

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 1 of 58

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- BaseKamp Lodge tree at City Hall](#)
- [3- Olive Grove Golf Course tree at City Hall](#)
- [4- Birds enjoying the water as skating rink is flooded](#)
- [5- World of Experience - Write a letter](#)
- [6- Weather Pages](#)
- [10- Daily Devotional](#)
- [11- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [12- Subscription Form](#)
- [13- News from the Associated Press](#)

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

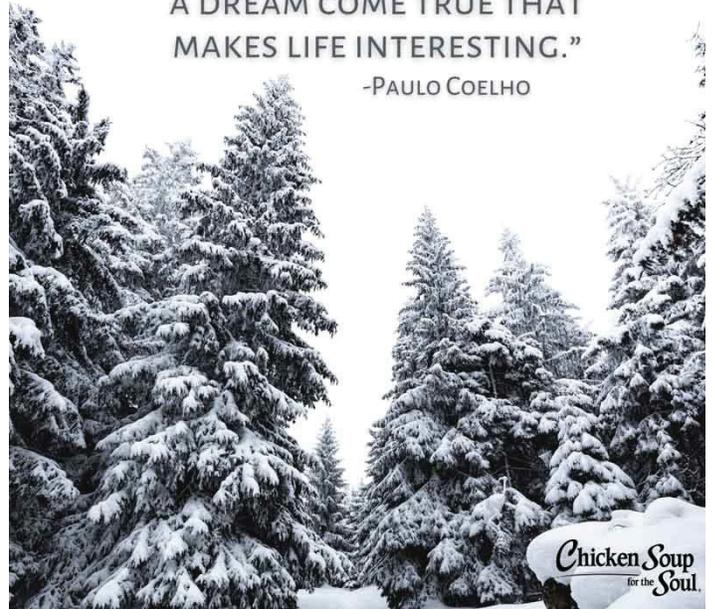
Groton Robotics Tournament, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Penguin Classic Debate on-line

Girls Basketball Classic at Redfield

“IT'S THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING
A DREAM COME TRUE THAT
MAKES LIFE INTERESTING.”

-PAULO COELHO



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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
© 2021 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 2 of 58



The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by BaseKamp Lodge.

Groton Daily Independent

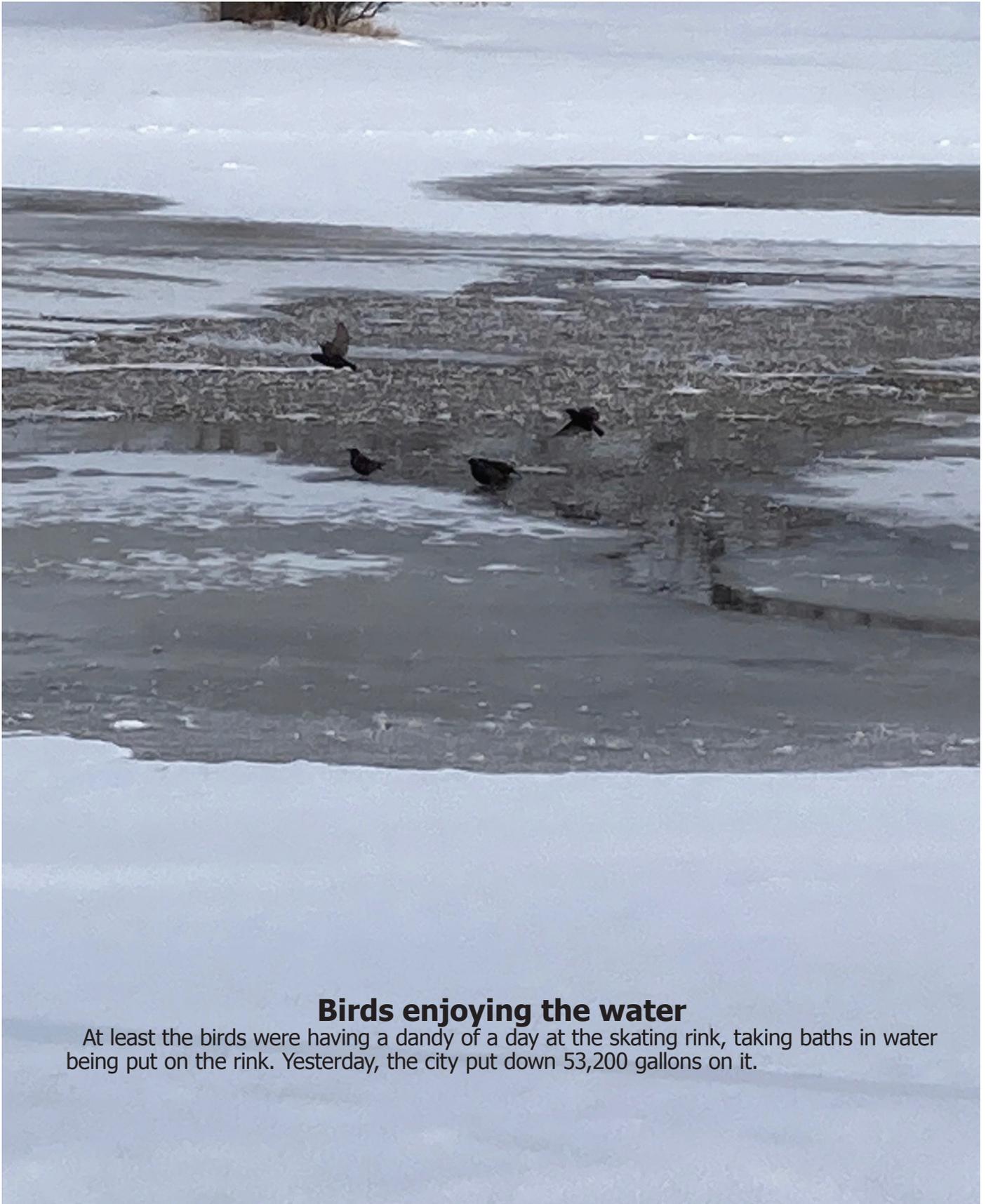
Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 3 of 58



The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by Olive Grove Golf Course.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 4 of 58



Birds enjoying the water

At least the birds were having a dandy of a day at the skating rink, taking baths in water being put on the rink. Yesterday, the city put down 53,200 gallons on it.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 5 of 58



Perhaps it could be called the new world. Or perhaps it could be called quick to type and slow to think.

I remember when I was a kid that I was told if we were angry at someone, write a letter (for those who don't know what that is - you take a piece of paper and with a pen or pencil, and actually write a note). Once your letter was written, you would take your letter and set it aside for a day before mailing it. The next day you would look at your letter, and probably decide it's not worth mailing and then throw it away. It served a two-fold purpose - you got off your chest what you wanted to say, but you didn't ruffle any more feathers than what was necessary and all was well.

Too many times I have seen on social media family drama issues.

Now days, if there is something or someone you don't like, there is no "cooling" off period. You quickly get on your phone or computer, pop open your social media platform, type what's on your angry mind, and then hit send. Boom! Now all of your friends and relatives can read what's on your mind. So now, the battle begins. To say the devil is in the details is a statement that is more true than it seems.

On the one side of the ring, we have you, not listed as a fighter with your boxing gloves on. Your friends and relatives come sliding over to you, encouraging you, feeling sorry of you, trying to make you feel good. Suddenly, Scotty from the Enterprise beams the victim of the social media attack to the other side of the ring. You are stripped from your peaceful realm into the battle ring without warning. And there you stand, in awe, trying to figure out what just happened. Your friends and relatives start encouraging you, feeling sorry for you, trying to make you feel good.

Now they put the boxing gloves on you and you're suppose to attack. The crowd goes wild as both sides begin to engage in the battle. It's all star wrestling in a digital world. The victim doesn't want to engage, but feels they have to. One punches and then there's the counter punch. And it gets heated. Pretty soon the match is the buzz all over social media and everyone is talking about it. "Did you see that post?" and now we have the number one show that everyone wants to tune into to watch the punches and counter punches.

Really.

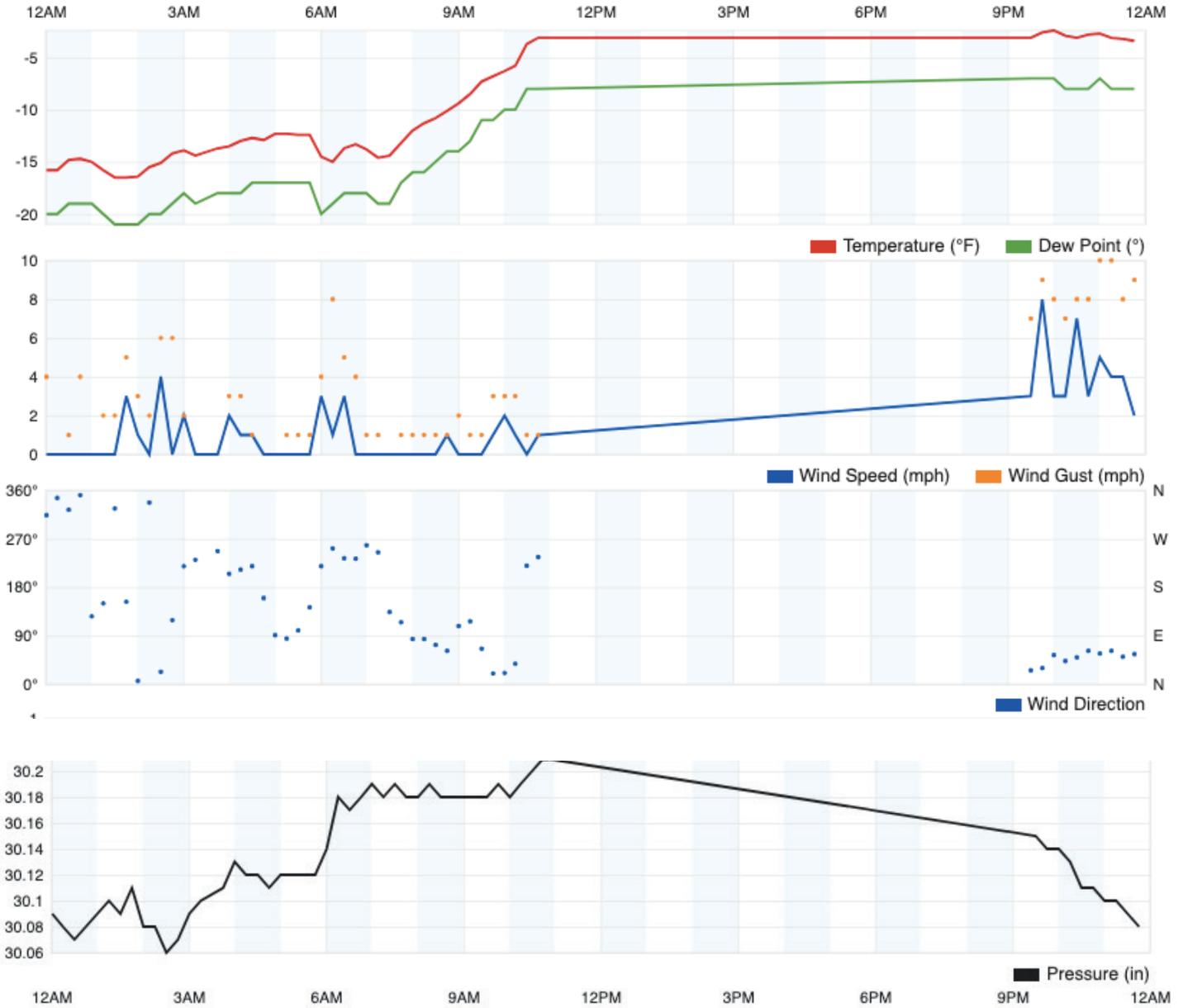
The problem that lies here is that no one wins. One side, with all of their friends and relatives, may think they have won. The other side may think they have won as well. The only winner is the crowd that got the tickets to watch the show for entertainment. Oh yes, eventually, the punches get smaller and soon disappear into the sunset. The attention will be drawn somewhere else. Some people love to dwell on drama. But ask yourself this question, "What have you accomplished?" Or better yet, ask yourself, "Is God proud of me for the way I handled that?"

