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UpComing Events

Thursday, Dec. 30

9:30 a.m.: Wrestling at Webster

Friday, Dec. 31

Girls Basketball at Webster. C game at 11 a.m. followed by JV and then varsity

Monday, Jan. 4

School resumes

Basketball Double Header at Warner. Girls JV at 4 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity.

5 p.m.: Junior High Wrestling Tournament at Groton.

Thursday, Jan. 6

6 p.m.: Wrestling Tri-angular at Groton with Redfield and Webster

Friday, Jan. 7

Penguin Classic Debate on-line

5 p.m.: Junior High Wrestling at Milbank

Girls Basketball hosts Sisseton with JV at 6 p.m. and varsity to follow

Saturday, Jan. 8

Groton Robotics Tournament, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Penguin Classic Debate on-line

Girls Basketball Classic at Redfield

“Love unlocks doors
and opens windows
that weren't even
there before.”

-Mignon McLaughlin

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Conde National League

Dec. 26 Team Standings: Mets 9, Pirates 9, Giants 8, Tigers 5, Cubs 4, Braves 1

Men's High Games: Pat Knecht 245, Austin Schuelke 189, Joe Groeblichhoff 186

Men's High Series: Pat Knecht 573, Austin Schuelke 474, Joe Groeblichhoff 471

Women's High Games: Nancy Radke 212, 183; Vickie Kramp 177; Sam Bahr 167

Women's High Series: Nancy Radke 522, Vickie Kramp 467, Michelle Johnson 419.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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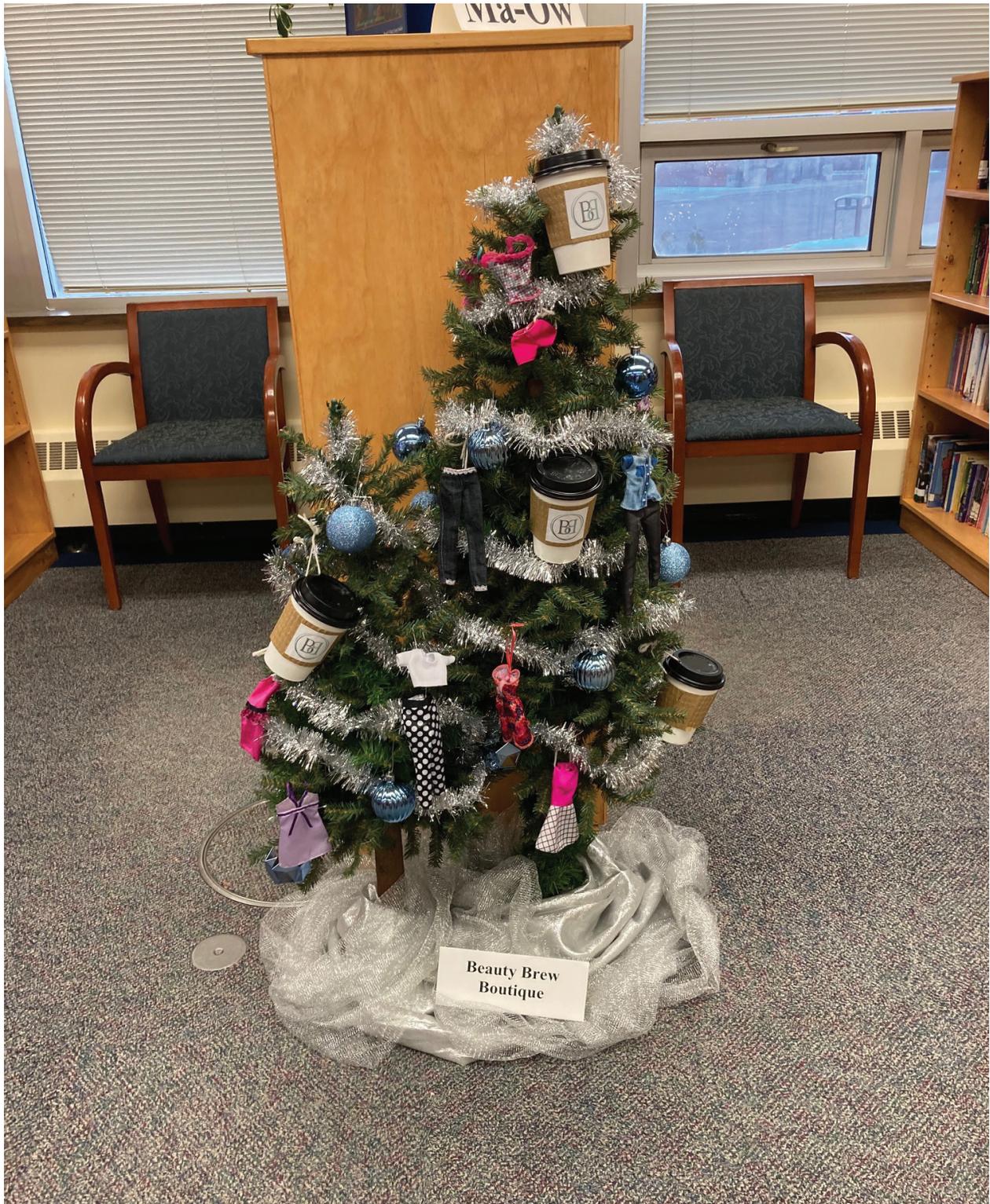
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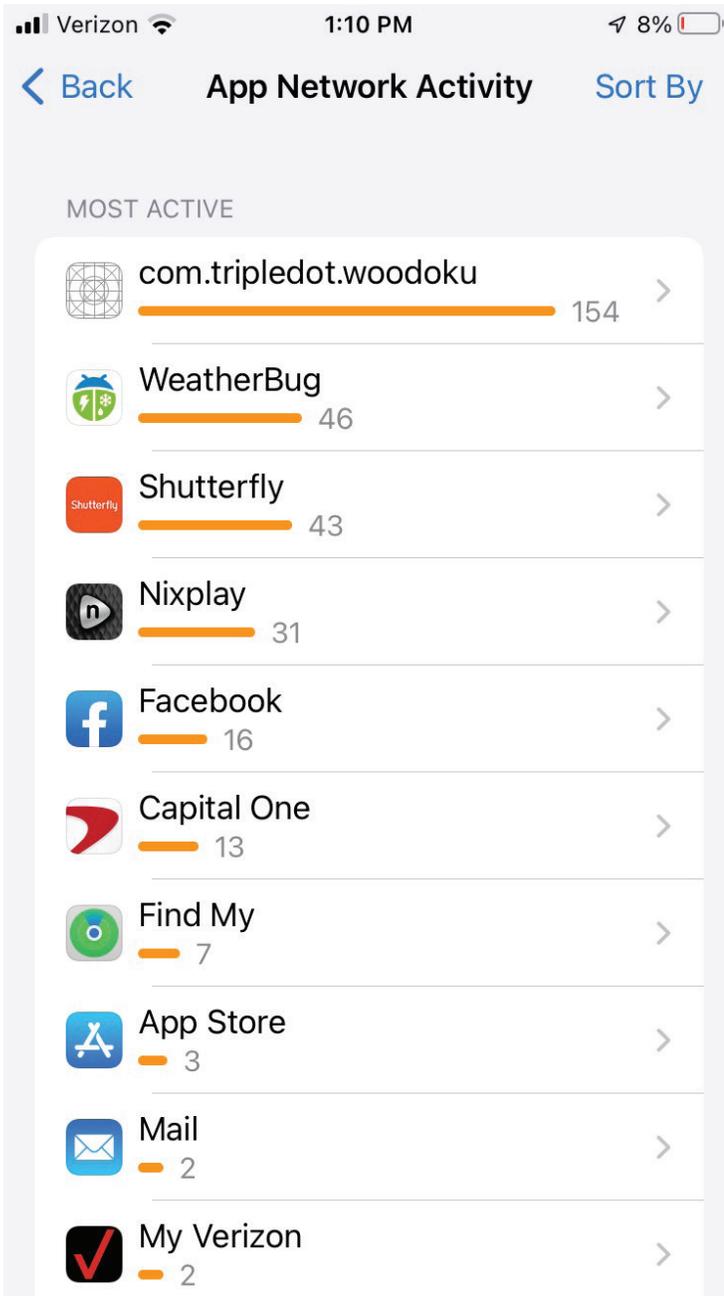
The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by Front Porch 605.

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The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by Beauty Brew Botique.



The new Apple iPhone update is amazing

Updates are not my most favorite thing. In fact, they rank down the scale for me. But the latest 15.2 update on the iPhone has an amazing feature on it. It's the App Privacy feature. By default, it is turned off so if you want to see what's going on, you need to go and turn it on.

I seen this neat game on Facebook - it was like a puzzle type game by Woodoku. It was fun playing it, but after awhile, I thought I would see what the "neat" app was doing for me. As you can tell on the left, it had sent out its tentacles to 154 different locations which included websites and anonymous IP addresses. I wasn't impressed. Needless to say, I deleted the App off my phone.

I have seen so many people on Facebook who have had their Facebook accounts hacked. Everytime you download an app and use it, it's gathering information about you and sending it out to the world wide web. Also note that every time you view something on Facebook, that will also be recorded.

Now I'm not a big gamer myself - I simply don't have time to play games. But I know a lot of people out there play games. This would be my suggestion to you.

If you do any banking on your iPhone or have other sensitive information, you need to delete those games and unwanted APPS on your phone. It would be a good idea to take an inventory of your APPS and start deleting them that you don't use.

If you're one of those that likes to play those games, I would suggest getting an iPad or similar device and use that for your games, separating them from your phone. Or better yet, why are you wasting your limited earthly time playing mindless games?

So where to do you find this report? Go under settings, Scroll down to Privacy. Scroll all the way down to App Privacy Report. At the bottom of that screen you can toggle the report on or off. Like I said, the default is off, so toggle it on. It will take a little bit for the information the gathered as you're using the apps. Check back later on that screen for your report. You might be shocked at what you see!



Groton Area MS/HS December Student of the Month

Left back: Jackson Garstecki (10th), Brody Lord (7th), Cole Simon (11th), Seth Johnson (12th)

Left Front: Thomas Schuster (6th), Talli Wright (8th), Laila Roberts (9th)

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

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That's Life by Tony Bender Last column of the year

It's daybreak, which isn't all that early in this light-deprived season. So far, the snowdrifts in the yard seem navigable but we're expecting 45 mph winds and that will reorganize the white stuff into who knows what. You know, those snowbirds are looking smarter all the time. Gus the Wonder Pug took one step outside and scampered back in. I guess he intends to hold it.

My old Bobcat is down—bad solenoid, I think; perfect timing, we discovered that over the weekend—so we'll have to see if my snowblower is up to the task as well as my achy, breaky hip.

Not only are we Benders blessed with incredible good looks and humility but the good Lord threw in genetically bad hips just to keep us from getting too cocky. A legitimate concern. I had my hip X-rayed nine years ago—the last time it gave me trouble—and the doctor described what should a ball and socket as a “hook” and socket. I don't know much about orthopedics but enough to know that's not tenable. My younger brother Scott had his hip replaced this summer, leaving me as the sixth-fastest sibling out of six. But still the best looking. Sad, really.

Yes, dear reader, this is the point where things spiral downward, and you'll probably get nothing but complaints about aches and pains from here on out. It's hard to believe this is my last column of the year. Harder still to believe that I've been doing this for more than 30 years. The plan was always to do radio until I was too old to be cool on the air, then write for a living, and well, here we are. Now, I may not even be cool enough to write a column.

It started in 1989 when I was working in Alaska. I wrote a letter to the editor of the Brown County News (Frederick, SD) about my old baseball coach Bob Fuhrman after his passing. That resulted in one of only two known compliments I ever received from my Dad although he never told me to my face. German stoicism. “I didn't know he could write like that,” he told someone, who passed it on to me. Still, when I quit radio in my early 30s and jumped into journalism, Dad almost had a conniption because I was finally making a good living behind a microphone. “What, are you going to be the next Wayne Lubenow?” he asked cynically. “Better,” I said, which, of course, was sacrilege.

Wayne was a poet and his columns, which appeared in weekly papers around North Dakota, were funny and altogether brilliant. I have a picture of Wayne at my office, so he looks over my shoulder every week. I miss him. Then Dean Meyer retired. That guy would get up every Monday, feed the livestock, and then come in and write something hilarious about pulling calves or being trampled by a surly cow. For a while, I considered getting cows just for inspiration, but decided against it since I wasn't sure if I could write them off.

Well, Christmas has passed and a New Year is knocking at the door—2022. So far, it's poised not to come in like a lamb but as an ill-tempered polar bear. So, the usual. You have to be an optimist to live in North Dakota. Or about half-crazy when you consider today's forecast. Still, there's something about harrowing, white windswept prairies I appreciate. On the best winter days it's like living in a Christmas card, and after all the snow has been pushed aside—pray for the Bobcat—there's a certain satisfaction that feels a whole lot better than surviving a sunburn in Mesa. But I may test that theory one of these winters.

The good news is, the generator has been freshly serviced, I have a freezer full of food, a month's supply of coffee, a few beers, and two cases of red wine. As long as I can dig out before my caffeine supply runs out, I'll be fine.

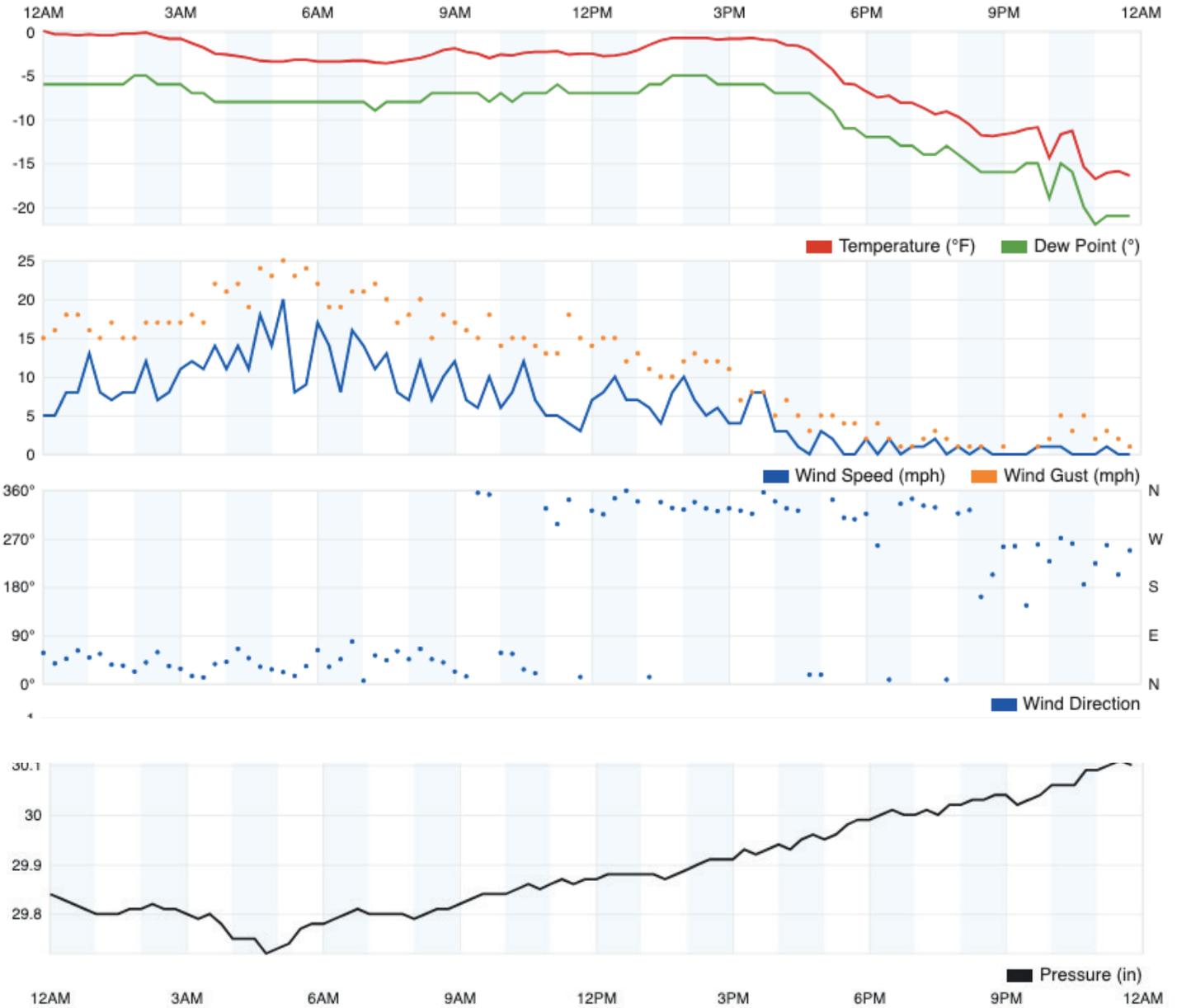
So here's to you readers, the slackers reading this in Arizona and the rest of you who are toughing it out on the high plains. We made another year. The last few have been challenging, haven't they? We've lost friends and neighbors to Covid, but I remain an eternal optimist. It's going to be a better year. Knock on wood. Now, where's my shovel?

© Tony Bender, 2021

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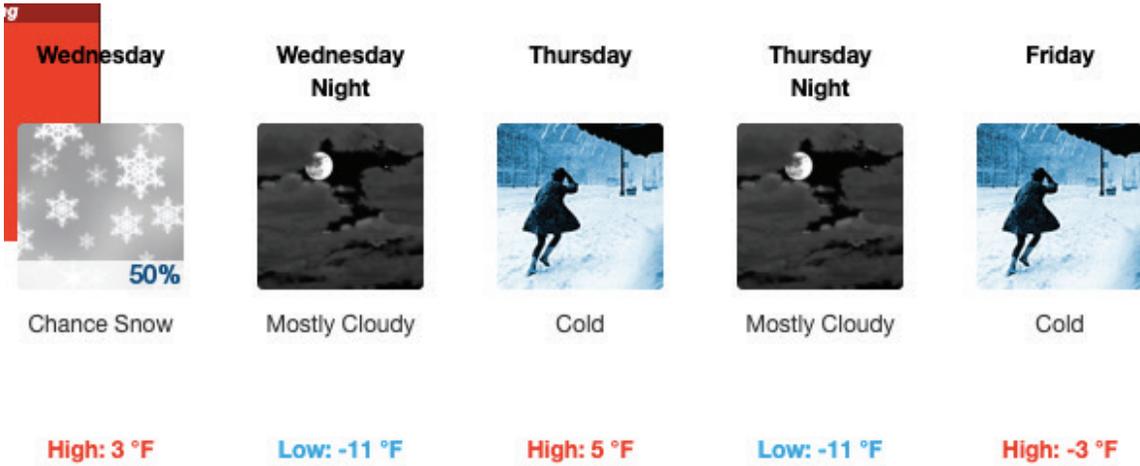
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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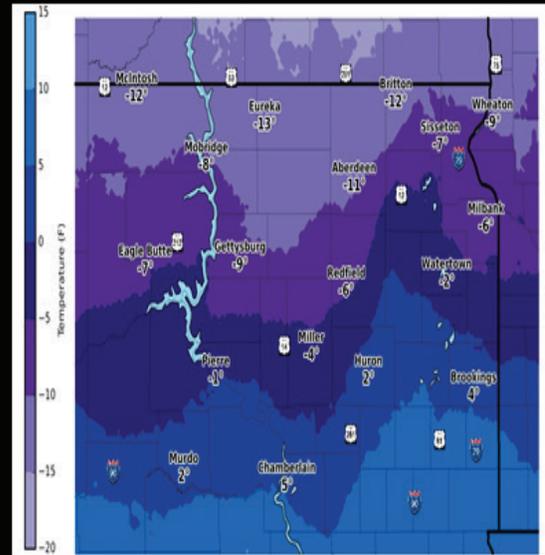
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Light Snow Today



Low Temperatures Tonight



A little light snow can be expected across parts of the region today, with accumulations generally less than one inch. Very cold air, along with periods of bitterly cold wind chills, will remain in place across the area through this weekend.

