

5th-40 (-1)

Total: 277

OST Fundraiser: Orders are now ready for pickup at the elementary. Families can call us at the elementary if they have any questions. We were able to profit \$3662.40. We are planning to purchase a great deal of STEM project/programs. We also have a few ideas to upgrade some of our centers for summer OST. Kim and I would like to thank everyone who participated and purchased items.

MAPS Testing: Last week we started our Reading, Math, and Science winter benchmark testing. For the most part everything has been going smoothly. We have had a few glitches with the program and we are not sure if it is the program itself or the iPads. We did not have any issues today, so I am hoping it had something to do with the online program and it was a onetime deal.

School Assembly: On either Monday or Tuesday of next week we will be holding a Christmas Assembly. Students from the high school will be singing to our elementary students, around 30 students will get to silly string the principal, and we will be giving our a few door prizes.

Elementary Christmas Concert: Our elementary concert will be on Wednesday, December 22. Students will be dismissed after the concert with their parents. We will be sending home dismissal sheets this week so we know what each of our students' plans are.

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Groton Area School District 06-6

Capital Outlay Projection by Category

	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027
Facilities, Acquisitions, Construction	\$396,000	\$349,500	\$274,500	\$140,000	\$140,000
Available Funding @ Projected Revenues	-\$384,967	-\$94,040	\$5,288	-\$21,994	\$265,142
Elementary Roofing Replacement (Sections A&C)	\$165,000				
Elementary Landscaping	\$15,000				
Security Camera Additions - South Exterior, WR Room, Storage	\$7,500				
HS - 1957 Hallway Lighting Upgrades	\$8,500				
Replace Fulton Boiler - 1969 HS Addition	\$65,000				
Replace Domestic Hot Water Storage @ Old Gym	\$45,000				
Replace Old Gym Air Handling Units					\$70,000
Replace Doors @ Old Gym Entrance (Interior)					\$27,000
Playground Equipment Upgrades					\$25,000
Replace 1969 Gymnasium Bleachers					\$75,000
Weight Room Equipment Upgrades					\$20,000
Replace 1969 Gymnasium Flooring					\$100,000
Elementary Roofing Replacement (Sections B&D)		\$185,000			
Replace AO Smith Boilers - 1969 HS Addition			\$75,000		
West Side HS Parking Lot Repairs					\$35,000
Crow's Nest Replacement	\$80,000				
Siding/Roofing Custodial Maintenance Garage		\$30,000			
2009 Addition Carpeting			\$29,500		
Replace Elementary Gym Floor			\$75,000		
MS/HS IP Intercom					

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SDHSAA Enrollment- Male Only by ADM 2022-23 and 2023-24 School Years

Rank By Enrollment		Total Males 9-11
1	Sioux Falls Washington High School	768
2	Rapid City Central High School	765
3	Sioux Falls Lincoln High School	733
4	Sioux Falls Jefferson High School	712
5	Rapid City Stevens High School	688
6	Sioux Falls Roosevelt High School	670
7	Harrisburg High School	583
8	Brandon Valley High School	527
9	Aberdeen Central High School	513
10	Watertown High School	479
11	Sturgis Brown High School	373
12	Yankton High School	369
13	Brookings High School	360
14	Mitchell High School	345
15	Huron High School	339
16	Douglas High School	332
17	Pierre T F Riggs High School	324
18	Spearfish High School	303
19	O`Gorman High School	273
20	Tea Area High School	246
21	Lakota Tech High School	211
22	Todd County High School	207
23	Belle Fourche High School	180
24	West Central High School	177
25	Dakota Valley High School	167
26	Sioux Falls Christian High School	151
27	Vermillion High School	150
28	Lennox High School	149
29	Madison High School	134
30	Dell Rapids High School	130
31	Little Wound High School	129
32	Canton High School	127
33	Milbank High School	127
34	Cheyenne-Eagle Butte High School	126
35	Chamberlain High School	113
36	Pine Ridge High School	112
37	Beresford High School	111
38	Custer High School	111
39	Sisseton High School	111
40	Tri-Valley High School	107
41	Hamlin High School	103
42	Flandreau High Sch	97
43	Rapid City Christian High School	91
44	Elk Point Jefferson High School	90

45	Lead-Deadwood High School	90
46	Hot Springs High School	88
47	Winner High School	83
48	Mobridge High School	79
49	St. Francis High Sch	76
50	Wagner High School	75
51	Baltic High School	74
52	Redfield High School	72
53	Groton Area High School	71
54	Red Cloud High School	71
55	Sioux Valley High School	70
56	Deuel High School	69
57	Hill City High School	69
58	McLaughlin High School	67
59	St. Thomas More High Sch	65
60	Tiospa Zina High School	65
61	Parker High School	64
62	Webster Area High School	61
63	Crow Creek High School	58
64	Aberdeen Roncalli High School	57
65	Garretson High School	55
66	Bon Homme High School	54
67	Parkston High School	54
68	Dupree High School	52
69	Elkton-Lake Benton High School	52
70	McCook Central High School	52
71	Miller High School	51
72	White River High School	50
73	Bennett County High School	49
74	Howard High School	49
75	Viborg-Hurley High School	48
76	Ipswich High School	47
77	Britton-Hecla High School	46
78	Stanley County High School	46
79	Platte-Geddes High School	45
80	Wall High School	45
81	Great Plains Luth High School	44
82	Bridgewater-Emery High School	43
83	Clark High School	43
84	Hanson High School	43
85	Chester Area High School	42
86	Gregory High School	42
87	Timber Lake High School	42
88	Colman-Egan High School	41
89	Crazy Horse High School	41
90	Wolsey-Wessington High School	41
91	Florence High School	40
92	Northwestern High School	40

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93	Waverly/South Shore High School	40
94	Kimball High School	39
95	Lyman High School	39
96	Deubrook High School	38
97	Estelline High School	38
98	Philip High School	38
99	Centerville High School	37
100	Wakpala High School	37
101	Warner High School	37
102	Newell High School	36
103	Oelrichs High School	36
104	Alcester-Hudson High School	35
105	Burke High School	35
106	Canistota High School	35
107	Castlewood High School	35
108	Plankinton High School	35
109	Ethan High School	34
110	Lower Brule High School	34
111	New Underwood High School	34
112	Scotland High School	34
113	Andes Central High School	33
114	Irene-Wakonda High School	33
115	Mount Vernon High School	33
116	Aberdeen Christian High School	32
117	De Smet High School	32
118	Gayville-Volin High School	32
119	Arlington High School	31
120	Faith High School	31
121	Faulton High School	31
122	Kadoka Area High School	31
123	Rosholt High School	31
124	Lemmon High School	30
125	Menno High School	30
126	Sully Buttes High School	30
127	Wilmot High School	30
128	Marty High School	29
129	Woonsocket High School	29
130	Avon High School	28
131	Highmore-Harrold High School	28
132	McCrossan High School	28
133	Waubay High School	28
134	Flandreau Indian High School	26
135	Frederick High School	26
136	Freeman High School	26
137	Hitchcock-Tulare High School	26
138	Wessington Springs High School	26
139	Harding County High School	24
140	Marion High School	24

141	McIntosh High School	24
142	Montrose High School	24
143	Gettysburg High School	23
144	Henry High School	23
145	Summit High School	23
146	Armour High School	22
147	Corsica-Stickney High School	22
148	Iroquois High School	22
149	Leola High School *	22
150	Dell Rapids St. Mary High School	21
151	Jones County High School	21
152	Rutland High School	20
153	Willow Lake High School	20
154	Colome High School	19
155	Lake Preston High School	19
156	Sanborn Central High School	19
157	Selby High School	19
158	Wessington Springs High School Cyber School	19
159	Bison High School	18
160	Bowdle High School	18
161	Edgemont High School	18
162	Sioux Falls Lutheran High School	18
163	Freeman Academy High School	17
164	Takini High School	17
165	Tripp-Delmont High School	17
166	White Lake High School	17
167	Eureka High School	16
168	James Valley Chr High School	16
169	Langford Area High School	16
170	Edmunds Central High School	15
171	Herreid High School	15
172	Oldham-Ramona High School	15
173	Tiospaye Topa High School	14
174	Doland High School	12
175	Mitchell Christian High School	12
176	Black Hills Christian Academy High School	11
177	Hoven High School	9
178	Dakota Christian High School	8
179	Sunshine Bible High School	7
180	South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired	6
181	Elk Mountain High School	2

That's Life by Tony Bender

The dragonfly returns

I suppose I was born a mystic. Instead of seeing coincidences, I saw universal connections. Instead of seeing interesting phenomena, I saw signs, messages, the hand of a greater power.

I think you're born a writer, too. Born observers. We see stories and meaning where others don't. Or at least we're better able to define them. We ponder things that may not give others pause. That's not to claim any superpowers; we all have our gifts and interpretations of the things that cross our path.

Something I've wondered is when does one become accountable for one's sins? That question goes back to a summer day in Edgeley, ND, when I was eight. Edgeley was a brief stopping point for my family after we moved from Ashley, ND, before we finally landed in Frederick, SD.

I don't remember which friend lent me his BB gun, but I remember the day with extraordinary clarity. The bright sun, the vivid green of bushes beside a brown brick church, and a beautiful blue dragonfly resting on the greenery. I thoughtlessly took aim at the creature, never expecting in a million years to hit it, but I did. Broke the poor thing in half. Broke something inside of me, too.

I went on to slay a lot of gophers, to hunt deer, pheasants, and waterfowl, to shoot coyotes and skunks without a twinge of guilt because there was a purpose to it—getting rid of pests and predators or stocking the freezer. But the dragonfly? That was unnecessary, and I carried that guilt with me, buried deep to be sure, but it reemerged from time to time.

I told that story to a friend recently and they attempted to assuage my remorse.

"But you were only in second grade!"

"Yeah. But I knew better."

A dragonfly's lifespan is short—one to five weeks—however, compared to a bowhead whale's 200 years, ours is brief, too. Dragonflies have been on earth for 300 million years. We've been here but a blink of an eye.

Last summer, I sat outside writing, drinking in every ray of sunshine, observing the flowers, listening to the birds, and contemplating the cancer battle from which I'd just emerged, feeling lucky, so very lucky. A dragonfly hovered persistently then landed beside me, and ever the mystic, I wondered what it symbolized. I researched it. Wisdom, evolution, new beginnings, hope, and rebirth are among the meanings attributed to dragonflies.

When Dylan and India came home for Thanksgiving they were astonished to see a blue dragonfly boldly tattooed on my right forearm. I'd never imagined, and certainly they hadn't, that I'd get a tattoo. For one thing, I wasn't sure I could sit still long enough. Then there was the idea of living with one for a lifetime. The potential for buyer's remorse. But the older you get the less risk that entails! So that's how the blue dragonfly came to land on my arm, rays of sunshine behind it with the word "evolve" etched permanently in Sanskrit beneath. A constant reminder to do better.

I swear I hadn't thought about that doomed dragonfly—consciously, at least—leading up to the tattoo, but when a friend asked me about my new ink, I shared my story of the senseless killing.

"And now, he's back," she said. Hmm.

I shared a photo of the tattoo on social media, too, because that's what we do these days, isn't it? Well, last week a large, flat package arrived at the office from Laura and Dennis Dockter. I carefully unwrapped it, and there it was, a 12" x 18" watercolor painting of a dragonfly by the noted artist Ric Sprynczynatyk. Spectacular. It gave me shivers.

In a note accompanying the painting, Laura explained that she and Dennis had bought it several years ago, not really knowing why, but, "When I saw your tattoo, I knew why," she wrote. "It was meant for you. Continued health and happiness to you."

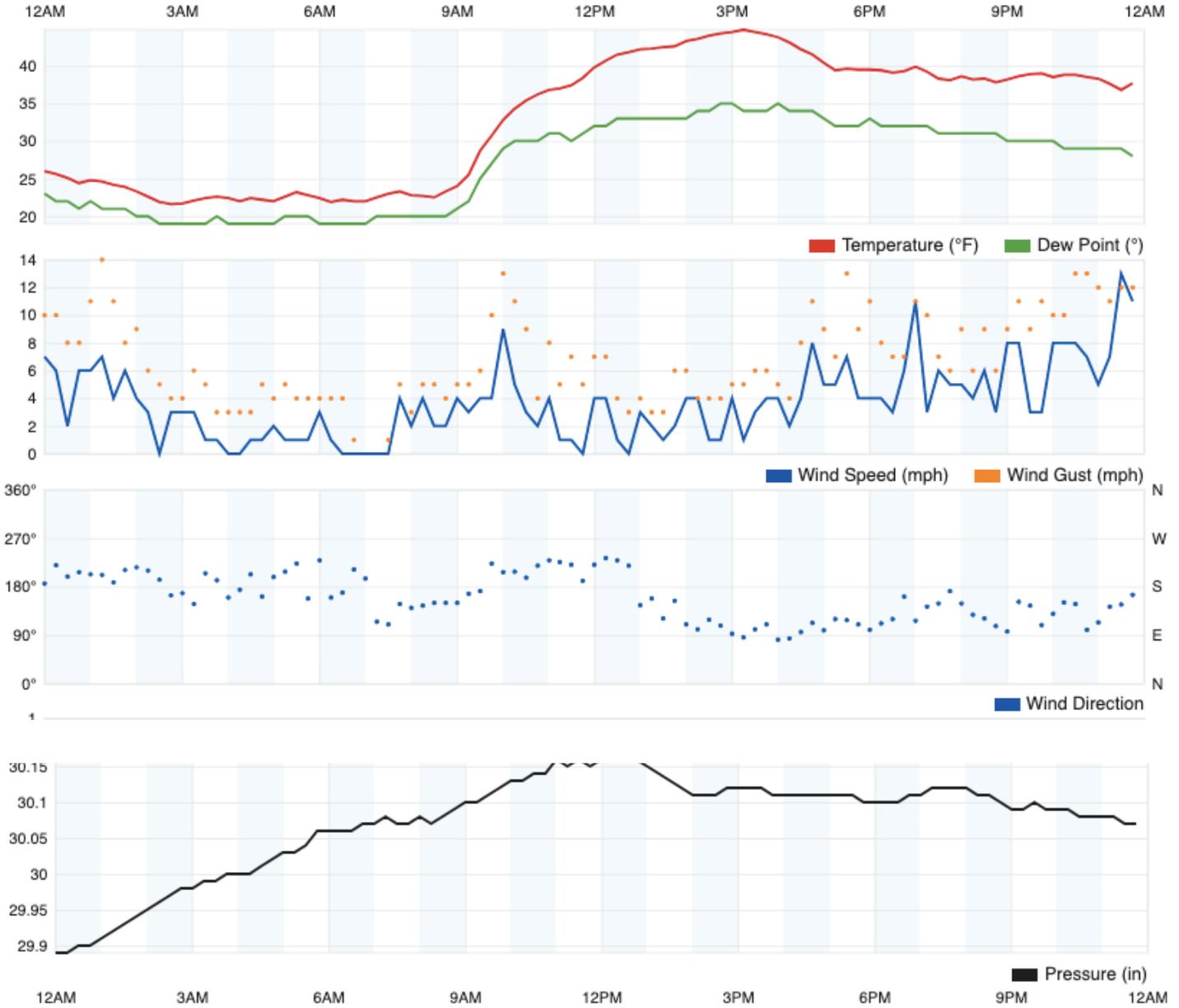
She'd unknowingly written the end of a chapter without knowing the beginning, so here it is, Laura. I owed you the rest of the story. That dragonfly will live on long after I'm gone on some great-grandchild's wall. Laura's note and this column will be on the back of the frame. And when I return, I trust it will be with the lessons that dragonfly taught me.

There's a space on my living room wall where it was meant to be. From there it will symbolize all the positives mystics through the ages have assigned to it, and one more thing: karmic absolution.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Chance Rain/Snow and Breezy	Snow Likely and Windy then Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Sunny
High: 43 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 41 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 26 °F

Impactful Weather Anticipated

December 14, 2021 5:19 AM

Wind Potential Wednesday

What

- Strong northwest winds with gusts of 45 mph to potentially in excess of 58 mph

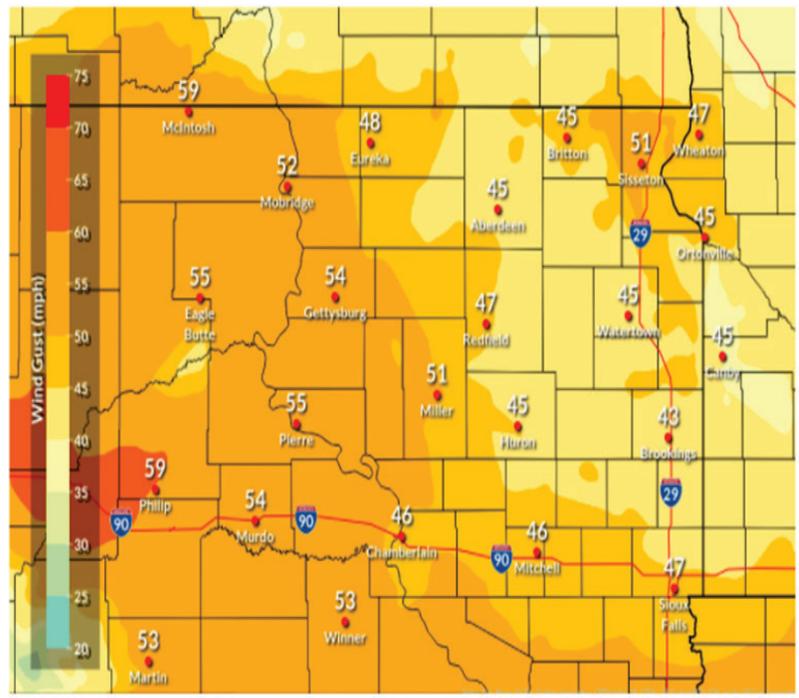
Where

- Central, north central and northeastern SD, and west central MN

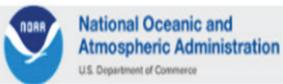
When

- Wednesday afternoon and evening, lessening through early Thursday morning

Forecast Confidence Levels



Maximum Wind Gust Forecast: Wed-Wed Night



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Another mild day is in store today, but a strong system will impact the area Wednesday through Wednesday night. Strong winds, rain changing to snow, and quickly dropping temperatures leading to potentially icy surfaces are the main concerns. Stay tuned for updates, as some snowfall amounts and timing uncertainty remains.

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Impactful Weather Anticipated

December 14, 2021
5:19 AM

Precipitation Potential Wednesday

What

- Rain (a few thunderstorms possible too) transitions to snow (brief mixed precipitation-type possible in-between).
- 0-2" of snow is most likely, with locally higher amounts possible
- Significant visibility reductions possible, especially while & where heavier snow falls

Where

- Uncertainty remains on location of heaviest snowfall amounts. Exact low track will determine this.

When

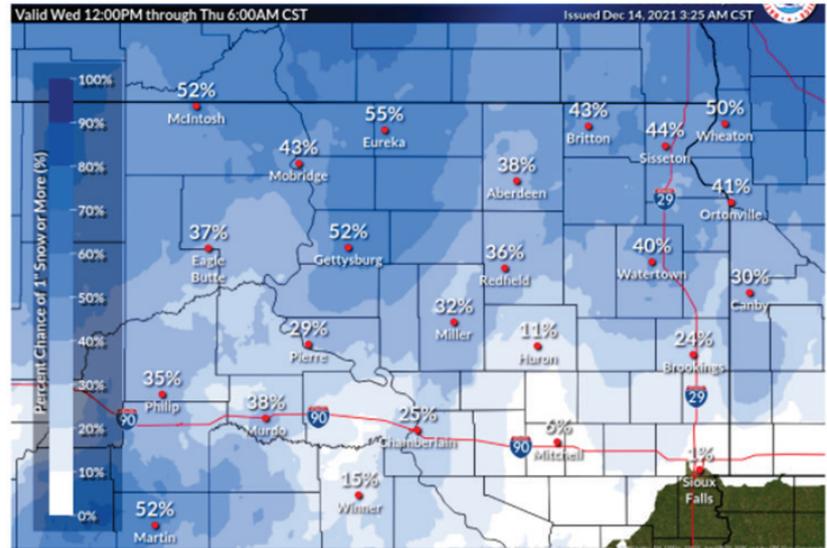
- Rain Wed afternoon, transitions to snow through the afternoon and evening from west to east.

Forecast Confidence Levels

Low

Medium

High



Percent Chance of 1" or More of Snow



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Another mild day is in store today, but a strong system will impact the area Wednesday through Wednesday night. Strong winds, rain changing to snow, and quickly dropping temperatures leading to potentially icy surfaces are the main concerns. Stay tuned for updates, as some snowfall amounts and timing uncertainty remains.

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Today in Weather History

December 14, 1994: Snow accumulated over all of South Dakota on the 14th but was heavy in the central part of the state and at a few places in the northwest. The greatest accumulations were 11 inches at Murdo and 10 inches at the Lake Sharpe project and near Stephan. The storm caused numerous accidents, but no fatalities or injuries were reported. Eight inches of snow fell at McLaughlin and Miller, with 7 inches at Faulkton and McIntosh, 6 inches at Eagle Butte and Timber Lake, and 5 inches at Mobridge, Kennebec, and near Highmore.

December 14, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches fell across most of central, north central, and part of northeast South Dakota during the late evening of the 14th. Strong north winds of 20 to 35 mph created near-blizzard conditions and heavy drifting across the area. Travel was tough if not impossible, with several cars going into the ditch. A two-car accident between Blunt and Pierre left several people injured. Many activities were postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Fort Pierre, Ipswich, Kennebec, Aberdeen, and Pollock; 7 inches at Mobridge; 8 inches at Lake Sharpe, Clark, and Mellette; 9 inches at Roscoe, Gettysburg, and McIntosh; 10 inches at Highmore, Eagle Butte, 22 miles SSW of Keldron, and at West Whitlock; 11 inches at Blunt and Miller; 12 inches at Ree Heights, McLaughlin, and Onida; 13 inches at Highmore; 14 inches at Redfield; 15 inches at Timber Lake; 18 inches at Faulkton; and 20 inches at Hoven.

December 14, 1287: A powerful storm affected the Netherlands and Northern Germany on this day. Called the St. Lucia's flood, which was the day before, this storm broke a dike, flooding much of the land in what is now the Waddenzee and IJsselmeer. A significant percentage of the country's population perished in this disaster and had been rated as one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The death toll from this storm was between 50,000 to 80,000 people. Also, 180 residents of Hickling village, which is 137 miles north-east of London was impacted by this storm. The storm surge rose a foot above the high altar in the church. From British-History.ac.uk, "Hickling was one of the townships that suffered most severely from the tremendous storm of December, 1287, no fewer than nine score persons being drowned there. In the priory the water rose more than a foot above the high altar, and all the canons fled away except two, who stayed behind and managed to save the horses and other property by bringing them up into the dormitory over the vaulted undercroft."

December 14, 1952: Trace of snow or sleet at or near Pensacola, Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Quincy, Carrabelle, Tallahassee, St. Marks, Monticello, Madison, Mayo, Live Oak, Lake City, Glen St. Mary, and Hilliard in Florida. Frozen precipitation occurred before noon at most points, but happened in the afternoon at Mayo and Lake City and near Hilliard. Temperatures were above freezing and snow or sleet melted as it fell.

December 14, 1997: Central Mississippi and western Alabama saw significant snowfall of 4 to 8 inches on this day. In Mississippi, this was one of the heavier snowfalls to occur since 1929. The weight of the snow caused limbs of trees to break, which knocked down power lines.