Next time, pick up the phone and make that call. It might be a simple mis-understanding. And even if it's not, don't put your personal battles on social media. God's commandments are just as relevant on social media as they are in real life. Be responsible and write a letter.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 6 of 58

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 7 of 58

Today



Cold

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Friday



Cold

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy

High: 6 °F

Low: -10 °F

High: -1 °F↓

Low: -22 °F

Cold End To The Week

Today



Highs: 3 to 24° F

Tonight



Lows: -12 to 2° F

Friday

BREEZY



Highs: -5 to 7° F

Wind chills in the teens
below to 20s below zero

Arctic air will remain in place through the weekend, with periods of bitterly cold wind chills. Look for a little light snow across the southern half of South Dakota on Friday as well, with minimal accumulations expected.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 8 of 58

Today in Weather History

December 30, 1985: Winds gusted to 40 to 50 mph over northern South Dakota through the day and into the southern part of the state by late afternoon. The high winds lowered visibilities to near zero at times between Lemmon in Perkins County and Faith in Meade County. The strongest wind gusts were to 63 mph at Mitchell. At 9:33 pm CST, the strong winds blew a semi-tractor trailer off the highway one mile east of Aberdeen.

December 30, 2010: A strong upper-level low-pressure trough and associated surface low-pressure area moved across the region bringing the first of two consecutive blizzards to central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 3 to 6 inches combined with bitter cold north winds of 25 to 40 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions across central and northeast South Dakota from the late morning until the evening hours. Near zero visibilities caused dangerous travel conditions resulting in the closing of Interstates 29 and 90 along with several highways across the region. Several hundred people were stranded in the aftermath of the storm. A group of fishermen had to be rescued in Day County when they became stranded on the ice. The snowfall began across the area anywhere from 7 to 11 am CST and ended between 10 pm and 1 am CST.

1960: A massive accumulation of snow, 68.2 inches to be exact, buries the Japanese city of Tsukayama in 24 hours. Tsukayama is located in the coastal mountains inland from the Sea of Japan along Honshu's west coast and subject to significant sea-effect snowfalls. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the Papers in Meteorology and Geophysics.

2003: The first time in five years, sections of Las Vegas receive an inch or two of snow on cars, roads, sidewalks, and trees, while snow flurries fell on downtown and the Strip.

2014: Steam Devils were seen over Lake Superior near Saginaw, Minnesota. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the Minnesota Public Radio.

2017: Funnels/steam devils were observed on Lake McConaughy, Nebraska in the morning. A boundary moved over the lake's 'warmer' water (compared to the surrounding air). The combination of converging winds and energy added by the lake helped spin these up.

1880 - The temperature at Charlotte, NC, plunged to an all-time record cold reading of 5 degrees below zero, a record which was equalled on the 21st of January in 1985. (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A great cold wave set many records in the northeastern U.S. The mercury plunged to 13 degrees below zero at New York City, and to 15 degrees below zero at Boston. Temperature readings dipped below zero at Boston five nights in a row. Berlin NH hit 44 degrees below zero in the "Great World War I Cold Wave," and Saint Johnsbury VT reached 43 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1933 - The temperature reached 50 degrees below zero at Bloomfield, VT. It was the coldest reading in modern records for New England. The temperature at Pittsborough NH reached 44 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1955 - Anchorage, AK, reported an all-time record snow depth of 47 inches. (30th-1st) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in Utah, with 28 inches reported in the Mount Holly and Elk Meadows area. Strong winds prevailed ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. Winds gusted to 46 mph at Dodge City KS, and reached 80 mph at Ruidoso NM. Strong northerly winds, ushering arctic cold into the north central U.S., created blizzard conditions in western Minnesota and central and eastern South Dakota. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. A week of subfreezing temperatures in southern California claimed the lives of five people. Redding CA was blanketed with four inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Extreme cold continued across northern Maine. Milo ME was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 38 degrees below zero, and the low of 31 degrees below zero at Caribou ME was a December record for that location. Freezing rain spread across much of Lower Michigan, knocking out electrical power to 1.9 million customers in southeastern Lower Michigan. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 10 of 58



SOME FINAL WORDS

Often what we find depends on what we look for. Here are a few things to look for in the days we will face in the year to come:

Look for God's presence. When fear grips us or failure would defeat us, or if life's challenges seem to be larger than we are, or the nights are longer than usual, remember, we are never alone if Jesus rules and reigns in our lives. He promised that "He will never leave us nor forsake us." When life turns to shambles, He will wrap His loving arms around us and protect us because He is with us.

Look for God's power. The psalmist said that "God is our refuge and strength." Often we look to people for insights and advice when we are faced with difficult problems. But their solutions are never as good as the solutions that come from God. God is the greatest asset any Christian has but we must go to Him and draw from His strength and power.

Look for God's provision. "My God shall supply all your needs." Though we may fail Him, He will not fail us. Though we may fail to claim His promises, it does not mean they are not available. If we look to and trust in Him, He will not let us down.

Prayer: Father, we look to You in faith believing that You will meet our every need if we trust You. Lord, help our unbelief! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: 1 Kings 8:56-58; Psalm 46:1-3; Philippians 4:19

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 11 of 58

2021 Community Events

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 12 of 58

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

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

E-mail _____

Password _____

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

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 13 of 58

News from the  Associated Press

Wednesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Highmore-Harrold 47, Wessington Springs 36

McLaughlin 47, Solen, N.D. 40

Sioux Valley 59, Baltic 48

Chadron Rotary Holiday Classic=

Consolation=

Custer 60, Hemingford, Neb. 29

Hoop City Classic=

Mitchell 50, Campbell County, Wyo. 49

Huron Holiday Classic=

Chester 78, Iroquois 42

DeSmet 46, Jones County 37

Howard 41, Faulkton 35

James Valley Christian 51, Lyman 42

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 49, Lower Brule 38

Sanford Classic=

Thunder Basin, Wyo. 61, Elk Point-Jefferson 39

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Sioux Valley 71, Baltic 33

Wessington Springs 53, Highmore-Harrold 43

Chadron Classic=

Custer 68, Valentine, Neb. 44

Chadron Rotary Holiday Classic=

Consolation=

Custer 68, Valentine, Neb. 44

Hoop City Classic=

FACS, Tenn. 71, Sioux Falls Christian 57

Howard 56, Freeman Academy/Marion 53

Lennox 66, Garretson 45

Lower Brule 63, Viborg-Hurley 58

Mitchell 85, Campbell County, Wyo. 81

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

16-19-21-22-33

(sixteen, nineteen, twenty-one, twenty-two, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$32,000

Lotto America

11-13-15-20-46, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 4

(eleven, thirteen, fifteen, twenty, forty-six; Star Ball: seven; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$5.56 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$221 million

Powerball

02-06-09-33-39, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 2

(two, six, nine, thirty-three, thirty-nine; Powerball: eleven; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$441 million

SD committee investigating AG subpoena crash investigators

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Wednesday subpoenaed law enforcement officials and crash investigation documents as they weigh whether the state's attorney general should be impeached for his conduct in a fatal car crash.

After meeting behind closed doors in executive session for two days, a House committee tasked with recommending whether Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg should face impeachment charges unanimously approved the subpoenas in a brief public session Tuesday. The committee — made of seven Republicans and two Democrats — indicated it will reconvene in January to hear from those who investigated the crash.

House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican, said that as the committee sifted through the crash investigation file, "questions arose and we issued subpoenas to get our questions answered."

The attorney general, 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 Ravnsborg struck him with his car. Ravnsborg 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.

The committee subpoenaed Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price, who oversaw the investigation, two agents from the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, which assisted in the investigation, a crash reconstruction expert, and a South Dakota Highway Patrol trooper. They also subpoenaed crash investigation documents, including from the Hyde County State's Attorney, which brought charges against Ravnsborg.

A spokesman for Ravnsborg did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Gov. Kristi Noem, a fellow Republican, has called for Ravnsborg to resign, and Price, her cabinet secretary, has said he believes the attorney general should have faced a charge of manslaughter.

The governor gave Gosch a copy of the crash investigation, which lawmakers reviewed during their private meeting. But Gosch said the committee was also subpoenaing the documents to make sure they received a complete record of the investigation.

"We spent a good, two long days going through a very big file and we are by no means all the way through that," said Rep. Jamie Smith, a Democrat who has previously called for Ravnsborg's ouster.

He said the committee wanted to "be as transparent as possible" in its investigation but decided to initially meet in private because the crash investigation file contains "personal information that does need to be redacted."

Lawmakers planned to meet in executive session on Jan. 17 to discuss what material should be redacted from the crash investigation, but Gosch said he planned for the testimony from law enforcement officials to happen in a public hearing.

If the investigative committee recommends impeachment charges be brought against Ravnsborg and a majority of the House were to approve the charges, Ravnsborg 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.

"I don't anticipate this being a quick process," Smith said. "This is a ton of information to go through."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 15 of 58

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. December 28, 2021.

Editorial: New CDC Protocols: Is Now The Right Time?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) picked a curious moment to ease up on its recommendations for the isolation of people infected with COVID-19.

On Monday, the CDC announced it has shortened the recommended isolation time for people with COVID-19 from 10 days to five days if they don't exhibit any symptoms — and a test is not required. Additionally, they are advised to wear a mask around others for at least five more days beyond that.

The recommended quarantine time for vaccinated people exposed to the virus has also been reduced to five days

The moment to announce these alterations for what are already confusing guidelines is striking since COVID's omicron variant is surging around many parts of the country. (Given our pandemic history, this is likely a preview of coming attractions for this area.)

However, officials said they are making the changes in part BECAUSE of the surge in the new variant.

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

The social media reaction from health experts to the CDC recommendations has been extremely mixed.

For instance, Dr. Lean Wen, who is a CNN analyst, tweeted that the modification is necessary "to prevent collapse of critical infrastructure. The US will soon surpass our previous peak of infections & could top 1 million new cases a day."

However, Dr. Eric Fiegl-Ding, an epidemiologist, health economist and a senior fellow with a Federation of American Scientists (and who, by the way, was raised in South Dakota), criticized the recommendations, saying, "... this lackadaisical pandemic management approach will only PROLONG the pandemic and worsen the transmission and hospital system crisis longer!" He also questions (and rightly so, sadly) the reliability of the honor system, which would trust people to decide for themselves when they are well enough to return to work.