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Today in Weather History

December 29, 2005: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across parts of north-central and most of north-east South Dakota from the morning of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Big Stone and Traverse counties in west-central Minnesota had 7 to 8 inches of snow the evening of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Light rain and freezing rain fell before the snow, creating some slick roads which resulted in some accidents. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, Big Stone City, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Waubay, Browns Valley, and Wheaton; 9 inches northeast of Isabel and Hecla; 10 inches at Wilmot and Clear Lake; 12 inches at Milbank; and 14 inches at Summit.

December 29, 1876: The Pacific Express train was crossing the Ashtabula River in Ohio when the bridge collapsed. The bridge collapsed at 7:28 PM, during a snowstorm that left two feet of snow and produced 40 mph winds. The only railcar not to fall into the icy river below was the first locomotive.

December 29, 1894: Express A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees.

1830 - A very heavy snowstorm ushered in the "winter of the deep snow." The storm produced 30 inches of snow at Peoria IL and 36 inches at Kansas City MO. Cold and snow continued until the middle of February causing great suffering among pioneers. (David Ludlum)

1894 - A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Fort Scott, KS, was buried under 26 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 - One hundred cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures. Kansas City, MO, experienced its warmest December day of record with a morning low of 60 degrees and an afternoon high of 71 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - A storm off the Middle Atlantic Coast produced heavy snow in the Appalachians and the north-eastern U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in southeastern Massachusetts. Cape Cod received thirteen inches of snow, and snow drifts three feet deep were reported around Chatham MA. Strong winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in southwestern New England. In the western U.S., a Pacific coast storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, with 24 inches reported at Mammoth Mountain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A cold front brought rain and snow to the northwestern U.S. The rainfall total of 2.70 inches at Astoria OR was a record for the date. High winds along the eastern slopes of the Northern Rockies gusted to 81 mph at Livingston MT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Snow and ice prevailed from the southwestern U.S. to the Great Lakes Region. Flagstaff, AZ, received nine inches of snow in just six hours. Bitter cold weather continued over Maine. Portland ME reported a record twenty-two straight days with highs 32 degrees or colder. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

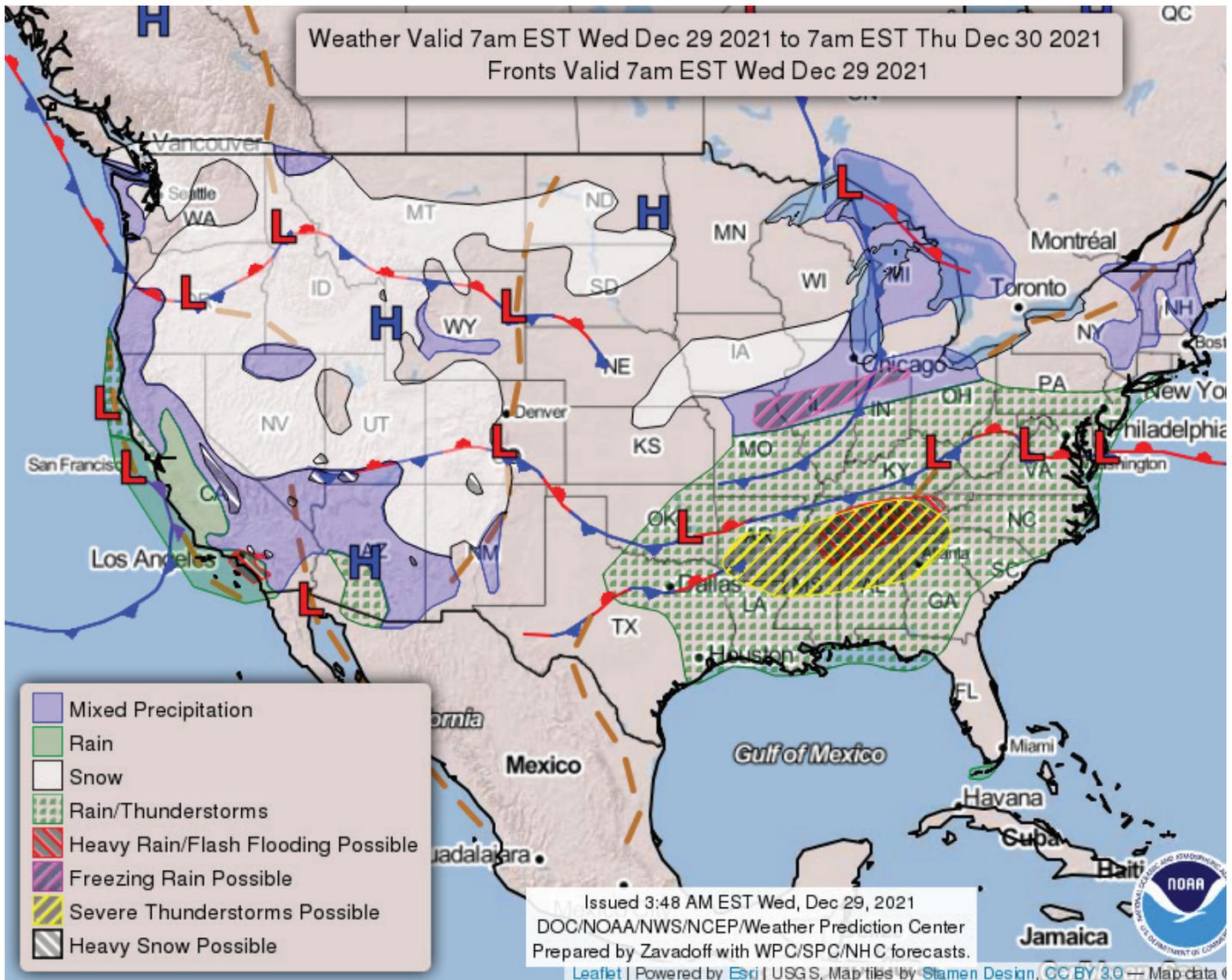
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 0.1 °F at Midnight
Low Temp: -16.8 °F at 11:00 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 5:15 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 59° in 1999
Record Low: -35° in 1917
Average High: 25°F
Average Low: 4°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.57
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.52
Average Precip to date: 21.78
Precip Year to Date: 20.08
Sunset Tonight: 4:59:05 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:21 AM



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2022

As we come to the close of this year and face the uncertainties that are before us in the year to come, it is important to pause, listen to, and accept a promise from our God:

"For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

"In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you search for me with all your heart, you will find me, declares the Lord."

This is one of God's if – then's. There can be no misunderstanding of what He is talking about in this passage of Scripture. God knows our future. He very carefully designed it in our best interest to enable us to find and follow His will. Because He knows our future, He assures us that it can be one of goodness and hope – not one of disaster.

But if we want this future that contains goodness and hope, we must study His Word and go to Him in earnest prayer. He assures us that He will listen to us IF we search for Him with all of our hearts and THEN are obedient to and follow Him. IF we do this, THEN He will bless us.

Perhaps we have prayed and even searched for Him in years past, but did not do so with all our heart. With God, it is always IF you obey me, THEN you can count on Me.

Prayer: Lord, may we come to You this year with sincerity and singleness of heart to find Your plans. Give us Your courage to seek, find, and follow You in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

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2021 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-05-08-31-38, Mega Ball: 4, Megaplier: 3

(three, five, eight, thirty-one, thirty-eight; Mega Ball: four; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$201 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$441 million

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Bison 82, Tiospaye Topa 61

Bridgewater-Emery 58, Waubay/Summit 41

Dell Rapids 55, Milbank 53

Dell Rapids St. Mary 53, Chester 46

Elk Point-Jefferson 68, Irene-Wakonda 38

Gayville-Volin 66, Alcester-Hudson 31

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 67, Miller 37

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 94, Lake Preston 40

Timber Lake 71, Lyman 67

Warner 57, Florence/Henry 41

White River 58, Aberdeen Christian 48

Winner 69, Bon Homme 31

Chadron Rotary - George Watson Holiday Classic=

Chadron, Neb. 62, Custer 36

Hoop City Classic=

Canistota 65, Gregory 59

Thunder Basin, Wyo. 61, Mitchell 53

Yankton 79, Campbell County, Wyo. 51

Parkston Classic=

Dakota Valley 76, Platte-Geddes 41

McCook Central/Montrose 54, Corsica/Stickney 51

Parkston 65, Sully Buttes 56

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 59, Herreid/Selby Area 28

Brandon Valley 61, Tea Area 60

Bridgewater-Emery 49, Campbell County, Wyo. 32

Dell Rapids St. Mary 68, Chester 57

Elk Point-Jefferson 53, Irene-Wakonda 49

Gayville-Volin 36, Alcester-Hudson 23

Langford 55, Iroquois/Doland 53

Lyman 69, Timber Lake 66

Milbank 49, Dell Rapids 43

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Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 50, Miller 14
Tri-Valley 57, Garretson 42
Winner 56, Bon Homme 17
Chadron Rotary - George Watson Holiday Classic=
Chadron, Neb. 43, Custer 17
Hoop City Classic=
Thunder Basin, Wyo. 61, Mitchell 45
Parkston Classic=
Dakota Valley 67, Corsica/Stickney 66
Parkston 58, Viborg-Hurley 51
Sully Buttes 43, Menno 20

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

Wilkins scores 16 to lead Drake past Mount Marty 82-53

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — D.J. Wilkins registered 16 points as Drake easily beat Mount Marty 82-53 on Tuesday night.

Wilkins hit 4 of 6 3-pointers.

Tucker DeVries had 11 points for Drake (10-4), which won its fourth straight game. Darnell Brodie added 10 points. Tremell Murphy had 10 points and seven rebounds.

Gio Diaz had 16 points for the Lancers. Tyrell Harper added 11 rebounds and three blocks. He also committed eight turnovers.

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

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South Dakota AG impeachment investigation begins in secrecy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers met behind closed doors on Tuesday as they launched an impeachment investigation into the state attorney general for his conduct surrounding a fatal car crash last year.

The House Speaker, Republican Spencer Gosch, had pledged a transparent process as a committee that he appointed considers whether to recommend Attorney General Jason Ravensborg's impeachment. But it took just four minutes on Tuesday for the committee — made of seven Republicans and two Democrats — to take an oath, then move into a private executive session with the attorney hired to guide the inquiry.

Lawmakers planned to take formal action that will lay out the scope of their investigation during a public session slated for Wednesday.

Ravnsborg, a Republican elected to his first term in 2018, pleaded no contest in August to a pair of misdemeanors in the crash that killed Joseph Boever. The 55-year-old man was walking along a rural stretch of highway in September 2020 when Ravensborg struck him with his car. Ravensborg first reported the crash as a collision with an animal. He has insisted that he did not realize he had killed a man until he returned to the scene the next day and discovered Boever's body.

Gov. Kristi Noem, a fellow Republican, has called for Ravensborg's ouster, and her Secretary of Public Safety, who oversaw the crash investigation, has said he believes the attorney general should have faced a manslaughter charge. The governor gave Gosch a copy of the crash investigation, which lawmakers plan to delve into as they weigh whether to bring impeachment charges.

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In a statement late Tuesday, Gosch said the committee began a review of the crash investigation and reviewed state law on the grounds for impeachment.

Other lawmakers on the committee either declined to discuss their Tuesday session or did not respond to a request for comment.

Lawmakers have said a priority will be to determine what an impeachable offense is in South Dakota. The state constitution stipulates that officials such as the attorney general can be impeached for "corrupt conduct, malfeasance or misdemeanor in office." The Legislature has never before impeached a state official.

If the investigative committee recommends impeachment charges be brought against Ravensborg and a majority of the House were to approve the charges, Ravensborg would then face a trial in the Senate. It would take a two-thirds majority of the Senate to convict and remove him from office.

A spokesman for Ravensborg did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

Gosch indicated Tuesday's private meeting was held under "attorney and client privilege." State law allows government bodies to meet in executive sessions to consult with legal counsel, and to discuss the "qualifications, competence, performance, character or fitness of any public officer." Any official action must be made in an open meeting.

"We will be as transparent as humanly possible," Gosch told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, adding that he was trying to ensure fairness by keeping some of the discussions private.

The House voted in November to make public the material that the investigative committee uses, with the exception of redacted confidential and "nonrelevant information."

But the impeachment inquiry has been held under a cloud of secrecy: Gosch has refused to divulge the names of the 49 House members who petitioned for a special legislative session to launch the committee in the first place. He and the Legislature's support staff are facing a lawsuit from the Sioux Falls Argus Leader and the South Dakota Newspaper Association to formally release the names.

Even though those have already been released — by the Senate Pro Tempore, and against Gosch's wishes — the media organizations have pressed the lawsuit in order to establish that petitions for a special legislative session are public record.

South Dakota minimum wage to jump 50 cents in January

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's minimum wage will go up on Saturday.

KELO-TV reported Tuesday that the minimum wage will rise 50 cents on Jan. 1, from \$9.45 an hour to \$9.95 an hour. A state law passed in 2016 mandates that the minimum wage increase annually to keep pace with the cost of living as measured by the U.S. Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index.

The increase applies to all South Dakota employers. The hourly minimum wage for tipped employees is currently \$4.97, half the wage for non-tipped employees.

The increase comes as state labor officials report more than 28,000 job openings across South Dakota.

Men, women rob lost hitchhiker in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Sioux Falls are searching for two men and a woman who robbed a lost hitchhiker.

The Argus Leader reported the 20-year-old hitchhiker was walking along Interstate 29 in Sioux Falls early Tuesday morning when the men and the woman pulled up in a gray Nissan and offered him a ride. Police said the hitchhiker agreed to pay them gas money if they'd take him to Brookings.

One of the men pulled out a pistol and asked for all his money. The hitchhiker turned over an undisclosed amount of cash before the group left him stranded in the city.

Police said the hitchhiker couldn't tell them precisely where he was driven because he apparently isn't from Sioux Falls and doesn't know the area well.

Bystander uses stun gun on Sioux Falls shoplifter

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Sioux Falls say a bystander used a stun gun on a shoplifter who assaulted store employees.

Police said the 38-year-old man tried to steal from a convenience store the afternoon of Dec. 22. The man assaulted two employees before police arrived. The bystander stunned the man to stop him, the Argus Leader reported.

The alleged thief was arrested. Police Sgt. Travis Olsen says it doesn't appear the person who fired the stun gun will be charged.

Hong Kong pro-democracy news site closes after raid, arrests

HONG KONG (AP) — A vocal pro-democracy website in Hong Kong shut down Wednesday after police raided its office and arrested six current and former editors and board members in a continuing crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

Stand News said in a statement that its website and social media are no longer being updated and will be taken down. It said all employees have been dismissed.

The outlet was one of the last remaining openly critical voices in Hong Kong following the shuttering of the Apple Daily newspaper, which closed after its publisher, Jimmy Lai, and top editors were arrested and its assets frozen.

Police raided Stand News' office earlier in the day after arresting the six, including popular singer and activist Denise Ho, a former board member, on charges of conspiracy to publish a seditious publication.

More than 200 officers were involved in the search, police said. They had a warrant to seize relevant journalistic materials under a national security law enacted last year.

The six were arrested under a crime ordinance that dates from Hong Kong's days as a British colony before 1997, when it was returned to China. Those convicted could face up to two years in prison and a fine of up to 5,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$640).

Police did not identify who was arrested, but Hong Kong's South China Morning Post newspaper reported they were one current and one former editor of Stand News, and four former board members including Ho and former lawmaker Margaret Ng.

A Facebook post early Wednesday morning on Ho's account confirmed that she was being arrested. A subsequent message posted on her behalf said she was OK and urged friends and supporters not to worry about her.

That post drew nearly 40,000 likes and 2,700 comments, mostly from supporters.

Early Wednesday, Stand News posted a video on Facebook of police officers at the home of a deputy editor, Ronson Chan. Chan, who is also chair of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, was taken away for questioning, the organization confirmed in a statement.

Chan, who was later released, told media the police seized his electronic devices, bank cards and press card.

The arrests come as authorities crack down on dissent in the semi-autonomous Chinese city. Hong Kong police previously raided the offices of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, seizing boxes of materials and computer hard drives to assist in their investigation and freezing millions in assets that later forced the newspaper to cease operations.

Police charged the Apple Daily's Lai, who is already jailed on other charges, with sedition on Tuesday.

"We are not targeting reporters, we are not targeting the media, we just targeted national security offenses," said Li Kwai-wah, senior superintendent of the police National Security Department. "If you only report, I don't think this is a problem."

He said at a news conference that those arrested had to account for their actions even if they had resigned from Stand News.

Asked what advice he had for the media, Li replied, "Don't be biased. You know well how to report, how to be a responsible reporter, how to make a non-biased report to your readers. That's all I can give you."

Stand News earlier this year said it would suspend subscriptions and remove most opinion pieces and

columns from its website due to the national security law. Six board members also resigned from the company.

The journalists' association urged the city's government to protect press freedom in accordance with Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law.

"The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) is deeply concerned that the police have repeatedly arrested senior members of the media and searched the offices of news organizations containing large quantities of journalistic materials within a year," it said in a statement.

Benedict Rogers, co-founder and CEO of the non-governmental organization Hong Kong Watch, said the arrests are "nothing short of an all-out assault on the freedom of the press in Hong Kong."