1924 - The temperature at Helena, MT, plunged 79 degrees in 24 hours, and 88 degrees in 34 hours. The mercury plummeted from 63 above to 25 below zero. At Fairfield MT the temperature plunged 84 degrees in just 12 hours, from 63 at Noon to 21 below zero at midnight. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A powerful storm spread heavy snow from the Southern High Plains to the Middle Mississippi Valley, and produced severe thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley. During the evening a tornado hit West Memphis TN killing six persons and injuring two hundred others. The tornado left 1500 persons homeless, and left all of the residents of Crittendon County without electricity. Kansas City MO was blanketed with 10.8 inches of snow, a 24 hour record for December, and snowfall totals in the Oklahoma panhandle ranged up to 14 inches. Strong winds, gusting to 63 mph at Austin TX, ushered arctic cold into the Great Plains, and caused considerable blowing and drifting of snow. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Blowing snow was reported in western Kansas, as snow and gusty winds plagued the Central Rockies and Central High Plains. Colorado Springs CO reported thirteen inches of snow. Low pressure in Wisconsin brought heavy snow to the Lake Superior snowbelt area, with 22 inches reported at Marquette MI. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

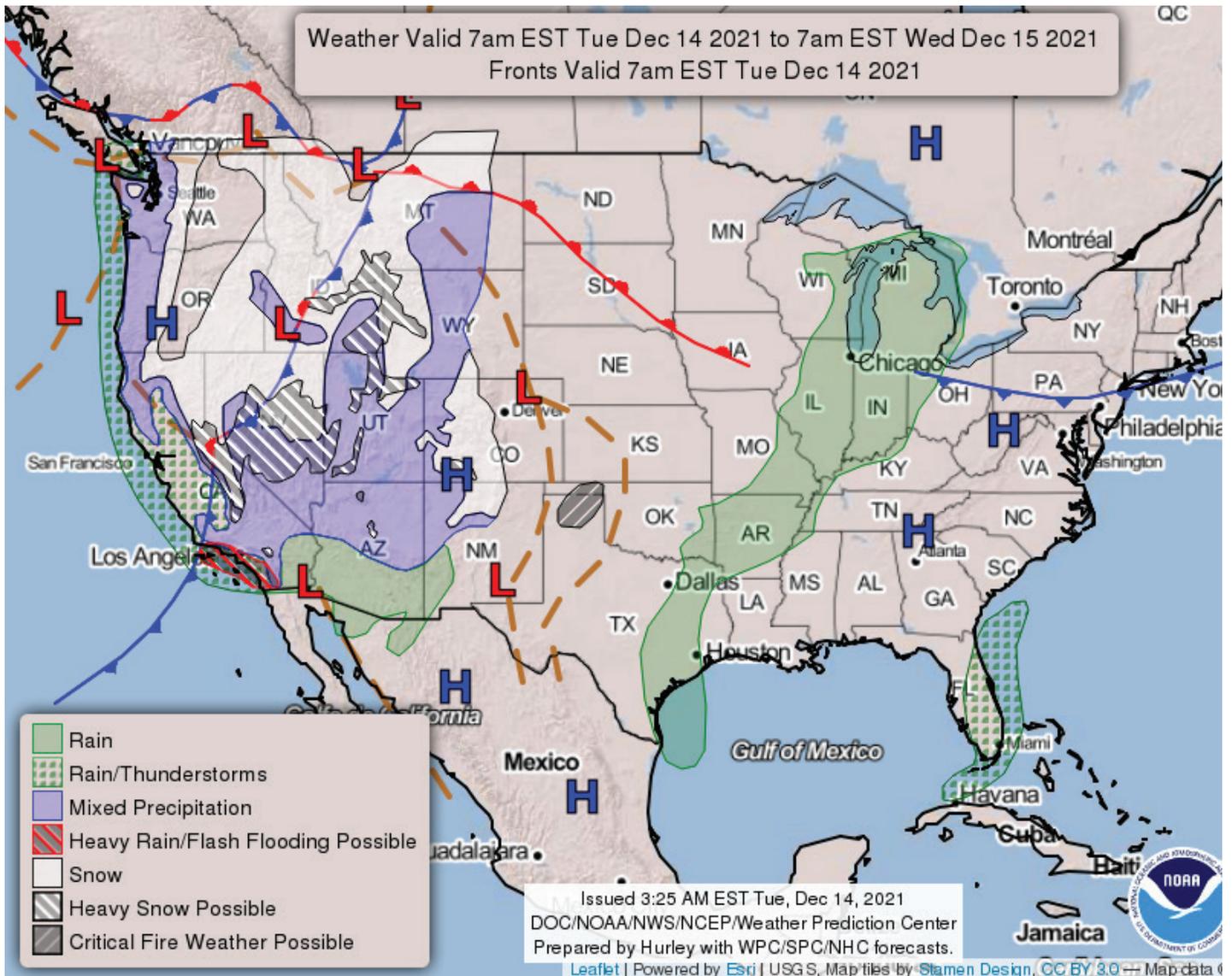
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 44.8 °F at 3:15 PM
Low Temp: 21.6 °F at 2:45 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 1:15 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 55° in 1998
Record Low: -30° in 1917
Average High: 29°F
Average Low: 8°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.27
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11
Average Precip to date: 21.48
Precip Year to Date: 19.97
Sunset Tonight: 4:51:19 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:58 AM



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FACING FEAR WITH FACTS

A bright light on a dark night would frighten most individuals if it was unexpected. How much more frightening would it be if an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and God's glory lit up the area where sheep were quietly sleeping, and shepherds were watching them carefully and constantly to make certain that they were safe.

Sensing the fear of the shepherds, the angel said confidently, "Don't be afraid of this Light!" The angel wanted to calm their pounding hearts. "I came with Good News. News that will bring great joy to everyone, everywhere who is willing to accept this Good News!"

How gracious is our God! The shepherds did what any of us would have done: react with apprehension and fear. Yet, God, in His love and mercy, first gave them His assurance that they were safe and then explained to them what had happened: "A Savior, Christ, who is the Anointed One, the One that you have been waiting for, even the LORD, has been born!"

There is a wonderful lesson here for each of us. Rarely do we get through any day without something unusual – sometimes a tragedy, perhaps a life-threatening or grief-producing event – invading our lives. It is normal and natural to react with fear when the unwelcomed comes.

But, as God said to the shepherds then and as He says to us every day, "Don't be afraid. Good News awaits you. Your Savior is with you. Turn to Him in faith and He will save you!"

Prayer: How thankful we are, Father, to know that Your Son, our Savior, is with us every moment of every day. Calm our fears and bring peace to our hearts through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8-12 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

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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

Key official to testify in Noem-daughter licensing inquiry

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Lawmakers in South Dakota will hear Tuesday from a former state employee at the center of questions over whether Gov. Kristi Noem used her influence to aid her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

Sherry Bren, the longtime director of the state's Appraiser Certification Program, will testify before the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee.

It would be the first time that Bren has spoken in depth in public about a meeting in the governor's mansion last year since The Associated Press first reported on it in September. The Republican governor held the meeting just days after Bren's agency moved to deny Noem's daughter, Kassidy Peters, an upgrade to her appraiser license.

Both Bren and Peters attended the meeting. Peters got another opportunity to pursue her license through an agreement signed the week after the meeting.

Noem has denied wrongdoing, casting her actions as an effort to cut red tape to address a shortage of appraisers certified by the state. The inquiry comes as Noem has positioned herself as a prospect for the GOP presidential ticket in 2024 and shown a willingness to jab at potential rivals.

Bren has been mostly silent. She was pressed to retire after Peters got her license in November 2020, filed an age discrimination lawsuit and accepted a \$200,000 settlement that bars her from disparaging state officials. But her appearance on Tuesday was compelled by subpoena.

The committee's inquiry has been going on for nearly two months.

In October testimony, Noem's secretary of labor, Marcia Hultman, described the meeting as innocuous — mostly a policy discussion aimed at changes to the application process for appraiser licenses. She acknowledged that it was uncommon to have an applicant in such a meeting and said there was a "brief discussion at the end" about a plan to allow Peters to fix problems with her application and try again. Hultman excused any appearance of impropriety by saying that details of the agreement with Peters were in place before that meeting.

Noem had echoed a similar defense to reporters, saying that "the decision was already made on her path forward." She insisted the agreement was not even broached at the meeting and Peters had only given "her personal experiences through the program."

However, when the committee pressed Hultman's department to show them a copy of Peters' agreement, it was revealed that it was not signed until more than a week after the meeting.

Bren also has said she was presented with a letter at the meeting from Peters' supervisor that slammed the agency's decision to deny the license.

Bren helped start the state's Appraiser Certification Program and was its director for nearly three decades. Appraisers describe her as a by-the-books regulator.

"It doesn't matter who you are, she's the same for everyone," said Amy Frink, the vice president of the Professional Appraiser Association of South Dakota, a group that has been critical of changes to the agency since Bren's departure.

But Noem has implied that Bren was getting in the way of changes she wanted to make as the state saw a shortage of appraisers.

Follow Stephen Groves on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/stephengroves>

Miss America turns 100. Will she last another 100 years?

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. (AP) — As Miss America turns 100, a major question remains unanswered: Is she

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still relevant?

The glitzy competition was born from a 1921 Atlantic City beauty contest, just a year after women were given the right to vote, and maintains a complicated presence in an American culture that has since undergone multiple waves of feminism. Participation and viewership has dropped since its 1960s heyday — when the next Miss America is crowned Thursday, her coronation will only be available to stream via NBC's Peacock service, shunted from her primetime broadcast throne.

Faithful Miss America organizers and enthusiasts contend the annual ritual is here to stay and will keep changing with the times. And even though they may not have indeed devised a plan for world peace, many participants say the organization — billed as one of the largest providers of scholarship assistance to young women — has been life-altering, opening doors for them professionally and personally. And they believe others should have the same opportunities.

"I think that people have the wrong idea about what Miss America is all about because it's not just about getting dressed up and being prim and proper and being perfect on stage," said Miss America 2004 Ericka Dunlap, who graduated from college debt-free, founded a public relations firm and became a TV personality.

Fans of Miss America often cheer on their state's contender like they would for a local sports team. Yet some have voiced disappointment about some of the competition's attempts to adapt to contemporary mores and evolve from its regressive beginnings.

"It's in kind of a bind because as it tries to progress, it not only loses its original identity, but becomes less entertaining to the people who like to watch it," said Margot Mifflin, author of "Looking for Miss America: A Pageant's 100-Year Quest to Define Womanhood." Fans, she said, are split over the trajectory of the competition — no longer "pageant." Some want it to be about "beauty and fitness" while others embrace the move toward focusing on leadership, talent and communication skills, she said.

Meanwhile, the competition is still engulfed by calls for greater diversity.

In the late 1930s, 40s and 50s, minority women were excluded by "rule number seven," which stated contestants had to be "of good health and of the white race."

1968 saw a Miss Black America Contest, held to revolt against the lack of diversity, as well as a protest by several hundred women organized by the feminist group New York Radical Women, which called Miss America "an image that oppresses women in every area in which it purports to represent us."

It wasn't until 1984 that the first Black Miss America, Vanessa Williams, was crowned — and she relinquished her title over a nude photo scandal, receiving an apology from the organization only in 2015. At least 11 minority women have won the title in all.

Miss America President and CEO Shantel Krebs, a former South Dakota secretary of state who does not take a salary, contends the Miss America organization is "committed to diversity, equity and inclusion." She said the event has also been at "the center of social issues" over the past 100 years, noting winners have taken on serious modern-day issues during their reigns, from HIV/AIDS awareness to the scourge of opioid abuse. But Mifflin notes the modernization of the competition has happened "well behind the broader culture in terms of women's progress."

It wasn't until 2018 that the judging on physical appearance was eliminated, with the help of former Miss America Gretchen Carlson, who ended up having to step down as board chair. Carlson was part of an all-female leadership team that took over following an email scandal in which male leaders insulted former Miss Americas, denigrating their appearance, intelligence and even their sex lives. While some welcomed the changes as a way to make the event more relevant, many state organizations rebelled against the new leadership team.

"I say in the book that it's always been in dialogue with feminism, but behind feminism," Mifflin said of the Miss America competition. "So it always seems like it's trying to catch up."

Dunlap, the seventh Black Miss America, believes the competition — which she has no problem calling a pageant — needs to become more diverse in order to remain relevant. She noted, for example, there have been no winners of Hispanic origin.

She said more needs to be done to help young women of color get involved at the local level, such as helping them cover the high costs of participating — including developing their talents and buying gowns

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— so they can pursue the same life-changing opportunities.

This year, the nonprofit organization — run by an ardent group of volunteers at the national, state and local levels — announced the top scholarship awarded at the Dec. 16 finale will double to \$100,000. The change was made possible by a donation from Miss America 1996 Shawntel Smith Wuerch and her husband Ryan Wuerch. According to the organization, a total of \$435,500 in scholarship money will be distributed in this year's competition, while more than \$5 million is awarded annually through national, state and local programs.

Dunlap hopes that instead of looking for what she calls an "it girl" who can attract hits on social media, the Miss America organization in the coming years focuses on the promoting the "longevity of the organization." Krebs says organizers are doing just that, noting the number of annual participants increased from about 5,000 to 6,500 after the 2018 changes.

"I just feel like there's mixed messaging on whether or not you can be beautiful and attractive and also still be intelligent. And I just think that's silly to me," Dunlap said. "It's like women can only do one thing, so pick a side. And that's not true."

It's unclear if the decision to move the competition online says more about the fate of broadcast television than Miss America. NBCUniversal Media has been bullish about its streaming service and Krebs insisted the move to streaming was the organization's decision and it had nothing to do with viewership numbers.

In 2019, the Miss America finale on NBC drew 3.6 million viewers, an all-time low. In contrast, the 1954 competition attracted 27 million viewers when there was much less competition for eyeballs.

"If you say you want to be around the next 100 years, we absolutely had the desire to be streamed because that is where our future is," Krebs said, noting how younger people — and keep in mind, Miss America contestants must be between the ages of 17 and 25 — are less likely to have access to broadcast television.

Some fear moving online may spell the downfall of what's often dubbed "the first reality TV show," which started airing live in 1954.

"We have witnessed the demise of a historic event that helped shape Americans' lifetimes," one fan proclaimed on Facebook. Another agreed with Krebs, predicting "the audience we can reach is greater than ever now!"

Yet another fan, still upset the event is no longer in Atlantic City — it moved to a Connecticut casino in 2019 — wrote: "Unfortunately after 100 years it seems to have run its course."

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$148 million

Powerball

10-30-37-53-59, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 2

(ten, thirty, thirty-seven, fifty-three, fifty-nine; Powerball: four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$320 million

With new charges, Sioux Falls man could face death penalty

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls man who could face the death penalty if convicted of killing his infant son pleaded not guilty Monday.

A grand jury last week determined that Dylan Castimore can be charged with first-degree murder in the death of 8-week-old Daxton Castimore. The defendant was originally charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Minnehaha County State's Attorney Daniel Haggar has not decided whether to pursue the death penalty, which became a possibility with the new charge. Should Haggar decline the capital punishment option,

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Castimore would face a mandatory life sentence, KELO-TV reported.

Castimore looked down as the new charges were read on Monday. When asked if he understood the charges, Castimore said, "Yes, your honor," and the judge entered a not guilty plea on his behalf.

An autopsy determined the baby's death was caused by a skull fracture. A contributing factor in the child's death was a lacerated liver. Court documents say the infant had several other injuries, including broken ribs.

The new charges also include aggravated battery of an infant and abuse or cruelty of a minor under the age of seven. Castimore is also accused of being a habitual offender.

Castimore is being held on a \$1 million cash bond.

Union rep: Teachers should not be crawling on ice for money

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A fundraising event that featured teachers on their hands and knees fetching dollar bills between periods of a junior hockey league game in South Dakota should not have happened, the head of the state's teachers union said Monday.

The so-called "Dash For Cash" event Saturday night in Sioux Falls was a competition from which 10 local teachers were selected to shovel up money for school projects they outlined before being selected to participate. They had five minutes to collect as many of the 5,000 one-dollar bills that were spread out on carpet at center ice of the home arena for the Sioux Falls Stampede.

The most money gathered by a teacher was \$616, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

Many critics on social media called the event demeaning. Loren Paul, president of the South Dakota Education Association, said it showed that the state needs to do better for its teachers and students when it comes to funding education.

"While the Dash for the Cash may have been well-intentioned, it only underscores the fact that educators don't have the resources necessary to meet the needs of their students," Paul said. "As a state, we shouldn't be forcing teachers to crawl around on an ice rink to get the money they need to fund their classrooms."

Ryan Knudson, the director of business development and marketing for CU Mortgage Direct, which donated money for the event, and Stampede President Jim Olander did not respond to phone and email messages left Monday by The Associated Press.

Noem offers bill to create moment of silence in schools

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem said Monday she has drafted legislation to create a moment of silence at the beginning of each day in South Dakota public schools, a move she said would restore protections for prayer in the classroom.

A draft of the bill said it will provide students and teachers with a reprieve from the frenzy of daily life and set a tone of decorum conducive to learning. Students and teachers can engage in voluntary prayer, reflection, meditation or other quiet, respectful activity during the minute of silence, the bill states.

"Every student deserves the opportunity to begin their day with a calm, silent moment," Noem said in a statement. "I hope students will take this opportunity to say a quick prayer or reflect on their upcoming day. However they choose to take advantage of this time, it will be beneficial to students and teachers alike."

School employees would not be able to dictate the action to be taken by students or teachers during the moment of silence, and no student may interfere with how other classmates are engaged in the minute.

The bill's draft said the moment of silence should not be construed as a religious exercise.

The bill isn't Noem's first attempt to introduce religion-inspired ideas into public schools.

In 2019, she successfully required the national motto "In God We Trust" be displayed in all public schools, sparking a national debate and drawing criticism from groups like Freedom From Religion Foundation. The Madison, Wisconsin-based foundation argued it would lead to "more onerous things."

South Dakota's legislative session starts Jan. 11.

9 more deaths attributed to COVID-19 in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Nine more people who contracted COVID-19 have died in South Dakota, according to data released Monday by the Department of Health.

The state reported another 335 coronavirus cases based on data from Friday with a total of 7,583 cases currently active in South Dakota. Saturday and Sunday data is included in the department's Tuesday report.

Hospitalizations increased to 273, with 80 patients currently in intensive care and 46 patients on ventilators.

The deaths brought the state's total to 2,407. The fatalities include six men and three women. Two were between the ages of 50-59, three were between the ages of 60-69, one was between the ages of 70-79 and three were 80 years or older.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 609,422 people over the age of 5 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in South Dakota. That's 74% of the state's vaccine-eligible population.

Gasoline truck explodes in northern Haiti; dozens killed

By EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A truck carrying gasoline exploded in northern Haiti, killing more than 40 people and injuring dozens of others, officials and news reports said Tuesday.

The blast occurred late Monday in the city of Cap-Haitien, Prime Minister Ariel Henry said, adding that he was devastated.

No further details were immediately available. Police didn't immediately return calls requesting information.

Le Nouvelliste newspaper reported that dozens have been hospitalized with injuries and that hospitals were seeking supplies.

"We are overwhelmed," a person identified as Dr. Calhil Turenne told the paper.

Dave Larose, a civil engineer who works in Cap-Haitien, told The Associated Press that he was driving when he saw ambulances and a crowd of people gathered along a road around 1 a.m.

He said he observed how some people were using buckets to scoop up gasoline from the truck and the street to take back to their house. The explosion occurred as Haiti struggles with a severe shortage of fuel and spiraling gas prices.

"It's terrible what our country has to go through" Larose said.

Former Prime Minister Claude Joseph also mourned the victims, tweeting, "I share the pain and sorrow of all the people."

Kim Jong Un's decade of rule: Purges, nukes, Trump diplomacy

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Friday marks 10 years since Kim Jong Un, the third generation of his family to rule North Korea, took power after his father's sudden heart attack.

Initially considered inexperienced, Kim quickly showed his ruthless willingness to consolidate his rule by having his powerful uncle and other potential rivals executed or purged. His torrid run of nuclear and missile tests in recent years caused many to fear a second Korean War.

Kim switched gears again and staged landmark nuclear disarmament summits with then-U.S. President Donald Trump, but their diplomacy collapsed because of disputes over U.S.-led sanctions. Now, with the pandemic and sanctions causing deepening problems, Kim has sealed off his country's borders and tried to fix its struggling economy.

As Kim enters his second decade in power, here's a look at key moments in his rule.

HEIR APPARENT

Jan. 8, 1984: Kim Jong Un is born, the third and youngest of Kim Jong Il's sons.

September 2010: State media say Kim Jong Un has been made a four-star general in the first public

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mention of his name.

October 2010: Kim Jong Un makes his public debut at a military parade, standing next to his gaunt-looking father on a balcony. He smiles, claps and waves as goose-stepping soldiers, tanks and missiles move past.

"GREAT SUCCESSOR"

Dec. 17, 2011: Kim Jong Il dies at the age of 69, but the news of his death is not made public for two days.

Dec. 19, 2011: Kim Jong Il's death is announced in a special noon broadcast on state television. Kim Jong Un's name appears first on the list of the National Funeral Committee, and he is called "great successor" by state media.

Dec. 30, 2011: Kim Jong Un is named supreme commander of the North's 1.2 million-strong military, the first top job he's given after his father's death. In the following months, he takes up leadership posts at other key organizations such as the ruling Workers' Party and the National Defense Commission.

PURGES

July 2012: North Korean military chief Ri Yong Ho is dismissed from all high-level posts in what's seen as Kim Jong Un's first major purge.

December 2013: Kim's powerful uncle and former mentor, Jang Song Thaek, is executed for alleged treason, corruption and other charges in what remains the highest-profile such move of Kim's rule.

May 2015: South Korea's spy agency says Kim Jong Un ordered his armed forces minister, Hyon Yong Chol, executed with an anti-aircraft gun the month before for complaining about him and sleeping during a meeting Kim presided over.

February 2017: Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half-brother of Kim Jong Un, is killed at a Malaysian airport after VX nerve agent is smeared on his face. Two Asian women are arrested, but South Korea's spy service accuses North Korea of being behind the attack. The North denies involvement.

NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

December 2012: North Korea says it has put a satellite into orbit in what outsiders call the North's first successful long-range rocket launch. The U.N. views such a launch by North Korea as a banned test of missile technology.

February 2013: North Korea conducts its third nuclear test, the first atomic bomb explosion under Kim's rule.

2016: North Korea carries out two more nuclear tests and its second successful satellite launch.

July 4, 2017: North Korea conducts its first flight test of an intercontinental ballistic missile, which Kim calls the North's "package of gifts" for U.S. Independence Day. North Korea stages two more ICBM launches in 2017.

August 2017: Trump warns that North Korea could "be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen." North Korea later responds by threatening to launch a salvo of missiles toward the U.S. territory of Guam.

September 2017: North Korea performs its sixth and most powerful nuclear test to date, saying it is a hydrogen bomb designed to top an ICBM.

DIPLOMACY

April 2018: Kim Jong Un holds a meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in the third summit between the rival countries since their 1945 division. The two leaders hold two more summit talks.

June 2018: Kim Jong Un and Trump meet in Singapore for the first summit between the leaders of the United States and North Korea since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. Kim vows to work toward achieving complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula without presenting a detailed timetable or roadmap for disarmament.

February 2019: Kim Jong Un meets with Trump in Hanoi, Vietnam, for their second summit. The meeting collapses because of disputes over U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea.

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June 2019: Kim Jong Un meets Trump at the tense Korean border, but their impromptu third meeting produces no major breakthrough.

STRUGGLES

June 2020: North Korea destroys an empty inter-Korean liaison office in its territory in a display of anger over a South Korean civilian leafleting campaign. It's North Korea's most provocative act since it began nuclear diplomacy with Washington and Seoul in 2018.

January 2021: Kim Jong Un admits his economic development plans have failed during the North's first Workers' Party congress in five years. But he also threatens to expand his nuclear arsenal and develop more sophisticated weapons in protest of what he calls U.S. hostility.

April 2021: Kim Jong Un says his country faces its "worst-ever situation" because of the pandemic, persistent sanctions and natural disasters.

October 2021: Kim Jong Un vows to build an "invincible" military during a rare weapons exhibition that includes long-range missiles capable of reaching the U.S. homeland.

Pfizer confirms COVID pill's results, potency versus omicron

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer said Tuesday that its experimental COVID-19 pill appears effective against the omicron variant.

The company also said full results of its 2,250-person study confirmed the pill's promising early results against the virus: The drug reduced combined hospitalizations and deaths by about 89% among high-risk adults when taken shortly after initial COVID-19 symptoms.

Separate laboratory testing shows the drug retains its potency against the omicron variant, the company announced, as many experts had predicted. Pfizer tested the antiviral drug against a man-made version of a key protein that omicron uses to reproduce itself.

The updates come as COVID-19 cases, deaths and hospitalization are all rising again and the U.S. hovers around 800,000 pandemic deaths. The latest surge, driven by the delta variant, is accelerating due to colder weather and more indoor gatherings, even as health officials brace for the impact of the emerging omicron mutant.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to soon rule on whether to authorize Pfizer's pill and a competing pill from Merck, which was submitted to regulators several weeks earlier. If granted, the pills would be the first COVID-19 treatments that Americans could pickup at a pharmacy and take at home.

Pfizer's data could help reassure regulators of its drug's benefit after Merck disclosed smaller-than-expected benefits for its drug in final testing. Late last month, Merck said that its pill reduced hospitalizations and deaths by 30% in high-risk adults.

Both companies initially studied their drugs in unvaccinated adults who face the gravest risks from COVID-19, due to older age or health problems, such as asthma or obesity.

Pfizer is also studying its pill in lower-risk adults — including a subset who are vaccinated — but reported mixed data for that group on Tuesday.

In interim results, Pfizer said its drug failed to meet its main study goal: sustained relief from COVID-19 for four days during or after treatment, as reported by patients. But the drug did achieve a second goal by reducing hospitalizations by about 70% among that group, which included otherwise healthy unvaccinated adults and vaccinated adults with one or more health issues. Less than 1% of patients who got the drug were hospitalized, compared with 2.4% of patients who got a dummy pill.

