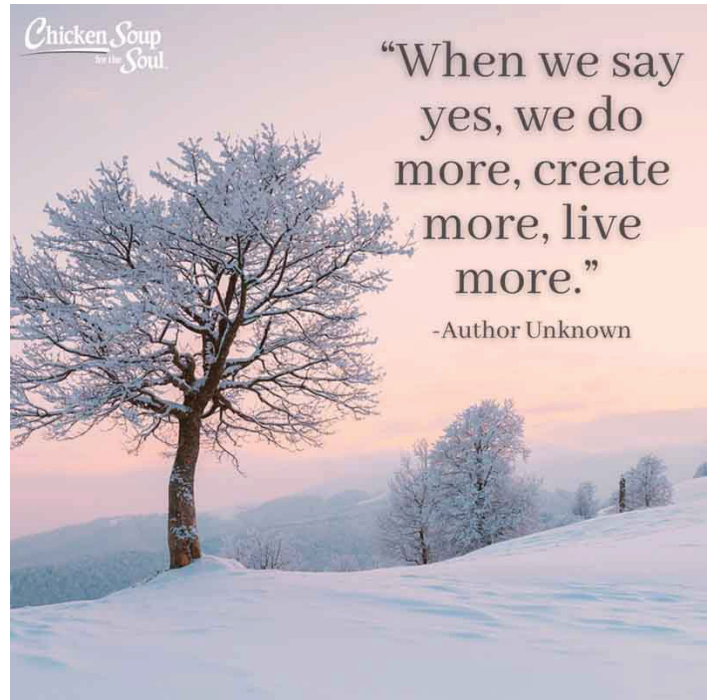


Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 1 of 93

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- State aid does not help Groton Area](#)
- [2- Fire at the laundromat](#)
- [3- Dacotah Bank Ad](#)
- [4- Christmas in South Dakota through the Decades](#)
- [6- Weather Pages](#)
- [10- Daily Devotional](#)
- [11- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [12- Subscription Form](#)
- [13- News from the Associated Press](#)



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. The varsity games will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

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.
© 2021 Groton Daily Independent

State aid does not help Groton Area

There is a proposal of increase state aid by 6 percent with the funds to be used teacher salaries. There is a problem with that formula. Groton Area does not get any state aid so the district would not qualify for any of those funds. Of course, Governor Noem's proposal would have to be approved by the state legislature and Superintendent Joe Schwan said there is a good chance that the legislature would say that 6 percent is too much of an increase.

Board Member Marty Weismantel said that he had emailed the three local legislatures to have them come to the Groton School and discuss the education funding. "I have not heard back from any of them," he said.

Speaking of budget, the general fund for the district runs at a big short fall with \$500,000 coming from the Capital Outlay Fund to cover the shortfall in the general fund. There are also a number of projects in the works that need to come from the Capital Outlay Fund, including roof replacement for the elementary school (Sections A&C in FY2023 for \$165,000; and Sections B&D in FY2024 for \$185,000), boiler replacements for the 1969 addition (AO Smith for \$75,000 in FY2025 and Fulton Boiler for \$65,000 in FY2023), replace the elementary gym floor (\$75,000 in FY 2025), replace 1969 gym flooring for \$100,000, replace 1969 gym bleachers for \$75,000, replace old gym air handling units for \$70,000, just to mention a few.

The board agreed to keep the door open for discussion with the Doland School for cooping in all sports.

Schwan reported that the annual Breast Cancer Awareness volleyball event with Northwestern raised \$4,424.88, the second highest annual since 2011. This event has raised \$32,384.90 in total over the years. Jan Hoffman has been a major coordinator of the project.



The Groton Fire Department responded to a fire at the laundromat in downtown Groton at 2:30 a.m. The flame was restricted to the dryer area and was quickly extinguished. A Groton resident called the owner of the laundromat after seeing the place filled with smoke.



DACOTAH BANK

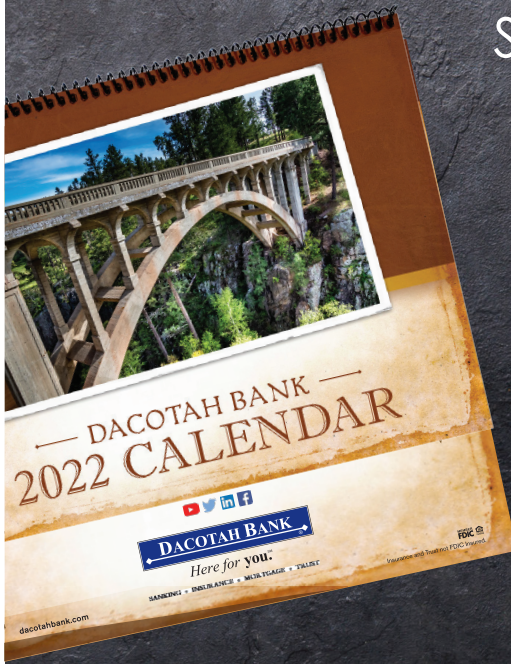
Cookies & Calendar OPEN HOUSE

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

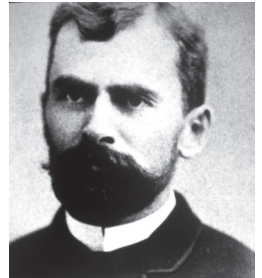


Christmas in South Dakota through the Decades



"Christmas is the day that holds all time together."
– Alexander Smith

It looked much different years ago, but the fellowship with family and friends at Christmas has remained a treasured constant, as shown in these three stories about South Dakota Christmases past.



Thomas L.

Hope Station, 1873

Christmastime might have had a special meaning for Thomas L. Riggs, a missionary to the Lakota.

"It was before Christmas in 1871, while I was still a student in the Seminary in Chicago that I had found the one woman for me and had dared to ask her to share the future with me," Riggs wrote in the book "Sunset to Sunset."

That woman was Cornelia "Nina" Foster of Bangor, Maine.

The two were married the day after Christmas in 1872 in Bangor. Riggs had established a mission called Hope Station on the west side of the Missouri River, across from Fort Sully in what would become central South Dakota, in 1872. The mission headquarters was later relocated to the eastern side of the Missouri River, about 16 miles north of present-day Pierre, and named Oahe Mission.

In "Sunset to Sunset," Riggs shared a letter about Christmas 1873 written by Lizzie Bishop, who had come to Hope Station as a teacher and helper.

"The Christmas holidays have passed, but not the pleasant remembrances of their good cheer," Bishop wrote.

The day after Christmas was the Riggs' anniversary.

"The good friends at Fort Sully remembered it and planned very quietly, but most generously, to surprise the family at Hope Station ... Just after the noonday meal, while the table was still spread, there appeared close by a team containing the Chaplain of the Fort and his family. Close behind, coming up the steep bank of the river, was a four-mule team drawing a heavy army wagon filled with good friends who speedily filled our rooms."

Those from Fort Sully came bearing gifts of a \$35 cash donation and provisions of meat, vegetables, coffee, spices, sugar, rice, lard, dried and canned fruit, cornmeal, a pair of live fowl and fresh eggs.

"The variety of canned articles has sometimes led us almost to forget how many hundred miles we are from any market, especially when eating clam chowder or oyster stew," Bishop wrote.

Deadwood, circa 1914

A native of Philadelphia, Anna Langhorne Waltz came to Burke as a bride in 1911. Her husband, A. Pierce Waltz, was a Baptist missionary pastor who served churches in Burke and Lucas and ministered to farmers and ranchers in the surrounding area. In 1913, the couple bought a relinquished homestead 10 miles west and south of the town of White River. Pierce was called to serve a church in Deadwood shortly after they acquired the claim. Early in 1914, Anna went to live in a sod house on the claim with their infant daughter. Her account of their first years in South Dakota was published in 1987 issues of "South Dakota History," a benefit of membership in the South Dakota State Historical Society.

Receiving mail on the homestead helped ease her loneliness, and one particular letter from her husband brought her great joy.

"He wrote that he had been told that homesteaders were given permission to leave their claims for two or three weeks during the homesteading period. This would not count against them or have to be made up, so he wanted us to come so we could be together for Christmas and the New Year."

Anna and the baby traveled by train to join her husband in Deadwood.

"At the journey's end, there was Daddy, waiting to receive us with open arms. We were together again! He had a very nice church in a pretty town of about five thousand people. The whole congregation immediately adopted us into their friendly circle, and I felt as if they were all old friends instead of newly

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 5 of 93

made ones," Anna wrote.

Snow covered the prairie when Anna and her daughter returned to the homestead in January. She described the scene, "No need of diamonds out here, where the sun could shine on this vast coverlet of snow and make it sparkle like the bright, shining tinsel on a Christmas tree. It was truly beautiful."

Pierre, 1932

In September 1932, 25-year-old Philip Cummings left his home in Vermont to begin a new job at an exclusive preparatory school southwest of Cody, Wyo. An account of his spending December 1932 in Pierre was published in the Summer 2009 issue of "South Dakota History."

On the afternoon of Dec. 24, Cummings put in a phone call to his mother in Hardwick, Vt. "I suppose everyone in the town is talking of my extravagance but many a person would pay double the \$6.45 to have a mother to talk to," he wrote.

That evening he delivered Christmas presents to friends, returned to his host family's house and opened presents. At eleven he went to the Episcopal Church for the midnight communion service.

"We finally raised a very small glass of very fine wine to the Spirit of Christmas and went to bed at five minutes to three."

The wife in his host family prepared "a great feast" served at 5 p.m. Christmas Day.

"What a dinner we had," Cummings wrote. "We launched right into the tremendous turkey with all the gelatinized salads, creamed cauliflower, then mashed potatoes, carrots, hot rolls, the various pickles and jellies, then a frozen dessert with coffee, nuts, candy and stuffed dates. At the end of the meal there were more things stuffed than the dates. After the dinner, some played cards, then seniority of the family party left for a short auto drive around town to see the Christmas trees. Later in the evening when everyone had returned, we all sat around the big dining table and played a fine game of cards which lasted us to the midnight hours, when all returned to their various homes. It was a merry MERRY Christmas.

"It was not difficult on retiring to count my blessings, for truly to be with friends and partake of decent fellowship is a large blessing indeed."

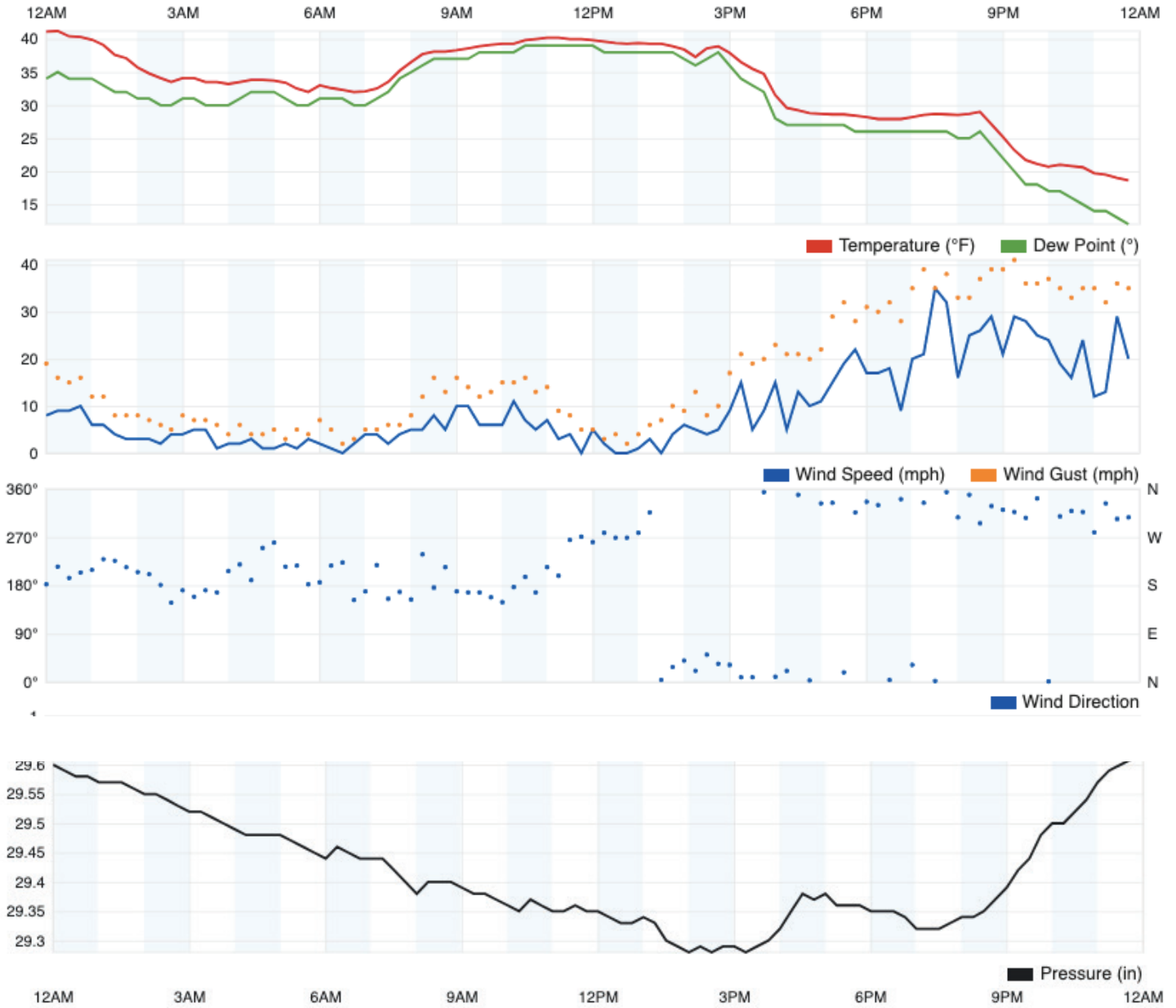
This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea

- Dorinda Daniel
- South Dakota Historical Society Foundation

Groton Daily Independent






Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 6 of 93

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

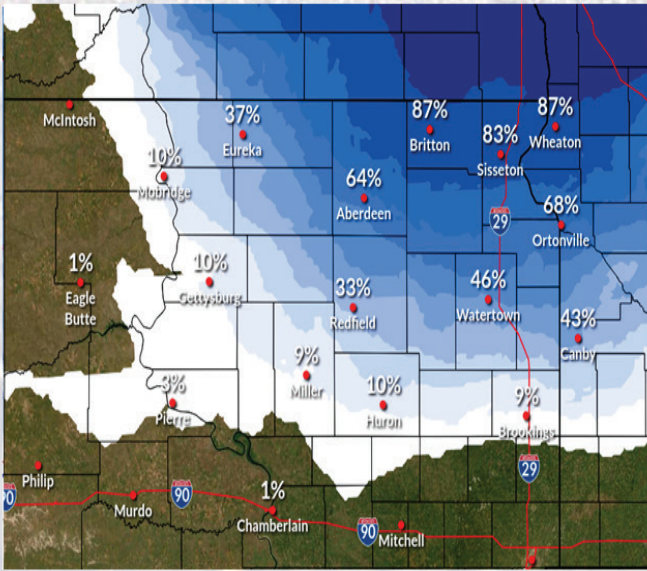
Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 7 of 93

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Sunny and Blustery then Sunny	Mostly Clear then Slight Chance Snow	Snow Likely	Snow Likely then Chance Snow	Sunny
High: 23 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 20 °F	Low: -1 °F	High: 11 °F

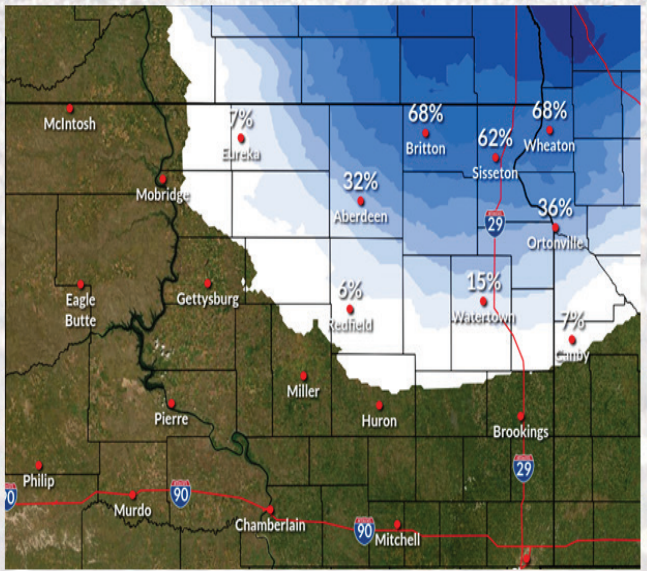
Accumulating Snowfall Friday

- Generally light but steady snow possible Friday morning through Friday night across mainly northeastern SD and west central MN
- Breezy northwest winds across central SD Friday afternoon
- Travel may be impacted. Keep an eye on the forecast, and plan accordingly

Percent chance for 1"+ of snow Friday



Percent chance for 2"+ of snow Friday



Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 12/16/2021 4:52 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Breezy conditions linger but gradually decrease today as one system exits, but another system will be right on its heels. Thus, more snow showers are forecast throughout the day Friday, and accumulations are most likely across northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Colder air moves in Friday night, with lows in the single digits on either side of zero.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 8 of 93

Today in Weather History

December 16, 1967: With temperatures in the upper 20s, heavy freezing rain fell in west central and southwest Minnesota at night on the 16th, causing widespread ice accumulations on all exposed surfaces, and power and telephone poles and lines went down over a vast region. Some places were without power and phone service for three to four days. This storm was classified as the most severe ice storm in the past 20 years in some areas. Reports were received of turkeys and other poultry dying due to the cold in the countryside. 20 to 30 cars were in the ditch on one slick stretch of road in Rock County. Further west, throughout eastern South Dakota, freezing rain for most of the day formed ice from 3/8 to 3/4 inch on exposed surfaces. Extensive damage was caused to utility lines. All roads became dangerous for traveling, and one death was directly linked to the ice storm. The ice cut off a regular water supply, causing one person to attempt to get water from a cistern. She slipped on the ice into the cistern. Three deaths were indirectly related to the ice storm; two due to automobile accidents, and one due to a heart attack.

December 16, 2000: Northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to 60 mph, combined with newly fallen snow and arctic air to bring widespread blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills as low as 70 below zero to west central Minnesota and much of South Dakota from late on the 15th through the 16th. Events were canceled, travel was shut down, and some motorists were stranded. Both US Highway 12 and Interstate 29 in South Dakota were closed throughout the day. As an indirect result of the low visibility, a semi-truck hit and totaled a pickup truck in the snow just west of Clark.

December 16, 1811: An estimated Magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck the Mississippi Valley near the town of New Madrid in Missouri at 2:15 am local time. People were awakened by the shaking in New York City, Washington D.C., and Charleston, South Carolina. The ground motions were described as most alarming and frightening in places like Nashville, Tennessee, and Louisville, Kentucky. In the epicentral area, the ground surface was described as in great convulsion with sand and water ejected tens of feet into the air.

December 16, 1941: In 1941, only two women were employed by the Weather Bureau. By 1945, more than 900 women are employed by the Weather Bureau as observers and forecasters, as a result of filling positions of men during World War II. Eleven days after Pearl Harbor, the Army requested that all weather broadcasts be discontinued. The fear was that the enemy would use this information to plan an attack on the United States.

1835 - New England experienced one of their coldest days of record. At noon on that bitterly cold Wednesday the mercury stood at four degrees below at Boston, 15 degrees below at Norfolk CT, and 17 degrees below at Hanover NH. The temperature at Boston was 12 degrees below zero by sunset. Gale force winds accompanied the severe cold, and that night a great New York City fire destroyed much of the financial district. (David Ludlum)

1917 - An ice jam closed the Ohio River between Warsaw, KY, and Rising Sun, IN. The thirty foot high ice jam held for 58 days, and backed up the river a distance of 100 miles. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A Pacific storm battered the coast of California with rain and high winds, and dumped heavy snow on the mountains of California. Winds along the coast gusted to 70 mph at Point Arguello, and winds in the Tehachapi Mountains of southern California gusted to 100 mph at Wheeler Ridge. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at Mammoth Mountain. Snow fell for two minutes at Malibu Beach, and Disneyland was closed due to the weather for only the second time in twenty-four years. A winter storm which began in the Southern Rockies four days earlier finished its course producing snow and high winds in New England. Snowfall totals ranged up to 19 inches at Blanchard ME. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fairbanks, AK, reported freezing rain and record warm temperatures. The afternoon high of 41 degrees was 43 degrees above normal. Snow and high winds continued to plague the mountains of southern California. Mount Wilson CA reported two inches of rain in six hours during the early morning, and a storm total of more than 3.50 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

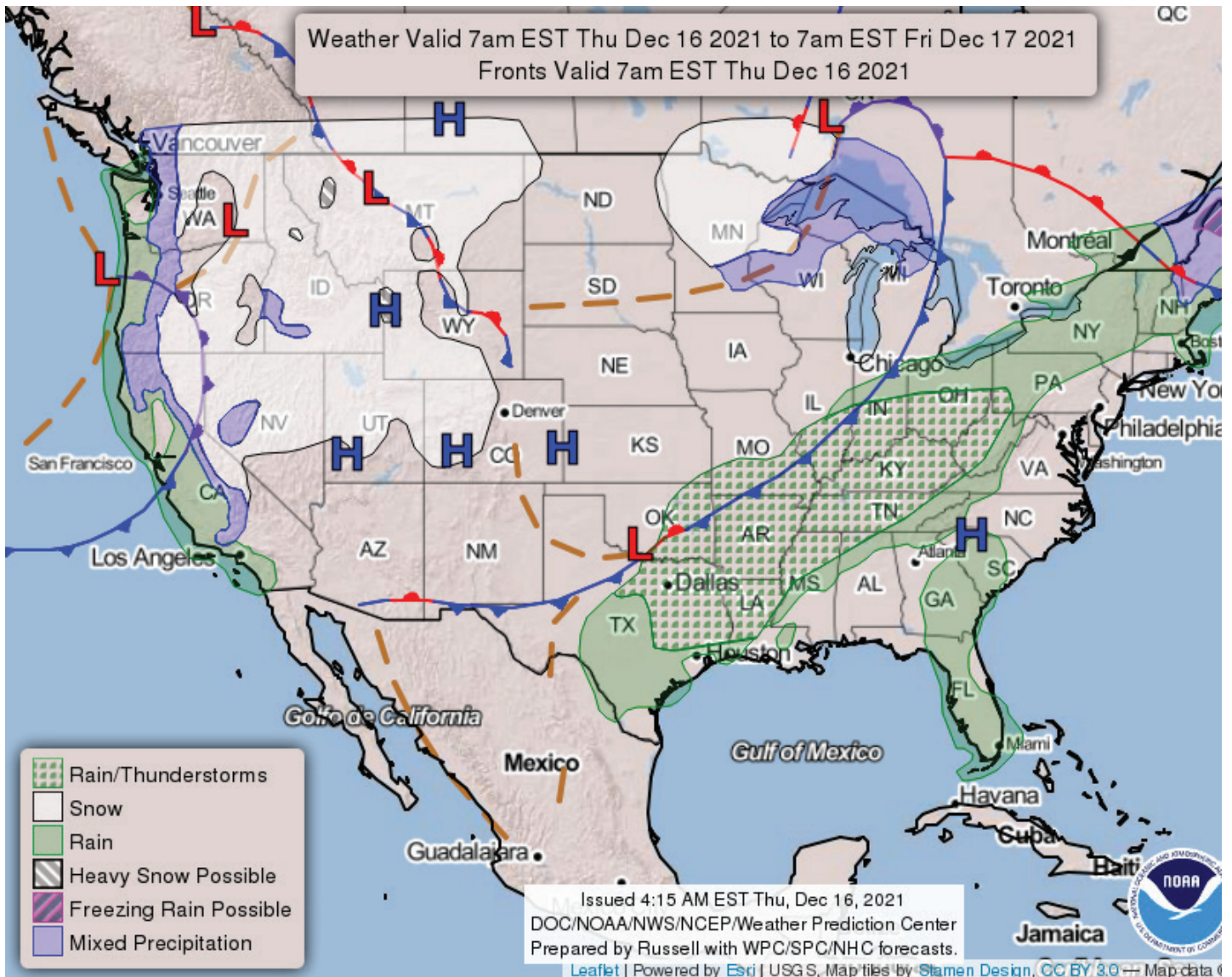
Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 9 of 93

Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 41.2 °F at 12:15 AM
Low Temp: 18.6 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 41 mph at 9:15 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 62° in 1962
Record Low: -28° in 1951
Average High: 28°F
Average Low: 8°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.31
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11
Average Precip to date: 21.52
Precip Year to Date: 19.97
Sunset Tonight: 4:51:49 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05:20 AM





GIFTS

Christmas gifts generate great excitement and interest. After the presents are wrapped and placed under the tree, many people spend countless hours trying to figure out what might be on the inside. Sometimes the gifts are carefully shaken or lifted to see if the weight or size might give an indication about what the contents might be.

But when God gave us the first Christmas gift, its value was obvious. It was a gift of love that could not be measured or found outside of Him. It was a gift of mercy that only He could provide. And, it was a gift of grace that only God could give us through His Son.

God's love is ultimately expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His love is the source of His mercy and grace, and it is because of His love that we have mercy and grace. It was because of His love for us that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will find His mercy and enjoy His grace and be with Him forever in eternity.

John says something very significant about this love. "If God loved us," he says, "we ought to love one another." His love does not end with our salvation and then begins with our obligation to share His love with others. It begins a pattern of self-sacrificing love that Christians must live by sharing His mercy and grace with others.

Prayer: Lord, we often forget how responsible we are to share Your gifts of love, mercy, and salvation with others. Give us no peace until we share Your gifts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 11 of 93

2021 Community Events

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 12 of 93

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

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

E-mail _____

Password _____

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

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 13 of 93

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

06-27-30-31-35

(six, twenty-seven, thirty, thirty-one, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

01-09-24-25-47, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 2

(one, nine, twenty-four, twenty-five, forty-seven; Star Ball: one; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$5.07 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$160 million

Powerball

19-20-40-42-59, Powerball: 15, Power Play: 3

(nineteen, twenty, forty, forty-two, fifty-nine; Powerball: fifteen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$333 million

Wednesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Custer 46, Lower Brule 26

Santee, Neb. 54, Tiospaye Topa 32

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 85, Crow Creek 83

Little Wound 59, St. Francis Indian 23

Santee, Neb. 87, Tiospaye Topa 29

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

Fuller carries South Dakota past Bellarmine 78-64

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Xavier Fuller matched his season high with 20 points and South Dakota topped Bellarmine 78-64 on Wednesday night.

Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 19 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota (7-4), which earned its sixth consecutive home win. Mason Archambault scored 12 points and Hunter Goodrick gathered eight rebounds.

Dylan Penn had 19 points and seven rebounds for the Knights (5-7). CJ Fleming scored 16, Alec Pfriem and Juston Betz collared a career-high 10 rebounds.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

This was generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 14 of 93

Minnett carries Missouri St. over S. Dakota St. 75-63

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (AP) — Jaylen Minnett came off the bench to score 16 points with four 3-pointers to lead Missouri State to a 75-63 win over South Dakota State on Wednesday night.

Gaige Prim had 13 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks for Missouri State (7-4). Donovan Clay added 12 points, seven rebounds and three blocks. Lu'Cye Patterson had 11 points and six assists. Ja'Monta Black scored 10.

South Dakota State scored 30 second-half points, a season low for the team.

Douglas Wilson had 18 points for the Jackrabbits (9-4). Luke Appel added 17 points.

Noah Freidel, who led the Jackrabbits in scoring at 20 points per game, had only seven points on 2-of-12 shooting. Baylor Scheierman (14.0 points per game) scored five points (2 of 12).

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

This was generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

South Dakota hospitals strained as holiday gatherings loom

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's largest hospital systems on Wednesday warned they are strained and pushing off medical care as the state's hospitals fill with the highest number of people infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of this year.

"We continue to have concerns that as our hospitals fill with COVID-19 patients, we will not be able to provide prompt, quality care to our patients who are coming in with other medical needs," said Dr. Mike Wilde, the head medical officer at Sanford Health.

Officials with Sanford, Avera Medical Group and the city of Sioux Falls spoke at a news conference Wednesday to urge people to get vaccinated and take precautions against spreading the virus during holiday gatherings. The state is seeing its worse surge of the virus since last winter, when hundreds of people died.

"We're just back up, climbing, climbing, climbing," said Dr. David Basel, the vice president of clinical quality at Avera.

One in every 351 people in the state tested positive for the virus in the past week, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. Health officials reported eight new deaths Wednesday. While hospitals saw a small drop to 271 patients with COVID-19, the number of hospitalizations on Tuesday was the highest in nearly a year.

Basel described how his wife, who works as a physician in an intensive care unit, "has seen more death and suffering in this last year than she's seen in the 20 years of her career prior to that."

Avera is deferring medical procedures that are not urgent until the spring, Basel said. "We just don't have the beds," he added.

While Sanford has not canceled medical procedures, Wilde said the situation is changing day-to-day.

The officials urged people to get vaccinated, including booster shots, as well as wear masks in crowded, indoor places.

"Think about what we can do to save lives," said Dr. Charles Chima, the public health director for Sioux Falls, "what can we do to stay safe this holiday."

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. December 13, 2021.

Editorial: Malsam-Rysdon Set To Depart DOH

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 15 of 93

You really can't begrudge Kim Malsam-Rysdon for stepping down as the secretary of the South Dakota Department of Health.

She has served in that position since 2015, but the last 22 months have probably felt more like a lifetime for her, or for any health official dealing with a once-in-a-century global pandemic.

Prior to the arrival of COVID-19, there's a pretty good chance that few South Dakotans could probably have named who their health secretary was. And in the scheme of things, that's how a health secretary would want it, for it means there was little cause for such urgent attention.

But these have been different times, and Malsam-Rysdon has been one of the familiar faces and explanatory voices the people of this state have turned to in dealing with — and understanding — this pandemic.

Along the way, she has helped shepherd a state response as best she could amid a lot of unknowns and, one might suspect, some political inconveniences.

For instance, Malsam-Rysdon, along with State Epidemiologist Joshua Clayton, spent many media briefings on COVID emphasizing the need for safety precautions such as social distancing and masking, even when (for example) others in state government were not following those recommendations. They also urged South Dakotans to get vaccinated, even though some people in this state were not willing to adhere to or even tolerate such advice.

Malsam-Rysdon was asked about these things frequently by reporters during the briefings (which were discontinued this past summer), and she held her ground, not choosing to call anybody out while continuing to promote the safety measures that have been a staple of our pandemic defense.

She also helped organize the vaccination effort in this state, which coped with a lot of uncertainties about supply in the earliest days. After the change in presidential administrations last winter, the vaccine supply became much more predictable and easier to administer. For a while, South Dakota did quite well in dispensing vaccinations until it hit what now appears to be a brick wall common to many so-called red states. Nevertheless, Malsam-Rysdon helped get things running as smoothly as possible.

And, like everyone else in the health field, she endured COVID surges, hospitalization crunches, plant outbreaks and various other crises and general situations. There have a lot of dramas these past 22 months.

It wasn't all perfect, of course, but Malsam-Rysdon did a great job during an extraordinary emergency. In the briefings, you could sometimes hear the weariness in her voice, especially during last fall's surge, and you could also detect her uplifted spirit when the vaccines began changing the landscape. Clearly, she rode this roller coaster along with everyone else.

She's leaving to join the private sector, which is a loss for the state. But she will be leaving behind a legacy of great service that likely saved lives in this very uncertain age.

We wish her all the best.

END

Sonic blasts used to scare geese away in Sioux Falls

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls will use pyrotechnics and sound cannons to scare Canada geese that are migrating into the city as temperatures drop and ponds freeze in rural areas.

City officials say the geese are creating a safety hazard for airplanes near the Sioux Falls Regional Airport. The geese can strike a plane's windshield or get sucked into its engines.

Sioux Falls Animal Control and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks will begin using pyrotechnics and sound cannons Thursday to scare geese from quarry ponds east of the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds and at Elmwood golf course.

The birds are attracted to the Big Sioux River in Sioux Falls, portions of which remain open throughout the winter and to harvested crop fields near the airport.

Animal control officials say the sound cannons are a humane method of scaring geese, instead of using chemicals or poisons. They are pressure-regulated and create a sonic blast with no projectiles. The cannons will go off several times during the day and will not be used at night.

Ex-boarding school for Native children owning up to its past

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — Middle schooler Rarity Cournoyer stood at the heart of the Red Cloud Indian School campus and chanted a prayer song firmly and solemnly in the Lakota language — in a place where past generations of students were punished for speaking their mother tongue.

Her classmates stood around her at a prayer circle designed with archetypes of Native American spirituality, with a circular sidewalk representing a traditional medicine wheel.

Lakota language teacher Amery Brave Heart walked quietly with a small bundle of smoldering sage stems. Brave Heart — sporting a long braid on the very campus where his grandfather, Basil Brave Heart, said he had his long hair shorn and carelessly trampled on as a newly arrived pupil — offered the sage to each student as part of a brief smudging or purification ritual, in which they symbolically waved the scented smoke toward themselves.

Such scenes would have been hard to imagine here decades ago when Holy Rosary Mission — as the Catholic K-12 school was then named — formed part of a network of boarding schools across North America where generations of Indigenous children were brought to weaken their bonds to tribe and family and assimilate them into the dominant white, English-speaking, Christian culture.

But while Lakota staff, language and ritual have increasingly become central to Red Cloud, the 133-year-old school has never fully reckoned with this history, which has alienated many Lakota living on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, one of the nation's largest.

Now the school is undertaking what it calls a Truth and Healing process, seeking to hear the stories of former students, open its archives and face its past.

The ceremony at the prayer circle was a way of acknowledging that history, one of several small gatherings held at Red Cloud on the last day of September to mark what's come to be known across North America as Orange Shirt Day.

Many students and teachers wore orange in solidarity with Indigenous children of past generations who suffered cultural loss, family rupture and sometimes abuse and neglect while compelled to attend residential schools from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries.