While understanding the need for the CDC to adapt to changing science, this decision at this time does seem nervously questionable, especially given that the variant now marching around the globe and across the U.S. has only been on our radar for a little more than a month. While early indications suggest that omicron infections may not be as severe as past COVID waves, there are still segments of the population that are susceptible to the variant — including younger people, who are seeing their infection numbers rise.

And while keeping businesses and infrastructure — including health care facilities — up and running is certainly important, it's also essential to get a handle on the surge and contain its impact.

Their best way to do that is to proceed on the side of caution, and that still includes getting vaccinated and masking up in public situations when you cannot socially distance. And it should also embrace the most conservative measures to keep the spread of the variant in check.

The CDC may ultimately be proven wise in this approach, but at this juncture, with a new surge on the rise, it doesn't seem like a good time to gamble on that possibility.

END

Jail inmates sue to get mental health treatment

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Three jail inmates have filed a class-action lawsuit over delays in getting treatment to restore their mental competency.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported Tuesday that the inmates — Juan Alvarez, Aubrey Archambeau and Joseph Baker — filed the lawsuit against the South Dakota Human Services Center in federal court last week.

They contend they've been ordered to go to the center to restore their mental competency earlier this year but they still haven't been sent to the facility and remain in jail.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 16 of 58

The state Department of Social Services didn't respond to the newspaper's request for comment on the lawsuit.

The center is the state's public mental health hospital. It's been suffering from chronic staffing shortages that have limited the number of patients it can accept. State lawmakers formed a committee this past year to review mental health services and consider changes to the system. They could introduce legislation on the issue during the next session.

'Slow-motion insurrection': How GOP seizes election power

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

In the weeks leading up to the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, a handful of Americans — well-known politicians, obscure local bureaucrats — stood up to block then-President Donald Trump's unprecedented attempt to overturn a free and fair vote of the American people.

In the year since, Trump-aligned Republicans have worked to clear the path for next time.

In battleground states and beyond, Republicans are taking hold of the once-overlooked machinery of elections. While the effort is incomplete and uneven, outside experts on democracy and Democrats are sounding alarms, warning that the United States is witnessing a "slow-motion insurrection" with a better chance of success than Trump's failed power grab last year.

They point to a mounting list of evidence: Several candidates who deny Trump's loss are running for offices that could have a key role in the election of the next president in 2024. In Michigan, the Republican Party is restocking members of obscure local boards that could block approval of an election. In Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, the GOP-controlled legislatures are backing open-ended "reviews" of the 2020 election, modeled on a deeply flawed look-back in Arizona. The efforts are poised to fuel disinformation and anger about the 2020 results for years to come.

All this comes as the Republican Party has become more aligned behind Trump, who has made denial of the 2020 results a litmus test for his support. Trump has praised the Jan. 6 rioters and backed primaries aimed at purging lawmakers who have crossed him. Sixteen GOP governors have signed laws making it more difficult to vote. An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll showed that two-thirds of Republicans do not believe Democrat Joe Biden was legitimately elected as president.

The result, experts say, is that another baseless challenge to an election has become more likely, not less.

"It's not clear that the Republican Party is willing to accept defeat anymore," said Steven Levitsky, a Harvard political scientist and co-author of the book "How Democracies Die." "The party itself has become an anti-democratic force."

American democracy has been flawed and manipulated by both parties since its inception. Millions of Americans — Black people, women, Native Americans and others — have been excluded from the process. Both Republicans and Democrats have written laws rigging the rules in their favor.

This time, experts argue, is different: Never in the country's modern history has a major party sought to turn the administration of elections into an explicitly partisan act.

Republicans who sound alarms are struggling to be heard by their own party. GOP Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming or Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, members of a House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection, are often dismissed as party apostates. Others have cast the election denialism as little more than a distraction.

But some local officials, the people closest to the process and its fragility, are pleading for change. At a recent news conference in Wisconsin, Kathleen Bernier, a GOP state senator and former elections clerk, denounced her party's efforts to seize control of the election process.

"These made up things that people do to jazz up the base is just despicable and I don't believe any elected legislator should play that game," said Bernier.

LOCAL CONTROL

Bernier's view is not shared by the majority of the Republicans who control the state Legislature in Wisconsin, one of a handful of states that Biden carried but Trump wrongly claims he won. Early in 2021,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 17 of 58

Wisconsin Republicans ordered their Legislative Audit Bureau to review the 2020 election. That review found no significant fraud. Last month, an investigation by the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty came to the same conclusion.

Still, many Republicans are convinced that something went wrong. They point to how the nonpartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission — which the GOP-led Legislature and then-Republican governor created eight years ago to run the state's elections — changed guidance for local elections officers to make voting easier during the pandemic.

That's led to a struggle for control of elections between the state Legislature and the commission.

"We feel we need to get this straight for people to believe we have integrity," said GOP Sen. Alberta Darling, who represents the conservative suburbs north of Milwaukee. "We're not just trying to change the election with Trump. We're trying to dig into the next election and change irregularities."

Republicans are also remaking the way elections are run in other states. In Georgia, an election bill signed this year by the GOP governor gave the Republican-controlled General Assembly new powers over the state board of elections, which controls its local counterparts.

The law is being used to launch a review of operations in solidly-Democratic Fulton County, home to most of Atlanta, which could lead to a state takeover. The legislature also passed measures allowing local officials to remove Democrats from election boards in six other counties.

In Pennsylvania, the GOP-controlled legislature is undertaking a review of the presidential election, subpoenaing voter information that Democrats contend is an unprecedented intrusion into voter privacy. Meanwhile, Trump supporters are signing up for local election jobs in droves. One pastor who attended the Jan. 6 rally in the nation's capital recently won a race to become an election judge overseeing voting in a rural part of Lancaster County.

In Michigan, the GOP has focused on the state's county boards of canvassers. The little-known committees' power was briefly in the spotlight in November of 2020, when Trump urged the two Republican members of the board overseeing Wayne County, home to Democratic-bastion Detroit, to vote to block certification of the election.

After one of the Republican members defied Trump, local Republicans replaced her with Robert Boyd, who told The Detroit Free Press that he would not have certified Biden's win last year.

Boyd did not return a call for comment.

A similar swap — replacing a traditional Republican with one who parroted Trump's election lies — occurred in Macomb County, the state's third most populous county.

The Detroit News in October reported that Republicans had replaced their members on boards of canvassers in eight of Michigan's 11 most populous counties

Michigan officials say that if boards of canvassers don't certify an election they can be sued and compelled to do so. Still, that process could cause chaos and be used as a rallying cry behind election disputes.

"They're laying the groundwork for a slow-motion insurrection," said Mark Brewer, an election lawyer and former chair of the Michigan Democratic Party.

The state's top election official, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, warned: "The movement to cast doubt on the 2020 election has now turned their eyes ... to changing the people who were in positions of authority and protected 2020."

TRUMP'S RETRIBUTION

That includes Benson.

Multiple Republicans have lined up to challenge her, including Kristina Karamo, a community college professor who alleged fraud in the 2020 elections and contended that the Jan. 6 attackers were actually antifa activists trying to frame Trump supporters.

Trump has been clear about his intentions: He is seeking to oust statewide officials who stood in his way and replace them with allies.

"We have secretary of states that did not do the right thing for the American people," Trump, who has endorsed Karamo, told The Associated Press this month.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 18 of 58

The most prominent Trump push is in Georgia, where the former president is backing U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, who voted against Biden's Electoral College victory on Jan. 6, in a primary race against the Republican secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger. He rejected Trump's pleas to "find" enough votes to declare him the winner.

Trump also encouraged former U.S. Sen. David Perdue to challenge Gov. Brian Kemp in the GOP primary. Kemp turned down Trump's entreaties to declare him the victor in the 2020 election.

In October, Jason Shepherd stepped down as chair of the Cobb County GOP after the group censured Kemp. "It's shortsighted. They're not contemplating the effects of this down the line," Shepherd said in an interview. "They want their pound of flesh from Brian Kemp because Brian Kemp followed the law."

In Nevada, multiple lawsuits seeking to overturn Biden's victory were thrown out by judges. A suit aimed at overturning his congressional loss was filed by Jim Marchant, a former GOP state lawmaker now running to be secretary of state, and it too was dismissed. The current Republican secretary of state, Barbara Cegavske, who is term limited, found there was no significant fraud in the contests.

Marchant said he's not just seeking to become a Trump enabler, though he was endorsed by Trump in his congressional bid. "I've been fighting this since before he came along," Marchant said of Trump. "All we want is fair and transparent elections."

In Pennsylvania, Republican state Sen. Doug Mastriano, who organized buses of Trump supporters for Trump's rally near the White House on Jan. 6, has signaled he's running for governor. In Arizona, state Rep. Mark Finchem's bid to be secretary of state has unnerved many Republicans, given that he hosted a daylong hearing in November 2020 that featured Trump adviser Rudolph Giuliani. Former news anchor Kari Lake, who repeats Trump's election falsehoods, is running to succeed Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, who stood up to Trump's election-year pressure and is barred from another term.

Elsewhere in Arizona, Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer, who defended his office against the conspiratorial election review, has started a political committee to provide financial support to Republicans who tell the truth about the election. But he's realistic about the persistence of the myth of a stolen election within his party's base.

"Right now," Richer said, "the incentive structure seems to be strongly in favor of doing the wrong thing."

HIGH STAKES RACES FOR GOVERNOR

In Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, Democratic governors have been a major impediment to the GOP's effort to overhaul elections. Most significantly, they have vetoed new rules that Democrats argue are aimed at making it harder for people of color to vote.

Governors have a significant role in U.S. elections: They certify the winners in their states, clearing way for the appointment of Electoral College members. That raises fears that Trump-friendly governors could try to certify him — if he were to run in 2024 and be the GOP nominee — as the winner of their state's electoral votes regardless of the vote count.

Additionally, some Republicans argue that state legislatures can name their own electors regardless of what the vote tally says.

But Democrats have had little success in laying out the stakes in these races. It's difficult for voters to believe the system could be vulnerable, said Daniel Squadron of The States Project, a Democratic group that tries to win state legislatures.

"The most motivated voters in America today are those who think the 2020 election was stolen," he said. "Acknowledging this is afoot requires such a leap from any core American value system that any of us have lived through."

Denver shootings suspect wrote books previewing attacks

By COLLEEN SLEVIN and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A man accused of killing five people in a rampage in Denver is believed to have written fictional books self-published online that named some of his real-life victims and described similar attacks.

The writings are part of the investigation into what led Lyndon James McLeod to carry out the shootings,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 19 of 58

which took place in less than an hour Monday at several locations around the metro area, Denver police spokesman Doug Schepman said Wednesday.

McLeod, 47, knew most of the people he shot through business or personal relationships, police have said. Four of those shot were attacked at tattoo shops. In addition to those killed, two other people were wounded, including a police officer who shot and killed McLeod after being hit.

In the first novel, written under a pen name of Roman McClay, a character named Lyndon stalks a poker party held by a character named "Michael Swinyard" and gains access to a building near Cheesman Park by posing as a police officer. He then fatally shoots everyone at the party and robs them before fleeing with his dog in a van.