An independent board of medical experts reviewed the data and recommended Pfizer continue the study to get the full results before proceeding further with regulators.

Across both of Pfizer's studies, adults taking the company's drug had a 10-fold decrease in virus levels compared with those on placebo.

The prospect of new pills to fight COVID-19 can't come soon enough for communities in the Northeast

and Midwest, where many hospitals are once again being overloaded by incoming virus cases.

Both the Merck and Pfizer pills are expected to perform well against omicron because they don't target the coronavirus' spike protein, which contains most of the new variant's mutations.

The U.S. government has agreed to purchase enough of Pfizer's drug to treat 10 million people and enough of Merck's to treat 3 million, pending FDA authorization.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDAAwriter

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

Parents of suspect in Michigan school shooting due in court

ROCHESTER HILLS, Mich. (AP) — The parents of a Michigan teen charged with killing four students at Oxford High School were scheduled to return to court Tuesday on charges of involuntary manslaughter.

A probable cause conference was scheduled in Rochester Hills District Court for James and Jennifer Crumbley.

Police said the Oxford, Michigan, couple was found Dec. 4 hiding in a commercial building in Detroit after warrants were issued for their arrests. They're jailed on bond of \$500,000 apiece.

Probable cause conferences typically are procedural and involve discussions between defense attorneys, prosecutors and a judge on bond and other matters.

Their son, Ethan Crumbley, is charged as an adult with murder, terrorism and other crimes.

His probable cause conference was adjourned from Monday to Jan. 7 to allow his court-appointed lawyer to review evidence including witness statements from the Nov. 30 shooting that also left six other students and a teacher wounded.

James and Jennifer Crumbley are accused of failing to intervene on the day of the tragedy despite being confronted with a drawing and chilling message — "blood everywhere" — that was found at the boy's desk.

The Crumbleys committed "egregious" acts, from buying a gun on Black Friday and making it available to Ethan Crumbley to resisting his removal from school when they were summoned a few hours before the shooting, Oakland County prosecutor Karen McDonald has said.

They entered not guilty pleas to each of the four involuntary manslaughter counts against them at their arraignment.

They were captured in a commercial building that housed artwork. The Crumbleys' attorney, Shannon Smith, had said the day before that the pair had left town earlier in the week "for their own safety" and would be returning to Oxford to face charges.

Detroit Police Chief James White has said the couple "were aided in getting into the building" and that a person who helped them may also face charges.

Oxford High School, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of Detroit, has been closed since the shooting. Students on the school's sports teams began returning Monday to competition.

The district says it has consulted with mental health experts and law enforcement officials on the return of athletics, and the recommendation was to give students and the community opportunities to interact with their peers.

Other schools in the district were closed Tuesday out of "an abundance of caution," the district said, after a threat was directed its middle school on social media. Online threats against other Michigan schools following the shooting at Oxford High have led to school closings elsewhere and charges.

The Oxford district also will hold its first school board meeting Tuesday evening since the shooting.

Potter trial jurors see differences between gun, Taser

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Prosecutors in the manslaughter trial of a Minnesota police officer put the differ-

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ences between her handgun and her Taser on display for jurors, seeking to raise questions about how an experienced officer could confuse the two weapons in the shooting death of Daunte Wright.

Wright, 20, was killed April 11 after being pulled over in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center for having expired license plate tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. Kim Potter, 49, is charged with manslaughter.

Potter, a 26-year police veteran who resigned two days later, was trying to stop Wright after he pulled away and got back in his car as officers tried to arrest him on a warrant for a weapons charge. Potter is white and Wright was Black. His death, which came while Derek Chauvin was on trial in nearby Minneapolis in George Floyd's death, set off several nights of angry protests in Brooklyn Center.

The defense has called the shooting a horrific mistake, but has also asserted that Potter would have been within her rights to use deadly force on Wright because he might have dragged another officer, then-Sgt. Mychal Johnson, with his car.

Sam McGinnis, a senior special agent with the state's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, testified Monday that Potter's duty belt had holsters that require an officer to take deliberate actions to release the weapons. The gun holster has a snap, while the Taser holster has a lever. The handgun, which is black, is also twice as heavy as the yellow Taser, McGinnis said.

The Taser and gun have different triggers, grips and safety mechanisms, McGinnis testified. The Taser also has a laser and LED lights that display before it is fired, which he demonstrated for the jury, while the handgun does not, he said.

McGinnis also testified that Potter didn't perform a function test on her Taser at the start of her shift. Although the Brooklyn Center Police Department's policy is that officers are supposed to do that, McGinnis acknowledged under cross-examination that he didn't check to see how widely the department's officers complied.

Prosecutors asked to have the jurors handle a Taser, but Judge Regina Chu didn't allow it after Potter's attorneys objected. Chu said jurors can do so during deliberations if they want.

Earlier Monday, Dr. Lorren Jackson, an assistant Hennepin County medical examiner, testified that Potter's bullet caused injuries to Wright's heart and lungs and those caused his death. He said one can survive such injuries for only "seconds to minutes."

After Wright was shot, his car drove away and collided seconds later with an oncoming car. Any injuries from the crash were insignificant in terms of what caused Wright's death, Jackson said.

Some officers testified last week that they weren't able to immediately approach Wright's car after it crashed because they weren't sure it was safe to do so. Prosecutors criticized Potter for not immediately radioing in what happened at the traffic stop.

Jackson testified that Wright had some cannabinoids, or THC and its metabolites, in his blood from smoking marijuana, but that they didn't factor in his cause of death. He said the level of THC metabolites in Wright's blood was "on the high end" of numbers he sees, but was still within a normal range for people who use marijuana.

Jurors were shown graphic images of Wright's body at the scene, as the assistant medical examiner found the body on the ground, with some medical equipment still attached from lifesaving efforts, and some dried blood from the gunshot wound.

They also saw autopsy photos, which Chu limited after Potter's attorneys objected earlier in the trial. Wright's mother, who has been present for much of the testimony, was not in court as the autopsy photos were shown.

Testimony was scheduled to resume Tuesday and the state is expected to rest its case midweek.

Separately, prosecutors filed two motions Monday, including one designed to limit the opinion of witnesses who are not testifying as experts. That came after Johnson last week testified that Potter's actions were authorized under state law. Johnson was not testifying as an expert on the police use of force.

Prosecutors also asked Chu for permission to question police officers about union membership. They wrote that Potter had roles in the union, including as president, that gave her an elevated level of respect

among her coworkers. They want to ask officers about it so jurors can evaluate any potential bias toward Potter.

The case is being heard by a mostly white jury.

State sentencing guidelines call for just over seven years in prison upon conviction of first-degree manslaughter and four years for second-degree, though prosecutors have said they plan to push for longer sentences.

Associated Press writers Mohamed Ibrahim in Minneapolis and Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed to this report.

Find the AP's full coverage of the Daunte Wright case: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-daunte-wright>

Indonesia lifts tsunami alert after powerful undersea quake

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia lifted a tsunami alert Tuesday following a magnitude 7.3 undersea earthquake that struck off Flores Island, triggering panic in a region prone to fatal quakes but apparently causing no major damage or casualties.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the quake hit at a depth of 18.5 kilometers (11.5 miles) under the sea, and was located 112 kilometers (74 miles) north of the town of Maumere, the second-largest on the island in East Nusa Tenggara province with a population of 85,000.

After an initial tsunami alert, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii and later Indonesia's meteorological agency lifted the warning hours after the quake.

National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said residents in East Flores district felt the earthquake strongly. Footage showed people running away from buildings that shook from the impact.

One person was reported injured in East Nusa Tenggara province.

The shocks were felt in 14 districts and cities across the provinces of East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi.

The shocks were also felt in Makassar city and the Selayar Islands area in South Sulawesi province, across the Flores Sea. The disaster mitigation agency reported hundreds of buildings, including houses, schools and places of worships, were damaged in the Selayar Islands.

Muhari said that based on sea level observations, minor tsunamis of 7 centimeters (2.8 inches) were detected in Marapokot and Reo areas.

Dwikorita Karnawati, head of Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysical Agency, said people along the coastlines on the northern side of Flores should be aware of further quakes and a potential tsunami.

"The earlier earthquake no longer has a tsunami potential. But it is very possible there'll be aftershocks, hopefully not stronger than before," Karnawati said.

The chief of Flores Timur district, Anton Hayon, said no damage was reported.

"We asked people in the coastal areas to get away from the beach lines, especially in the northern side ... as there was a big tsunami there back in 1972," Hayon said.

He added that residents had joined a tsunami drill before and they know what to do.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of 270 million people, is frequently struck by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis because of its location on the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines that arcs the Pacific.

The last major earthquake was in January, a magnitude 6.2 that killed at least 105 people and injured nearly 6,500 in West Sulawesi province.

Pfizer jabs protect 70% against hospitalization from omicron

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

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JOHANNESBURG (AP) — A two-dose Pfizer/BioNTech vaccination provides just 33% protection against infection by the omicron variant of the coronavirus, but 70% protection against hospitalization, according to a large-scale analysis in South Africa released Tuesday.

The first large-scale analysis of vaccine effectiveness in the region where the new variant was discovered appears to support early indications that omicron is more easily transmissible and that the Pfizer shot isn't as effective in protecting against infection as it was against the delta variant.

The analysis was based on more than 211,000 positive COVID-19 test results, 41% from adults who had received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. About 78,000 of these positive COVID-19 test results between Nov. 15 and Dec. 7 were attributed to omicron infections. The study was carried out by Discovery Health, South Africa's largest private health insurer, and the South African Medical Research Council.

The study has been carried out in the weeks since omicron was first announced in November by scientists in South Africa and Botswana. The researchers emphasized that its findings are preliminary and not peer reviewed.

The data are gathered from the first three weeks of South Africa's omicron-driven wave and may change as time passes. South Africa is the first country to experience a surge in COVID-19 driven by the omicron variant.

South Africa has experienced rapid community spread — concentrated in its most populous province, Gauteng — dominated by the omicron variant.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in South Africa has risen over the past two weeks from 8.07 new cases per 100,000 people on Nov. 29 to 34.37 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 13, according to Johns Hopkins University. The death rate hasn't increased during that same period.

"Superb genetic surveillance by the Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa identified that omicron infection accounts for over 90% of new infections in South Africa, and has displaced the formerly dominant delta variant," Discovery Health chief executive Dr. Ryan Noach said.

"The omicron-driven fourth wave has a significantly steeper trajectory of new infections relative to prior waves. National data show an exponential increase in both new infections and test positivity rates during the first three weeks of this wave, indicating a highly transmissible variant with rapid community spread of infection," Noach said.

The result shows that vaccinated individuals who received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine have 33% protection against infection from omicron, relative to those who were unvaccinated in the first weeks of South Africa's current omicron-driven wave. This represents a significant drop from the 80% protection against infection afforded during the earlier period, probably on the basis of lower antibody susceptibility, following the extensive spike protein mutations in the omicron variant.

Encouragingly though, the result shows that these same vaccinated individuals who received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine have 70% protection against hospital admission in this same time period. This protection against hospital admission is reduced from the highs of 93% in South Africa's delta-driven variant.

The study shows that the protection against hospital admission is maintained across all ages, in people from 18 to 79 years old, with slightly lower levels of protection for older people, with 67% in people age 60 to 69 and 60% for people age 70 to 79. Protection against admission is also consistent across a range of chronic illnesses including diabetes, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, and other cardiovascular diseases.

The study also found:

1. Omicron poses a higher risk of reinfection. For individuals who have previously had COVID-19, the risk of reinfection with omicron is significantly higher than that of earlier variants.
2. Risk of hospitalization from omicron is lower. Hospital admissions among adults diagnosed with COVID-19 attributed to omicron is 29% lower compared to the COVID-19 wave that South Africa experienced in mid-2020, after adjusting for vaccination status.

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

Tornado-slammed parts of Kentucky face long recovery

By BRUCE SCHREINER and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

MAYFIELD, Ky. (AP) — Workers, volunteers and members of the National Guard fanned out in areas of Kentucky slammed by a series of tornadoes to begin the long process of recovery, including replacing thousands of damaged utility poles, delivering bottles of drinking water and continuing to search for the dead.

The tornado outbreak Friday that killed at least 88 people in five states — 74 of them in Kentucky — cut a path of devastation that stretched from Arkansas, where a nursing home was destroyed, to Illinois, where an Amazon distribution center was heavily damaged.

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear said the death toll could grow as authorities continued to work around debris that slowed recovery efforts. Nearly 450 National Guard members have been mobilized in the state, and 95 of them are searching for those presumed dead.

“With this amount of damage and rubble, it may be a week or even more before we have a final count on the number of lost lives,” the governor said.

Kentucky authorities said the sheer level of destruction was hindering their ability to tally the damage. Still, efforts turned to repairing the power grid, sheltering those whose homes were destroyed and delivering supplies.

Across the state, about 26,000 homes and businesses were without electricity, according to power outage. us, including nearly all of those in Mayfield. More than 10,000 homes and businesses had no water as of Monday, and another 17,000 are under boil-water advisories, Kentucky Emergency Management Director Michael Dossett told reporters.

A fund set up by the state collected \$6 million in donations, according to the governor. Kentucky First Lady Brittainy Beshear launched a Christmas toy drive for children affected by the storm. She is asking for unwrapped toys, books, and gift cards of \$25 that will be distributed to families in need.

State and local officials said it could take years for some of the hardest-hit areas to fully recover.

“This again is not going to be a week or a month operation, folks. This will go on for years to come. This is a massive event,” Dossett said.

Five twisters hit Kentucky in all, including one with an extraordinarily long path of about 200 miles (320 kilometers), authorities said.

In addition to the deaths in Kentucky, the tornadoes also killed at least six people in Illinois, where the Amazon distribution center in Edwardsville was hit; four in Tennessee; two in Arkansas, where the nursing home was destroyed and the governor said workers shielded residents with their own bodies; and two in Missouri.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced Monday that it has opened an investigation into the collapse of the Amazon warehouse in Illinois.

Mayfield, home to 10,000, suffered some of the worst damage. Debris from destroyed buildings and shredded trees covered the ground in the city. Twisted sheet metal, downed power lines and wrecked vehicles lined the streets. Windows were blown out and roofs torn off the buildings that were still standing.

Not far from Mayfield, a church serving as a shelter in Wingo said it expected to host more than 100 people Monday night.

Glynda Glover, 82, said she had no idea how long she would stay at the Wingo shelter: Her apartment is uninhabitable since the wind blew out the windows and covered her bed in glass and asphalt.

“I’ll stay here until we get back to whatever normal is,” she said, “and I don’t know what normal is anymore.”

On the outskirts of Dawson Springs, another town devastated by the storms, homes were reduced to rubble and trees toppled, littering the landscape for a span of at least a mile. Jack Whitfield Jr., the Hopkins County judge-executive, estimated that more than 60% of the town, including hundreds of homes, was “beyond repair.”

"A full recovering is going to take years," he said.

Schreiner reported from Dawson Springs, Kentucky. Associated Press writer Rebecca Reynolds in Louisville, Kentucky, contributed to this report.

Europe, US frustrated with Iranian stance in nuclear talks

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — European diplomats are expressing frustration with Iran's stance in talks aimed at salvaging its tattered 2015 nuclear deal, saying they are wasting "precious time" dealing with new Iranian demands and that "time is running out." U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday diplomacy remains the best option but that Washington is engaging with partners on alternatives.

Talks in Vienna between the remaining signatories to the 2015 agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, resumed last week in Vienna.

Diplomats from Britain, France and Germany had urged Tehran to come back with "realistic proposals" after the Iranian delegation — representing the country's new hard-line government — previously made numerous demands that other participants deemed unacceptable.

Senior diplomats from the three European powers made clear on Monday night that things have not improved although "all delegations have pressed Iran to be reasonable." Russia and China also are part of the agreement with Iran.

The United States has participated indirectly in the ongoing talks because it withdrew from the accord in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden has signaled that he wants to rejoin the deal.

"As of this moment, we still have not been able to get down to real negotiations," the European diplomats said. "We are losing precious time dealing with new Iranian positions inconsistent with the JCPOA or that go beyond it."

They said the situation is frustrating because the outline of a "comprehensive and fair agreement" that removes all sanctions related to the nuclear deal while addressing nonproliferation concerns had been visible last summer.

"Time is running out," they warned. "Without swift progress, in light of Iran's fast-forwarding of its nuclear program, the JCPOA will very soon become an empty shell."

The accord, sealed in Vienna in 2015, was meant to rein in Iran's nuclear program in return for loosened economic sanctions.

Following the U.S. decision to withdraw and reimpose sanctions on Iran, Tehran has ramped up its nuclear program again by enriching uranium beyond the thresholds allowed in the agreement. Iran has also restricted monitors from the U.N. atomic watchdog from accessing its nuclear facilities, raising concerns about what the country is doing out of view.

Speaking to reporters in Jakarta, Blinken pointed to the frustration expressed by the European powers.

"We continue at this hour, on this day to pursue diplomacy because it remains at this moment the best option, but we are actively engaging with allies and partners on alternatives," he said.

AP's Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Moscow's rocky relationship with NATO alliance

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian military buildup near Ukraine has raised fears in Kyiv and the West that Moscow might invade its neighbor.

The tensions over Ukraine come amid a new low in relations between Russia and NATO, which once were so warm that President Vladimir Putin even floated the prospect of his country joining the military alliance.

A look at Russia-NATO ties:

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COLD WAR & COMMUNISM'S COLLAPSE

For decades throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies in Central and Eastern Europe were locked in a tense standoff with NATO.

That confrontation eased in the 1980s when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev moved to reform the Soviet Union and encouraged democratic reforms in East bloc countries. Gorbachev didn't try to avert the collapse of communist regimes in those allies, and he quickly agreed to the reunification of East and West Germany after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall.

During the talks on German reunification, Gorbachev received Western promises that NATO wouldn't expand eastward, but he never documented those verbal pledges.

Busy with political and economic crises that followed the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian President Boris Yeltsin paid little attention when Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999.

That same year, NATO's air campaign against what is now Serbia, a Russian ally, marked the first major rift between Moscow and the military alliance since the USSR collapsed.

PUTIN ENTERS WITH A BRIEF THAW

After Putin succeeded Yeltsin in 2000, he moved quickly to bolster relations with the West, even testing the grounds for Russia to possibly join NATO.

Lord George Robertson, who was NATO's secretary-general in 1999-2004, recently recalled how Putin asked him when the alliance was going to invite Russia and how he was offended when Robertson replied that Moscow would have to apply for membership, just like any other candidate.

Putin later said NATO was unwilling to embrace Russia because the West feared its power and independent stance.

While exploring possible NATO membership, Putin also moved to forge closer political and security ties with Washington and its allies.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Putin was the first foreign leader to call then-U.S. President George W. Bush, offering assistance. He quickly welcomed the U.S. military deployment to bases in former Soviet republics in Central Asia for the war in Afghanistan. In another goodwill gesture, Putin moved to shut Soviet-era bases in Cuba and Vietnam.

Even though Moscow's NATO bid never materialized, Russia and the alliance agreed in 2002 to establish a council to coordinate policies and cooperate on fighting terrorism and other issues.

A CHILL RETURNS

Russia-NATO ties began to worsen in 2002 after Washington opted out of a Cold-War-era treaty banning defenses against ballistic missiles, a move Moscow saw as a potential threat to its nuclear deterrent.

The U.S. war in Iraq in 2003 drew strong criticism from Moscow and further strained relations. Russia grumbled further when Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004.

Tensions between the West and Russia mounted in 2004 over the Orange Revolution protests in Ukraine that forced the cancellation of a fraud-tinged election victory of a Kremlin-backed presidential candidate. The Kremlin viewed those protests and the earlier ouster of an unpopular leader in the former Soviet republic of Georgia as Western-inspired meddling in what it considered Russia's backyard.

In a watershed speech at a security conference in Munich, Germany, in 2007, Putin sharply criticized U.S. moves around the world, saying Washington "has overstepped its national borders in every way," and called NATO's eastward expansion "a serious provocation."

RUSSIA-GEORGIA WAR

Russia complained vociferously when NATO promised membership to Ukraine and Georgia at a summit in Bucharest, Romania, in April 2008, seeing it as a blow to its vital security interests.

Four months later, Russia routed Georgia in a five-day war that erupted when the South Caucasus nation used force to try to reclaim control over the Moscow-backed separatist province of South Ossetia.

Russia quickly recognized South Ossetia and another Georgian rebel province, Abkhazia, as independent nations and bolstered its military foothold there.

UKRAINIAN CONFLICT BRINGS MOVES AND COUNTERMOVES

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In 2014, Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich was driven from power by mass demonstrations that broke out when he decided to ditch an agreement with the European Union, in favor of closer ties with Moscow.

Russia responded by annexing Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and backing separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland, known as the Donbas. The conflict, now in its eighth year, has killed over 14,000 people, and efforts to seek a political settlement have failed. Moscow denies any involvement, saying any Russians involved in the fighting are volunteers joining the separatists.

The U.S. and its allies then slapped Moscow with sanctions, and NATO halted all practical cooperation with Moscow, bolstering its forces near Russia. The Kremlin denounced those deployments and drills near its borders as a security threat.

In October, Russia suspended its mission at NATO and ordered the closure of the alliance's office in Moscow after NATO withdrew the accreditation of eight Russian officials to its Brussels headquarters over their alleged ties to Russian intelligence.

Tensions soared last month amid the Russian troop buildup near Ukraine. Putin has denied planning such an attack but sought a Western pledge that NATO wouldn't incorporate Ukraine into the alliance or deploy its forces there — an expansion he described as a "red line" for Moscow.

In a video call last week, U.S. President Joe Biden warned Putin of "severe consequences" if Russia invades Ukraine, but promised to hold consultations to address Russian concerns.

NEXT STEPS FOR NATO, RUSSIA

NATO's credibility hinges on its common defense guarantee, known as Article 5, under which an attack on one member is considered an attack on them all, and its commitment to offer membership to any European country that can contribute to security in Europe and North America. But both Ukraine and Georgia have unresolved conflicts on their territories, and bringing them in now would oblige all 30 member countries to spring to their defense militarily.

Russia wants the West to make a legal pledge not to deploy forces and weapons to Ukraine, and the Russian Foreign Ministry demanded last week that NATO rescind its 2008 pledge to accept Ukraine and Georgia as members.

The U.S. and other NATO allies rejected Russia's demands. "NATO's relationship with Ukraine is going to be decided by the 30 NATO allies and Ukraine, no one else," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last week.

Putin countered NATO's argument by saying that while Ukraine is free to decide its security arrangements, those shouldn't threaten Russia.

"Every country certainly has the right to choose the most acceptable way of ensuring its security, but it must be done in a way that doesn't infringe on the interests and undermine security of other countries, in this case Russia," Putin said. "Security must be global and equally cover everyone."

Associated Press writer Lorne Cook in Brussels contributed.

McConnell, Spears, Osaka: A look at 2021's notable quotes

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — A line from a speech given from the U.S. Senate floor before rioters broke into the Capitol on Jan. 6 tops a Yale Law School librarian's list of the most notable quotes of 2021.

Sen. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was urging fellow Republicans to abandon their effort to overrule the election victory of President Joe Biden when he said: "The voters, the courts, and the states have all spoken."

Moments later, the insurrection began, forcing the Capitol's evacuation.

Fred Shapiro, an associate director at the library, assembles a list of noteworthy quotes each year. He said he picks quotes that are important or revealing of the spirit of the times, not because they are necessarily eloquent or admirable.

The list is a supplement to The New Yale Book of Quotations, which was edited by Shapiro and published

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by Yale University Press.

THE LIST

1. "The voters, the courts, and the states have all spoken." — U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, remarks on Senate floor, Jan. 6.
2. "The likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely." — President Joe Biden, televised address, July 8.
3. "We say no more 'blah blah blah,' no more exploitation of people and nature and the planet." — activist Greta Thunberg, remarks to climate protesters, Edinburgh, Scotland, Nov. 1.
4. "When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?" — poet Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb" inauguration poem, Jan. 20.
5. "This conservatorship is abusive." — Britney Spears, statement to court, Los Angeles, June 23.
6. "I communicated that I wanted to skip press conferences at Roland Garros to exercise self-care and preservation of my mental health." — tennis player Naomi Osaka, Time Magazine, July 19/26 issue.
7. "In those months when I was pregnant, all around the same time, so we have in tandem the conversation of, he won't be given security, he's not going to be given a title, and also concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born." — Duchess Megan Markle, remarks about her son Archie, "Oprah with Megan and Harry" CBS interview, March 7.
8. "My name is Cleo." — Cleo Smith, 4, in response to a policeman upon her rescue from kidnapping, Carnarvon, Australia, Nov. 3.
9. "Presidents are not kings." — Judge Tanya Chutkan, opinion in case of Trump v. Thompson, Nov. 9.
10. "I am here today because I believe Facebook's products harm children, stoke division, and weaken our democracy." — whistleblower Frances Haugen, testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee Sub-Committee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, Oct. 5.