The event commemorates the long-ago account of an Indigenous woman in Canada whose residential school confiscated her orange shirt — a cherished gift from her grandmother — and made her wear a uniform.

"Our ancestors faced a lot in their time, but they remained resilient," Red Cloud senior Mia Murdoch told fellow students during the high school's observance. "They weren't allowed to express themselves or to rejoice in who they were. We as young people now have those privileges. ... Orange Shirt Day is not just a single day. It is a confrontation of the past and a conversation that takes place over a long period."

The school's Truth and Healing process, begun in 2020, is following four steps described as confrontation, understanding, healing and transformation.

"We're really in the early stages of confrontation," said Maka Black Elk, executive director for Truth and Healing at Red Cloud.

"I think people want to rush quickly to healing because it's hopeful ... but there's a lot more that needs to happen before we can," he said.

That includes giving former students a chance to tell their stories, whether in public settings or confidentially.

It will also involve a deep dive into school archives, even if it yields stories "we don't want to hear," Black Elk said.

The Truth and Healing process comes amid larger-scale reckonings by governments and church groups that ran residential schools.

Earlier this year in Canada, specialists using ground-penetrating radar discovered hundreds of unmarked graves at former school sites. A 2015 report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada said residential schools were often abusive, unsanitary and unsafe.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 17 of 93

While school conditions varied across the U.S. and Canada, and some former students say they had positive experiences, even schools with better track records were serving in the larger project of cultural assimilation — what some call cultural genocide.

At least 367 such boarding schools once operated across the United States, about 40 percent of them affiliated with Catholic or Protestant churches, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Most have closed, and most of the remaining ones, including Red Cloud, no longer board students overnight.

Holy Rosary, long staffed by Jesuit brothers and Franciscan nuns, boarded students for nearly a century after its founding in 1888.

A small group of Jesuits remain, but much else has changed at what is now a day school, with a total enrollment of 600 at its main campus and a second elementary school about 30 miles away.

Still, the wounds remain for many.

"This is something that people in the community who are from here have known about for a long time," Black Elk said. "It's their family history."

Black Elk said the school plans to use ground-penetrating radar next summer where unmarked graves are suspected — in tandem with archival research about student deaths.

"It isn't to do a quick and dirty measure of what your number (of graves) is. That's actually traumatizing," he said. "Really what ground-penetrating radar is about is healing. You're finding people. You're trying to find names, and a story about why that person is there."

The Jesuits at the school, as elsewhere, are undergoing their own soul-searching.

U.S. and Canadian Jesuit leaders issued a statement of regret in August for the suppression of Native culture. They pledged to help "shine the light of truth" on this history.

"The pain or the trauma of that past can hold us back no matter what positive moves we've made," said the Rev. Peter Klink, former president and now vice president for mission and identity at Red Cloud. "We've got to pursue the truth so that we understand fully the past."

AP journalist Emily Leshner contributed to this report.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Ex-boarding school for Native children owning up to its past

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — Middle schooler Rarity Cournoyer stood at the heart of the Red Cloud Indian School campus and chanted a prayer song firmly and solemnly in the Lakota language — in a place where past generations of students were punished for speaking their mother tongue.

Her classmates stood around her at a prayer circle designed with archetypes of Native American spirituality, with a circular sidewalk representing a traditional medicine wheel, crossed by sidewalks pointing to the four cardinal directions.

Lakota language teacher Amery Brave Heart walked quietly with a small bundle of smoldering sage stems. Brave Heart — sporting a long braid on the very campus where his grandfather, Basil Brave Heart, said he had his long hair shorn and carelessly trampled on as a newly arrived pupil — offered the sage to each student as part of a brief smudging or purification ritual, in which they symbolically waved the scented smoke toward themselves.

Such scenes would have been hard to imagine here decades ago when Holy Rosary Mission — as the Catholic K-12 school was then named — formed part of a network of boarding schools across North America where generations of Indigenous children were brought to weaken their bonds to tribe and family and assimilate them into the dominant white, English-speaking, Christian culture.

But while Lakota staff, language and ritual have increasingly become central to Red Cloud, the 133-year-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 18 of 93

old school has never fully reckoned with this history, which has alienated many Lakota living on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, one of the nation's largest.

Now the school is undertaking what it calls a Truth and Healing process, seeking to hear the stories of former students, open its archives and face its past.

"I'm so proud of who we are today, the direction Red Cloud is heading in. That's the beautiful part," said Tashina Banks Rama, the school's vice president for advancement. "The tough part is we have to confront ... the dark history of boarding school policies and our role in that policy."

The ceremony at the prayer circle was a way of acknowledging that history, one of several small gatherings held at Red Cloud on the last day of September to mark what's come to be known across North America as Orange Shirt Day.

Many students and teachers wore orange in solidarity with Indigenous children of past generations who suffered cultural loss, family rupture and sometimes abuse and neglect while compelled to attend residential schools from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries.

The event commemorates the long-ago account of an Indigenous woman in Canada whose residential school confiscated her orange shirt — a cherished gift from her grandmother — and made her wear a uniform.

"Our ancestors faced a lot in their time, but they remained resilient," Red Cloud senior Mia Murdoch told fellow students during the high school's observance. "They weren't allowed to express themselves or to rejoice in who they were. We as young people now have those privileges. ... Orange Shirt Day is not just a single day. It is a confrontation of the past and a conversation that takes place over a long period."

The school's Truth and Healing process, begun in 2020, is following four steps described as confrontation, understanding, healing and transformation.

"We're really in the early stages of confrontation," said Maka Black Elk, executive director for Truth and Healing at Red Cloud.

"I think people want to rush quickly to healing because it's hopeful ... but there's a lot more that needs to happen before we can," he said.

That includes giving former students a chance to tell their stories, whether in public settings or confidentially.

It will also involve a deep dive into school archives. "The stories that records and archives tell are sometimes ones that we don't want to hear," Black Elk said.

The Truth and Healing process comes amid larger-scale reckonings by governments and church groups that ran residential schools.

Earlier this year in Canada, specialists using ground-penetrating radar discovered hundreds of unmarked graves at former school sites. The discoveries reopened historical wounds years after a 2015 report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada said residential schools were often abusive, unsanitary and unsafe, where children died from disease and fires "in numbers that would not have been tolerated" anywhere else.

While school conditions varied across the U.S. and Canada, and some former students say they had positive experiences, even schools with better track records were serving in the larger project of cultural assimilation — what some call cultural genocide.

At least 367 such boarding schools once operated across the United States, about 40 percent of them affiliated with Catholic or Protestant churches, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Most have closed, and most of the remaining ones, including Red Cloud, no longer board students overnight.

Holy Rosary, long staffed by Jesuit brothers and Franciscan nuns, boarded students for nearly a century after its founding in 1888. Its current name comes from the 19th-century Lakota warrior and chief who long fought against U.S. land grabs before his people were confined to the reservation, and who later invited the Jesuits to start the school and converted to Catholicism.

A small group of Jesuits remain, but much else has changed at what is now a day school, with buses fanning out across the sprawling reservation to bring students to the main campus and an elementary

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 19 of 93

school about 30 miles away. K-12 enrollment on both campuses totals about 600.

Still, the wounds of earlier generations continue to fester for many on the reservation.

"This is something that people in the community who are from here have known about for a long time," Black Elk said. "It's their family history."

That family history is also motivating a group of high school students at Red Cloud to add their voices to the Truth and Healing process. They're raising awareness of the history and helping with ceremonies honoring their forebears and others who went to boarding schools.

"We're trying to heal from what they did to them, because that intergenerational trauma is still with us," said Destiny Big Crow, a junior. "I also want to bring that healing around to my community."

One path to healing, she said is "by learning the language and learning the traditions, learning what they took away from us."

Lakota language instruction is now woven into the curriculum. On a recent day, students in one high school class competed to complete a series of translations the fastest.

"Help each other out, work together," teacher Roger White Eyes urged as he moved from desk to desk.

"It's just awesome to hear the language spoken by the youth," said White Eyes, wearing a T-shirt and face mask with Red Cloud logos. "For me, growing up, you never heard it" except among elders.

Across the campus, elementary students sat in a classroom where they learn most of their subjects in a Lakota immersion program.

Teacher Randilynn Boucher-Giago presented a slideshow on the boarding school legacy. Afterward the students gathered around a drum and joined in a pulsing, full-throated Lakota chant.

Boucher-Giago said she incorporated the chant into the lesson to tell the students: "You speak Lakota, you sing in Lakota. Our grandparents had suffered, but now you're turning that around."

As a Catholic school, Red Cloud also represents something larger.

"We also have to address a very dynamic and complex relationship between Indigenous people as a whole and the greater Catholic Church, and what that church represents for colonial history," Black Elk said. "And so we're kind of ground zero for an intercultural and interreligious dialogue."

It's a complex picture, because some Lakota are Catholics and some follow Lakota spiritual traditions, while others practice both and still others belong to different faiths. The school teaches about both Catholicism and Lakota beliefs in its religion classes.

The Jesuits at the school, as elsewhere, are undergoing a soul-searching of their own.

Leaders of the order in the U.S. and Canada issued a statement in August expressing regret for the suppression of Native culture and separation of families and pledging cooperation with efforts to "shine the light of truth" on this history.

The Rev. Peter Klink, a former longtime president of Red Cloud and now its vice president for mission and identity, first began working at the school in 1975. He's seen it increasingly incorporate Lakota staff and cultural sensitivity.

Still, "the pain or the trauma of that past can hold us back no matter what positive moves we've made," he said. "We've got to pursue the truth so that we understand fully the past."

Critics inside and outside of Red Cloud say the school still has work to do.

While Mass attendance is only required of students on a few dates each year, some are calling for that mandate to be removed, recalling how past generations were coerced into converting to Christianity.

Some want the school to immediately begin searching for children's graves with ground-penetrating radar. And they want the school's history told — all of it.

Basil Brave Heart, who attended in the 1940s, said that while some of the priests and nuns were kind, one made him bite a rubber band, stretch it and snap it against his lips as punishment for speaking a Lakota word. His and other boys' long hair, considered sacred, was unceremoniously cut short upon arrival.

"Physical abuse was difficult. But when they took my language away, they took my moral compass," said Brave Heart, 88, who lives on the nearby farm where he grew up and where he helps other Native Americans heal from trauma through traditional ceremonies.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 20 of 93

"The language we speak is the way you think, the way you pray and the way you conduct your ceremonies," he said. The Lakota language, he said, resonates with divine vibration; taking it away "was moving us from our Indian-ness to something else," he said.

Some former Holy Rosary attendees do look back positively on their boarding-school education.

"It depends on who you talk to," said Patricia Catches the Enemy, 80, who also lives nearby. She said she "had some sadness, having to leave my home and being forced to go into a school." But she said she didn't witness any abuse, and she values the education, the training in skills such as needlework and the deepened Catholic faith that she received at Holy Rosary.

She said it's important to focus on today's problems, such as drug addiction: "The past is the past. We can't do anything about it but forgive and move on."

Black Elk said the varied perspectives are understandable. The good that some experienced "doesn't mitigate the abuse that happened, and the abuse that happened does not mitigate the good that some people got out of it," he said.

Black Elk also said the school plans to use ground-penetrating radar where unmarked graves are suspected at the school's historic cemetery and other sites beginning next summer. That may not be as soon as some would like, but Black said the school will consult with spiritual leaders, former students and other stakeholders.

"It isn't to do a quick and dirty measure of what your number (of graves) is. That's actually traumatizing," he said. "Really what ground-penetrating radar is about is healing. You're finding people. You're trying to find names, and a story about why that person is there."

Rama, the vice president for advancement at Red Cloud, said she never imagined she would be working for Red Cloud, given the painful experiences her family had in boarding schools.

"I'm not Christian. I'm definitely not Catholic," she said. "I was raised in traditional Lakota spirituality."

But when her teenage daughter struggled in her school, Rama's mother persuaded her to transfer her to Red Cloud, saying things had changed. The girl began to thrive — and is now, years later, teaching the Lakota language at the school.

Rama, whose younger children are now students here, works in a section of the century-old Drexel Hall, a gabled, brick complex that once housed the children's dormitories.

"We're reclaiming this space," Rama said. "This building maybe used to be a boarding school, but now, when my children visit me in my office, these halls are filled with their laughter. And I think the spirits of the past and our ancestors could not be more proud of where we are today."

AP journalist Emily Leshner contributed to this report.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

British surge seen as warning on omicron but responses vary

By DANICA KIRKA and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Spiraling infections in Britain driven in part by the new omicron variant of the coronavirus sent shockwaves Thursday into the rest of Europe, fueling a familiar dread that tighter restrictions will scuttle holiday plans again this year.

Much remains unknown about omicron, but increasingly officials are warning that at the very least it appears more transmissible than the delta variant, which was already putting pressure on hospitals from the United States to the Netherlands. With so many questions outstanding, uncertainty reigned over how quickly and how severely to crack down on everything from travel to Christmas parties.

After the U.K. recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections Wednesday since the pandemic began, France tightened entry rules for those coming from Britain.

In England, the chief medical officer urged people to limit who they see in the festive period — though

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 21 of 93

there has been much debate about how much should be canceled. In the U.S., meanwhile, the White House insisted there was no need for a lockdown, despite signs that omicron was gaining ground there.

Globally, more than 75 countries have reported confirmed cases of the new variant. In Britain, where omicron cases are doubling every two to three days, the variant is expected to soon replace delta as the dominant strain in the country. Authorities in the 27-nation European Union expect omicron to be the dominant variant in the bloc by mid-January.

In addition to hints that it's more contagious, early data suggest omicron may be milder but better at evading vaccines. Experts have urged caution in particular on drawing conclusions about how mild it is because its hospitalizations lag behind infections and so many variables contribute to how sick people get.

Also, even if omicron proves milder on the whole than delta, it may disarm some of the lifesaving tools available and put immune-compromised and elderly people at particular risk. And if it's more transmissible, more infections overall raise the risk of more serious ones.

EU leaders gathering in Brussels for a summit Thursday sought to balance tackling the surge of infections across the continent while keeping borders open.

But ahead of the meeting, European nations already were acting to rein in the spread of the virus.

France said it will slap restrictions on travelers arriving from the U.K. — which is no longer part of the EU — putting limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new measures will take effect first thing Saturday.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex said the measures are being imposed "in the face of the extremely rapid spread of the omicron variant in the U.K."

The abrupt move comes after weeks of political tensions between France and Britain over fishing rights and how to deal with migration in dangerous small boats across the English Channel.

It also comes as France's government is desperately trying to avoid a new lockdown or stricter measures that would hurt the economy and cloud President Emmanuel Macron's expected campaign for April presidential elections.

Greece announced Wednesday that all travelers to the country will have to show a PCR test with a negative result starting Sunday whether they are vaccinated or not. Italy this week also required negative tests from vaccinated visitors, raising concerns that similar moves elsewhere will limit the ability of EU citizens to travel to see friends and relatives over the holidays.

Portugal's Prime Minister António Costa said he intends to keep tighter COVID-19 border controls in place beyond their planned end on Jan. 9 due to the threat from the highly infectious new omicron variant. In Greece,

England's chief medical officer warned the situation there is only likely to get worse during the holidays.

Professor Chris Whitty described the current situation as two epidemics in one — with omicron infections rising rapidly even as the country continues to grapple with the older delta variant, which is still causing a large number of infections.

Whitty advised people to limit their social contacts, putting a priority on those that are the most important.

Fearing a raft of canceled parties and a general drop in business at the height of the crucial and lucrative Christmas season, British restaurants and pubs demanded government help Thursday. They said concerns about the new variant have already wiped out 2 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion) in sales over the last 10 days.

Jonathan Neame, chief executive of pub and brewery Shepherd Neame, said the grim warnings will plunge his business back to the start of the pandemic.

"We've seen a significant number of cancellations and that's accelerating every day, and will accelerate even further after the news last night, which seems to have thrown us back into that sort of zombie world of the first week of March, of the pandemic last year," he told Times Radio.

The Music Venue Trust said that a catastrophic drop in attendance and advance ticket sales have hit the industry since the government announced tougher restrictions last Wednesday, "placing the entire sector back on red alert for the risk of permanent closures."

Corder reported from The Hague, Netherlands.

Live updates: UK travel industry decries French COVID rules

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — Travel industry officials have expressed dismay at French restrictions on arrivals from Britain, describing the new rules to prevent the spread of the omicron variant as a hammer blow to the industry.

The comments by Mark Tanzer, chief executive of travel and trade association Abta, came after medical officials expressed alarm at what they described as the phenomenal speed at which the variant is spreading. Travel officials demanded government help to help battered businesses.

“The winter sports and school travel markets are particularly exposed, and the government must now bring forward a support package if we are not to see company failures and job losses,” Tanzer said.

Tanzer said the sector has had little opportunity to make money since the start of the pandemic, and will now be faced with another wave of cancellations.

The new French measures place limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new rules take effect first thing Saturday.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TODAY ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC:

- EU leaders discussing rise of infections, spread of omicron
- France to restrict travel from Britain to fight omicron
- Vaccine skeptics in Eastern Europe having change of heart
- US sports leagues cope with COVID-19 outbreaks amid variants
- New California rules end distinction for vaccinated workers
- Israel to donate 1 million COVID vaccines to African nations

Go to <https://APNews.com/coronavirus-pandemic> for updates throughout the day.

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TODAY:

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's Health Ministry has confirmed the country's first case of infection with the omicron coronavirus variant in a woman from Lesotho.

The case was found in a sample examined in Katowice. The ministry tweeted Thursday that the 30-year Lesotho citizen feels well but has been put in hospital isolation.

It said national health authorities have taken necessary steps. That usually means contacting, testing and putting under quarantine people who have had contact with the infected person.

The first Polish person diagnosed with omicron was a teenager who travelled to China this month and tested positive on arrival.

LISBON, Portugal — Portugal's prime minister says he intends to keep tighter COVID-19 border controls in place beyond their planned end on Jan. 9 because of the threat from the highly infectious new omicron variant.

He says Portugal is also likely to provide another booster shot next year for already vaccinated vulnerable people who are receiving a booster after having the COVID-19 jab earlier this year.

Portugal requires a negative test for all passengers on arriving flights.

Prime Minister António Costa told reporters Thursday that border controls will continue beyond Jan. 9 and could even be tightened. He didn't elaborate.

The government had previously announced a “contention week” from Jan. 2-9, when working from home is mandatory and schools will be closed.

LONDON — British restaurants and pubs demanded government help as the omicron variant threatened businesses with closure at the height of the crucial and lucrative Christmas season.

U.K. hospitality appealed to the government for business rates relief and value-added tax discounts,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 23 of 93

warning that fears about the new variant have already had an impact on the sector, with sales already having plunged by a third in the last 10 days — reflecting 2 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion) in lost trade.

Jonathan Neame, the chief executive of pub and brewery Shepherd Neame, said the government comments and concerns will throw his business back to the start of the pandemic.

“We’ve seen a significant number of cancellations and that’s accelerating every day, and will accelerate even further after the news last night, which seems to have thrown us back into that sort of zombie world of the first week of March, of the pandemic last year,” he told Times Radio.

The U.K. recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections Wednesday since the pandemic began.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey is offering COVID-19 booster shots for people who received their second shots at least three months ago as a measure to fight the omicron variant.

The measure, announced late Wednesday, cuts by three months the previous six-month interval between the second shot and the booster vaccine.

The country of nearly 84 million has so far reported six cases of the omicron variant.

BRUSSELS — A summit of European Union leaders is trying to coordinate action to tackle the surge of coronavirus infections across the continent and the emergence of the new omicron variant while keeping borders open.

The bloc’s leaders want to avoid a confusing mixture of rules with the festive season looming. And they want to ensure all 27 member states are on the same page and that the COVID-19 certificates continues to guarantee unrestricted travel.

But alarming rises in infections have prompted many European governments to implement public health measures and new restrictions in recent weeks.

PARIS — France will restrict arrivals from Britain because of fast-spreading cases of the omicron virus variant.

The government spokesman said Thursday that France will impose limits on reasons for traveling and a new requirement of a 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new measures are taking effect first thing Saturday.

The government is holding a special virus security meeting Friday that will address growing pressure on hospitals in France from rising infections in recent weeks.

Delta remains the dominant variant in France. But omicron is spreading so fast in Britain that it is raising concerns across the Channel. The U.K. recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections Wednesday since the pandemic began.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Swedish authorities say citizens from fellow Nordic countries will have to show a valid COVID-19 vaccination certificate when entering Sweden starting next week.

As of Dec. 21, people from Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland no longer will have an exemption to the certificate requirement and must also show their passes to enter Sweden.

The country’s social affairs minister also encouraged all travelers to be tested for the coronavirus upon entry due to what she called a “deteriorating” public health situation. Sweden has previously stood out among European nations for its comparatively hands-off response to the coronavirus.

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — Some former vaccine skeptics in Eastern Europe are shifting over to the other side.

Fata Keco was afraid of possible adverse side effects when she rolled up her sleeve in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo to take her first COVID-19 vaccine shot. But the worst she had to contend with was “moderately discomforting pain” in her left arm.

The 52-year-old joined the global community of vaccine-believers after months of “being very susceptible”

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 24 of 93

to what she now describes as “the most ridiculous theories.” She is not alone. Countries like Bosnia and Romania are seeing their vaccination rates rise amid tighter COVID-19 restrictions.

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesia has detected its first case of the omicron variant of the coronavirus in a cleaning worker at a hospital in Jakarta.

The patient has no symptoms and is being quarantined at the Athlete’s Village emergency hospital, where the patient worked.

The government created the facility in March 2020 to treat COVID-19 patients and as a quarantine venue for Indonesians returning from abroad. Indonesian Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said the case was found on Wednesday, and he urged people to continue to follow recommended health protocols, including wearing masks and maintaining physical distance.

He also called for increased testing and to accelerate the country’s vaccination program.

DENVER — U.S. sports leagues are seeing rapidly increasing COVID-19 outbreaks with dozens of players in health and safety protocols, amid an ongoing surge by the delta variant of the coronavirus and rising cases of the highly transmissible omicron mutation.

Both the NBA and NHL have postponed games over the last month with so many players sidelined, and the men’s basketball teams at Tulane and the University of Washington have had cancellations.

But don’t expect the leagues to return to “bubble” play or shut down until things subside. Experts say managing outbreaks is easier with highly vaccinated rosters, and there’s too much at stake to cut back seasons.

SACRAMENTO, California — Workplace regulators are poised to extend California’s coronavirus pandemic regulations into next year with revisions that businesses say could worsen the labor shortage.

The main change in the California Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board’s revised rule Thursday is that it would erase current distinctions between vaccinated and unvaccinated employees.

Both would be barred from the workplace if they come in close contact with someone with the virus. Exposed, vaccinated but asymptomatic workers would have to stay home for 14 days even if they test negative. If they return to work, they would have to wear masks and stay six feet (about two meters) from anyone else during those two weeks.

JERUSALEM — The Israeli government says it is donating 1 million coronavirus vaccines to the U.N.-backed COVAX program.

The Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that the AstraZeneca vaccines would be transferred to African countries in the coming weeks. It says the decision is part of Israel’s strengthening ties with African countries.

COVAX is a global initiative that aims to provide coronavirus vaccines to poorer nations. Wealthier countries have acquired the most of the world’s vaccine supplies, causing vast inequality in access to jabs. Israel was one of the first countries to vaccinate its population. Early this year, it came under criticism for not sharing enough of its supplies with the Palestinians.

NEW YORK — U.S. health officials say pets and another animals can get the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. But the risk of them spreading it to people is low.

Dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits, otters, hyenas and white-tailed deer are among the animals that have tested positive, in most cases after contracting it from infected people.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should avoid contact with pets, farm animals and wildlife, as well as with other people. The best way to prevent the virus from spreading among animals is to control it among people.

Rescuers battle strong typhoon lashing southern Philippines

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 25 of 93

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A powerful typhoon slammed into the southeastern Philippines on Thursday, toppling trees, ripping tin roofs and knocking down power as it blew across island provinces where nearly 100,000 people have been evacuated.

Coast guard personnel were rescuing residents stranded by chest-deep waters in a southern province, where pounding rains swamped villages in brownish water. In southern Cagayan de Oro city, footage showed two rescuers struggling to keep a month-old baby inside a laundry basin above the waters and shielded from the wind and rain with an umbrella.

Forecasters said Typhoon Rai further strengthened with sustained winds of 195 kilometers (121 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 270 kph (168 mph) as it blew from the Pacific Ocean into the Siargao Islands. There were no immediate reports of casualties or major damage.

"I'm scared and praying here in my house that this stops now. The wind outside is so strong it's cutting down trees," Teresa Lozano, a resident of eastern MacArthur town in coastal Leyte province, told DZMM radio by telephone, adding roofs of nearby houses were damaged and that her farming village had lost power.

Disaster-response officials said about 10,000 villages lie in the projected path of the typhoon, which has a 400-kilometer (248-mile)-wide rain band and is one of the strongest to hit the country this year.

The coast guard said it has grounded all vessels, stranding nearly 4,000 passengers and ferry and cargo ship workers in dozens of southern and central ports. Several mostly domestic flights have been canceled and schools and workplaces were shut in the most vulnerable areas.

More than 98,000 people have been evacuated to safety, the government's disaster-response agency said. Crowding in evacuation centers was complicating efforts to keep people safely distanced after authorities detected the country's first infections caused by the omicron variant of the coronavirus. Intensified vaccinations were also halted in provinces likely to experience stormy weather.

The Philippines is among the hardest-hit in Southeast Asia by the pandemic, with confirmed infections of more than 2.8 million and more than 50,000 deaths. Quarantine restrictions have been eased and more businesses have been allowed to reopen in recent weeks after an intensified vaccination campaign helped reduce infections to a few hundred from more than 26,000 in September. The detection of the omicron cases this week, however, has set off the alarm and the government renewed calls for people to avoid crowds and get vaccinated immediately.

Gov. Ben Evardone of Eastern Samar province said he suspended vaccinations in his region of nearly half a million people due to the typhoon. More than 70% of villagers in the province have gotten at least one shot, and Evardone expressed concern because some vaccines stored in Eastern Samar will expire in a few months.

Overcrowding is unavoidable, he said, in the limited number of evacuation centers in his province, where more than 32,000 people have been moved to safety.

"It's impossible to observe social distancing, it will really be tough," Evardone told The Associated Press. "What we do is we cluster evacuees by families. We don't mix different people in the same place as a precaution."

About 20 storms and typhoons batter the Philippines each year. The archipelago is also located in the seismically active Pacific "Ring of Fire" region, making it one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.

EU leaders to discuss rise of infections, spread of omicron

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A summit of European Union leaders on Thursday is trying to coordinate action to tackle the surge of coronavirus infections across the continent and the emergence of the new omicron variant while keeping borders open.

With the festive season looming, the bloc's leaders want to avoid a confusing mixture of rules and to

ensure all 27 member states are on the same page and that COVID-19 certificates continue to guarantee unrestricted travel.

But alarming rises in infections have prompted many European governments to implement public health measures and new restrictions in recent weeks. France will restrict arrivals from Britain because of fast-spreading omicron cases, putting limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new measures will take effect first thing Saturday.

The European Council, which brings together EU leaders to set the bloc's political agenda, said before the talks in Brussels that "any restrictions should not undermine the functioning of the single market or hamper travel between EU member states and to Europe."

Italy this week required negative tests from vaccinated visitors, raising concerns that similar moves elsewhere will limit the ability of EU citizens to travel to see friends and relatives over the holidays.

Portugal adopted a similar measure on Dec. 1, requiring a mandatory negative test for all passengers on arriving flights, regardless of their vaccination status, point of origin or nationality. Greece announced Wednesday that all arriving travelers must display a negative test starting Sunday unless they have spent less than 48 hours abroad.

Leaders will discuss the rollout of vaccines and the need to deploy booster doses to counter the spread of omicron.

"The one answer to the omicron right now is the acceleration of our vaccination program, with a particular emphasis to the booster shots," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said. "In Greece, we are one of the first European countries to open booster shots to the entire population."

Mitsotakis said additional restrictive measures, like extra testing for visitors, should only apply during the Christmas period "in order for us to gain additional time to boost as many people as possible. It's a battle against time."

Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin said that leaders have significant concerns about omicron's capacity to spread rapidly and create pressure on health systems.

Omicron is expected to be the dominant coronavirus variant in the European Union's 27 nations by mid-January, according to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. She said that more than 66% of the EU population is now fully vaccinated, but that figure doesn't offer a clear view of the contrasted EU picture.

While nations like Portugal and Spain have immunized the vast majority of their people, other countries lag way behind. Bulgaria, for example, has just 26.6% of its population fully vaccinated, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

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

Vaccine skeptics in Eastern Europe having change of heart

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Some former vaccine skeptics in Eastern Europe have shifted over to the other side as coronavirus infections surge, countries are making it more difficult for the unvaccinated to travel abroad and authorities battle against government distrust and vaccine disinformation.

When she rolled up her sleeve in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo to take her first COVID-19 vaccine dose, Fata Keco was afraid of possible adverse side effects. But she said the worst she had to contend with over the next few days was "moderately discomforting pain" in her left arm around the site of the injection.

More significantly, the 52-year-old self-employed cleaning woman has joined the global community of vaccine-believers after months of "being very susceptible" to what she now describes as "the most ridiculous theories."

She told The Associated Press that some of those that she heard were "that the coronavirus does not exist, that journalists were paid to spread panic, that planes were spraying us with viruses at night, that vaccines were being used by the powers that be to implant us with tracking microchips."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 27 of 93

"Now I feel relief for having done something to protect my health after putting myself in danger for a long time," Keco said. "Also, I don't mind that it will make my life easier if I decide to take a trip abroad."

She isn't alone in her transformation, especially after numerous European countries started tightening their anti-virus rules, including by requiring proof of vaccination from foreign visitors.

"I want to travel and study abroad and for that I have to be vaccinated," said Esmā Dzaka, 18, after getting her first dose Tuesday in Sarajevo.

This week, health authorities in Sarajevo stepped up their efforts to administer COVID-19 vaccines as widely as possible, stymied so far by public mistrust and an onslaught of disinformation. They started dispatching nurses to dispense vaccines in local council offices and shopping centers around the city in hopes that easy access will persuade more people to get their shots.

Sarajevo's top health official, Haris Vranic, said he believed that some vaccine skeptics have been having a change of heart recently, not just because they want to travel abroad freely, but also because the "numbers do not lie."

"The statistic is clear — between 92% and 94% of our people who died in the third and the (current) fourth wave (of COVID-19) were not vaccinated," Vranic said.

Bosnia, which is still struggling to recover from a devastating ethnic war in 1992-95, has so far inoculated just under a quarter of its 3.3 million people, one of the lowest vaccination rates in Europe.

But while such a level of mistrust in vaccines, which have been widely available since late last spring, may not be surprising in the poor, corruption-plagued and ethnically divided Bosnia, similar woes have befallen many of its Balkan neighbors, including some European Union members.

In Romania, a EU nation of about 19 million, the vaccination rate hovered around 28% until mid-October, when a sharp spike in new COVID-19 infections and deaths forced some hospitals to put body bags in their hallways as morgues ran out of space.

Fear — combined with stricter anti-virus measures introduced by authorities, including a nighttime curfew and requiring proof of vaccination, a recent recovery or a recent negative test to enter most public venues — has sent the vaccination rate in Romania spiking to over 40% by Dec. 10, according to Our World in Data.

"I was scared, there are so many (negative) rumors" about vaccines, said Ofelia Gligor, who got her first COVID-19 jab on a frigid December day this week in the main vaccination center in Sighisoara, a small, historic Romanian town 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of Bucharest, the capital.

The 18-year-old trainee nurse had to overcome her fears for a practical reason — without proof of vaccination, she wouldn't be allowed to attend her training program at the local hospital.

"My advice to people now is to get vaccinated, because sooner or later vaccines will become mandatory" for all, she said.

A similar scenario played out in Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013. Amid a major surge in daily COVID-19 infections and deaths, Croatian authorities introduced a vaccine mandate on Nov. 15 for all public sector workers and all citizens using their services.

Despite sporadic protests against the COVID-19 restrictions, Croatia's overall vaccination rate has since been steadily rising over 1.2% per week to encompass nearly 55% of its population of 4.2 million on Dec. 11.

In ethnically and administratively fragmented Bosnia, where jurisdiction over pandemic management is divided between 14 different levels of government that don't always move in lockstep, the introduction of mandatory COVID-19 vaccination passes is still on hold. While indoor mask-wearing and social distancing mandates remain, their enforcement is haphazard.

Bosnia has seen over 12,900 COVID-19 deaths, but for some people like Keco, it took more than just mortality statistics to come to terms with the reality of the pandemic. It took a dispute with her daughter, Mahira.

"She said: 'Mom, vaccines work 100%. Millions of people were vaccinated by now and they are all doing fine, don't be silly,'" Keco recalled, adding that her son-in-law's friend — who "claimed he would not be caught dead getting vaccinated" — got infected and COVID-19 "had left him feeling broken."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 28 of 93

"I finally realized that I need to get vaccinated if I want to be safe," Keco said, shaking her head in bafflement. "People and their chatter crazed me. For a time at least, I believed in all their silly stories."

Eldar Emric in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Stephen McGrath in Sighisoara, Romania, contributed to this story.

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

Young Americans motivated to make change: AP-NORC, MTV poll

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There are plenty of reasons for Sebastian Garcia to feel downbeat about the future.

After his family immigrated from Mexico, he was raised on a farm in northwest Texas, where he says there aren't many racial slurs he hasn't heard. When the now-24-year-old graduated from college, he decided to become an educator. But the first few years of his teaching career have been upended by the coronavirus pandemic, which forced his public school system to close for months.

Garcia and his peers, meanwhile, have had to navigate the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression, weighed down by student loans that have made affordable housing and access to healthcare out of reach.

Despite the challenges of what Garcia describes as the endless pursuit of the American Dream, he says he's confident that better things are ahead. He's part of a broader trend among millennials and Generation Z Americans who say they are more likely to be optimistic about the future and their ability to create change than their older counterparts, according to a new poll from MTV and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll measured attitudes among Gen Z Americans ages 13 through 24, as well as 25- to 40-year-old millennials and 41- to 56-year-old Gen X Americans.