In Monday's attack, Michael Swinyard, 67, was fatally shot at a home near Denver's Cheesman Park, police said.

In his second novel, which also features a character named Lyndon, McClay names Alicia Cardenas as a victim. The book also mentions the tattoo shop she owned, Sol Tribe.

Alicia Cardenas, a 44-year-old tattoo artist, was among his first victims in Monday's rampage. She was killed at her tattoo shop, along with another woman, Alyssa Gunn, 35. A man who was also wounded there is expected to survive, police said. He was identified by friends and customers as Gunn's husband, James Maldonado, a piercer there.

That shop is less than a mile (1.6 kilometers) from a tattoo shop that McLeod was listed as the lease holder for between 2014 and 2016. Cardenas later took it over before moving the shop to its current spot, city records show.

McLeod was not licensed to work as a tattoo artist or operate a tattoo business himself in Denver according to city records, a spokesperson for Denver's licensing agency, Eric Escudero, said Wednesday.

Cardenas, whose daughter is 12 years old, described herself as a "proud Indigenous artist" who also painted murals.

Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen said during a news conference Tuesday 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.

Matt Clark, commander of the Denver Police Department's Major Crimes Division, said McLeod knew most of the people he targeted but not the last person he shot — a clerk in a hotel in Lakewood's Belmar shopping area. However, McLeod had had some dealings with the hotel, Clark said.

The hotel clerk, 28-year-old Sarah Steck, died of her injuries Tuesday.

Steck graduated this year from Metropolitan State University with a bachelor's degree of fine art in communication design. She was known among her co-workers at the hotel for her infectious laugh and love of kittens, art and music, The Denver Post reported.

Soon after the shooting at Cardenas' shop, McLeod forced his way into a residence that is also home to a business. City records show it is licensed as a tattoo shop. He pursued the occupants through the building and fired shots, but no one was injured, Clark said. Then he shot and killed Swinyard near Cheesman Park, Clark 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 Scofield, 38, was killed there, Lakewood police spokesperson John Romero said.

Scofield was a father of three, according to a site raising money for his family.

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, before shooting her, he said.

About a minute later, Lakewood police officer Ashley Ferris saw McLeod and ordered him to drop his

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 20 of 58

weapon. She was shot in the abdomen but fired back and killed the gunman.

Ferris underwent surgery Monday night and is expected to make a full recovery.

"I can't overemphasize enough the heroic actions of our Lakewood police agent," Romero said during a news conference Tuesday. "In the face of being shot, in the face of danger, she was able to not only save others from this terrible tragedy but also neutralize the threat."

Associated Press writer Mead Gruver contributed to this report.

Late Senate leader Harry Reid remembered as 'man of action'

By KEVIN FREKING, LAURIE KELLMAN and KEN RITTER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Presidents and former Senate colleagues are lauding longtime Majority Leader Harry Reid for a political legacy that included an expansion of health insurance coverage for millions of Americans and helping secure an economic aid package and banking overhaul following the 2008 financial crisis.

They are also recalling a politician whose blunt and combative words often antagonized his political rivals, and sometimes his allies. The Nevada Democrat's abrupt style was typified by his habit of unceremoniously hanging up the phone without saying goodbye.

Reid, 82, died Tuesday at home in Henderson, Nevada, of complications from pancreatic cancer, according to Landra Reid, his wife of 62 years.

President Joe Biden said in a proclamation that the U.S. flag will be flown at half-staff at the White House and other federal buildings on the day of Reid's internment. Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak issued a similar order for his state. The flag at the U.S. Capitol has already been lowered. Reid's family has not yet announced memorial service plans.

Biden called Reid one of the great Senate majority leaders in the country's history.

"He was a man of action, and a man of his word — guided by faith, loyalty, and unshakeable resolve," Biden said in the proclamation.

Over a 34-year career in Washington, Reid thrived on behind-the-scenes wrangling. He served as majority leader during the presidency of a Republican, George W. Bush, and a Democrat, Barack Obama, a chaotic period that included a crippling recession and the Republican takeover of the House after the 2010 elections.

Reid retired in 2016 after an accident left him blind in one eye. He announced in May 2018 that he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was being treated.

In many respects, his legacy is tied to Obama's. In a letter to Reid before Reid's death, Obama said he wouldn't have been president without Reid's support.

"As different as we are, I think we both saw something of ourselves in each other — a couple of outsiders who had defied the odds and knew how to take a punch and cared about the little guy," Obama said.

Republicans cited Reid's toughness and tenacity, while also noting they disagreed with him on many issues.

"The nature of Harry's and my jobs brought us into frequent and sometimes intense conflict over politics and policy," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. "But I never doubted that Harry was always doing what he earnestly, deeply felt was right for Nevada and our country."

Former House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said he and Reid "disagreed on many things, sometimes famously. But we were always honest with each other. In the years after we left public service, that honesty became a bond."

Reid was born in Searchlight, Nevada. His father was an alcoholic who died by suicide at 58. His mother was a laundress in a bordello, Reid grew up in a small cabin without indoor plumbing. He hitchhiked to Basic High School in Henderson about 40 miles (64 kilometers) from home, and that's where he met the wife. At Utah State University, the couple became members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The future senator put himself through George Washington University law school in the District of Columbia by working nights as a U.S. Capitol police officer.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 21 of 58

At 28, Reid was elected to the Nevada Assembly. At 30, he became the youngest lieutenant governor in Nevada history.

Elected to the U.S. House in 1982, Reid served in Congress longer than anyone in Nevada history.

After his election as Senate majority leader in 2007, he 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.

Reid steered hundreds of millions of dollars to Nevada and was credited with almost single-handedly blocking construction of a nuclear waste storage facility at Yucca Mountain outside Las Vegas.

Reid's 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 a ban on so-called partial-birth abortion and the Iraq War resolution in 2002, something Reid later said was his biggest regret in Congress.

He also voted against most gun control bills. In 2013, after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in Connecticut, he dropped a proposed ban on assault weapons from the Democrats' gun control legislation. The package, he said, would not pass with the ban attached.

Reid's Senate particularly irritated members of the House, both Republicans and Democrats. When then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., 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. They used it to demonize Pelosi and cast the legislation as a big-government power grab. Obama signed the measure into law in March 2010.

But voters, angered by the recession and inspired by the small-government tea party, soon swept Democrats from their House majority.

Reid also took action in 2013 to change the Senate's filibuster rules and lower the threshold for advancement to 51 votes for most executive and judicial nominees, but not Supreme Court picks.

McConnell went further when Republicans were in the majority, lowering it to 51 votes for Supreme Court nominees too, and enabling Republicans to install three of President Donald Trump's high court choices over Democratic objections.

In his final months, Reid spoke in favor of eliminating the filibuster altogether, calling the Senate a "legislative graveyard" and no longer a deliberative body.

"The filibuster has become an anti-democratic weapon wielded by the minority to silence the will of the people," he wrote in the Las Vegas Sun.

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

Myanmar military reverts to strategy of massacres, burnings

By SAM McNEIL, DAVID RISING and RISHABH R. JAIN Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — When the young farmhand returned to his village in Myanmar, he found the still smoldering corpses in a circle in a burned-out hut, some with their limbs tied.

The Myanmar military had stormed Done Taw at 11 a.m. on Dec. 7, he told the AP, with about 50 soldiers hunting people on foot. The farmhand and other villagers fled to the forest and fields, but 10 were captured and killed, including five teenagers, with one only 14, he said. A photo taken by his friend shows the charred remains of a victim lying face down, holding his head up, suggesting he was burned alive.

"I am very upset, it is unacceptable," said the 19-year-old, who like others interviewed by the AP asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal.

The carnage at Done Taw is just one of the most recent signs that the Myanmar military is reverting to a strategy of massacres as a weapon of war, according to an AP investigation based on interviews with 40 witnesses, social media, satellite imagery and data on deaths.

The massacres and scorched-earth tactics — such as the razing of entire villages — represent the latest

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 22 of 58

escalation in the military's violence against both civilians and the growing opposition. Since the military seized power in February, it has cracked down ever more brutally, abducting young men and boys, killing health care workers and torturing prisoners.

The massacres and burnings also signal a return to practices that the military has long used against ethnic minorities such as the Muslim Rohingya, thousands of whom were killed in 2017. The military is now accused of killing at least 35 civilians on Christmas Eve in Mo So village in an eastern region home to the Karenni minority. A witness told the AP that many of the bodies of the men, women and children were burned beyond recognition.

But this time, the military is also using the same methods against people and villages of its own Buddhist Bamar ethnic majority. The focus of most of the latest killings has been in the northwest, including in a Bamar heartland where support for the opposition is strong.

More than 80 people have died in killings of three or more in the Sagaing region alone since August, according to data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, or AAPP, a group that monitors verified arrests and deaths in Myanmar. These include the deaths of those in Done Taw, five people in Gaung Kwal village on Dec. 12 and nine in Kalay township on Dec. 23, part of a trend that has made Sagaing the deadliest region in Myanmar.

The military is also reprising a hallmark tactic of destroying entire villages where there may be support for the opposition. Satellite imagery the AP obtained from Maxar Technologies shows that more than 580 buildings have been burned in the northwestern town of Thantlang alone since September.

The violence appears to be a response to the local resistance forces springing up across the country, but the military is wiping out civilians in the process. In Done Taw, for example, the military moved in after a convoy hit a roadside bomb nearby, but the people killed were not part of any resistance, another villager told the AP.

"They were just normal workers on the betel-leaf plantation," the 48-year-old welder said. "They hid because they were afraid."

For the investigation, the AP spoke to dozens of witnesses, family members, a military commander who deserted, human rights groups and officials, along with analyzing data on deaths from the AAPP. The AP also reviewed satellite imagery and dozens of images and videos, with experts checking them against known locations and events.

The numbers likely fall far short of actual killings because they tend to happen in remote locations, and the military suppresses information on them by curtailing Internet access and checking cell phones.

"There are similar cases taking place across the country at this point, especially in the northwest of Myanmar," Kyaw Moe Tun, who refused to leave his position as Myanmar's United Nations envoy after the military seized power, told the AP. "Look at the pattern, look at the way it's happened...it is systematic and widespread."

The military, known as the Tatmadaw, did not respond to several requests by phone and by email for comment. Three days after the Done Taw attack, the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper dismissed reports of the slayings as "fake news," accusing unidentified countries of "wishing to disintegrate Myanmar" by inciting bloodshed.

"The nature of how brazen this attack was is really indicative of the scale of violence we can expect in the coming months, and particularly next year," said Manny Maung, a researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Just in the week of the Done Taw massacre, the military killed 20 more people in Sagaing, the AP analysis shows. And on Dec. 17, soldiers killed nine people, including a child, in Gantgaw township in the neighboring region of Magway, a witness told the AP, confirming AAPP data. Troops brought in by helicopter occupied the village for two days, and those who fled returned to find, identify and cremate rotting bodies, the witness said.

The movement of troops suggests that violence in the northwest is likely to pick up. Two military convoys of more than 80 trucks each with troops and supplies from Sagaing have made it to neighboring Chin state, according to an opposition group. And a former military captain told the AP that soldiers in Chin State were resupplied and reinforced in October, and the army is now stockpiling munition, fuel and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 23 of 58

rations in Sagaing.