In the ruins of Mayfield, a search for hope in what's saved

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

WINGO, Ky. (AP) — She arrived at the shelter sobbing. Her house was gone, along with everything in it. On the phone, Victoria Byerly-Zuck begged her neighbors to search the wreckage for the one thing she could not bear to lose.

It was a plexiglass box, about the size of a medicine cabinet, and inside was all she has left of her infant son who died four years ago: his cremated ashes, his photos, the first and only outfit he ever wore.

The 35-year-old was surrounded at this makeshift shelter by others who lost everything when a deadly tornado tore apart their small town of Mayfield. Their downtown was demolished. Hundreds of houses were reduced to rubble. They lost cars, wallets, clothes, Christmas presents, all their furniture, photos and priceless family heirlooms.

More than 100 survivors are here, at a church in the nearby town of Wingo, population 600, that opened its doors in the hours after the tornado touched down and now no one knows how long it will have to remain open. One 82-year-old widow with no home to go to asked volunteers how long she could stay, and they told her as long as she needed to.

Byerly-Zuck's 3-year-old son spent a day trying to climb into any car that came and went from this shelter. "He wants to go home," she said. He has autism and is nonverbal. She doesn't know how to make him understand they don't have one anymore.

They'd been alone at their rented house in downtown Mayfield when the storm roared in. She piled pillows in the bathtub and laid him on top of them. As the windows burst, she grabbed the essentials for her son: a bag of diapers, some wipes, a few changes of clothes, a gallon of milk. It did not occur to her that those hastily selected items would be all they'd have left.

She got back to the bathroom and closed the door just as a tree uprooted and fell into the house, feet from where they covered. She climbed onto the edge of the tub, trying to balance her body to shield her

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son without crushing him beneath her.

She prayed to God to save him: "Please let us make it through this. I don't know care about anything else. Everything else is replaceable, but he is not replaceable."

She'd buried a baby before, and all she could think was that she could not do it again. In 2017, she was pregnant, learned she was carrying a boy and picked a name. The very next day, her water broke and the doctors couldn't save him. He was born premature at 22 weeks, and his lungs weren't developed. He gasped for breath once and died moments later. She lives in that moment every day in her mind.

"I can't live through it again. I really can't. I just got my one son now," she said.

As he lay in the bathtub while the storm passed, she realized they were trapped. The fallen tree and debris had blocked the bathroom door. Crying and choking, she couldn't scream for help. She smashed a hole through the drywall, and turned the flashlight on and off to signal that someone was inside. The National Guard came and dug them out.

That very morning, she'd wrapped her son's last Christmas present — \$300 worth of gifts she'd bought for him. As they fled their ruined home, the only things standing were the bathroom where they'd been and one other room — all those presents were under the rubble.

A neighbor called her later that night to tell her the rest of the house crumbled, and she begged them to search for the box with her baby's ashes.

Now they're surrounded by rows of cots and people who had been strangers. They play together on the pool table in the corner that the church set up for now-homeless kids. There are people here in their 80s and 90s, babies, dogs, including a little one named Jingles.

On Monday afternoon, volunteers scrambled to set up more cots because they expected to absorb 40 more people from other shelters that sprung up in the hours after the storm, never intending or equipped for people to stay but unwilling to turn anyone away.

A health care company pulled a trailer into the lot. They are trying to find an outdoor shower facility and a laundry truck, because they're fearful this might be the only long-term solution for many of the displaced. Volunteers scramble around. "I've got two that need undergarments," one said. "Do we have socks?"

Byerly-Zuck's son is used to having a routine: bed at 8 p.m., a nap in the afternoon. But he's having trouble sleeping. She can't get him to go down for a nap, and she couldn't get him to sleep on the cot they share until after midnight Sunday. She is worried about what all this uncertainty is doing to him.

He's close to his grandfather, who is at a Nashville hospital recovering after his home collapsed onto him. Their neighbor died. Other people they know in nearby apartments are missing.

"I will need therapy after this; we will all need therapy," she said, because here they exchange stories of the horrors they survived, and the people they know who didn't.

She answers many questions about their future the same way: "I don't know." She's desperate and sad — she doesn't even have a driver's license anymore — but she tries to pretend she isn't scared so her son won't get scared, too.

"He's all I've got," she said. "We lost everything."

She guesses they'll spend Christmas in the shelter.

All she can think to do is pray.

There was one blessing, she said: On Sunday night, a neighbor called and said they'd found the box with her baby's ashes, unbroken, amid the rubble.

Air Force discharges 27 for refusal to get COVID vaccine

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Air Force has discharged 27 people for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine, making them what officials believe are the first service members to be removed for disobeying the mandate to get the shots.

The Air Force gave its forces until Nov. 2 to get the vaccine, and thousands have either refused or sought an exemption. Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said Monday that these are the first airmen to be

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administratively discharged for reasons involving the vaccine.

She said all of them were in their first term of enlistment, so they were younger, lower-ranking personnel. And while the Air Force does not disclose what type of discharge a service member gets, legislation working its way through Congress limits the military to giving troops in vaccine refusal cases an honorable discharge or general discharge under honorable conditions.

The Pentagon earlier this year required the vaccine for all members of the military, including active duty, National Guard and the Reserves. Each of the services set its own deadlines and procedures for the mandate, and the Air Force set the earliest deadline. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said the vaccine is critical to maintaining the health of the force and its ability to respond to an national security crisis.

None of the 27 airmen sought a medical, administrative or religious exemption, Stefanek said. Several officials from the other services said they believe that so far only the Air Force has gotten this far along in the process and discharged people over the vaccine refusal.

As a result, they were formally removed from service for failure to obey an order. Stefanek said it is also possible that some had other infractions on their records, but all had the vaccine refusal as one of the elements of their discharge.

It is not unusual for members of the military to be thrown out of the service for disobeying an order; discipline is a key tenet of the armed services. As a comparison, Stefanek said that in the first three quarters of 2021, about 1,800 airmen were discharged for failure to follow orders.

According to the latest Air Force data, more than 1,000 airmen have refused the shot and more than 4,700 are seeking a religious exemption. As of last week, a bit more than 97% of the active duty Air Force had gotten at least one shot.

Members of the Navy and the Marine Corps had until Nov. 28 to get the shots and their Reserve members have until Dec. 28. Army active duty soldiers have until Wednesday, and members of the Army National Guard and the Reserves have the most time to be vaccinated, with a deadline of next June 30.

Across the military, the vaccine reaction has mirrored that of society as a whole, with thousands seeking exemptions or refusing the shots. But overall the percentage of troops — particularly active duty members — who quickly got the shots exceeds the nationwide numbers.

As of Dec. 10, the Pentagon said that 96.4% of active duty personnel have gotten at least one shot. The number plummets to about 74%, however, when the Guard and Reserve are included. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 72% of the U.S. population 18 and older have gotten at least one shot.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has made it clear that the Guard and Reserve are also subject to the mandate, and has warned that those who fail to comply risk their continuing as members of the military. But that has proven to be contentious.

Oklahoma's Republican governor and the state attorney general have already filed a federal lawsuit challenging the military mandate for the state's Guard. Gov. Kevin Stitt — the first state leader to publicly challenge the mandate — is arguing that Austin is overstepping his constitutional authority.

Stitt had asked Austin to suspend the mandate for the Oklahoma National Guard and directed his new adjutant general to assure members that they would not be punished for not being vaccinated.

Austin rejected the request and said unvaccinated Guard members would be barred from federally funded drills and training required to maintain their Guard status.

Oklahoma's adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Thomas Mancino, posted a letter on the state Guard's website, however, warning his troops that those who refuse the vaccine could end their military careers.

"Anyone ... deciding not to take the vaccine, must realize that the potential for career ending federal action, barring a favorable court ruling, legislative intervention, or a change in policy is present," Mancino wrote.

Stafford, Donald lead Rams to 30-23 win over Cardinals

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — From the first play to the last, Aaron Donald and the Los Angeles Rams showed they're still a heavyweight in the NFC West.

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The six-time All-Pro finished with three sacks — the first on the initial play from scrimmage and the last as time expired — while Matthew Stafford threw for 287 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Rams past the Arizona Cardinals 30-23 on Monday night.

"That's what the best do. They play their best when the best is required," Rams coach Sean McVay said. "We talk about competitive greatness all the time and this guy is the epitome of competitive greatness. Really proud of Aaron. Not at all surprised."

The Cardinals (10-3) will have to wait at least one more week before clinching their first playoff spot since 2015. Kyler Murray threw two interceptions that led to Rams touchdowns.

Cooper Kupp and Odell Beckham Jr. both caught touchdowns for the Rams (9-4), who won their second straight, pulled within one game of the Cardinals in the division and look rejuvenated following a three-game losing streak in November.

Kupp had 13 catches for 123 yards, the eighth 100-yard game this season for the NFL's receiving leader.

The Cardinals had a chance to tie the game in the final seconds after recovering an onside kick. But a holding call wiped out Murray's long run on the first play of the drive and Arizona couldn't produce a last-second miracle. On the final play, Donald charged toward Murray and the quarterback fell to the turf instead of getting run over by the 280-pound defensive lineman.

"We had a game plan, we stuck to it and it was fun," Donald said.

Stafford — who had plenty of protection and time to throw most of the night — hit Van Jefferson on a high-arching pass for a 52-yard touchdown to push the Rams ahead 20-13 early in the third quarter. The veteran quarterback dissected a Cardinals defense that had been among the best against the pass in the NFL this season.

A few plays later, Murray was picked off for the second time. Leonard Floyd tipped the ball into the air, caught it and then rumbled downfield to the Arizona 19. Seven plays later, Stafford hit a diving Kupp for a 4-yard touchdown and the Rams led 27-13.

James Conner sliced through the Rams' defense for an 8-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter to cut the deficit to 27-20.

Murray finished with 383 yards passing as the Cardinals tried to catch up late.

Arizona's Matt Prater made his second 53-yard field goal of the first half — moments after Murray scrambled for 16 yards and got out of bounds with 1 second left — to tie the game 13-all at halftime. The six-play, 35-second drive ended a back-and-forth first half that saw both teams take the lead and then lose it.

"Not very clean but I thought the effort was as good as we've had as far as start to finish," Cardinals coach Kliff Kingsbury said. "Some adverse situations and guys continued to battle and stay in the game, but just not clean enough in any phase."

Prater opened the scoring with his first 53-yard kick. Arizona was threatening to score again later in the first quarter, but Murray was picked off by Ernest Jones on second-and-goal from the 4 after Donald deflected the pass.

Donald had a big first quarter that also included a sack, a tackle for loss and a quarterback hurry. He has 10 sacks this season.

The Rams converted Jones' interception into a touchdown when Stafford found Beckham for a 2-yard score. Stafford completed all seven of his passes on the drive.

"The guys we needed to play well stepped up," Stafford said.

It was Beckham's third touchdown since joining the Rams last month. He did not have a touchdown in six games with Cleveland this season. It was also the first time he's scored touchdowns in three straight games since 2015.

NOSE FOR THE END ZONE

Conner scored his first TD from 1 yard out late in the second quarter, bursting into the end zone on a second effort after bouncing off a pile. He has scored a touchdown in seven straight games, tying a Cardinals record set by John David Crow in 1960.

COVID-19 PROBLEMS

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The Rams played without defensive back Jalen Ramsey and tight end Tyler Higbee, who were both put on the COVID-19 list earlier Monday. It was the first game both players have missed this season.

Ramsey came into Monday leading the team with three interceptions. Higbee has 44 receptions for 395 yards and three touchdowns.

HOME WOES

The Cardinals are 7-0 away from home but 3-3 at State Farm Stadium.

THIS IS 40

LA's Andrew Whitworth made NFL history by becoming the first player to start a game at left tackle at age 40.

INJURIES

Rams: LA welcomed back linebacker Justin Hollins, who had missed nine games because of injury.

Cardinals: Arizona activated DL Rashard Lawrence (calf) and long snapper Aaron Brewer (broken arm) before the game. Left guard Justin Pugh was also active, though he didn't start. ... DeAndre Hopkins and Conner both limped off the field after the game but Kingsbury said he didn't believe the injuries were serious.

UP NEXT

Rams: Host Seattle on Sunday.

Cardinals: At Detroit on Sunday.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Jan. 6 panel votes for contempt charges against Mark Meadows

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection has voted to recommend contempt charges against former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows as lawmakers revealed a series of frantic texts he received as the attack was underway.

The texts, provided by Meadows before he ceased cooperating with the committee, revealed that members of Congress, Fox News anchors and even President Donald Trump's own son were urging Meadows to push Trump to act quickly to stop the siege by his supporters.

The panel voted 9-0 Monday to recommend the contempt charges. The House is expected to vote Tuesday to refer the charges to the Justice Department, which will decide whether to prosecute the former Republican congressman.

"We need an Oval address," Donald Trump Jr. texted Meadows as his father's supporters were breaking into the Capitol, sending lawmakers running for their lives and interrupting the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. "He has to lead now. It has gone too far and gotten out of hand."

Trump Jr. added, "He's got to condemn this s--- ASAP."

Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the panel's vice chairwoman, detailed the texts obtained by the committee as the panel voted to recommend the contempt charges against Meadows, who did not show up for a deposition last week after his lawyer said he would stop cooperating.

Cheney said the texts show Trump's "supreme dereliction" as he refused to strongly condemn the violence of his supporters, and also raise questions about whether he sought to obstruct the congressional certification through inaction.

"These texts leave no doubt," Cheney said. "The White House knew exactly what was happening at the Capitol."

The vote comes as the panel has already interviewed more than 300 witnesses, and subpoenaed more than 40 people, as it seeks to create the most comprehensive record yet of the lead-up to the insurrection and of the violent siege itself. The committee's leaders have vowed to punish anyone who doesn't comply, and the Justice Department has already indicted longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon after he defied his subpoena this fall.

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"Whatever legacy he thought he left in the House, this is his legacy now," committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said of Meadows — a former Republican congressman from North Carolina — ahead of the vote. "His former colleagues singling him out for criminal prosecution because he wouldn't answer questions about what he knows about a brutal attack on our democracy. That's his legacy."

In a Monday letter to Thompson, Meadows' attorney George Terwilliger said the contempt vote would be "unjust" because Meadows was one of Trump's top aides and all presidents should be afforded executive privilege to shield their private conversations. Meadows himself sued the panel, asking a court to invalidate two subpoenas that he says are "overly broad and unduly burdensome."

Terwilliger noted that the contempt statute has been used infrequently over time and argued that a contempt referral of a senior presidential aide "would do great damage to the institution of the Presidency."

The committee has gradually teased a handful of the emails and texts Meadows had provided to the committee before he ended his cooperation — including 6,600 pages of records taken from personal email accounts and about 2,000 text messages. The panel has not released any of the communications in full.

On Monday, Cheney read the texts from Trump Jr. and a series of Fox News hosts as those in Trump's inner circle attempted to reach the president through his chief of staff, imploring him to take action against the violence that was taking place outside and inside the Capitol.

"Hey Mark, the president needs to tell people in the Capitol to go home ... this is hurting all of us ... he is destroying his legacy," Fox News host Laura Ingraham texted Meadows, according to the committee.

"Please get him on tv. Destroying everything you have accomplished," Brian Kilmeade wrote.

In response to one text from Trump Jr., Meadows texted: "I'm pushing it hard. I agree."

Cheney also detailed texts that she said were from members of Congress and others in the Capitol.

"Hey, Mark, protestors are literally storming the Capitol," read one text. "Breaking windows on doors. Rushing in. Is Trump going to say something?"

Another appeared to come from a member in the House chamber. "There's an armed standoff at the House Chamber door," the text read, according to the panel.

If Meadows had appeared for his deposition, lawmakers had planned to ask him about Trump's efforts to overturn the election in the weeks before the insurrection, including his outreach to states and his communications with members of Congress.

Trump's former top White House aide "is uniquely situated to provide key information, having straddled an official role in the White House and unofficial role related to Mr. Trump's reelection campaign," the panel said in a 51-page report released Sunday evening.

As part of its list of questions for Meadows, the panel says it wanted to know more about whether Trump was engaged in discussions regarding the response of the National Guard, which was delayed for hours as the violence escalated and the rioters beat police guarding the Capitol building.

The documents provided by Meadows include an email he sent to an unidentified person saying that the Guard would be present to "protect pro Trump people," the panel said, and that more would be available on standby. The committee did not release any additional details about the email.

In a transcript of the deposition Meadows skipped, committee staff said they would have interviewed Meadows about emails "to leadership at the Department of Justice on December 29th and 30th, 2020, and January 1st, 2021, encouraging investigations of suspected voter fraud," even though election officials and courts across the country had rejected those claims.

In a text exchange with an unidentified senator, the committee said, Meadows said Trump believed Vice President Mike Pence had power to reject electors in his role presiding over the Jan. 6 certification.

Pence did not have that power under the law, as the vice president's function is largely ceremonial.

Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Chile sees migrant crossings rise ahead of presidential vote

By MATÍAS DELACROIX and PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

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COLCHANE, Chile (AP) — A merciless sun seared the migrants as they walked through one of the driest places in the world, trying to illegally cross the border from Bolivia into Chile fearing it might soon be closed.

It has become common in recent months to see migrants trudging across the Atacama Desert but the flow appears to have increased in recent days ahead of Chile's presidential runoff Sunday. The migrants fear that if far-right candidate José Antonio Kast wins he will close the border as he promised during his campaign.

The conservative lawmaker, who has defended Chile's military dictatorship, finished first in the country's presidential election in November but did not get enough votes to win outright setting up a runoff against leftist Gabriel Boric. Kast has said he will order a ditch to be built to prevent migrants from crossing from Bolivia.

Immigration has been a recurring topic in Chile's presidential campaign as the country sees an increasing flow of migrants, mainly from Venezuela, but also from nations like Haiti and Colombia. It's a divisive issue and recently there was a widely publicized case of Chileans attacking Venezuelan migrants in Iquique, near the border with Bolivia and Peru.

The U.N. International Organization for Migration estimates there are almost 1.7 million immigrants in Chile. Only this year, Chilean authorities have registered more than 25,000 people arriving through the Atacama Desert, a significant increase compared to the 16,500 for all 2020.

"We have relatives here in Chile who told us that we had to go before Dec. 19, because if the one who won the first round (Kast) wins again, he will close all borders," said Rayber Rodríguez, a Venezuelan traveling with his wife and daughter.

Tatiana Castro, a Colombian who also crossed into Chile through the desert, put it bluntly. "We had to cross right now for fear that they would send us back."

She said people "do not know how hard it is, that we have to go through many countries and across many borders where it is hard for us, we have to endure hunger... cold weather."

The border has been guarded for months by the police and the army, though migrants cross using different paths in the desert in plain sight. The border area was empty until few years ago. Now it looks like the transit area of a train terminal.

Once in Chilean territory, migrants are not detained. Some keep walking to the closest city while others turn themselves in to authorities so they can start a process that might help them to regularize their immigration status.

Colchane, a Chilean town near the border with fewer than 1,600 inhabitants, mostly Indigenous Aymara, has seen a constant flow of migrants in recent months. Sometimes the migrants outnumber the local population.

"We can't take it anymore", said Nicolás Mamani Gómez, who wants Kast to win, so "no more immigrants will come."

Some of the migrants walk further after crossing the border and make it to the city of Iquique.

There, some of the migrants have been living in public parks and beaches. And not all the residents are happy. A few weeks ago, some locals attacked a camp where Venezuelans were staying and burned their belongings.

Virginia Carrasco, a 30 years-old Venezuelan, crossed the desert and entered into Chile with her three children — 11 and 8 years old, and a baby of six months — looking for a better life.

Carrasco said she wants a better health care system for them.

"In Venezuela's hospitals you get nothing," she said, as she dragged a cart filled with suitcases, bags and backpacks. "There are people who have died because they cannot get medicine or doctors. I expect a better quality of life for my children in Chile, that's why I came here."

Luna reported from Santiago, Chile.

AP seeks answers from US gov't on tracking of journalists

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By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Associated Press sought answers Monday from the Department of Homeland Security on its use of sensitive government databases for tracking international terrorists to investigate as many as 20 American journalists, including an acclaimed AP reporter.

In a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, AP Executive Editor Julie Pace urged the agency to explain why the name of Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter Martha Mendoza was run through the databases and identified as a potential confidential informant during the Trump administration, as detailed in a report by Homeland Security's inspector general.

"This is a flagrant example of a federal agency using its power to examine the contacts of journalists," Pace wrote. "While the actions detailed in the inspector general's report occurred under a previous administration, the practices were described as routine."

The DHS investigation of U.S. journalists, as well as congressional staff and perhaps members of Congress, which was reported by Yahoo News and AP on Saturday. It represents the latest apparent example of an agency created in the wake of the 9/11 attacks using its vast capabilities to target American citizens.

DHS prompted criticism from Congress and elsewhere in July 2020 when it deployed poorly or unidentified agents in military-style uniforms to sweep people off the streets of Portland, Oregon, and hustle them into unmarked cars during protests outside the federal courthouse in the city.

This latest revelation prompted Sen. Ron Wyden to call on DHS to immediately turn over the inspector general report to Congress.

"If multiple government agencies were aware of this conduct and took no action to stop it, there needs to be serious consequences for every official involved, and DHS and the Justice Department must explain what actions they are taking to prevent this unacceptable conduct in the future," said Wyden, an Oregon Democrat who has long sought more oversight of government surveillance.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, the Mississippi Democrat who chairs the House Homeland Security Committee, said, "If true, this abuse of government surveillance powers to target journalists, elected officials and their staff is deeply disturbing."

CBP said in a statement over the weekend that its vetting and investigative practices are "strictly governed" and that the agency doesn't investigate without a legitimate and legal basis to do so.

A DHS spokeswoman, Marsha Espinosa, said Monday that Mayorkas is "deeply committed to ensuring the protection of First Amendment rights" and has developed policies that "reflect this priority," though she did not provide details.

"We do not condone the investigation of reporters in response to the exercise of First Amendment rights," she said. "CBP and every component agency and office in the Department will ensure their practices are consistent with our values and our highest standards."

In the AP's letter, Pace called for "assurances that these improper practices and apparent abuse of power will not continue going forward."

That would be in line with recent order from Attorney General Merrick Garland prohibiting the seizing of records of journalists in leak investigations. That followed an outcry over revelations that the Justice Department under former President Donald Trump had obtained records belonging to journalists, as well as Democratic members of Congress and their aides and a former White House counsel, Don McGahn.

During the Obama administration, federal investigators secretly seized phone records for some reporters and editors at the AP. Those seizures involved office and home lines as well as cellphones.

The DHS inspector general report that revealed the most recent disclosure of investigations of journalists also stemmed from a Trump-era leak investigation.

The IG was looking into the actions of Jeffrey Rambo, a Border Patrol agent who was on temporary duty with a Customs and Border Protection unit in the Washington D.C. area in 2017 when he accessed government travel records as part of a leak investigation involving reporter Ali Watkins, who was with Politico at the time and now writes for The New York Times.

The inspector general opened its investigation after media reports exposed Rambo and his investigation

of Watkins.

In the course of its investigation, the IG learned from Rambo that he had routinely run checks on journalists and others, including congressional staff, while working at the CBP unit, the Counter Network Division.

Rambo told investigators that he queried its databases about Mendoza before trying to establish a relationship with her because of her expertise in writing about forced labor, an area of concern for CBP because it enforces import restrictions. The AP reporter is a known expert on the subject who won her second Pulitzer Prize in 2016 as part of a team that reported on slave labor in the fishing industry in Southeast Asia.

The AP, in a separate statement from the Pace letter, also sought an explanation for the use of the databases to investigate Mendoza and other journalists.

"We are deeply concerned about this apparent abuse of power," the AP said. "This appears to be an example of journalists being targeted for simply doing their jobs, which is a violation of the First Amendment."

The inspector general referred its findings to a federal prosecutor for possible charges of misusing government databases and lying to investigators, but the Justice Department declined to prosecute Rambo and two other Homeland Security employees.

Jan. 6 panel votes for contempt charges against Mark Meadows

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection voted Monday to recommend contempt charges against former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows as lawmakers revealed a series of frantic texts he received as the attack was underway.

The texts, provided by Meadows before he ceased cooperating with the committee, revealed that members of Congress, Fox News anchors and even President Donald Trump's own son were urging Meadows to push Trump to act quickly to stop the siege by his supporters.

"We need an Oval address," Donald Trump Jr. texted Meadows as his father's supporters were breaking into the Capitol, sending lawmakers running for their lives and interrupting the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. "He has to lead now. It has gone too far and gotten out of hand."