"When a free press guaranteed by Hong Kong's Basic Law is labeled 'seditious,' it is a symbol of the speed at which this once great, open, international city has descended into little more than a police state," he said.

Wednesday's arrests also followed the removal of sculptures and other artwork from university campuses last week. The works supported democracy and memorialized the victims of China's crackdown on democracy protesters at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

WHO: global COVID cases up 11% last week, omicron risk high

BERLIN (AP) — The World Health Organization says the number of COVID-19 cases recorded worldwide increased by 11% last week compared with the previous week, with the biggest increase in the Americas. The gain followed a gradual increase since October.

The U.N. health agency said in its weekly epidemiological report released late Tuesday that there were nearly 4.99 million newly reported cases around the world from Dec. 20-26.

Europe accounted for more than half the total, with 2.84 million, though that amounted to only a 3% increase over the previous week. It also had the highest infection rate of any region, with 304.6 new cases per 100,000 residents.

WHO said that new cases in the Americas were up 39% to nearly 1.48 million, and the region had the second-highest infection rate with 144.4 new cases per 100,000 residents. The U.S. alone saw more than 1.18 million cases, a 34% increase.

Reported new cases in Africa were up 7% to nearly 275,000.

The agency said that "the overall risk related to the new variant ... omicron remains very high." It cited "consistent evidence" that it has a growth advantage over the delta variant, which remains dominant in parts of the world.

It noted that a decline in case incidence has been seen in South Africa, and that early data from that country, the U.K. and Denmark suggest a reduced risk of hospitalization with omicron. But it said that more data is needed "to understand the clinical markers of severity including the use of oxygen, mechanical ventilation and death, and how severity may be impacted by vaccination and/or prior ... infection."

WHO said that the number of newly reported deaths worldwide last week was down 4% to 44,680.

Follow all AP stories on the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Tutu's advocacy for LGBTQ rights did not sway most of Africa

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Desmond Tutu is being remembered for his passionate advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ people as well as his fight for racial justice. But the South African archbishop's campaign against homophobia had limited impact in the rest of Africa, where same-sex marriage remains illegal and most countries criminalize gay sex.

Even within his own denomination, the Anglican Communion, there has been no continentwide embrace of LGBTQ rights. Leaders of Ghana's Anglican Church, for example, have joined other religious leaders there in endorsing a bill that would impose prison sentences on people who identify as LGBTQ or support that community.

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Before Tutu died Sunday at age 90, most African religious leaders rejected his LGBTQ positions, and those who agreed with him often were cautious, said Kenya-based researcher Yvonne Wamari of Outright Action International, a global LGBTQ-rights organization.

"Most of them are unwilling to offer their contrary views due to fear of reprisal and backlash for not conforming with 'African values,'" Wamari said via email. "As long as the religious leaders are unwilling to interpret the Bible from the lens of love for all, as Tutu did, homophobia and transphobia will remain a part of our lives."

Homosexual activity remains outlawed in more than 30 of Africa's 54 countries; in a few, it is punishable by death. Many LGBTQ Africans are subject to stigma and abuse, facing unemployment, homelessness and estrangement from their families.

Stephen Brown, a professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Political Studies, described Tutu as "a moral giant" who held to his convictions — including support for LGBTQ people — no matter how risky or unpopular it could be.

For example, Tutu was mocked in 2013 by Robert Mugabe, then the repressive leader of Zimbabwe.

"Tutu should just step down because he supports gays, something that is evil," Mugabe told a political rally.

That same year, Tutu uttered one of his most memorable comments about LGBTQ inclusion.

"I would not worship a God who is homophobic," he said. "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say, 'Sorry, I would much rather go to the other place.'"

South Africa is the only African country that has legalized same-sex marriage, and its constitution protects against anti-LGBTQ discrimination. Yet even there, violence against LGBTQ people remains common.

In Cape Town, where Tutu was the Anglican archbishop, members of the LGBTQ community reacted to his death with tributes.

Throughout his life, Tutu stuck "to the ideas of promoting absolute love, absolute acceptance and absolute kindness, no matter who you are, no matter your sexuality or race," activist Saya Pierce-Jones said.

Daniel Jay, who works in the medical industry, said Tutu's support for LGBTQ people was pivotal in South Africa's decision to make HIV drugs available at no cost.

"I love him to bits," Jay said.

Beyond South Africa's borders, a few recent developments have encouraged LGBTQ-rights supporters.

— In Botswana, the Court of Appeal last month unanimously upheld a 2019 ruling that decriminalized consensual same-sex activities. Previously, gay sex was outlawed and offenders faced up to seven years in prison. A few other African countries also have decriminalized same-sex relationships in recent years, including Angola, Mozambique and the Seychelles.

— In Namibia, the LGBTQ community recently held its biggest Pride event — a weeklong celebration in Windhoek, the capital, that began Nov. 27. During the parade at the end of the week, some marchers urged repeal of a Namibian anti-sodomy law that remains on the books though is not enforced.

The winner of the 2021 Mr. Gay World pageant — Louw Breytenbach of South Africa — was the parade's grand marshal. He later posted a tribute to Tutu on Facebook: "RIP to one of the most amazing humans to ever walk this earth! A champion for human rights. A warrior for gay rights."

In many African countries, anti-LGBTQ violence is a persistent threat.

A prominent LGBTQ activist in Tunisia reported that two men, one in a police uniform, beat and kicked him during an assault in October they said was punishment for his attempts to file complaints against officers for previous mistreatment. The attack left Badr Baabou, president of the Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality, with extensive welts and bruises.

Last month, according to Human Rights Watch, a mob in Cameroon beat and sexually assaulted a 27-year-old intersex person. The perpetrators made videos of the prolonged attack that circulated on social media.

At the government level, Senegal and Ghana are under scrutiny from LGBTQ-rights supporters.

In Senegal, 13 opposition legislators recently introduced a bill to toughen penalties against homosexuality, doubling the maximum sentence to 10 years. Parliament members from the governing coalition say such a measure is unnecessary since homosexual acts are already illegal.

In Ghana, parliament members continue to work on a bill that has been condemned by LGBTQ-rights

supporters in the West African country and abroad. Among other things, the bill seeks to criminalize the promotion and funding of LGBTQ activities, and disseminating information about LGBTQ people.

Alex Kofi Donkor, director of LGBT+ Rights Ghana, expressed regret that relatively few African faith leaders shared Tutu's outlook.

"A lot of African preachers hold a lot of prejudice, hate and disgust for the LGBTQ community," he said.

Controversy over the Ghana bill has highlighted the challenges facing the global Anglican Communion, which has taken LGBTQ-friendly positions not embraced by many Anglican leaders in Africa.

In October, Justin Welby, the Church of England's archbishop of Canterbury and the symbolic head of Anglicans worldwide, said he was "gravely concerned" about the bill and would discuss the Anglican Church of Ghana's response to the bill with Ghana's archbishop.

He issued a statement reminding Ghana's Anglican leaders that the global body of Anglican leaders had committed itself to opposing anti-LGBTQ discrimination and the criminalization of same-sex activity.

But in mid-November, Welby apologized for failing to speak to the Ghanaian church before issuing his statement of concern.

"I have no authority over the Church of Ghana, nor would I want any," he said.

A few days later, he issued another ambivalent statement, referring to ongoing "private conversations" that would become "useless or harmful" if made public.

The Rev. Susan Russell, who is on the staff of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, recalled a visit by Tutu to the church in 2005, shortly after the Episcopal Church's ordination of its first openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, touched off a controversy that still roils the Anglican Communion.

She recalled that Tutu talked about how all people are embraced by God, regardless of gender or race — and when he also included gays and lesbians in that list, "there really was an audible gasp in the room of amazement and relief and delight."

"When you're struggling on the margins, and the powers seem to be galvanizing against you, and you have Desmond Tutu on your side, almost anything seems possible," she said.

Associated Press writers Sylvia Hui in London; Farai Mutsaka in Harare, Zimbabwe; Wesley Fester in Cape Town, South Africa; Francis Kokutse in Accra, Ghana; Kwasi Asiedu in New York and Peter Smith in Pittsburgh contributed to this report.

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Harry Reid remembered as a fighter, skilled Senate dealmaker

By LAURIE KELLMAN and KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — He was an accomplished amateur boxer who'd rather dance. But Harry Reid was fond of reminding his opponents that he knew how to fight, too.

That skill took him far — from poverty in Searchlight, Nevada, to the pinnacle of the U.S. Senate.

"I don't have people saying 'he's the greatest speaker,' 'he's handsome,' 'he's a man about town,'" Reid told The New York Times in 2010 after a hard-fought reelection victory. "But I don't really care. I feel very comfortable with my place in history."

Reid, who died Tuesday at 82 after a four-year battle with pancreatic cancer, was one of Congress' most skilled negotiators, thriving on the behind-the-scenes wrangling that frustrated many of his predecessors. As majority leader from 2007 to 2015, he kept the Senate in Democratic hands through a volatile era of polarizing health care and economic policy, recession and war, and with a Republican and then a Democratic president.

"If Harry said he would do something, he did it," President Joe Biden said in a statement after the death of his longtime Senate colleague. "If he gave you his word, you could bank on it. That's how he got things done for the good of the country for decades."

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Not a showman, Reid sometimes got in his own way on the national political stage. He once called President George W. Bush a "loser," criticized Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan as a "political hack" and misstated the condition of ailing Democratic Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who was then dying of brain cancer. He apologized to President Barack Obama for calling him "light-skinned" and having "no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one."

Reid made an unproven political claim he refused to retract. During the 2012 presidential election he said on the Senate floor that GOP candidate and fellow Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints member Mitt Romney had not paid taxes for a decade. Romney denied that, and fact-checkers at the time found no evidence to support Reid's claim.

He was frequently underestimated. In his 2010 bid for reelection he looked like the underdog to tea party favorite Sharron Angle. Ambitious Democrats, assuming his defeat, began angling for his leadership post. But Reid defeated Angle, 50% to 45%.

Reid reluctantly retired rather than seek reelection in 2016 after an accident while he was exercising left him blind in one eye. His life after public office included a fellowship at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, law school and a role leading a new think tank at the school with former House Speaker John Boehner. The Ohio Republican and former congressional rival remembered Reid on Tuesday as "a fighter until the end."

Former President Bill Clinton, in a statement, called Reid "a canny and tough negotiator who was never afraid to make an unpopular decision if it meant getting something done that was right for the country." Obama released a letter he sent recently to Reid telling the ailing Democrat that "I wouldn't have been president if it hadn't been for your encouragement and support."

Reid was born Dec. 2, 1939, the son of an alcoholic hard-rock miner who killed himself at 58 and a mother who served as a laundress in a bordello. He grew up in a small cabin without indoor plumbing and swam with other children at a local brothel.

He hitchhiked to Basic High School in Henderson, 40 miles from his Searchlight home, where he met the woman he would marry, Landra Gould, in 1959; she and their five children survive him. At Utah State University, the couple became members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He put himself through George Washington University law school by working nights as a U.S. Capitol police officer.

At age 28, Reid was elected to the Nevada Assembly and at age 30 became the youngest lieutenant governor in Nevada history as Gov. Mike O'Callaghan's running mate in 1970. Elected to the U.S. House in 1982 and 1984 and to the U.S. Senate from 1986, Reid served in Congress longer than anyone else in Nevada history. In 1998 he held off Republican Rep. John Ensign by 428 votes after a recount that stretched into January.

After his election as Senate majority leader in 2007, Reid was credited with putting Nevada on the political map by pushing to move the state's caucuses to February, at the start of presidential nominating season. That forced each national party to pour resources into a state which, while home to the country's fastest growth over the past two decades, still only had six votes in the Electoral College.

Reid's extensive network of campaign workers and volunteers twice helped deliver the state for Obama.

The most influential politician in Nevada for more than a decade, Reid steered hundreds of millions of dollars to the state and was credited with single-handedly blocking construction of a nuclear waste storage facility at Yucca Mountain outside Las Vegas.

He often went out of his way to defend social programs, calling Social Security "one of the great government programs in history" and championing suicide prevention with the story of his own father. He stirred controversy in 2010 when he said in a speech on the floor of the Nevada legislature it was time to end legal prostitution in the state.

Reid's political moderation meant he was never politically secure in his home state or entirely trusted in the increasingly polarized Senate. Democrats grumbled about his votes for the Iraq war resolution in 2002, for a ban on so-called partial-birth abortion and against resolutions endorsing Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

He also voted against most gun-control bills and in 2013, after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, dropped a proposed ban on assault weapons from the Democrats' gun control legislation. The

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package, he said, would not pass with the ban attached.

Reid's Senate particularly chafed members of the House, both Republicans and Democrats. When Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi muscled Obama's health care overhaul through the House in 2009, a different version passed the Senate and the reconciliation process floundered long enough for Republicans to turn it into an election-year weapon to demonize Pelosi and cast the legislation as a big-government power grab.

Obama signed the measure into law in March 2010. But angered by the Great Recession and inspired by the small-government tea party, voters swept Democrats from the House majority.

Reid hand-picked a Democratic candidate, former Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto, who won the election to replace him in 2016. He built a political machine in the state that helped Democrats win a series of key elections in 2016 and 2018.

On his way out of office, he repeatedly lambasted President Donald Trump, calling him at one point "a sociopath" and "a sexual predator who lost the popular vote and fueled his campaign with bigotry and hate."

Reid brushed off verbal tussles with the seen-it-all calm of a political veteran. After all, he had faced one of those before he ever got to Washington. As head of the Nevada Gaming Commission investigating organized crime, Reid became the target of a car bomb in 1980. Police called it an attempted homicide. Reid blamed Jack Gordon, who went to prison for trying to bribe him in a sting operation over illegal efforts to bring new games to casinos in 1978.

An accomplished amateur boxer in his teens, Reid often was seen ringside at title fights in Las Vegas. He said meeting Muhammad Ali was one of his greatest thrills. He also was a big baseball fan and could recite details about the careers of individual players.

His Mormon faith meant Reid sometimes sided with Nevada's social conservatives. Besides defending gun rights and opposing abortion, he said he believed marriage should be between a man and a woman but that states should decide whether it's legal for same-sex couples to marry.

On the other hand, Reid enjoyed strong support from environmentalists on most issues, earning praise for turning Nevada from one of the states with the least federally protected wilderness to one of the most during his tenure in the Senate.

Legislation he authored in 1986 established Nevada's first and only national park, Great Basin National Park on the Utah line. Reid also pushed Obama to create Basin and Range and Gold Butte national monuments in 2015 and 2016, protecting about 1 million acres of rugged desert, mountains and valleys.

In 1997, he persuaded Clinton and Vice President Al Gore to host an environmental summit at Lake Tahoe. Two decades later, he persuaded Obama to make a similar visit. Obama praised Reid's environmental efforts at the time and declared, "I could not have accomplished what I accomplished without him being at my side."

Reid waged an ongoing battle against the coal industry and promoted renewable energy but frustrated conservationists by fending off federal mining law reforms opposed by his allies in Nevada's gold mining industry.

Following Reid's lengthy farewell address on the Senate floor in 2016, his Nevada colleague Republican Dean Heller declared: "It's been said that it's better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both. And as me and my colleagues here today and those in the gallery probably agree with me, no individual in American politics embodies that sentiment today more than my colleague from Nevada, Harry Mason Reid."

Kellman, an Associated Press writer in Jerusalem, covered Congress during Reid's time as Senate majority leader. AP writers Michelle L. Price in New York and Scott Sonner in Reno, Nevada, contributed to this report.

Asia keeps omicron at bay, but a surge may be inevitable

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

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TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Much of Asia has largely managed to keep omicron at bay even as the variant rages in other parts of the world, but the region that is home to most of the globe's population is bracing for what may be an inevitable surge.

Strict quarantine rules for arrivals and widespread mask wearing have helped slow the spread of the highly contagious variant in Asia. Countries such as Japan, South Korea and Thailand quickly reinstated entry and quarantine restrictions in recent weeks after relaxing them in the fall.

But cases are mounting, and experts say the next few months will be critical. Those fears have been amplified by doubts about the effectiveness of the Chinese-made vaccines used in China and much of the developing world.

"Once the pace picks up, its upsurge would be extremely fast," said Dr. Shigeru Omi, a top medical adviser to Japan's government.

In India, which has been getting back to normal after a devastating COVID-19 outbreak earlier this year, omicron is once again raising fears, with more than 700 cases reported in the country of nearly 1.4 billion people.

The capital, New Delhi, banned large gatherings for Christmas and New Year's, and many other states have announced new restrictions, including curfews and vaccination requirements at stores and restaurants.

At the crowded Chandni Chowk market in New Delhi, many people were shopping without masks this week. Cycle rickshaw driver Mahesh Kumar said he is afraid of passengers who don't wear masks.

"There are many people who don't believe in this disease. They think it doesn't exist. But I am very scared. I have children and a family," he said. "If something happens to me, who will take care of them?"

Australia is already dealing with multiple COVID-19 surges, with a state leader saying Wednesday that "omicron is moving too quickly." Elsewhere, Thailand has topped 700 cases, South Korea has more than 500 and Japan, over 300. China, which has some of the strictest virus controls in the world, has reported at least eight.

Only four cases have been reported in the Philippines, where people flocked to shopping malls ahead of Christmas and to Mass in the biggest Roman Catholic nation in Asia. Some hospitals have even begun dismantling COVID-19 wards in a move experts say could prove to be premature.

Japan managed to delay the spread of the new variant for about a month largely thanks to its reimposition of entry restrictions, mandatory COVID-19 tests for all arrivals and the isolation of all passengers on a flight if anyone tested positive for omicron.

But the barrier was broken last week when the first locally transmitted cases were confirmed in the neighboring cities of Osaka and Kyoto. Experts are urging the government to prepare for an imminent wave of infections by increasing testing, speeding up booster shots and preparing more beds at hospitals.

"We want to believe the omicron cases could be mild, but its fast-paced infections could quickly multiply the number of patients and could still overwhelm hospitals," Omi said.

Taiwan, where wearing a face mask is near universal in major cities, has started to offer booster shots of the Moderna vaccine and is urging people get a third shot before an expected influx of people returning home for Lunar New Year at the end of January.

Preliminary research has shown that booster shots of the Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines offer continued, though diminished, protection against omicron.

However, a Hong Kong University study that has yet to be published found that China's widely used Sinovac vaccine does not generate enough antibodies to protect against omicron, even with a booster shot, according to a university news release. Hong Kong offers both the Sinovac and Pfizer vaccines.

Sinovac did not respond to a request for comment. Chinese officials have said their vaccines are still effective.

"Our inactivated vaccines are still rather reliable and cover a range of antigens. Therefore, they won't be completely ineffective against omicron," Zhong Nanshan, a top government doctor, said at a public forum.

Some countries that relied on the Chinese vaccines are turning to others for boosters.