The captain, who goes by the nom de guerre Zin Yaw, or Seagull, is a 20-year military veteran who deserted in March and now trains opposition forces. He said he continues to receive updates from friends still in the military and has access to defense documents, several of which he shared with the AP as proof of his access. His identity was also verified by an organization of military deserters.

"What the military worries about most is giving up their power," said Zin Yaw. "In the military they have a saying, if you retreat, destroy everything. It means that even if they know they are going to lose, they destroy everything."

The Tatmadaw overthrew the enormously popular Aung San Suu Kyi in February, claiming massive fraud in the 2020 democratic election that saw her party win in a landslide. Since then, the military and police have killed more than 1,375 people and arrested more than 11,200, according to the AAPP.

One of the earliest mass killings took place on March 14 in the township of Hlaing Tharyar in Yangon, the biggest city in Myanmar, according to a report this month from Human Rights Watch. Witnesses said that security forces fired on protesters with military assault rifles and killed at least 65, including bystanders.

As the military's tactics have turned increasingly brutal, civilians have fought back. Opposition started with a national civil disobedience movement and protests, but has grown increasingly violent with attacks on troops and government facilities.

In May, the opposition National Unity Government announced a new military wing, the People's Defense Force, and in September declared a "defensive war." Loose-knit guerrilla groups calling themselves PDF have since emerged across the country, with varying degrees of allegiance to the NUG.

An early example of the military unleashing its battle-tested tactics on majority Buddhist areas came just 23 miles up the river from Done Taw in Kani township. In July, images circulated of massacres in four small villages that Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations called "crimes against humanity." Four witnesses told the AP that soldiers killed 43 people in four incidents and discarded their bodies in the jungle.

On July 9, soldiers in trucks rolled into Yin village in Kani, launching an attack that would leave 16 dead, according to three witness accounts. The soldiers started shooting and sent people fleeing. Troops surrounded a group in the nearby jungle, said one woman who was captured with her brother.

She was set free, but would never see her brother alive again. When she returned with others three days later, they discovered his body on the forest floor, already rotting in the heat and showing signs of torture.

"We all live in fear," said the woman, who like the other villagers asked to remain anonymous for safety. "We are worried that they might come back during the night."

One 42-year-old man said a search party of 50 villagers found three separate clusters of bodies. Some appeared to have been dragged to death along rocky ground with ropes or with their own clothes. The bodies had been pillaged for gold.

"There were some fleshly remains and the odor was so foul," the villager said. "We couldn't even get close because of the smell."

The village is now terrorized into silence, he said, listening for the next attack with their bags packed and the normal rhythms of life frozen in fear.

Another Kani resident told the AP that when soldiers approached his village of Zee Pin Twin on July 26, he fled into the jungle. He returned to find his home broken and blackened by fire. Precious goods were stolen, and important documents, food, and other belongings like wedding photos lay in a smoldering heap.

Two days later, villagers with search dogs found 12 bodies, some buried in shallow pits in the jungle. A villager told the AP that they saw bruises and other signs of torture on the corpses, and that one man's hands were tied with military boot laces and his mouth gagged.

The descriptions match photographs and videos of burned and brutalized bodies given to the Myanmar Witness monitoring group.

"When there's image and videos (in) three separate events...it's very hard to deny," said Benjamin Strick, head of investigations for the Britain and Thailand-based group.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 24 of 58

The AP could not independently verify the grisly images, but they also match incident reports collected by the AAPP. John Quinley, a human rights specialist with Fortify Rights, said the group believes the violence in Kani and in Sagaing is a "direct result" of PDF operations there.

"The Myanmar junta's strategy is to try to create an environment of terror and try to silence civilians and also try to drive out the PDF," Quinley said.

That strategy may not be working. Resistance has only stiffened, according to the Kani villagers. "The whole village plays a role," one man said. "Some women make gunpowder; people do not work; all the villagers somehow take part in the revolution."

Another described a few shattered survivors in a village unified by hatred of the military.

"I am not afraid anymore," he said. "Instead of dying fleeing, I will use my life for a purpose."

Thousands of army desertions have been reported, although usually of lower ranks, said Quinley from Fortify Rights.

"These atrocities are happening to everyday people, you know, engineers, university students, business-people," he said. "And so I think there's a growing solidarity movement across religious and ethnic lines."

The Tatmadaw has the advantage of airpower and automatic weapons. But the opposition in Sagaing and Chin state relies on knowledge of the terrain and the support of locals, some lightly armed with muzzle-loaded home-made traditional guns.

"They just modify their skills of fighting to the defensive war and guerrilla warfare," said Aung Myo Min, the NUG's minister for human rights, in an interview from Europe.

The army's attacks in Sagaing are thought to be the opening salvo in a campaign to stamp out resistance in Myanmar's northwest, called Operation Anawrahta. Anawrahta was an 11th-century Buddhist king who established a Burmese empire, and the name carries a special meaning to the military, said the deserter, Zin Yaw.

"That means they are going to brutally crush the people," he said.

More than 51,000 people are already displaced in seven Sagaing townships, including Kani, and another 30,200 in Chin State, according to the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs.

"What we're seeing in Sagaing is really interesting, because we're talking about the Bamar heartland that basically should be the core foundation of this military," said Maung of Human Rights Watch. "It's telling how worried the military is of its own people."

There are now growing signs that the military is turning its focus on Chin state. Chin fighters claim to have killed dozens of soldiers, according to social media analysis by Myanmar Witness.

As fresh soldiers have flowed into Chin state, residents have reported troops putting down protests with live rounds and brutal beatings. A teacher in the town of Mindat said many fled early on, but she was determined not to be forced out.

Then the military fired artillery into the town so the "houses would shake like an earthquake," she said. Her cousin, a member of the PDF, was killed by a sniper and his body boobytrapped, the teacher said.

That evening, villagers tried to move the body from a distance with a stick. The body blew up.

"We didn't get back a body," she said. "Instead we had to collect pieces."

She fled to neighboring India in October.

A half-day's drive west from Mindat lies Matupi, a town with two military camps that is now bereft of its young people, according to a college student who fled with her two teenage brothers in October. She said the military had locked people into houses and set them alight, hid bombs in churches and schools, killed three protest leaders she knew and left bodies in the middle of roads to terrorize people.

Yet the resistance has spread, she said.

"People are scared of the military, but they want democracy and they are fighting for democracy," she said from India, where she now lives. "They are screaming for democracy."

Thantlang, a town near the Indian border, has also been emptied of its people after four months of heavy fighting, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization. Drone footage shot by the group in October

and December and seen by the AP shows fires raging inside buildings and charred churches, collapsed schools and ruined homes. The footage matches fires detected by satellites and interviews with villagers.

Rachel, a 23-year-old who had moved home to Thantlang in June to escape the COVID pandemic in Yangon, said residents started hearing explosions and gunfire in the distance. The sounds gradually got closer starting in September.

As the shelling hit the town, she and others hid on the ground floor of their local church for four days, she said.

She then fled for a nearby village. But she sneaked back into town on Dec. 3 to gather belongings. While she was in her home with three friends, small arms fire and explosions suddenly erupted outside.

She felt a hot burn as a bullet tore into her torso. Two of her friends bolted, leaving her alone with a cousin who has trouble walking due to a birth defect.

She told him she was going to die and asked him to leave. But he stayed, wrapping her scarf around her stomach to stem the bleeding. The two managed to get to her motorbike, and her cousin held her with one hand as he drove with the other.

A local doctor determined that the bullet had hit her cell phone and then gone into the left side of her stomach.

"I think I would have died there if it had not hit the phone," said Rachel, who asked to be identified by one name only for her safety.

The following day she got across the border to Mizoram in India. In an interview with the AP from Mizoram, she said she would return home despite the danger to look after her ailing 70-year-old mother.

In the meantime, the farmhand who told the AP about the Done Taw massacre is defiant. He had been passively supporting the PDF before, but is now vowing to avenge the killings of his neighbors.

"I have just decided to fight until the end for them," he said. "I will do whatever I can until I die or until I am arrested."

McNeil reported from Beijing; Jain reported from New Delhi.

Ghislaine Maxwell convicted in Epstein sex abuse case

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted Wednesday of luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by the American millionaire Jeffrey Epstein.

The verdict capped a monthlong trial featuring sordid accounts of the sexual exploitation of girls as young as 14, told by four women who described being abused as teens in the 1990s and early 2000s at Epstein's palatial homes in Florida, New York and New Mexico.

Jurors deliberated for five full days before finding Maxwell guilty of five of six counts. With the maximum prison terms for each charge ranging from five to 40 years in prison, Maxwell faces the likelihood of years behind bars — an outcome long sought by women who spent years fighting in civil courts to hold her accountable for her role in recruiting and grooming Epstein's teenage victims and sometimes joining in the sexual abuse.

As the verdict was read, Maxwell was largely stoic behind a black mask. Afterward, she could be seen pouring herself water as one of her attorneys patted her back. She stood with her hands folded as the jury filed out, and glanced at her siblings — faithfully in attendance each day of the trial — as she herself was led from the courtroom. She did not hug her lawyers on the way out, a marked change from previous days during which Maxwell and her team were often physically affectionate with one another.

One of her victims, Annie Farmer, said she was grateful the jury recognized Maxwell's "pattern of predatory behavior."

"She has caused hurt to many more women than the few of us who had the chance to testify in the courtroom," she said in a prepared statement. "I hope that this verdict brings solace to all who need it and demonstrates that no one is above the law. Even those with great power and privilege will be held

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 26 of 58

accountable when they sexually abuse and exploit the young.”

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams praised the victims who testified against Maxwell after experiencing what he called “one of the worst crimes imaginable.”

“I want to commend the bravery of the girls – now grown women – who stepped out of the shadows and into the courtroom. Their courage and willingness to face their abuser made this case, and today’s result, possible,” he said in a statement.

No sentencing date was set.

The defense had insisted Maxwell was a victim of a vindictive prosecution devised to deliver justice to women deprived of their main villain when Epstein killed himself while awaiting trial in 2019.

Her brother, Kevin Maxwell, said the family believes she will be vindicated on appeal. “We firmly believe in our sister’s innocence,” he said in a written statement.

During the trial, prosecutors called 24 witnesses to give jurors a picture of life inside Epstein’s homes — a subject of public fascination and speculation ever since his 2006 arrest in Florida in a child sex case.

A housekeeper testified he was expected to be “blind, deaf and dumb” about the private lives of Epstein, a financier who cultivated friendships with influential politicians and business tycoons, and Maxwell, who had led a jet-setting lifestyle as the favorite child of a media mogul.

Pilots took the witness stand and dropped the names of luminaries — Britain’s Prince Andrew, Bill Clinton, Donald Trump — who flew on Epstein’s private jets.

Jurors saw physical evidence like a folding massage table once used by Epstein and a “black book” that listed contact information for some of the victims under the heading “massages.”

There were bank records showing he had transferred \$30.7 million to Maxwell, his longtime companion — onetime girlfriend, later employee.

But the core of the prosecution was the testimony of four women who said they were victimized by Maxwell and Epstein at tender ages.

Three testified using first names or pseudonyms to protect their privacy: Jane, a television actress; Kate, a former model from Great Britain; and Carolyn, now a mom recovering from drug addiction. The fourth was Farmer, who chose to use her real name after being vocal about her allegations in recent years.