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Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the panel's vice chairwoman, detailed the texts obtained by the committee as the panel voted to recommend the contempt charges against Meadows, who did not show up for a deposition last week after his lawyer said he would stop cooperating.

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Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Thousands without heat, water after tornadoes kill dozens

By BRUCE SCHREINER and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

MAYFIELD, Ky. (AP) — Residents of Kentucky counties where tornadoes killed dozens of people could be without heat, water or electricity in frigid temperatures for weeks or longer, state officials warned Monday, as the toll of damage and deaths came into clearer focus in five states slammed by the swarm of twisters.

Kentucky authorities said the sheer level of destruction was hindering their ability to tally the damage from Friday night's storms. At least 88 people — including 74 in Kentucky — were killed by the tornado outbreak that also destroyed a nursing home in Arkansas, heavily damaged an Amazon distribution center in Illinois and spread its deadly effects into Tennessee and Missouri.

In Kentucky, as searches continued for those still missing, efforts also turned to repairing the power grid,

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sheltering those whose homes were destroyed and delivering drinking water and other supplies.

"We're not going to let any of our families go homeless," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said in announcing that lodges in state parks were being used to provide shelter.

In Mayfield, one of the hardest hit towns, those who survived faced a high in the 50s and a low below freezing Monday without any utilities.

"Our infrastructure is so damaged. We have no running water. Our water tower was lost. Our wastewater management was lost, and there's no natural gas to the city. So we have nothing to rely on there," Mayfield Mayor Kathy Stewart O'Nan said on "CBS Mornings." "So that is purely survival at this point for so many of our people."

Across the state, about 26,000 homes and businesses were without electricity, according to power outage, including nearly all of those in Mayfield. More than 10,000 homes and businesses have no water, and another 17,000 are under boil-water advisories, Kentucky Emergency Management Director Michael Dossett told reporters.

Kentucky was the worst hit by far in the cluster of twisters across several states, remarkable because they came at a time of year when cold weather normally limits tornadoes. At least 74 people died in the state, Beshear said Monday, offering the first specific count of the dead.

In Bowling Green, Kentucky, 11 people died on the same street, including two infants found among the bodies of five relatives near a residence, Warren County coroner Kevin Kirby said.

Beshear warned that it could take days longer to pin down the full death toll, with door-to-door searches impossible in some places.

"With this amount of damage and rubble, it may be a week or even more before we have a final count on the number of lost lives," the governor said.

Initially as many as 70 people were feared dead in the Mayfield Consumer Products candle factory, but the company said Sunday that eight deaths were confirmed and eight people remained missing, while more than 90 others had been located. Bob Ferguson, a spokesman for the company, said many employees gathered in a tornado shelter, then left the site and were hard to reach because phone service was out.

On Monday evening, Louisville Emergency Management Director E.J. Meiman said at a news conference that the company indicated everyone in the building during the storm had been accounted for.

"We have a high level of confidence that nobody is left in this building," Meiman said. He added the death toll from the factory has not changed.

Debris from destroyed buildings and shredded trees covered the ground in Mayfield, a city of about 10,000 in western Kentucky. Twisted sheet metal, downed power lines and wrecked vehicles lined the streets. Windows were blown out and roofs torn off the buildings that were still standing.

Five twisters hit Kentucky in all, including one with an extraordinarily long path of about 200 miles (322 kilometers), authorities said.

In addition to the deaths in Kentucky, the tornadoes also killed at least six people in Illinois, where the Amazon distribution center in Edwardsville was hit; four in Tennessee; two in Arkansas, where the nursing home was destroyed and the governor said workers shielded residents with their own bodies; and two in Missouri.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced Monday that it has opened an investigation into the collapse of the Amazon warehouse in Illinois.

Amazon's Kelly Nantel said the Illinois warehouse was "constructed consistent with code." Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said there would be an investigation into updating code "given serious change in climate that we are seeing across the country" that appears to factor into stronger tornadoes.

Not far from Mayfield, 67 people spent Sunday night at a church serving as a shelter in Wingo, and 40 more were expected to arrive Monday. Organizers were working to find a mobile outdoor shower facility and a laundry truck, expecting many of the displaced to need a long-term place to stay. Volunteers were scrambling to meet more immediate needs, too, such as underwear and socks.

Lifelong Mayfield resident Cynthia Gargis, 51, is staying with her daughter after the storm tore off the

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front of her apartment and sucked out almost everything inside. She came to the shelter to offer help and visit with friends who lost their homes.

"I don't know, I don't see how we'll ever get over this," she said. "It won't ever be the same."

Glynda Glover, 82, said she had no idea how long she would stay at the Wingo shelter: Her apartment is uninhabitable since the wind blew out the windows and covered her bed in glass and asphalt.

"I'll stay here until we get back to whatever normal is," she said, "and I don't know what normal is anymore."

On the outskirts of Dawson Springs, another town devastated by the storms, homes were reduced to rubble and trees toppled, littering the landscape for a span of at least a mile.

"It looks like a bomb went off. It's just completely destroyed in areas," said Jack Whitfield Jr., the Hopkins County judge-executive.

He estimated that more than 60% of the town, including hundreds of homes, was "beyond repair."

"A full recovering is going to take years," he said.

Tim Morgan, a volunteer chaplain for the Hopkins County Sheriff's Department, said he's seen the aftermath of tornadoes and hurricanes before, but nothing like this.

"Just absolute decimation. There is an entire hillside of houses that are 3 feet tall now," he said.

Schreiner reported from Dawson Springs, Kentucky. Associated Press writers Kristin Hall in Mayfield; Seth Borenstein, Zeke Miller and Dino Hazell in Washington; Travis Loller in Nashville, Tennessee; Rebecca Reynolds in Louisville, Kentucky, Jonathan Drew in Durham, North Carolina, and John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia, contributed.

Big California storm dumps snow, drenches parched regions

By JANIE HAR and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Motorists spun out on whitened mountain passes and residents wielded umbrellas that flopped in the face of fierce winds as Northern California absorbed even more rain and snow on Monday, bringing the possibility of rockslides and mudslides to areas scarred by wildfires following an especially warm and dry fall across the U.S. West.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort was closed Monday, saying on social media that it was not safe to open with 17 inches (43 centimeters) of overnight snow and high winds. A California Highway Patrol car in Truckee nudged a big-rig up a snowy hill while smaller vehicles spun out, resulting in minor bumps and bruises but no real injuries, CHP Officer Carlos Perez said.

"It's just so bad and so thick," he said of the snowfall, with more expected Monday night. "We're telling people that if they don't need to be around this area, they probably shouldn't travel."

The multiday storm, a powerful "atmospheric river" weather system that is sucking up moisture from the Pacific Ocean, raised the threat of flooding and was expected to dump more than 8 feet (2.4 meters) of snow on the highest peaks in California and Nevada and drench other parts of the two states before it moves on midweek, forecasters said.

The storm will bring much needed moisture to the broader region that's been gripped by drought that scientists have said is caused by climate change. The latest U.S. drought monitor shows parts of Montana, Oregon, California, Nevada and Utah are classified as being in exceptional drought, which is the worst category.

Most western U.S. reservoirs that deliver water to states, cities, tribes, farmers and utilities rely on melted snow in the springtime.

This week's storm is typical for this time of the year but notable because it's the first big snow that is expected to significantly affect travel with ice and snow on the roads, strong winds and limited visibility, said National Weather Service meteorologist Anna Wanless in Sacramento.

"Most of California, if not all, will see some sort of rain and snow," she said.

Meanwhile, gusts were so strong in and around San Francisco that state transportation officials issued

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a wind advisory for the Bay Bridge connecting the city to Oakland and warned drivers of campers and trailers to avoid the 4.5-mile (7.2-kilometer) span late Sunday.

The welcome rain didn't stop Oakland resident and artist Zhenne Wood from walking her neighbor's dog, a short-legged corgi.

"I decided to stay home today and not go anywhere, which is nice," she said. "And I'm really happy for the rain. I think we needed it a lot."

The storm prompted officials to shut down a 40-mile (64-kilometer) stretch of the iconic Highway 1 in California's Big Sur area until Tuesday. The scenic coastal route south of the San Francisco Bay Area, frequently experiences damage during wet weather.

Nearby Monterey County residents who live close to burn scars from last year's Dolan Fire were warned to be prepared to evacuate if rains loosen hillsides and cause debris flows while in Southern California, Los Angeles County fire officials urged residents to be aware of the potential for mud flows.

In coastal Santa Barbara County, residents of mountain communities near the Alisal Fire burn scar were ordered Monday to evacuate over concerns that heavy rains might cause flooding and debris flows that could inundate hillside homes. Officials didn't say how many people were affected by the order. A similar order was issued for people living in several communities near another burn scar in the San Bernardino Mountains, more than an hour's drive east of Los Angeles.

Forecasters said strong winds accompanying the storm could lead to power outages. Karly Hernandez, a spokesperson for Pacific Gas & Electric, said crews and equipment are staged across the state to respond if the power goes out.

The second storm predicted to hit California midweek shortly after the current storm moves on could deliver almost continuous snow in mountainous areas, said Edan Weishahn of the weather service in Reno, which monitors an area straddling the Nevada state line.

Donner Summit, one of the highest points on Interstate 80 and a major commerce commuter route, could face major travel disruptions or road closures, Weishahn said.

Vail Resorts' three Tahoe-area ski resorts opened with limited offerings over the weekend after crews produced artificial snow. Northstar and Heavenly were both able to open Monday, but Kirkwood could not, said spokeswoman Sara Roston.

Weber reported from Los Angeles. AP staffer Terence Chea reported from Oakland, Calif.

Tornado victims include infant girl, longtime florist, judge

By DYLAN LOVAN and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

A 2-month-old whose family tried to protect her by putting her in a car seat. A 94-year-old Korean War veteran from Arkansas. A longtime florist in Tennessee who recently "started on her new adventure" as an airport security worker. An Amazon warehouse worker in Illinois. A Kentucky judge known for his common sense.

These were among the dozens of people killed during Friday night's tornadoes that ripped through five states in the Midwest and South. There were dozens of confirmed deaths in Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri and Tennessee, but those numbers were expected to rise. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said Monday at least 74 had died in his state alone.

Here are some of the people who perished during the tornadoes.

Douglas Koon, his wife, Jackie, and their three children huddled in his mother-in-law's bathroom in Dawson Springs, Kentucky, as the storms approached. The tornado hit the house directly, flinging the family around and tossing a bathtub in the air that was shielding two of his sons. The couple put their infant daughter, Oaklynn, in a car seat to protect her, and she appeared to be OK on Saturday.

"It's the most traumatic thing I've been through, I felt like I was helpless in protecting my kids," Douglas Koon told MSNBC in an interview on Saturday. But by Sunday, the baby was having seizures, and doctors

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noticed a brain bleed after she was taken to the hospital. They believed she had a stroke, Koon said in a Facebook post.

"It's not looking good at this point," he wrote. "The machines are keeping her alive."

Early Monday morning, the family posted that the infant had died.

In a text message to The Associated Press on Monday, Koon said he was struggling "to process everything that I'm going through."

A family member has set up a GoFundMe account for Koon's family and his mother-in-law, Sheila Rose, who lost her home.

Lisa Taylor had worked 14 years as a florist at the same family-owned shop in Memphis, Tennessee, when she left in October to start a new career at the airport with the Transportation Security Administration. Co-workers at Rachel's Flowers congratulated her with balloons on a sign that read, "Good Luck, Lisa."

Taylor, 54, stayed in touch with her friends at the flower shop, making plans to return part-time over the holidays to make some extra money. Then the phone rang Saturday, just as the power came back on at the shop after violent storms passed through overnight. Taylor's longtime boyfriend was calling with tragic news. A large tree had fallen through her roof overnight, killing Taylor as she slept in bed.

"She had just gotten started on her new adventure and she's just been taken," said Angie Morton, who worked as a florist alongside Taylor for several years.

A single mother of two children now in their 20s, Taylor took her new government job for higher wages and the extra stability that came with health insurance and other benefits, friends said.

But she had a creative spark that made her a natural when it came to working with flowers, Morton said, whether she was helping grieving families design funeral arrangements or using bits and pieces of broken, castoff jewelry to add some custom sparkle to high school girls' prom corsages.

"She really liked to bling everything up," Morton said. "She would take stuff other people would throw in the trash and make beautiful things out of it. If she found an earring in a store that didn't have a matching pair, she would think, 'I know there's somebody who that would be perfect for her corsage.'"

Charles Newell, deputy emergency management administrator for Shelby County, Tennessee, said she was the only known storm death in the county that includes Memphis.

Rachel Greer, the flower shop's owner, was helping plan floral arrangements for Taylor's funeral. She said Taylor's daughter had requested "a sea of purple flowers" such as lavender roses and chrysanthemums to match her mother's favorite color.

Meanwhile customers were dropping by the shop to offer condolences and leaving notes. One of them read: "Lisa was a light in a dark world."

Annistyn Rackley was an outgoing and energetic southeast Missouri 9-year-old who loved swimming, dancing and cheerleading, according to Sandra Hooker, the girl's grandaunt.

The two became close over the past four years as Hooker offered the girl support during doctor's visits and blood draws required by a rare liver condition that still didn't keep Annistyn from activities.

Annistyn, her parents and her two younger sisters, took shelter Friday night in a windowless bathroom in their new home west of Caruthersville, Missouri. To prove they'd gotten to the family's "safe space," the girls' mom texted Hooker a photo of the three in and next to the bathtub — all of them smiling, 9-year-old Annistyn holding her favorite doll.

Fifteen minutes later, Sandra Hooker said, a tornado splintered the home, carrying the family members dozens of yards through the air into a field where first responders found them in mud. Annistyn died, and the others were injured. The mother, Meghan Rackley, and their middle daughter, 7-year-old Avalinn, remained hospitalized Monday.

Hooker called Annistyn a "special angel" and said the girl delighted in donning outfits and makeup for cheer competitions and with learning new dances from TikTok. She did cartwheels and splits in front of Hooker.

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"I would just gasp because she could do the splits all the time, and she would just laugh," Hooker said. "She loved dancing."

Hooker teaches gifted students at the same elementary school where Meghan Rackley teaches kindergarten in Caruthersville, which is nestled next to the Mississippi River in what's known as Missouri's Bootheel region.

Hooker said Annistyn's parents learned when she was 2 months old that she had a rare liver disorder in which bile ducts don't develop properly, sometimes making it hard to fight off illness.

Golden Wes Hembrey, 94, died when a tornado destroyed the nursing home in which he lived in Monette, Arkansas.

His nephew, Mike Hembrey, said the Korean War veteran and retired farmer had been in the nursing home since 2016 because of Alzheimer's disease. But he remembered his uncle as engaged with his extended family throughout their younger years.

"He was outgoing," his nephew said. "He'd be out in the yard playing with us. But don't make him mad. When he was mad, he was mad."

"He liked cutting up, telling jokes," said niece Kristie Carmichael.

The Hembreys said Jimmie Hembrey had visited his brother the day before the tornado and found him to be in good health.

Graves County Deputy Jailer Robert Daniel was supervising inmate workers at a candle factory in Mayfield, Kentucky, when the tornado struck. His boss said Monday that Daniel had been focused on the prisoners in his care when he was killed as the twister wrecked the plant.

Daniel, 47, had worked at the county jail for a few years previously and was rehired a few months ago, Graves County Jailer George Workman said. The seven inmates Daniel was overseeing at the factory Friday night were part of a brand-new work program and had just begun their jobs three days earlier.

After the storm hit, the inmates told Workman's deputies that it was Daniel who literally had pushed them all to safety, guiding them through a doorway and against a wall in an interior part of the plant. Workman said the last inmate through the door told deputies that Daniel was behind him one moment, and suddenly he was gone.

"He was physically still in the act of trying to get them to safety. And that's when it hit," Workman said. "It takes a tremendous person to be able to lay their own life down for somebody else. But he did and he was doing it for the right reasons."

All of seven of the inmates in Daniel's care survived, Workman said, with two of them suffering broken legs.

A cousin, Mark Saxton Sr., said Daniel was a native of the Mayfield area that was devastated by the storm.

"He loved his community," Saxton said. "He was a great family man. Everybody who met him just loved him. He's the type of person you want to be associated with."

Brian Crick, a judge for two western Kentucky counties, was known for his sound judgment when it came to solving problems, a fellow judge said.

Crick, 43, was a district judge for Muhlenberg and McLean counties who handled criminal misdemeanor cases, traffic court and juvenile cases, said Circuit Judge Brian W. Wiggins. Wiggins said he has known his fellow judge since 2005, when Crick was a public defender. He later was in private practice before taking the bench in 2011.

Many of the defendants who came before him weren't represented by attorneys, and Crick "was very good about seeing to it that their rights were protected," Wiggins said. "He had a very common sense approach. He was very level-headed about how to handle cases and how to talk to people."

Wiggins was killed when the storm hit his family's home in Muhlenberg County. He is survived by a wife and three children, all of whom made it through the storm without major injuries, Wiggins said. "He was

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just a consummate family man ... very engaged with his children and his wife. They were number one to him."

"We are especially heartbroken to get the news," Kentucky Supreme Court Chief Justice John Minton said in a statement. "This is a shocking loss to his family, his community and the court system and his family is in our prayers."

Two of June Pennington's children said the Manila, Arkansas, resident was devoted to her four children and nine grandchildren and had a particular soft spot for animals.

Pennington, 52, was working as an assistant manager at a Dollar General store in nearby Leachville, Arkansas, when it was hit.

"She didn't love anything as much in life as her kids and grandkids," said Christie Pennington. "She was truly selfless and loved whole-heartedly."

David Benefield, the oldest of June Pennington's four children, said he was born when his mother was only 14.

"She was a kid raising a kid. We were just like best friends," he said. "It's crazy how close you become."

Her children remember her as someone who "would do anything that we asked her to do," Benefield said. Even after her children were grown, they said June Pennington wanted to spend as much time with them as possible.

Christie Pennington said her mother adopted dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, turtles and even a ferret.

"If there was ever an animal in need of a home, we took it in," she said.

Clayton Lynn Cope, 29, had been working at Amazon for more than a year before the storm killed him at a company facility in southwestern Illinois.

Five other workers also died at the facility located outside St. Louis.

Cope, who lived in nearby Alton, Illinois, had joined the Navy after graduating high school and was an avid outdoorsman who also liked to ride motorcycles and play video games. He had a special place in his heart for his dog, Draco, said his younger sister, Rachel Cope.

"He would go out of his way for anyone," Cope said in a written message.

Ollie Borgmann, 84, was a sweet and "typical grandmother" who had lived in her home in Defiance, Missouri, for decades.

A tornado blew through the home she shared with her 84-year-old husband, Vernon, on Friday night, blowing the house off its foundation, as well as that of a neighbor's house in the town located about 40 miles (64 kilometers) west of St. Louis.

Her son, Mark Borgmann, told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that his brother, Keith, was on the phone with their father during the powerful storm when the line went dead. The next thing Vernon Borgmann remembers is waking up in a nearby field surrounded by debris. He suffered scratches and bruises but will be OK, said Mark Borgmann.

When Ollie Borgmann was found by rescuers, she was awake. She died later at a hospital.

Lovan reported from Louisville, Kentucky. Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia. Associated Press writers Travis Loller in Nashville, Tennessee; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Terry Wallace in Dallas; Sophie Tareen in Chicago; Josh Funk in Omaha, Nebraska; Mike Schneider in Orlando, Florida; and Jeff Amy in Atlanta contributed to this article.

Insurer agrees to \$800M settlement in Boy Scouts bankruptcy

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — Attorneys in the Boy Scouts of America bankruptcy case have reached a tentative settlement under which one of the organization's largest insurers would contribute \$800 million into a fund

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for victims of child sexual abuse.

The agreement announced Monday calls for Century Indemnity Co. and affiliated companies to contribute \$800 million into the fund in return for being released from further liability for abuse claims. The payment would bring the amount of money in the proposed trust to more than \$2.6 billion, which would be the largest sexual abuse settlement in U.S. history.

The settlement comes as more than 82,000 sexual abuse claimants face a Dec. 28 deadline to vote on a previously announced Boy Scouts reorganization plan.

That plan called for the Boys Scouts and its roughly 250 local councils to contribute up to \$820 million in cash and property into a fund for victims. They also would assign certain insurance rights to the fund. In return, the local councils and national organization would be released from further liability for sexual abuse claims.

The plan also includes settlement agreements involving another one of the Boy Scouts' major insurers, The Hartford, and the BSA's former largest troop sponsor, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon church. The Hartford has agreed to pay \$787 million into the victims' fund, and the Mormons have agreed to contribute \$250 million. In exchange, both entities would be released from any further liability involving child sex abuse claims.

The Century settlement, which is subject to court approval, provides for additional contributions from the BSA and its local councils on behalf of chartered sponsoring organizations. They include a \$40 million commitment from the local councils and additional potential payments of up to \$100 million from the BSA and local councils attributable to growth in membership because of chartered organizations' continued sponsorship of Scouting units.

"This is an extremely important step forward in the BSA's efforts to equitably compensate survivors, and our hope is that this will lead to further settlement agreements from other parties," the Boy Scouts said in a prepared statement. "In addition to our continued negotiations with other insurers, the BSA has worked diligently to create a structure that will allow the Roman Catholic-affiliated churches and United Methodist-affiliated churches who sponsored Scouting units to contribute to the proposed settlement trust to compensate survivors."

The Boy Scouts, based in Irving, Texas, sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020, seeking to halt hundreds of individual lawsuits and create a fund for men who say they were sexually abused as children. Although the organization was facing 275 lawsuits at the time, it's now facing more than 82,000 sexual abuse claims in the bankruptcy.

Attorneys with an ad hoc group called the Coalition of Abused Scouts for Justice, which represents about 18,000 abuse claimants, said in a news release that the Century settlement is another reason for victims to vote for the BSA's reorganization plan.

"Not only is the coalition creating the biggest possible compensation fund for survivors — it's the only fund on the table, and it vanishes with a 'no' vote," said attorney and coalition co-founder Anne Andrews. "The coalition also continues to work with the Boy Scouts of America on accountability and safety measures to ensure that no child will have to endure the horrific harm and abuse our clients have suffered."

The coalition, which is affiliated with more than two dozen law firms, has played a dominant role in the bankruptcy despite the existence of an official committee charged with representing the best interests of all abuse claimants. It also has been at the center of various disputes over information sharing and how the BSA's reorganization plan and trust distribution procedures were crafted.

Opponents of the plan include several other law firms, as well as the official abuse claimants committee appointed by the U.S. bankruptcy trustee. The committee has said the plan is "grossly unfair" and represents only a fraction of the settling parties' potential liabilities and what they should and can pay.

The committee, for example, has said the settlements with local Boy Scout councils would leave them with more than \$1 billion in cash and property above what they need to fulfill the scouting mission. The committee has also noted that sponsoring organizations such as churches and civic groups can avoid liability for abuse claims dating to 1976 simply by transferring their interests in insurance policies purchased

by the BSA and local councils to the victims fund, without contributing any cash or property.

News of the Century settlement came the same day that a bankruptcy judge in Indiana approved a \$380 million settlement involving USA Gymnastics and more than 500 victims of sexual abuse by former national team doctor Larry Nassar. The agreement, which also involves the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, is in addition to the \$500 million that the University of Michigan agreed to pay in 2018 to settle lawsuits brought by more than 300 victims of Nassar, a former associate professor and sports doctor at the school.

The \$880 million in the combined Nassar settlements represents an average of more than \$1 million per victim, while the proposed \$2.6 billion settlement in the Boy Scouts bankruptcy averages about \$31,600 per victim.

Jurors at Potter trial see differences between gun, Taser

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Prosecutors in the manslaughter trial of a Minnesota police officer charged in the shooting death of Daunte Wright walked jurors through the differences between her handgun and her Taser on Monday, seeking to raise questions about how an experienced officer could confuse the two.

Wright, 20, was killed on April 11 after being pulled over in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center for having expired license plate tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. Kim Potter, 49, is charged with manslaughter.

Potter, a 26-year police veteran who resigned two days later, has said she meant to use her Taser to stop Wright after he pulled away and got back in his car as officers tried to arrest him on a warrant for a weapons charge. Potter is white and Wright was Black. His death, which came while Derek Chauvin was on trial in nearby Minneapolis in George Floyd's death, set off several nights of angry protests in Brooklyn Center.

The defense has called the shooting a horrific mistake, but has also asserted that Potter would have been within her rights to use deadly force on Wright because he might have dragged another officer, then-Sgt. Mychal Johnson, with his car.

Sam McGinnis, a senior special agent with the state's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, highlighted how Potter's duty belt had holsters that require an officer to take deliberate actions to release the weapons. The gun holster has a snap, while the Taser holster has a lever. The handgun, which is black, is also twice as heavy as the yellow Taser, McGinnis said.

The Taser and gun have different triggers, grips and safety mechanisms, McGinnis testified. The Taser also has a laser and LED lights that display before it is fired, which he demonstrated for the jury, while the handgun does not, he said.