Thailand, which largely used Sinovac and Sinopharm, another Chinese vaccine, is offering booster shots of AstraZeneca or Pfizer. Indonesia, where Sinovac has been the mainstay of a campaign to vaccinate its

270 million residents, is offering a Moderna booster for health care workers. The government is also planning boosters for the general population in January, though it hasn't said which vaccine.

China's attitude toward the virus, omicron or not, is to stop transmission in its tracks, and the country appears to be getting even tougher with the approach of the Beijing Winter Olympics in February.

Officials locked down the city of Xi'an, a city and administrative area of 13 million people last week, amid a delta outbreak that has infected hundreds of people. On Monday, they ordered everyone to stay at home until another citywide round of testing was completed.

Residents complained on social media about the sudden ban. Many were relying on instant noodles and other packaged food. Some worried how they would get enough food in the coming days, especially fresh vegetables.

China quarantines those arriving from abroad for weeks, depending on the province, with three weeks being the most common.

How China's zero-COVID-19 policy will play out at the Olympics is a major question. Athletes and visitors will not be allowed to leave the Olympic zones, and those attending such as officials, journalists and venue staff will be tested every day.

To contain a deadly delta-driven surge in South Korea, the government this month restored its toughest distancing rules with a four-person limit on private gatherings and a 9 p.m. curfew on restaurants.

Health experts predict it's only a matter of time before omicron comes.

"Omicron has such a high transmission rate that it's too obvious that it'll become the dominant variant in South Korea at some point," said Jaehun Jung, a professor at Gachon University College of Medicine in South Korea.

Associated Press staffers Busaba Sivasomboon in Bangkok, Thailand, Jim Gomez in the Philippines, Edna Tarigan in Jakarta, Indonesia, Krutika Pathi and Rishabh Jain in New Delhi, Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea, Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo, Japan and Olivia Zhang in Beijing contributed to this report.

Mom: 14-year-old shot by LA police 'died in my arms'

By STEFANIE DAZIO, CHRISTOPHER WEBER and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A 14-year-old was shopping for Christmas clothes last week with her mother when the pair heard screams and hid in a dressing room, where the girl was fatally shot by Los Angeles police after an officer fired a rifle at a suspect and a bullet pierced a wall, the family said Tuesday.

Valentina Orellana-Peralta died in her mother's arms last Thursday at a Burlington store in the San Fernando Valley's North Hollywood neighborhood. Her family said the teen loved skateboarding and had dreams of becoming an engineer to build robots.

After screams broke out in the store the day before Christmas Eve, the teenager locked the dressing room door.

"We sat down on a seat, holding each other, praying, when something hit my daughter, Valentina, and threw us to the floor," Soledad Peralta said Tuesday. "And my daughter died in my arms. I couldn't do anything."

The teen's family stood outside Los Angeles Police Department headquarters on Tuesday, next to a large photo of Orellana-Peralta wreathed in flowers, to call for justice and remember their daughter.

Speaking in Spanish and choking back tears as sirens wailed in the background in downtown LA, they said they had left Chile to get away from violence and injustice in search of a better life in the U.S.

The LAPD on Monday posted an edited video package online that included 911 calls, radio transmissions, body camera footage and surveillance video from the Thursday shooting at a store crowded with holiday shoppers. The department's policy is to release video from critical incidents, such as police shootings, within 45 days.

The family's attorneys — including civil rights lawyer Ben Crump — have sent a letter to the LAPD asking for more video.

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Surveillance video showed the suspect attacking two women, including one who fell to the floor before he dragged her by her feet through the store's aisles as she tried to crawl away.

Multiple people including store employees called police to report a man striking customers with a bike lock. One caller told a 911 dispatcher that the man had a gun. No firearm — only the bike lock — was recovered at the scene.

The early surveillance footage showed a man carrying a bicycle up the store's escalator to the second floor, where he wandered around, seemingly disoriented, clutching a cable-style bike lock. At times he stood motionless, staring into the distance.

The footage later showed the man on the down escalator attacking a woman, who managed to escape his grip and run out of the store.

The man then left the store for a minute and a half, police said. After he returned, according to the video, he repeatedly beat a woman with a bike lock while she cowered on the floor. As she tried to escape, he dragged her through the aisle toward the dressing rooms.

In bodycam video, armed officers entered the store and approached the suspect. One held a rifle and pushed to the front of the pack as the officers went through the store in formation.

Other officers repeatedly said "slow down" and "slow it down" as the officer with the rifle moves forward. "She's bleeding!" an officer shouted as they encountered the victim, crawling on the blood-stained floor. The suspect was on the other side of the aisle.

"Hold up! Hold up!" another officer screamed just before three shots rang out.

The officer holding the rifle fired, police said.

The 24-year-old suspect, Daniel Elena Lopez, died at the scene. Soledad Peralta's screams can be heard in the video.

"At this preliminary phase of the investigation, it is believed that the victim was struck by one of the rounds fired by an officer at the suspect," police Capt. Stacy Spell said in the posted video. Police believe the bullet skipped off the floor and struck the dressing room wall.

The California Department of Justice is also investigating.

"We at the LAPD would like to express our most heartfelt condolences and profound regret for the loss of this innocent victim, Valentina Orellana-Peralta. There are no words that can describe the depth of the sorrow we feel at this tragic outcome," Spell said in the video.

LAPD officers have shot 38 people — 18 of them fatally, including the shooting Sunday of a man with a knife — in 2021, according to the Los Angeles Times. Those figures mark a dramatic rise in cases where officers shot or killed people in either of the last two years.

Mourners left flowers and a votive candle outside the store on Christmas in a memorial for Orellana-Peralta. Her family said she earned good grades, even though English was her second language and she'd only been in the U.S. for about six months.

Her father, Juan Pablo Orellana Larenas, already had purchased tickets to relocate to the U.S. when he learned of his daughter's death. They were planning to go to an NBA basketball game — she was a fan of star LeBron James — and see a favorite band perform, he said.

"That's very sad and very tragic," James told The Associated Press after Tuesday's Los Angeles Lakers game against the Houston Rockets. "Any time a family loses a loved one in such an incident like that, you can only just grieve with them and feel the sincerity of it, and just pray that no kid should ever, ever, have to lose their life over such an act like that."

"There's definitely a life gone too soon," he said, describing her as an angel now looking over her family. "I wish them nothing but comfort throughout these difficult times. And to know that she was a fan of mine, hopefully I'm still making her proud as she looks over me as well."

Outside LAPD headquarters, Orellana Larenas held up a brand-new skateboard, still in its plastic wrapping, that his daughter had ordered online. It was delivered after she died.

The family plans to leave the skateboard at her grave "so that she can skate with the angels," her father said.

The Times reported that Elena Lopez's previous criminal history includes convictions for car theft, carrying a loaded gun in public and carrying a gun as a felon. Authorities would not release his history in the state prison system, citing the ongoing investigation.

The woman who was assaulted had moderate to serious injuries, including wounds to her head, arms and face. She has not been named publicly.

LAPD officers also killed a bystander in 2018, during a gunfight with a suspect at a Trader Joe's market. Police fatally shot Melyda Corado, 27, the assistant store manager, as she ran toward the store's entrance. Prosecutors found two police officers acted lawfully when they returned the suspect's gunfire.

Lee reported from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Associated Press journalist Kristie Rieken contributed from Houston.

Police: Gunman in Denver who killed 5 targeted some victims

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A gunman who went on a shooting rampage in several locations around the Denver area, killing five people and wounding two, targeted his victims based on previous personal and business dealings, authorities said.

Lyndon James McLeod, 47, was also killed Monday night after he shot a police officer who confronted him in a busy shopping district in the Denver suburb of Lakewood. The officer managed to fire back at McLeod, killing him, Lakewood police spokesperson John Romero said Tuesday.

Matt Clark, commander of the Denver Police Department's Major Crimes Division, said the gunman knew most of his victims but not the last person he shot — a clerk in a hotel in Lakewood's Belmar shopping area. Sarah Steck, 28, who died of her injuries Tuesday, was apparently targeted because of a dispute with the hotel, not with her, Clark said.

McLeod once owned a business in Denver called Flat Black Ink Corp. at an address that is now World Tattoo Studio, according to records from the Colorado Secretary of State's Office. A man who answered the phone at World Tattoo Studio hung up after he was asked about McLeod on Tuesday evening.

The first shooting took place at a tattoo shop less than a mile (1.6 kilometers) from that address. Four of the victims, including three who died, were shot at two tattoo shops in the Denver area.

Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen said during a news conference that McLeod was on the radar of law enforcement and had been investigated in both 2020 and 2021. He declined to say what McLeod was investigated for but said charges were not filed against him.

The shootings started around 5:30 p.m. in central Denver along Broadway, a busy street lined with shops, bars and restaurants, where two women were killed and a man was injured but expected to survive, police said. Soon after, McLeod forced his way into a home that also housed a business nearby, pursued the occupants through the building and fired shots, but no one was injured, Clark said. Then a man was shot and killed in a home near Denver's Cheesman Park, he said.

Later, Denver police chased the vehicle believed to have been involved in the shootings, and an officer exchanged gunfire with McLeod, Clark said. McLeod was able to get away, fleeing into Lakewood, after gunfire disabled the officer's cruiser, he said.

Just before 6 p.m., the Lakewood Police Department received a report of shots fired at the Lucky 13 tattoo shop. Danny Schofield, 38, was killed there, Romero said.

When officers spotted the car suspected of being involved in the shooting at the Belmar shopping area — where shops line sidewalks in a modern version of a downtown — McLeod opened fire and officers shot back, Romero said. He ran away and allegedly threatened some people in a restaurant with a gun before going to the Hyatt House hotel, where he spoke briefly with Steck, the clerk, before shooting her, he said.

About a minute later, the Lakewood police officer saw McLeod and ordered him to drop his weapon. She was shot in the abdomen but fired back at him, Romero said.

The wounded officer, whose name has not been released, underwent surgery Monday night. She is

expected to make a full recovery.

Family members identified one of the other victims Tuesday as Alicia Cardenas, 44, the owner of the Sol Tribe tattoo shop, where the first shooting happened.

Alfredo Cardenas told KMGH-TV that his only daughter owned her first tattoo shop when she was 19 and had worked in the Broadway location in Denver for 15 to 20 years.

"Very gregarious, very friendly, but she was a very determined person," he said. "She knew where she was going."

Alicia Cardenas is survived by her 12-year-old, Alfredo Cardenas said.

On Tuesday, candles, flower bouquets and some containers of fruit rested in the doorway of Cardenas' shop as people, including her fiance, Daniel Clelland, stopped by to remember a woman they said cared for so many.

"I don't know why someone would do this," Clelland said.

Associated Press photographer David Zalubowski and writer Thomas Peipert contributed to this report.

Decades of DOD efforts fail to stamp out bias, extremism

By KAT STAFFORD and JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

In February, with the images of the violent insurrection in Washington still fresh in the minds of Americans, newly confirmed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin took the unprecedented step of signing a memo directing commanding officers across the military to institute a one-day stand-down to address extremism within the nation's armed forces.

The stand-down came in response to the participation and the subsequent arrests of several veterans and at least one active duty service member, who along with thousands of supporters of former President Donald Trump on Jan. 6, stormed the U.S. Capitol in a melee that sent lawmakers scrambling for safety, left one person fatally shot by Capitol Police and caused millions of dollars in damages to the building largely seen as the symbol of American democracy.

Austin's order, which also came as America as a whole was grappling with how to address systemic racism, was the latest in a series of decades-long efforts by the military to purge its ranks of extremists and white supremacists. Last week, in response to the order the military issued new rules to deal with extremism that included social media usage policy updates where liking and reposting white nationalist and extremist content could result in disciplinary action. The DOD also updated its screening of recruits and is looking at how to prepare troops who are retiring from being targeted by extremist organizations.

But an AP investigation found that despite the new rules, racism and extremism remain an ongoing concern in the military.

The investigation shows the new guidelines do not address ongoing disparities in military justice under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the legal code that governs the U.S. armed forces. Numerous studies, including a report last year from the Government Accountability Office, show Black and Hispanic service members were disproportionately investigated and court-martialed. A recent Naval Postgraduate School study found that Black Marines were convicted and punished at courts-martial at a rate five times higher than other races across the Marine Corps.

The AP investigation also shows the military's judicial system has no explicit category for bias-motivated crimes – something the federal government, at least 46 states, and the District of Columbia have on the books – making it difficult to quantify crimes prompted by prejudice.

As a result, investigative agencies such as the Naval Criminal Investigative Service or Army Criminal Investigative Division also don't have a specific hate crime category, which impacts how they investigate cases.

"While it's possible hate crimes have occurred, our investigations are not titled as such," the NCIS said in an email. "For example, an assault on a person, regardless of the reason for the assault, would still be categorized as an assault...regardless of what motivated the crime."

The new National Defense Authorization Act signed into law by President Biden on Monday directs the

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Secretary of Defense to make a recommendation to Congress within 180 days if a new statute is needed to address violent extremism, but does not address hate crimes or racial disparities in military law.

The new Pentagon rules do not outright ban service members from being members of extremist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, Oath Keepers, or other right-wing and white nationalist groups. The regulations, like the previous ones, only prohibit "active participation," in such groups, a murky policy that civil rights organizations have raised concerns about for years. The military describes active participation as "publicly demonstrating or rallying, fundraising, recruiting and training members," as well as organizing or leading organizations.

Experts interviewed by the AP say there's also ongoing concern over the military commander's ability to enact a wide range of administrative and disciplinary actions -- including administrative separation or appropriate criminal action -- against military personnel who engage in prohibited activities.

Commanders essentially have total discretion to determine how to address situations as they arise, which experts say has created non-uniform, scattershot enforcement, with some commanders establishing a no-tolerance approach and others employing weak enforcement of the rules.

The AP investigation also found that while the DOD says it considers racism and extremism within the military to be a "security concern," it does not have funding that specifically supports efforts to address extremism. Instead, military officials said the Pentagon uses personnel vetting programs, training, and education programs, and the Insider Threat Program to "positively contribute to countering extremism within the force."

The Pentagon did not respond to questions about how much money it has spent or budgeted for efforts solely related to diversity and inclusion, and how many employees are dedicated to it. Officials also did not respond to dozens of questions from the AP on how it plans to enforce its new guidelines on extremism.

Pentagon Spokesperson Maj. César Santiago acknowledged in a statement to the AP that extremism and extremist ideology can have an outsized effect on the military force.

But he added: "The vast majority of the women and men in uniform serve their nation with honor and integrity." He said since taking office in January, Secretary Llyod Austin, the first African American to serve as Secretary of Defense, has taken immediate action to address extremism. In addition to the new guidelines on extremism, the Defense Department appointed an interim deputy inspector general for diversity and inclusion and military insider threats in April.

Susan Corke, the director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project, commended the DOD for taking key steps this year, including the changes announced last week, to address extremism. She said the DOD sought the expertise of civil rights organizations, academics, and others who have sounded the alarm about the dangers of extremism in the ranks for years.

But Corke said it's too soon to definitively say whether the updated policies will purge extremism from military ranks.

"The devil will be in the details," she said. "I do appreciate that there is a commitment from the Defense Department to have much more consultation with outside partners and that there's much more focus on doing additional research. So, we're going to hold their feet to the fire."

Corke said the SPLC is still pressing for additional reforms, including how the military's command structure allows commanders to have virtually absolute command authority over subordinates, which might discourage members from reporting incidents or concerns of extremism.

Even some in the military agree that the armed forces need to do more. "There needs to be a change in action and behaviors -- elements that can't be so easily influenced by a change in military law," said Maj. Tyrone Collier, a judge advocate in the Marine Corps Reserve, in an interview with the AP.

"Even if some legislation is passed from the highest echelons of government that says you will do this and that, will it actually get done?" Collier said.

DECADES OF REPEATED WARNINGS

Extremism and racism in the military are hardly new. Racist attitudes and discrimination against people of color in the military were official policies before President Harry Truman, on July 26, 1948, signed Ex-

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Executive Order 9981, which officially desegregated the armed forces. Still, many units remained segregated until late 1954.

In the 1960s, Black soldiers in Vietnam filed numerous complaints with the Pentagon about white soldiers flying Confederate flags. Following the death of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, white U.S. service members based at the Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam naval base, celebrated his death by parading around the base in Ku Klux Klan-style white sheets and hoisted a Confederate flag atop the headquarters building, according to the 1997 book "Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War."

In the 1970s, extremism in the military gained national attention when the Ku Klux Klan was found to be operating openly at Camp Pendleton, a U.S. Marine Corps base in southern California. White Marine klansmen openly distributed racist literature on the base, pasted KKK stickers on barracks doors, and hid illegal weapons in their rooms. The hate group's presence on the base came to light in 1976 when 14 Black Marines were charged with assault when they broke into the wrong room and attempted to break up what they thought was a party of klansmen.

In June of 1986, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Klanwatch Project issued one of the first of many warnings to the DOD about white supremacists in its ranks and urged then-Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger to bar active duty service members from belonging to Ku Klux Klan factions. The center at that time alleged it had evidence, including photos, of active-duty U.S. Marines who had participated in the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a North Carolina-based Klan faction that changed its name last year to the White Patriot Party.

"It is simply intolerable that members of the U.S. armed forces, sworn to uphold and defend the constitution of the United States, be allowed to hold membership in an organization which seeks to overthrow the federal government through violent means," the SPLC wrote.

The military responded by saying it found no evidence to support those allegations and while it strongly discouraged membership by military personnel in organizations "which have clear racist objectives, we also realize that our military personnel do not forfeit their constitutional rights under the First Amendment upon entry into the military service. Thus DoD does not prohibit personnel from joining such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan."

Weinberger did issue a directive instructing service members to "reject participation in white supremacy, neo-Nazi and other such groups which espouse or attempt to create overt discrimination."

But critics say the military's response fell short and failed to meet the moment by not instituting new, stricter policies.

In 1995, extremism in the military was thrust into the national spotlight again when three white Army paratroopers at Fort Bragg in North Carolina were arrested in the murder of a Black couple, Michael James and Jackie Burden, who they shot and killed in downtown Fayetteville. Two of the paratroopers, James Burmeister and Malcolm Wright, were sentenced to life in prison. Another 19 Fort Bragg soldiers were discharged for taking part in neo-Nazi activities.

Burmeister had made no attempts to hide his beliefs: Police found a Nazi flag over his bed and white supremacist pamphlets and instructions for making bombs in a room he rented off base. Earlier that year, Army veteran Timothy McVeigh, an anti-government extremist who earned a Bronze Star in Operation Desert Storm, parked a truck with a homemade bomb in front of a federal building in Oklahoma, killing 168 people, including 19 children.