"I know that as long as there are people willing to work hard and push through the hard times, you can persevere," Garcia said. "Me and my family are proven facts of that."

The poll finds 66% of Gen Z and 63% of millennial Americans think their generation is motivated to make positive change, compared with 56% of Gen X Americans. Those generations are also more likely than Generation X to feel they can impact what the government does, with 44% of Gen Z and 42% of millennials saying they can at least a moderate amount, compared with only 31% of Gen X.

For Jonathan Belden, 29, being optimistic about the future and potential for positive change is necessary as a father of five.

"Despite the challenges, in many regards, the U.S. is the only place where we have as much of an opportunity without hindrance," the New Mexico resident said. "And I want my kids to grow up in a place where they can succeed at whatever they do."

While members of all three of these generations have mixed views of the state of the country and the future, the poll shows Gen Z and millennials are not as negative about the world that their generation is facing.

Despite the fact that millennials, some of whom are now creeping toward middle age, are reaching milestones like marriage, parenthood and homeownership later in life than previous generations, close to half of them reported that their standard of living is better than their parents' at the same age. For Gen Z, about half likewise think their standard of living is better than what their parents had, while just about a quarter think it is worse.

Additionally, about half of Gen Z and millennials say the world they face is worse than other generations, compared with about 6 in 10 Gen X.

Along with less pessimism and motivation to create change, many Gen Z and millennials put stock in progressive policies aimed at race, class and gender disparities.

Roughly half of Gen Z and millennials say they favor a universal basic income, while about a quarter are opposed. Among Gen X, about a third are in favor and roughly as many are against.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 29 of 93

About 3 in 10 Gen Z and millennials favor reducing funding for law enforcement agencies, while about 4 in 10 are opposed. Opposition is much higher among Gen X, with 56% against.

And while few across the three generations oppose prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of gender identity, millennials and Gen Z are more likely than Gen X to support that policy.

Despite a clear divide in policy attitudes, Gen Z and millennials are more optimistic than Gen X that Americans can come together and work out their political differences (45% and 41%, compared with 33%).

"Where I find the most hope is when I talk to people and we find the common ground," Belden said. "When that happens, even if there are differences, it helps me to feel like there is actually good in people and in the world and that it's not going to hell in a handbasket."

Garcia agreed, saying that while the past few years have been hard, "I know eventually one day, maybe not today, maybe not next year, but we will eventually overcome it."

The AP-NORC poll of 3,764 teens ages 13-17 and adults ages 18-56 was conducted Sept. 1-19 using a combined sample of interviews from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population, and interviews from opt-in online panels. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.3 percentage points. The AmeriSpeak panel is recruited randomly using address-based sampling methods, and respondents later were interviewed online or by phone.

Jittery Ukrainian villagers 'fear that a big war will start'

By INNA VARENYTSIA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

NEVELSKE, Ukraine (AP) — Liudmyla Momot wipes away tears as she searches for clothes and household items to salvage from the ruins of her home that was shelled by Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Her village of Nevelske, northwest of the rebel-held city of Donetsk, is only about three kilometers (two miles) from the line of contact between the separatists and the Ukrainian military and has been emptied of all but five people.

Small arms fire frequently is heard in the daytime, giving way to the booms of light artillery and mortar shelling after dusk.

With the bloody conflict now more than seven years old, there are fears in Ukraine and the West that a buildup of armed forces on Russia's side of the border could lead to an invasion or the resumption of full-scale hostilities.

Rebels targeted Nevelske with shelling twice in the last month, damaging or destroying 16 of the village's 50 houses and rattling the handful of nervous residents who remain.

"The worse Ukraine-Russia relations are, the more we simple people are suffering," said 68-year-old Momot, who has worked at a dairy farm all her life.

Now with no home, "who could have imagined that? I was preparing for the winter, stocking up coal and firewood."

After the shell hit her house, Momot fled to a nearby settlement where her son lives. But the anxiety has followed her there.

"We fear that a big war will start. People are scared and packed up their bags," said Momot, who collected some blankets, warm clothes and other items in the debris.

The conflict in the eastern industrial heartland known as the Donbas erupted in April 2014, weeks after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula following the ouster of Ukraine's Moscow-friendly former president. Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of supporting the rebels with troops and weapons, but Moscow says that Russians who joined the fight were volunteers acting on their own.

More than 14,000 people have been killed in fighting that has driven more than 2 million people from their homes in the east.

When the conflict began, Nevelske had a population of 286. Now, the five older people who remain in the ruined village collect rainwater for drinking and cooking. Between shipments of humanitarian aid, they

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 30 of 93

rely on eating stale bread.

"We have grown accustomed to the shelling," said 84-year-old Halyna Moroka, who has stayed in Nevelske with her disabled son.

A 2015 peace agreement brokered by France and Germany ended large-scale battles, but frequent skirmishes have continued. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitors the shaky cease-fire, has reported an increasing number of such incidents, with both sides trading the blame for truce violations.

"The security situation along the contact line is still of concern, with a high level of kinetic activity," Mikko Kinnune, the OSCE representative for the group that involves representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the rebels, said earlier this month.

Amid the recent Russian troop buildup, Washington and its allies have warned Moscow that it will pay a high economic price if it attacks Ukraine. Moscow denies having such intentions and accused Ukraine of planning to reclaim control of rebel-held territory, something Kyiv has rejected,

Russian President Vladimir Putin has urged the West to provide guarantees that NATO won't expand to include Ukraine or deploy the alliance's forces and weapons there, calling that a "red line" for Moscow. The U.S. and its allies have refused to make such a pledge, but U.S. President Joe Biden and Putin decided last week to hold talks to discuss Russian concerns.

The geopolitical threats resonate in Nevelske on those few occasions that the village has power, enabling its remaining residents to watch Russian television news.

"We don't want war!" exclaimed 75-year-old Kateryna Shklyar, who shares her fears with her husband, Dmytro. Their daughter and grandchildren live in nearby Krasnohorivka, a Ukrainian-controlled western suburb of Donetsk.

"For how long will this torment last?" asked Shklyar. "It has worn out our souls and hearts. You can't call that life, but we have no place to go."

Humanitarian groups provide basic supplies to Nevelske and other villages and even try to offer housing in safer areas, but their resources are limited.

"I just survive each day, trying to make it to the evening, and my soul aches," said Moroka, who has lost vision in one eye but can't get any medical help.

"We are frightened," she added. "It's really scary to sit here and wait for death. It's horrible!"

Yuras Karmanau reported from Kyiv, Ukraine.

The AP Interview: Nikole Hannah-Jones' warning on democracy

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Following a year of professional milestones born of her work on America's history of slavery, Pulitzer Prize-winning Black journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones said she is clear-eyed about her mission to force a reckoning around the nation's self-image.

The New York Times Magazine writer began this year in a protracted tenure fight with her alma mater in North Carolina — the dispute ended when she announced in July that she'd take her talents to a historically Black university — and is closing it as a national best-selling author.

"I've gone from being just a journalist to becoming some sort of symbol for people who either love me and my work or revile me and my work," she said.

Hannah-Jones recently spoke to The Associated Press in an exclusive interview about the ongoing controversy over The 1619 Project, a groundbreaking collection of essays on race that first appeared in a special issue of The New York Times Magazine in 2019. Now in book form, the project has become a touchstone for America's reckoning over slavery and the reverberations for Black Americans.

"The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story," and "Born on the Water," a picture storybook collaboration with co-writer Renée Watson and illustrator Nikkolos Smith, each have spent consecutive weeks atop the Times bestseller list since their Nov. 16 release. A TV documentary on the work is due out later in 2022.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 31 of 93

Still, Hannah-Jones said the backlash to her work is evidence that the U.S. is approaching a make-or-break crossroads on its global standing as a democracy.

"I think that we are in a very frightening time," she said in the interview at AP's New York City headquarters.

"People who are much, much smarter than me, who have studied this much, much longer than I have are ringing the alarm," Hannah-Jones said. "I think we have to ask ourselves ... the narrators, the storytellers, the journalists: Are we ringing the alarm in the right way? Are we doing our jobs to try to uphold our democracy?"

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

AP: If anything, what did this year teach you about where we are in our country currently, when it comes to racial justice and our reckoning with history?

HANNAH-JONES: This year, to me, is just reflective of what I've always understood about this country. And that is that steps forward, steps towards racial progress, are always met with an intensive backlash. That we are a society that willfully does not want to deal with the anti-Blackness that is at the core of so many of our institutions and really our society itself.

AP: Can you point to any progress in how the discourse has developed or evolved?

HANNAH-JONES: Certainly the fact that very powerful people are so concerned about a work of journalism called The 1619 Project that they would seek to discredit it, that they would seek to censor it, that they would seek to ban it from being taught, does speak to the fact that there are millions of Americans who want a more honest accounting of our history, who want to better understand the country that we're in, who are open to new narratives.

AP: Do you think this country is poised to make any progress on issues of racial justice, and especially around education?

HANNAH-JONES: Many in mainstream media got caught up in the Republican propaganda campaign, which tried to conflate the teaching of a more accurate history, the teaching of structural racism, with trying to make white children feel badly about themselves or guilty. And so much of the coverage was driven by that. ... I hope that there's going to be some serious examination of the role that we as media played (in) really putting forth and legitimizing what was a propaganda campaign.

AP: The 1619 Project is now a book. For people who don't understand, how is it different from what was published in The New York Times Magazine?

HANNAH-JONES: We all know that there has been a tremendous amount of scrutiny of the 1619 Project. ... I think those who had questions can now go and actually see the source material, can see the historiography that undergirds the work. For anyone who comes to it with an open mind, it is going to be deeply surprising. They're going to learn so much about both the history of their country, but also the history that shapes so much of modern American life.

AP: Some people would say that this is all an agenda-driven piece of work.

HANNAH-JONES: And they'd be right.

AP: Why are they right?

HANNAH-JONES: Because it is. The agenda is to force a reckoning with who we are as a country. The agenda is to take the story of Black Americans in slavery, from being an asterisk to being marginal to being central to how we understand our country. When people say that, though, I know that they're saying it in disparaging ways. I'm just being honest about the nature of this work. ... We've been taught the history of a country that does not exist. We've been taught the history of a country that renders us incapable of understanding how we get an insurrection in the greatest democracy on Jan. 6.

AP: What issues do you see as dominating our politics in 2022?

HANNAH-JONES: I try to never predict the future. And I'm also not a political reporter. ... We, as Americans, are going to be severely tested in the next year or two to decide, what are we willing to sacrifice to be the country that we believe that we are? And whose rights do we hold as fundamental in this country? And are all Americans worthy of having those same rights? I don't think we know the answer to that. But

I think what is important for us to know is we decide.

AP Race and Ethnicity writer Aaron Morrison is a member, trainer and mentor for the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting, which Hannah-Jones co-founded. Follow Morrison on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

Jaguars fire Urban Meyer after 13 games, countless missteps

By MARK LONG AP Pro Football Writer

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Urban Meyer never fit in the NFL.

His mottos. His methods. Even his moods seemed to go against what's considered normal behavior in a league filled with professionals and grown men. He rubbed just about everyone the wrong way: assistants, players and eventually his bosses.

Meyer's tumultuous tenure ended after just 13 games — and two victories — when the Jacksonville Jaguars fired him early Thursday because of an accumulation of missteps.

Owner Shad Khan made the move hours after former Jaguars player Josh Lambo told a Florida newspaper Meyer kicked him during practice in August. It was the latest black eye — adding to an already lengthy list of embarrassments — for the three-time national championship-winning college coach who failed miserably to make the transition to the NFL.

"After deliberation over many weeks and a thorough analysis of the entirety of Urban's tenure with our team, I am bitterly disappointed to arrive at the conclusion that an immediate change is imperative for everyone," Khan said in a statement. "I informed Urban of the change this evening. As I stated in October, regaining our trust and respect was essential. Regrettably, it did not happen."

Meyer joins former Atlanta Falcons coach Bobby Petrino as college coaches whose NFL careers flamed out in stunningly swift fashion. Petrino resigned in December 2007 to take over at Arkansas. He was 3-10 at the time.

Meyer went 2-11 in his partial season, and the Jaguars really started to unravel on the offensive side of the ball following the team's bye week. They averaged a measly 9.1 points in Meyer's final seven games, which ended with a five-game skid.

Offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell will serve as Jacksonville's interim head coach for the final four games, beginning Sunday against Houston (2-11).

Meyer's biggest issues came off the field, where he tried to handle a professional team like he was on a college campus. He splashed slogans and catchphrases around the facility, instilled gimmicks in practice and repeated his misguided belief that coaches coach for players and players play for coaches. He brought in motivational speakers and kept blaming assistants for the team's mounting losses instead of the guys actually on the field.

One of Meyer's most damning decisions came following a Thursday night game at Cincinnati in late September. He chose to stay behind with family instead of flying home with his team and then got caught on video the following night behaving inappropriately with a woman at a bar in Columbus, Ohio. Khan publicly reprimanded Meyer then, saying he needed to regain the owner's trust and respect.

Bailing on his players showed just how out of touch Meyer was with NFL norms. And it was just one of many head-scratching choices for the 57-year-old coach who found success at every college stop: Bowling Green (2001-02), Utah (2003-04), Florida (2005-10) and Ohio State (2012-18).

Meyer simply never made the proper adjustments to the pro level.

Lambo's claim seemingly proved too much for Khan, who two days earlier said he didn't want to make an impulsive decision on the coach's future.

"What's different about this thing is you have losses and you have drama," Khan said then.

The Jags had way more drama than victories.

Lambo provided the latest when he told the Tampa Bay Times that Meyer kicked him while he was stretching at the start of a practice. Lambo, the team's place-kicker to open the season, said he told Meyer

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 33 of 93

"don't you ever (expletive) kick me again" and said the coach responded, "I'm the head ball coach, I'll kick you whenever the (expletive) I want."

Meyer released a statement through the team denying the incident happened the way Lambo described it.

"Josh's characterization of me and this incident is completely inaccurate, and there are eyewitnesses to refute his account," Meyer said.

Lambo said he reported the kick to his agent, who contacted the Jaguars' legal counsel the following day.

"Jaguars legal counsel indeed acknowledged and responded immediately to the query made by Josh Lambo's agent Friday, August 27, 2021," the Jaguars said in a statement. "Counsel offered to speak with Josh, or to assist Josh in speaking with coaching or any other football personnel, if he was comfortable with her sharing the information. Any suggestion otherwise is blatantly false."

Lambo was released after he missed his first three field-goal attempts to start the season.

Lambo's allegation came on the heels of an NFL Network report which said Meyer created tension with multiple run-ins with players as well as assistants he allegedly called "losers." Citing unidentified sources, the report detailed a heated exchange between Meyer and veteran receiver Marvin Jones that stemmed from Meyer criticizing receivers by saying they weren't winning enough one-on-one matchups or getting enough separation.

"I would just say this: There was something that was brought to my attention that I didn't like too well," Jones said Wednesday, his first public comments since the report was published Saturday. "I approached him about it and we talked and we handled it like grown men. And that's all I have to say about that."

Jones denied threatening to leave practice over the argument.

"I mean, shoot, when you lose, you're always going to be the center of attention in a negative way," Jones said. "That just is what it is. That's all I have to say."

Other issues for Meyer:

— He hired strength coach Chris Doyle in February despite accusations of racist behavior and then had to let him go a day later because of a pending lawsuit.

— Jacksonville was fined \$200,000 and Meyer docked \$100,000 on July 1, a punishment that stemmed from an early June practice in which the league deemed receivers and defensive backs had too much contact during 11-on-11 drills.

— Meyer signed 2007 Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Tim Tebow to play tight end, an experiment that ended with Tebow looking lost in the preseason opener against Cleveland.

— Meyer held a fake QB competition between Trevor Lawrence, a generational prospect, and Gardner Minshew in training camp. Meyer and general manager Trent Baalke traded Minshew to Philadelphia, where he's a backup to Jalen Hurts.

— The NFL Players Association launched an investigation after Meyer said vaccination status factored into the team's roster decisions.

— He repeatedly mishandled running back James Robinson, allowing the team's most consistent offensive player to get benched twice following fumbles and botched trying to explain why Robinson got pulled and how long he remained on the sideline.

All the drama became too much for Lawrence.

"I do think that has to change and that's something that we need to work on for sure," Lawrence said Wednesday. "You can't always be in the headlines. You just got to go play football, and that's where we're trying to get, and I have no doubt we'll get there."

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

In Kashmir, closed mosque belies India's religious freedom

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — Jamia Masjid, the grand mosque of Srinagar, dominates its neighborhood with an imposing main gate and massive turrets. It can hold 33,000 worshippers, and on special occasions

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 34 of 93

over the years hundreds of thousands of Muslims have filled nearby lanes and roads to offer prayers led from the mosque.

But Indian authorities see the mosque as a trouble spot — a nerve center for protests and clashes that challenge India's sovereignty over the disputed Kashmir region.

For Kashmiri Muslims it is a sacred venue for Friday prayers and a place they can raise their voices for political rights.

In this bitter dispute, the mosque in Kashmir's main city has largely remained closed for the past two years. The mosque's chief priest has been detained in his home almost nonstop throughout that time, and the mosque's main gate is padlocked and blocked with corrugated tin sheets on Fridays.

The closure of the mosque, which is revered by Kashmir's mostly Muslim population, has deepened their anger.

"There is a constant feeling that something is missing in my life," said Bashir Ahmed, 65, a retired government employee who has offered prayers at the mosque over five decades.

Indian authorities refused to comment on the mosque restrictions despite repeated queries from The Associated Press. In the past, officials have said the government was forced to close the mosque because its management committee was unable to stop anti-India protests on the premises.

The shutting of the 600-year-old mosque came amid a clampdown that began in 2019 after the government stripped Kashmir of its long-held semiautonomous status.

In the past two years, some of the region's other mosques and shrines — also closed for months due to the security crackdown and the subsequent pandemic — have been allowed to offer religious services.

Jamia Masjid has remained out of bounds to worshippers for prayers on Friday — the main day of congregational worship in Islam. Authorities allow the mosque to remain open the other six days, but only a few hundred worshippers assemble there on those occasions, compared to the tens of thousands that often gathered on Fridays.

"This is the central mosque where our ancestors, scholars and spiritual masters have prayed and meditated for centuries," said Altaf Ahmad Bhat, one of the officials at the grand mosque.

He dismissed the law-and-order reasons cited by the authorities as "absurd," adding that discussions about social, economic and political issues affecting Muslims were a core religious function of any grand mosque.

The grand mosque is mainly reserved for mandatory Friday congregational prayers and special services. Obligatory daily prayers are usually held in smaller neighborhood mosques.

For the region's Muslims, the mosque's closure brings painful memories of the past. In 1819, Sikh rulers closed it for 21 years. Over the past 15 years, it has been subject to periodic bans and lockdowns by successive Indian governments.

But the current restrictions are the most severe since the region was divided between India and Pakistan after the two nations gained independence from British colonialism in 1947. Both claim the Himalayan territory in its entirety.

The Indian government initially grappled with largely peaceful public protests seeking a united Kashmir, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent entity. But a crackdown on dissent led to Kashmir's eruption into an armed rebellion against India in 1989. India has depicted the insurgency as Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, a charge Pakistan has denied.

Indian forces largely crushed the rebellion about 10 years ago, though popular demands for "Azadi," or freedom, remained ingrained in the Kashmiri psyche.

The region made a transition from the armed struggle to unarmed uprisings, with tens of thousands of civilians repeatedly taking to the streets to protest Indian rule, often leading to deadly clashes between stone-throwing residents and Indian troops. The grand mosque and its surrounding areas in Srinagar's heart emerged as central to these protests.

Sermons at the Jamia Masjid would often address the long-simmering conflict, with Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chief priest and one of the region's top separatist leaders, giving fiery speeches highlighting Kashmir's political struggle.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 35 of 93

Authorities often clamped down, banning prayers at the mosque for extended periods. According to official data, the mosque was closed for at least 250 days in 2008, 2010 and 2016 combined.

The armed conflict again intensified after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 and won a landslide re-election in 2019. Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led government toughened its stance both against Pakistan and Kashmiri separatists amid rising attacks by Hindu hard-liners against minorities in India, further deepening frustrations among Kashmir's Muslims.

Soon a new wave of rebels revived Kashmir's militancy and challenged India's rule with guns and effective use of social media. India responded with sometimes deadly counterinsurgency operations.

Freedom of religion is enshrined in India's constitution, allowing citizens to follow and freely practice religion. The constitution also says the state will not "discriminate, patronize or meddle in the profession of any religion."

But even before the current security operation in Kashmir, experts say conditions for India's Muslims under Modi have worsened.

In Kashmir, the clampdown on the most revered mosque has aggravated these fears.

"Jamia Masjid represents the soul of Kashmiri Muslims' faith and has remained at the center of demands for social and political rights since its foundation some six centuries back," said Zareef Ahmed Zareef, a poet and an oral historian. "Its closure is an attack on our faith."

On special occasions like the last Friday in the fasting month of Ramadan, hundreds of thousands of faithful pray in the mosque, filling its neighborhood's winding lanes and roads.

For the last two years, such scenes have remained missing. Muslims say the gag is undermining their constitutional right to religious freedom.

Ahmed, the worshipper, on a recent Saturday afternoon sat inside the mosque, a wood and brick architectural marvel with 378 wooden pillars. He said he has never seen the mosque shut and desolate for such an extended period.

"I feel deprived and violated," Ahmed said as he raised his hands in supplication. "We have been subjected to extreme spiritual suffering."

Many Kashmiri Muslims have long said New Delhi curbs their religious freedom on the pretext of law and order while promoting and patronizing the annual Hindu pilgrimage to an icy Himalayan cave visited by hundreds of thousands of Hindus from across India.

The Amarnath pilgrimage lasts for nearly two months, although it was canceled for the last two years due to the pandemic.

On a recent Friday, as the mosque remained closed, its sprawling marketplace, an otherwise vibrant and bustling neighborhood, wore a deserted look.

Babull, a mentally challenged man in his 40s who inhabits the place in and around the grand mosque, whirled around the neighborhood. He cautioned shopkeepers of imminent danger from police raiding the place, as they have done in the past.

Nearby, a gaggle of Indian tourists went about clicking selfies in the backdrop of the mosque's barricaded and locked main gate.

Kashmiri onlookers watched them in silence.

Follow Aijaz Hussain on Twitter at twitter.com/hussain_ajaz

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Defense set to make case Maxwell is taking fall for Epstein

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York City jury has heard four women detail accusations that they were teens when they became victims of a sex-abuse scheme devised by Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein. Starting Thursday, the British socialite's attorneys are expected to make their case that Maxwell isn't the

one to blame.

Maxwell's trial will resume with the defense calling its own witnesses in federal court in Manhattan. The government's case lasted only two weeks and the defense case could last just two days. Both sides streamlined their witness lists without revealing why, making the trial end well short of an original six-week estimate.

The start of the defense case has already sparked the usual speculation about whether the high-profile defendant will take the witness stand in her own defense — a gamble that is almost never taken. Either way, U.S. District Judge Alison Nathan will have to receive direct confirmation from Maxwell about her decision before the defense can rest.

Maxwell, 59, has pleaded not guilty to charges she acted as Epstein's chief enabler, recruiting and grooming young girls for him to abuse during sexual massages.

Maxwell was once Epstein's girlfriend before becoming a trusted employee. Witnesses testified the pair exploited them between 1994 to 2004 at Epstein's homes, including an estate in Palm Beach, Florida; his posh Manhattan townhouse; and a Santa Fe, New Mexico, ranch.

The defense has insisted that Maxwell is being made a scapegoat for alleged sex crimes by Epstein, who killed himself in jail in 2019. Her lawyers have sought to show that the accusers exaggerated her involvement at the behest of lawyers seeking payouts for the women from civil claims against the Epstein estate.

Afghanistan's health care system on the brink of collapse

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The diesel fuel needed to produce oxygen for coronavirus patients has run out. So have supplies of dozens of essential drugs. The staff, unpaid for months, still shows up for work, but they are struggling to make ends meet at home.

This is the plight at the Afghan-Japan Hospital for communicable diseases, the only COVID-19 facility for the more than 4 million people who live in the capital of Kabul. While the coronavirus situation in Afghanistan appears to have improved from a few months ago when cases reached their peak, it is now the hospital itself that needs life support.

Its predicament is a symptom of the crisis in Afghanistan's health care system, which is on the brink of collapse and able to function only with a lifeline from aid organizations.

"We face many problems here," said Dr. Ahmad Fatah Habibyar, the hospital's administration logistics manager, citing three months of unpaid salaries, shortages of equipment and drugs, and a lack of food.

Some of the staff are in such financial difficulties that they are selling their household furniture to make ends meet, he said.

"Oxygen is a big issue for us because we can't run the generators," he said, noting the hospital's production plant hasn't worked for months "because we can't afford the diesel." Instead, oxygen cylinders for COVID-19 patients are bought from a local supplier.

And doctors are bracing for more infections that they fear are inevitable with the omicron variant.

Without outside help, "we are not ready for omicron. A disaster will be here," said Dr. Shereen Agha, the 38-year-old head of the hospital's intensive care unit. The hospital was short even of basic supplies like examination gloves, he said, and its two ambulances sit idle for lack of fuel.

The previous government had contracted with a Netherlands-based aid group, HealthNet TPO, to run the hospital. But the contract expired in November and was financed under a fund managed by the World Bank, which like most of the international community has frozen payments to the new Taliban government.

HealthNet TPO program manager Willem Reussing said the organization is in negotiations to secure funding, "but the donor community is very reluctant to continue support and has strict conditions." The World Health Organization and UNICEF were only managing to maintain minimal services and did not cover the coronavirus response, he added.

"The health care system ... is really on the brink of collapsing," Reussing said. "The Afghan-Japan Hospital is a dire example, where we are nearly begging donors to step in and save lives."

When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August amid a chaotic U.S. and NATO troop withdrawal,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 37 of 93

the international community pulled all funding and froze billions of dollars of Afghanistan's assets abroad. For a country heavily dependent on foreign aid, the consequences have been devastating.

The economy already was deeply troubled under the previous government, with state employees often going unpaid. Last year, almost half the population was living in poverty, with the situation made worse by the pandemic and a drought that has driven up food prices.

The Taliban government wants the international community to ease sanctions and release Afghanistan's assets abroad so it can pay civil servants, including doctors and teachers.

The United Nations has sounded the alarm over a hunger crisis, with 22% of Afghanistan's 38 million people near famine and another 36% facing acute food insecurity.

"We're seeing the economic collapse being exponential," U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said in an interview last week with The Associated Press. "It's getting more and more dire by the week."

Nowhere is that more evident than the malnutrition ward of the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital, where anxious mothers sit by emaciated children.

Two-year-old Mohammad, his cheeks sunken and his hair sparse, sipped a cup of high-nutrition milk with his mother, Parwana, beside him. From the central province of Wardak, she had been sleeping in the hospital for six nights.

"I don't even have money to change his diapers," the 20-year-old said. Her husband, a tailor, lost both legs in a roadside bomb several years ago, and has trouble sitting up. Work is hard to come by, and Parwana said her father and brothers are helping the family of three survive.

In the next bed, 1½-year-old Talwasa lay covered in blankets. Only her eyes moved behind half-closed eyelids.

"We are in a very bad situation," said her mother, Noor Bibi, who has six other children. Her husband can't find work, she said, and "we only eat dried bread and can't find food for weeks and weeks."

Deputy Health Minister Dr. Abdul Bari Omar said last week that Afghanistan had 3.5 million malnourished children, although he noted that the data was from the previous government.

"It didn't happen in the last four months. Malnutrition was inherited from the previous system, but we are trying to find a solution for this problem," he said, adding that the former administration also had failed to resolve shortages of medical equipment.

The deputy director of the children's hospital, Mohammad Latif Baher, said the facility had seen 3,000 malnutrition cases in the last four months. Of those, 250 were hospitalized and the rest were treated at home.

Hospital workers also are struggling with shortages, and they have not been paid for months.

"We are loyal to our homeland and our profession. That's why we still continue our jobs and provide services to our patients," Baher said, noting they have gone without salaries for five months. He said the hospital also is running low on drug supplies, including special food supplements for malnutrition, as well as antibiotics, analgesics and anesthetics. Some supplies had come in from aid agencies, he added, but more were needed.

The situation was similar at Wazir Mohammed Akhbar Khan National Hospital, where supplies were running low. As with most of the other state-run hospitals, its patients must buy their own drugs, with staff only dipping into emergency supplies for those who truly cannot afford it.

Sometimes doctors are forced to give smaller doses of drugs because they simply don't have enough, said Ghulam Nabi Pahlawi, the emergency department's head nurse.

But it is in Kabul's COVID-19 hospital where the situation seems most severe. Pharmacist Bilal Ahmad said more than 36 essential medications had run out and many others had expired. In three months, he said, another 55 medications will run out.

"The requirements, we cannot fulfill them," Ahmad said.

Towns in mourning while digging out from deadly tornadoes

By SEAN MURPHY and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

DAWSON SPRINGS, Ky. (AP) — Tight-knit communities still digging out from the deadly tornadoes that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 38 of 93

killed dozens of people across eight states in the South and Midwest are turning to another heavy-hearted task: honoring and burying their dead.

The storms that began Friday night destroyed lives and property from Arkansas to Illinois and in parts of neighboring states, carving a more than 200-mile (320-kilometer) path through Kentucky alone. The National Weather Service recorded at least 41 tornadoes, including 16 in Tennessee and eight in Kentucky.

Along the violent storm path, a funeral home in western Kentucky prepared to welcome the families of those who lost loved ones while grieving losses of its own.

Beshear Funeral Home in Dawson Springs was preparing for at least four services in coming days for storm victims and has to catch up on funerals delayed by the massive storm, said funeral home owner Jenny Beshear Sewell, a cousin of Kentucky's governor.

The storm-related deaths include those of two sisters who had worked at the funeral home, the only one in the small western Kentucky town.

Eighty-year-old Carole Grisham and 72-year-old Marsha Hall decided to "ride it out" in their home as the tornado barreled down in the dark of night, Sewell said by phone Wednesday. The home, which lacked a basement, was demolished.

Hall, a fixture at the funeral home, had a hard day's work Friday, hours before she died in the storm, Sewell said. As she left work, Hall's parting words were: "Well, I'll see you."

As the tornado approached, Sewell texted Hall with an update on the storm's path and urged the sisters to shelter in the funeral home's basement or a church basement. Hall replied "OK" to a text — the last she heard from the longtime employee she considered a member of the family.

But the business of laying the dead to rest won't wait. A service at the funeral home was being planned for Friday for a woman whose funeral was delayed since last Saturday, the day after the storm hit. If the building's natural gas hasn't been restored once services resume, "everybody will just need to bundle up. But that's the best we can do," Sewell said.

Arrangements were still pending for Grisham and Hall, but a double funeral is expected, Sewell said.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear has pledged \$5,000 payments to each of the victims' families to help with burial expenses. The state was the hardest hit with 74 deaths reported so far.

In the western Kentucky town of Madisonville, family and friends on Wednesday mourned a couple killed when the twister ripped through nearby Dawson Springs.

Jeffrey Eckert, 70, was remembered as "mysterious and cool" by his nephew, Mike Eckert, who recalled his uncle playing in various bands, always owning a boat and buzzing his home after he'd earned his pilot's license to let the family know it was time to meet him at the airport.

Many of the mourners wore animal prints in honor of Jeffrey Eckert's wife, Jennifer Eckert, 69, who loved to wear them and was remembered by her niece, Kathy Moore, for her chocolate merengue pies and the love of her grandchildren.

Moore said her grief was tempered by the memories and the relationships Jennifer Eckert left behind.

"When it's all said and done, relationships are all that matters," Moore said. "Life has to end. Love does not."

The grieving, meanwhile, has extended beyond the states hardest hit and into Florida, the home of a father and son killed while staying at a west Tennessee resort.

Steve Gunn and his 12-year-old son Grayson were staying at the Cypress Point Resort, a popular destination for hunters and anglers. They will be buried in Florida this weekend.

"You couldn't go to Walmart with him without a hundred people stopping him," said his sister, Sandy Gunn. "His son was the kid you grew up dreaming to have."

Her brother-in-law, Jamie Hall, also was part of the hunting group and remains missing.

"Our world has been shattered," she said. "I'm terrified each time I hear the phone ring. My brother in law was the kindest and most gentle man you would have ever known."

In Mayfield, a vigil was held earlier this week for the victims of a Kentucky candle factory flattened by a tornado. A deputy jailer, Robert Daniel, who was escorting a group of inmates working at the factory,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 39 of 93

was one of the eight victims. He will be buried Saturday.

Across town at the heavily damaged courthouse in downtown Mayfield, Makayla Wadkins, 24, helped set up a makeshift memorial. Flyers with color photographs and the names of victims were taped to the fence surrounding the building.

"We're just going to allow the families to have a place to come where they can grieve and see their loved ones surrounded with flowers and beauty," said Wadkins, from neighboring Kirksey.

Associated Press writer Kim Kruesi contributed to this story from Nashville, Tennessee.

AP source: Biden, Manchin sharply divided over \$2T Dem bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Sen. Joe Manchin are said to be sharply divided over Democrats' huge social and environment bill, with the holdout senator pushing to erase the measure's improved child tax credit, as leaders' hopes of passing the legislation before Christmas appear to be fading away.

The rocky status of their talks, described only on condition of anonymity by a person familiar with them, was among several indications that Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer faces a struggle to even begin debate on the massive measure before the holiday. Schumer, D-N.Y., has set a goal for passage of the 10-year, roughly \$2 trillion measure by Christmas, in hopes of finally concluding his party's eight months of infighting over the package.

Many Democrats consider the expanded child tax credit the bill's chief weapon in their effort to reduce child poverty, and one of the provisions most responsible for largely unifying Democrats behind the legislation.