McGinnis also testified that Potter didn't perform a function test on her Taser at the start of her shift. Although the Brooklyn Center Police Department's policy is that officers are supposed to do that, McGinnis acknowledged under cross-examination that he didn't check to see how widely the department's officers complied.

Prosecutors asked to have the jurors handle a Taser, but Judge Regina Chu didn't allow it after Potter's attorneys objected. Chu said jurors can do so during deliberations if they want.

Earlier Monday, Dr. Lorren Jackson, an assistant Hennepin County medical examiner, testified that Potter's bullet caused injuries to Wright's heart and lungs and those caused his death. He said one can survive such injuries for only "seconds to minutes."

After Wright was shot, his car drove away and collided seconds later with an oncoming car. Any injuries from the crash were insignificant in terms of what caused Wright's death, Jackson said.

Some officers testified last week that they weren't able to immediately approach Wright's car after it crashed because they weren't sure it was safe to do so. Prosecutors criticized Potter for not immediately radioing in what happened at the traffic stop.

Jackson testified that Wright had some cannabinoids, or THC and its metabolites, in his blood from smoking marijuana, but that they didn't factor in his cause of death. He said the level of THC metabolites in

Wright's blood was "on the high end" of numbers he sees, but was still within a normal range for people who use marijuana.

Jurors were shown graphic images of Wright's body at the scene, as the assistant medical examiner found the body on the ground, with some medical equipment still attached from lifesaving efforts, and some dried blood from the gunshot wound.

They also saw autopsy photos, which Chu limited after Potter's attorneys objected earlier in the trial. Wright's mother, who has been present for much of the testimony, was not in court as the autopsy photos were shown.

The state is expected to rest its case midweek.

Separately, prosecutors filed two motions Monday, including one designed to limit the opinion of witnesses who are not testifying as experts. That came after Johnson last week testified that Potter's actions were authorized under state law. Johnson was not testifying as an expert on the police use of force.

Prosecutors also asked Chu for permission to question police officers about union membership. They wrote that Potter had roles in the union, including as president, that gave her an elevated level of respect among her coworkers. They want to ask officers about it so jurors can evaluate any potential bias toward Potter.

The case is being heard by a mostly white jury.

State sentencing guidelines call for just over seven years in prison upon conviction of first-degree manslaughter and four years for second-degree, though prosecutors have said they plan to push for longer sentences.

Associated Press writers Mohamed Ibrahim in Minneapolis and Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed to this report.

Find the AP's full coverage of the Daunte Wright case: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-daunte-wright>

Mom demands answers in Black man's deadly Louisiana arrest

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Ronald Greene's mother chastised Louisiana lawmakers Monday for not acting quickly enough to hold state troopers accountable for her son's deadly 2019 arrest, saying the Black motorist's death at the end of a high-speed chase was a "murder" that's been covered up, sugarcoated and mired in bureaucracy.

"I'm so damn mad at the fact that I'm talking to people who have it in their power to make things happen," Mona Hardin said through tears. "I've been wandering around in a cloud of confusion just wondering: What does it take for the state of Louisiana to recognize the murder of a man? What does it take to get answers?"

Hardin's testimony underscored the tension building in Louisiana as federal and state prosecutors prepare to seek the first criminal charges in the case.

Troopers initially blamed Greene's death on a car crash on a rural roadside outside Monroe. But long-withheld body-camera video obtained and published by The Associated Press in May instead showed white troopers punching, stunning and dragging Greene as he pleaded for mercy and repeatedly wailed, "I'm scared!"

A federal civil rights probe into the case has since broadened to include the beatings of several other Black motorists and whether state police brass broke the law to protect troopers. Greene's death was among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which an AP investigation found state troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct.

"All the dots are connected," Hardin told the Senate Select Committee on State Police Oversight. "Ronnie's not the first. Ronnie's not the last. But why do we have to sugarcoat the murder of a man just to

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get people off the hook?”

State police commanders earlier described several changes the agency enacted in the wake of Greene's death, including a new investigative unit that will probe uses of force by troopers.

“We don't have the luxury of getting this wrong,” said Lt. Col. Kenny VanBuren.

But the ongoing criminal investigations prevented lawmakers from delving more deeply into what ranking officials knew and when they knew it in the wake of Greene's in-custody death — questions that remain at the heart of the federal inquiry.

Two state troopers invited to address the advisory panel — Kory York and John Clary — did not attend Monday's hearing, drawing an exasperated rebuke from State Sen. Cleo Fields, who grilled Col. Lamar Davis, the state police superintendent, about their “disrespectful” absence.

During one heated exchange, Fields raised the specter of summoning Clary from his home. “How far does he live from here?” the Democratic lawmaker asked.

York and Clary remain in the crosshairs of both federal and state prosecutors, and their attorneys advised them against appearing Monday.

Clary, the ranking officer at the scene of Greene's arrest, withheld a critical 30-minute body camera video of the in-custody death for more than two years, according to state police records obtained by AP.

York, meanwhile, can be seen on video dragging Greene by his ankle shackles and leaving the heavysset 49-year-old face down with his hands and feet restrained for more than nine minutes.

Lawmakers did hear from Sgt. Albert Paxton, the lead state police detective who pushed early on for state criminal charges to be brought in Greene's death but was rebuffed by his chain of command. His testimony was cut short, however, by a state police attorney who stopped Paxton from answering questions specific to the Greene case.

Fields, in a recent interview, said he “could not stomach” watching the footage of Greene's death in its entirety.

“The state police failed, and this, in my view, was a cover-up,” he told AP. “We need to not only offer an apology, we need to fix this. No mother should ever go through this in the future.”

Chauvin expected to plead guilty in Floyd civil rights case

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin appears to be on the verge of pleading guilty to violating George Floyd's civil rights, a move that would remove him from a federal trial but could significantly increase the amount of time he'll spend behind bars.

A notice sent out Monday by the court's electronic filing system shows a hearing is scheduled for Wednesday for Chauvin to change his not guilty plea. These types of notices typically indicate a defendant is planning to plead guilty, though nothing will be official until it happens in court.

Chauvin has already been convicted of state murder and manslaughter charges for pinning his knee against Floyd's neck as the Black man said he couldn't breathe during a May 25, 2020, arrest. He was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in that case.

A message left with Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, was not immediately returned. The U.S. Attorney's Office had no comment.

Chauvin and three other former officers — Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao — were indicted earlier this year on federal charges alleging they willfully violated Floyd's rights. They were set to go to trial in late January.

Chauvin's plea could be a positive for the other three. They had asked the court to separate their trials from Chauvin's, arguing that his presence would hurt them before a jury, but that request was denied. Mike Brandt, a local defense attorney not connected to the case, said a trial without Chauvin could reduce some of the inflammatory evidence jurors would see.

Brandt has also said that if Chauvin pleads guilty, he can be compelled to testify — which could benefit the others if he says he was the veteran officer who made the decision to do what he did.

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The information sent out Monday gives no indication that the other officers intend to plead guilty. Messages left for their attorneys were not immediately returned.

Mark Osler, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, said any potential prison time that Chauvin would face in the federal case would likely be served at the same time as his state sentence — but the federal term has the potential to be much longer, up to life in prison.

By claiming responsibility, Chauvin can reduce his federal sentence. Though rare, Osler said he could also arrange to serve his sentence in the federal system, which could benefit him since he has been in solitary confinement in Minnesota. Brandt added that Chauvin would still have notoriety in the federal system and might still need to be segregated.

"I'm guessing he actually negotiated something that would allow him to see the light of day before he leaves the earth," Brandt said.

But the federal system has no parole, so even with a reduced federal sentence, Chauvin could spend more time behind bars.

In Minnesota, defendants with good behavior serve two-thirds of their sentence in prison, and the remaining one-third on supervised release, also known as parole. Under that formula, he's expected to serve 15 years in prison on the state charges, and 7 1/2 years on parole.

Under sentencing guidelines, Chauvin could get a federal penalty ranging from 27 years to more than 33 years in prison, with credit for taking responsibility, Osler said. But the guidelines are not mandatory, and Osler estimated Chauvin would be sentenced toward the lower end of the range.

According to evidence in the state case against Chauvin, Kueng and Lane helped restrain the 46-year-old Floyd as he was on the ground — Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down Floyd's legs. Thao held back bystanders and kept them from intervening during the 9 1/2-minute restraint.

Floyd's arrest and death, which a bystander captured on cellphone video, sparked mass protests nationwide that called for an end to racial inequality and police mistreatment of Black people.

All four former officers were charged broadly in federal court with depriving Floyd of his rights while acting under government authority, but the federal indictment broke down the counts even further. A count against Chauvin alleged he violated Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure and from unreasonable force by a police officer.

Thao and Kueng are charged with violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Chauvin as he knelt on Floyd's neck. All four officers are charged for their failure to provide Floyd with medical care.

It was not immediately clear if Chauvin plans to plead guilty to all or some of the federal charges against him in Floyd's death.

Osler said he's not surprised the other three former officers don't seem to be involved in this plea deal because they would likely face much lesser sentences than Chauvin if convicted.

If they were to plead guilty, Osler said, the other three would likely want "a plea deal that would wrap up both the state and federal charges."

The other three men were also charged in state court with aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter. They are scheduled to go to trial in that case in March.

Chauvin is also charged in a second indictment, stemming from the use of force and neck restraint of a 14-year-old boy in 2017.

That indictment alleges Chauvin deprived the boy, who is Black, of his right to be free of unreasonable force when he held him by the throat, hit him in the head with a flashlight and held his knee on the boy's neck and upper back while he was prone, handcuffed and not resisting. Information from the court gave no indication that Chauvin would be changing his plea in that case.

Find AP's full coverage of the death of George Floyd at: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-george-floyd>

No troops disciplined in US strike killing Afghan civilians

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By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No U.S. troops involved in the August drone strike that killed innocent Kabul civilians and children will face disciplinary action, U.S. defense officials said Monday.

The Pentagon said that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has approved recommendations for improvements in strike operations from the generals who lead U.S. Central Command and Special Operations Command, based on the findings of an independent Pentagon review released last month. There were no recommendations for discipline made by the generals, said John Kirby, chief Pentagon spokesman.

The review, done by Air Force Lt. Gen. Sami Said and endorsed by Austin in November, found there were breakdowns in communication and in the process of identifying and confirming the target of the bombing, which killed 10 civilians, including seven children. But he concluded that the strike was a tragic mistake and not caused by misconduct or negligence.

Austin asked Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of Central Command, and Gen. Richard Clarke, head of Special Operations Command, to review Said's conclusions and come back to him with recommendations. The two commanders agreed with Said's findings, and they did not recommend any discipline. Kirby said Monday that Austin endorsed their decisions, including the lack of disciplinary actions.

"None of their recommendations dealt specifically with issues of accountability," Kirby said. "So I do not anticipate there being issues of personal accountability to be had with respect to the August 29th airstrike."

The Aug. 29 drone strike on a white Toyota Corolla sedan killed Zemerai Ahmadi and nine family members, including seven children. Ahmadi, 37, was a longtime employee of an American humanitarian organization.

"We know that there will be some who don't like this particular decision, but it wasn't an outcome that we came to without careful thought and consideration," said Kirby. He said that if Austin "believed that accountability was warranted and needed, he would certainly support those kinds of efforts."

Steven Kwon, founder of Nutrition & Education International, the aid organization Zemari worked for, called the disciplinary decision shocking on Monday.

"How can our military wrongly take the lives of ten precious Afghan people, and hold no one accountable in any way?" he said. "When the Pentagon absolves itself of accountability, it sends a dangerous and misleading message that its actions were somehow justified."

The intelligence about the car and its potential threat came just days after an Islamic State suicide bomber killed 13 U.S. troops and 169 Afghans at a Kabul airport gate. The U.S. was working to evacuate thousands of Americans, Afghans and other allies in the wake of the collapse of the country's government.

Said concluded that U.S. forces genuinely believed that the car they were following was an imminent threat and that they needed to strike it before it got closer to the airport. He concluded that better communication between those making the strike decision and other support personnel might have raised more doubts about the bombing, but in the end may not have prevented it.

He made a number of recommendations, including that more be done to prevent what military officials call "confirmation bias" — the idea that troops making the strike decision were too quick to conclude that what they were seeing aligned with the intelligence and confirmed their conclusion to bomb what turned out to be the wrong car.

And he said the military should have personnel present with a strike team, and their job should be to actively question such conclusions. He also recommended that the military improve its procedures to ensure that children and other innocent civilians are not present before launching a time-sensitive strike.

Officials said McKenzie and Clarke largely agreed with Said's recommendations.

The U.S. is working to pay financial reparations to the relatives and surviving family members, and potentially get them out of Afghanistan, but nothing has been finalized. Asked why it was taking so long, Kirby said the U.S. wants to make sure that the family is gotten out as safely as possible, and that high level discussions about that are ongoing.

USA Gymnastics, USOPC reach \$380M settlement with victims

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

The legal wrangling between USA Gymnastics and the hundreds of victims of sexual abuse by former

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national team doctor Larry Nassar, among others, is over after a \$380 million settlement was reached.

The fight for substantive change within the sport's national governing body is just beginning.

A federal bankruptcy court in Indianapolis on Monday approved the agreement between USA Gymnastics and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the more than 500 victims, ending one aspect of the fallout of the largest sexual abuse scandal in the history of the U.S. Olympic movement.

Over 90% of the victims voted in favor of the tentative settlement reached in September. That agreement called for \$425 million in damages, but a modified settlement of \$380 million was conditionally approved by the court. More than 300 victims were abused by Nassar, with the remaining victims abused by individuals affiliated with USA Gymnastics in some capacity.

The financial reckoning is just one part of the equation. A series of nonmonetary provisions will make the victims stakeholders at USA Gymnastics going forward. The provisions include a dedicated seat on the organization's Safe Sport Committee, Athlete Health and Wellness Council and board of directors, as well as a thorough look at the culture and practices within USA Gymnastics that allowed abusers like Nassar to run unchecked for years.

"Individually and collectively, survivors have stepped forward with bravery to advocate for enduring change in this sport," USA Gymnastics president Li Li Leung said in a statement after the settlement was approved. "We are committed to working with them, and with the entire gymnastics community, to ensure that we continue to prioritize the safety, health and wellness of our athletes and community above all else."

Hundreds of girls and women have said Nassar sexually abused them under the guise of medical treatment when he worked for Michigan State University, USA Gymnastics, which trains Olympians, and a Michigan gym that's a USA Gymnastics member.

He pleaded guilty in federal court to child pornography crimes before pleading guilty in state court to sexually assaulting female gymnasts. He was sentenced in 2018 to 40 to 175 years in prison.

Rachael Denhollander, who in the fall of 2016 was the first woman to come forward to detail sexual abuse at the hands of Nassar, said the provisions were a pivotal part of the mediation process.

"It's not about money, it's about change," Denhollander told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "It's about an accurate assessment of what went wrong so that it is safer for the next generation."

Denhollander has been one of the most outspoken Nassar victims from the outset of the scandal. She said it was important to move past the legal proceedings so women can move forward with their lives and get the help they need.

"The frank reality is the longer this goes on, the more difficult it is for survivors," she said. "So many of these women, they can't access medical care without a settlement. We had to balance that reality with the length of time it was taking. We felt it was in the best interest of everyone to accept this settlement ... so that survivors would receive some semblance of justice."

Denhollander pointed out some of the medical care required is not covered by certain types of insurance. The settlement will ease part of the financial burden.

The settlement comes nearly four years after an emotional sentencing hearing in Michigan in which hundreds of women detailed their experiences with Nassar and the toll it took on their lives.

USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said the organization — which is paying \$34 million of its own money and \$73 million more from insurers toward the settlement — recognizes its role in "failing to protect these athletes, and we are sorry for the profound hurt they have endured."

Denhollander described the five-plus years from when she first approached reporters at The Indianapolis Star to Monday as "hellish."

"It's been hellish for all of us," she said. "To have to push for so long for the right things to take place, to have to push for so long to have justice happen ... it should have never taken five years."

USA Gymnastics filed for bankruptcy in December 2018 in an effort to consolidate the various lawsuits filed against it. The move also forced the USOPC to halt the decertification process it began against USA Gymnastics.

The organization has undergone a massive leadership overhaul in the interim and revamped its health

and safety policies. The settlement will allow it to continue as the sport's national governing body, though Denhollander stressed that USA Gymnastics has not gone far enough, which is why the involvement of the victims going forward is so significant.

"We need to see for ourselves what reform is taking place," she said. "The ability to do that provides a level of accountability that hasn't been in place up until now."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Study: Winter tornadoes to get more powerful as world warms

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Nasty winter tornadoes — like the deadly ones last week that hit five states — are likely to be stronger and stay on the ground longer with a wider swath of destruction in a warming world, a new study shows.

The combination of a longer and wider track with slightly stronger winds means some rare winter tornadoes that are killers now will have nine times more the power by the end of the century if carbon dioxide levels continued to rise, according to a study presented at the American Geophysical Union conference Monday.

The study, which pre-dates the devastating Mayfield, Kentucky, tornado outbreak, looks at strength and not frequency of big tornadoes as climate change progresses. Not peer reviewed yet, it was presented in poster form as a peak at new research to be published later.

"There is a potential for events in the future that are more intense that would not have been as intense in the current climate," said study author Jeff Trapp, head of atmospheric sciences at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. "Bearing in mind that these high end events are still going to be rare."

Trapp took the conditions during two large tornado strikes in 2013 — the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, tornado that in February of that year injured 82 people with winds of 170 mph and the Moore, Oklahoma, tornado that killed 24 people with winds up to 210 mph (340 kph) in May— and put them into dozens of computer simulations of worst-case climate change scenario by 2100, which other scientists say is increasingly unlikely.

The worst-case scenario, which the world used to be on track for, would have another 6 degrees (3.3 degrees Celsius) or so of warming between now and the end of the century. Trapp said he will soon run simulations based on a scenario closer to the current trajectory for carbon dioxide emissions of about 3.2 degrees (1.8 degrees Celsius) warming above current levels.

Trapp found a big change on the winter storm, significantly longer and wider tracks and windspeed increases around 14% that added up to the nine-fold increase in power when using a formula that takes wind speed, rotation and size of path into account. Power increased 1.5 times for the spring storm, he said.

Trapp said that's because there are two key ingredients needed for tornadoes: unstable stormy weather and wind shear. Wind shear, the difference between winds up high and near the ground, is usually stronger in the winter, but there's not as much stormy weather because it requires warm humid conditions near the ground. But as the world warms there will be more opportunity for instability in the winter, he said.

Three outside scientists said there may be something to the research, but they aren't yet completely convinced.

"I'm not 100% sold on the technique, but it's a very interesting approach," said Harold Brooks, a scientist at the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma. "To me the really interesting result seems to be the longer-tracks for the cool season."

A single study always raises uncertainty issues, but the results make sense, said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini: "One of the major components to Friday's outbreak was the broad and anomalous warm (swath of temperatures) which permitted the storm to last for what will likely be a record-breaking path length."

Read more of AP's climate coverage at <http://www.apnews.com/Climate>

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears

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

Biden to tour tornado damage in Kentucky on Wednesday

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Monday that he will travel to Kentucky on Wednesday to view damage from last week's devastating tornadoes that killed at dozens of people and displaced thousands more.

Biden announced the upcoming trip following a briefing with homeland security and disaster response officials in the Oval Office to discuss what more the federal government can do to support those affected by the natural disaster. The White House said he would visit Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for a briefing on the response operations, and then to hard-hit Mayfield and Dawson Springs to survey the damage.

Biden said he was developing the itinerary in consultation with local officials to ensure that his presence doesn't distract from the ongoing emergency response.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that Biden is not expected to give a speech when he visits Kentucky, but will rather be focused on meeting with local officials and "trying to be a source of comfort to people who have gone through a devastating couple of days in their communities."

"That visit is really about him receiving an update of the work that's happening on the ground, hearing directly from leaders on what they need more from the federal government, if anything, and he's going to be very responsive to that," she said.

Biden, who has already signed emergency declarations for Kentucky, said he stands ready to do the same for Illinois. He added that he has ordered his administration to make every resource available to local and state officials in Kentucky and the other states impacted by the storms.

The president said his message to governors was that the federal government would help them get "Whatever they need, when they need it."

"We're going to get this done," Biden added. "We're going to be there as long as it takes to help."

Speaking on the Senate floor, Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who hails from Kentucky, said, "This is the worst storm to hit Kentucky in my lifetime." McConnell said he'll travel "at the end of the week" back to Kentucky — an indication he would not be joining Biden's trip Wednesday.

McConnell earlier Monday thanked Biden in a tweet for his actions to help the state.

"Thank you @POTUS for your rapid approval of Kentucky's Major Disaster Declaration," he said. "Our entire congressional delegation came together to support @GovAndyBeshear's request. I appreciate the Administration's quick work to speed resources to help deal with this crisis."

Biden said he was worried, beyond the lives lost, about the emotional toll the disaster is putting on all those impacted.

"I worry quite frankly about the mental health of these people," he said. He said his administration was working to help people gain "peace of mind" so that they can "actually put their head on a pillow, lie down and be able to know their kids are going to be okay."

—
AP writers Lisa Mascaro and Alexandra Jaffe contributed.

Shatner marvels at Blue Origin flight frenzy, 'finite' Earth

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — William Shatner's durable role as an avatar of space's promise drew a frenzy of attention when fiction became fact with his rocket ride.

The "Star Trek" actor says he was as surprised by it as he was gratified by the 10-minute, suborbital jaunt made possible by billionaire Jeff Bezos. The experience is the subject of "Shatner in Space," a hour-

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long special out Wednesday on Amazon Prime Video.

It details last October's flight that made Shatner, 90, the oldest person to reach space and explores what the streaming service called the "growing friendship" between Shatner and Bezos. The Amazon empire founder credits "Star Trek" with igniting his interest in space travel.

Shatner, whose decades-long career includes "The Defenders," "T.J. Hooker" and "Boston Legal" along with the original "Star Trek" series and films, wanted to be part of Bezos' Blue Origin launch last July, its first with passengers. Shatner saw joining trip No. 2 akin to being named vice president when the Oval Office was the dream.

He discussed his change of heart and the flight's impact in an Associated Press interview, shifting between philosopher and blunt storyteller who, at one point, invoked 1937's Hindenburg blimp explosion. Remarks were edited for length and clarity.

AP: The zest for adventure can ebb with the years, but it hasn't with you. How do you explain it?

SHATNER: Well, I've been doing a lot of foolish things, according to my wife, in the last many years. I'm probably an adrenaline junkie. A couple of years ago I drove a motorcycle across the country, and I recently went down 60 feet underwater and visited with four tiger sharks. I'm no stranger to thinking, "Oh, geez, I can die here." But I didn't feel the necessity of going up into space. Why do I want to put myself in that position? It's uncomfortable. I've got, my wife calls them "velvet sheets," I can just snuggle in. Then I thought a little further about it, the idea of weightlessness and going into space and just the feeling, and (decided) "I'll do it." When it caught people's imagination I was absolutely shocked. I was as shocked about that as I was about the flight itself.

AP: But you're Capt. Kirk.

SHATNER: I know. But that's 55 years ago. There have been other things since then. The acquisition of knowledge was shocking, its popularity was shocking. Everything about it was extraordinary.

AP: Before the flight, you gave interviews in which you fretted about the dangers of the flight. Was that joking or jitters?

SHATNER: Weren't you brought up on the Hindenburg burning? It's burning hydrogen. That's what they're putting in the (rocket) tank.

AP: You had an emotional conversation with Jeff Bezos immediately after the flight. What touched you so deeply?

SHATNER: I immersed myself in the last 50 years in the connectivity of the Earth and how connected everything is. Everything is beautiful on Earth, and we have destroyed millions of (living) things. And then I saw the Earth giving life and I felt such sadness. I saw how finite the Earth is. And you and me are little dots, not as large as ants. We are insignificant on this insignificant planet. And yet we are aware, we are observers of that insignificance. And that's significant.

AP: "Star Trek" depicted advanced human behavior that we've yet to achieve. How do you see the world politically, environmentally?

SHATNER: Human beings resist change, probably part of our indigenous makeup. But change is happening so quickly, and more quickly than we imagined. The tipping points of these changes have happened in the last 50 years, and it takes longer than 50 years, I guess, for mankind to say, "My God, the poles are melting."

AP: Are you optimistic about the future?

SHATNER: I interviewed Bezos several times while shooting this documentary, and I'm hopeful that some of that will be in there. The last line he told me, which is what reverberates in my head, is, "You have to hope. Without hope, what is there?" So he's busy trying to get industry up into space, up into geocentric orbit, which we have the technology to do.

AP: Many decades have passed since "Star Trek," but people still see Capt. Kirk as part of your public persona. Is that something you wish for or not?