The Pentagon, again, pledged after the slayings to address extremism within its ranks. Congressional leaders held hearings and the Army formed an extremism task force. But military leadership said the task force found minimal evidence of extremist activity in the Army.

"The SPLC has been writing to Defense Department officials about our concerns about white supremacy, white nationalism in the military since the mid-1980s," said Margaret Huang, the president and CEO of the Southern Poverty Law Center. "This has been an issue that we've talked about quite a number of times because it has been a significant problem in the U.S. military for many decades now."

A 2005 Defense Department report, "Screening for Potential Terrorists in the Enlisted Military Accessions

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Process," noted that the Pentagon has established numerous policies defining and restricting participation in extremist organizations. But it also found that "effectively, the military has a "don't ask, don't tell" policy pertaining to extremism."

"If individuals can perform satisfactorily, without making their extremist opinions overt through words or actions that violate policy, reflect poorly on the Armed Forces, or disrupt the effectiveness and order of their units, they are likely to be able to complete their contracts," the report read. "This reality demonstrates the balance the Armed Forces have achieved between screening for extremists while respecting privacy and preserving federally protected rights to freedom of speech, religion, and association."

In July 2009, civil rights organizations again wrote to the DOD. This time to then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates urging the Obama Administration to take appropriate measures to deal with extremists in the ranks. No sweeping action was taken.

The guidelines last week represent a major step on guidance for troops' social media usage. Retweeting or liking extremist content will now be viewed as advocating the content. The new rules do not provide a list of extremist organizations that troops should not actively participate in.

Retired Air Force Col. Don Christensen, who served as the chief prosecutor for the U.S. Air Force between 2010 and 2014, said the new policies are "loosely defined," and "lack guidance" in terms of what organizations service members should not interact with.

He also said that the new policies are unclear on how commanders would enforce the social media rules. "I understand this stuff is hard, but the like button means so many different things to different people. My main takeaway is this isn't going to be enforceable. There's a lot of subjectivity," Christensen said. "I also think they (the Defense Department) are naive to think it's a small number of service members who engage in extremist activity."

The DOD said it is commissioning a study to determine the extent of extremism in the military.

But in its report last week, the Pentagon said prohibited extremist activity among service members was rare.

"The military itself doesn't know the extent of the problem," said Mark Pitcavage, a senior research fellow at the Anti-Defamation League, who testified before Congress in February 2020 about the dangers of extremism within the military, one year before the insurrection.

Pitcavage told Congress in 2020 that the ADL had reported 72 suspected white supremacists to the various branches in a three-year span, including 38 in the Army, two in the Army National Guard, four in the Navy, 19 in the Marine Corps, two in the Air Force, and one in the Coast Guard, as well as six with an indeterminate service branch. The DOD said it found fewer than 100 military members who were involved in substantiated cases of extremist activity in the past year.

"There's no safe number of extremists in the military," Pitcavage said.

MORE CHANGES NEEDED

U.S. Rep. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democrat, was one of the many members of Congress trapped in the House Chamber gallery on Jan. 6. as chaos erupted when a mob of insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol.

As the mob breached the outer security perimeter and began banging on the gallery doors in an attempt to break down the makeshift barricades, Crow urged other members amid the pandemonium to remove their congressional lapel pins because he worried that if the mob had broken through the door, "they were going to try to kill members."

They were eventually rescued but Crow said a conversation from that day with a fellow Black Democratic congresswoman remains firm in his mind. He said the congresswoman thanked him for urging members to remove their pins in an effort to remain undetected by the mob but she told Crow that as a Black woman, she would have never been able to blend in, unlike her white counterparts.

"That was the first time in my life that I was on the receiving end of the violence of racism and white supremacy in our nation's history," Crow said in an AP interview earlier this year.

Crow, a former Army Ranger and Iraq War veteran, who is a member of Congress' House Armed Services Committee, introduced legislation last year called the Realizing Efforts for Military Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Act. It would require and create a more rigorous diversity training program for troops, contrac-

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tors, and civilian staff members at the Defense Department. The legislation was passed this month as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Crow said last week it's too soon to determine whether the Pentagon's policy updates are enough to weed out extremism, but he believes Austin is the right person to tackle the decades-long issue.

But Crow said he's planning to have conversations with the Pentagon about its updated policies, including the fact that members are still allowed to be members of extremist organizations as long as it isn't "active" participation.

"Membership in some of these groups does give me concern and it does potentially send the wrong message," Crow said. "The military is all about trust. It's all about making sure that you trust the person on your right and your left. Membership in some of these extreme organizations go right to the core of undermining that trust."

Experts on extremism say the military's efforts to address racism and white supremacy need to start before recruits actually join the various services. One key area: vetting recruit's social media posts.

The Pentagon said it has a robust screening procedure, including a fingerprint check and an FBI background check. Recruits are also screened for offensive, racist, or supremacist tattoos.

But it doesn't currently "have the capability to conduct social media screenings," DOD officials said in a statement.

During last week's press conference announcing the new guidelines on extremism Kirby also emphasized that the DOD does not screen service members' social media posts for extremist content: "There's no methodology in there. There's no ability for the Department of Defense to monitor the personal social media accounts of every member of the armed forces." He said when commanders are notified of problems through "various streams of reporting," they would be expected to speak to troops to determine whether further steps were needed.

Veteran groups and experts on hate groups said the military also needs to do more to address extremism in those separating from active duty. The modern white power movement was born out of the 1970s when disillusioned Vietnam War veterans began to be recruited by white power militia groups, according to research by Kathleen Belew, an assistant professor of History at the University of Chicago.

Under the new guidelines, the DOD said it would develop programs to prepare troops who are leaving the service from being targeted by extremist organizations. Numerous studies have shown that some veterans are much more likely to be targeted for recruitment in the white extremist fringe, compared to the civilian population, and they are disproportionately involved in acts of violence.

The most recent study, an October research brief by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, found that from 1990 through the first nine months of 2021, at least 458 criminal extremists with U.S. military backgrounds committed criminal acts that were motivated by their "political, economic, social, or religious goals."

That figure includes 118 individuals who are facing charges for their involvement in the Capitol insurrection. Of the 458 people, 83.6%, or 383, were no longer serving when they were arrested for committing extremist crimes.

"Overall, numerically, this is still a small but growing problem," said William Braniff, the director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism and a University of Maryland professor, during a Brookings Institute panel on extremism in the military earlier this month.

"It's a national security concern," Braniff said. "So, this is really creating a soft underbelly in American society. So, it's not just a numbers problem. I think this is a problem regarding American democracy. And it's a problem for which we have to put a preventative ecosystem in place now before the numbers do get more concerning."

EVERYDAY RACISM

Veterans like Reuben Keith Green said it's disheartening to see the military struggling decade after decade to deal with racism and extremism in its ranks.

Green, 64 and a retired Navy Lt. Cmdr., was part of generations of men in his family who joined the military. Both his father and grandfather served. But he grew disillusioned by the military and what he

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believed were broken promises that all servicemen and women were equal and would be treated the same regardless of race.

He said he endured and witnessed countless acts of racism through his time in the service from when he first enlisted on Valentine's Day in 1975 to when he left in the mid-'90s. Some fellow service members, he said, proudly displayed Confederate flags and expressed white supremacist views, with no retribution. Green wrote a book in 2017, "Black Officer, White Navy," that detailed his personal experiences. He's also penned several articles, demanding military accountability.

This year, he said he served as a guest speaker for a Pentagon program that was part of Secretary Lloyd Austin's extremism stand-down.

But Green said while the stand-down was a step in the right direction, he believes the military has yet to address the "everyday racism that is based on extremist views."

Green said he worries the policies released last week won't move the needle. He also questioned whether military officials will be able to uniformly enforce and establish "intent" behind a service member's decision to like or share extremist views and posts on social media.

"If my CO (commanding officer) is a member of the KKK, am I going to report discrimination or extremist behavior to him or her?" Green said.

He also noted that none of the policies specifically address acts of discrimination or racism that are not "violent" in nature but could still have disastrous impacts on unit cohesion and service members of color.

"The military has let this white supremacist, racist issue fester for so long," Green said. "They've been trying to hide the actual truth and now it's blowing up in their faces."

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org or <https://www.ap.org/tips/>

John Madden, Hall of Fame coach and broadcaster, dies at 85

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

John Madden, the Hall of Fame coach turned broadcaster whose exuberant calls combined with simple explanations provided a weekly soundtrack to NFL games for three decades, died Tuesday morning, the league said. He was 85.

The NFL said he died unexpectedly and did not detail a cause.

Madden gained fame in a decade-long stint as the coach of the renegade Oakland Raiders, making it to seven AFC title games and winning the Super Bowl following the 1976 season. He compiled a 103-32-7 regular-season record, and his .759 winning percentage is the best among NFL coaches with more than 100 games.

But it was his work after prematurely retiring as coach at age 42 that made Madden truly a household name. He educated a football nation with his use of the telestrator on broadcasts; entertained millions with his interjections of "Boom!" and "Doink!" throughout games; was an omnipresent pitchman selling restaurants, hardware stores and beer; became the face of "Madden NFL Football," one of the most successful sports video games of all-time; and was a best-selling author.

Most of all, he was the preeminent television sports analyst for most of his three decades calling games, winning an unprecedented 16 Emmy Awards for outstanding sports analyst/personality, and covering 11 Super Bowls for four networks from 1979-2009.

"People always ask, are you a coach or a broadcaster or a video game guy?" he said when was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. "I'm a coach, always been a coach."

He started his broadcasting career at CBS after leaving coaching in great part because of his fear of flying. He and Pat Summerall became the network's top announcing duo. Madden then helped give Fox credibility as a major network when he moved there in 1994, and went on to call prime-time games at ABC and NBC before retiring following Pittsburgh's thrilling 27-23 win over Arizona in the 2009 Super Bowl.

"I am not aware of anyone who has made a more meaningful impact on the National Football League than John Madden, and I know of no one who loved the game more," Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones

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said in a statement.

Burly and a little unkempt, Madden earned a place in America's heart with a likable, unpretentious style that was refreshing in a sports world of spiraling salaries and prima donna stars. He rode from game to game in his own bus because he suffered from claustrophobia and had stopped flying. For a time, Madden gave out a "turducken" — a chicken stuffed inside a duck stuffed inside a turkey — to the outstanding player in the Thanksgiving game that he called.

"Nobody loved football more than Coach. He was football," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "He was an incredible sounding board to me and so many others. There will never be another John Madden, and we will forever be indebted to him for all he did to make football and the NFL what it is today."

When he finally retired from the broadcast booth, leaving NBC's "Sunday Night Football," colleagues universally praised Madden's passion for the sport, his preparation, and his ability to explain an often-complicated game in down-to-earth terms.

Al Michaels, Madden's broadcast partner for seven years on ABC and NBC, said working with him "was like hitting the lottery."

"He was so much more than just football — a keen observer of everything around him and a man who could carry on a smart conversation about hundreds and hundreds of topics. The term 'Renaissance Man' is tossed around a little too loosely these days, but John was as close as you can come," Michaels said.

For anyone who heard Madden exclaim "Boom!" while breaking down a play, his love of the game was obvious.

"For me, TV is really an extension of coaching," Madden wrote in "Hey, Wait a Minute! (I Wrote a Book!)."

"My knowledge of football has come from coaching. And on TV, all I'm trying to do is pass on some of that knowledge to viewers."

Madden was raised in Daly City, California. He played on both the offensive and defensive lines for Cal Poly in 1957-58 and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the school.

Madden was chosen to the all-conference team and was drafted by the Philadelphia Eagles, but a knee injury ended his hopes of a pro playing career. Instead, Madden got into coaching, first at Hancock Junior College and then as defensive coordinator at San Diego State.

Al Davis brought him to the Raiders as a linebackers coach in 1967, and Oakland went to the Super Bowl in his first year in the pros. He replaced John Rauch as head coach after the 1968 season at age 32, beginning a remarkable 10-year run.

With his demonstrative demeanor on the sideline and disheveled look, Madden was the ideal coach for the collection of castoffs and misfits that made up those Raiders teams.

"Sometimes guys were disciplinarians in things that didn't make any difference. I was a disciplinarian in jumping offsides; I hated that," Madden once said. "Being in bad position and missing tackles, those things. I wasn't, 'Your hair has to be combed.'"

The Raiders responded.

"I always thought his strong suit was his style of coaching," quarterback Ken Stabler once said. "John just had a great knack for letting us be what we wanted to be, on the field and off the field. ... How do you repay him for being that way? You win for him."

And boy, did they ever. Many years, the only problem was the playoffs.

Madden went 12-1-1 in his first season, losing the AFL title game 17-7 to Kansas City. That pattern repeated itself during his tenure; the Raiders won the division title in seven of his first eight seasons, but went 1-6 in conference title games during that span.

Still, Madden's Raiders played in some of the sport's most memorable games of the 1970s, games that helped change rules in the NFL. There was the "Holy Roller" in 1978, when Stabler purposely fumbled forward before being sacked on the final play. The ball rolled and was batted to the end zone before Dave Casper recovered it for the winning touchdown against San Diego.

The most famous of those games went against the Raiders in the 1972 playoffs at Pittsburgh. With the

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Raiders leading 7-6 and 22 seconds left, the Steelers had a fourth-and-10 from their 40. Terry Bradshaw's desperation pass deflected off either Oakland's Jack Tatum or Pittsburgh's Frenchy Fuqua to Franco Harris, who caught it at his shoe tops and ran in for a TD.

In those days, a pass that bounced off an offensive player directly to a teammate was illegal, and the debate continues to this day over which player it hit. The catch, of course, was dubbed the "Immaculate Reception."

Oakland finally broke through with a loaded team in 1976 that had Stabler at quarterback; Fred Biletnikoff and Cliff Branch at receiver; tight end Dave Casper; Hall of Fame offensive linemen Gene Upshaw and Art Shell; and a defense that included Willie Brown, Ted Hendricks, Tatum, John Matuszak, Otis Sistrunk and George Atkinson.

The Raiders went 13-1, losing only a blowout at New England in Week 4. They paid the Patriots back with a 24-21 win in their first playoff game and got over the AFC title game hump with a 24-7 win over the hated Steelers, who were crippled by injuries.

Oakland won it all with a 32-14 Super Bowl romp against Minnesota.

"Players loved playing for him," Shell said. "He made it fun for us in camp and fun for us in the regular season. All he asked is that we be on time and play like hell when it was time to play."

Madden battled an ulcer the following season, when the Raiders once again lost in the AFC title game. He retired from coaching at age 42 after a 9-7 season in 1978.

Madden was a longtime resident of Pleasanton, California, a Bay Area suburb. A 90-minute documentary on his coaching and broadcasting career, "All Madden," debuted on Fox on Christmas Day. The film featured extensive interviews that Madden sat for this year. His wife, Virginia, and sons Joseph and Michael were also interviewed for the documentary.

John and Virginia Madden's 62nd wedding anniversary was two days before his death.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and <https://apnews.com/hub/pro-32> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Police: Gunman in Denver who killed 5 targeted some victims

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A gunman who went on a shooting rampage in several locations around the Denver area, killing five people and wounding two, targeted his victims based on previous personal and business dealings, authorities said Tuesday.

Lyndon James McLeod, 47, was also killed Monday night after he shot a police officer who confronted him in a busy shopping district in the Denver suburb of Lakewood. The officer managed to fire back at McLeod, killing him, Lakewood police spokesperson John Romero said.

Matt Clark, commander of the Denver Police Department's Major Crimes Division, said the gunman knew most of his victims but not the last person he shot — a clerk in a hotel in Lakewood's Belmar shopping area. Sarah Steck, 28, who died of her injuries Tuesday, was apparently targeted because of a dispute with the hotel, not with her, Clark said.

McLeod once owned a business in Denver called Flat Black Ink Corp. at an address that is now World Tattoo Studio, according to records from the Colorado Secretary of State's Office. A man who answered the phone at World Tattoo Studio hung up after he was asked about McLeod on Tuesday evening.

The first shooting took place at a tattoo shop less than a mile (1.6 kilometers) from that address. Four of the victims, including three who died, were shot at two tattoo shops in the Denver area.

Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen said during a news conference that McLeod was on the radar of law enforcement and had been investigated in both 2020 and 2021. He declined to say what McLeod was investigated for but said charges were not filed against him.

The shootings started around 5:30 p.m. in central Denver along Broadway, a busy street lined with shops, bars and restaurants, where two women were killed and a man was injured but expected to survive,

police said. Soon after, McLeod forced his way into a home that also housed a business nearby, pursued the occupants through the building and fired shots, but no one was injured, Clark said. Then a man was shot and killed in a home near Denver's Cheesman Park, he said.

Later, Denver police chased the vehicle believed to have been involved in the shootings, and an officer exchanged gunfire with McLeod, Clark said. McLeod was able to get away, fleeing into Lakewood, after gunfire disabled the officer's cruiser, he said.

Just before 6 p.m., the Lakewood Police Department received a report of shots fired at the Lucky 13 tattoo shop. Danny Schofield, 38, was killed there, Romero said.

When officers spotted the car suspected of being involved in the shooting at the Belmar shopping area — where shops line sidewalks in a modern version of a downtown — McLeod opened fire and officers shot back, Romero said. He ran away and allegedly threatened some people in a restaurant with a gun before going to the Hyatt House hotel, where he spoke briefly with Steck, the clerk, before shooting her, he said.

About a minute later, the Lakewood police officer saw McLeod and ordered him to drop his weapon. She was shot in the abdomen but fired back at him, Romero said.

The wounded officer, whose name has not been released, underwent surgery Monday night. She is expected to make a full recovery.

Family members identified one of the other victims Tuesday as Alicia Cardenas, 44, the owner of the Sol Tribe tattoo shop, where the first shooting happened.

Alfredo Cardenas told KMGH-TV that his only daughter owned her first tattoo shop when she was 19 and had worked in the Broadway location in Denver for 15 to 20 years.

"Very gregarious, very friendly, but she was a very determined person," he said. "She knew where she was going."

Alicia Cardenas is survived by her 12-year-old, Alfredo Cardenas said.

On Tuesday, candles, flower bouquets and some containers of fruit rested in the doorway of Cardenas' shop as people, including her fiance, Daniel Clelland, stopped by to remember a woman they said cared for so many.

"I don't know why someone would do this," Clelland said.

Associated Press photographer David Zalubowski and writer Thomas Peipert contributed to this report.

This version has been updated to correct the spelling of the suspect's last name and the name of shooting victim Danny Schofield.

DA: No charges for Cuomo from allegations by 2 women

By DAVID PORTER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo won't face criminal charges stemming from allegations from two women — including a state trooper — that he planted unwanted kisses on their cheeks, a suburban prosecutor said Tuesday. It's the latest in a series of decisions about whether a raft of sexual assault and harassment claims against Cuomo will end up in criminal court.