Manchin told reporters that assertions he wants to strip the child tax credit provisions were "a lot of bad rumors," adding that he's "always been for child tax credits." Asked if he backed one of the bill's child tax credit improvements — monthly checks sent to millions of families — he said, "I'm not negotiating with any of you."

In another factor clouding the bill's prospects, Biden suggested that Senate Democrats should instead prioritize voting rights legislation, a primary party goal that Republicans have long stymied. Democrats face an uphill fight on the voting measure, but focusing on it would let them wage a battle that energizes the party's voters while lawmakers work behind the scenes on the social and environment bill.

Asked whether Congress should quickly consider the voting legislation and delay the \$2 trillion bill to next year, Biden told reporters, "If we can get the congressional voting rights done, we should do it." He added, "There's nothing domestically more important than voting rights." Biden spoke as he toured tornado damage in Dawson Springs, Kentucky.

All of that produced a day of confusion in the Senate, where rank-and-file lawmakers and aides said they knew nothing about what legislation the chamber would tackle next, when and whether they would prevail.

Letting the social and environment legislation slip into next year, when congressional elections will be held, would be ominous for the bill's ultimate prospects. The party will need support from all its members in the 50-50 Senate to overcome solid Republican opposition to the bill, which embodies many of Biden's foremost domestic goals.

With Democrats having blown past previous self-imposed deadlines on the measure, another delay would fuel Republican accusations that they are incompetently running a government they control. Democrats are bracing for November elections when the GOP has a real chance of winning control of the House and Senate.

Word of Manchin's stance prompted a backlash from colleagues, whom he's frustrated for months with constant demands to cut the bill's size and scope. The measure also has money for health care, universal prekindergarten and climate change programs, largely paid for with tax boosts on big corporations and the rich.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said that if "Mr. Manchin and the Republicans"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 40 of 93

want to tell beneficiaries of the child tax credit that they don't need help, "Let them tell the American people that." Sanders pointedly said "the people of West Virginia understand that working families are facing one crisis after another."

Another impediment to Democrats is a time-consuming review by the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, about whether many of the bill's provisions violate the chamber's rules and should be dropped. Her written opinions on that, including on provisions letting many migrants remain temporarily in the U.S., may not be ready until the weekend or later.

Asked whether he would supply a pivotal vote to begin Senate debate on the legislation without rulings from MacDonough, Manchin said, "Everyone wants to see it, not just me."

Biden and Manchin have spoken by phone about the legislation at least twice this week.

Manchin recently said he wants all programs in the bill to run for its full 10-year duration, but also that the measure's price tag should total below \$2 trillion. The legislation extends for just one year the extra child tax credit benefits that otherwise expire Dec. 31. They're among the many temporary initiatives Democrats proposed to keep down costs.

A one-year extension of that credit is estimated to cost more than \$100 billion. Extending it over a decade would cost more than \$1 trillion, which would likely squeeze out other Democratic priorities.

The bill makes the maximum credit more generous, allows coverage for 17-year-olds and lets many of the benefits be paid by monthly checks, instead of annual refunds from the IRS. The Treasury Department says the families of 61 million children have benefited.

Before the overall bill can come to the Senate floor, Schumer must resolve Manchin demands to curb the legislation's cost and remove provisions he opposes, such as required paid family leave. Disputes among other lawmakers include how to increase federal tax deductions for state and local taxes.

Schumer has scheduled the Senate to be in session the week of Jan. 3, potentially creating time for lawmakers to plunge quickly back into work on the bill. Congress is seldom in session in early January in election years.

The House approved its version of the legislation in November.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro and Associated Press writers Colleen Long and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

How brothers in arms plotted theft, sale of US Army weaponry

By JAMES LAPORTA and JASON DEAREN Associated Press

Packed with rifles and explosives, the SUV hurtled down a Florida interstate beneath bright blue autumn skies, passing other motorists with little notice.

It was November 2018, and the driver, Tyler Sumlin, was uncomfortable. Clammy. The husky, bearded former U.S. Army soldier was getting a cold, and understandably tense: He was transporting a platoon's worth of stolen rifles, enough C4 to blow up his car and those around him, a live hand grenade.

He would recall thinking, "Is it too late to turn around?"

Riding shotgun was Sumlin's military blood brother, Sgt. 1st Class Jason Jarvis, a soldier on active-duty from Fort Bragg's 18th Ordnance Company in North Carolina — Sumlin's old unit.

The two men, who'd been close since they served in Afghanistan, tried to distract themselves with idle road-trip chatter. Their wives, war stories, favorite movies.

A few months earlier, Jarvis had reached out to ask if Sumlin had interest in making some money. Jarvis was looking to sell stolen military equipment from an armory at Bragg.

Sumlin said he might be able to find a buyer.

Now they were headed to El Paso, Texas, to sell the stolen weapons. The two men had heard from contacts that the customers were taking the haul into Mexico.

In a series of stories, The Associated Press has detailed how the U.S. military has a problem with missing and stolen guns and explosives, and how some weapons have been used in domestic crime.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 41 of 93

But the inside story of how two men who'd forged a deep bond amid the violence of the battlefield attempted to sell stolen Army weapons reveals another kind of threat: an organized group of soldiers and veterans taking advantage of flaws in the military's system to make fast money.

This story is based on extensive interviews, text messages associated with a federal criminal case, private Facebook group messages, court records and documents from military investigative proceedings.

While information about Sumlin and Jarvis has come to light before, this account offers new details about a case that left other soldiers appalled and enraged — betrayed, they believed, by two of their own.

A photograph captures a day in 2009 as Sumlin and Jarvis sat together on a rock in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. A rifle rests on Sumlin's lap, and he wears a tactical vest, his T-shirt sleeves cut off to expose a farmer's tan and tattoo on his left shoulder. Jarvis is off to his side, his rifle in hand.

The two young men had become brothers amid the breakneck tempo of wartime Afghanistan. Sumlin and Jarvis specialized in explosive ordnance disposal, or EOD, the kind of work — with its stifling, hulking bomb suits — given the Hollywood treatment in "The Hurt Locker."

Their work eliminating improvised explosive devices set by the Taliban was nonstop, and gave them little time to process what they saw, heard and smelled. It was a pressure cooker of a job inside a pressure cooker, intense even in the high stakes world of the battlefield. They stashed traumatic experiences and images deep inside themselves, and their comradery helped blunt the stress.

When they returned stateside both struggled with adjusting to the slower pace of life. Like many soldiers, they found some balm in the friendship of others who'd seen what they'd seen.

Like many military subcultures, the tight-knit EOD community has its own code of conduct, ethics and language. Sumlin joined a private Facebook group where the EOD community commiserated, argued and pranked one another. They also held each other to account, debating whether a member's conduct violated the brotherhood's code.

Sumlin left the Army in December 2017, but deployed again to do bomb disposal with a private defense contracting company.

Meanwhile, Jarvis remained in the Army. At Fort Bragg, home to some of the Army's most elite units, Jarvis worked in an armory. And that gave him access to a wealth of military firearms, parts and other equipment such as night vision goggles and explosives.

Inside the Fort Bragg armory, Jarvis took photographs of weaponry — and then he stole it, and set out to sell it.

His buddy, Sumlin, sent the photos and an inventory list of the pilfered weapons and explosives to an accomplice who called himself "Mr. Anderson." Anderson, a former Army combat engineer who had served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, was one of several other soldiers or veterans connected to the scheme.

In May 2018, Sumlin and Jarvis began mining their contacts to offload the haul. They would find a promising lead with the help of a man identified as "Evan," who they hadn't met but who said he had connections with a willing buyer.

"Inventory: NVG-13, Aimpoint-8, ACOG-18, PEQ2A-10, DD Rail-24, DD-Barrel-15, Various Troy toys," Anderson texted Evan, including Jarvis' photos. The letters and numbers described a litany of arms and night vision goggles, rifle optics and lasers designed for aiming, and rifle parts.

"Wow, items are good, any idea on price if I took everything?" Evan texted back.

"I'll let you know as soon as I hear back from him," Anderson wrote, referring to Sumlin.

Over the next few days, the conversation continued, copies of messages show. Anderson and Evan complained about the weapons' high prices. They sounded paranoid when they discussed dealing with amateur gun dealers like Sumlin and Jarvis, and feared they would attract attention from law enforcement.

"As soon as he named his price (for the gunsights) I thought he was joking since they're definitely USED," Anderson wrote. "I'm not sure if it's his first time or not. But it's the last time I ask around for (Sumlin)."

After a few days, Evan said he'd found a buyer who wanted it. All of it.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 42 of 93

What Anderson didn't know is that Evan was a longtime confidential informant working with Homeland Security Investigations, an arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

In his communication with Sumlin and Anderson, Evan said, he represented a buyer who claimed to be connected to narcotraffickers. (Sumlin has denied that the weapons were meant to be sold to drugrunners.)

"I didn't know (the buyer) was south of Texas," Anderson wrote.

"Yep he goes between Texas and Mexico all the time," Evan wrote back.

"I wouldn't sell anything to anyone down there," Anderson replied.

"Lol ... well he has always been a cash buyer without question and never any issues at all," Evan responded. "It sounds like they've made a deal."

"I hope so. They still have to meet and conclude," wrote Anderson.

By mid-November 2018, Jarvis had rented a Chevy Tahoe SUV in North Carolina and drove the stolen cache south. He met Sumlin in Inverness, a small town in central Florida's lakes region, so they could prepare the weapons for sale, according to a federal criminal complaint.

Sumlin would say he and Jarvis had initially sought \$250,000 for the firearms and explosives. After some back-and-forth, they settled on a much lower price: \$75,000.

It seemed a paltry amount, considering the risk, but the weapons sale may have been just one in which they were involved. According to the Army Criminal Investigation Division's case file, Jarvis and Sumlin would later tell agents about "criminal transactions" in Colorado, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia and Texas. In the document, another soldier confessed to stealing multiple rifle optic systems and a bomb suit, which were given to Sumlin.

In Florida, Jarvis and Sumlin cleaned the firearms to remove their fingerprints. They also paid to have some parts modified to fit the rifles. With the cache assembled, cleaned, packed in storage containers and loaded for delivery, the men got into the SUV for the 24-hour drive to Texas.

Arriving in El Paso, they pulled into a truck stop the morning of Nov. 14, 2018. A man they thought was the buyers' contact, known as Andy, waited with some others. They told Sumlin and Jarvis to follow them to a nearby warehouse — and into the trap.

There, the agents confirmed that the two men were indeed carrying multiple firearms, military equipment and C4 plastic explosives. A SWAT team pounced, arrested them and secured the cache.

Homeland Security agents seized more than 30 firearms; several blocks of C4; a hand grenade; shape charges; body armor; night vision devices; binoculars; ammunition; lasers and magazines. In Mexico, where drug traffickers have fought openly, the equipment could unleash carnage.

Yet the weapons recovered did not account for all that was missing from Bragg's armory. According to the report by Army criminal investigators, the items stolen between Sumlin, Jarvis and their accomplices between 2014 and 2018 were valued at close to \$180,000. But the U.S. government only recovered roughly \$26,000 worth.

The Army referred questions to Homeland Security Investigations, which initially promised to discuss the case with AP, then canceled the interview and, later, did not respond to written questions.

Jarvis and Sumlin were indicted on eight different federal charges, including conspiracy and gunrunning.

"Holy hell they had to be planning a crazy something for sure," Evan texted a Homeland Security agent.

"Boss is extremely happy ... It was a good hit," the agent replied. "Bad guys thought we were narco traffickers from Mexico ... Using their weapons against troops."

Sumlin posted bail and returned to his Florida home to pick up the pieces. He faced a possible 70 years in prison, and struggled under the weight of PTSD.

He logged onto the EOD community's private Facebook group page and saw a message directed at him.

"Dude is this you?" an EOD brother asked.

There on the page for everyone to see was a copy of his indictment, which had not been made public or attracted any media attention.

"Yup," Sumlin typed.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 43 of 93

"Mistakes were made," a fellow EOD member responded, glibly.

"A lot of them," Sumlin wrote.

In the months after the arrests, word had swirled in the small EOD community about fellow soldiers who'd tried to sell firearms and explosives. But the Army sent no official press release and there were no news reports. The chatter was dismissed as a rumor traded among troops.

The indictment confirmed the rumor, and some of Sumlin's brethren were livid. Explosive ordnance disposal technicians work on the border amid Mexican drug-related violence. What if the weapons had ended up with narcos? They might have been used against the good guys.

"Bro, (obscenity) you AND your service. You're a piece of (obscenity)," wrote one EOD group member. "You betrayed everyone you ever worked with as soon as you tried to sell weapons and explosives to a cartel."

In response, Sumlin indicated there had been six others involved in the conspiracy. Pressed to identify them, he refused.

Why, asked another community member, was he protecting the other conspirators?

"I'd like to hope they learned from what's going to happen to me," Sumlin explained. He said he didn't think any of them had been arrested, and he wanted to keep it that way. He hoped his and Jarvis' punishment would dissuade them from future arms dealings.

For many in the EOD community, Sumlin's mea culpa and excuses about needing money were not enough. He had crossed a line by selling items that could have killed one of their own.

Sumlin and Jarvis had faced decades in prison, but both reached deals with federal prosecutors. They pleaded guilty to attempting to smuggle goods from the United States.

The other seven counts were dropped. The maximum term was now 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

But they didn't even get that.

Each was sentenced to five years' probation, and Jarvis was ordered to mental health counseling and required to take prescribed medication.

Jarvis and Anderson did not return messages seeking comment. Sumlin declined to be interviewed for this story, but said in a 2019 interview that he planned to finish his probation and complete a psychology degree.

"I want to try and help veterans that have lost their way and try to help veterans transition out of the military and back into civilian life ... people that have gone through the issues of losing that rush ... that spark in life," he said.

The investigators, meanwhile, were incensed. They speculated that the federal judge was moved by the defendants' service records and claims of post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I don't mind getting my ass kicked in court fair and square ... but when they take a plea agreement and admit to everything we charged him with ... I just don't know what to say," a federal agent wrote to Evan.

"It's like if they pulled over (Timothy) McVeigh on the way to Oklahoma City ... and gave him probation because he didn't actually blow up the building," Evan responded.

As for Sumlin's insistence that drug traffickers were never discussed when he was negotiating the deal with undercover agents, Evan is adamant: The veteran was lying.

"They definitely planned to steal the weapons, the C4, the blasting caps and everything and they were going to sell it to the Mexican cartel, period," Evan told the AP.

The legal record is unclear. Sumlin told federal officials he believed the weapons were going to be exported to Mexico. But the federal complaint does not mention drug cartels.

To Evan, Sumlin and Jarvis are terrorists. If they were Muslim or Black, he said, they wouldn't have gotten off so easily.

"It was very frustrating that so many risked their lives, so many undercover people. There were all kinds of agencies involved and this is the outcome?" Evan wrote a Homeland Security agent. "There's other guys who got much worse for much less."

LaPorta reported from Boca Raton, Florida; contact him at <https://twitter.com/JimLaPorta>. Dearen reported from New York; contact him at <https://twitter.com/JHDearen>. Randy Herschaft in New York contributed.

Email AP's Global Investigations Team at investigative@ap.org or via <https://www.ap.org/tips/>. See other work at <https://www.apnews.com/hub/ap-investigations>.

Prosecutors expected to wrap up case against Kim Potter

By SCOTT BAUER and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Prosecutors were expected to wrap up their case Thursday against the Minnesota police officer charged in Daunte Wright's death, setting the stage for a defense that at some point will have Kim Potter directly addressing the jury.

Potter, 49, has said she meant to use her Taser when she shot and killed Wright on April 11, as he had pulled away from officers at a traffic stop and was trying to drive away. Body-camera video captured her shouting "I'll tase you!" and "Taser, Taser, Taser!" before firing once.

Her attorneys have also argued that Potter would have been within her rights to use deadly force because a fellow officer was endangered by Wright's attempt to flee.

The death of Wright, who was Black, set off angry demonstrations for several days in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center just as a white former officer, Derek Chauvin, was on trial in nearby Minneapolis for the killing of George Floyd. Potter, who is white, resigned two days after the shooting. She's charged with manslaughter.

It wasn't clear when Potter would take the stand. Her attorneys also plan to call several character witnesses on her behalf, though the judge ruled Wednesday that they would be limited to three.

During Wednesday's testimony, use-of-force expert Seth Stoughton testified for the prosecution that Potter acted unreasonably in shooting Wright.

"The use of deadly force was not appropriate and the evidence suggests a reasonable officer in Officer Potter's position could not have believed it was proportional to the threat at the time," said Stoughton, a professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law who also testified for the prosecution at Chauvin's trial.

Stoughton reminded jurors that Potter warned that she was about to use her Taser on Wright, and said a reasonable officer would not have decided to use a Taser if they thought there was an imminent threat of death or great bodily harm.

Stoughton said deadly force would have been inappropriate even if Potter believed another officer was in the car because of the risk that nearby officers or Wright's passenger could get shot.

And he said that if it appeared Wright was going to drive away, shooting would make things worse because he could be incapacitated and the vehicle itself would become a weapon.

In an acrimonious cross-examination, defense attorney Earl Gray sought to undermine Stoughton's expertise, including by questioning his experience as a police officer. Gray got Stoughton to agree that Wright would not have been shot if he hadn't tried to get away, and he fired a series of questions at Stoughton to point out that Wright did not stop resisting the officers despite Potter's warnings that she intended to use her Taser.

Wright's father, Arbuey Wright, was called by prosecutors to provide "spark of life" testimony, which Minnesota courts allow to humanize a victim.

He described his son as a typical big brother who joked a lot with his two younger sisters, and he said the family got together every Sunday. Arbuey Wright was moved to tears when prosecutors showed jurors photos of him and his son with their arms around each other and one of Daunte Wright with his own son.

"He was so happy about junior," Wright said. "He loved his son."

The case is being heard by a mostly white jury.

Bauer reported from Madison, Wisconsin. Associated Press writers Sara Burnett in Naperville, Illinois, and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed.

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

In tornado's wake, a church and pastor turn to God, service

By HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

MAYFIELD, Ky. (AP) — After riding out the violent tornado that devastated their town in a tunnel under their church, the Rev. Wes Fowler and his family emerged to devastation stretching for blocks: Crackling power lines, piles of rubble and calls for help they couldn't pinpoint in the darkness.

Later, safe back at home, his daughter had a question that left him stumped: "My little girl asked me, 'Why would God let this happen?'" said Fowler, senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Mayfield.

While he believes God did allow the tornado to happen, he had no answer as to why the western Kentucky community where he was baptized, grew up and chose to raise his family wasn't spared from the Friday night storms that left dozens dead and communities reeling across at least five states. But he felt he knew what to do next: glorify God amid the suffering, and serve those in need.

"It's easy to serve the Lord when things are good," Fowler said. "It's more challenging to serve him when times are bad, and I think that's really when people are looking to see if our faith is genuine, if our faith is true."

Despite suffering damage to their own church buildings, First Baptist staff and volunteers mobilized to provide whatever they can to help survivors cope with the disaster's aftermath and stay afloat — gift cards, food, generators, water, a listening ear and more.

Blake Schuecraft, associate pastor, said church leadership formed three teams in the wake of the storm: One to help affected members of the congregation, which numbers around 350 on Sundays; a second to focus on patching up and cleaning the First Baptist campus; and a third to serve the broader community of about 10,000 people and coordinate offers of aid.

A Georgia ministry showed up with generators ready to serve coffee to the community, and first Baptist invited them to use their space, Schuecraft said. He has fielded offers of help from churches as far away as New York as well as individuals in Florida and Illinois: "Some people are just loading up what they have and bringing it here."

The congregation, whose founding dates to before the Civil War, was about two months from moving into its newly remodeled, nearly century-old sanctuary when the tornado hit. Some of its stained-glass windows blew out and a wall was cracked, delaying its reopening. But it fared the best of the First Baptist structures.

Across the street in the church's children's building, the decorated Christmas tree in the foyer was miraculously untouched, but glass shards, soggy ceiling tiles and other debris were strewn across the floor as workers scrambled to cover holes in the roof of the congregation's temporary worship space.

Outside and in front of one of the dust-covered entrances, coffee dispensers, creamers and sweeteners lined folding tables beneath a towering cross in a shattered second-story window.

Debbie Samples, a member of First Baptist for about 20 years, spent hours Monday brewing pot after pot of coffee that was handed out in Styrofoam cups to community cleanup crews and to neighbors through the rolled-down windows of cars creeping through the devastated downtown.

That small offering of comfort was a familiar act of service for Samples, who often provides meals to the bereaved and those in need through one of the church's ministries. Heartbroken by the destruction, Samples wanted to help any way she could.

"This church has been a vital part of our lives, but it's not just the building — it's our church family," Samples said. "It's who calls on us or who we call on when things are down ... it's Christ, and we hope that we can shine for him through this."

Samples said she hunkered down with more than a dozen family members and neighbors in her basement

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 46 of 93

late Friday as the tornado roared through like a freight train. They have a standing invitation to take cover there, the only home with a basement in her neighborhood. Located a couple of miles outside Mayfield, the area was not hit by the twister — so she gasped when she saw the scope of the destruction in town.

"Pictures do not do justice to what we see," Samples said. "It's worse than we could ever imagine."

Fowler, too, recalled the terror of that night, when he and his wife used their bodies to cover their three children in the tunnel as the ceiling shook violently, enveloping them in a cloud of dust.

"It probably lasted ... 30 seconds or more. It felt like it lasted five minutes," Fowler said. "The kids were crying, and I was telling them verbally, 'We're going to be OK. We're going to be OK.' ... But in my mind I was thinking we might not be OK."

In the moment, they focused on staying alive. Once safe, their conversation turned to God.

Days later, as the afternoon sun shone through damaged stained glass in the empty sanctuary, Fowler still had no answer to his daughter's question. He believes in a sovereign God but could come up with no theological reasoning for why the tornado delivered such a deadly blow to Mayfield and not some other town.

"I had to look at my little 8-year-old girl, who looks to me for answers," he said, "and I had to say ... 'I don't know. I don't know.'"

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Why the Fed feels now is time to tighten credit more quickly

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell responded to surging inflation by counseling patience and stressing that the Fed wanted to see unemployment return to near-pre-pandemic levels before it would raise interest rates.

But on Wednesday, Powell suggested that his patience has run out. High inflation has not only persisted but accelerated to a nearly four-decade high. Average wages are rising. Hiring is solid, and unemployment is falling. All those trends, Powell said at a news conference, have led him and the rest of the Fed's policymakers to decide that now is the time to speed up the Fed's tightening of credit.

The central bank said it will reduce its monthly bond purchases — which are intended to lower long-term rates — at twice the pace it had previously set and will likely end the purchases in March. That accelerated timetable puts the Fed on a path to start raising rates as early as the first half of next year.

What's more, the policymakers collectively forecast that they will raise their benchmark short-term rate three times next year — a significant increase from September, when the 18 officials had split over whether to hike even a single time in 2022. The Fed's key rate, now pinned near zero, influences many consumer and business loans, including mortgages, credit cards and auto loans. Rates for those loans may start to rise, too, next year.

The policy changes reflect an abrupt shift by Powell and the Fed to focus more on wrestling inflation under control and less on further reducing unemployment.

At his news conference after the Fed's latest policy meeting, Powell stopped short of declaring that the job market had fully recovered from the pandemic recession. But he said "rapid progress" had been made toward the Fed's target of "maximum employment." And if inflation is still running high next year, he said, the Fed might decide to start raising rates even if maximum employment hasn't been achieved.

He noted recent economic reports that have shown higher inflation, solid wage growth and steady job gains.

"We have to make policy now, and inflation is well above" the central bank's 2% annual target, Powell said. "With elevated inflation pressures and a rapidly strengthening labor market, the economy no longer needs increasing amounts of policy support."

The Fed's actions may raise borrowing costs across the economy in the coming months, although policy

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 47 of 93

changes by the Fed don't always immediately affect other loan rates. And even if the central bank does raise rates three times next year, that would still leave its benchmark rate historically low, below 1%.

Since spring, the central bank had characterized inflation as mainly a "transitory" problem that would fade as supply bottlenecks, caused by the pandemic, were resolved. But at his news conference, Powell acknowledged that price spikes have persisted longer than the Fed expected.

Once consumers start to expect inflation to continue, Powell noted, it can make it harder for the Fed to control. If households expect higher prices, they tend to demand higher wage increases, which can then lead companies to raise prices further to offset their higher labor costs.

"There's a real risk now," Powell said, "that inflation may be more persistent and that may be putting inflation expectations under pressure, and that the risk of higher inflation becoming entrenched has increased. I think part of the reason behind our move today is to put ourselves in a position to be able to deal with that risk."

He said the Fed's goals of maximum employment and stable prices have been complicated by the unusual dynamics of the pandemic recovery. The Fed had hoped to see inflation rise because of very low unemployment and higher wages, which are signs of a strong economy. Instead, surging inflation has mostly stemmed from supply chain snarls and a spike in demand for goods such as furniture, cars and appliances.

"The inflation that we got," Powell said, "was not at all the inflation we were looking for."

The run-up in prices has lasted longer than the Fed expected and has spread from goods like food, energy and autos to services like apartment rents, restaurant meals and hotel rooms. It has weighed heavily on consumers, especially lower-income households and particularly for everyday necessities, and negated the higher wages many workers have received.

Collectively, the Fed's policymakers forecast Wednesday that inflation, as measured by their preferred gauge, will reach 5.3% by year's end, according to the Fed's preferred gauge. They expect inflation to slow considerably to a 2.6% annual rate by the end of 2022. But that's up from its September forecast of just 2.2%.

Gas prices have already come off their peaks. Supply chain bottlenecks in some areas are gradually easing. And government stimulus payments, which helped spur a spike in spending that boosted inflation, aren't likely to return.

The officials foresee the unemployment rate falling to 3.5% by the end of next year, which would match the pre-pandemic level, when unemployment was at 50-year lows.

Powell said all Fed officials expect the central bank's goal of "maximum employment" to be reached some time next year, and he pointed to a rapid fall in the unemployment rate just in the past two months, from 4.8% to 4.2%.

He also noted that job openings are at near-record highs and that millions of people are quitting their jobs, which is typically a sign of a strong labor market, in which people are finding new positions at higher pay. Though the proportion of people either working or looking for work still remains notably below pre-pandemic levels, Powell held out hope that it could fully recover over time if the economy remains healthy.

"We would not in any way want to foreclose the idea that the labor market can get even better," even after the Fed starts to raise rates, he said.

The Fed is buying \$90 billion a month in bonds, down from \$120 billion in October, and had been reducing those purchases by \$15 billion a month. But in January, it will reduce those purchases by \$30 billion, to \$60 billion, and will be on track, Powell said, to end them altogether in March.

In addition to three rate hikes next year, Fed officials foresee raising rates three times in 2023 and twice more in 2024, leaving their benchmark rate at 2.1%, still a relatively low level historically.

On Wall Street, stock prices rose gradually and then surged after the Fed issued its statement and Powell began speaking at a news conference. At the end of the day, stock market averages were all up more than 1%, a substantial gain.

AP Economics Writer Martin Crutsinger contributed to this report.

In pictures: Kim Jong Un's decade of total but isolated rule

By HYUNG-JIN KIM undefined

Since assuming power 10 years ago, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ruled the isolated country with absolute power, significantly expanded its nuclear arsenal and become the North's first ruler to hold a summit with a sitting U.S. president.

But now, he's hunkering down and struggling to revive a dilapidated economy battered hard by pandemic-related border shutdowns, toughened U.N. sanctions and mismanagement.

When he inherited power upon the death of his father and longtime ruler Kim Jong Il, there were questions about the future of North Korea. Little was known about the then-27-year-old son who was taking his family's dynastic rule into a third generation. But Kim Jong Un quickly consolidated his power by orchestrating a spate of brutal purges and executions that removed his potential rivals including his own powerful uncle.

With a firm grip on power, Kim has carried on his family's nuclear ambitions and diverted much of his country's scarce resources toward programs to build nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. His provocative run of nuclear and missile tests in 2016-17 placed North Korea a step closer to its goal of possessing such functioning intercontinental ballistic missiles, but they also led North Korea to face stricter U.N. sanctions and deepened international isolation.

Entering 2018, Kim abruptly took conciliatory gestures by sending a delegation to the Winter Olympics held in rival South Korea and telling visiting South Korean envoys that he was willing to place his nuclear program on the negotiating table. Some critics accused Kim of just trying to weaken the sanctions, buy time and perfect his weapons program, but then-U.S. President Donald Trump accepted Kim's offers for unprecedented summit talks between the leaders of the two countries.

In 2018-19, Kim met Trump three times and held summits with other world leaders including South Korean President Moon Jae-in, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. These meetings gave Kim the diplomatic legitimacy that his government had long desired.

The high-stakes nuclear diplomacy triggered a rare mood of rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula, such as athletes from the rival Koreas marching together during the Olympics' opening ceremony and their singers performing in each other's territory. North Korea also demolished its nuclear test site and released American detainees, while the U.S. and South Korean militaries suspended or canceled some of their regular drills.

But such moves were short-lived, as the Kim-Trump diplomacy eventually collapsed in 2019 due to wrangling over the sanctions.

Since early last year, Kim has largely shut his country's borders as part of draconian anti-virus measures that experts say are taking a heavy toll on his country's already troubled economy. He called ongoing difficulties "the worst-ever" and compared them with a 1990s famine that killed hundreds of thousands.

But there are no signs that Kim will return to talks with the United States anytime soon. Instead, he has repeatedly warned he will bolster his nuclear and missile arsenals unless Washington drops its hostility against Pyongyang.

Biden pledges 'whatever it takes' to assist tornado victims

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

DAWSON SPRINGS, Ky. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday pledged to do "whatever it takes, as long as it takes" to help Kentucky and other states after a series of deadly tornadoes that he said left a trail of unimaginable devastation. "You will recover and rebuild," he said.

"The scope and scale of this destruction is almost beyond belief," he said as he stood before a home reduced to a few walls and piles of rubble in Dawson Springs, one of two Kentucky towns he visited.

Biden spoke of the stress felt by victims of natural disasters such as the weekend storms that swept across eight states and said it was urgent that people be moved from emergency shelters in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, the president praised the outpouring of support from

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 49 of 93

reeling communities and said the federal support he has committed will keep flowing.

"Something good has to come out of this," Biden said. "In so many places, destruction was met with compassion."

More than 30 tornadoes tore through Kentucky and seven other states over the weekend, killing at least 88 people. Thousands of residents have lost their houses or are without power.

"I intend to do whatever it takes as long as it takes to support your state, your local leaders, as you recover and rebuild, and you will recover and rebuild," Biden said.

In Dawson Springs, Biden walked through mounds of debris. Shattered Christmas decorations were tangled up with shards of furniture and strewn clothing. Trees were uprooted among homes reduced to rubble. Over the sounds of heavy machinery engaged in cleanup just blocks away, the president stopped to speak with storm victims, including a young girl clutching an American flag.

Biden came over to a family sitting before a home without a roof or windows, and also spoke to a group of police officers. He offered hugs to an older couple. And at one point he joked with woman wearing Green Bay Packers apparel that she should tell star NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers that "he's gotta get the vaccine" — a reference to Rodgers' stand against the COVID-19 shot.

Earlier, in Mayfield, the president held hands in prayer with Graves County Executive Jesse Perry and a pastor. A family that had gathered in front of a destroyed home talked with Biden, who told reporters he was "impressed how everybody is working together" on the recovery. On Mayfield's main street, Biden spoke with two women in a shattered building. They had a sign that said, "God is good. Beaten but not defeated."

Biden also took an aerial tour of the damage and held a briefing with officials in an airport hangar. "I'm here to listen," he said. This kind of tragedy, Biden said, "either brings people together or it knocks them apart."

He added, "There's no red tornadoes and blue tornadoes."

Despite the president's push for unity in the face of disaster, his visit to the strongly Republican county, which Donald Trump won by a nearly 4-to-1 margin in 2020 — brought out some detractors. Scattered protesters offered up "Let's go Brandon" chants, used by some conservatives to represent a more vulgar epithet against the president, as Biden arrived.

But Biden's stop was met with optimism by many residents, who said they hoped the president would help get their communities back on their feet.

"I want to see if he's going to help individuals who have been affected by this," said Michelle Anderson, 68, who took cover in her bathtub with her cat when the tornado ripped the roof off the second floor of her apartment building in Mayfield. "I hope he does."

While congressional business kept him in Washington during the tour, U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell leader has spoken about his appreciation for Biden's response to the disaster. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said she is talking to Kentucky lawmakers about what's needed for the state — a nod to a possible disaster relief bill with supplemental funds for recovery.

Across the United States, it's been a year marked by a notable increase in extreme weather occurrences driven primarily by climate change. Only a month after he was sworn into office, Biden went to Houston to survey the damage wrought by a historic storm. He was in Idaho, Colorado and California to survey wildfire damage during the summer. After Hurricane Ida struck, Biden went to Louisiana as well as New Jersey and New York in September.

The disasters have offered Biden evidence of what he says is the pressing need for America to do more to combat climate change and prepare for future disasters — a case he made to help push for passage of his spending proposals.

The \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, signed into law last month, includes billions for climate resilience projects aimed to better defend people and property from future storms, wildfires and other natural disasters. His proposed \$2 trillion social spending package, still pending in Congress, includes billions more to help shift the nation away from oil, gas and coal and toward widespread clean energy and electric vehicle use.

The White House has spent much of the week engaging with lawmakers on the latter. Biden talked with West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a key Democratic holdout, in hopes of smoothing over some of his issues

in time to pass a package before year's end.

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

Besides 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 a nursing home was destroyed and the governor said workers shielded residents with their own bodies; and two in Missouri.

Associated Press writers Sean Murphy and Bruce Schreiner in Mayfield, Kentucky, contributed to this report.

Strong winds in Midwest whip up dust, blow over semitrailers

By MARGERY A. BECK and MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A powerful storm system swept across the Great Plains and Midwest Wednesday, closing highways in western Kansas, spawning reported tornadoes in Nebraska and Iowa and raising concerns about fires because of unusually high temperatures.