SHATNER: Somebody once said, "You get the career you deserve." And to change those words, you get the life you deserve. You made a decision based on what you knew at the time. You liked the guy, you

didn't like the guy; you wanted to live in the city. Whatever the instances were that you turned left instead of right. You can't regret having made a decision because it was based on your need, whatever it was.

The AP Interview: Japanese tourist says space trip 'amazing'

By HARRIET MORRIS and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Japanese space tourist on Monday rejected criticism from those who questioned his decision to pay a fortune for a trip to the International Space Station, saying the "amazing" experience was worth it.

Speaking to The Associated Press in a live interview from the orbiting space outpost, billionaire fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa said even though he had imagined what his mission would be like before the flight, he was struck by the reality of space travel.

"Once you are in space, you realize how much it is worth it by having this amazing experience," he told the AP in the first TV interview since he arrived at the station. "And I believe that this amazing experience will lead to something else."

Maezawa, 46, and his 36-year-old producer Yozo Hirano are the first self-paying tourists to visit the space station since 2009. Asked about reports claiming that he paid over \$80 million for a 12-day mission, Maezawa said he couldn't disclose the contract sum but admitted that he paid "pretty much" that amount.

In October, Russian actor Yulia Peresild and film director Klim Shipenko spent 12 days on the station to make the world's first movie in orbit, a project sponsored by Russia's space corporation Roscosmos to help burnish the nation's space glory.

Maezawa deflected the criticism from those who questioned his decision to spend money on his space travel instead of using it to help people back on Earth, saying that "those who criticize are perhaps those who have never been to space."

"The most memorable moments were when I saw the International Space Station from Soyuz just before the docking and when we entered after the docking," he said.

He admitted that space tourism is mostly for the super-rich now, but added that those who embark on space travel must be prepared for other challenges.

"Yes, it is still rather expensive, but it is not only about money," he told the AP. "It takes time for your body to adjust in this environment and the training for emergencies takes at least a few months. So, honestly speaking, it is only accessible for those who have time and are physically fit and those who can afford it. But we don't know if that is still going to be the case in 10 years, 20 years' time."

Maezawa told the AP he felt "a little bit of motion sickness" and it was "a little bit difficult to sleep," adding that future space tourists need to be aware of the need to spend up to five days to adapt to motion sickness in space.

He acknowledged that taking a nap still presents a challenge.

"I am not sleeping well, to be honest. A sleeping bag has been provided but it is too hot so I am not using it," he said.

He was happy with the length of his trip.

"Twelve days was about right for me," Maezawa added. "I am getting over the motion sickness so I can enjoy the remaining days. I am returning on the 20th and starting to miss Japan. Once I return, I want to have sushi!"

Maezawa and Hirano, who was filming his mission, blasted off for the International Space Station on Wednesday in a Russian Soyuz spacecraft along with Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

Space Adventures, a Virginia-based company that organized his flight, had previously sent seven other tourists to the space station in 2001-2009.

Maezawa expressed his profound admiration for the space station's crew. In addition to Misurkin, they include NASA astronauts Raja Chari, Thomas Marshburn, Kayla Barron and Mark Vande Hei; Russian cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov; and Matthias Maurer of the European Space Agency.

"They are like super-heroes who save Earth," he said. "Not only that they are ahead of the latest science,

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but trained physically and mentally, and very brave. I can feel directly how human can develop this far, and our lives depend on these people – how it changes in the future. I respect them a lot.”

He and Hirano will be returning to Earth with Misurkin on Sunday.

Before the flight, Maezawa had compiled a list of 100 things to do in space during his mission after asking the public for ideas.

“I am looking forward to doing some sports inside the space station – badminton, table tennis and golf,” he told the AP. “What I am not looking forward to that much is toilet-related stuff. ”

Maezawa made his fortune in retail fashion, launching Japan’s largest online fashion mall, Zozotown. Forbes magazine estimated his net worth at \$1.9 billion.

The tycoon has also booked a flyby around the moon aboard Elon Musk’s Starship, which is tentatively scheduled in the next few years. He’ll be joined on that trip by eight contest winners.

“I am planning to go to the moon in 2023 – we are in the final stages of selecting the 8 people for the Dear Moon project,” he said.

AP All-America team: Young and Tide lead with 3 1st teamers

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young and Alabama teammates Will Anderson Jr. and Jameson Williams have been selected All-Americans by The Associated Press, giving the top-ranked Crimson Tide more players on the first team than any other school.

The AP All-America team presented by Regions Bank, selected by a panel of Top 25 college football poll voters, was released Monday.

Young became the fourth Alabama player, and first Tide quarterback, to win the Heisman on Saturday night. Anderson, who leads the nation in sacks with 15.5, was fifth in the Heisman voting.

Alabama (12-1) will face No. 4 Cincinnati (13-0) in the College Football Playoff semifinals Dec. 31.

The Tide will bring five players who received AP All-American honors into their playoff game. Tackle Evan Neal made the second team and safety Jordan Battle was a third-team selection.

Cincinnati is represented on the first team by cornerback Ahmad Gardner, who was a second-team All-American last season. Fellow Bearcats cornerback Coby Bryant made the second team.

The other playoff semifinal on New Year’s Eve, No. 2 Michigan (12-1) against No. 3 Georgia (12-1), will feature four more first-team All-Americans.

Defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, the Heisman runner-up, and kicker Jake Moody are All-Americans for the Wolverines. Georgia’s top-ranked defense is represented by defensive tackle Jordan Davis and linebacker Nakobe Dean.

Michigan linebacker David Ojabo was chosen for the second team and running back Hassan Haskins was a third-team selection.

Georgia matched Alabama with five players across the three teams. Defensive tackle Devonte Wyatt and freshman tight end Brock Bowers made the second team and safety Lewis Cine was a third-team choice.

Pittsburgh quarterback Kenny Pickett made the second team and fellow Heisman finalist C.J. Stroud from Ohio State was the third-team QB.

Iowa State running back Breece Hall is the only player to repeat as a first-team AP All-American this season.

Iowa center Tyler Linderbaum and Texas A&M guard Kenyon Green each were first-team selections this season after making the second team in 2020.

Kentucky tackle Darian Kinnard and Oregon edge rusher Kayvon Thibodeaux went from third-team in 2020 to first-team in 2021.

The AP added two players, one on each side of the ball, to the teams this year, the first change to the All-America structure since 2006. To reflect a game that features more passing than ever before — plus more schools playing major college football — the offenses now feature three receivers and the defenses include an extra defensive back.

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With more receiver spots to fill, Ohio State became the first school to have three wideouts earn All-America honors in the same season. Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson made the second team and Jaxon Smith-Njigba was a third-team pick.

Add in Alabama's Williams, an Ohio State transfer, and four receivers who played for the Buckeyes in 2020 made the AP All-America teams.

The Buckeyes led all schools, placing eight players on the three teams. Joining the three receivers and Stroud were offensive linemen Thayer Munford and Nichola Petit-Frere, defensive lineman Haskell Garrett and kicker Noah Ruggles, who all made the second team.

BREAKDOWN

First-teamers by school

Alabama - 3.

Georgia, Michigan, Oregon, Texas A&M - 2.

Auburn, Baylor, Boston College, Cincinnati, Colorado State, Houston, Iowa, Iowa State, Kansas State, Kentucky, Michigan State, North Carolina State, Pittsburgh, Purdue, San Diego State, Utah - 1.

First-teamers by conference

SEC - 9.

Big Ten - 5.

Pac-12 - 3.

ACC - 3.

Big 12 - 3.

American - 2.

Mountain West - 2.

FIRST TEAM

OFFENSE

Quarterback — Bryce Young, sophomore, Alabama.

Running backs — Kenneth Walker III, junior, Michigan State; Breece Hall, junior, Iowa State.

Tackles — Ikem Ekwonu, junior, North Carolina State; Darian Kinnard, senior, Kentucky.

Guards — Kenyon Green, junior, Texas A&M; Zion Johnson, senior, Boston College.

Center — Tyler Linderbaum, junior, Iowa.

Tight end — Trey McBride, senior, Colorado State.

Receivers — Jordan Addison, sophomore, Pittsburgh; David Bell, junior, Purdue; Jameson Williams, junior, Alabama.

All-purpose player — Deuce Vaughn, sophomore, Kansas State.

Kicker — Jake Moody, senior, Michigan.

DEFENSE

Edge rushers — Aidan Hutchinson, senior, Michigan; Kayvon Thibodeaux, junior, Oregon.

Linemen — Jordan Davis, senior, Georgia; DeMarvin Leal, junior, Texas A&M.

Linebackers — Will Anderson, Jr., sophomore, Alabama; Nakobe Dean, junior, Georgia; Devin Lloyd, junior, Utah.

Cornerbacks — Ahmad Gardner, junior, Cincinnati; Roger McCreary, senior, Auburn.

Safeties — Verone McKinley III, sophomore, Oregon; Jalen Pitre, senior, Baylor.

Defensive back — Marcus Jones, senior, Houston.

Punter — Matt Araiza, junior, San Diego State.

SECOND TEAM

OFFENSE

Quarterback — Kenny Pickett, senior, Pittsburgh.

Running backs — Sean Tucker, sophomore, Syracuse; Tyler Badie, senior, Missouri.

Tackles — Evan Neal, junior, Alabama; Nicholas Petit-Frere, junior, Ohio State.

Guards — Thayer Munford, senior, Ohio State; William Dunkle, junior, San Diego State.

Center — Alec Lindstrom, senior, Boston College.

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Tight end — Brock Bowers, freshman, Georgia.

Receivers — Chris Olave, senior, Ohio State; Garrett Wilson, junior, Ohio State; Jerreth Sterns, junior, Western Kentucky.

All-purpose player — Jahmyr Gibbs, sophomore, Georgia Tech.

Kicker — Noah Ruggles, senior, Ohio State.

DEFENSE

Edge rushers —Jermaine Johnson, senior, Florida State; Cameron Thomas, junior, San Diego State.

Linemen — Devonte Wyatt, senior, Georgia; Haskell Garrett, senior, Ohio State.

Linebackers — Malcolm Rodriguez, senior, Oklahoma State; Leo Chenal, junior, Wisconsin; David Ojabo, junior, Michigan.

Cornerbacks — Coby Bryant, senior, Cincinnati; Ja'Quan McMillian, junior, East Carolina.

Safeties — Jaquan Brisker, senior, Penn State; Kyle Hamilton, junior, Notre Dame.

Defensive back — JoJo Domann, senior, Nebraska.

Punter — Adam Korsak, senior, Rutgers.

THIRD TEAM

OFFENSE

Quarterback — C.J. Stroud, redshirt freshman, Ohio State.

Running backs — Hassan Haskins, senior, Michigan; Sincere McCormick, junior, UTSA.

Tackles — Connor Galvin, senior, Baylor, Max Mitchell, senior, Louisiana-Lafayette.

Guards —Andrew Vorhees, senior, Southern California; Josh Seltzner, senior, Wisconsin.

Center — Michael Maietti, senior, Missouri.

Tight end — Michael Mayer, sophomore, Notre Dame.

Receivers — Drake London, junior, Southern California; Jaxon Smith-Njigba, sophomore, Ohio State; Jahan Dotson, senior, Penn State.

All-purpose player — Deven Thompkins, senior, Utah State.

Kicker — Caleb Shudak, senior, Iowa.

DEFENSE

Edge rushers — Will McDonald IV, junior, Iowa State; Sam Williams, senior, Mississippi.

Linemen — Calijah Kancey, sophomore, Pittsburgh; George Karlaftis, junior, Purdue.

Linebackers — Chad Muma, senior, Wyoming; Nik Bonitto, junior, Oklahoma; Andre Carter II, junior, Army.

Cornerbacks — Riley Moss, senior, Iowa; Trent McDuffie, junior, Washington.

Safeties — Jordan Battle, junior, Alabama; Lewis Cine, junior, Georgia.

Defensive back — Kolby Harvell-Peel, senior, Oklahoma State.

Punter — Jordan Stout, senior, Penn State.

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One year of vaccines: Many lives saved, many needlessly lost

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

One year ago, the biggest vaccination drive in American history began with a flush of excitement in an otherwise gloomy December. Trucks loaded with freezer-packed vials of a COVID-19 vaccine that had proved wildly successful in clinical trials fanned out across the land, bringing shots that many hoped would spell the end of the crisis.

That hasn't happened. A year later, too many Americans remain unvaccinated and too many are dying.

The nation's COVID-19 death toll stands at around 800,000 as the anniversary of the U.S. vaccine rollout arrives. A year ago it stood at 300,000. An untold number of lives, perhaps tens of thousands, have been saved by vaccination. But what might have been a time to celebrate a scientific achievement is fraught

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with discord and mourning.

National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins said scientists and health officials may have underestimated how the spread of misinformation could hobble the "astounding achievement" of the vaccines.

"Deaths continue ... most of them unvaccinated, most of the unvaccinated because somebody somewhere fed them information that was categorically wrong and dangerous," Collins said.

Developed and rolled out at blistering speed, the vaccines have proved incredibly safe and highly effective at preventing deaths and hospitalizations. Unvaccinated people have a 14 times higher risk of dying compared to fully vaccinated people, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated based on available data from September.

Their effectiveness has held up for the most part, allowing schools to reopen, restaurants to welcome diners and families to gather for the holidays. At last count, 95% of Americans 65 and older had had at least one shot.

"In terms of scientific, public health and logistical achievements, this is in the same category as putting a man on the moon," said Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious-disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The vaccines' first year has been rocky with the disappointment of breakthrough infections, the political strife over mandates and, now, worries about whether the mutant omicron will evade protection.

Despite all that, Dowdy said, "we're going to look back and say the vaccines were a huge success story."

On the very day that an eager nation began rolling up its sleeves, Dec. 14, 2020, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 300,000. And deaths were running at an average of more than 2,500 a day and rising fast, worse than what the country witnessed during the harrowing spring of 2020, when New York City was the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak.

By late February total U.S. deaths had crossed 500,000, but the daily death count was plummeting from the horrible heights of early January. With hopes rising in early March, some states began reopening, lifting mask mandates and limits on indoor dining. Former President Donald Trump assured his supporters during a Fox News interview that the vaccine was safe and urged them to get it.

But by June, with the threat from COVID-19 seemingly fading, demand for vaccines had slipped and states and companies had turned to incentives to try to restore interest in vaccination.

It was too little, too late. Delta, a highly contagious mutated form of coronavirus, had silently arrived and had begun to spread quickly, finding plenty of unvaccinated victims.

"You have to be almost perfect almost all the time to beat this virus," said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. "The vaccine alone is not causing the pandemic to crash back to Earth."

One of the great missed opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic is the shunning of vaccination by many Americans.

This fall, Rachel McKibbens, 45, lost her father and brother to COVID-19. Both had refused the protection of vaccination because they believed false conspiracy theories that the shots contained poison.

"What an embarrassment of a tragedy," McKibbens said. "It didn't have to be this way."

More than 228,500 Americans have died from COVID-19 since April 19, the date when all U.S. adults were eligible to be vaccinated. That's about 29% of the count since the first U.S. coronavirus deaths were recorded in February 2020, according to an Associated Press analysis.

In all, two states — Florida and Texas — contributed more than 52,000 deaths since that date. Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, Wyoming and Idaho also saw outsize death tolls after mid-April.

Red states were more likely than blue states to have greater than average death tolls since then.

"I see the U.S. as being in camps," Noymer said. "The vaccines have become a litmus test for trust in government."

Wyoming and West Virginia, the states with the highest vote percentages for Donald Trump in 2016, have recorded about 50% of their total COVID-19 deaths since all adults were declared eligible for the vaccine in those states. In Oklahoma, nearly 60% of COVID-19 deaths occurred after all adults were vaccine-eligible.

There are exceptions: Notably, Hawaii and Oregon are the only Joe Biden-supporting states where more

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than half of the COVID-19 deaths came after shots were thrown open to all adults. North Dakota and South Dakota — both ardent Trump states — have kept their share of deaths after the vaccine became available across the board to under 25%.

California has seen more than 15,000 COVID-19 deaths since the state opened eligibility to all adults in mid-April. McKibbens' father and brother died in Santa Ana, California, in their shared home.

McKibbens pieced together what happened from text messages on her brother's phone. Some of the texts she read after his death, including back-and-forth messages with a cousin who cited TikTok as the source of bad advice.

"My brother did not seek medical attention for my dad," keeping him lying on his back, even as his breathing began to sound like a broken-down motor, said McKibbens, who lives across the country in Rochester, New York.

Her father, Pete Camacho, died Oct. 22 at age 67. McKibbens flew to California to help with arrangements.

Her brother was sick, too, but "he refused to let me into the house because he said I shed coronavirus because I was vaccinated," McKibbens recalled. "It was a strange new belief I had never heard before."

A friend found her brother's body after noticing food deliveries untouched on the porch. Peter Camacho, named for his father, died Nov. 8 at age 44.

"For me to have lost two-thirds of my family, it just levels you," McKibbens said.

Important advice came too late for some. Seven months pregnant and unvaccinated, Tamara Alves Rodriguez tested positive for the coronavirus Aug. 9. Two days later, with many pregnant women falling seriously ill, U.S. health officials strengthened their guidance to urge all mothers-to-be to get vaccinated.

Rodriguez had tried to get vaccinated weeks earlier but was told at a pharmacy she needed authorization from her doctor. "She never returned," said her sister, Tanya Alves of Weston, Florida.

Six days after testing positive, Rodriguez had to have a breathing tube inserted down her throat at a hospital near her home in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her baby girl was delivered by emergency cesarean section Aug. 16.

The young mother never held her child. Rodriguez died Oct. 30 at age 24. She left behind her husband, two other children and an extended family.

"Her children ask for her constantly," Alves said. "I literally feel like a piece of me has been ripped out of me and even those words aren't enough to describe it."

She urges others to get vaccinated: "If you would know the terror of being hospitalized or having a loved one there ... if people would know, they would be afraid of this instead of fearing the vaccine."

AP data journalist Angeliki Kastanis and AP medical writer Luran Neergaard contributed.

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Booster blitz: UK races to get ahead of surging omicron

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Long lines formed Monday at vaccination centers across England as people heeded the government's call for all adults to get booster shots to protect themselves against the omicron variant, and as the U.K. recorded its first death of a patient infected with omicron.

In a televised announcement late Sunday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said everyone 18 and up would be offered a third vaccine dose by Dec. 31 — less than three weeks away, and a month earlier than the previous target. Johnson said boosters would "reinforce our wall of vaccine protection" against an anticipated "tidal wave of omicron."

U.K. health authorities say omicron cases are doubling every two to three days in Britain, and that the variant will replace delta as the dominant coronavirus strain within days. Health Secretary Sajid Javid told lawmakers Monday that omicron will be dominant in London "within 48 hours."

While omicron is acknowledged to be much more transmissible than previous coronavirus variants, it's

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unclear both how virulent it is and whether the expected wave of infections will inundate the country's state-funded health care system

Barely two weeks after it was identified in South Africa, 10 people are in British hospitals with omicron-related COVID-19. The British government raised the country's coronavirus threat level on Sunday, warning that the rapid spread of omicron "adds an additional and rapidly increasing risk to the public and health care services."

Scientists in South Africa say the variant may cause less severe disease than the delta variant but caution that it's too soon to be certain. Health authorities around the world are watching Britain closely to see what an omicron surge looks like in a country with an older, more highly vaccinated population than South Africa's.

"The idea that this is somehow a milder version of the virus, I think that's something we need to set on one side and just recognize the sheer pace at which it accelerates through the population," Johnson said as he visited a vaccination center in London. "So the best thing we can do is all get our boosters."

The U.K. Health Security Agency says existing vaccines appear less effective in preventing symptomatic infections in people exposed to omicron, though that effectiveness appears to rise to between 70% and 75% after a third dose.

More than 80% of people age 12 and up in Britain have received two vaccine doses, and 40% of adults have had three. But the acceleration of the booster program will be a huge challenge, requiring almost 1 million doses given out each day — more than the previous high of around 850,000 a day. Some 750 soldiers and thousands of volunteer vaccinators will be drafted to give the shots at doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies and pop-up vaccination centers.

Many routine procedures will be postponed as Britain's National Health Service swings into high gear for the boosters.

While the online booster appointment system will not be open to under-30s until Wednesday, adults could — and did — show up at a walk-in centers to get a booster starting Monday.

At St. Thomas' Hospital, on the south bank of the River Thames in London, the lines of people waiting for booster shots stretched across Westminster Bridge toward Parliament. At the Gordon Hospital walk-in clinic in central London, most of those lining up were in their 20s and 30s.

Sam Collins, 30, said he was "not especially" worried about omicron, "but I'd just prefer to be triple vaxxed."

"Also my partner has just had a baby and she's not vaccinated, so if I can be extra vaccinated, then that will help," he said.

The government's appointment-booking website struggled to keep up with demand, and also ran out of rapid at-home virus test kits, which have been distributed free to households during the pandemic.

The British government's Dec. 31 booster target applies to England. The other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are also expected to speed up their vaccination campaigns.

While omicron is spreading around the world, Britain may be especially affected because it ordinarily has high levels of travel to South Africa. The omicron outbreak is also more visible in Britain because U.K. is also a world leader in genomic sequencing, which identifies and tracks new variants.

Researchers in the U.K. have sequenced about 13.3% of all positive cases, compared with 3.8% in the U.S., according to GISAID, which promotes rapid sharing of data on COVID-19 and the flu. While Iceland and Denmark have sequenced a greater percentage of their positive cases, the size of the U.K.'s population and the scope of its outbreak mean that Britain has sequenced many more cases.

This surveillance provided key evidence that Johnson and his chief medical officers used in deciding to tighten pandemic restrictions and ramp up the U.K.'s vaccination program.

Johnson's Conservative government is requiring vaccine certificates to enter nightclubs and reintroducing restrictions that were lifted almost six months ago. Masks must be worn again in most indoor settings and as of Monday, people were urged to work from home if possible.

Many scientists say those measures are unlikely to be enough and are calling for tougher ones. But cafes, pubs and shops in city centers fear that plummeting numbers of commuters will hammer their businesses

in the usually busy pre-Christmas period.

Johnson is facing a major rebellion from unhappy Conservative lawmakers when Parliament votes on the new virus restrictions. The measures are still highly likely to pass with support from the opposition Labour Party.

Robert Read, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Southampton, said it was still unclear how severe cases of COVID-19 from omicron are but "omicron probably requires much larger amounts of antibody in the blood in order to thwart the virus as much as possible."

"We need to get those third doses into as many adults as we possibly can, just in case this virus turns out to be a raging bull rather than a pussy cat," Read told radio station LBC.

Pan Pylas in London contributed to this report.

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

'Y'all pray for Mayfield': Town grieves in tornado aftermath

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

MAYFIELD, Ky. (AP) — Judy Burton's hands shivered as she gazed up at what had been her third-floor apartment. She could see her clothes still hanging in the closet, through the building's shredded walls. Across the street, her church was boarded up. A few blocks away, the spire was ripped away from the town's grand courthouse, its roof caved in. The restaurant where neighbors met for lunch, too, was lost in the rubble.

She clasped her hands together and tried to quiet their quivering. Burton and her dog had narrowly escaped as a tornado hit her town, part of an outbreak of twisters across the Midwest and South. Now, she stood among the grind of heavy machinery clearing the wreckage of landmarks, businesses and homes of Mayfield, population 10,000.

"It's gone. It's terrible, just terrible, I'm shaking," she said. "It's going to take me awhile to settle my nerves."

Burton can't imagine a single family here not mourning. Theirs is the sort of town where everyone is connected to everyone else. Mayfield was one of the worst-hit towns in the unusual mid-December spate of tornadoes, and Burton looked around at a disorienting jumble of boards and bricks and broken glass.

Hundreds of buildings have been reduced to nothing. Roofs are sheared off those that stand. Some streets are littered with snapped trees, clothes, chunks of insulation and blown-away Christmas decorations. The fire station is inoperable, most police cars destroyed.

At least eight people working at a Mayfield candle factory were killed, and eight more are missing. It's still unclear how many others in Mayfield died. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear had feared more than 100 dead statewide, but he later scaled back that estimate, with many at the candle factory accounted for. On Monday, he said at least 64 had died in the state.

Burton worries for her neighbor and her little dog. They're feared among the dead, as they were probably unable to escape as the walls collapsed around them.

Burton and others evacuated in the middle of the night. She harnessed her dog, grabbed a neighbor by the hand and herded them to the elevator toward the basement. About 15 people there cried, screamed and prayed for protection as the wind blew open locked doors.

Down the hall, Johnny Shreve had been watching the storm approach from his window. Lightning crashed, and in that split second of brightness, he realized that their town would not be the same come morning: He saw an office building across the street disintegrate. Then he dove onto his kitchen floor as chunks of concrete pelted his body.

"It felt like everything in the world came down on me," he said.