They echoed one another in their descriptions of Maxwell’s behavior: She used charm and gifts to gain their trust, taking an interest in their adolescent challenges and giving them assurances that Epstein could use his wealth and connections to fulfill their dreams.

They said the script would darken when Maxwell coaxed them into giving massages to Epstein that turned sexual, encounters she played off as normal: After one sexual massage, Kate, then 17, said Maxwell asked her if she’d had fun and told her: “You are such a good girl.”

Carolyn testified that she was one of several underprivileged teens who lived near Epstein’s Florida home in the early 2000s and took up an offer to give massages in exchange for \$100 bills, which prosecutors described as “a pyramid of abuse.”

Maxwell made all the arrangements, Carolyn told the jury, even though she knew the girl was only 14 at the time.

Jane said in 1994, when she was only 14, she was instructed to follow Epstein into a pool house at the Palm Beach estate, where he masturbated on her.

Two charges, including the lone count on which Maxwell was acquitted, applied only to Jane.

“I was frozen in fear,” she told the jury, adding that the assault was the first time she had ever seen a penis. She also directly accused Maxwell of participating in her abuse.

Maxwell’s lawyer asked Jane why it had taken so long to come forward.

“I was scared,” she said, choking back tears. “I was embarrassed, ashamed. I didn’t want anybody to know any of this about me.”

The last to testify, Farmer described how Maxwell touched her breasts while giving her a massage at Epstein’s New Mexico ranch and how Epstein unexpectedly crawled into bed and pressed himself against her.

Maxwell, who turned 60 on Christmas, vehemently denied the charges through her lawyers.

Still, she declined to take the risk of testifying, telling the judge: “The government has not proven its

case beyond a reasonable doubt so there is no reason for me to testify.”

“The charges against Ghislaine Maxwell are for things that Jeffrey Epstein did,” one of Maxwell’s lawyers, Bobbi Sternheim, emphasized to the jury. “But she is not Jeffrey Epstein and she is not like Jeffrey Epstein.”

Maxwell’s legal team questioned whether the accusers’ memories were faulty, or had been influenced by lawyers seeking big payouts from Maxwell and from Epstein’s estate in civil court. During their two-day presentation, they called as a witness Elizabeth Loftus, a professor who has testified as a memory expert for defense lawyers at about 300 trials, including the rape trial of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

Maxwell’s family complained she was under duress from harsh conditions at the Brooklyn jail where she’s been held since her arrest in July 2020. She had repeatedly, and futilely, sought bail, arguing that she was unable to adequately contribute to her defense.

Before Maxwell was taken from the courtroom, Sternheim asked that arrangements be made to give her a coronavirus booster shot, saying infection rates were rising dramatically at the lockup. The recent surge threatened to derail the trial itself as U.S. District Court Judge Alison J. Nathan prodded jurors to work quickly to avoid the potential of a mistrial caused by sickened jurors.

The legal fights involving Epstein and Maxwell are not over.

Maxwell still awaits trial on two counts of perjury.

Lawsuits loom, including one in which a woman not involved in the trial, Virginia Giuffre, says she was coerced into sexual encounters with Prince Andrew when she was 17. Andrew has denied her account and that lawsuit is not expected to come to trial for many months.

Following the Maxwell verdict, Giuffre released a statement through her lawyers, saying, “I hope that today is not the end but rather another step in justice being served.”

AP journalist Ted Shaffrey in New York contributed to this report.

Suspect in Denver shootings wrote books previewing attacks

By COLLEEN SLEVIN and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A man accused of killing five people in a rampage in Denver is believed to have written fictional books self-published online that named some of his real-life victims and described similar attacks.

The writings are part of the investigation into what led Lyndon James McLeod to carry out the shootings, which took place in less than an hour Monday at several locations around the metro area, Denver police spokesman Doug Schepman said Wednesday.

McLeod, 47, knew most of the people he shot through business or personal relationships, police have said. Four of the people who were shot were attacked at tattoo shops. In addition to those killed, two other people were wounded, including a police officer who shot and killed McLeod after being hit.

In the first novel, written under a pen name of Roman McClay, a character named Lyndon stalks a poker party held by a character named “Michael Swinyard” and gains access to a building near Cheesman Park by posing as a police officer. He then fatally shoots everyone at the party and robs them before fleeing with his dog in a van.

In Monday’s attack, Michael Swinyard, 67, was fatally shot at a home near Denver’s Cheesman Park, police said.

In his second novel, which also features a character named Lyndon, McClay names Alicia Cardenas as a victim. The book also mentions the tattoo shop she owned, Sol Tribe.

Alicia Cardenas, a 44-year-old tattoo artist, was among his first victims in Monday’s rampage. She was killed at her tattoo shop, along with another woman, Alyssa Gunn, 35. A man who was also wounded there is expected to survive, police said. He was identified by friends and customers as Gunn’s husband, James Maldonado, a piercer there.

That shop is less than a mile (1.6 kilometers) from a tattoo shop that McLeod was listed as the lease holder for between 2014 and 2016. Cardenas later took it over before moving the shop to its current spot, city records show.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 28 of 58

McLeod was not licensed to work as a tattoo artist or operate a tattoo business himself in Denver according to city records, a spokesperson for Denver's licensing agency, Eric Escudero, said Wednesday.

Cardenas, whose daughter is 12 years old, described herself as a "proud Indigenous artist" who also painted murals.

Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen said during a news conference Tuesday 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.

Matt Clark, commander of the Denver Police Department's Major Crimes Division, said McLeod knew most of the people he targeted but not the last person he shot — a clerk in a hotel in Lakewood's Belmar shopping area. However, McLeod had had some dealings with the hotel, Clark said.

The hotel clerk, 28-year-old Sarah Steck, died of her injuries Tuesday.

Steck graduated this year from Metropolitan State University with a bachelor's degree of fine art in communication design. She was known among her co-workers at the hotel for her infectious laugh and love of kittens, art and music, The Denver Post reported.

Soon after the shooting at Cardenas' shop, McLeod forced his way into a residence that is also home to a business. City records show it is licensed as a tattoo shop. He pursued the occupants through the building and fired shots, but no one was injured, Clark said. Then he shot and killed Swinyard near Cheesman Park, Clark 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 Scofield, 38, was killed there, Lakewood police spokesperson John Romero said.

Scofield was a father of three, according to a site raising money for his family.

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, before shooting her, he said.

About a minute later, Lakewood police officer Ashley Ferris saw McLeod and ordered him to drop his weapon. She was shot in the abdomen but fired back and killed the gunman.

Ferris underwent surgery Monday night and is expected to make a full recovery.

"I can't overemphasize enough the heroic actions of our Lakewood police agent," Romero said during a news conference Tuesday. "In the face of being shot, in the face of danger, she was able to not only save others from this terrible tragedy but also neutralize the threat."

Associated Press writer Mead Gruver contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to change the spelling of Danny Scofield's last name.

New COVID-19 cases in US soar to highest levels on record

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — More than a year after the vaccine was rolled out, new cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. have soared to their highest level on record at over 265,000 per day on average, a surge driven largely by the highly contagious omicron variant.

New cases per day have more than doubled over the past two weeks, eclipsing the old mark of 250,000, set in mid-January, according to data kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The fast-spreading mutant version of the virus has cast a pall over Christmas and New Year's, forcing communities to scale back or call off their festivities just weeks after it seemed as if Americans were about to enjoy an almost normal holiday season. Thousands of flights have been canceled amid staffing

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 29 of 58

shortages blamed on the virus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious-disease expert, said Wednesday that there is no need to cancel small home gatherings among vaccinated and boosted family and friends.

But "if your plans are to go to a 40- to 50-person New Year's Eve party with all the bells and whistles and everybody hugging and kissing and wishing each other a happy new year, I would strongly recommend that this year we not do that," he said.

The threat of omicron and the desire to spend the holidays with friends and loved ones have spurred many Americans to get tested for COVID-19.

Aravindh Shankar, 24, flew to San Jose, California, on Christmas from West Lafayette, Indiana, to be with family. Though he felt fine, he decided to get tested Wednesday just to play it safe, since he had been on an airplane.

He and his family spent almost an entire day searching for a testing appointment for him before he went to a site in a parking lot next to the San Jose airport.

"It was actually surprisingly hard," Shankar said about trying to find a test. "Some people have it harder for sure."

The picture is grim elsewhere around the world, especially in Europe, with World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying he is worried about omicron combining with the delta variant to produce a "tsunami" of cases. That, he said, will put "immense pressure on exhausted health workers and health systems on the brink of collapse."

The number of Americans now in the hospital with COVID-19 is running at around 60,000, or about half the figure seen in January, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

While hospitalizations sometimes lag behind cases, the hospital figures may reflect both the protection conferred by the vaccine and the possibility that omicron is not making people as sick as previous versions.

COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have climbed over the past two weeks from an average of 1,200 per day to around 1,500.

Public health experts will be closely watching the numbers in the coming week for indications of the vaccines' effectiveness in preventing serious illness, keeping people out of the hospital and relieving strain on exhausted health care workers, said Bob Bednarczyk, a professor of global health and epidemiology at Emory University.

CDC data already suggests that the unvaccinated are hospitalized at much higher rates than those who have gotten inoculated, even if the effectiveness of the shots decreases over time, he said.

"If we're able to weather this surge with hopefully minimal disruptions to the overall health care system, that is a place where vaccines are really showing their worth," Bednarczyk said.

It's highly unlikely that hospitalization numbers will ever rise to their previous peak, said Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School Public Health. Vaccines and treatments developed since last year have made it easier to curb the spread of the virus and minimize serious effects among people with breakthrough infections.

"It's going to take some time for people to get attuned to the fact that cases don't matter the same way they did in the past," Adalja said. "We have a lot of defense against it."

But even with fewer people hospitalized compared with past surges, the virus can wreak havoc on hospitals and health care workers, he added.

"In a way, those hospitalizations are worse because they're all preventable," he said.

Several European countries, including France, Greece, Britain and Spain, also reported record case counts this week, prompting a ban on music at New Year's celebrations in Greece and a renewed push to encourage vaccination by French authorities.

WHO reported that new COVID-19 cases worldwide increased 11% last week from the week before, with nearly 4.99 million recorded Dec. 20-26. But the U.N. health agency also noted a decline in cases in South Africa, where omicron was first detected just over a month ago.

___ Associated Press writer Terry Tang in San Jose, California, contributed to this report.

Live updates: Mexico approves use of Cuba's Abdala vaccine

By The Associated Press undefined

MEXICO CITY -- Mexico's health safety council has approved the use of Cuba's three-dose Abdala coronavirus vaccine.

The council said Wednesday that it has sufficient evidence the vaccine is safe and effective.

The approval for emergency use does not necessarily mean the Mexican government will acquire or administer the Abdala vaccine in Mexico. Mexico has approved 10 vaccines for use, but has made little use of some, like China's Sinopharm.

Cuba has approved Abdala for use domestically and begun commercial exports of the three-dose vaccine to Vietnam and Venezuela.