The strong winds whipped up dust that reduced visibility to zero west of Wakeeney, Kansas, the state Department of Transportation said, and caused at least four semitrailers to blow over. Kansas officials closed Interstate 70 from the Colorado border to Salina, as well as all state highways in nine counties in northwest Kansas.

The National Weather Service said there have been 13 tornado reports in the Plains states, scattered through eastern Nebraska and Iowa. Winds topped 70 mph through much of Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa.

"To have this number of damaging wind storms at one time would be unusual anytime of year," said Brian Barjenbruch, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Valley, Nebraska. "But to have this happen in December is really abnormal."

The system came on the heels of devastating tornadoes last weekend that cut a path through states including Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Illinois and Kentucky, killing more than 85 people.

The National Weather Service issued a high wind warning for an area stretching from New Mexico to upper Michigan, including Wisconsin and Illinois. Gusts topping 80 mph (129 kph) were recorded in the Texas Panhandle and western Kansas. The weather service said an automated observation site in Lamar, Colorado, recorded a gust of 107 mph (172 kph) Wednesday morning. Wind gusts of 100 mph were reported in Russell, Kansas.

Greg Butcher, the city administrator in Seward, Nebraska, said he was standing in his office at city hall Wednesday when he saw a giant wall of cloud rolling toward him. Butcher said he braced for a major hit but so far the worst damage appears to be a few toppled telephone poles.

"We lucked out," Butcher said. "It came in really fast."

Officials also warned of a dangerous fire risk along the western edge of the weather system, where conditions were dry.

A wildfire prompted Sheridan County officials to evacuate a few homes near Quinter in northwest Kansas. Emergency management director Don Koerperich did not have an estimate of how big the fire was but said "I'm glad it wasn't near any towns." Other fires were reported in Russell and Ellis counties.

Scientists say extreme weather events and warmer temperatures, much like what's happening, are more likely to occur with human-caused climate change. However, scientifically attributing a specific event like this storm system to global warming requires specific analysis and computer simulations that take time, haven't been done and sometimes show no clear connection.

"I think we also need to stop asking the question of whether or not this event was caused by climate change. All events nowadays are augmented by climate change," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini. "We need to be asking, 'To what extent did climate change play a role and how likely was this event to occur in the absence of climate change?'"

The unusually warm temperatures on Wednesday were due in part to record high ocean temperatures

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 51 of 93

in the Gulf of Mexico, which wouldn't have happened without global warming, said Jeff Masters, a Yale Climate Connections meteorologist who cofounded Weather Underground.

"That record heat is helping feed heat and moisture into today's storms, increasing their damage potential," he said.

Damaging winds were likely to bring down trees and power lines, leading to power outages, the National Weather Service warned. Some schools in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa either canceled in-person classes or closed early.

Officials in Ashland, Kansas, shut down the town's power supply for a few hours to reduce the threat of fire after multiple power poles were knocked down.

The system blew into the Plains from Colorado, where high winds knocked out power, closed roads and highways and delayed or canceled hundreds of flights. The weather service said a wind gust of 100 mph (160 kph) was recorded on the airfield at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Blaire Brush, a spokeswoman for the military academy, said windows on multiple cars and buildings were shattered during the windstorm. She did not know if the windows were smashed by objects flung by the wind or from the force of a gust.

On nearby Interstate 25, more than a dozen semitrailers blew over in winds that topped 90 mph (145 kph), according to the Colorado Springs Gazette.

In the Southwest, strong winds took down power lines in Shiprock, New Mexico, knocking out power to residents across the Navajo Nation.

Blowing dust drastically cut visibility in the Texas Panhandle, where Sherman County Sheriff Ted Allen said all roads in and out of the county were closed. In the Oklahoma Panhandle, the state Department of Transportation reported the main road north from Boise City into Colorado was closed because of collisions and downed power lines.

The winds and storms were expected to move quickly east, Thies said. After that, forecasters expect temperatures to plunge, with below freezing temperatures in the northern Plains.

Stafford reported from Liberty, Missouri.

Associated Press writers Ken Miller in Oklahoma City; Terry Wallace in Dallas; Seth Borenstein in Washington D.C.; Jim Anderson in Denver and Grant Schulte in Omaha, Neb., contributed to this report.

Myanmar public urges gas sanctions to stop military funding

By KRISTEN GELINEAU, VICTORIA MILKO and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The young woman in Myanmar decided to speak out when she realized that money from the company she loved was now in the hands of the military leaders she hated.

She and her parents had long worked for Total Energies, the French company that operates a lucrative gas field off the coast of southern Myanmar with a state-owned enterprise. But in February, the military took over Myanmar's government and its bank accounts, including those that receive hundreds of millions of dollars each year from the Total gas field, known as Yadana.

As military abuses such as the murder and detention of thousands have grown, the young woman joined others across Myanmar in a groundswell of support for targeted sanctions on oil and gas funds, the country's single largest source of foreign currency revenue. But Western governments — most notably the United States and France — have refused to take that step amid lobbying from energy company officials and resistance from countries such as Thailand, which gets gas from Myanmar. On Friday, the U.S. announced a raft of sanctions against several Myanmar officials and entities, but again left out oil or gas revenues.

The young woman chanted slogans outside Total's offices, and later protested the military's takeover. She said she has since lost her job, and was thrown into prison for three weeks.

"We had a good relationship and good memories of Total," said the young woman, whose name, like those of other Myanmar gas workers in this story, is being withheld by The Associated Press for their

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 52 of 93

safety. "Total has taken a lot from Myanmar....so they should at least help Myanmar with a little bit of effort during such a bloody period in our country."

In recent months, the Myanmar public's cries for sanctions on gas revenues have grown thunderous. In August, activists launched the "Blood Money Campaign" movement, risking their lives by marching in the streets and carrying signs that read: "Freeze payments to junta and save Myanmar." Others posted photos of themselves on social media holding signs that targeted the gas companies at the center of the debate: "Total, Chevron — Stop accessory to murder."

The United Nations' top expert on human rights in Myanmar says millions of people across the country are imposing personal sanctions by withholding taxes, refusing to pay power bills and boycotting products linked to the military. And on Nov. 30, 540 civil society organizations in Myanmar joined international colleagues in sending a letter to CEO Patrick Pouyanne asking Total to "put an end to its complicity in crimes against humanity" by making payments to a holding account. The letter argued that Total is violating local laws against misappropriating public money and "has placed itself on the side of the junta."

The AP also obtained a copy of a letter from workers at Yadana to their managers earlier this year calling on Total's subsidiary, Total E&P Myanmar, to suspend export payments to the military, place the funds in a protected account and freeze income tax.

"We are specifically concerned that the profits gained from Yadana Project, which we are working for, will, one way or another, help fund the military junta's violent repression of Myanmar people," the letter said.

Total and Chevron say they condemn human rights abuses, but also want to prevent further harm to the people of Myanmar by cutting off electricity. In addition, Total said it is wary of putting its local employees in danger of reprisals from the military, including forced labor.

Meanwhile, tolerance on the ground for global inaction has worn thin. Local armed groups, referred to as People's Defense Forces, have targeted bill collectors for the national utility and sabotaged buildings and infrastructure, according to EarthRights International, which works on environmental and human rights issues in Myanmar.

Pro-sanctions activists do not want to shut down the gas field itself. Instead, they want to sanction the project's revenues and place them in a protected offshore bank account that the military can't touch.

The sanctions would target the state-owned Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), which is a joint venture partner in all offshore gas projects in Myanmar, including Yadana with Total, Chevron, and Thailand's PTT Exploration & Production. Total has a majority stake in the venture and runs its daily operations, while MOGE collects revenues on behalf of the government. Gas from Yadana is piped to Myanmar and neighboring Thailand.

Total cancelled exploration for new deposits in Myanmar after the military takeover. But it argues that it has to pay taxes and respect its contracts under the law, and that it will donate the equivalent of the taxes to human rights associations in Myanmar. Total said it would willingly comply with any new international sanctions, which would override local laws that govern its contracts in Myanmar.

"In particular, should MOGE be under economic sanctions it would oblige all parties to put all cash flows due to MOGE in an escrow account," the company told AP in a statement. "We have taken all possible measures under our control and respecting the legal framework without putting our staff at risk."

Several smaller offshore gas fields also operate in Myanmar's waters, run by companies from Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, India and South Korea in partnership with MOGE. And China is an investor in the pipeline that delivers the gas to the country.

About 50 percent of Myanmar's foreign currency comes from natural gas revenues, with MOGE expected to earn \$1.5 billion from offshore and pipeline projects in 2021-2022, according to a Myanmar government forecast. The Yadana gas project and pipeline is particularly important, earning around \$400 million in revenues in 2017-2018.

Yet despite the growing calls for action, neither U.S. President Joe Biden nor French President Emmanuel Macron have publicly moved against Myanmar's oil and gas revenues. The current sanctions from the U.S. and European Union lean heavily on gemstones.

The U.S. State Department did not directly address AP's questions about why it has yet to impose sanc-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 53 of 93

tions on MOGE. Instead, the department pointed to a list of other people and entities the U.S. has already sanctioned, including several military officials and their family members, two army units believed responsible for a litany of atrocities, the military's two largest holding companies and a state-owned gems enterprise.

"We will not hesitate to take further action against those who perpetrate violence and suppress the will of the people," the department said in a statement.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that the Biden administration is weighing tough new sanctions on Myanmar to pressure the country's military leaders to restore a democratic path. He did not mention oil and gas sanctions.

An aide on the House Foreign Affairs Committee acknowledged that oil and gas make up "a huge chunk" of the military's ability to maintain control. Despite that, a measure introduced in the House in October that specifically calls out MOGE as a potential sanctions target has yet to advance.

The aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the thinking around the legislation, said objections from Singapore and Thailand have played a role in the Biden administration's hesitation to impose new sanctions, as has lobbying from Chevron. Activists have accused Singapore's banks of holding assets on the Myanmar military's behalf, although its central bank has said regular surveillance showed Myanmar companies and citizens did not have "significant funds" in the city state.

In the first half of 2021, Chevron reported spending \$3.7 million on federal lobbying in the U.S., with "Burma Energy Issues" and "Myanmar Energy and Investment Issues" listed as specific lobbying areas of focus.

"It certainly seems in the U.S. there is a major lobbying campaign going on from Chevron to try and protect its interests," said Chris Sidoti, a human rights lawyer and a member of the U.N. Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar from 2017 to 2019.

In response to questions from the AP, a spokesman for Chevron pointed to an earlier statement from the company, which said Chevron would comply with any sanctions imposed by the U.S.

"Any actions should be carefully considered to ensure the people of Myanmar are not further disadvantaged by unintended and unpredictable consequences of well-intentioned decisions," Chevron wrote in its May statement.

The French government also said it wants to avoid adding to the burdens of Myanmar civilians through sanctions and aims to target individuals from the junta rather than a vital economic sector. France wants to avoid normalizing relations with the junta but also wants to "stay involved on the ground" for humanitarian reasons, which requires "operational contacts" with Myanmar's administration, according to a senior official in the French president's office. He described the French government's thinking on condition of anonymity.

He said Total's activities in Myanmar, including how it carries out payment for the gas, are the company's responsibility. Both the French government and Total want a return to a democratically elected government, "but at the same time you have to take into account the reality on the ground," he said.

French authorities have told activists that Europe is expecting to impose a fourth round of sanctions by Feb. 1, the anniversary of the military's takeover, and that both the energy and banking sectors are on the table.

MOGE can be targeted for sanctions without interrupting the flow of energy, said Tom Andrews, the United Nations special rapporteur on Myanmar.

"The people of Myanmar are not calling for anything that they, themselves, are unwilling to do," Andrews said in an e-mail to the AP. "But the fact remains that to be truly effective, the people of Myanmar need countries to join them and impose sanctions on MOGE."

Human rights activists say it's unconscionable for any company to help fund a military that has, in recent months, engaged in mass torture, launched attacks on medics, forcibly disappeared thousands of people, and returned mutilated corpses to victims' families as tools of terror. Since February, soldiers and police have killed at least 1,300 people and arrested more than 10,800, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors deaths and arrests.

Last month, the National Unity Government, an underground opposition group and parallel administra-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 54 of 93

tion, released a public statement that dubbed MOGE the military's most important financial lifeline and called for urgent sanctions.

"As a nation, we have these natural resources to build a school, to build a hospital, to build a road," said spokesman Dr. Sasa, who goes by one name. "So why are we still using this money to kill the people of Myanmar? To us, it is barbarity."

In response to questions, the military said state revenue is used for education, infrastructure, development projects and public service, and is also used "proportionately for the rule of law and for defense." The military has long denied allegations of human rights abuses.

"All state revenue is spent according to the needs of the country," the military said in a statement to the AP. "Putting restrictions on the current government is directly affecting the social and economic life of the citizens."

The Yadana project provides less than 1.5 percent of Chevron's worldwide natural gas output, and Total says Yadana represents less than 1 percent of its production. But while Yadana isn't a significant source of income, it also doesn't cost the companies much because major set-up fees were incurred decades ago, said Readul Islam, a Singapore-based research analyst at Rystad Energy. Chevron and Total would also struggle to sell the operation, given the remaining short life of the aging gas field and the grim political situation, he said.

"These operations are not company-makers by any sense, but they are profitable," Islam said.

Also, Chevron and Total's aversion to sanctions may be less about money than about precedent, said John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch.

"If you signal that every time a country has serious human rights abuses, Human Rights Watch and other groups can come in and say, 'You should sanction your revenue,' it's going to create business headaches for them all over the world," he said.

With public pressure mounting, Total and Chevron announced in May that they were suspending dividend payments by the Moattama Gas Transportation Company, which owns the Yadana pipeline. While welcoming the move as a first step, activists argue the dividend payments are a fraction of the military's gas revenues.

The energy analytics firm Wood Mackenzie in November downgraded its forecast of Myanmar gas exports to Thailand after Yadana's output fell faster than expected. Rights activists said Thai fears of a gas slowdown or cutoff at a time of surging prices across Asia have stiffened its resistance to new sanctions, which the U.S. and EU appeared reluctant to challenge. The Thai government did not respond with comment.

In Myanmar, some gas workers have dismissed the energy companies' concerns that they will face retaliation with sanctions, arguing the entire country is already oppressed. One 10-year employee of Total said the risk of losing his job due to sanctions was nothing compared to the risk of the generals remaining in power.

"Everyone needs a job," he said. "But I don't want to survive by working here while everyone is suffering from this crisis."

Given he and millions of others already have risked so much in the pursuit of democracy, he is frustrated with the international community's failure to act.

"I don't understand why they keep paying the junta," he said.

After the young woman whose family had long worked for Total protested outside its gates, the contractor company that hired her warned her not to participate again in the country's pro-democracy Civil Disobedience Movement, she said.

A few months later, she posted on social media about what she felt was Total's poor treatment of a colleague who died of COVID-19. Days later, she said, the contractor company fired her for allegedly defaming Total. In a statement, Total said that no Total E&P employees have been fired since the military's takeover, and none have been prevented from participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In September, she was arrested and imprisoned for three weeks under Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which, in part, criminalizes comments that "cause fear" or spread "false news."

"I feel very disappointed in Total because they are neglecting this country in which they invested," she said.

For another Total employee, the lack of action from those who claim to stand for human rights is baffling. Why, he asked, hasn't the international community told gas companies that if they do business with the military, they can no longer do business with the rest of the world?

For him, the solution to military abuse is simple.

"If they do not have revenue, they cannot buy weapons," he says. "If they cannot buy weapons, this revolution will end quickly."

Gelineau reported from Sydney and Hinnant reported from Paris. AP Business Writer Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok contributed to this report. Correspondents Matt Lee and Ben Fox contributed from Washington, D.C.

Election reviews persist despite no evidence of rigged vote

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A Pennsylvania courtroom on Wednesday became the latest battleground over claims the 2020 presidential election was rigged, as Republicans around the country pressed ahead with efforts to investigate the voting despite a lack of evidence of widespread fraud.

A five-judge panel in Harrisburg heard Democrats' arguments to block a subpoena sought by Senate Republicans, seeking information on voters and election systems. Democrats argue the subpoena is an abuse of power and serves no legitimate legislative purpose.

A lawyer for Senate Republicans insisted lawmakers have a legitimate interest in getting the information to improve election law, regardless of the backdrop of former President Donald Trump trying to get allies in battleground states to turn up evidence of election fraud.

"The fact that there's noise floating around out there shouldn't concern the court," lawyer Matt Haverstick said.

The election review in Pennsylvania and another in Wisconsin are part of the larger story, as GOP lawmakers elsewhere make their case for similar efforts in their states. They cite concerns raised by claims made by Trump and his allies, who have referenced various conspiracy theories to explain his loss last November to Democrat Joe Biden.

Among the claims is that widespread voter fraud occurred, but an Associated Press review found fewer than 475 instances of potential voter fraud in the six states disputed by Trump — a number that would have made no difference in the election.

Republican leaders argue their probes are needed to restore public confidence in elections, but experts say it's the reviews themselves that are undermining faith in U.S. elections.

"The intent of these reviews is to continue to create doubt, distrust and confusion around an election that has been canvassed, certified, audited, litigated and reviewed so they can keep the narrative going. So they can continue to raise money and raise their political profiles," said Matt Masterson, a former top election security official in the Trump administration.

In Pennsylvania, Republicans led by Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman insist the undertaking has nothing to do with Trump or trying to overturn last year's election. Rather, they say the point is to fix problems with the state's elections.

However, the 2020 election has been the focus of Republican-controlled committees in the Senate and House. There have been numerous hearings, hours of testimony, and proposed legislation.

In an interview Tuesday, Trump praised the work of Republican lawmakers in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania and argued that many of the problems that arose in the election were due to pandemic-related changes made outside of the legislative process.

"They used COVID in order to cheat, as a way of cheating," Trump said. "In Pennsylvania, Sen. Corman and a whole group of people are totally engaged because they've now found that things were much different than they were told."

The AP's review of Pennsylvania's 67 counties identified a total of 26 potential voter fraud cases so far,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 56 of 93

which represents just 0.03% of Biden's margin of victory in the state. Six people have been charged.

To conduct their review, Pennsylvania Republicans have hired a small firm with little track record and no experience in elections. There was no bidding for the contract, and no public request for proposals. A similar situation unfolded in Arizona, where Senate Republicans seeking a review of the 2020 election hired an outside firm that was criticized for its lack of knowledge of election systems and processes.

The Arizona review ended in September without offering proof to support Trump's claims of a stolen election.

In Wisconsin this week, Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said the investigation he ordered into the 2020 presidential election will spill into next year and cost more money. So far, the effort has cost taxpayers nearly \$680,000.

Former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman was tapped to lead the investigation and has sought subpoenas of the mayors of the state's five largest cities and the state's top elections official.

Democrats and some Republicans in the state have criticized the investigation as a sham, given that some of those hired by Gableman worked in Trump's administration or have supported conspiracy theories about the 2020 election. Trump lost Wisconsin by nearly 21,000 votes, an outcome that's been upheld following recounts, multiple court rulings and a nonpartisan audit.

Wisconsin election officials have so far identified 31 potential cases of voter fraud. In 26 of those cases, prosecutors declined to bring charges after conducting a review, according to the AP's findings.

Earlier this week, Republican state Sen. Kathy Bernier, chair of the Senate elections committee and the former Chippewa County election clerk, called the review a "charade" designed to appease the GOP's conservative base and said questioning the integrity of elections will ultimately hurt turnout for Republicans.

"I understand there is frustration when you have a president saying there is massive voter fraud," Bernier said. "We have a great system here and no one should falsely accuse election officials of cheating."

The wave of demands for reviews of the election also includes reliably Republican states that Trump won in 2020.

Last week, a panel of majority-GOP lawmakers in Utah approved an audit of the state's election system. Unlike Arizona, the Utah effort will be conducted by nonpartisan legislative auditors and is not focused solely on 2020.

Republican Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson cautioned that efforts questioning the integrity of the state's voting system are "destructive" and "very concerning."

"From all of the things that I have seen, the endgame here is to fundamentally destroy the voting system we have here in the state of Utah," Henderson said in an interview.

Cassidy reported from Atlanta. Associated Press writers Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin and Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City contributed to this report.

US faces a double coronavirus surge as omicron advances

By LAURA UNGAR and CARLA K. JOHNSON Associated Press

The new omicron coronavirus mutant speeding around the world may bring another wave of chaos, threatening to further stretch hospital workers already struggling with a surge of delta cases and upend holiday plans for the second year in a row.

The White House on Wednesday insisted there was no need for a lockdown because vaccines are widely available and appear to offer protection against the worst consequences of the virus. But even if omicron proves milder on the whole than delta, it may disarm some of the lifesaving tools available and put immune-compromised and elderly people at particular risk as it begins a rapid assault on the United States.

"Our delta surge is ongoing and, in fact, accelerating. And on top of that, we're going to add an omicron surge," said Dr. Jacob Lemieux, who monitors variants for a research collaboration led by Harvard Medical School.

"That's alarming, because our hospitals are already filling up. Staff are fatigued," leaving limited capacity

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 57 of 93

for a potential crush of COVID-19 cases “from an omicron wave superimposed on a delta surge.”

Most likely, he and other experts said at a news briefing Tuesday, an omicron surge is already under way in the United States, with the latest mutant coronavirus outpacing the nation’s ability to track it.

Based on specimens collected last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said omicron accounted for about 3% of genetically-sequenced coronaviruses nationally. Percentages vary by region, with the highest — 13% — in the New York/New Jersey area.

But Harvard experts said these are likely underestimates because omicron is moving so fast that surveillance attempts can’t keep up.

Globally, more than 75 countries have reported confirmed cases of omicron. In the United States, 36 states have detected the variant. Meanwhile, delta is surging in many places, with hot spots in New England and the upper Midwest. The five states with the highest two-week rolling average of cases per 100,000 people are New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Michigan, Minnesota and Vermont.

Universities are abruptly closing classrooms during finals week with infections multiplying at a fast rate. Both the NBA and NHL have had to postpone games, and the NFL had its worst two-day outbreak since the start of the pandemic, with dozens of players infected.

Outside the U.S., the president of the European Union said omicron will become the dominant variant in a month and declared that “once again, this Christmas will be overshadowed by the pandemic.”

Scientists around the world are racing to understand omicron, which has a large number of worrisome mutations in important regions of its genetic structure that could affect how it spreads from person to person. How quickly the number of cases doubles, known as “doubling time,” can give a preview of what the disease burden could be in a few weeks.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said Wednesday that early data suggests omicron is more transmissible than delta, with a doubling time of about two days.

In Britain, where omicron cases are doubling every two to three days, the variant is expected to soon replace delta as the dominant strain in the country.

The U.K. on Wednesday recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections since the pandemic began, and England’s chief medical officer warned that the situation is likely to get worse as omicron drives a new wave of illness during the holidays.

“The data out of the UK are quite alarming at this point,” and foreshadow what’s to come in the United States, said Bronwyn MacInnis, director of pathogen genomic surveillance at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. For example, she said, by Tuesday afternoon, omicron was already the most common variant in London.

In many ways, omicron remains a mystery. Hints are emerging from South Africa, where it was first reported, indicating it may cause less severe disease than delta but be better at evading vaccines.

But, MacInnis warned: “There’s much more that we don’t know about this variant than we do, including the severity.”

At the same time, Lemieux said, there seem to be fewer tools to fight it. Some monoclonal antibody treatments don’t work as well against omicron in lab tests, Lemieux said. Vaccines appear to offer less protection, although CDC officials said booster shots strengthen that protection.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert, said Wednesday there is no need, for now, for an omicron-specific booster shot. The two-dose mRNA vaccines, the Pfizer and Moderna shots, still appear to offer considerable protection against hospitalization from omicron, Fauci said.

“If we didn’t have these tools, I would be telling you to really, really be worried,” Fauci said.

Jeff Zients, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, said the U.S. has the tools to fight the virus, including omicron, and “there is no need to lock down.” With vaccines available now for 95% of Americans, “we know how to keep our kids in schools and our businesses open. And we’re not going to shut down.”

Health officials called on Americans to get vaccinated, get their booster shots, wear masks indoors and get tested before traveling and before holiday gatherings.

“Hospital capacity is already at a breaking point in many states because of severe cases of COVID-19,”

Michael Fraser, CEO of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, said in a statement.

Given the high level of transmission, MacInnis said there will undoubtedly be severe cases.

"No matter how severely it affects healthy, fully vaccinated and boosted populations, it will hit the most vulnerable among us the hardest still," she said. "So the elderly, the immunocompromised, other vulnerable populations will still be at greatest risk and still bear the brunt of this."

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.

Evictions on the rise months after federal moratorium ends

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Soon after losing his trucking job amid the pandemic, Freddie Davis got another blow: His landlord in Miami was almost doubling the rent on his Miami apartment.

Davis girded for what he feared would come next. In September he was evicted — just over a month after a federal eviction moratorium ended. He's now languishing in a hotel, aided by a nonprofit that helps homeless people.

The 51-year-old desperately wants to find a new apartment. But it's proving impossible on his \$1,000-a-month disability check.

"We live in America, and the thing is, people like me, we got to go to the street if we don't have no other place to go because we can't afford rent," said Davis, who lost a leg to diabetes, suffers congestive heart failure and is recovering from multiple wounds on his other leg and foot. "I really can't do nothing."

The federal ban, along with a mix of state and federal moratoriums, is credited with keeping Davis and millions of others in their homes during the pandemic and preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

There was a brief lull in evictions filings after the ban ended. But housing advocates say they're on the rise in many parts of the country — though numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels due to the infusion of federal rental assistance and other pandemic-related assistance like expanded child tax credit payments that are also set to end.

Part of the increase is due to courts catching up on the backlog of eviction cases. But advocates say the upsurge also shows the limits of federal emergency rental assistance in places where distribution remains slow and tenant protections are weak. Rising housing prices in many markets also are playing a role.

According to the latest data from the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, eviction filings have been rising in most of the 31 cities and six states where it collects data. They increased 10.4% from the first half of August to the first half of September. In the first half of October, numbers were 38% above August levels and 25% higher than in September. Filings fell around 7% from the first half of October to November and now remain about 48% below pre-pandemic levels.

Among places where eviction filings are returning to normal are Connecticut as well as Houston, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio, according to the Eviction Lab. Florida, too, has seen a significant rise, with filings in Tampa and Gainesville returning to near pre-pandemic levels.

"There was a batch of initial commentary coming out when the moratorium ended and the tone ... was, well, there wasn't a tsunami so we don't have an eviction crisis on our hands," said Ben Martin, senior researcher at Texas Housers, a nonprofit focused on housing issues.

"That initial narrative was somewhat misleading. What we are seeing is a reflection of reality, which is that evictions take time to work their way into and through the court system."

Among the concerns is that some landlords who got federal assistance are still evicting tenants. A survey of nearly 120 attorneys nationwide from the National Housing Law Project found 86% had seen cases like this. They also saw increasing instances of landlords lying in court to evict tenants and illegally locking out tenants.

"In many states, landlord tenant law is antiquated and designed to provide results for landlords," said Shamus Roller, executive director of the National Housing Law Project. "Instead of adjudicating the facts,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 59 of 93

courts function as conveyor belts, moving tenants toward eviction.”

Among those who contend they were illegally evicted is Faye Moore. The 72-year-old returned home from work in October to find her life spread out on the sidewalk.

Behind several thousand dollars rent on her two-bedroom townhouse in an Atlanta suburb, Moore figured she would get the chance to present her case to a judge, including that management refused to take her rent money for months and that she was given no notice before she was evicted.

“I’m devastated. It was a house full of furniture. Everything,” said Moore, a retired mental health therapist who is now staying in a hotel with her 61-year-old partner, Garry Betared. “It was like a storm came in and devastated everything. I can’t find my important papers or anything.”

Cicely Murray, a HUD housing counselor with the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America who is working with Moore, was most upset that the couple was evicted without a court hearing and forced to fend for themselves.

“I’m angry that anyone would put an elderly couple out without trying to figure out what resources are there,” Murray said. “We are still in a pandemic. ... You are putting people in precarious situations who are some of the most fragile.”

As Christmas approaches, there are plenty of signs that eviction cases will keep rising.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, those saying they weren’t confident of paying next month’s rent increased from about 5 million at the end of September to 6.3 million in the latest data.

Landlords, especially smaller ones who own a handful of apartments, have also struggled. They believed the moratorium was illegal and saddled them with months of back rent they may never get back. Others were forced to lay off maintenance staff or sell units as they awaited federal rental assistance that was slow to be distributed.

Some localities have lagged behind in getting out their portion of the \$46.5 billion in federal Emergency Rental Assistance. According to a November report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 28% of grantees — 32 states and 80 localities — spent less than 30% of their first allocation of money and risk losing those funds.

Among them is Nebraska, which spent only 6% of its funding through September and just 7% through October. Some landlords are refusing to take part in the program, said Caitlin Cedfeldt, a staff attorney at Legal Aid of Nebraska, while others have grown tired of waiting and are moving to evict. Tenants, some of whom got initial help but still face economic hardship, are being told they can’t yet reapply for additional help.

Missouri only spent 18% of its funding through September but has since improved.

“We have so much more work to do,” U.S. Rep. Cori Bush, a St. Louis Democrat, said, citing data showing that evictions during the pandemic “have taken lives.”

There are some states and local governments that “feel, ‘We don’t want this money. We don’t want this federal aid,’” she said. “And, we have some landlords who say that they don’t want the money as well. So that makes it harder for the money to be dispersed.”

Gene Sperling, who is charged with overseeing implementation of President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package, said some increase in evictions was inevitable after the ban ended. “But fortunately because the Emergency Rental Assistance program is now paying full back-rent to about 500,000 renters each month, the eviction tsunami that experts feared has not occurred,” he said.

On the flip side are states and cities running out of rental assistance. The Treasury Department expects that upwards of \$30 billion, or about two-thirds of the money, will have been spent or allocated by the end of the year. As the law dictates, Treasury is expected to begin reallocating funds from places not spending it to those in need.

Texas has stopped accepting new applicants because it has allocated all its funds, though it continues to process applications received before the deadline. Oregon has stopped taking new applicants for now.

The state of New York has spent or committed nearly all of its money, as has Philadelphia. California will soon exhaust its funds, while Atlanta has closed its program to new applicants. Austin, Texas, also

stopped taking applications.

"It's particularly concerning that a number of these programs are now shutting down because all funds have been expended or obligated," said Peter Hepburn, research fellow at the Eviction Lab.

"If that funding gets removed, landlords may have less incentive to work with tenants."

Associated Press writers Adriana Gomez in Miami and Jim Salter in O'Fallon, Missouri, contributed to this report.

Why the Fed feels now is time to tighten credit more quickly

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell responded to surging inflation by counseling patience and stressing that the Fed wanted to see unemployment return to near-pre-pandemic levels before it would raise interest rates.

But on Wednesday, Powell suggested that his patience has run out. High inflation has not only persisted but accelerated to a nearly four-decade high. Average wages are rising. Hiring is solid, and unemployment is falling. All those trends, Powell said at a news conference, have led him and the rest of the Fed's policymakers to decide that now is the time to speed up the Fed's tightening of credit.

The central bank said it will reduce its monthly bond purchases — which are intended to lower long-term rates — at twice the pace it had previously set and will likely end the purchases in March. That accelerated timetable puts the Fed on a path to start raising rates as early as the first half of next year.

What's more, the policymakers collectively forecast that they will raise their benchmark short-term rate three times next year — a significant increase from September, when the 18 officials had split over whether to hike even a single time in 2022. The Fed's key rate, now pinned near zero, influences many consumer and business loans, including mortgages, credit cards and auto loans. Rates for those loans may start to rise, too, next year.

The policy changes reflect an abrupt shift by Powell and the Fed to focus more on wrestling inflation under control and less on further reducing unemployment.

At his news conference after the Fed's latest policy meeting, Powell stopped short of declaring that the job market had fully recovered from the pandemic recession. But he said "rapid progress" had been made toward the Fed's target of "maximum employment." And if inflation is still running high next year, he said, the Fed might decide to start raising rates even if maximum employment hasn't been achieved.

He noted recent economic reports that have shown higher inflation, solid wage growth and steady job gains.

"We have to make policy now, and inflation is well above" the central bank's 2% annual target, Powell said. "With elevated inflation pressures and a rapidly strengthening labor market, the economy no longer needs increasing amounts of policy support."

The Fed's actions may raise borrowing costs across the economy in the coming months, although policy changes by the Fed don't always immediately affect other loan rates. And even if the central bank does raise rates three times next year, that would still leave its benchmark rate historically low, below 1%.

Since spring, the central bank had characterized inflation as mainly a "transitory" problem that would fade as supply bottlenecks, caused by the pandemic, were resolved. But at his news conference, Powell acknowledged that price spikes have persisted longer than the Fed expected.

Once consumers start to expect inflation to continue, Powell noted, it can make it harder for the Fed to control. If households expect higher prices, they tend to demand higher wage increases, which can then lead companies to raise prices further to offset their higher labor costs.

"There's a real risk now," Powell said, "that inflation may be more persistent and that may be putting inflation expectations under pressure, and that the risk of higher inflation becoming entrenched has increased. I think part of the reason behind our move today is to put ourselves in a position to be able to deal with that risk."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 61 of 93

He said the Fed's goals of maximum employment and stable prices have been complicated by the unusual dynamics of the pandemic recovery. The Fed had hoped to see inflation rise because of very low unemployment and higher wages, which are signs of a strong economy. Instead, surging inflation has mostly stemmed from supply chain snarls and a spike in demand for goods such as furniture, cars and appliances.

"The inflation that we got," Powell said, "was not at all the inflation we were looking for."

The run-up in prices has lasted longer than the Fed expected and has spread from goods like food, energy and autos to services like apartment rents, restaurant meals and hotel rooms. It has weighed heavily on consumers, especially lower-income households and particularly for everyday necessities, and negated the higher wages many workers have received.

Collectively, the Fed's policymakers forecast Wednesday that inflation, as measured by their preferred gauge, will reach 5.3% by year's end, according to the Fed's preferred gauge. They expect inflation to slow considerably to a 2.6% annual rate by the end of 2022. But that's up from its September forecast of just 2.2%.