Westchester County District Attorney Mimi Rocah said that while there was evidence to conclude the conduct the women described did occur, she couldn't bring criminal cases over it.

"In both instances, my office has determined that, although the allegations and witnesses were credible, and the conduct concerning, we cannot pursue criminal charges due to the statutory requirements of the criminal laws of New York," Rocah said in a statement.

Cuomo had no immediate comment on the decision. The Democrat has denied sexually harassing anyone or touching anyone inappropriately and has said he doesn't recall touching the trooper.

A number of prosecutors around the state launched investigations after state Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, chronicled accusations from 11 women against Cuomo. The August report led to his resignation from office, although he has attacked the findings as biased and inaccurate.

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In October, the Albany County sheriff's office filed a misdemeanor groping complaint against Cuomo, but a week later the district attorney asked a judge for more time to evaluate the evidence.

The district attorney said the sheriff's one-page criminal complaint, based on allegations from a woman who said Cuomo slid his hand up her blouse and grabbed her breast at the governor's mansion in late 2020, was "potentially defective."

At the prosecutor's request, a court delayed Cuomo's scheduled arraignment until Jan. 7.

Last week, a Long Island prosecutor said Cuomo wouldn't face criminal charges after the same trooper as in the Westchester investigation said she felt "completely violated" by his unwanted touching at an event at Belmont Park in September 2019. Acting Nassau County District Attorney Joyce Smith said the allegations were credible and troubling but not criminal under state law.

The alleged Westchester County incident involving the trooper happened outside Cuomo's then-home in Mount Kisco, according to the district attorney's office. The trooper told investigators that while stationed in the driveway as part of Cuomo's security detail in summer 2019, she asked the governor if he needed anything, and he responded by asking her whether he could kiss her.

"I remember just freezing, being — in the back of my head, I'm like, 'Oh, how do I say no politely?' Because in my head, if I said no, he's going to take it out on the detail. And now I'm on the bad list," she told investigators, according to James' report.

So, she said, she told him, "Sure." He kissed her on the cheek, while saying something like "Oh, I'm not supposed to do that," or "Unless that's against the rules," she told investigators.

A male colleague told investigators he witnessed the episode, the attorney general's report said.

The trooper hasn't been publicly identified. A message seeking comment was sent to a lawyer for her.

In the other incident that Westchester prosecutors examined, Cuomo allegedly greeted a woman by grabbing her arm, pulling her toward him and kissing her on the cheek without asking whether that was OK. She was attending a press conference he gave at White Plains High School in June 2018.

"I smiled nervously afterward. I had to endure comments from people in attendance," the woman, Susan Iannucci, told reporters at a virtual news conference in August.

Iannucci, a school office manager, said she came forward because she was appalled to see Cuomo use a photo of the encounter in a compilation video that he released to argue that he commonly greeted people with kisses, touches and hugs "to convey warmth."

Her lawyer, Gloria Allred, said Tuesday that Iannucci had spoken to the DA's office knowing that criminal charges weren't legally possible. Nonetheless, Iannucci was gratified that prosecutors found her and her allegation credible, her attorney said.

"We thank the district attorney's office for their serious consideration of this matter," Allred said in a statement.

'So difficult': Winter snow, cold slam Northwest and Sierra

By MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The Pacific Northwest and Sierra Nevada grappled Tuesday with another day of snow, ice and unseasonable cold that has disrupted traffic, caused closures and forced people to find refuge in emergency warming shelters.

Across western Washington and Oregon, officials and private groups opened emergency spaces for people as forecasters said the extreme cold from an arctic blast that blew in Sunday could last until the weekend.

Farther south, part of the main highway from San Francisco to Reno remained closed Tuesday for a third day due to record-setting snow in the Lake Tahoe area after a winter storm blasted across northern California and Nevada.

Snow-choked Interstate 80 shut down Sunday from the Nevada state line to Placer County, California, although Caltrans said U.S. 50 reopened late Monday for vehicles with chains or four-wheel drive.

And with temperatures in normally mild Seattle dropping well below freezing, Kaety West walked a short distance in the snow from the tent where she usually stays to find refuge at a small warming center at

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an American Legion hall.

"I'm not even willing to stay in it right now. It's just so difficult," she said of her tent on Monday.

Snow showers began in the Northwest on Sunday from the Gulf of Alaska, dumping up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) across the Seattle area. Another storm dropped more snow in western Washington and Oregon late Monday and Tuesday.

The region continued to break daily cold records. The National Weather Service said the low was 17 degrees F (-8.3 C) in Seattle on Monday, breaking a record set in 1968. Bellingham, Washington, plunged to 7 F (-13.9 C) on Monday, tying a record set in 1968.

In Seattle, the city said garbage pickup was canceled for Tuesday, as side streets remained treacherous. And another round of snow was predicted for the Seattle and Portland, Oregon, areas on Thursday.

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — about a half dozen weather shelters were open.

On Tuesday, county officials said a resident died from exposure to cold temperatures on Saturday, KGW-TV reported. The person who died was not homeless but was found unresponsive outdoors, according to a news release from Multnomah County. No further information was released.

"This is a somber reminder that cold weather is dangerous for anyone outside who does not have the right gear to stay dry and warm," county health officer Dr. Jennifer Vines said.

Seattle city leaders opened at least six severe weather shelters and the mayor declared an emergency. On Tuesday, King County Executive Dow Constantine also issued an emergency proclamation because of severe winter storm conditions.

Warming shelters in Oregon's Multnomah County were around 75% full on Monday night, with 339 people. "We had about 100 beds free, but also expect more people to seek shelter with colder temps and snow," Kate Yeiser, a spokesperson for the county, said Tuesday.

Utilities reported about 5,000 customers without power Tuesday morning, mostly in southwestern Oregon.

Two snowmobilers died in an avalanche in the mountains north of Yellowstone National Park, where about 3 feet (1 meter) of snow had fallen over the past week, the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center said. The avalanche Monday brought down snow about 5 feet (1.5 meters) deep and approximately 300 feet (91 meters) wide, burying two of the four riders.

At Donner Pass in the Sierra, officials with the University of California, Berkeley's Central Sierra Snow Laboratory on Monday said recent snowfall has smashed the snowiest December record of 179 inches (4.6 meters), set in 1970. The record is now 193.7 inches (4.9 meters) as more snow is expected.

The snowpack in the Sierra was at dangerously low levels after recent weeks of dry weather but the state Department of Water Resources reported on Monday that the snowpack was between 145% and 161% of normal across the range with more snow expected, which will help in a region experiencing a protracted drought.

With temperatures in western Washington and Oregon not forecast to rise above freezing for days, officials were planning on keeping emergency shelters for longer than initially expected.

Seattle leaders said city shelters will remain open through the new year. At the shelter where West went to get warm, American Legion Hall Post 160, there was room for about a dozen people.

Keith Hughes of the American Legion said the capacity is limited by lack of volunteer staff.

"Volunteers, this is a problem for myself as well as everyone else in town, it's really hard to get with COVID going on," he said, adding there were plans to keep the space open for about 10 days. "The longer it goes on the harder it's going to be on people that don't have a place to get out of this."

Associated Press writers Ken Ritter in Las Vegas and Sara Cline in Portland, Oregon contributed.

Citing COVID, judge prods Maxwell jury to work overtime

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The jury weighing the fate Ghislaine Maxwell's fate said Tuesday they were "making progress" at the end of the fourth full day of deliberations at the closely watched sex trafficking trial where

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a judge expressed concern New York City's coronavirus surge could derail proceedings.

Judge Alison J. Nathan granted jurors' request to leave at 5 p.m. — an hour earlier than planned — but told them they were expected to work toward a verdict the rest of the week, if needed. Earlier Tuesday, Nathan told lawyers out of the presence of the jury that the "astronomical spike" in the number of coronavirus cases necessitated jurors working longer hours.

"We now face a high and escalating risk that jurors and trial participants may need to quarantine," Nathan said. "We are simply in a different place regarding the pandemic than we were a week ago."

In her explanation to the lawyers, Nathan voiced what had largely gone unmentioned in her previous requests to get the jury to work overtime: the fear that sickened jurors could force a mistrial.

"We now face a high and escalating risk that jurors and trial participants may need to quarantine," Nathan said. "We are simply in a different place regarding the pandemic than we were a week ago."

During the first week of deliberations, the jury stopped at 5 p.m., but Nathan told jurors late Monday that they should be prepared to stay until at least 6 p.m. moving forward. Despite that, the judge agreed to release them early after they assured her, in a note: "Our deliberations are moving along and we are making progress."

The judge had told lawyers she was considering informing jurors she would require deliberations every day — including the New Year's weekend, if necessary — until they reach a verdict. But after defense lawyers pushed back, she chose Tuesday to not tell jurors that weekend deliberations were a possibility.

Fueled by the omicron variant, coronavirus cases in the city have rocketed from an average of about 3,400 a day in the week that ended Dec. 12 to 22,000 in the week that ended Sunday.

Laura Menninger, a defense lawyer, told Nathan on Monday that any suggestion that the jury stay later "is beginning to sound like urging them to hurry up."

"We would object to trying to urge them to stay later if they are not asking to do so and aren't expressing any difficulty in proceeding with the deliberations that they are currently undertaking," Menninger said.

Menninger noted that the jury was continuing to request transcripts of trial testimony and other materials that indicate they are working diligently to decide six charges alleging Maxwell played a crucial role in Epstein's sexual abuse of teenage girls between 1994 and 2004.

Defense lawyers have said Maxwell, 60, is being used as a scapegoat by prosecutors after the U.S. government was embarrassed by Epstein's suicide at a federal jail in Manhattan in August 2019 while he awaited a sex trafficking trial.

Maxwell was arrested in July 2020 and has remained in jail after Nathan repeatedly rejected bail attempts, including a \$28.5 million package with 24-hour armed guards to ensure she did not flee.

Biden's new German shepherd draws attention from pup-arazzi

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden's new puppy, Commander, got his moment under the flashing lights of the Washington press corps — and some time frolicking on the beach — on Tuesday.

Biden and first lady Jill Biden took the German shepherd on a walk near their second home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

Commander was born Sept. 1 and arrived at the White House last week, a birthday gift from the president's brother, James Biden, and sister-in-law Sara Biden. Biden introduced Commander in a tweet. He turned 79 in November.

Commander is the third German shepherd Biden has welcomed to the White House. Champ died in June at age 13. The other dog, Major, 3, now lives with family friends in Delaware after behaving aggressively while living at the White House.

The Bidens are spending the holidays between their homes in Delaware.

Experts pull documents, money from Lee statue time capsule

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

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RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Conservation experts in Virginia's capital pulled books, money, ammunition, documents and other artifacts Tuesday from a long-sought-after time capsule found in the remnants of a pedestal that once held a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Over the course of about two hours, the team sliced open the 36-pound copper box and meticulously pried apart and documented the damp contents. The box had been tucked in a foundation cornerstone of the massive — and now mostly deconstructed — Richmond monument since 1887.

The time capsule had drawn substantial interest, both because it proved to be elusive during an earlier search and because historical records had led to some speculation it might contain a rare photo of President Abraham Lincoln after his death. Ultimately, such a photo was not found.

The conservation team was able to identify many of the items immediately as they were pulled from the box, though some materials were warped from water damage and required further study. Experts were on hand to triage the artifacts.

"They were more waterlogged than we had hoped but not as bad as it could have been," said Kate Ridgway, the lead conservator for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The time capsule had been found a day earlier — buried and sitting in water — by workers wrapping up the removal of the Lee statue pedestal.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam ordered the enormous equestrian statue of Lee removed in 2020, amid the global protest movement sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. Litigation pushed back his plans, and the statue was not removed until September, after a court cleared the way.

Contemporaneous news accounts from the late 1800s detailed the placement of the box in the cornerstone of the pedestal, but a lengthy search during the statue removal came up empty.

Earlier this month, Northam ordered the pedestal removed as well, and crews working on the project again started to search for the artifact. A different time capsule was discovered two weeks ago, generating excitement, but hours of painstaking and ultimately anti-climactic examination suggested that artifact was placed by someone else, perhaps someone involved with the construction.

Ridgway said the measurements and copper material of the box opened Tuesday matched historical accounts. As the contents inside were unpacked, they largely lined up with the items listed in a newspaper article from the time.

One tidbit in that newspaper article had led to some conjecture that the capsule might contain a historically significant photo of Lincoln. It listed among the contents a "picture of Lincoln lying in his coffin."

On Tuesday, conservators found a printed image from an 1865 issue of Harper's Weekly that they said seemed to show a figure grieving over Lincoln's grave — but it was not the much-anticipated photo.

"It was not an original. It was perhaps taken from a photograph, but it is an engraving," said Sue Donovan, conservator for special collections at the University of Virginia Library.

The contents of the tightly packed box had expanded from the dampness and stuck together, making unpacking difficult, so conservators decided to relieve pressure by cutting down one side.

"Not ideal, but it's the way it is," Ridgway said.

After Ridgway and other team members meticulously extracted each object, other conservators would cart the pieces to the back of the lab for further study and cataloging. The team made sure to photograph each object before manipulating it.

Along with several waterlogged books, pamphlets and newspapers, the box contained an envelope of Confederate money, which conservators carefully separated, and two carved artifacts — a Masonic symbol and a Confederate flag said to have been made from the tree that grew over Gen. Stonewall Jackson's original grave.

Conservators also pulled buttons, coins and Minié balls, a type of bullet used in the Civil War, from the box. A bomb squad had checked the capsule Monday, partly to make sure there was no live ammunition inside.

Ridgway told reporters after the box had been emptied that there was some question about whether calling the vessel a time capsule was the most accurate terminology, as it did not appear to have a defini-

tive date when it was expected to have been opened.

"A cornerstone box is probably more accurate," she said.

No inscription could be seen on the box's interior or exterior, though Ridgway said it was possible that any such carving could have corroded away with time.

The Lee monument used to be part of a collection of Confederate statuary that dotted historic Monument Avenue in Richmond, which was capital of the Confederacy for most of the Civil War. The other Confederate statues, which were the property of the city, were removed last year.

US move to shorten COVID-19 isolation stirs confusion, doubt

By ZEKE MILLER and KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health officials' decision to shorten the recommended COVID-19 isolation and quarantine period from 10 days to five is drawing criticism from some medical experts and could create more confusion and fear among Americans.

To the dismay of some authorities, the new guidelines allow people to leave isolation without getting tested to see if they are still infectious.

The guidance has raised questions about how it was crafted and why it was changed now, in the middle of another wintertime spike in cases, this one driven largely by the highly contagious omicron variant.

Monday's action by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cut in half the recommended isolation time for Americans who are infected with the coronavirus but have no symptoms. The CDC similarly shortened the amount of time people who have come into close contact with an infected person need to quarantine.

The CDC has been under pressure from the public and the private sector, including the airline industry, to shorten the isolation time and reduce the risk of severe staffing shortages amid the omicron surge. Thousands of flights have been canceled over the past few days in a mess blamed on omicron.

"Not all of those cases are going to be severe. In fact, many are going to be asymptomatic," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Monday. "We want to make sure there is a mechanism by which we can safely continue to keep society functioning while following the science."

CDC officials said the guidance is in keeping with growing evidence that people with the virus are most infectious in the first few days.

Louis Mansky, director of the Institute for Molecular Virology at the University of Minnesota, agreed there is a scientific basis to the CDC's recommendations.

"When somebody gets infected, when are they most likely to transmit the virus to another person?" he said. "It's usually in the earlier course of the illness, which is typically a day or two before they actually develop symptoms and then a couple of days to three days after that."

Research, including a study published in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine in August, backs that up, though medical experts cautioned that nearly all of the data predates omicron.

The CDC released a report Tuesday on a cluster of six omicron cases in a Nebraska household and found the median incubation period — the time between exposure and the appearance of symptoms — was about three days, versus the five days or more documented earlier in the pandemic. The six people also experienced relatively mild illness.

But other experts questioned why the CDC guidelines allow people to leave isolation without testing.

"It's frankly reckless to proceed like this," said Dr. Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute. "Using a rapid test or some type of test to validate that the person isn't infectious is vital."

"There's no evidence, no data to support this," he added.

Mansky said CDC probably didn't include exit testing in its guidelines for logistical reasons: There is a run on COVID-19 rapid tests amid the spike in cases and the busy holiday travel season. In many places, at-home tests are difficult or impossible to find.

The CDC is "driven by the science, but they also have to be cognizant of the fact of, you know, what are

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they going to tell the public that they'll do," Mansky said. "That would undermine CDC if they had guidance that everybody was ignoring."

Qamara Edwards, director of business and events for Sojourn Philly, which owns four restaurants in Philadelphia, said about 15% of its employees are out sick with COVID-19, and staffing is tight.

The CDC changes are "great for businesses, they do allow people to return to work sooner than they've expected," Edwards said, though she understands why workers might be resistant and worried about their safety.

In Los Angeles, King Holder, who runs the StretchLab Beverly fitness business, likewise said omicron has caused "ample disruption" to his company, and he welcomed the more relaxed guidelines.

"The possibility of five days compared to 10-14 days is huge for our business and allows us to stay afloat," he said.

But Dana Martin, a 38-year-old Philadelphia teacher and educational consultant, said: "The looser COVID guidelines make me nervous. I'm more hesitant to participate in holiday activities because of the omicron variant and the seemingly more lax protocols."

Marshall Hatch, senior pastor of New Mount Pilgrim Church on Chicago's West Side, said he is bracing for some confusion in his congregation. The church has been a strong advocate for testing, vaccinations and booster shots.

Hatch said the CDC's latest guidance is confusing and "a little incongruous."

"Either we're in a surge that we need to take very seriously or are we winding down the pandemic and that's why we're shortening the isolation and quarantine times," he said Tuesday. "They might want to give us a little more information to go with."

Hatch said some members of the largely Black congregation, particularly senior citizens, are skeptical of information from government.

The CDC move follows global efforts to adjust isolation rules, with policies differing from country to country.

England last week trimmed its self-isolation period for vaccinated people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to seven days in many cases, provided two negative lateral flow tests are taken a day apart.

The French government said Monday that it will soon relax its isolation rules, although by exactly how much isn't yet clear.

Health Minister Olivier Veran said the rule changes will be aimed at warding off "paralysis" of public and private services. By some estimates, France could be registering more than 250,000 new infections per day by January.

Italy, meanwhile, is considering doing away with a quarantine altogether for those who have had close contact with an infected person as long they have had a booster shot. Projections indicate as many as 2 million Italians could be put in quarantine over the next two weeks as the virus spreads.

The U.S. airline industry applauded the CDC move.