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

- Asia keeps omicron at bay, but a surge may be inevitable
- WHO: Global COVID cases up 11% last week, omicron risk high
- California 1st US state to top 5M cases amid omicron surge
- Stricter Canadian rules complicate NHL push through pandemic

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TODAY:

TOPEKA, Kan. — Kansas has recorded more than 7,000 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Gov. Laura Kelly on Wednesday ordered flags to be flown at half-staff until sundown Friday, just as she has every time Kansas has reported another 1,000 deaths.

State health department data showed that Kansas averaged 2,003 new confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases a day for the seven days ending Wednesday, its highest seven-day average since Jan. 14. The state also averaged 34 new hospitalizations and seven new deaths a day during the seven days ending Wednesday.

The delta variant has spread across the state, and 45 cases of the new omicron variant have been reported in 13 of the state's 105 counties.

LAS VEGAS — Las Vegas isn't canceling or scaling back plans for New Year's Eve gatherings.

More than 300,000 visitors are expected in town for events including a New Year's Eve fireworks show on the Las Vegas Strip that was canceled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands of ticketholders also are expected at a multi-stage outdoor music event beneath a canopy light show at the downtown casino pedestrian mall.

In announcing Wednesday that the show will go on, Clark County Commissioner Michael Naft said: "If you're sick, stay at home. If you're indoors, wear a mask."

Las Vegas regional health officials reported 2,201 new coronavirus cases — the most in one day since last Jan. 11. New cases and deaths in Las Vegas have been trending up.

TORONTO — Coronavirus infections are continuing to climb across Canada, prompting several provinces to impose more pandemic restrictions.

Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba provinces all reported record one-day highs for new cases Wednesday. Quebec had more than 13,000 infections in the previous 24 hours, Ontario listed 10,436 and Manitoba reported 947.

Officials in Newfoundland and Labrador province, meanwhile, say schools will shift to remote learning after the Christmas break.

And in Nunavut territory, officials are extending a lockdown as a rise in infections strains its health care system. Premier P.J. Akeagok says the ban on indoor gatherings that began before Christmas is being

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 31 of 58

extended to Jan. 17. Libraries, gyms, arenas and churches must also remain closed and restaurants are limited to takeout service only.

EDMONTON, Alberta — An outbreak of coronavirus cases among players at the world junior men's hockey championship being held in Canada has led officials to cancel the event.

The International Ice Hockey Federation, Hockey Canada and the organizing committee announced Wednesday that the decision was made to call off the 11-day, 10-country tournament after a third game was forfeited in two days.

After two days of games, players testing positive for the virus had put defending champion United States as well as the teams for Russia and Czechia into mandatory quarantines.

Teams arrived in Alberta on Dec. 15. Players were quarantined and were tested before being allowed to skate.

NEW YORK — A surge of coronavirus cases in New York has forced the postponement of another signature event, the Westminster Kennel Club's annual dog show.

The show announced Wednesday it has postponed its 146th annual event to have been contested in late January. The announcement didn't give a new date for the show but said it would be later in 2022.

The dog show normally is held in February at Madison Square Garden but was moved to June last year and held at the Lyndhurst estate in suburban Tarrytown. Spectators weren't allowed, and human participants had to be vaccinated or newly tested.

MILAN — The Italian government on Wednesday put fresh restrictions on the unvaccinated and reduced quarantine times for those with boosters as the number of new virus cases skyrocketed by one-quarter to a single-day total of nearly 100,000.

Under a decree aimed at preventing an economic slowdown, anyone with a booster shot or who has completed two doses within four months will not be required to quarantine after close contact with someone who is positive. A 10-day quarantine remains in effect for the unvaccinated.

The government is reducing the list of free-time activities available to the unvaccinated. Starting Jan. 10, the jab will be required to access public transportation of any kind, hotels, ski lifts, conventions and fairs, swimming pools and wellness areas. Until then, a negative 10 within 48 hours will remain sufficient.

NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana's COVID-19 death toll edged toward 15,000 on Wednesday, and the zoo in New Orleans said half of its lions had been diagnosed with the disease.

Five deaths reported Wednesday brought the state total to 14,983. And hospitalizations, after doubling in the week that ended Sunday, have risen nearly 47% since then to 659, the Louisiana Department of Health dashboard indicated.

The three infected African lions are doing well and have normal appetites, the Audubon Zoo said in a news release Wednesday. Arnold, a full-grown male; Asani, one of two yearling males, and Kali, one of three females, were tested after they came down with coughs and nasal discharges. The other three are now being tested, the statement said.

"All symptoms have been intermittent and mild," so no medication has been needed, senior veterinarian Bob MacLean said in a statement relayed by a zoo spokeswoman.

"We are prepared to start treatments if signs or animal comfort warrant," he said.

The zoo said veterinarians don't know how the lions became infected, but it's likely that they got the coronavirus from an asymptomatic keeper in spite of numerous precautions. Employees must be vaccinated against COVID-19, and those working with susceptible animals must wear N95 or KN95 masks, the statement said.

PLATTSBURGH, N.Y. — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul is warning of a January surge in COVID-19 infections

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 32 of 58

as hospitalizations from the virus continue to rise.

Hochul says more than 67,000 people tested positive for COVID-19 across the state on Tuesday. About 6,700 were hospitalized with the virus. That's more than double the number in hospitals a month ago when the highly contagious omicron variant first emerged as a variant of concern.

Hochul urged New Yorkers to keep New Year's Eve celebrations small in order to prevent further spread of the virus. New COVID-19 cases across the country have risen to their highest level on record at over 265,000 per day.

MADRID — Spain is reporting over 100,000 infections in 24 hours for the first time in the coronavirus pandemic, although authorities are working to streamline the data amid a backlog caused by a high number of positives confirmed with home testing kits.

Health Minister Carolina Darias called during a press conference Wednesday for self-diagnosed positive COVID-19 cases to be reported to health authorities. She also said that the omicron variant is now responsible for most new infections.

With 100,760 new infections, the 14-day cumulative incidence rose Wednesday to 1,508 cases per 100,000 residents, up from 199 only one month ago.

Darias said that despite the share of cases that need hospitalization in intensive care units is "significantly lower" in this surge, the high contagion rate "is slowly increasing occupation in hospitals."

Fearing further disruption of economic activity, Spanish authorities have shortened from 10 to seven days the mandatory isolation period for people who contract COVID-19 but show no symptoms and those unvaccinated who have been in contact with infected people.

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has reached a pandemic record high in Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine said Wednesday as he ordered additional members of the state National Guard into hospitals to help with the surge. The state also saw another record number of new coronavirus cases.

Ohio had 5,356 people in the hospital with the coronavirus Wednesday, the highest since the pandemic began in March 2020, accounting for more than one of every five hospital beds. That's also the highest per-capita hospitalization rate in the country, said Robert Wylie, chief medical operations officer at the Cleveland Clinic.

More than nine of every 10 people hospitalized with COVID-19 since June have been unvaccinated, DeWine said.

"If you're vaccinated, the chances of you ending up in the hospital are pretty darn slim," the governor said.

DeWine is ordering the deployment of 1,250 members of the Ohio National Guard to help hospitals. That's on top of the more than 1,000 members of the Guard that DeWine called up earlier this month.

A total of 20,320 new coronavirus cases were reported Wednesday. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in Ohio has risen over the past two weeks from 7,592.86 new cases per day on Dec. 13 to 12,525.57 new cases per day on Dec. 27, according to data collected by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering.

NICOSIA, Cyprus — New Year's Eve celebrations in Cyprus will be muted after the government banned dancing and ordered bar, restaurant, reception hall and nightclub patrons to remain seated amid a third day of record daily COVID-19 infections.

Cyprus' Health Minister Michael Hadjipantela said Wednesday that the daily infection rate now hovers at a record high of around 2.5% as the omicron variant has now taken a firm hold on the country and is projected to increase infections as well as hospital admissions.

Hadjipantela said that as of Thursday, the maximum number of patrons at bars, restaurants and nightclubs will be capped at 300 vaccinated persons. Anyone who hasn't received a booster shot is required to have a negative rapid test 24 hours prior to attending any function.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 33 of 58

Between Jan. 4 and Jan. 15, all inbound travelers will be required to undergo a PCR test 48 hours prior to their departure which they will pay for themselves.

Also next month, 40% of all staff at offices will be required to work from home, while attendance at sports stadiums will be capped at 50% capacity with all fans needing to wear masks. All visits to hospitals, hospices and nursing homes are also banned, while additional PCR testing will be required for health sector professionals who haven't been fully vaccinated.

The Cypriot Health Ministry said nearly 83% of those receiving hospital treatment for COVID-19 are not vaccinated.

JACKSON, Miss. — COVID-19 outbreaks in Mississippi nursing homes have almost doubled in the past week, an indicator that the state is likely heading into another major surge of virus cases and hospitalizations, a top health official said Wednesday.

There were 63 outbreaks in Mississippi nursing homes Monday, around twice the number of nursing home outbreaks reported in the state last week, state epidemiologist Dr. Paul Byers wrote in a memo to Mississippi hospitals and health care providers. There were 8,344 new COVID-19 cases reported last week, an 80% increase from the week before. Byers said a growing proportion of Mississippi cases are fueled by the omicron variant of the virus.

The data points to "very rapid growth of COVID-19 infection and transmission and indicate that we have now entered our 5th wave of COVID-19 in the state," Byers wrote.

Last week, the omicron variant accounted for around 13% of all samples sequenced in the state, up from around 8% in the previous week.

"This likely represents an underestimate of the impact of Omicron on the state, with samples collected in the last two weeks still pending sequencing," the state epidemiologist said, noting that the omicron variant is significantly more infectious than the delta variant.

LA PAZ, Bolivia — Bolivia's main cities canceled any public activities for New Year's Eve after the country reached a record 4,939 new cases of COVID-19, the highest number for one day in all the pandemic in the South American nation.

The celebrations were called off for the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and El Alto after local authorities said it would be irresponsible to allow public festivities.

"The pandemic is escalating, and life is first," said Iván Arias, mayor of La Paz. "It's preferable to be safe than sorry."

Bolivia has not detected the omicron variant, but the health authorities have said that the surge in cases can be attributed to people not following some measures such as social distancing or wearing masks.

President Luis Arce issued a decree requiring people to show a vaccination certificate before entering some public places, like restaurants. The measure will take effect on Jan. 1.

Only a little bit more than 38% of the population is fully vaccinated, according to online research website Our World in Data. Bolivia, a country of 11.5 million people, has reported more than 585,000 infections and more than 19,600 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Holmes jury to take break after six days of deliberation

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — The jury weighing fraud charges against former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes departed court Wednesday without reaching a verdict after six days of deliberations. It won't resume discussions until after the upcoming New Year's holiday weekend.

The eight men and four women on the jury had been expected to continue deliberations on Thursday morning, but a court filing after they left disclosed they will be taking a break until Monday. There was no explanation for the decision to pause deliberations. The jury had already been scheduled to be off Friday, a federal court holiday.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 34 of 58

The latest round of discussions occurred against a backdrop of intrigue raised by a closed-door meeting early Wednesday involving Holmes' attorneys, and the judge presiding over the case.

U.S. District Judge Edward Davila held the "in camera" hearing Tuesday morning with two of Holmes' lawyers, Kevin Downey and Lance Wade, along with a two of the prosecutors, Jeffrey Schenk and Robert Leach, according to a court filing late Tuesday night. Holmes was not present at the 23-minute hearing.