Gas prices have already come off their peaks. Supply chain bottlenecks in some areas are gradually easing. And government stimulus payments, which helped spur a spike in spending that boosted inflation, aren't likely to return.

The officials foresee the unemployment rate falling to 3.5% by the end of next year, which would match the pre-pandemic level, when unemployment was at 50-year lows.

Powell said all Fed officials expect the central bank's goal of "maximum employment" to be reached some time next year, and he pointed to a rapid fall in the unemployment rate just in the past two months, from 4.8% to 4.2%.

He also noted that job openings are at near-record highs and that millions of people are quitting their jobs, which is typically a sign of a strong labor market, in which people are finding new positions at higher pay. Though the proportion of people either working or looking for work still remains notably below pre-pandemic levels, Powell held out hope that it could fully recover over time if the economy remains healthy.

"We would not in any way want to foreclose the idea that the labor market can get even better," even after the Fed starts to raise rates, he said.

The Fed is buying \$90 billion a month in bonds, down from \$120 billion in October, and had been reducing those purchases by \$15 billion a month. But in January, it will reduce those purchases by \$30 billion, to \$60 billion, and will be on track, Powell said, to end them altogether in March.

In addition to three rate hikes next year, Fed officials foresee raising rates three times in 2023 and twice more in 2024, leaving their benchmark rate at 2.1%, still a relatively low level historically.

On Wall Street, stock prices rose gradually and then surged after the Fed issued its statement and Powell began speaking at a news conference. At the end of the day, stock market averages were all up more than 1%, a substantial gain.

AP Economics Writer Martin Crutsinger contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: What's next after Derek Chauvin's guilty plea?

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin pleaded guilty Wednesday to a federal count alleging he willfully deprived George Floyd of his rights during the May 25, 2020, arrest that led to the Black man's death.

He also pleaded guilty to an unrelated but similar count stemming from the use of force against a then-14-year-old boy, who is also Black, in 2017. Here's what the guilty pleas mean for Chauvin, and for the three other officers charged in Floyd's death.

WHAT DOES THE PLEA IN FLOYD'S CASE MEAN?

Essentially, it means Chauvin has acknowledged for the first time that he violated Floyd's rights. Chauvin admitted he knew what he did to Floyd was wrong and that he had a "callous and wanton disregard" for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 62 of 93

Floyd's life, the plea agreement said. It also said Chauvin "was aware that Mr. Floyd not only stopped resisting, but also stopped talking, stopped moving, stopped breathing, and lost consciousness and a pulse."

Floyd's family members said the plea brings a certain accountability, but they also said Chauvin didn't have much of a choice.

"Hearing him accept accountability was nice. But I didn't feel a thing," said Brandon Williams, Floyd's nephew. "That guy's a monster ... He knew what he was doing. He had nine minutes and 29 seconds to understand what he was doing and stop kneeling. He chose not to."

DOES CHAUVIN FACE MORE CRIMINAL CHARGES?

No. Once he's sentenced on these federal counts, that will wrap up the criminal cases against him. However, he is in the process of appealing his state convictions.

WHAT'S NEXT?

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson has ordered a presentence investigation, and must still formally accept the guilty plea. Then Magnuson will sentence Chauvin at a date that's yet to be scheduled.

With the guilty plea, Chauvin avoids the possibility of a life sentence. Instead, the defense and prosecutors have agreed to a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years, with prosecutors saying they will seek 25. With credit for good time in the federal system, he would serve anywhere from 17 years to 21 years and three months behind bars.

Chauvin is already in state prison, serving a 22 1/2-year sentence on state murder and manslaughter convictions. In the state system, he would've been released on parole after 15 years. So if Magnuson sticks to the range outlined in the agreement, Chauvin will end up spending more time behind bars overall. The plea agreement says it's expected that the federal and state sentences would be served at the same time — not one after the other.

WHERE WILL HE GO?

The agreement says it's expected that Chauvin will serve his time in the federal prison system, and that means he could go anywhere in the U.S. The judge may recommend a location, but that's not binding, said Ted Sampsell-Jones, a professor at Mitchell-Hamline School of Law.

The Bureau of Prisons says it has a system in which it assigns a security level to all institutions, and also assigns a security level and custody level to all inmates. Classifying people is necessary to make sure each person goes to the most appropriate facility, the bureau says.

WAS THIS PLEA SMART FOR CHAUVIN?

Experts say yes. With this plea, it's expected that Chauvin won't serve a sentence much longer than he's already serving, said Rachel Moran, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. Moran said that since Chauvin already has the state conviction and would be looking at a possible life sentence on the federal charge, the plea is "kind of cutting your losses."

Tom Heffelfinger, a former U.S. attorney for Minnesota, said Chauvin's defense attorney, Eric Nelson, showed good judgment in reaching a plea deal, because the federal case would have been just as strong as the state's. A federal prison is also preferable, Heffelfinger said: "You can assume that a state prison is not a safe or hospitable place for him to do such a long sentence."

He also said the plea deal is good for the Floyd family because it gives them some justice.

COULD HE BE FORCED TO TESTIFY?

Moran said that's an open question. The plea agreement doesn't require Chauvin's testimony in the upcoming trial of three other former officers involved in Floyd's arrest.

Chauvin gave up his right against self-incrimination by pleading guilty in the federal case, but he hasn't done so in the state murder case — and a pending appeal there could provide grounds for him to resist testifying in detail at the federal trial of the other former officers, Moran said.

Heffelfinger said Chauvin also technically hasn't given up his Fifth Amendment right in the federal case either — because Magnuson could still reject the plea. Heffelfinger said it's rare for a judge to do that, but he has seen it happen.

IS THERE POTENTIAL CIVIL LIABILITY?

Yes. While Floyd's family and the city of Minneapolis have already reached a \$27 million settlement in

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 63 of 93

Floyd's death, the teen who was injured when Chauvin arrested him in 2017 intends to sue Chauvin, the city, police Chief Medaria Arradondo and possibly others, said Bob Bennett, an attorney for the man, who was 14 at the time.

Bennett said the plea agreement proves the elements of the case involving the teenager beyond a reasonable doubt — and the burden of proving that the boy's civil rights were violated will be lower in a civil case. Bennett said this plea agreement is robust — laying out each element of the crime, and requiring Chauvin to admit to all of it.

"What are they going to say?" Bennett said of the city, noting that Chauvin wasn't disciplined after the 2017 incident and was kept on the street. "He just admitted to a civil rights violation from soup to nuts."

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER THREE FORMER COPS?

The other three former officers involved in Floyd's arrest — Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao — face a federal trial alleging they violated Floyd's rights in January, and a state trial in March on charges of aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter.

There's nothing in the public record that suggests Chauvin's guilty plea will delay their trials.

The three men had wanted their federal trial to be separated from Chauvin's — which happened with Chauvin's plea.

"They just don't want the shadow of Derek Chauvin's guilt looming over them," Moran said. "It still will in a way, but not having him there ... might be helpful to the other three."

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

AP source: Biden, Manchin sharply divided over \$2T Dem bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Sen. Joe Manchin were said to be sharply divided Wednesday over Democrats' huge social and environment bill, with the holdout senator pushing to erase the measure's improved child tax credit, as leaders' hopes of passing the legislation before Christmas appear to be fading away.

The rocky status of their talks, described only on condition of anonymity by a person familiar with the talks, was among several indications that Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer faces a struggle to even begin debate on the massive measure before the holiday. Schumer, D-N.Y., has set a goal for passage of the 10-year, roughly \$2 trillion measure by Christmas, in hopes of finally concluding his party's eight months of infighting over the package.

Many Democrats consider the expanded child tax credit the bill's chief weapon in their effort to reduce child poverty, and one of the provisions most responsible for largely unifying Democrats behind the legislation.

Manchin told reporters that assertions he wants to strip the child tax credit provisions were "a lot of bad rumors," adding that he's "always been for child tax credits." Asked if he backed one of the bill's child tax credit improvements — monthly checks sent to millions of families — he said, "I'm not negotiating with any of you."

In another factor clouding the bill's prospects, Biden suggested that Senate Democrats should instead prioritize voting rights legislation, a primary party goal that Republicans have long stymied. Democrats face an uphill fight on the voting measure, but focusing on it would let them wage a battle that energizes the party's voters while lawmakers work behind the scenes on the social and environment bill.

Asked whether Congress should quickly consider the voting legislation and delay the \$2 trillion bill to next year, Biden told reporters, "If we can get the congressional voting rights done, we should do it." He added, "There's nothing domestically more important than voting rights." Biden spoke as he toured tornado damage in Dawson Springs, Kentucky.

All of that produced a day of confusion in the Senate, where rank-and-file lawmakers and aides said they knew nothing about what legislation the chamber would tackle next, when and whether they would prevail.

Letting the social and environment legislation slip into next year, when congressional elections will be

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 64 of 93

held, would be ominous for the bill's ultimate prospects. The party will need support from all its members in the 50-50 Senate to overcome solid Republican opposition to the bill, which embodies many of Biden's foremost domestic goals.

With Democrats having blown past previous self-imposed deadlines on the measure, another delay would fuel Republican accusations that they are incompetently running a government they control. Democrats are bracing for November elections when the GOP has a real chance of winning control of the House and Senate.

Word of Manchin's stance prompted a backlash from colleagues, whom he's frustrated for months with constant demands to cut the bill's size and scope. The measure also has money for health care, universal prekindergarten and climate change programs, largely paid for with tax boosts on big corporations and the rich.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said that if "Mr. Manchin and the Republicans" want to tell beneficiaries of the child tax credit that they don't need help, "Let them tell the American people that." Sanders pointedly said "the people of West Virginia understand that working families are facing one crisis after another."

Another impediment to Democrats is a time-consuming review by the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, about whether many of the bill's provisions violate the chamber's rules and should be dropped. Her written opinions on that, including on provisions letting many migrants remain temporarily in the U.S., may not be ready until the weekend or later.

Asked whether he would supply a pivotal vote to begin Senate debate on the legislation without rulings from MacDonough, Manchin said, "Everyone wants to see it, not just me."

Biden and Manchin have spoken by phone about the legislation at least twice this week.

Manchin recently said he wants all programs in the bill to run for its full 10-year duration, but also that the measure's price tag should total below \$2 trillion. The legislation extends for just one year the extra child tax credit benefits that otherwise expire Dec. 31. They're among the many temporary initiatives Democrats proposed to keep down costs.

A one-year extension of that credit is estimated to cost more than \$100 billion. Extending it over a decade would cost more than \$1 trillion, which would likely squeeze out other Democratic priorities.

The bill makes the maximum credit more generous, allows coverage for 17-year-olds and lets many of the benefits be paid by monthly checks, instead of annual refunds from the IRS. The Treasury Department says the families of 61 million children have benefited.

Before the overall bill can come to the Senate floor, Schumer must resolve Manchin demands to curb the legislation's cost and remove provisions he opposes, such as required paid family leave. Disputes among other lawmakers include how to increase federal tax deductions for state and local taxes.

Schumer has scheduled the Senate to be in session the week of Jan. 3, potentially creating time for lawmakers to plunge quickly back into work on the bill. Congress is seldom in session in early January in election years.

The House approved its version of the legislation in November.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro and Associated Press writers Colleen Long and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Chauvin pleads guilty to federal charge in Floyd's death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin pleaded guilty Wednesday to a federal charge of violating George Floyd's civil rights, admitting for the first time that he kept his knee on Floyd's neck — even after he became unresponsive — resulting in the Black man's death.

Chauvin, who is white, was convicted this spring of state murder and manslaughter charges in Floyd's May 25, 2020, death, and was sentenced to 22 1/2 years.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 65 of 93

In his federal plea Wednesday, Chauvin admitted he willfully deprived Floyd of his right to be free from unreasonable seizure, including unreasonable force by a police officer, by kneeling on Floyd's neck even though he was handcuffed and not resisting. A second federal count in Floyd's death was dismissed, but Chauvin pleaded guilty to another count in an unrelated 2017 case.

Chauvin appeared in person for the change of plea hearing in an orange short-sleeve prison shirt and was led into and out of the court in handcuffs. He said "Guilty, your honor" to confirm his pleas, and acknowledged that he committed the acts alleged.

Chauvin could have faced life in prison on the federal count, one possible incentive for him to avoid trial. Under the plea agreement, both sides agreed Chauvin should face a sentence ranging from 20 to 25 years, with prosecutors saying they would seek 25. The final sentence will be up to U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson, but Chauvin is likely to face more time behind bars than he would on the state charges alone.

With good behavior, Chauvin's state sentence would have amounted to 15 years behind bars before he became eligible for parole. A federal sentence would run at the same time, and good behavior also can reduce time — but inmates typically serve about 85% of their sentences.

That means if Chauvin gets the 25 years prosecutors want, he would likely spend 21 years and three months in prison — or roughly six years longer behind bars than his state sentence alone.

Three other former officers — Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao — were indicted on federal charges alongside Chauvin.

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

Chauvin also pleaded guilty to violating the rights of a 14-year-old boy during a 2017 arrest in which he held the boy 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.

That was one of several cases mentioned in state court filings that prosecutors said showed Chauvin used neck or head and upper body restraints seven times dating back to 2014, including four times state prosecutors said they went beyond the point force was needed.

Several members of Floyd's family were present Wednesday, as was the teenager in the 2017 arrest. As they left the courtroom, Floyd's brother Philonise said to the teen: "It's a good day for justice."

Nine people came to support Chauvin, including family members. He waved and smiled at them as he entered and left the courtroom.

George Floyd's nephew, Brandon Williams, afterward called Chauvin a "monster" who should have been arrested in 2017.

"Had he been held accountable for what he did in 2017 to that minor, George Floyd would still be here," Williams said. "Today he had a chance to blow kisses and give air hugs to his family. We can't do that."

An attorney for Floyd's family, Jeff Storms, said they planned to head to Minneapolis later Wednesday to support the family of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man who was fatally shot in a traffic stop during Chauvin's state trial. The police officer in that case, Kim Potter, is on trial on manslaughter charges.

To bring federal charges in deaths involving police, prosecutors must believe an officer acted under the "color of law," or government authority, and willfully deprived someone of their constitutional rights. It's a high legal standard, and an accident, bad judgment or negligence aren't enough. Prosecutors have to prove the officer knew what he was doing was wrong in that moment but did it anyway.

Chauvin admitted that he knew what he did to Floyd was wrong and he had a "callous and wanton disregard" for Floyd's life, the plea agreement said. It also said Chauvin "was aware that Mr. Floyd not only stopped resisting, but also stopped talking, stopped moving, stopped breathing, and lost consciousness and a pulse."

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.

All four former officers were charged broadly in federal court with depriving Floyd of his rights while

acting under government authority.

The other three former officers are still expected to go to trial on federal charges in January, and they face state trial on aiding and abetting counts in March.

This story has been corrected to show Chauvin plea in Floyd's death was to a single charge, with a second count dismissed.

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

bell hooks, groundbreaking feminist thinker, dies at 69

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — bell hooks, the groundbreaking author, educator and activist whose explorations of how race, gender, economics and politics intertwined helped shape academic and popular debates over the past 40 years, has died. She was 69.

In a statement issued through William Morrow Publishers, hooks' family announced that she died Wednesday in Berea, Kentucky, home to the bell hooks center at Berea College. Additional details were not immediately available, although her close friend Dr. Linda Strong-Leek said she had been ill for a long time.

"She was a giant, no nonsense person who lived by her own rules, and spoke her own truth in a time when Black people, and women especially, did not feel empowered to do that," Dr. Strong-Leek, a former provost of Berea College, wrote in an email to The Associated Press. "It was a privilege to know her, and the world is a lesser place today because she is gone. There will never be another bell hooks."

Starting in the 1970s, hooks was a profound presence in the classroom and on the page. She drew upon professional scholarship and personal history as she completed dozens of books that influenced countless peers and helped provide a framework for current debates about race, class and feminism. Her notable works included "Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism," "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center" and "All About Love: New Visions." She also wrote poetry and children's stories and appeared in such documentaries as "Black Is ... Black Ain't" and "Hillbilly."

Rejecting the isolation of feminism, civil rights and economics into separate fields, she was a believer in community and connectivity and how racism, sexism and economic disparity reinforced each other. Among her most famous expressions was her definition of feminism, which she called "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression."

Ibram X. Kendi, Roxane Gay, Tressie McMillan Cottom and others mourned hooks. Author Saeed Jones noted that her death came just a week after the loss of the celebrated Black author and critic Greg Tate. "It all feels so pointed," he tweeted Wednesday.

Hooks' honors included an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, which champions diversity in literature. She taught at numerous schools, including Yale University, Oberlin College and City College of New York. She joined the Berea College faculty in 2004 and a decade later founded the center named for her, where "many and varied expressions of difference can thrive." One former student at Yale, the author Min Jin Lee, would write in The New York Times in 2019 that in hooks' classroom "everything felt so intense and crackling like the way the air can feel heavy before a long-awaited rain."

hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins in 1952 in the segregated town of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and later gave herself the pen name bell hooks in honor of her maternal great-grandmother, while also spelling the words in lower case to establish her own identity and way of thinking. She loved reading from an early age, remembering how books gave her "visions of new worlds" that forced her out of her "comfort zones."

Her early influences ranged from James Baldwin and fellow Kentucky author Wendell Berry to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Martin Luther King was my teacher for understanding the importance of beloved community. He had a profound awareness that the people involved in oppressive institutions will not change from the logics and practices of domination without engagement with those who are striving for a better way," she said

in an interview that ran in Appalachian Heritage in 2012.

She majored in English at Stanford University and received a master's in English from the University of Wisconsin. It was the 1970s, the height of second wave feminism, but hooks — "this bold young black female from rural Kentucky" — felt apart from the movement and its "white and female comrades." She was still in college when she began writing "Ain't I a Woman," named for a speech by Sojourner Truth and a now-canonical look at how the "devaluation of black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery."

Over the following decades, Hooks examined how stereotypes influence everything from music and movies ("the oppositional gaze") to love, writing in "All About Love" that "much of what we were taught about the nature of love makes no sense when applied to daily life." She also documented at length the collective identity and past of Black people in rural Kentucky, a part of the state often depicted as largely white and homogeneous.

"We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering," she wrote in "Belonging: A Culture of Place," published in 2009.

"I pay tribute to the past as a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone, can belong."

Associated Press Writer Piper Hudspeth Blackburn in Louisville, Kentucky contributed to this report.

Colleges go back to drawing board — again — to fight COVID

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

Facing rising infections and a new COVID-19 variant, colleges across the U.S. have once again been thwarted in seeking a move to normalcy and are starting to require booster shots, extend mask mandates, limit social gatherings and, in some cases, revert to online classes.

The threat of the omicron variant comes as a gut punch to schools that were hoping to relax safety measures this spring. Now, many are telling students to prepare for another term of masking, testing and, if cases get bad, limits around social life.

Cornell University abruptly shut down all campus activities on Tuesday and moved final exams online after more than 700 students tested positive over three days. In a campus message, President Martha Pollack said there was evidence of the omicron variant in a "significant" number of samples.

"It is obviously extremely dispiriting to have to take these steps," Pollack wrote. "However, since the start of the pandemic, our commitment has been to follow the science and do all we can to protect the health of our faculty, staff and students.

Hours later, Princeton University moved its exams online and urged students to leave campus "at their earliest convenience" amid a rise in cases. On Wednesday, New York University canceled all non-academic events and encouraged professors to move finals online.

Cornell, Princeton and NYU all report student vaccination rates of more than 98%.

After a fall with few coronavirus cases, officials at Syracuse University were "feeling pretty good" about the spring term, said Kent Syverud, the upstate New York school's chancellor.

"But omicron has changed that," Syverud said. "It has made us go back and say, until we know more about this variant for sure, we're going to have to reinstate some precautions."

Last week, Syracuse announced that all eligible students and employees must get COVID-19 booster shots before the spring term. Students will also face a round of virus tests when they return, and officials are weighing whether to extend an existing mask mandate.

Much is still unknown about the omicron variant and how big of a threat it poses. In the United States and many other nations, the delta variant is currently responsible for most COVID-19 cases.

But as colleges brace for the worst, many see boosters as their best hope. More than 30 colleges have

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 68 of 93

issued booster shot requirements in recent weeks, and others say they're thinking about it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is encouraging boosters for people ages 17 and older, and Pfizer last week announced that a booster of its COVID-19 vaccine might offer important protection against omicron even though the initial two doses appear less effective.

Hundreds of colleges already require COVID-19 vaccines, and some say boosters are an obvious next step. Most booster mandates so far have come from small liberal arts colleges in the Northeast, but the list includes some as big as Boston University and NYU, and as far away as the University of Notre Dame in Indiana and the University of New Mexico.

The University of Massachusetts in Amherst was among the first to require the booster for students, saying all students must get shots unless they have medical or religious exemptions.

"The boosters are our best protection," said Jeffrey Hescocock, co-director of the university's Public Health Promotion Center. "This demonstrates that we take public health seriously, and our students do too."

A recent online petition arguing against the booster mandate — citing 97% of students vaccinated and few on-campus cases — has attracted a few dozen signatures. But Emily O'Brien, a freshman at UMass, said the booster shot is a reasonable demand. She was already planning on getting a booster but said the mandate will probably increase uptake among students and prevent future lockdowns.

"If the past six months have shown anything, it's that lots of people won't bother to get vaccines — especially younger healthy people — if they don't have a requirement to," said O'Brien, 18, of Bedford, New Hampshire.

UMass will also require masks at the start of spring term, and it's sending students home with a rapid test to be taken near the end of winter break.

Many colleges are planning for potential disruption next semester even as they contend with outbreaks now.

Middlebury College in Vermont switched to remote instruction last week amid a surge in cases and urged students to leave early for winter break. Rising cases at the University of Pennsylvania led to a ban on indoor social events last Thursday.

On Friday, Tulane University in New Orleans warned that a campus spike includes probable cases of the omicron variant, confirmed in at least one student last week. In response, school officials reinstated a mask mandate and expanded virus testing.

Some other schools are already postponing the return to campus next month to avoid outbreaks. Southern New Hampshire University and DePaul University in Chicago recently said students will take classes remotely for two weeks before returning to campus after the holidays.

In a letter to students, DePaul's president, A. Gabriel Esteban, said the school will "cautiously start winter quarter so we can sustain a robust college experience the remainder of the academic year."

When students at Stanford University return to campus in January, they will be barred from holding parties or other big gatherings for two weeks. They'll also be tested once a week and continue to wear masks indoors as requirements to attend in-person classes. The measures aim to limit virus transmission without going too far in limiting the college experience, said Russell Furr, associate vice provost for environmental health and safety.

"This is something we've grappled with throughout the pandemic — how do we get a balanced approach?" Furr said. The goal is to avoid the strict lockdowns seen early in the pandemic, when student mental health "really suffered," he added.

At some colleges, there's still cautious hope for a normal semester. Leaders at the University of Central Florida told professors they can require in-person attendance in the spring, which had been discouraged this fall amid a surge in delta cases.

In a campus message, interim provost Michael D. Johnson warned that if the omicron variant takes off, "we may need to change direction yet again."

Another concern is omicron's timing — even without a new variant, there were worries of more outbreaks as colder weather drives people indoors, said Anita Barkin, co-chair of a COVID-19 task force for

the American College Health Association.

The association recently recommended that colleges focus on increasing vaccination rates to avoid a new wave of cases.

"The message in all of it is, we need to remain vigilant," Barkin said. "There is certainly pandemic fatigue and people are tired of the pandemic — but it appears that the pandemic is not quite tired of us."

Health worker vaccine mandate blocked in half the states

By KEVIN MCGILL and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal appeals court panel on Wednesday lifted a nationwide ban against President Joe Biden's vaccine mandate for health care workers, instead blocking the requirement in only certain states and creating the potential for patchwork enforcement across the country.

The decision by the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals kept a preliminary injunction in place for 14 states that had collectively sued in federal court in Louisiana. It altered a Nov. 30 ruling by U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty, who originally applied his order nationwide.

A separate preliminary injunction on appeal before the St. Louis-based 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals applies to 10 additional states. That means the vaccine requirement for Medicare and Medicaid providers is blocked by courts in about half states but not in the other half.

"This vaccine rule is an issue of great significance currently being litigated throughout the country. Its ultimate resolution will benefit from 'the airing of competing views' in our sister circuits," the ruling from three 5th Circuit judges said.

At issue is a rule published Nov. 5 by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid that applied to a wide range of health care providers that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid funding. It required their workers to receive the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by Dec. 6 and be fully vaccinated by Jan. 4. It was projected to affect more than 17 million workers in about 76,000 health care facilities as well as home health care providers.

The agency said on Dec. 2 that it would not enforce the vaccine rule while court injunctions were in place. It was not immediately clear Wednesday whether the agency would continue to suspend the rule for all states or seek to go ahead with it in states no longer subject to the injunctions.

About 85% of adults nationwide already have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. But Biden contends his various workforce vaccine mandates are an important step to drive up vaccination rates and contain the virus outbreak, which has killed about 800,000 people in the U.S.

Courts that have blocked the mandates for health workers, federal contractors and medium- to-large-sized businesses all have said the Biden administration likely exceeded the executive powers spelled out in law. The administration has continued to say it is on firm legal ground.

In upholding Doughty's injunction for the states that sued, the 5th Circuit panel said it appears likely that opponents of the health worker vaccine mandate will prevail as the case moves through the courts. However, the panel also said there are significant differences between the health care vaccine mandate and another vaccine mandate — blocked previously in a separate ruling upheld by the 5th Circuit — that applied to all businesses employing more than 100 people.

Among the key differences, the court said, is that "the targeted health care facilities, especially nursing homes, are where COVID-19 has posed the greatest risk."

Wednesday's 5th Circuit ruling was issued by judges Leslie Southwick, nominated to the court by President George W. Bush; and James Graves and Gregg Costa, both nominated by President Barack Obama.

The 5th Circuit decision blocks the health worker vaccine mandate in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia. The separate case pending before the 8th Circuit blocks the mandate in Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming.

Also Wednesday, the Cincinnati-based U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals said a three-judge panel — rather than the entire court — would rule on a challenge to the Biden administration's mandate that all private employers with at least 100 workers require them to be vaccinated or wear masks and face weekly tests.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 70 of 93

That decision is a victory for the Biden administration, which had pushed back against efforts to have all the judges in the panel initially involved. Eleven of the 16 full-time judges in the 6th Circuit were appointed by Republicans.

The vote in the 6th Circuit was split, with eight judges wanting the entire panel to hear the case and eight wanting it to stay with three judges. Judge Karen Nelson Moore wrote that the three-judge panel already has devoted time to the case and switching now would "subvert our normal process."

Chief Judge Jeffrey Sutton disagreed, arguing in a dissent, "there is something to be said for putting all hands on deck, particularly when it comes to handling the stay motion." In his dissent, he laid out a case against the administration's authority to issue the mandate.

At least for now, the earlier ruling from the 5th Circuit remains in place and the broader business vaccine mandate is on hold nationwide. The federal government has asked for that order to be dissolved. Determining which judges will decide that issue could set the stage for a ruling in the matter.

Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri. Associated Press writer Geoff Mulvihill in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

The AP names its Breakthrough Entertainers of 2021

By The Associated Press undefined

If 2020 was a pandemic-induced pause, 2021 was when things started up again, albeit slowly and timidly. But that doesn't describe this year's eight Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year: They seized their masks — and the moment.

They are Damson Idris, Simu Liu, Rachel Zegler, Rauw Alejandro, Adrienne Warren, Saweetie, Anupam Tripathi and Sydney Sweeney. Each found ways to share their art despite virus fears and variants.

The year went quickly for Zegler, who had beat out thousands for the part of Maria in Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story." The pandemic pushed the film's release a year but she didn't stop.

Zegler was cast in and filmed the sequel to "Shazam" and snagged the role of Snow White in the live-action reimagining with Gal Gadot playing the evil queen. Then there was all the press for "West Side Story" and even a Met Gala invite. "I stepped out of my comfort zone," she says.

Liu smashed through the Marvel Cinematic Universe's comfort zone as its first Asian-led superhero stand-alone in "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings." His was a career-making turn as Shang-Chi, who combines Spider-Man's aw-shucks sweetness with lethal fists.

The path Tripathi took was far slower. For more than a decade, the Indian actor who relocated to South Korea more than a decade ago, spent countless hours singing in humble theaters and taking on minor film gigs. Then came "Squid Game" and sudden, massive popularity.

The pandemic stopped live theater in its tracks, so Adrienne Warren pivoted. While waiting for Broadway to restart, she turned to a project she never would have been able had she still been starring in the title role in "Tina — The Tina Turner Musical."

Warren lost and gained 30 pounds to play civil rights catalyst Mamie Till-Mobley — whose son Emmett Till was brutally murdered in the Jim Crow South — in the upcoming ABC series "Women of the Movement." She co-founded the Broadway Advocacy Coalition, which uses storytelling to dismantle the systems that perpetuate racism. And when Broadway resumed, she came back to earn her first Tony Award.

Idris' popularity has grown exponentially over the past four seasons of the critically-acclaimed series "Snowfall." His breakthrough role landed him other opportunities including "The Twilight Zone," "Black Mirror," "Farming" and Netflix's "Outside the Wire."

Sweeney sealed her stardom in 2021 with major roles in the hit HBO miniseries, "The White Lotus," and Amazon's sexy psychological thriller, "The Voyeurs." She also filmed the hotly anticipated second season of "Euphoria," which drops in January. On top of all that, Sweeney also started her own production company.

Bay Area-rapper Saweetie had landed three Top 40 hits in the last three years but in 2021 she earned two Grammy nods, made her debut on "SNL" and hosted the MTV Europe Music Awards in Hungary.

Like her, Alejandro has been on the rise for the past few years, but 2021 catapulted him into another level of success — five songs in the top 50, sold out shows and Grammy recognition. “This year has been my best, and I hope the next one surpasses this one,” he says, something his other nominees might agree with.

For more on AP’s 2021 class of Breakthrough Entertainers, please visit: <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-breakthrough-entertainers>

Germany expels Russian diplomats over state-ordered killing

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany announced Wednesday it is expelling two Russian diplomats after a German court concluded that Moscow was behind the killing of a Chechen man in Berlin two years ago.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called the state-ordered killing a “grave breach of German law and the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany.” Russia’s ambassador in Berlin was summoned to discuss the court’s finding and informed of the diplomats’ expulsion, she said.

The 2019 brazen daylight killing of Zelimkhan “Tornike” Khangoshvili, a 40-year-old Georgian citizen of Chechen ethnicity, sparked outrage in Berlin and prompted the German government to expel two other Russian diplomats at the time — a move Russia swiftly reciprocated.

The two diplomats being expelled now are linked to Russian intelligence agencies, according to Associated Press sources.

Judges at Berlin’s regional court on Wednesday convicted 56-year-old Vadim Krasikov of the killing, but said he had acted on the orders of Russian federal authorities, who provided him with a false identity, a fake passport and the resources to carry out the hit near Berlin’s Kleiner Tiergarten park on Aug. 23, 2019.

“The central government of the Russian Federation was the author of this crime,” presiding judge Olaf Arnoldi said, labeling the killing “state terrorism.”

Baerbock said during a call Tuesday with her Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, she had made clear that Germany wants an “open and honest exchange with Russia,” and that this should happen “on the basis of international law and mutual respect.”

“It is clear that acts such as the Tiergarten murder weigh heavily on this relationship,” she said. “The German government will do everything necessary to ensure that security in our country and the respect for our laws is ensured.”

After Wednesday’s verdict, Russia’s ambassador in Berlin issued a statement rejecting allegations of Russian involvement in the killing.

“We consider the verdict an unobjective, politically motivated decision that seriously aggravates already complicated Russian-German relations,” Ambassador Sergei Nechayev said. He called the verdict “an unfriendly act that won’t go unanswered.”

“The absurd notion about Russia’s involvement in the wrongdoing during the entire course of the trial was being methodically imposed on the public ... but wasn’t in the end proved with convincing evidence,” Nechayev said.

During an oral summary of the court’s findings that lasted almost two hours, Arnoldi said he and four fellow judges had reviewed a wealth of evidence during the 14-month trial, including 47 witness testimonies and material provided by a dozen countries, along with “very limited answers from the Russian Federation.”

The court found Krasikov guilty of murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Defense lawyers had asked the court to acquit their client, who claimed a case of mistaken identity. The judges said Krasikov bore “particularly grave responsibility” for the slaying, meaning he won’t be entitled to the automatic parole after 15 years that is customary in Germany.

Arnoldi said it was important to note the victim’s involvement in fighting against Russian forces in Chechnya from 2001 onward. In 2004, Khangoshvili led a group of fighters who attacked a police station in Russia, and civilians were killed along with officers.

“There is no doubt that Khangoshvili bears responsibility for people’s deaths,” the judge said, adding

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 72 of 93

later that Russian authorities had likely sought "revenge and retribution" for his actions.

Asked about the case in December 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin described the victim as a "terrorist and murderer."

Khangoshvili's family, which under German law was allowed to take part in the trial as co-plaintiffs, accused Russia last week of trying to "send a message" to its political enemies by killing him.

Khangoshvili survived an earlier assassination attempt in Georgia before moving to Ukraine and then to Berlin in 2016, where he applied for asylum. German authorities denied Khangoshvili's asylum request, and an appeal was rejected in 2018 on the grounds that he didn't face political persecution in his home country.

"This later proved to be obviously wrong," Arnoldi said, adding there was no evidence that Khangoshvili was politically active in Germany.

The German judges said that overwhelming evidence reviewed over dozens of hearings left no doubt that Krasikov had carried out the killing just a few hundred meters (yards) from the courthouse.

Krasikov — a twice-married father of three — had no previous convictions, Arnoldi said, but official records showed he had been sought by Russian authorities over the killing of a businessman in Moscow in 2013. The case was dropped in 2015.

Evidence reviewed by the court, including material unearthed by the investigative news site Bellingcat, showed that Krasikov had been employed by a Russian security agency and was likely asked to carry out the hit in 2019, Arnoldi said.

A month before the killing, Russian authorities issued Krasikov a fake passport under the alias Vadim Sokolov that he used to travel to Berlin, where he shot the victim repeatedly from behind with a silencer-fitted handgun.