"The decision is the right one based upon science," said the lobbying group Airlines for America.

But the head of a flight attendants union criticized the change, saying it could lead businesses to pressure sick employees to come back before they are well.

If that happens, "we will make clear it is an unsafe work environment, which will cause a much greater disruption than any 'staffing shortages,'" warned Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA International.

Associated Press writers Laura Ungar in Louisville, Kentucky; Colleen Barry in Milan, Italy; Paul Wiseman in Washington; and Tali Arbel and Mike Stobbe in New York contributed.

Live updates: 'Music Man' revival on hold as star infected

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK — The Broadway revival of "The Music Man" has been one of the hottest tickets in town

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and it has limped along without co-star Sutton Foster. But now the show is being shuttered until the new year because Hugh Jackman has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Jackman took to social media Tuesday to announce that he had tested positive. He says that although his symptoms are mild with only a scratchy throat and a runny nose, he needs to quarantine.

Some Broadway shows have closed for several days and some have folded completely because of virus cases "Thoughts of a Colored Man" joined "Waitress" and "Jagged Little Pill" as shows that have closed this winter due in part to rising infection rates.

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

- Undertakers, rabbis join global fight promoting COVID shot
- US officials recommend shorter COVID isolation, quarantine
- Fauci: US should consider vaccine mandate for US air travel
- In eastern Germany, pastors push for shots despite protests

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TODAY:

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana officials are urging residents to go online for Office of Motor Vehicles services, and say 12 offices are temporarily closing due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The department said Tuesday that "Louisiana residents should only visit OMV field offices if it's absolutely necessary."

Louisiana, officials reported Monday that hospitalizations of people infected with the coronavirus had doubled over the course of a week.

ORLANDO Fla. — The mayor of one of Florida's largest counties on Tuesday blasted Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, saying he has been missing in action during the latest wave of COVID-19, as some counties brought back mask mandates for government workers and other municipalities opened up new testing sites in response to overwhelming demand.

The mayor of Orange County, Jerry Demings, said local governments had been forced to figure out on their own, without help from the state, how to respond to the omicron variant that has rapidly overtaken the delta variant as the dominant strain of the coronavirus in Florida.

Florida hit a new record for daily cases last weekend, with the state reporting 32,850 new cases on Saturday.

Demings said new restrictions placed by DeSantis and the Florida Legislature on actions that can be taken by local governments and private businesses to combat the virus have made fighting the pandemic more difficult.

A new law signed by DeSantis last month prevents businesses from having vaccine mandates unless they allow workers to opt out, bars schools and governments from having vaccine mandates and allows parents to sue schools with masking requirements.

The governor's office did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

MADRID — A recent sharp surge in coronavirus infections in Spain gave no signs of abating Tuesday with nearly 100,000 cases reported in the previous 24 hours, a new all-time pandemic high.

Health Ministry data showed that the 14-day infection rate soared to 1,360 cases per 100,000 residents, up from 1,206 new cases on Monday, nearly twice the level from a week earlier and five times the incidence rate at the beginning of December.

Authorities reported a total of 99,671 new positive cases, a new daily record for the seventh consecutive day.

But the sharp increase in contagion is not replicating the flow patients requiring hospital care that strained

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Spain's public health system in previous surges, something that experts partially explain because of a vaccine uptake of more than 80% of the total population. Intensive care unit occupation with COVID-19 patients remained at an average of 18.7% of the national capacity.

With 114 new casualties, the pandemic's confirmed death toll is 89,253 in the southern European country.

ATLANTA — Georgia is setting new records for the number of test-confirmed COVID-19 cases.

An extremely rapid rise in cases pushed totals on Tuesday beyond peaks previously set in January. The state recorded nearly 14,000 positive tests in its report released Tuesday, a combination of molecular PCR tests and rapid antigen tests.

The seven-day average of positive tests in Georgia rose to nearly 10,000. The number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals rose to nearly 2,200 statewide on Tuesday.

Rising cases led the city of Atlanta to cancel its New Year's Peach Drop. Emory University says it will begin spring semester classes online. And some public schools say they will require students to again wear masks in January.

SEATTLE — The Washington state Department of Health has reported a new record number of cases tallied in a single day.

The Seattle Times reports state officials confirmed 6,235 new cases on Dec. 24. The state's previous single-day record number of cases was 5,526 cases on Dec. 7, 2020.

Dec. 24 also marked the first time Washington state reported over 6,000 cases in a single day.

The spike in cases mirrors that of other U.S. cities as the highly contagious omicron variant has become dominant.

HONOLULU — The University of Hawaii will conduct mostly online classes for the first two weeks of the spring semester as the state watches a surge in omicron coronavirus cases.

Hawaii has had all-time record high daily COVID-19 numbers in recent days. University of Hawaii officials say that campuses across the islands will temporarily move many classes to online instruction.

In an email to students and staff, University of Hawaii President David Lassner says only classes that can be "effectively taught online" will change.

Other classes will be taught in person but with physical distancing, mask wearing and health screenings in place

ATLANTA — Emory University's president said Tuesday the school is switching to virtual classes to start the spring semester because of a national surge in COVID cases fueled by the omicron variant.

In a letter to the university community, President Gregory Fennes said Emory will transition back to in-person learning on January 31 if conditions permit that.

The switch to remote learning applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional courses. Residence halls will remain open, though students are encouraged to delay their return to campus.

COVID-19 infections in the Atlanta area, where Emory is located, are climbing rapidly.

The seven-day average of COVID-19 cases in Georgia rose to nearly 8,700 a day on Monday, according to the state Public Health Department. That's nearing the peaks that Georgia saw in infection numbers in early January and early September.

LONDON — The U.K. has reported another record number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, with a further 129,471 infections on Tuesday.

The data was incomplete because of the Christmas holidays, and did not include figures from Scotland or Northern Ireland.

A further 18 people had died after testing positive for the coronavirus, the government said.

Officials have said some 90% of cases in the country are now the omicron variant.

Despite the high daily infections Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government has said it is not imposing further virus restrictions in England before the new year. Meanwhile Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which make their own public health rules, began shuttering nightclubs and limiting social gatherings from Boxing Day.

White House, Jan. 6 committee agree to shield some documents

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol has agreed to defer its attempt to get hundreds of pages of records from the Trump administration, holding off at the request of the Biden White House.

The deferral is in response to concerns by the Biden White House that releasing all the Trump administration documents sought by the committee could compromise national security and executive privilege.

President Joe Biden has repeatedly rejected former President Donald Trump's blanket efforts to cite executive privilege to block the release of documents surrounding that day. But Biden's White House is still working with the committee to shield some documents from being turned over.

Trump is appealing to the Supreme Court to try to block the National Archives and Records Administration, which maintains custody of the documents from his time in office, from giving them to the committee.

The agreement to keep some Trump-era records away from the committee is memorialized in a Dec. 16 letter from the White House counsel's office. It mostly shields records that do not involve the events of Jan. 6 but were covered by the committee's sweeping request for documents from the Trump White House about the events of that day.

Dozen of pages created Jan. 6 don't pertain to the assault on the Capitol. Other documents involve sensitive preparations and deliberations by the National Security Council. Biden's officials were worried that if those pages were turned over to Congress, that would set a troublesome precedent for the executive branch, no matter who is president.

Still other documents are highly classified and the White House asked Congress to work with the federal agencies that created them to discuss their release.

"The documents for which the Select Committee has agreed to withdraw or defer its request do not appear to bear on the White House's preparations for or response to the events of January 6, or on efforts to overturn the election or otherwise obstruct the peaceful transfer of power," White House deputy counsel Jonathan Su wrote in one of two letters to the committee obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press.

Su wrote that for the committee, withholding the documents "should not compromise its ability to complete its critical investigation expeditiously."

Committee spokesman Tim Mulvey said: "The committee has agreed to defer action on certain records as part of the accommodations process, as was the case with an earlier tranche of records. The Select Committee has not withdrawn its request for these records and will continue to engage with the executive branch to ensure the committee gets access to all the information relevant to our probe."

For the last several months the National Archives has been transmitting tranches of documents to the White House and to lawyers for Trump to determine whether they contain any privileged information. Trump has raised both broad objections to the release of the documents as well as specific concerns about particular documents.

The National Archives has said that the records Trump wants to block include presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts, handwritten notes "concerning the events of January 6" from the files of former chief of staff Mark Meadows, and "a draft Executive Order on the topic of election integrity."

Biden has repeatedly rejected Trump's claims of executive privilege over those documents, including in a letter sent Dec. 23 regarding about 20 pages of documents.

"The President has determined that an assertion of executive privilege is not in the best interests of the United States, and therefore is not justified," White House counsel Dana Remus reiterated in the latest letter.

Trump has taken to the courts to block the document releases. A federal appeals court ruled this month against Trump, and he has filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, though the high court has yet to decide whether to take up the case.

Judge Patricia Millett, writing for the court in the Dec. 9 opinion, said Congress had a "uniquely vital interest" in studying the events of Jan. 6 and Biden had made a "carefully reasoned" determination that the documents were in the public interest and that executive privilege should therefore not be invoked. Trump also failed to show any harm that would occur from the release of the sought-after records, Millett wrote.

"On the record before us, former President Trump has provided no basis for this court to override President Biden's judgment and the agreement and accommodations worked out between the Political Branches over these documents," the opinion stated.

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed.

Severe Brazil flooding spreads in Bahia and beyond

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — A total of 116 cities in the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia were in a state of emergency because of flooding on Tuesday due to heavy rains that have been pounding the region since the end of November.

Cities in at least five other states in Brazil's north and southeast have also been flooded in recent days.

In Bahia, flooding has affected more than 470,000 people. In at least 50 cities, water surged into homes and businesses, and people were forced to abandon their belongings. Official data from the state government say 34,163 people have been made homeless and almost 43,000 are displaced. There have been a total of 21 deaths and 358 people injured since the beginning of the month.

This is the heaviest period of rainfall for Bahia in the last 32 years, according to the website of the National Center for Monitoring and Alerts of Natural Disasters, a government agency. In southern Bahia, it rained more than five times the normal amount for this time of the year.

In an interview with local radio stations Tuesday morning, Bahia Gov. Rui Costa compared the situation to a "bombardment." He also said that coronavirus vaccines were lost in the floods of some cities.

"Some municipal health offices and medicine depots were completely under water," he said.

On Tuesday, the population of at least four municipalities in Bahia received warnings to leave their homes because of the increased flow of the Pardo River due to the opening of the Machado Mineiro dam's sluice gates in neighboring Minas Gerais state, according to the state government's advisory office.

Bahia's Civil Defense superintendent, Col. Miguel Filho, told The Associated Press that there are still flooded and isolated cities, and rains are still ongoing.

"Our first response is to help, then to shelter, to care for the population in the shelters by giving humanitarian aid, with sheets, blankets, food," he said.

He added that at least five dams in Bahia are at risk of bursting. Bridges and federal and state roads in the state were destroyed and have been provisionally rebuilt to allow food and other items to be brought to people in need.

"We still don't have a complete list of all the damage caused, the amount of structures that will need to be replaced," Gov. Costa said. "It isn't possible to stipulate a timeframe for recovery, because we don't have that dimension. We're guaranteeing accessibility, the detour, the temporary structure so that people can come and go."

The above-average rainfall is due to the La Nina atmospheric phenomenon, which increases precipitation in some areas of Brazil, including Bahia, the government's science ministry said in a statement last week.

Carlos Nobre, a prominent climatologist, explained to the Associated Press that the intensity of rains observed in Bahia are due to global warming. "We have to expect that these kinds of phenomena become more and more common. It's how the planet responds. The evaporation of the oceans is greater and, with more water vapor in the atmosphere, there are more conditions for more intense rains, as we saw in

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Europe and China months ago," said the expert, who also mentioned other climatic phenomena that are becoming more intense and frequent, such as droughts, hurricanes and fires.

The federal government has authorized emergency spending totaling 80 million reais (\$14.2 million) for Bahia alone. Additional funds will be directed to other regions also affected by the rains in recent weeks, and which are still suffering the consequences.

In Tocantins state, which is adjacent to Bahia in Brazil's northern region, 22 municipalities were affected by the rains by early Tuesday afternoon. The executive director of the state's civil defense authority, Maj, Alex Matos, told the AP this number is expected to grow in the coming hours.

"We're predicting an increase in the volume of the Araguaia River, which will fill the Tocantins River even more," he said.

One of a kind: Ohtani wins AP Male Athlete of Year award

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Most of the time in professional sports, it's easy to think it's all been done before.

With so many finetuned athletes constantly pushing each other to the peak of human potential, we can experience unprecedented demonstrations of sporting brilliance every week of our lives. But it's truly rare to witness anything that isn't fundamentally just a better, more prolific version of something we've already seen.

That's why Shohei Ohtani's astonishing redefinition of modern baseball captured the world's attention so vividly in 2021 — and that's why the Los Angeles Angels' two-way superstar is the winner of The Associated Press' Male Athlete of the Year award.

The unanimous American League MVP put together a season with no analogue in the past century of his sport. Almost no one had been an everyday two-way player for many decades — and nobody has been both one of baseball's top power hitters and one of its best starting pitchers since Babe Ruth starred at the plate and on the mound for the Boston Red Sox in 1919.

"He's doing something we haven't seen in our lifetimes, but he's also doing it at the very highest level of hitting and pitching," Angels manager Joe Maddon said late in the regular season. "He's doing more than other players, but he's also doing it better than almost everybody else on that field, and those are the greatest players in the game, his contemporaries. He's playing their game, but he's also playing a different game."

Ohtani hit 46 homers and drove in 100 runs with a .965 OPS while playing in 126 games as the AL's best designated hitter, as evidenced by his Silver Slugger award. He finished third in the majors in homers after leading the sport for much of the season.

Ohtani also started 23 games on the mound, going 9-2 with a 3.18 ERA and 156 strikeouts over 130 1/3 innings as the Angels' ace and one of the AL's top right-handers. He has a 100-mph fastball, but his splitter might be the best pitch in baseball, with movement that resembles a ball rolling off the edge of a table.

The 6-foot-4 star also was among the fastest baserunners in the majors while stealing 26 bases and scoring 103 runs. He even led the league with eight triples — and he also played a little outfield when asked.

Any one of these achievements would be impressive for a 27-year-old hitting his prime in his fourth season since moving from Japan to the major leagues.

Doing it all at the same time is something that almost nobody who's currently alive had ever seen.

Ohtani kept baseball's historians and statheads metaphorically buried up to their eyes in dusty record books all summer as they dug into the early 20th century annals to identify the last players to accomplish the statistical superlatives Ohtani was currently blazing past.

Mike Trout, Ohtani's three-time AL MVP teammate, called Ohtani's season "nothing short of electric."

"At times, I felt like I was back in Little League," Trout added. "To watch a player throw eight innings, hit a home run, steal a base and then go play right field was incredible."

Fans across the world agreed: Despite his soft-spoken personality and single-minded focus on his sport, Ohtani has become an icon wherever baseball is played and a known figure even beyond the game's

traditional borders.

"I've never seen fans get to ballparks so early and stay to the end," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said in July. "That's what he's bringing to the equation. I love it. Seems like every pitch when he's at the plate, you can hear the oohs and aahs. I think it's great for baseball."

Ohtani's success not only commanded fans' attention on both sides of the Pacific, but also reignited a debate long considered finished about the merits of sports specialization in a country where young athletes are often encouraged to stop competing in multiple disciplines even before they reach their teens. Nobody currently has Ohtani's overall talents, but big-league teams are increasingly open to the possibility of two-way contributors across their organizations.

Ohtani lives a quiet life in both Anaheim and Japan, but he is unfailingly gracious when lauded for his unique achievements. Sometimes he seems just as surprised by his multifaceted success as the rest of the world, while at other times he expresses the quiet confidence necessary to do such a thing in the first place.

"I'm a student of the game, so I do feel like I need to grow every year, and I think I've been able to do that," Ohtani said through his interpreter and constant companion, Ipeei Mizuhara.

Ohtani's achievements are even more impressive because they've happened with the Angels, arguably the majors' most disappointing franchise of the last half-decade despite their hefty payroll and elite talent in sunny Southern California.

With Trout missing nearly the entire season due to injury, Los Angeles won only 77 games despite Ohtani's Herculean efforts, missing the playoffs for the seventh straight year and posting their sixth straight losing record. Ohtani accomplished his feats at the plate with an often terrible lineup protecting him in the batting order.

Better times seem possible for the revamped Angels in 2022, and Ohtani says his biggest goal is winning in his next two years with the club. No matter what his future holds, Ohtani will always be remembered for a 2021 season that blew the sports world's collective mind.

"Just a fabulous, fabulous year," Maddon said. "There's only one person that can duplicate it. That would be him."

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

Sudan officials say defunct mine collapses, kills 38 people

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudanese authorities said at least 38 people were killed Tuesday when a defunct gold mine collapsed in West Kordofan province.

The country's state-run mining company said in a statement the collapse of the closed, non-functioning mine took place in the village of Fuja 700 kilometers (435 miles) south of the capital of Khartoum. It said there were also injuries without giving a specific tally.

Local media reported that several shafts collapsed at the Darsaya mine, and that besides the dead at least eight injured people were taken to a local hospital.

The mining company posted images on Facebook showing villagers gathering at the site as at least two dredgers worked to find possible survivors and bodies.

Other images showed people preparing traditional graves to bury the dead.

The company said the mine was not functional but local miners returned to work it after security forces guarding the site left the area. It did not say when the mine stopped working.

The Sudanese Mineral Resources Limited Company in its statement called for troops to guard the site to prevent unregulated mining. It also called on local communities to help it resume its mining activities in the area, which were suspended in 2019. It did not elaborate.

Sudan is a major gold producer with numerous mines scattered across the country. In 2020, the East African nation produced 36.6 tons, the second most in the continent, according to official numbers.

The transitional government has begun regulating the industry in the past two years amid allegations of gold smuggling.

Collapses are common in Sudan's gold mines, where safety standards are not widely in effect.

Russian court shuts renowned rights group

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's highest court on Tuesday shut down one of the country's oldest and most prominent human rights organizations, the latest move in a relentless crackdown on rights activists, independent media and opposition supporters.

The Supreme Court's ruling to close Memorial, an international human rights group that drew international acclaim for its studies of political repression in the Soviet Union, sparked international outrage.

Memorial is made up of more than 50 smaller groups in Russia and abroad. It was declared a "foreign agent" in 2016 — a label that implies additional government scrutiny and carries strong pejorative connotations that can discredit the targeted organization. Prosecutors said the group repeatedly failed to identify itself as a foreign agent and tried to conceal the designation, the accusations rejected by Memorial.

During the hearing, prosecutors also charged that Memorial "creates a false image of the USSR as a terrorist state," a claim the group said revealed the authorities' real motive.