He lay there for more than an hour, trying to dig himself out and shouting for his neighbors and his Shih Tzu, Buddy. Finally, Shreve broke through into the living room. There was Buddy, trying to scratch toward

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him from the other side.

He posted on Facebook that they were alive, and added: "Y'all pray for Mayfield."

"It blew my mind when the sun came up," Shreve said, when he and others returned over the weekend to salvage what they could and traded stories of survival in the parking lot. "I don't see how this town can recover. I hope we can, but we need a miracle."

In the nearby town of Wingo, more than 100 people took shelter at a church — babies, people in their 80s and 90s, family pets. Everyone has a story, a reason they have nowhere else to go.

Meagan Ralph, a schoolteacher volunteering to coordinate the shelter, pulled up an aerial photo of Mayfield, her hometown, on her phone. She zoomed in, seeking a landmark to orient herself.

"I can't recognize it, it's not recognizable," she said. "I can't even identify what I'm looking at, it's that bad."

But she has found hope at the shelter. Donations have poured in. Volunteers from surrounding counties came in droves. People from Mayfield take care of each other, she said.

As the news spread of the horrors at the candle factory on the night of the storm, hundreds of ordinary people arrived at the factory to help, braving slippery rubble until authorities told them to go home, said Stephen Boyken, who's a chaplain there. That spirit is part of the fabric of Mayfield, he said: "If you're off in a ditch, there's somebody going to stop by, probably three or four trucks try to get you out and help you."

By the time the sun came up, they were lined up at churches and school gymnasiums to give piles of clothes and coats, food and water.

"We will recover, absolutely," Ralph said. "We're small but mighty."

She looked around the shelter, and noted that the task before them is extraordinary, with hundreds of their neighbors now with nothing and nowhere to go.

Wanda Johnson, 90, ended up here after she was evacuated from the same apartment building where Burton escaped. Johnson's windows burst, and she clung to her doorframe, pleading: "Dear God, help me, please help me get out of here."

At the shelter with her son and granddaughter, she wonders what will become of them now.

"They tell me we don't have a town," Johnson said. "Everything's gone. It's just wiped away. It just flipped over our city."

"We don't know where we're going to go — we don't know what's left to go to."

Amid tension, Southern Baptist women lead where they can

By BOB SMIETANA of Religion News Service and HOLLY MEYER of The Associated Press
Jacki King, the women's minister at Second Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas, first felt a call to ministry as a college student.

She decided to follow it, giving up her pre-med major and her spot on a college softball team for ministry training at a small Bible school with a mostly male student body. She picked Criswell College because it was where her pastor was a dean. She wanted to teach the Bible the way he did.

King thought at the time she only had two options for ministry — marrying a pastor or serving as an overseas missionary.

"I really didn't want to be married to a lead pastor," she said.

But God, as the saying goes, had other plans.

She met Josh King, an aspiring preacher at Criswell, fell in love and married him. They went into ministry together with his pastor role opening doors for her. Today, King is an author as well as a Bible teacher, and worries that too much of the conversation about women's roles in the church is focused on what they cannot do — namely, serve as senior pastor in a Southern Baptist church — rather than what they can do.

This story is part of a series by The Associated Press and Religion News Service on women's roles in male-led religions.

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The Bible shows women and men as partners and portrays women leading in the early church, King said, pointing to Phoebe, who is mentioned in the New Testament book of Romans, along with other women leaders.

"Women are part of the Great Commission," she said, a reference to Jesus' command to spread his teaching around the world.

Few congregations could function without the work of female members. Still, there is tension in the Southern Baptist Convention over the role of women, mainly over how to put a section of the denomination's statement of faith, known as the Baptist Faith and Message, into practice. That section, based on the SBC's interpretation of Bible verses like 1 Timothy 2:12 and Titus 1:5-9, deals with leadership in churches.

"While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture," the statement reads. But local Southern Baptist churches, because they are governed autonomously, are free to decide how to implement that teaching.

For some in the nation's largest Protestant denomination, the statement of faith means the senior pastor must be a man, but staff and other pastoral roles can be filled by women, including teaching the Bible to both men and women. For others, pastoral duties, especially preaching, are limited to men, and women are only allowed to teach the Bible to other women and children.

These two views clashed in spring 2019, when Beth Moore, then a beloved Southern Baptist women's Bible teacher, tweeted about speaking at a Mother's Day church service. It led to a social media firestorm and renewed criticism of women preachers and teachers from more conservative Southern Baptists. In the spring of 2021, Moore left the SBC, citing a number of concerns, including how the denomination has handled sexual abuse allegations, as well as sexism and racism within its ranks.

"At the end of the day, there comes a time when you have to say, this is not who I am," she told Religion News Service at the time.

This ongoing fight has left some women leaders who feel called to ministry in a bind.

"Until we stop debating or demanding an ever-narrowing conformity, we will continue to circle a revolving door of unnecessary controversy," said Katie McCoy, a women's ministry director for a state convention and former seminary professor, in an email.

Jacqueline Scott, a member of Dorrisville Baptist Church in Harrisburg, Illinois, and women's Bible study teacher, said being a leader is a natural outgrowth of her faith, and she has always felt called to encourage people to reach their potential.

"I've realized that being a leader is just something that is almost ingrained," she said. "You don't even realize that you're doing it."

Scott believes her faith frees her from some of the limitations society puts on her gender. But she said Christians put up boundaries too, restricting what people can do for God and how they share the Gospel — forgetting everyone has a place in the church's mission.

Still, Scott believes the Bible limits the role of pastor to men and she thinks they are better suited for that role. "On the other hand, do I believe that women can be preachers?" she said. "Yes, I do."

In 2019, King, McCoy and other faithful Southern Baptists launched the SBC Women's Leadership Network to foster female leaders across the evangelical denomination.

"I get to have tons of conversations with women across our convention about ... how they're serving and how their creativity and resilience is changing communities and schools and churches," King said. "None of that is platformed. None of that is shared to the world."

King pointed to the examples of Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, legendary missionaries in Southern Baptist life. Two of the largest denomination-wide offerings are named after the women.

Leadership is more than high-profile ministries, McCoy said. It can look like women hosting college students for the holidays, mentoring young moms and organizing community service projects, she said.

"Leadership is influence, not necessarily position," McCoy said.

Called to ministry at 22, McCoy, who holds a doctorate in systematic theology, said her parents, professors and peers encouraged her to pursue leadership in Baptist life. Today, she is the new women's ministry

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director for Texas Baptists, recently making the jump from an SBC seminary to the state convention.

Texas Baptist churches seemed to have worked out how to cooperate despite their differences over the role of women, and they do it "without the controversy — or perennial acrimony — the SBC experiences," McCoy said. It is a local church matter and not a test issue for joining the state convention, she said.

"Many of our 5,300 churches are just as conservative as the SBC, affirming the same confessional documents," McCoy said, adding that others allow women to preach or teach, but limit pastor and elder positions to men.

When McCoy previously worked at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, she said she felt valued by the administration and supported by President Adam Greenway but felt limited as an employee of an SBC seminary.

"I felt that, as a woman, I couldn't grow beyond where I was," McCoy said.

Despite her credentials, McCoy knew teaching in the School of Theology wasn't an option. It would be, she said, "at best, fodder for the next alarmist documentary, and at worst, a call for investigations and resignations" at the SBC's national gathering.

"If the SBC ever looks around and realizes it has lost a generation of women leaders, it won't be because those women drifted into liberalism. It will be because they're exhausted," she said.

Instead, McCoy was named an assistant professor of applied theology and women's studies, but in the School of Educational Ministries, which prepares students for church ministry more practically. She doesn't fault Greenway.

"I do, however, fault a religious culture that so caters to its fundamentalist fringe that it views women teaching theology courses as a more imminent threat to its doctrinal purity than decades of infighting and rancor," McCoy said.

Ashley Allen, a women's ministry professor and the director of news and information at Southwestern seminary, does not feel restricted by the denomination's beliefs.

"I abide by what Scripture says," Allen said. "But at the same time, Scripture provides opportunities for me as a woman."

In college, Allen knew she was being called to a Christian vocation, but she refined that calling through the example and guidance of the ladies at her church — many of whom didn't carry a title.

"They were what I define leadership to be now, which is influencing," Allen said. "When you are influencing somebody else, you're leading them — good or bad."

Men, including a seminary dean, a professor and a state convention leader, also championed Allen along her career path. Allen said they invested in her, ran interference and recommended her for different positions.

Today Allen is doing the influencing, and she would like to see more women in Southern Baptist life fostering leadership among their peers in "whatever it may be, but really coming alongside those ladies and giving them opportunities to be able to serve and to use their gifts."

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In Hinduism, women creating spaces for their own leadership

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

When Sushma Dwivedi started seriously thinking about performing wedding rites and other Hindu religious blessings in New York City and elsewhere, she knew who she needed to talk to - her grandmother.

Together, they went through the mantras that are recited by pandits, the priests who perform Hindu religious rituals, to find the ones that resonated with what Dwivedi was trying to do -- offer Hindu blessings and services that were welcoming of all, irrespective of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, any of it.

Her grandmother isn't a pandit — in India, as well as in Indian diaspora communities, that's been a domain that is largely populated by men, with cultural mores at play. But she had a wealth of religious

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knowledge, of ritual, of proper pronunciation, to share with her granddaughter.

And that her grandmother played an integral role in Dwivedi's understanding and practice of Hinduism reflects a larger religious reality. Those who study the religion and its traditions say that while there aren't a lot of women priests (although that is changing in India and in other places), women in Hinduism globally continue to take on leadership roles in other ways - building communities, taking on positions in organizations, passing on knowledge.

"We just jammed together and sort of went through scriptures. ... And in that sense, that's the 'old school'-est Hindu way on Earth, right? You pass it down," Dwivedi said.

After all, it was through her grandparents, immigrants from India, that Dwivedi had been exposed to Hinduism while growing up in Canada. They helped build a Hindu mandir, or temple, in their Montreal community, and made the religion an integral part of her life from childhood.

This story is part of a series by The Associated Press and Religion News Service on women's roles in male-led religions.

Hinduism encompasses a range of practices and philosophies, and has a pantheon of divine figures encompassing both male and female. People can call themselves Hindus and yet practice in different ways from each other. There is no central authority, like an equivalent to the role the pope plays in Catholicism.

So leadership, in India as well as Indian immigrant communities, is decentralized and diverse, encompassing religious scholars, Hindu temple boards and more, said Vasudha Narayanan, a religion professor at the University of Florida who studies Hinduism in India and in the Indian diaspora.

"I would also say that women sometimes create the spaces where they can be leaders in all these other ways," she said.

They're women like Dr. Uma Mysorekar, who serves as president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America. It runs one of the oldest Hindu temples in the United States in the Flushing section of New York City's Queens borough.

Mysorekar, trained as a physician, got involved with the temple in the mid-1980s, and has been part of its administration for years, as it expanded its facilities as well as its programming. There are programs for seniors as well as young adults; the temple kitchen is available on food delivery apps.

Being an administrator wasn't her intention when she started, Mysorekar said.

"I didn't get involved to become a president. But when the circumstances were forced in, I did accept that challenge."

She's convinced that in Hinduism, women can be leaders simply by virtue of their ability to communicate the faith to others, notably to children.

"How many women have led ... going back to times immemorial, and what they have contributed, it should give you that exemplary feeling," she said. "It's not that women have to be priests to be leaders, women have to be able to spread the teachings."

And in this modern age, when so much vital activity occurs online, women are making a difference there, too, said Dheepa Sundaram, assistant professor of Hindu studies, critical theory and digital religion at the University of Denver.

"If you look at social media spaces, you see a lot of women leading different kinds of groups now," she said.

She pointed to shubhpuja.com as an example, a site co-founded by a woman, Saumya Vardhan, that allows people all over the world to connect with pandits in India, who perform pujas, the religious rituals, that can be seen via videoconferencing.

"We're seeing women carve out different spaces in the spirituality ecosystem to find a way to actually gain power in that ecosystem," she said.

And there are examples of women making inroads even when it comes to being pandits, of pushing back against patriarchal restraints.

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Manisha Shete, 51, a female priest who has been working as the coordinator at Jnana Prabodhini, a Hindu reformist school in Pune in western India that trains men and women to perform rituals, first began to officiate at religious ceremonies in 2008.

Her aspirations stemmed in part from an interest in India's ancient scriptures; after getting married, she studied

"After my wedding, I studied Indology — the history, culture, languages and literature of India.

"During my research work at the Sanskrit language department in Jnana Prabodhini ... I felt that I can do this and I should do it. It was my favorite subject," Shete told The Associated Press.

Shete said at her school in Pune, where the course for the priesthood can extend up to 18 months, 80% of the students were women, including many who had been housewives and many others who voluntarily their jobs to enter the school.

She said the demand for female priests is growing in urban areas, especially among young women, and she often gets requests even from Indian families overseas to conduct rituals.

"People have started accepting women priests. Every reform comes with some obstacles. But it is happening."

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AP-NORC poll: Omicron raises COVID worry but not precautions

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — As the omicron variant sparks worldwide fears of renewed COVID-19 outbreaks, Americans' worries about infection are again on the rise, but fewer say they are regularly wearing masks or isolating compared with the beginning of the year.

A new poll conducted by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 36% of Americans now say they are very or extremely worried that they or a family member will be infected with the virus, up from 25% who said the same in late October. Another 31% now say they're somewhat worried.

The percentage saying they are highly worried is slightly lower now than it was in August, as the delta variant was taking hold, and still below the level of concern Americans expressed through much of 2020 as deaths and case counts varied widely across regions and seasons.

Hugh Gordon said he and his wife, Lillian, have continued to avoid people as much as possible and wear masks when they do go out to visit a doctor or retrieve groceries ordered online. But the 81-year-old retiree from Dalton, Georgia, said getting vaccinated made him feel comfortable seeing the couple's children and 10 grandchildren — even attending the oldest granddaughter's wedding this fall.

The Gordons hope to host 10 or 12 family members for Christmas at their house this month, a far cry from last year's holiday when they just "worked the phones," he said.

Although most of those who are vaccinated still say they're at least somewhat worried about infections, 55% of those who are unvaccinated say they have little or no worry. Roughly 8 in 10 Democrats say they're at least somewhat worried, compared with about half of Republicans.

The poll also shows that 57% of Americans now say they're wearing masks always or often when around other people outside their homes, a slight increase from 51% in August. But that's well below the 82% who said the same in an AP-NORC poll conducted in February and March, before many Americans had a chance to get vaccines.

Dr. Tara Kirk Sell, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said people become less likely to alter their lives as a threat becomes familiar to them.

"We've been dealing with COVID for a long time, and we're going to be dealing with it for a long time," she said. "People are going to want to do things, so the focus should be on how can we help people think through those risks ... rather than saying don't do 'X' or focusing on getting to zero risk."

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Those calculations differ from one person to another, Sell said. For instance, parents of children younger than 5 who are not yet approved for COVID-19 vaccines or people living with elderly relatives may have a lower tolerance for risking infection.

John O'Dell, a 25-year-old from Nashville, said getting his initial vaccination and a booster shot made him more comfortable getting together with friends, eating at restaurants and attending NFL and NHL games along with large crowds this year. But he also said looser rules on mask wearing in Tennessee has influenced his own relaxation on wearing masks or avoiding people.

This week, O'Dell and his father spent several hours browsing a Nashville mall for Christmas gifts and he's looking forward to visiting movie theaters to see several films set for release this month.

"It's a total, complete flip," he said, comparing those outings to his approach of masking and staying home a year ago.

Gordon, who has diabetes, said emerging variants of COVID-19 will likely keep him cautious about avoiding crowds and wearing masks in public.

"I just don't want to take chances, and I feel like I'm doing everything that I can," he said. "But if they come out with another shot, I'd be in line to get it. I want to stay around a little longer."

Americans as a whole remain much less likely than they were in the spring to report that they're always or often avoiding nonessential travel, staying away from large groups or avoiding other people as much as possible. But the poll shows that those who are vaccinated are far more likely than the unvaccinated to say they are still practicing those behaviors.

David Cotton, a vice president of Public Health Research and Evaluation at NORC who did not personally work on the poll, said those results suggest a large portion of Americans remain willing to take precautions more than a year into the pandemic.

"In some ways I find that encouraging, that there are so many people who continue to persist and follow the science and take care of one another," Cotton said.

Not everyone has returned to the activities that they did regularly before the pandemic, especially things like seeing movies and going to the gym. Among those who say they did so at least monthly prior to the pandemic, 84% say they will visit friends and family in the next few weeks, 80% will shop in person for nonessential items, 73% say they will attend religious services, and 73% say they will go to a bar or restaurant.

The poll shows 58% of those who frequently traveled pre-pandemic will do so in the next few weeks, and 56% of those who used public transportation will do so.

Even fewer -- 49% -- say they will exercise at a gym or studio or go out to a concert, movie or the theater, among those who did so regularly before the pandemic.

The poll shows that about two-thirds of Americans say they find it easy to find factual information about COVID-19 vaccines and when people can get booster shots. Somewhat fewer -- 58% -- say they think it's easy to find information about COVID-19 vaccines for children, with the numbers similar among both parents and non-parents.

Still, only about a third of the unvaccinated say they find it easy to find information about vaccines, vaccine booster or vaccines for children, with similar shares saying it is difficult and the remainder saying it's neither easy nor difficult.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,089 adults was conducted Dec. 2-7 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

'A way we resist': Quilts honor victims of racial violence

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press/Report for America
JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Long after he was killed, Myrtle Green-Burton wouldn't let anyone wear her 17-year-old son's high school track team jacket.

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James Earl Green, an aspiring Olympic runner, was supposed to receive the green and yellow coat at his graduation in Mississippi half a century ago. It became a symbol of his life — and her loss, said his sister Gloria Green-McCray.

"She just kept it until it dry-rotted because that was all she really had to remember his dream — his vision," Green-McCray said of her mother.

A cross-stitch portrait of Green wearing his track jacket is now included with 115 others in a quilting project dedicated to memorializing lives lost to racial violence in the U.S. The two quilts are open for public viewing on weekdays through Dec. 17 at Jackson State University's Margaret Walker Center.

James Earl Green and 21-year-old Jackson State student Phillip Lafayette Gibbs were fatally shot on the Jackson State campus during a violent police response to a protest against racial injustice in 1970. Green was not a student at the historically Black university, but was walking through the campus on his way home from his grocery store job.

Twelve more people were injured. No officer ever faced criminal charges.

On a visit to Jackson State's campus last week to see the portrait, Green-McCray, now in her late 60s, recalled her older brother's ambitions of running in college and then in the Olympics. In the weeks leading up to his death, graduating and getting that track jacket were all he could talk about, she said.

"He didn't get the chance to wear it," she said, reaching out and running her finger across the tiny portrait.

The Stitch Their Names Memorial Project was started by Eugene, Oregon, high school math teacher Holli Johannes in July 2020 as so many around the U.S. reckoned with the country's legacy of systematic racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police. A group of 75 stitchers from across the U.S. and beyond worked together to construct the two quilts and a website containing biographies of each victim.

Johannes said they wanted to create a piece of art that would humanize the lives lost.

Each stitcher took a different, personalized approach: Some portraits are headshots, some full-body. They include different backdrops and details to inform viewers about the victims' lives.

Elijah McClain, 23, a massage therapist killed by police in Aurora, Colorado, in 2019, is pictured playing the violin next to a tabby cat. McClain loved animals and taught himself how to play the guitar and violin.

John Crawford III, 22, was killed by police inside a Beavercreek, Ohio, Walmart store in 2014. He is depicted with his two young sons.

Gibbs — killed in Jackson the same night as Green — is wearing a gray suit. He was studying to be a lawyer.

Ebony Lumumba, department chair and associate professor of English at Jackson State, said quilting has long been a powerful form of activism and of reclaiming history — especially for Black women in America, whose voices are often overlooked.

"It's a history that sometimes supersedes what can be written down," said Lumumba, who is also the city of Jackson's first lady. "That's significant for our community because we have been denied the privilege of being documented for so many centuries and so this is one of the ways that we resist that."

At Jackson State, Green-McCray said she hadn't seen a quilt made since she was a little girl — the ones stitched by the women who raised her. She remembered how quilting was a form of storytelling for them. Her mother would piece together quilts using pieces of aprons, hats and dresses from her grandmother.

"Each little piece represents something — each piece had a significant meaning," she said. "It was not just a piece of cloth, but it was a piece of history, a piece of that person."

Green-McCray said the quilts would evoke memories, even of a time before she was born — a reminder of "the struggle of survival."

"It's like you re-live it," she said. "My mother came from a family of sharecroppers, old slaves, and I can remember the history."

Green-McCray said if people don't learn about history, it repeats itself. When her brother was killed, everyone asked her, "Do you think this will ever happen again?"

"At that time, we was thinking it was going to soon end, and it will never happen again," she said. "Now

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today, you see them saying 'Black Lives Matter,' and that really grieves my spirit. We've come a long way, but we still got such a long way to go."

Leah Willingham is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 14, the 348th day of 2021. There are 17 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 14, 2020, the Electoral College decisively confirmed Joe Biden as the nation's next president, ratifying his November victory in a state-by-state repudiation of President Donald Trump's refusal to concede he had lost; electors gave Biden 306 votes to Trump's 232. Speaking from Delaware, Biden accused Trump of threatening core principles of democracy, but told Americans that their form of self-government had "prevailed." A divided Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected Trump's lawsuit seeking to overturn his loss in the battleground state about an hour before the Electoral College cast Wisconsin's 10 votes for Biden.

On this date:

In 1799, the first president of the United States, George Washington, died at his Mount Vernon, Virginia, home at age 67.

In 1819, Alabama joined the Union as the 22nd state.

In 1861, Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, died at Windsor Castle at age 42.

In 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (ROH'-ahl AH'-mun-suhn) and his team became the first men to reach the South Pole, beating out a British expedition led by Robert F. Scott.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson vetoed an immigration measure aimed at preventing "undesirables" and anyone born in the "Asiatic Barred Zone" from entering the U.S. (Congress overrode Wilson's veto in February 1917.)

In 1939, the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations for invading Finland.

In 1961, a school bus was hit by a passenger train at a crossing near Greeley, Colorado, killing 20 students.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, ruled that Congress was within its authority to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against racial discrimination by private businesses (in this case, a motel that refused to cater to Blacks).

In 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights, which it had seized from Syria in 1967.

In 1985, former New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris, who'd hit 61 home runs during the 1961 season, died in Houston at age 51.

In 2005, President George W. Bush defended his decision to wage the Iraq war, even as he acknowledged that "much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong."

In 2012, a gunman with a semi-automatic rifle killed 20 first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then took his own life as police arrived; the 20-year-old had also fatally shot his mother at their home before carrying out the attack on the school.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama, visiting Fort Bragg in North Carolina, saluted troops returning from Iraq, asserting that the nearly nine-year conflict was ending honorably.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump convened a summit at Trump Tower for nearly a dozen tech leaders whose industry had largely supported Democrat Hillary Clinton; the CEOs included Apple's Tim Cook, Google's Eric Schmidt, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Tesla's Elon Musk. Trump announced his selection of former campaign rival Rick Perry to be secretary of energy. Yahoo said it believed hackers had stolen data from more than one billion user accounts in Aug. 2013 (in Oct. 2017, Yahoo raised that figure to 3 billion).

One year ago: The largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history began with health workers getting shots

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on the same day the nation's COVID-19 death toll hit 300,000. U.S. government agencies and private companies rushed to secure computer networks after the disclosure of a sophisticated, long-running cyber-espionage intrusion suspected of being carried out by Russian hackers. The owner of the Cleveland Indians said the team would drop the name it had used since 1915; he said it was "no longer acceptable in our world." (The team would still be known as the Indians in 2021, with the new name, the Guardians, taking effect after that season.)

Today's Birthdays: Singer-actor Abbe Lane is 90. Actor Hal Williams is 87. Actor-singer Jane Birkin is 75. Pop singer Joyce Vincent-Wilson (Tony Orlando and Dawn) is 75. Entertainment executive Michael Ovitz is 75. Actor Dee Wallace is 73. R&B singer Ronnie McNeir (The Four Tops) is 72. Rock musician Cliff Williams is 72. Actor-comedian T.K. Carter is 65. Rock singer-musician Mike Scott (The Waterboys) is 63. Singer-musician Peter "Spider" Stacy (The Pogues) is 63. Actor Cynthia Gibb is 58. Actor Nancy Valen is 56. Actor Archie Kao is 52. Actor Natascha McElhone is 52. Actor-comedian Michaela Watkins is 50. Actor-comedian Miranda Hart is 49. R&B singer Brian Dalrymple (Soul For Real) is 46. Actor KaDee Strickland is 46. Actor Tammy Blanchard is 45. Actor Sophie Monk is 42. Actor-singer-musician Jackson Rathbone is 37. Actor Vanessa Hudgens is 33. Rock/R&B singer Tori Kelly is 29.