Witnesses saw the suspect throw a bike, a gun and a long, dark wig into the Spree River near the scene and alerted police, who quickly arrested him before he could make off on an electric scooter.

The court concluded that the killing wouldn't have been possible without unidentified helpers in Berlin, that Moscow had a motive for targeting the victim, and that Russian law permits the killing of alleged terrorists, including abroad, if authorized by the president.

"If a business card belonging to a member of the Russian federal government had been found at the scene of the crime, it couldn't have been more damning," Arnoldi said.

The ruling, which can be appealed, marks a new low point in Germany-Russia relations that are already fraught over Ukraine, Russian cyberattacks and Berlin's support for Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

"We are seeing that Russia views Germany as an adversary and doesn't seem interested in engagement," said Stefan Meister, a Russia expert at the German Council on Foreign Relations think tank in Berlin.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's new government is still trying to find its foreign policy footing with Moscow, but the verdict and the growing tensions over Ukraine could increase domestic pressure for Germany to reconsider its support for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that is to bring gas from Russia straight to Germany, bypassing Ukraine, said Meister.

Daria Litvinova in Moscow contributed to this report.

Volunteers raise oyster gardens to help restore reefs

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

BAY ST. LOUIS, Miss. (AP) — It's time to agitate the oysters at St. Stanislaus High School on Mississippi's Gulf coast.

Students on a platform below the school's long pier gently shake their oyster garden's wire cages as they pull them from the water, loosening mud and algae that might keep water and nutrients from baby oysters clinging to those shells.

These students in Bay St. Louis are part of a volunteer force along U.S. coasts that's raising oysters from translucent spat the width of a soda straw to hard-shelled bivalves that can help restore depleted reefs.

Oyster reefs are a keystone of coastal ecosystems. Each oyster filters 25 to 50 gallons (95 to 190 liters)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 73 of 93

of water a day. Spat glue themselves to larger oysters and grow. The reefs provide habitat for shrimp, crabs and fish and protect shorelines.

In Maryland, Virginia, Mississippi and Alabama alone, there are more than 1,000 oyster gardens, most in wire cages hanging from private docks or open-topped floats tied to them.

Dennis Hatfield of Gulf Shores, Alabama, said he is struck each summer by the number of crabs, fish, shrimp, sponges and other animals he clears from his cages on Little Lagoon.

"I feel very positive we are creating habitat in the lagoon," he said, adding that many of the 50,000 to 55,000 adult oysters grown there each year go to reefs in Mobile Bay.

In the 1950s, an average of 37,400 tons of oysters were taken annually from brackish waters nationwide. But overharvesting, pollution, parasites, smothering sediment and other problems saw U.S. oyster harvests fall 68% to about 11,900 tons a year in the 1990s, federal figures show.

Commercial farmers around the country grow oysters near the surface because they mature much faster where the water holds more of the plankton they eat and predators can be more easily removed.

Oyster gardening uses the same techniques on a smaller scale. But the oysters aren't being grown for the half-shell or deep fryer.

It's as much education as restoration, said Bob Stokes, director of the Galveston Bay Foundation in Texas. Volunteers become "engaged about caring about the bay they live on," he said.

When the Little Lagoon oysters were collected, more than 20 big plastic "shrimp baskets" held clumps of oysters.

Big enough to spawn next spring, they're now on reefs being restored for fishing or reserved to hold brood stock for future generations, with no harvest allowed.

In the Mississippi Sound, heavy rains through spring and summer were hard on baby oysters. Most shells in the cages set out in late June at St. Stanislaus held only silt in mid-November, and surviving juveniles were generally less than an inch long.

"When you find one with an oyster, put it aside so you don't count them twice," cautioned Rayne Palmer, an Auburn University graduate student who runs the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant's gardening program in Mississippi.

Empty shells also go onto reefs, said Letha Boudreaux, head of the marine biology program at St. Stanislaus.

Oyster shells are the hard surface spat prefer, and entire artificial reefs are made from recycled shells. The Galveston Bay program puts mesh bags holding recycled shells into the water to attract spat and give them a head start.

Oyster gardening started in the late 1990s around the Chesapeake Bay, where harvests had plummeted 90% in two decades.

The Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant's oyster gardening program, modeled on the Chesapeake's, started in Alabama in 2001 as master's thesis research.

"It makes me really happy to see that it took off and people are still doing it" in Alabama, said Kimberly Henderson Hedrick, who won a Gulf Guardian Award in 2004 as head of Alabama's Shellfish Restoration Project and now teaches in the Indiana farm town where she grew up.

The Chesapeake Bay oysters were beset by two highly lethal parasitic diseases, in addition to other problems. Declines in the second half of the 1900s followed an even more drastic crash in the 1920s from rampant overharvesting, said Chris Moore, senior ecosystem scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Gardeners in the foundation and its member groups have added at least 15 million oysters in Maryland and 1 million in Virginia, Moore said.

Virginia's Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association members grow oysters to eat as well as to plant. Tidewater hasn't been able to collect data on reef contributions, but president emeritus Vic Spain thinks it's probably at least 500,000 a year.

An umbrella group called the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance has set a goal of 10 billion added oysters by 2025.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 74 of 93

"Wish us luck, that's gonna be tough," Spain wrote in an email.

Dozens of schools and community groups around New York Harbor have similar projects as part of the Billion Oyster Project, spokeswoman Helene Hetrick said in an email. The project does not call them "oyster gardens" because the harbor's oysters are unsafe to eat and the goal is not food but restoration, she said.

Oyster gardens get pulled from the water every week to 10 days to clear out critters, keep oysters from growing through the cage mesh, and dry out and clean off algae and seaweed growing on the wire.

It can take oysters three to four years to reach adulthood in the Chesapeake, and a year to 18 months in raised cages.

In Mobile Bay and in Mississippi, it may take only four to five months to have oysters ready to transplant, said P.J. Waters, an Auburn University extension associate professor who oversees Alabama's oyster gardening at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant.

Colin Wood, one of two student interns who maintain the St. Stanislaus garden, collect data and supervise other students -- not for pay but for a credit on their transcripts -- said he was excited by the hands-on aspect.

"I didn't realize oysters had a big impact on the environment," he said.

Follow Janet McConnaughey on Twitter: @JanetMcCinNO.

UK COVID cases hit record; Top doctor warns of worse to come

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections Wednesday since the pandemic began, and England's chief medical officer warned the situation is likely to get worse as the omicron variant drives a new wave of illness during the Christmas holidays.

Professor Chris Whitty described the current situation as two epidemics in one — with omicron infections rising rapidly even as the country continues to grapple with the older delta variant, which is still causing a large number of infections. Public health officials expect omicron to become the dominant variant across the U.K. within days. Omicron already accounts for a majority of cases in London.

The U.K. recorded 78,610 new infections on Wednesday, 16% higher than the previous record set in January. While scientists are still studying the risks posed by the highly transmissible omicron variant, Whitty said the public should be braced for the figures to continue rising in coming weeks.

"There are several things we don't know," Whitty said. "But all the things we do know are bad, the principal one being the speed at which this is moving. It is moving at an absolutely phenomenal pace."

The comments came on the day that the U.K. government implemented new rules ordering masks to be worn in most indoor settings in England and requiring proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test to enter nightclubs and large crowded events.

Britain is also accelerating its the national vaccination program, with a goal of offering a booster dose to every adult by the end of December. The government said within days it will open new mass vaccination centers at sports stadiums around the country, including Wembley, the 90,000-seat national soccer stadium in London.

Whitty advised people to limit their social contacts, putting a priority on those that are the most important.

"I am afraid there will be an increasing number of omicron patients going into the NHS, going into hospital, going into intensive care, and exact ratios we don't yet know, but there will be substantial numbers," he said. "That will begin to become apparent, in my view, fairly soon after Christmas."

Despite the surge in infections, daily coronavirus-related deaths in the U.K. are well below last winter's peak. Britain recorded 165 deaths on Wednesday, compared with a record 1,820 on Jan. 20.

Public health officials credit widespread vaccination with weakening the link between COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

Meanwhile, Britain is moving forward with a public inquiry into how the government has responded to the pandemic. Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday announced that Heather Hallett, a former Court

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 75 of 93

of Appeal judge, would chair the inquiry, which is due to begin next spring.

"She brings a wealth of experience to the role and I know shares my determination that the inquiry examines in a forensic and thoroughgoing way the government's response to the pandemic," Johnson said.

After pressure from bereaved families, Johnson agreed to hold an inquiry on his government's handling of the pandemic, which has left more than 146,000 people in Britain dead, the highest toll in Europe after Russia. The probe will have the power to summon evidence and to question witnesses under oath.

The pressure group Bereaved Families for Justice said the announcement of a chairperson was a "positive step" but "comes far too late."

"We've been calling for an inquiry since the end of the first wave, and we will never know how many lives could have been saved had the government had a rapid review phase in summer 2020," said Matt Fowler, the group's co-founder. "With the omicron variant upon us, the inquiry really cannot come soon enough."

Hallett said she would be consulting bereaved families and others on the inquiry's terms of reference.

"I shall do my utmost to ensure the inquiry answers as many questions as possible about the U.K.'s response to the pandemic so that we can all learn lessons for the future," she said.

Hallett oversaw inquests into the deaths of 52 people killed in the July 7, 2005 bombings on London's transit system. Last month, she was appointed to lead an inquiry into the death of Dawn Sturgess, who died in 2018 after being exposed to Novichok, the Soviet-made nerve agent used to poison former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the English city of Salisbury.

Because of Hallett's position with the COVID-19 probe, the government plans to find someone else to lead the inquiry to explore allegations of Russian involvement in Sturgess' death.

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

Omicron to be dominant variant in EU by mid-January

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Omicron is expected to be the dominant coronavirus variant in the European Union's 27 nations by mid-January, the bloc's top official said Wednesday amid concerns that a dramatic rise in infections will leave Europe shrouded in gloom during the holiday season.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU is well prepared to fight omicron with 66.6% of its population fully vaccinated. She expressed disappointment that the pandemic will again disrupt year-end celebrations but said she was confident the EU has the "strength" and "means" to overcome COVID-19.

"Like many of you, I'm sad that once again this Christmas will be overshadowed by the pandemic," she said.

The EU-wide vaccination rate obscures that some EU nations, like Portugal and Spain, have immunized the vast majority of their people while other countries lag way behind. Bulgaria, for example, has just 26.6% of its population fully vaccinated, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

Continental Europe can look at Britain for a sense of what lies ahead as omicron spreads; U.K. officials say it will be the country's dominant variant within days. The head of the U.K. Health Security Agency, Dr. Jenny Harries, said omicron is displaying a staggering growth rate compared to previous variants.

"The difficulty is that the growth of this virus, it has a doubling time which is shortening, i.e. it's doubling faster, growing faster," Harries told a parliamentary committee on Wednesday. "In most regions in the U.K., it is now under two days. When it started, we were estimating about four or five."

Harries said the variant poses "probably the most significant threat we've had since the start of the pandemic."

Britain on Wednesday recorded 78,610 new infections, its highest confirmed daily total of the pandemic. But deaths remained far lower than during the country's previous peaks, before vaccines against the coronavirus were widely deployed. Scientists have said they don't know yet if omicron is as lethal as other virus variants.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 76 of 93

Alarming rises in infections as winter approached and the delta variant remained at large prompted many European governments to implement public health measures as excess mortality increased during the fall.

The head of the World Health Organization says 77 countries have reported cases of omicron but the variant is probably in most countries by now, just not yet detected. WHO says data is still coming in and much remains unknown about the new variant.

According to an analysis Tuesday of data from South Africa, where omicron is driving a surge in infections, the variant seems to be more easily spread from person to person and better at evading vaccines while causing less serious illness.

"Omicron is spreading at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant. We are concerned that people are dismissing omicron as mild," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "Surely we have learned by now that we underestimate this virus at our peril."

Tedros emphasized that vaccines were just one tool — if a major one — to fight the pandemic, along with measures like mask-wearing, better indoor ventilation, social distancing and hand washing.

With omicron now on the scene, more countries are adopting restrictions. Italy this week required negative tests from vaccinated visitors, raising concerns that similar moves elsewhere will limit the ability of EU citizens to travel to see friends and relatives over the holidays.

Portugal adopted a similar measure on Dec. 1, requiring a mandatory negative test for all passengers on arriving flights, regardless of their vaccination status, point of origin or nationality.

Greece announced Wednesday that all arriving travelers must display a negative test starting Sunday unless they have spent less than 48 hours abroad.

Von der Leyen said the EU faces a double challenge, with a massive increase of cases in recent weeks due to the delta variant combined with the rise of omicron.

"We're seeing an increasing number of people falling ill, a greater burden on hospitals and unfortunately, an increase in the number of deaths," she told European Parliament lawmakers.

Von der Leyen insisted that the increase in infections in Europe right now remains due "almost exclusively" to the delta variant. She said that fighting vaccine skepticism is key, especially in EU nations with lower vaccination rates.

"Because the price that we will pay if people are not vaccinated continues to increase," she said. "It's also a problem for our elderly citizens, who once again this Christmas can't see their grandchildren. And it's also a problem for those children who once again can't go to school. What kind of a life is that?"

Echoing von der Leyen's comments, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz vowed Wednesday that his new government would do everything for Germany to overcome the coronavirus pandemic and let people return to normal lives.

"We have no time to waste," said Scholz, who took office as Germany grapples with its biggest wave of infections during the pandemic to date.

Scholz also said his German government won't tolerate a "tiny minority" of extremists trying to impose their will against coronavirus policies.

As governments braced for the holiday season, Greece, Italy, Spain and Hungary began vaccinating children aged 5-11 against COVID-19.

EU leaders have a summit scheduled for Thursday in Brussels.

Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Danica Kirka in London, Raf Casert in Brussels and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this story.

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

Happy 100th, bloody mary: Paris marks cocktail's birthday

By ALEX TURNBULL Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Harry's Bar in Paris is celebrating the 100th birthday of the bloody mary, the vodka-tomato

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 77 of 93

juice cocktail believed to have been invented at the iconic watering hole in 1921.

The centenary events this week bring a welcome respite from winter gloom and worries about the omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The bar is carefully checking COVID-19 health passes as foreign visitors gather to sample the drink closely associated with Harry's Bar, whose patrons over the past century have included writers Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

According to the history of Harry's, bartender Fernand Petiot invented the cocktail, and the recipe was first published in a book called "Harry's ABC of Cocktails" in 1921. The bar serves an estimated 12,000 bloody marys a year.

"It's a classic drink," bartender Dante Agnelli said while demonstrating the mixology behind the drink, ingredient by ingredient: salt and pepper, Tabasco sauce, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, vodka and tomato juice.

"You make it directly in the glass," Agnelli said as he stood at the counter where Petiot first performed the now well-established ritual 100 years ago, at the dawn of what became known as the roaring 1920s.

Harry's Bar plans to host a celebration on Thursday night despite concerns about the spread of omicron variant of the coronavirus in Europe and a surge in new virus infections across France.

Franz-Arthur MacElhone, a great-grandson of bar founder Harry MacElhone, said the celebration would take place in line with government regulations: the health passes of patrons from around the world will be checked, hand sanitizers will be distributed, and bar staff will wear masks.

In recent days, the French government expanded the places where passes are required, including all restaurants and a growing number of events and venues. To get one, people must show proof of full vaccination, a negative virus test less than 24 hours old, or recent recovery from COVID-19.

The French government closed nightclubs and tightened social distancing measures but is trying to avoid a new lockdown.

The health protocol is the only visible change inside the bar that used to be located on New York's 7th Avenue before it was dismantled, shipped to Europe and rebuilt in central Paris in 1911.

For Harry's patrons, the timeless décor is a reassuring fixture, particularly at a time of uncertainty due to the pandemic.

"Once you walk in, you leave all your worries aside," said Ihab Hassan, 61, a retired businessman from Egypt and a regular at the bar since the 1970s.

The coronavirus pandemic was not enough to get in the way of his favorite Paris pastime, Hassan said with a bloody mary on the counter in front of him.

Sitting next to Hassan were an American, Jay Sing, and an Australian, Renée DiGeorgio. They shared their thoughts on the famous cocktail with an Associated Press reporter, acknowledging they had already consumed a few.

"Sometimes, with breakfast, for my hangover, we drink bloody marys," said DiGeorgio, 42, who works in the mining industry and is based in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"This is a really nice bloody mary," he said. "It's actually the first time I've ever drunk a bloody mary when the sun's down!"

All three men said they took the necessary health precautions to be safe and in compliance with government anti-virus regulations.

"I have four vaccines in me," said Sing, 28, a tech industry worker from New York. "I'm like the Iron Man. Nothing is touching me!"

MacElhone, the great-grandson of the bar's founder, recounted different legends surrounding how the bloody mary got its name.

"Petiot said it was for a dancer that he was very fond of called Mary," MacElhone explained.

"She used to work in a place in Chicago called the Bucket of Blood," MacElhone said. But that's only one explanation for the name of the famous drink.

There are others, MacElhone said.

"There's a Hemingway story," he said. "It was just before he got married, and he had been dating some-

body called Mary.”

As that story goes, Hemingway allegedly did not want to have alcohol on his breath and asked for a drink mixed with juice.

Tomato juice was added, and “while he was drinking it, he was saying ‘bloody Mary’”, MacElhone said.

Top Fox hosts lobbied Trump to act on Jan. 6, texts show

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The revelation that Fox News Channel personalities sent text messages to the White House during the Jan. 6 insurrection is another example of how the network’s stars sought to influence then-President Donald Trump instead of simply reporting or commenting on him.

Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham and Brian Kilmeade all texted advice to Trump’s chief of staff, Mark Meadows, as a mob of pro-Donald Trump loyalists stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, according to Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, vice chair of the congressional committee probing the riot.

“Mark, the president needs to tell people in the Capitol to go home,” texted Ingraham, host of “The Ingraham Angle.” “This is hurting all of us. He is destroying his legacy.”

“Please get him on TV,” texted Kilmeade, a “Fox & Friends” host. “Destroying everything you have accomplished.”

Hannity, like Ingraham a prime-time host, wondered whether Trump could give a statement and ask people to leave the Capitol.

Cheney’s release of the text messages late Monday came a day after the most prominent hard-news journalist at Fox, Chris Wallace, announced he was leaving after 18 years for a new job at CNN. Wallace had grown privately frustrated by Fox’s amplification of its conservative opinion hosts, particularly since the network’s ratings took a brief dive following the election of President Joe Biden.

The network had no immediate comment Tuesday about the texts.

For journalists, the ethical lines are clear: Your job is to report the news, not try to influence the actions of newsmakers.

Fox has always tried to distinguish between “news” and “opinion” programming, even though those lines are often nonexistent and many viewers don’t make the same distinctions. The network considers Hannity, Ingraham and Kilmeade hosts of opinion shows. Fox has argued in court that its prime-time hosts can’t be held to the same factual standards as actual journalists.

It’s not the first time Fox personalities acted as sort of a kitchen cabinet to Trump. Hannity frequently consulted with him during his presidency, and Tucker Carlson once asked for and received a meeting with Trump to talk about COVID-19 in the early days of the pandemic.

“I don’t consider them in the traditional definition of a journalist,” said Aly Colon, a professor of media ethics at Washington and Lee University. “But even so, they are representative of a news operation at Fox.”

Their actions leave questions about whether their loyalty was to Trump or to viewers, who expect to learn about the news from them or at least get news analysis, Colon said.

While CNN and MSNBC provided live coverage of the Monday night hearing in which Cheney revealed the text messages, Fox did not. Hannity interviewed Meadows but did not ask about the advice he and his colleagues sent. At the outset of his show, he bashed the committee’s work.

“We’ve been telling you that this is a waste of your time and money,” Hannity said. “They have a pre-determined outcome.”

Not everyone thinks what the Fox hosts did was wrong, including a consultant who ran Fox’s news operation for eight years during the 2000s.

“I do think it was helpful to have them, or anyone else who had influence or potential influence over the president, tell him what needed to be done,” said Michael Clemente, a former executive vice president at Fox News.

At a point of national crisis, that’s more important than the objectivity rules that most journalists are bound by, he argued.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 79 of 93

"Texting the chief of staff to urge him to tell the president to call for an end to rioting is a good thing," said Tim Graham, director of media analysis at the conservative Media Research Center. "But, ideally, journalists shouldn't be texting political advice to the White House."

Graham said he didn't think the news will be a bombshell to Fox viewers. "It shows Fox being anti-riot, so they will be heartened by that," he said.

On the night of the riot, Ingraham told Fox viewers that the Capitol had been attacked "by people who can only be described as antithetical to the MAGA movement." She raised the idea that anti-fascist demonstrators may have been sprinkled through the crowd — which wasn't true.

She complained about the "continual video loop" of the Capitol breach. She said the demonstration was "99% peaceful," but "because of a small contingent of loons, these patriots have been unfairly maligned."

Hannity, on his show that night, condemned violence at the Capitol. He also spent considerable time talking about the "train wreck" presidential election and the failure of Democrats to condemn "violent far left riots" in American cities in the summer of 2020.

Some critics said they saw a disconnect between what the Fox personalities said publicly and texted privately.

"So you are telling me all these Fox News hosts knew the coup was terrible, begged Trump to stop it, and when he didn't they kept on promoting him?" tweeted Amanda Carpenter, a columnist for The Bulwark, a political website dominated by conservatives who oppose Trump.

On their shows Tuesday, both Hannity and Ingraham argued that there was no difference between what they said publicly on Jan. 6 and what they texted Meadows.

"Both publicly and privately, I said what I believe — that the breach of the Capitol was a terrible thing," Ingraham said.

Hannity complained about Cheney publicizing his text.

"Do we believe in privacy in this country?" he said. "Apparently not."

How a Kennedy built an anti-vaccine juggernaut amid COVID-19

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Robert F. Kennedy Jr. strode onto the stage at a Southern California church, radiating Kennedy confidence and surveying the standing ovation crowd with his piercing blue Bobby Kennedy eyes. Then, he launched into an anti-vaccine rant. Democrats "drank the Kool-Aid," he told people assembled for a far right conference, branded as standing for "health and freedom."

"It is criminal medical malpractice to give a child one of these vaccines," Kennedy contended, according to a video of the event, one of his many assertions that ignored or went against legal, scientific and public health consensus.

Then, Kennedy hawked his book. If just 300 attendees preordered it on Amazon that night, he told the crowd, it would land on the bestseller list and they could "stick it to Amazon and Jeff Bezos."

All profits, he said, would go to his charity, Children's Health Defense.

While many nonprofits and businesses have struggled during the pandemic, Kennedy's anti-vaccine group has thrived. An investigation by The Associated Press finds that Children's Health Defense has raked in funding and followers as Kennedy used his star power as a member of one of America's most famous families to open doors, raise money and lend his group credibility. Filings with charity regulators show revenue more than doubled in 2020, to \$6.8 million.

Since the pandemic started, Children's Health Defense has expanded the reach of its newsletter, which uses slanted information, cherry-picked facts and conspiracy theories to spread distrust of the COVID-19 vaccines. The group has also launched an internet TV channel and started a movie studio. CHD has global ambitions. In addition to opening new U.S. branches, it now boasts outposts in Canada, Europe and, most recently, Australia. It's translating articles into French, German, Italian and Spanish, and it's on a hiring spree.

According to data from Similarweb, a digital intelligence company that analyzes web traffic and search,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 80 of 93

Children's Health Defense has become one of the most popular "alternative and natural medicine sites" in the world, reaching a peak of nearly 4.7 million visits per month. That's up from less than 150,000 monthly visits before the pandemic.

As Children's Health Defense has worked to expand its influence, experts said, it has targeted its false claims at groups that may be more prone to distrust the vaccine, including mothers and Black Americans. It's a strategy that experts worry has deadly consequences during a pandemic that has killed more than 5 million people, when misinformation has been deemed a threat to public health. The death toll in the United States hit 800,000 this week, and nearly a third of those people have died since vaccines became available to all adults in the U.S. Unvaccinated people are 14 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than those who get the shot, according to the CDC.

As vaccines have become a wedge political issue, Kennedy's opposition to the shot has at times brought him close to anti-democracy forces on the right who have made common cause with the anti-vaccine movement. The scion of the country's most prominent Democratic family has appeared at events that pushed the lie that the 2020 election was stolen and associated with people who have celebrated or downplayed the violent Jan. 6. attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Kennedy has been a key part of the anti-vaccine movement for years, but doctors and public health advocates told the AP that COVID-19 launched him to a new level.

"With the pandemic, he's been turbocharged," said Dr. David Gorski, a cancer surgeon at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit and a critic of the anti-vaccine movement.

Dr. Richard Allen Williams, a cardiologist, professor of medicine at UCLA and founder of the Minority Health Institute, said Kennedy is leading "a propaganda movement," and "absolutely a racist operation" that is particularly dangerous to the Black community.

"He's really the ringleader of the misinformation campaign," said Williams, who has written several books about race and medicine. "So many people, even those in scientific circles, don't realize what Kennedy is doing."

Even Kennedy's own family members call his work "dangerous."

MISINFORMATION PIPELINE

Kennedy, 67, is a nephew of President John F. Kennedy and the son of his slain brother. He carved out a career as a bestselling author and top environmental lawyer fighting for important public health priorities such as clean water.

His work as a leading voice in that movement likely would have been his legacy, but more than 15 years ago, he became fixated on a belief that vaccines are not safe. While there are rare instances when people have severe reactions to vaccines, the billions of doses administered globally provide real world evidence that they are safe. The World Health Organization says vaccines prevent as many as 5 million deaths each year.

During the pandemic, Kennedy has become a near-ubiquitous source of false information about COVID-19 and vaccines. Earlier this year, Kennedy was named one of the "Disinformation Dozen" by the Center for Countering Digital Hate, which says he and the Children's Health Defense website are among the top spreaders of false information about vaccines online.

Kennedy's spokeswoman, Rita Shreffler, told the AP on Dec. 6 that he was not available for an interview for this story.

On Dec. 2, however, she had written to AP complaining of a "complete blackout by mainstream media" about Kennedy's book, and offering him for interviews.

An AP reporter responded within 20 minutes and sent multiple follow-up emails. When Shreffler finally responded, she asked for "your list of interview questions to be approved prior to scheduling an interview by the team." AP declined that restriction, and Shreffler then said Kennedy would not speak with AP.

More than 200 million Americans have been given a COVID-19 vaccine, and serious side effects are extremely rare, according to government safety tracking. That tracking and testing in tens of thousands of people has shown that the vaccines are safe and effective at reducing the risk of serious disease and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 81 of 93

death and that any health risks posed by the vaccine are far lower than the risks posed by the virus.

Children's Health Defense and its followers, seeking to undermine that message, use canny techniques to bring anti-vaccine misinformation even to those not looking for it.

The AP found links to Children's Health Defense articles all over Facebook. While many were shared as posts on the pages of fellow anti-vaccine activists, many more could be found in the comments sections on pages that people turn to for reliable information, including official government Facebook pages in all 50 states, and in health departments in nearly every state.

"The vaccine was not created to save us all from a pandemic. The pandemic was created to get us to take the vaccine and more," one person wrote in February below a North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Facebook post.

Then, they linked to a January Children's Health Defense article that claimed 329 deaths following the COVID-19 shot had been reported to VAERS, a federal vaccine safety surveillance system that has been misused by anti-vaccine activists.

"Every Friday, the true American hero Robert F Kennedy Jr. pulls the data from the VAERS report. Here is the latest up until 1/22," the commenter wrote. Another user replied that the comment had been reported for dishonesty, but it was still up 10 months later.

People also shared CHD links under posts made by governors, schools, hospitals, military outposts, universities, news outlets, even a major league soccer team. One state senator from Alaska has shared CHD links on her Facebook page at least four times since March. They were also shared outside the United States, on Facebook pages in places such as Canada, Norway and Greece.

Kennedy has hundreds of thousands of followers on Facebook and Twitter, although he was kicked off Facebook's Instagram platform earlier this year. Children's Health Defense remains on all three platforms.

Since January, Children's Health Defense's COVID-19 vaccine-related posts were shared more frequently on Twitter than links to vaccine content on mainstream sites including CNN, Fox News, NPR and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to Indiana University's Observatory on Social Media, which tracks COVID-19 vaccine-related content on Twitter. In some weeks, it found, CHD COVID-19 vaccine content was shared more often than that of The New York Times and The Washington Post.

A different research team found Kennedy's group, along with the now-removed group called Stop Mandatory Vaccination, bought more than half of the anti-vaccine advertising on Facebook prior to the pandemic. A member of that team, David Broniatowski, of George Washington University, said the groups had targeted Facebook ads to reach women of childbearing age using demographic data.

"They're much more effective at it than our public health infrastructure," he said. "That's in part because they just have a centralized foundation with a very clear sense of what it is they want to do."

CHD's effectiveness is in part because it's central to a network of anti-vaccine websites that link to and amplify each other, creating a disinformation echo chamber that reinforces false narratives that downplay the dangers of COVID-19 while exaggerating the risks of the vaccine. For example, the day after the FDA granted full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, Kennedy and CHD sent out an article falsely claiming that the vaccine that was licensed was not the one that was available, said Dorit Reiss, a professor at UC Hastings College of the Law and an expert in vaccine law.

"It started with CHD the day after the licensure and then was picked up by right wing outlets," Reiss said.

The idea circulated on fringe media outlets on the far right. Then, more than a month after the article was published, Republican Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin went on Tucker Carlson's show on Fox News and repeated the incorrect idea that the approved vaccine was not available in the United States.

It became one of CHD's biggest articles of the past year, with about 40,000 interactions on Facebook, according to CrowdTangle, a Facebook-owned tool that helps track material on the platforms.

In comments on CHD's website, people expressed anger, fear and calls to action. "You know, the more I read the news the more my stomach tightens up into a little ball," one wrote. "And they wonder why we don't trust them and why people won't get the 'jab,'" said another. One suggested people march on Washington on the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, writing, "Make Jan 6 look like a picnic."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 82 of 93

In addition to its rise on social media, CHD's website has also seen an explosion in traffic. According to Similarweb, in November 2019, a few months before the pandemic began, Children's Health Defense received 119,000 visits. That had grown to around 3 million visits last month, after peaking in August at nearly 4.7 million.

And its daily newsletter reaches more than 8 million people a month via email, according to a CHD fundraising appeal that sought to raise \$1 million by Nov. 30. AP was not able to independently verify the claim.

In November, Kennedy released his book, "The Real Anthony Fauci," in which he accuses the nation's leading infectious disease doctor of helping orchestrate "a historic coup d'état against Western democracy." A spokesperson for Fauci did not comment.

Kennedy also uses the book to push unproven COVID-19 treatments such as ivermectin, which is meant to treat parasites, and the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, and he contends that childhood vaccines are not properly safety tested, even though the FDA requires three phases of testing that involves hundreds of thousands of people before approving a childhood vaccine.

His sister, Kerry Kennedy, who runs Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, the international rights group founded by their mother, Ethel, told AP that it was irresponsible to attack doctors and scientists. Many, including Fauci, have received death threats, which can deter people from entering the profession.

"Our family knows that a death threat should be taken seriously," she said.

The group, which supports government-mandated vaccinations and steps such as requiring proof of vaccination, awarded Fauci its "Ripple of Hope Award" last year.

Kennedy Jr. by contrast has spent months hyping his book, including at the far right Reawaken America conference in Southern California in July. Last month, CHD urged supporters to buy the book right away so it would make the New York Times bestseller list. Some commenters on CHD's site said they bought multiple copies to drive sales. One said they had bought nine and were planning to buy more to put in neighborhood book exchange boxes "to help boost the book to number one on the New York Times bestseller list."

Kennedy's wish was granted. "The Real Anthony Fauci" reached No. 5 on the Times' list last month and hit No. 1 at Amazon. It sold nearly 166,000 copies through the beginning of December, according to NPD BookScan, which tracks around 85 percent of print sales.

Kennedy's anti-vaccine message has brought him close to many leading figures who have attacked the nation's democratic norms and institutions. A photo posted on Instagram July 18 and apparently taken backstage at the Reawaken America event, shows Kennedy alongside former President Donald Trump's ally Roger Stone, anti-vaccine profiteer Charlene Bollinger and former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, all of whom have pushed the lie that the 2020 election was stolen.

Kennedy has appeared at multiple events with Bollinger and her husband, even after their Super PAC sponsored an anti-vaccine, pro-Trump rally near the Capitol on Jan. 6, when, as AP previously reported, Bollinger celebrated the attack and her husband tried to enter the Capitol. Kennedy filmed a video conversation for their Super PAC in the spring.

He has also courted major GOP donors including Leila and David Centner, who were listed as CHD board members for 2021 on a filing the group made in August with Georgia charity regulators, and which AP obtained in a public records request. The couple are best known for the private school they established in Miami, Centner Academy, which put in place anti-vaccine policies for children and teachers.

BUILDING A POWERHOUSE

Kennedy often says he started looking at vaccines after a mother told him she believed her son developed autism from exposure to mercury in a vaccine. The theory has been thoroughly debunked. The form of mercury, thimerosal, was removed from childhood vaccines years ago with no effect on the levels of autism. Still, Kennedy and others continue to argue, against the scientific consensus, that vaccines are linked to autism, food allergies and a host of other medical problems. Among the ingredients he tells people to watch out for are common substances such as aluminum, acetaminophen, fluoride and food additives.

In 2015, Kennedy joined up with Eric Gladen, who in 2007 had founded a group called World Mercury Project in Southern California. Gladen believes he got mercury poisoning from a tetanus shot and had

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 83 of 93

made a film called Trace Amounts.

Gladen told AP that Kennedy family members urged him to distance himself from the group after they screened the movie at Kennedy's sister's house in Malibu. The next morning, Gladen recalled, Kennedy called him at 6 a.m. to say he was in.

World Mercury Project had been struggling to stay afloat, but everything changed when Kennedy joined. He was "a machine," doing research, writing op-eds, delivering speeches and connecting with well-placed people, Gladen said. There was "almost no limit" to who they could reach.

World Mercury Project, which reported just \$13,114 in revenue on its 2014 tax filings, brought in \$467,443 in revenue the following year, when Kennedy came on board.