"The Supreme Court's ruling confirmed once again that the history of political terror organized and directed by the government isn't an academic issue that is interesting only for experts, but an acute problem of today," Memorial said in a statement. "Memorial embodies the Russian citizens' need to know the truth about the country's tragic path and the fate of millions. No one would be able to 'liquidate' that need."

The group said it would appeal the verdict and pledged to continue its work.

"Of course, nothing is over with this," Maria Eismont, one of the lawyers that represented the group in court, said after the ruling. "We will appeal, and Memorial will live on with the people — because it's the people behind it serving this great cause first and foremost. The work will continue."

A crowd that gathered in front of the courthouse on Tuesday erupted into chants of "Disgrace!" in response to the ruling. Police detained several people who picketed the courthouse.

The Council of Europe's Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, described the move as "devastating news" and "a dark day for civil society in the Russian Federation."

Amnesty International called Memorial's closure "a blatant attack on civil society that seeks to blur the national memory of state repression" and "a grave insult to victims of the Russian Gulag."

U.S. Ambassador John Sullivan deplored the court's verdict as "a blatant and tragic attempt to suppress freedom of expression and erase history."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian expressed "indignation and concern" at the shutdown of the NGO Memorial International, calling it "a terrible loss for the Russian people."

"This announcement is deeply worrying about the future of historical research and the defense of human rights in Russia," he said in a statement.

Memorial's sister organization, the Memorial Human Rights Center, is up for closure as well, with a court hearing Wednesday morning in Moscow City Court.

Russian authorities in recent months have ratcheted up pressure on rights groups, media outlets and individual journalists, naming dozens as foreign agents. Some were outlawed as "undesirable" and several were forced to shut down or disband themselves to prevent further prosecution.

On Saturday, authorities blocked the website of OVD-Info — a prominent legal aid group that focuses on political arrests — and urged social media platforms to take down its accounts after a court ruled that the website contained materials that "justify actions of extremist and terrorist groups." The group rejected the charges as politically driven.

OVD-Info condemned the ruling to shut down Memorial.

"Memorial is an institution of national memory about the times of the Great Terror and Soviet repressions," the group said in a statement, adding that its closure amounted to an attempt to justify Soviet

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dictator Josef Stalin's repressions." "It is a clear signal both to society and to the elites: 'Yes, repressions were necessary and useful to the Soviet state in the past, and we need them today as well.'"

On Tuesday, five associates of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny were taken into custody. Earlier this year, a Moscow court outlawed Navalny's organizations — the Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his country-wide network of regional offices — as extremist, exposing their staff members and supporters to prosecution.

One of the five detained activists, Ksenia Fadeyeva, is reportedly facing charges of forming an extremist group. Fadeyeva used to run Navalny's regional office in the Siberian city of Tomsk, and in last year's election won a seat in the city legislature.

Another Navalny associate, Lilia Chanyшева, was arrested and jailed in November on similar charges. She used to head Navalny's office in the Russian region of Bashkortostan and is facing up to 10 years in prison, if convicted.

Navalny himself is serving 2½ years in prison for violating the terms of his probation from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that is widely seen as politically motivated. The politician was arrested in January upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning that he said was carried out by the FSB security agency on Kremlin orders — accusations that Russian officials reject.

On Tuesday, Navalny attended a court hearing on his appeal against prison authorities' decision to put him under special surveillance as a person inclined to "extremist and terrorist" activities.

"Why should I sleep under the sign where it is written that I'm a terrorist?" he told the judge by video-conference from prison. "I didn't explode anybody, I didn't take hostages, I didn't do anything like that and don't plan to. It's me who was a victim of a terrorist attack when FSB officers tried to kill me."

Most of Navalny's top associates have faced prosecution this year on various criminal charges and have left Russia.

Also on Tuesday, another prominent human rights organization — the Civic Assistance Committee that helps refugees and migrants in Russia — said the authorities were evicting it from an office in Moscow it had been allowed to occupy free of charge for years.

Moscow city officials handed the group a document voiding the agreement allowing the use of the space without compensation and ordered it to leave within a month.

"I link it to the overall trend of destroying civil society in Russia," Civic Assistance Committee head Svetlana Gannushkina told Mediazona.

Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this report.

California governor mulls RFK assassin Sirhan Sirhan parole

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's governor must soon decide whether to free one of America's most notorious assassins, a decision he has said evokes one of the darkest periods in the nation's history.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has until sometime next month to allow or block the parole recommendation for Robert F. Kennedy assassin Sirhan Sirhan.

The recommendation by a two-person panel of parole commissioners in August split the iconic Kennedy family more than a half-century after the 1968 slaying of the U.S. senator from New York moments after he claimed victory in California's pivotal Democratic presidential primary.

More than that, it tore open decades-old wounds lingering from the murders of RFK and his brother, President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963.

"This is very raw and emotional for people," said Newsom, who keeps RFK photos in both his official and home offices, including one of Kennedy with his late father.

"People aren't just giving an opinion about yes or no, they're expressing their memories of that time ... and connecting the dots to the '60s and that stress and anxiety and the wounds," Newsom said after the

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panel made its recommendation.

"And in a way that makes this decision even that much more powerful, because of the impact that has on opening up those memories, many memories that people want to suppress, understandably," said the Democratic governor, who called RFK his "political hero" in a victory speech after he beat back a recall election in September.

Fifteen times, parole panels rejected freeing Sirhan, now 77, before deciding that he is no longer a danger to public safety.

New laws since his last previous parole hearing in 2016 meant the panel had to consider that Sirhan committed the offense at a young age, when he was 24; is now an elderly prisoner; and that the Christian Palestinian who immigrated from Jordan had suffered childhood trauma from the conflict in the Middle East.

Also, for the first time, Los Angeles County prosecutors weren't at the parole hearing to object, under District Attorney George Gascón's policy that prosecutors should not be involved in deciding whether prisoners are ready for release.

And two of RFK's sons supported releasing him, including Douglas Kennedy, who told the parole panel that Sirhan was "worthy of compassion and love." Robert F. Kennedy Jr. wrote to the panel urging that Sirhan be freed, citing his "impressive record of rehabilitation."

But six of Kennedy's nine surviving children urged Newsom to block the release of a man who "took our father from our family and he took him from America." The statement was signed by Joseph P. Kennedy II, Courtney Kennedy, Kerry Kennedy, Christopher G. Kennedy, Maxwell T. Kennedy, and Rory Kennedy.

Ethel Kennedy, RFK's wife, said Sirhan "should not have the opportunity to terrorize again."

Sirhan has consistently said he doesn't recall shooting Kennedy and wounding five others the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. But he told parole commissioners that he takes responsibility killing a man he called "the hope of the world."

He was initially sentenced to death, but that sentence was commuted to life when the California Supreme Court briefly outlawed capital punishment in 1972.

Sirhan's attorney, Angela Berry, said in a written argument for his release that he suffers a heart condition and has survived prostate cancer, Valley Fever and having his throat slashed by another prisoner in 2019.

If freed, Munir Sirhan says his older brother can live with him, if he is not deported to Jordan. Sirhan waived his right to fight deportation.

"We are just two old brothers who wish to live out the rest of our lives together," he wrote to the parole board.

After the parole panel's decision, corrections officials released 101 pages of those documents and letters from across the nation, all but one supporting Sirhan's release.

Some compared him to a political prisoner or advanced various conspiracy theories around Sirhan's involvement or the assassinations of both Kennedy brothers. Many were clearly part of an organized effort, with similar wording or fill-in-the-blank responses.

Others were more personal.

One man recalled how, as a 19-year-old college student, he traveled by bus to an inner-city neighborhood to get out the vote for Robert Kennedy.

"He was a person who I loved and respected and in whom I had deep confidence that he would put a quick end to that unjust and immoral war in Vietnam," wrote the man, whose contact information was redacted.

Instead, the man was drafted in 1971.

"Sirhan's involvement in RFK's murder changed my life," he wrote. "But looking at life from this end, I forgive him."

The lone writer who opposed Sirhan's release said in a handwritten note that he still remembers details of "the god-awful" assassination a half-century later.

"Sirhan has caused the death of a man with a great political future," he wrote, and "along with that has taken away the innocence of people of my generation."

State legislatures in US poised to act on abortion rights

By WILSON RING Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Early in the new year, the Vermont House of Representatives is due to begin debate on an amendment that would enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution and send the question to voters in the fall.

Because the process began two years ago, it's a coincidence that Vermont lawmakers will be considering the Reproductive Liberty Amendment while the U.S. Supreme Court is considering a case that could severely erode a right that has stood for half a century.

The pending decision in that case, expected in mid-2022, means it's not just Vermont with abortion on the legislative agenda. State legislatures across the country will be responding to the possibility of seismic change to the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion across the U.S. Republican-led legislatures are ready to further restrict or ban abortions outright while Democratic-led ones are seeking to ensure access to abortion in their state law.

Supporters of the proposed Vermont amendment had the possible loss of Roe in mind when they began the process in 2019 to enshrine "reproductive autonomy," including abortion, in the constitution.

"In my mind, there should be no question where Vermont stands with regard to its core values and fundamental rights," said Democratic state Rep. Ann Pugh, who chairs the committee that will hold hearings on the proposal as early as January. "And for those rights and responsibilities and values to be protected more definitively, they need to be enshrined in our state constitution."

A far different approach is being considered in Kansas. Republican state lawmakers have placed on the state's August 2022 primary ballot a proposed constitutional amendment that would overturn a 2019 state Supreme Court decision. That ruling declared abortion access a "fundamental right" and part of a woman's inherent right to bodily autonomy.

The amendment would say that the state constitution provides no right to abortion and that the Legislature can regulate it however lawmakers see fit — which means if Roe v. Wade is overturned, Kansas lawmakers could ban abortion completely.

In California, lawmakers are expected to consider a plan in the coming year to make the state a "sanctuary" for those seeking reproductive care. That could include paying for travel, lodging and procedures for people from other states where abortions have been restricted or perhaps outlawed.

"Abortion has always been contentious," said Mary Hahn Beerworth, of the Vermont Right to Life Committee, which is opposing Vermont's abortion-rights amendment. "In every state legislature across the country, in every political election, abortion rises to the top. It's one of the most identifying issues of our time."

At least 20 states, mostly across the South and Midwest, already have laws that would severely restrict or ban abortion if the high court overturns Roe and leaves the issue up to the states, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive rights think tank.

Earlier this year, Republican lawmakers in at least half a dozen states said they planned to introduce legislation modeled after a new Texas law that effectively bans abortion about six weeks after conception. The law is written in a way that is intended to circumvent the federal courts by leaving enforcement up to individuals rather than the state. They hope it provides a pathway to enacting the kind of abortion crackdown they have sought for years.

In Mississippi, Republican state Sen. Chris McDaniel said earlier this year he would "absolutely" consider filing legislation to match the Texas law after a sharply divided U.S. Supreme Court let that law stand, at least for now.

"I think most conservative states in the South will look at this inaction by the court and will see that as perhaps a chance to move on that issue," he said.

More than a dozen states, plus the District of Columbia, have statutory protections in place for abortion rights, said Elizabeth Nash, a state policy analyst with the Guttmacher Institute. That includes Massachusetts, where the Democrats who control the legislature earlier this year approved a bill over the veto of

Republican Gov. Charlie Baker codifying abortion rights into state law.

Yet even in California, which already has adopted several measures to protect abortion access, a pro-choice group laid out 45 steps that could be taken to further protect those rights.

"There is a lot of work to be done in order to shore up abortion rights and access," Nash said.

Efforts to further restrict access are not just coming from more traditionally conservative parts of the country. The state budget New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, a Republican, signed in June contains a provision prohibiting abortion after 24 weeks of gestation, with exceptions for the mother's life or physical health. It takes effect Jan. 1, just before the start of the new legislation session.

And Republican lawmakers, who control New Hampshire's legislature, are drafting several abortion-related bills, including one that would prohibit the procedure after the detection of a fetal heartbeat. Another would allow the biological father of an unborn child to seek a court order prohibiting a woman from having an abortion. A third would repeal the prohibition against remaining on a sidewalk adjacent to an abortion clinic.

Nash said a handful of states have interpreted their state constitutions as protecting abortion rights, but Democrats in Vermont want to be certain.

The proposed amendment does not contain the word "abortion." Proponents say that's because it is not meant to authorize only abortion, but also would guarantee other reproductive rights such as someone's right to get pregnant or have access to birth control.

"There's a lot of support for this in the legislature," said Lucy Leriche of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. "I think the reason seems pretty clear to me at the moment. We've had this right for almost a half a century to reproductive liberty, and people don't want to see us go backwards."

Associated Press writers John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Steve LeBlanc in Boston; and Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire, contributed to this report.

US home prices surge 18.4% in October

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. home prices surged again in October as the housing market continues to boom in the wake of last year's coronavirus recession.

The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller 20-city home price index, out Tuesday, climbed 18.4% in October from a year earlier. The gain marked a slight deceleration from a 19.1% year-over-year increase in September but was about in line with what economists had been expecting.

All 20 cities posted double-digit annual gains. The hottest markets were Phoenix (up 32.3%), Tampa (28.1%) and Miami (25.7%). Minneapolis and Chicago posted the smallest increases, 11.5% each.

The housing market has been strong thanks to rock-bottom mortgage rates, a limited supply of homes on the market, and pent-up demand from consumers locked in last year by the pandemic. Many Americans, tired of being cooped up at home during the pandemic, are looking to trade up from apartments to homes or to bigger houses.

"Home price growth will slow further in the year ahead, but continue to go up," said Danielle Hale, chief economist at Realtor.com. "As housing costs eat up a larger share of home purchaser's paychecks, buyers will get creative. Many will take advantage of ongoing workplace flexibility to move to the suburbs where despite home price gains, many can still find a lower price per square foot than nearby cities."

It remains unclear if that shift is permanent or an aberration, said Craig Lazzara, managing director at S&P Dow Jones Indices.

"We have previously suggested that the strength in the U.S. housing market is being driven in part by a change in locational preferences as households react to the COVID pandemic," Lazzara said. "More data will be required to understand whether this demand surge represents an acceleration of purchases that would have occurred over the next several years, or reflects a more permanent secular change."

Last week, mortgage rates fell — to 3.05% for the benchmark 30-year, fixed-rate and 2.66% for the 15-year fixed-rate home loan. The persistently low rates signal that credit markets appear more concerned

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about the omicron variant depressing economic growth than about the highest inflation rates in nearly 40 years.

The National Association of Realtors reported last week that sales of previously occupied homes rose for the third straight month in November to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.46 million.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 29, the 363rd day of 2021. There are two days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 29, 1940, during World War II, Germany dropped incendiary bombs on London, setting off what came to be known as "The Second Great Fire of London."

On this date:

In 1170, Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was slain in Canterbury Cathedral by knights loyal to King Henry II.

In 1812, during the War of 1812, the American frigate USS Constitution engaged and severely damaged the British frigate HMS Java off Brazil.

In 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state.

In 1851, the first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the United States was founded in Boston.

In 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as an estimated 300 Sioux Indians were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them.

In 1916, James Joyce's first novel, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," was first published in book form in New York after being serialized in London.

In 1972, Eastern Air Lines Flight 401, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, crashed into the Florida Everglades near Miami International Airport, killing 101 of the 176 people aboard.

In 1989, dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel (VAHTS'-lahv HAH'-vel) assumed the presidency of Czechoslovakia.

In 1992, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo commuted the prison sentence of Jean Harris, the convicted killer of "Scarsdale Diet" author Herman Tarnower.

In 1996, guerrilla and government leaders in Guatemala signed an accord ending 36 years of civil conflict.

In 2006, word reached the United States of the execution of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (because of the time difference, it was the morning of Dec. 30 in Iraq when the hanging took place). In a statement, President George W. Bush called Saddam's execution an important milestone on Iraq's road to democracy.

In 2007, the New England Patriots ended their regular season with a remarkable 16-0 record following a 38-35 comeback victory over the New York Giants. (New England became the first NFL team since the 1972 Dolphins to win every game on the schedule.)

Ten years ago: Fed-up voters in Jamaica threw out the ruling party and delivered a landslide triumph to the opposition People's National Party and its leader, former Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller. The No. 15 Baylor Bears, led by Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III, pulled out an Alamo Bowl victory in the highest-scoring regulation bowl game in history, beating the Washington Huskies 67-56 at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas.

Five years ago: The United States struck back at Russia for hacking the U.S. presidential campaign with a sweeping set of punishments targeting Russia's spy agencies and diplomats. Tennis star Serena Williams announced her engagement to Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian — on Reddit. (The couple married on Nov. 16, 2017.)

One year ago: A Colorado National Guardsman who'd been sent to help out at a nursing home struggling with a COVID-19 outbreak was reported to be the first in the U.S. to have a new, more contagious variant of the coronavirus that had been circulating in England. Just days before he would have been sworn in

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as a new Republican member of the U.S. House from Louisiana, Luke Letlow died at the age of 41 from complications related to COVID-19. A statue of Abraham Lincoln with a freed slave appearing to kneel at his feet was removed from its downtown Boston perch. French designer Pierre Cardin died at 98. Phyllis McGuire, the last surviving member of the singing McGuire Sisters, died at her estate in Las Vegas at 89.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Rose Lee Maphis is 99. Actor Inga Swenson is 89. Retired ABC newscaster Tom Jarriel is 87. Actor Barbara Steele is 84. Actor Jon Voight is 83. Singer Marianne Faithfull is 75. Retired Hall of Fame Jockey Laffit Pincay Jr. is 75. Actor Ted Danson is 74. Singer-actor Yvonne Elliman is 70. The president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, is 68. Actor Patricia Clarkson is 62. Comedian Paula Poundstone is 62. Rock singer-musician Jim Reid (The Jesus and Mary Chain) is 60. Actor Michael Cudlitz is 57. Rock singer Dexter Holland (The Offspring) is 56. Actor-comedian Mystro Clark is 55. Actor Jason Gould is 55. News anchor Ashleigh Banfield is 54. Movie director Lilly Wachowski is 54. Actor Jennifer Ehle is 52. Actor Patrick Fischler is 52. Rock singer-musician Glen Phillips is 51. Actor Kevin Weisman is 51. Actor Jude Law is 49. Actor Maria Dizzia is 47. Actor Mekhi Phifer (mih-KY' FY'-fuhr) is 47. Actor Shawn Hatosy is 46. Actor Katherine Moennig is 44. Actor Diego Luna is 42. Actor Alison Brie is 39. Country singer Jessica Andrews is 38. Actor Iain de Caestecker is 34. Actor Jane Levy is 32. Singer-actor-dancer Ross Lynch is 26. Rock musician Danny Wagner is 23.