Gladen stepped down for health reasons in August 2016, but continues to support its work.

Kennedy became board chairman and chief legal counsel. The group rebranded with the name Children's Health Defense in 2018, removing the word "mercury" from its name and announcing an expanded mission. A press release emphasized autism, ADHD and other "health epidemics" affecting children. It mentioned vaccines only once, almost as an afterthought.

Kennedy told Tucker Carlson in a July 2017 appearance that his vaccine work was "probably the worst career move that I've ever made." When the Fox News host asked him if he was "getting paid for this," Kennedy replied, "No, I'm not. In fact, I'm getting unpaid for this."

According to tax filings, Kennedy was paid \$131,250 by Children's Health Defense in 2017. In 2018, he was paid \$184,375. By 2019, the most recent year available, his compensation had risen to \$255,000.

Kennedy told the conspiracy site InfoWars this month that he had "the opposite of a profit motive."

"Probably I've lost 80 percent of my income because of what I'm doing, along with a lot of friendships and, you know, and damaged relationships even with people in my family," Kennedy said.

Still, CHD's fundraising success has only grown with Kennedy's involvement, and no year was more successful than 2020.

Filings the group made with charity regulators in California show that in 2018, CHD reported \$1.1 million in gross revenue. That grew to nearly \$3 million in 2019. By 2020, the most recent year available, revenue had more than doubled to \$6.8 million. It reported that it spent more than \$3.5 million on program expenses last year, the first year of the pandemic. That includes producing 49 "educational videos" and six eBooks, CHD reported to Guidestar.

Kennedy's group has also lobbied over vaccine legislation in the states, collected large sums of money from special interests such as chiropractors, and filed multiple lawsuits, including a \$5 million lawsuit last year against Facebook. Among its claims is that Facebook deactivated the "donate button" on its page, hurting CHD's efforts to raise money. In May 2019 alone, according to its lawsuit, Children's Health Defense said it received \$24,872 in user donations from its Facebook page. A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit in June, but CHD is appealing.

CAPITALIZING ON THE KENNEDY NAME

Children's Health Defense's new movie studio released a film earlier this year, called "Medical Racism." Doctors and public health advocates said it was aimed at spreading misinformation and fear of vaccines within the Black community, which has been disproportionately hit by coronavirus.

The movie brings up racist abuses in medicine, such as the Tuskegee experiment, when hundreds of Black men in Alabama with syphilis were left untreated, to question whether the vaccine can be trusted or is necessary. Examples of racist medical practices have contributed to distrust and hesitation about vaccines among some members of the Black community.

Williams, of the Minority Health Institute, pointed out that in the Tuskegee study, people were denied medication to treat a disease. In the case of the COVID-19 vaccine, medication is available – but anti-vaccine activists are trying to persuade people not to take it. He said the film is "totally slanted."

"It is not only harmful, but it is deadly," he said.

Kennedy has also made hay from the deaths of prominent people. Baseball legend Hank Aaron got his shot as a way to show other Black Americans that the vaccine was safe. A few weeks later, the 86-year-old died in his sleep. Kennedy posted on Facebook and Twitter calling it "part of a wave of suspicious

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 84 of 93

deaths among elderly closely following administration of COVID vaccines," but provided no evidence of a connection. Kennedy's Jan. 22 posts are both still up and have been shared, commented on and liked thousands of times, although the Facebook post now carries a warning that it is missing context and "could mislead people."

In the movie, Kennedy and others also invoke the legacy of his family and its involvement in causes such as civil rights, Special Olympics and health care advocacy.

Dr. Oni Blackstock, who founded the racial and health equity consulting group Health Justice and who is a former assistant commissioner in the New York City Health Department, said the Kennedy name adds "heft" to the anti-vaccine movement among people who have positive associations with the Kennedys' legacy as advocates for civil rights.

"It may make people more willing to listen and to consider what's being said," Blackstock said.

Kennedy also uses his family name and legacy to raise money. On multiple occasions, he has offered a trip to the Kennedy compound on Cape Cod as a lure to drum up donations for Children's Health Defense. As family photos and images of people including President Kennedy flashed on screen of one Facebook appeal, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., said the winner would meet Kennedy family members on the visit.

"There's always plenty of people and good conversation," he said in one video posted in 2020. "If my mom decides to come, adventure is guaranteed."

Kerry Kennedy said her brother had taken down some family-related content at her request. Still, she noted, he continues to reference President Kennedy's name to advance his anti-vaccine stance.

"Anyone who believes this does not know their history. Vaccinations were a major effort of John F. Kennedy, both as a senator and later as president," she said.

"I love Bobby, I think he's just completely wrong on this issue and very dangerous," she said. "Failure to take vaccines puts people's lives at risk. It not only impacts the person who refuses the jab but imperils the community at large."

But that hasn't deterred him. He often name-drops the top government officials and scientists that he has had access to, including Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health.

"Part of the benefit of being part of my family is that I could get these people on the phone almost instantaneously," Kennedy said at Centner Academy.

Collins told AP he was "very disappointed" in Kennedy.

"With his name recognition, with his remarkable heritage and a family that has done so much for America -- that he's using that to spread lies without somehow having some sense, looking in the mirror, that he's doing harms," Collins said, adding, "Shame on him."

In a speech to the Ron Paul Institute in October, Kennedy told a receptive crowd that his children have sometimes questioned him.

"They say, well this is going to kill people. And I say to them, there's a lot worse things than dying," he said, before evoking the "generation of Americans in 1776" who fought the Revolutionary War and then likening their cause to a "second American Revolution."

During his speech, he referenced Nazis multiple times, obliquely comparing public health measures put in place by multiple governments around the world to Nazi propaganda meant to scare people into abandoning critical thinking.

On Sunday, Kennedy again raised the specter of Nazis as he put out a video asking followers to take part in an international campaign to "wallpaper your community legally" with anti-vaccine stickers. The stickers popped up next to his face as he spoke, including one that showed a picture of Fauci with a Hitler mustache, and another that read "IF YOU'RE NOT AN ANTI-VAXXER YOU AREN'T PAYING ATTENTION."

INTERNATIONAL AMBITIONS

The pandemic has allowed Kennedy to take Children's Health Defense's anti-vaccine message global.

In August 2020, CHD launched a Europe branch, and Kennedy attended a huge rally in Berlin against coronavirus restrictions. Last month, Kennedy appeared before thousands of people at protests on successive days in Switzerland and Italy. He complained of conspiracies by government officials and Big Pharma operatives and claimed falsely that the Pfizer COVID-19 shot kills more people than it saves. Kennedy

promised that he would "see you all on the barricades" and that "I and many others are ready to die with our boots on for liberty."

It has become something of a stump speech for Kennedy, one delivered not to win political office but to persuade as many people as possible not to get vaccinated.

Associated Press writers Luran Neergaard, Colleen Barry, Hillel Italie, Matt O'Brien and AP researcher Rhonda Shafner contributed to this report.

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org or <https://www.ap.org/tips/>.

Ex-boarding school for Native children owning up to its past

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — Middle schooler Rarity Cournoyer stood at the heart of the Red Cloud Indian School campus and chanted a prayer song firmly and solemnly in the Lakota language — in a place where past generations of students were punished for speaking their mother tongue.

Her classmates stood around her at a prayer circle designed with archetypes of Native American spirituality, with a circular sidewalk representing a traditional medicine wheel, crossed by sidewalks pointing to the four cardinal directions.

Lakota language teacher Amery Brave Heart walked quietly with a small bundle of smoldering sage stems. Brave Heart — sporting a long braid on the very campus where his grandfather, Basil Brave Heart, said he had his long hair shorn and carelessly trampled on as a newly arrived pupil — offered the sage to each student as part of a brief smudging or purification ritual, in which they symbolically waved the scented smoke toward themselves.

Such scenes would have been hard to imagine here decades ago when Holy Rosary Mission — as the Catholic K-12 school was then named — formed part of a network of boarding schools across North America where generations of Indigenous children were brought to weaken their bonds to tribe and family and assimilate them into the dominant white, English-speaking, Christian culture.

But while Lakota staff, language and ritual have increasingly become central to Red Cloud, the 133-year-old school has never fully reckoned with this history, which has alienated many Lakota living on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, one of the nation's largest.

Now the school is undertaking what it calls a Truth and Healing process, seeking to hear the stories of former students, open its archives and face its past.

"I'm so proud of who we are today, the direction Red Cloud is heading in. That's the beautiful part," said Tashina Banks Rama, the school's vice president for advancement. "The tough part is we have to confront ... the dark history of boarding school policies and our role in that policy."

The ceremony at the prayer circle was a way of acknowledging that history, one of several small gatherings held at Red Cloud on the last day of September to mark what's come to be known across North America as Orange Shirt Day.

Many students and teachers wore orange in solidarity with Indigenous children of past generations who suffered cultural loss, family rupture and sometimes abuse and neglect while compelled to attend residential schools from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries.

The event commemorates the long-ago account of an Indigenous woman in Canada whose residential school confiscated her orange shirt — a cherished gift from her grandmother — and made her wear a uniform.

"Our ancestors faced a lot in their time, but they remained resilient," Red Cloud senior Mia Murdoch told fellow students during the high school's observance. "They weren't allowed to express themselves or to rejoice in who they were. We as young people now have those privileges. ... Orange Shirt Day is not just a single day. It is a confrontation of the past and a conversation that takes place over a long period."

The school's Truth and Healing process, begun in 2020, is following four steps described as confronta-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 86 of 93

tion, understanding, healing and transformation.

"We're really in the early stages of confrontation," said Maka Black Elk, executive director for Truth and Healing at Red Cloud.

"I think people want to rush quickly to healing because it's hopeful ... but there's a lot more that needs to happen before we can," he said.

That includes giving former students a chance to tell their stories, whether in public settings or confidentially.

It will also involve a deep dive into school archives. "The stories that records and archives tell are sometimes ones that we don't want to hear," Black Elk said.

The Truth and Healing process comes amid larger-scale reckonings by governments and church groups that ran residential schools.

Earlier this year in Canada, specialists using ground-penetrating radar discovered hundreds of unmarked graves at former school sites. The discoveries reopened historical wounds years after a 2015 report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada said residential schools were often abusive, unsanitary and unsafe, where children died from disease and fires "in numbers that would not have been tolerated" anywhere else.

While school conditions varied across the U.S. and Canada, and some former students say they had positive experiences, even schools with better track records were serving in the larger project of cultural assimilation — what some call cultural genocide.

At least 367 such boarding schools once operated across the United States, about 40 percent of them affiliated with Catholic or Protestant churches, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Most have closed, and most of the remaining ones, including Red Cloud, no longer board students overnight.

Holy Rosary, long staffed by Jesuit brothers and Franciscan nuns, boarded students for nearly a century after its founding in 1888. Its current name comes from the 19th-century Lakota warrior and chief who long fought against U.S. land grabs before his people were confined to the reservation, and who later invited the Jesuits to start the school and converted to Catholicism.

A small group of Jesuits remain, but much else has changed at what is now a day school, with buses fanning out across the sprawling reservation to bring students to the main campus and an elementary school about 30 miles away. K-12 enrollment on both campuses totals about 600.

Still, the wounds of earlier generations continue to fester for many on the reservation.

"This is something that people in the community who are from here have known about for a long time," Black Elk said. "It's their family history."

That family history is also motivating a group of high school students at Red Cloud to add their voices to the Truth and Healing process. They're raising awareness of the history and helping with ceremonies honoring their forebears and others who went to boarding schools.

"We're trying to heal from what they did to them, because that intergenerational trauma is still with us," said Destiny Big Crow, a junior. "I also want to bring that healing around to my community."

One path to healing, she said is "by learning the language and learning the traditions, learning what they took away from us."

Lakota language instruction is now woven into the curriculum. On a recent day, students in one high school class competed to complete a series of translations the fastest.

"Help each other out, work together," teacher Roger White Eyes urged as he moved from desk to desk.

"It's just awesome to hear the language spoken by the youth," said White Eyes, wearing a T-shirt and face mask with Red Cloud logos. "For me, growing up, you never heard it" except among elders.

Across the campus, elementary students sat in a classroom where they learn most of their subjects in a Lakota immersion program.

Teacher Randilynn Boucher-Giagio presented a slideshow on the boarding school legacy. Afterward the students gathered around a drum and joined in a pulsing, full-throated Lakota chant.

Boucher-Giagio said she incorporated the chant into the lesson to tell the students: "You speak Lakota,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 87 of 93

you sing in Lakota. Our grandparents had suffered, but now you're turning that around."

As a Catholic school, Red Cloud also represents something larger.

"We also have to address a very dynamic and complex relationship between Indigenous people as a whole and the greater Catholic Church, and what that church represents for colonial history," Black Elk said. "And so we're kind of ground zero for an intercultural and interreligious dialogue."

It's a complex picture, because some Lakota are Catholics and some follow Lakota spiritual traditions, while others practice both and still others belong to different faiths. The school teaches about both Catholicism and Lakota beliefs in its religion classes.

The Jesuits at the school, as elsewhere, are undergoing a soul-searching of their own.

Leaders of the order in the U.S. and Canada issued a statement in August expressing regret for the suppression of Native culture and separation of families and pledging cooperation with efforts to "shine the light of truth" on this history.

The Rev. Peter Klink, a former longtime president of Red Cloud and now its vice president for mission and identity, first began working at the school in 1975. He's seen it increasingly incorporate Lakota staff and cultural sensitivity.

Still, "the pain or the trauma of that past can hold us back no matter what positive moves we've made," he said. "We've got to pursue the truth so that we understand fully the past."

Critics inside and outside of Red Cloud say the school still has work to do.

While Mass attendance is only required of students on a few dates each year, some are calling for that mandate to be removed, recalling how past generations were coerced into converting to Christianity.

Some want the school to immediately begin searching for children's graves with ground-penetrating radar.

And they want the school's history told — all of it.

Basil Brave Heart, who attended in the 1940s, said that while some of the priests and nuns were kind, one made him bite a rubber band, stretch it and snap it against his lips as punishment for speaking a Lakota word. His and other boys' long hair, considered sacred, was unceremoniously cut short upon arrival.

"Physical abuse was difficult. But when they took my language away, they took my moral compass," said Brave Heart, 88, who lives on the nearby farm where he grew up and where he helps other Native Americans heal from trauma through traditional ceremonies.

"The language we speak is the way you think, the way you pray and the way you conduct your ceremonies," he said. The Lakota language, he said, resonates with divine vibration; taking it away "was moving us from our Indian-ness to something else," he said.

Some former Holy Rosary attendees do look back positively on their boarding-school education.

"It depends on who you talk to," said Patricia Catches the Enemy, 80, who also lives nearby. She said she "had some sadness, having to leave my home and being forced to go into a school." But she said she didn't witness any abuse, and she values the education, the training in skills such as needlework and the deepened Catholic faith that she received at Holy Rosary.

She said it's important to focus on today's problems, such as drug addiction: "The past is the past. We can't do anything about it but forgive and move on."

Black Elk said the varied perspectives are understandable. The good that some experienced "doesn't mitigate the abuse that happened, and the abuse that happened does not mitigate the good that some people got out of it," he said.

Black Elk also said the school plans to use ground-penetrating radar where unmarked graves are suspected at the school's historic cemetery and other sites beginning next summer. That may not be as soon as some would like, but Black said the school will consult with spiritual leaders, former students and other stakeholders.

"It isn't to do a quick and dirty measure of what your number (of graves) is. That's actually traumatizing," he said. "Really what ground-penetrating radar is about is healing. You're finding people. You're trying to find names, and a story about why that person is there."

Rama, the vice president for advancement at Red Cloud, said she never imagined she would be working

for Red Cloud, given the painful experiences her family had in boarding schools.

"I'm not Christian. I'm definitely not Catholic," she said. "I was raised in traditional Lakota spirituality."

But when her teenage daughter struggled in her school, Rama's mother persuaded her to transfer her to Red Cloud, saying things had changed. The girl began to thrive — and is now, years later, teaching the Lakota language at the school.

Rama, whose younger children are now students here, works in a section of the century-old Drexel Hall, a gabled, brick complex that once housed the children's dormitories.

"We're reclaiming this space," Rama said. "This building maybe used to be a boarding school, but now, when my children visit me in my office, these halls are filled with their laughter. And I think the spirits of the past and our ancestors could not be more proud of where we are today."

AP journalist Emily Leshner contributed to this report.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

On a single Kentucky street, the tornado killed 7 children

By CLAIRE GALOFARO and JOHN RABY Associated Press

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (AP) — The little red wagon was strewn upside down on a heap of rubble — a pile of boards and bricks, a mangled blue bicycle, a baby doll.

Behind it, there was little more than a hole in the ground where a house had stood. Across the street, the tidy homes on this cul-de-sac were reduced to mounds of lumber. Clothes hung from the branches of snapped trees. The walls of one house were gone, and the only thing left standing inside was a white Christmas tree.

When a tornado touched down in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in the middle of the night, its violence was centered on this friendly subdivision, where everyone waved at one another and giggling children spent afternoons tooling around on bicycles on the sidewalks. Fourteen people died in a few blocks, 11 of them on a single street, Moss Creek Avenue. Entire families were lost, among them seven children, two of them infants. Neighbors who survived are so stricken with grief they struggle to speak of it. All around them, amid the ruins, is evidence of the kids they used to watch climb off the school bus.

Melinda Allen-Ray has barely slept since early Saturday, when tornado alerts started screaming and she carried her grandchildren into the bathroom as winds whipped her house apart. After just minutes of destruction, there was silence. She went outside and heard her neighbors' screams.

"I heard them — it traumatized me. I think about that each night when I go to sleep, when I do sleep," she said. In her dreams she hears the screaming and wakes up. She wept all weekend.

"I just think about all those babies," she said.

Hers is a diverse community of families from around the world — Bosnia, Myanmar, Nigeria — many of whom fled from violence. For some, this fresh destruction triggers thoughts of the dark days they fled in their homelands, where they hid from bombs and lost whole families.

"We come from war; this reminds us, it touches the memory of that, where we've been and how we came here," said Ganimete Ademi, a 46-year-old grandmother who fled Kosovo in 1999 during the war, in which she lost her uncle and a nephew. Now she looks around her own neighborhood.

"I turn my memory back to 22 years ago," she said.

One of the families that lost many members was from Bosnia. Two brothers lived in homes next door to each other with their families, Ademi said. They were happy and gregarious, holding summertime parties in the yard. From the two brothers' households, one woman died, along with two children and two infants, police said. Their surviving relatives said it's too difficult to speak of it.

Another family here lost six members: three adults, a 16-year-old girl, a 4-year-old boy and another child. Around the corner, a 77-year-old grandmother was killed. Two others from the neighborhood died of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 89 of 93

their injuries at the hospital.

"That's hard to think about — you go to bed, and your entire family is gone the next day," said Ronnie Ward, with the Bowling Green Police Department. They usually tell people to get in a bathtub and cover up with a mattress, he said, but that probably would've made little difference here: Some homes were destroyed so completely the tornado ripped all the way through the floor, exposing the earth below.

Now, they comb through what remains, turning over every strip of dry wall and each twisted car to make sure there aren't more victims underneath. It can be horrific work, Ward said, but they try to steady themselves enough because they know it must be done.

"So you go about that task of trying to get this work done, and then you come across a wagon," he said, standing near the Radio Flyer bent and broken on a pile. "And you think, that's associated with a child somewhere. And did that child live? Those thoughts, they overtake you, they overwhelm you."

What these children left consumes them. There's a Barbie doll missing a leg. A reindeer stuffed animal. A scooter, a toy horse, a hula hoop. There's a pink Disney princess backpack. A car from "Paw Patrol," and bedding printed with the faces of its goofy animal first responders.

The people who've had to see it are reckoning with how close they and their own children came. As the tornado tore through the subdivision, it decimated some houses and damaged others, yet left some just next door unscathed.

"It's almost hard to look at, because how did it miss that house but it got this house?" Ward said.

A tree shot through the neighborhood like a missile and landed in Ademi's backyard, about a dozen feet from where she'd cowered with her husband. Her four children and two grandchildren live nearby. "This tree could have come in my house, and we'd all be gone too," she said.

The tornado turned just as it got to Benedict Awm's house. Inside, he, his wife, their 2-year-old son and infant held one another under a blanket to protect their eyes and bodies from the broken glass shooting through shattered windows. His wife shook and asked if they would die. He said he didn't know.

"It's terrible, you can't imagine, I thought we were dead," he said. Had the tornado kept on its course, they would be, he thinks. But instead it turned slightly. Thunderous winds turned to silence, and their house still stood. A miracle, thinks Awm, who moved here from war-torn Burma.

Around the corner, someone spray-painted on their front door the words "By God's grace we survived," and hung an American flag from the wreckage of their rafters.

For days now, volunteers have arrived from all over with trucks and tools, and there's comfort in that.

"Sometimes it makes me want to cry, to see how people are willing to help me," Awm said.

Ben Cerimovic pulled his truck and trailer in every day over the weekend. He's an immigrant from Bosnia, and he knows the family that died here.

"The feelings I'm having right now I really can't explain," he said. There's a close-knit, thriving Bosnian community in Bowling Green, which has a robust refugee resettlement program to bring migrants to Western Kentucky. Most of them came here from war so their children would have a better life, he said. Now this subdivision looks like a war zone, scattered with things their children loved.

Cerimovic volunteered Saturday and Sunday, but he had to take Monday off to gather his emotions.

"Every time I see this, and I hear about those kids, I think about mine," he said. "What if they were my kids?"

Raby reported from Charleston, West Virginia. AP reporter Mike Catalini contributed from Morrisville, Pennsylvania.

The AP Interview: Karzai 'invited' Taliban to stop chaos

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban didn't take the Afghan capital — they were invited, says the man who issued the invitation.

In an Associated Press interview, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai offered some of the first insights

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 90 of 93

into the secret and sudden departure of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani — and how he came to invite the Taliban into the city “to protect the population so that the country, the city doesn’t fall into chaos and the unwanted elements who would probably loot the country, loot shops.”

When Ghani left, his security officials also left. Defense minister Bismillah Khan even asked Karzai if he wanted to leave Kabul when Karzai contacted him to know what remnants of the government still remained. It turned out there were none. Not even the Kabul police chief had remained.

Karzai, who was the country’s president for 13 years after the Taliban were first ousted in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, refused to leave.

In a wide-ranging interview at his tree-lined compound in the center of the city where he lives with his wife and young children, Karzai was adamant that Ghani’s flight scuttled a last-minute plan focused on the Taliban’s entry. He and Abdullah Abdullah, the government’s chief negotiator, had been working with the Taliban leadership in Doha on a negotiated agreement to allow the militia to enter the capital under controlled conditions.

The countdown to a possible deal began Aug. 14, the day before the Taliban came to power.

Karzai and Abdullah met Ghani, and they agreed that they would leave for Doha the next day with a list of 15 others to negotiate a power-sharing agreement. The Taliban were already on the outskirts of Kabul, but Karzai said the leadership in Qatar promised the insurgent force would remain outside the city until the deal was struck.

Early on the morning of Aug. 15, Karzai said, he waited to draw up the list. The capital was fidgety, on edge. Rumors were swirling about a Taliban takeover. Karzai called Doha. He was told the Taliban would not enter the city.

At noon, the Taliban called to say that “the government should stay in its positions and should not move that they have no intention to (go) into the city,” Karzai said. “I and others spoke to various officials and assurances were given to us that, yes, that was the case, that the Americans and the government forces were holding firm to the places (and) that Kabul would not fall.”

By about 2:45 p.m., though, it became apparent Ghani had fled the city. Karzai called the defense minister, called the interior minister, searched for the Kabul police chief. Everyone was gone. “There was no official present at all in the capital, no police chief, no corps commander, no other units. They had all left.”

Ghani’s own protection unit’s deputy chief called Karzai to come to the palace and take over the presidency. He declined, saying legally he had no right to the job. Instead the former president decided to make a public, televised message, with his children at his side “so that the Afghan people know that we are all here.”

Karzai was adamant that there would have been an agreement for a peaceful transition had Ghani remained in Kabul.

“Absolutely. Absolutely. That is what we were preparing for, what we were hoping (along) with the chairman of the peace council to go to Doha that evening, or the next morning, and to finalize the agreement,” he said. “And I believe the Taliban leaders were also waiting for us in Doha for the same ... objective, for the same purpose.”

Today, Karzai meets regularly with the Taliban leadership and says the world must engage with them. Equally important, he said, is that Afghans have to come together. War has dominated Afghanistan for more than 40 years, and in the last 20 years “Afghans have suffered on all sides,” he said. “Afghans have lost lives on all sides. . . . The Afghan army has suffered. Afghan police have suffered, the Taliban soldiers have suffered.”

He added: “An end to that can only come when Afghans get together, find their own way out.”

The former president has a plan. In his talks with the Taliban, he is advocating the temporary resurrection of the constitution that governed when Afghanistan was a monarchy. The idea was also floated during earlier Doha talks.

At the same time, a traditional Loya Jirga — a grand council of all Afghans, including women — would be convened. It would decide the country’s future, including a representative government, a constitution,

a national flag.

There's no indication the Taliban will accept his formula, though he says they have not rejected it in discussions. A jirga is a centuries-old Afghan tradition for decision-making and is particularly popular among ethnic Pashtuns, which make up the backbone of the Taliban.

Karzai said a future Afghanistan has to have universal education rights for boys and girls, and women "must find their place in the Afghan polity, in the administration, in economic activity and social activity, the political activity in all ways of life. ... That's an issue on which there cannot be any compromise."

But until it happens, Karzai says, the world has to engage with the Taliban. Afghanistan needs to operate. Government servants have to be paid. Health care facilities need to function.

"Right now, they need to cooperate with the government in any form they can," said Karzai, who also bemoaned the unchallenged and sometimes wrong international perceptions of the Taliban. He cited claims that women and girls are not allowed outside their homes or require a male companion. "That's not true. There are girls on the streets — women by themselves." The situation on the ground in Kabul bears this out.

Asked to describe the Taliban, Karzai said: "I would describe them as Afghans, but Afghans who have gone through a very difficult period in their lives as all other Afghans have done for the past 40 years."

We "have been through an extremely difficult period of our history in which we, the Afghans, have made mistakes on all sides, in which the international community and those who interacted with us have made tremendous mistakes," Karzai said. "It's time for all of us to realize that, and to look back at the mistakes that we have all made and to make it better."

Kathy Gannon, Associated Press news director for Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been covering the region for more than 30 years.

Kremlin: Xi supports Putin's pursuit of guarantees from West

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping supported Russian President Vladimir Putin in his push to get Western security guarantees precluding NATO's eastward expansion, the Kremlin said Wednesday after the two leaders held a virtual summit.

Putin and Xi spoke as Moscow faces heightened tensions with the West over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine's border. In recent weeks, Western nations engaged in diplomatic efforts to prevent a possible invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin has denied harboring plans to storm its neighbor.

Putin, meanwhile, demanded guarantees that NATO will not expand to Ukraine or deploy troops and weapons there.

He told Xi on Wednesday about "mounting threats to Russia's national interests from the U.S. and the NATO bloc, which consistently move their military infrastructure close to the Russian borders," Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said.

The Russian leader stressed the need to hold talks with NATO and the U.S. on legally binding security guarantees, according to Ushakov. Xi responded by saying he "understands Russia's concerns and fully supports our initiative to work out these security guarantees for Russia," Ushakov said.

He said Moscow's proposals have been passed on to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried, who visited Moscow on Wednesday and met with Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov.

In recent years, China and Russia have increasingly aligned their foreign policies to counter U.S. domination of the international economic and political order.

Both have faced sanctions — China over its abuses against minorities, especially Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, and for its crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, and Russia for annexing Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and over the poisoning and imprisonment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 92 of 93

Beijing and Washington also remain at odds over trade, technology and China's military intimidation of Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory.

Russia's relations with the U.S. sank to post-Cold War lows after it annexed Crimea and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in Ukraine's east. Tensions reignited in recent weeks after Moscow massed tens of thousands of troops near Ukraine's border, a move Ukraine and the West feared may indicate plans for a new invasion.

Moscow has denied that it plans to attack Ukraine and in turn blamed Ukraine for its own military buildup in the country's war-torn east. Russian officials alleged that Kyiv might try to reclaim the areas controlled by the rebels.

It is within that context that Putin has pressed the West for guarantees that NATO will not expand to Ukraine or deploy its forces there.

During their call on Wednesday, Putin and Xi hailed relations between Russia and China, with the Russian leader saying they are based on "such principles as not interfering in internal affairs (of each other), respect for each other's interests, determination to turn the shared border into a belt of eternal peace and good neighborliness."

Xi said, through a translator, that he appreciated that Putin "strongly supported China's efforts to protect key national interests and firmly opposed attempts to drive a wedge between our countries."

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported that Xi said "both China and Russia need to carry out more joint actions to more effectively safeguard our security and interests."

"At present, certain international forces are arbitrarily interfering in the internal affairs of China and Russia under the guise of democracy and human rights, and brutally trampling on international law and the norms of international relations," Xi was quoted by CCTV as saying.

Putin also said he plans to meet with Xi in person in Beijing in February and to attend the 2022 Winter Olympics.

The U.S., Canada, Australia and Britain have said they will not be sending dignitaries to the Winter Olympics as part of a diplomatic boycott to protest China's human rights record. Other countries have said they won't be sending officials because of pandemic travel restrictions.

In welcoming Putin's planned visit, Xi said sports could be a channel for their countries to boost ties. "Both sides should strengthen coordination and cooperation on international affairs to make louder voices on global governance, and come up with practical plans on global issues including the pandemic and climate change," Xi was quoted by CCTV as saying.

China's Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying Xi told Putin he "very much looks forward to this 'get together at the Winter Olympics' and stands ready to work with President Putin 'for a shared future' to jointly open a new chapter in post-COVID China-Russia relations."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 16, the 350th day of 2021. There are 15 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 16, 1773, the Boston Tea Party took place as American colonists boarded a British ship and dumped more than 300 chests of tea into Boston Harbor to protest tea taxes.

On this date:

In 1653, Oliver Cromwell became lord protector of England, Scotland and Ireland.

In 1811, the first of the powerful New Madrid (MAD'-rihd) earthquakes struck the central Mississippi Valley with an estimated magnitude of 7.7.

In 1944, the World War II Battle of the Bulge began as German forces launched a surprise attack against Allied forces through the Ardennes Forest in Belgium and Luxembourg (the Allies were eventually able to turn the Germans back).

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 162 ~ 93 of 93

In 1950, President Harry S. Truman proclaimed a national state of emergency in order to fight "world conquest by Communist imperialism."

In 1960, 134 people were killed when a United Air Lines DC-8 and a TWA Super Constellation collided over New York City.

In 1982, Environmental Protection Agency head Anne M. Gorsuch became the first Cabinet-level officer to be cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to submit documents requested by a congressional committee.

In 1991, the U.N. General Assembly rescinded its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism by a vote of 111-25.

In 2000, President-elect George W. Bush selected Colin Powell to become the first African-American secretary of state.

In 2001, after nine weeks of fighting, Afghan militia leaders claimed control of the last mountain bastion of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida fighters, but bin Laden himself was nowhere to be seen.

In 2012, President Barack Obama visited Newtown, Connecticut, the scene of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre; after meeting privately with victims' families, the president told an evening vigil he would use "whatever power" he had to prevent future shootings.

In 2014, Taliban gunmen stormed a military-run school in the northwestern Pakistan city of Peshawar, killing at least 148 people, mostly children.

In 2019, House Democrats laid out their impeachment case against President Donald Trump; a sweeping report from the House Judiciary Committee said Trump had "betrayed the Nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections." Boeing said it would temporarily stop producing its grounded 737 Max jet as it struggled to get approval from regulators to put the plane back in the air; it had been grounded since March after two deadly crashes.

Ten years ago: In San Francisco, eight years of being investigated for steroid allegations ended for home run king Barry Bonds with a 30-day sentence to be served at home. (Bonds never served the sentence; his conviction for obstruction of justice was overturned.)

Five years ago: President Barack Obama put Russia's Vladimir Putin on notice that the U.S. could use offensive cyber muscle to retaliate for interference in the U.S. presidential election, his strongest suggestion to date that Putin had been well aware of campaign email hacking. John Glenn's home state and the nation began saying goodbye to the beloved astronaut and former U.S. senator starting with a public viewing of his flag-draped casket inside Ohio's Statehouse rotunda in Columbus.

One year ago: The first COVID-19 vaccinations were underway at U.S. nursing homes, where the virus had killed 110,000 people. Tyson Foods said it had fired seven top managers at its largest pork plant after an investigation confirmed allegations that they had wagered on how many workers at the plant in Iowa would test positive for the coronavirus. (An outbreak centered around the plant infected more than 1,000 employees, at least six of whom died.) Major League Baseball reclassified the Negro Leagues as a major league and said it would count the statistics and records of its 3,400 players as part of major league history.

Today's Birthdays: Civil rights attorney and co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center Morris Dees is 85. Actor Joyce Bulifant is 84. Actor Liv Ullmann is 83. CBS news correspondent Lesley Stahl is 80. Pop musician Tony Hicks (The Hollies) is 76. Pop singer Benny Andersson (ABBA) is 75. Rock singer-musician Billy Gibbons (ZZ Top) is 72. Rock musician Bill Bateman (The Blasters) is 70. Actor Xander Berkeley is 66. Actor Alison LaPlaca is 62. Actor Sam Robards is 60. Actor Jon Tenney is 60. Actor Benjamin Bratt is 58. Country singer-songwriter Jeff Carson is 58. Actor-comedian JB Smoove is 56. Actor Miranda Otto is 54. Actor Daniel Cosgrove is 51. R&B singer Michael McCary is 50. Actor Jonathan Scarfe is 46. Actor Krysten Ritter is 40. Actor Zoe Jarman is 39. Country musician Chris Scruggs is 39. Actor Theo James is 37. Actor Amanda Setton is 36. Rock musician Dave Rublin (American Authors) is 35. Actor Hallee Hirsh is 34. Actor Anna Popplewell is 33. Actor Stephan James is 28.