The hearing transcript has been sealed, leaving the topics that were discussed a mystery. But it's not unusual for plea agreement discussions to take place while a jury deliberates over charges, especially the longer it takes to reach a verdict. The surprise decision to take Thursday off may also have been a focal point.

Holmes, 37, is facing 11 criminal charges alleging that she duped investors and patients by hailing her company's blood-testing technology as a medical breakthrough when in fact it was prone to wild errors. If she is convicted, Holmes faces up to 20 years in prison.

The eight men and four women on the jury have been meeting in a San Jose, California, federal courthouse after absorbing reams of evidence in a three-month trial that captivated Silicon Valley.

Last week, the jury sent out two notes to Judge Davila -- one making a swiftly rejected request to take their instructions home with them for further study and another that allowed them a replay of a 2013 recording of Holmes discussing Theranos' dealings with prospective investors.

The jurors didn't provide any inkling of their progress in deliberations this week.

The case has attracted worldwide attention. At its core is the rise and fall of Holmes, who started Theranos as a 19-year-old college dropout and then went on to break through Silicon Valley's male-dominated culture with her bold claims and fundraising savvy. She became a billionaire on paper before it all evaporated amid allegations she was more of a charlatan than an entrepreneur.

Another round of snow before thaw comes to frigid Northwest

SEATTLE (AP) — A thaw-out is coming for frozen Seattle and Portland, Oregon, but not before another round of snow that could compound problems for a region more accustomed to winter rain than arctic blasts.

More snow and rain fell on California on Wednesday, causing travel disruptions on mountain routes and raising the risk of debris flows from wildfire burn scars.

And in Nevada the governor plans to declare a state of emergency due to snow and storm conditions affecting travel in the Lake Tahoe area of northern Nevada.

Forecasters say parts of western Washington could see up to 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of snow Thursday and northwestern Oregon could see a similar amount.

The normally temperate part of the Pacific Northwest has shivered with temperatures hitting the single digits in some areas this week after extreme cold air from Canada's Fraser River Valley blew in on Sunday.

Snow and ice has made travel treacherous in some parts, forced closures and travel delays and prompted people to take shelter in emergency warming centers.

The weather and the pandemic have forced the cancellation of nearly 1,300 flights into and out of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport since Sunday. The situation has been acute in Alaska, where hundreds of passengers, many from coastal villages, have been stranded in the town of Bethel because of bad weather and ill-equipped airports.

Temperatures could rise above freezing in Seattle Thursday and be even warmer in Portland, before airflow from the Pacific blows in on the weekend and causes the mercury to rise to more seasonable highs in the 40s Fahrenheit (4.4 Celsius).

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — about a half dozen weather shelters were open this week. A similar number of shelters were opened in Seattle's King County, which also declared an emergency.

Seattle leaders said city shelters will remain open through the new year.

Winter weather and a return to pre-pandemic levels of traffic have resulted in hundreds of accidents on

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 35 of 58

Oregon roads this holiday season.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reported that between Dec. 23 and Dec. 28 there were 915 traffic accidents in the state. During that same period last year there were 365 accidents and 237 in 2019, according to Oregon State Police. The number of deaths has not been calculated yet.

David House, a spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Transportation, said the high number of accidents over the last week is a reminder to travelers to use caution and prepare for slick conditions.

"If you can sit tight for a couple more days, just avoid getting out there, that's going to be the safest thing you can possibly do," House said.

In Nevada, a statement released by Gov. Steve Sisolak's office said the emergency declaration will allow state officials to order vehicles traveling in on mountain highways to turn around and return to lower elevations until weather conditions subside and the roadways are safe to use.

"This will help prevent motorists from becoming stranded overnight on the roadways, potentially running out of gas in subfreezing temperatures without access to emergency services," the statement said.

It said U.S. 50 and State Routes 207 and 28 were experiencing long delays and dangerous conditions and that authorities need to be able to clear the roadways to make room for emergency vehicles and snow plows.

Caltrans said snowplows were working around the clock and urged people to avoid all but essential travel in the Sierra.

Among staggering snowfall totals in the Sierra, the Northstar resort at Lake Tahoe reported 135 inches (3.43 meters) since Dec. 21.

Schwarzenegger and Shriver divorce final after 10 years

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Arnold Schwarzenegger and Maria Shriver's marriage is officially over more than 10 years after the award-winning journalist petitioned to end her then-25-year marriage to the action star and former California governor.

A Los Angeles judge finalized the divorce on Tuesday, court records show.

The pair had been married since 1986 when Shriver filed for divorce in 2011 after Schwarzenegger disclosed he had fathered a child with a member of their household staff years earlier.

The revelation set off a tabloid frenzy, but Schwarzenegger and Shriver handled their divorce quietly and without lobbing accusations in court or in public.

It's not clear why the process took so long. There were virtually no public actions taken in the case between the initial flurry of filings in 2011 and a resumption of court moves in June.

Financial details of the settlement were kept confidential. Because the couple's four children together are now all adults, there is no child support or custody arrangement.

Settlement papers say that neither owes the other any spousal support, but both reserve the right to seek it through the court in the future.

Messages left with the former couple's lawyers seeking comment were not immediately returned.

Schwarzenegger amassed a fortune playing action roles in the "Terminator" and "Conan" film franchises after a successful career as a bodybuilder. After California suffered economic problems and widespread power outages under the administration of then-Governor Gray Davis, voters recalled the Democratic incumbent and elected Schwarzenegger, a Republican, to the governorship in a free-for-all election in 2003.

Schwarzenegger put his film career aside and served two terms as governor. Within a year of leaving office, he admitted fathering a child, Joseph Baena, who is now 24, with a member of his household staff in the late 1990s. Shriver filed for divorce in July 2011.

He has returned to acting sporadically since, with roles in "Terminator" and "Expendables" films.

Shriver was forced to resign from her position as a correspondent on the NBC show "Dateline" when her husband announced he was running for governor.

She resumed her work as a television journalist after her husband left office, producing stories for NBC

while remaining active promoting women's rights issues and reporting on and advocating for people with Alzheimer's disease.

In 2018 she authored the bestseller, "I've Been Thinking...: Reflections Prayers and Meditations for a Meaningful Life."

Shriver is the daughter of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who was the sister of President John F. Kennedy, and of Sargent Shriver, the first head of the Peace Corps and a vice presidential candidate in 1972.

Shriver and Schwarzenegger's children range in age from 24 to 32. The eldest, Katherine Schwarzenegger, is an author who is married to actor Chris Pratt.

Associated Press Writer Anthony McCartney contributed to this report.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>

Rest of world junior championship canceled over COVID-19

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

The remainder of the world junior hockey championship in Canada has been canceled over fears of a COVID-19 outbreak.

The International Ice Hockey Federation made the announcement Wednesday on the recommendation of the organization's medical officials. Citing the spread of the coronavirus and the omicron variant, the IIHF canceled the rest of the tournament "to ensure the health and safety of all participants."

Two games had already been forfeited because of positive coronavirus test results among U.S. and Czech players and another was imminent with Russia. Two U.S. players and one Czech player had returned positive tests, leading to team quarantine mandates.

The IIHF council determined the integrity of the event had been compromised by the forfeits, leading to the cancellation.

"We owed it to the participating teams to do our best to create the conditions necessary for this event to work," IIHF President Luc Tardif said. "Unfortunately, this was not enough. We now have to take some time and focus on getting all players and team staff back home safely."

Tardif said at a news conference that the tournament could resume this summer.

Teams arrived in Alberta on Dec. 15. Players were quarantined and tested before being allowed to skate. The pre-tournament schedule was reduced to one game per team, with the Czechs and Swiss unable to play an exhibition because of positive tests for the virus.

Protocols were established before a surge of the omicron variant caused the cancellation of six other tournaments in January, Tardif said in an interview posted on the IIHF website before the cancellation announcement.

"To put this into context, there were eight NHL games postponed when the teams entered their arrival quarantine on the 15th," Tardif said. "By the time we had accepted the recommendation to cancel the January events on the 23rd there were 62 total NHL games postponed. That is how quickly the situation has changed."

The cancellation breaks a run of 44 consecutive years for the IIHF's under-20 men's championship. The 2021 tournament in Edmonton managed to cross the finish line, with the United States beating Canada in the gold-medal game Jan. 5.

Tardif said the tournament adjusted protocols almost immediately upon players, coaches and staff arriving to avoid possible virus spread. That included daily testing and team-wide quarantine mandates when positive cases were confirmed.

Those steps, combined with participants not being contained fully inside a bubble, explain how the tournament for the top players in the world under age 20 was called off after nine games and four confirmed cases.

"Our hearts go out to the players and staff of not just our country but every nation, who have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to get to this point," U.S. national junior team general manager John Van-

biesbrouck said. "We're proud of our team for doing everything that's been asked of them and will work to ensure their safe return home."

Hockey Canada president Tom Renney and CEO Scott Smith said the host organization understands and supports the IIHF's decision.

"Although we know this is the right decision, we sympathize with all participants who have earned the opportunity to represent their countries on the world stage and that will not be able to realize that dream in its entirety," Renney and Smith said in a statement.

The women's under-18 world championship was one of the January tournaments cancellations, with the IIHF citing health and safety concerns. USA Hockey and Hockey Canada asked the IIHF to reconsider the cancelation of the women's tournament and instead reschedule for the good of the sport.

The Canadian Press contributed to this story.

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

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 Secretary of Defense to make a recommendation to Congress within 180 days if a new statute is needed

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 38 of 58

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 39 of 58

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 Process," noted that the Pentagon has established numerous policies defining and restricting participa-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 40 of 58

tion 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-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 41 of 58

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 lieutenant commander, was part of generations of men in his family who

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 42 of 58

joined the military. Both his father and grandfather served. But he grew disillusioned by the military and what he 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/>

A look at de Blasio's NYC mayoral tenure and what's next

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Bill de Blasio swept into the New York City mayor's office eight years ago promising a liberal remolding of the nation's largest city that would level deep inequities and reform police practices.

He had some successes, delivering on a promise to offer universal pre-kindergarten and curbing the police stop-and-frisk tactic. But the legacy of de Blasio's two terms has also been shaped by strained relationships with both police and the police-reform activists who propelled him to office, public discord with the former governor and gaffes memorialized in skewering headlines.

As he closes out the final days of his term, de Blasio is contemplating a run for higher office, a bet that his early achievements and his steering the city of 8.8 million through the pandemic will stick with New Yorkers more than the flubs and conflicts, separating the substance from style.

"I want people to remember that we needed to fight inequality and we did. And it can be done," de Blasio said in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press. "We were able to do that in very tangible, real ways. I think that opens the door for a lot more going forward, but it can be done."

The mayor also acknowledged he had a strained relationship with the media, and made errors along the way, something he said he's been reflecting on a lot lately as he wound down his time in the mayor's office.

"I think I could have communicated better. I think I could have understood better what the media needed to do to their jobs," de Blasio said. "I tried to make adjustments over time. And it's something I'm going to keep working on as a public service."

He officially turns over the reins to Mayor-elect Eric Adams, a Democrat and former police captain, on Jan. 1.

De Blasio's supporters and even some critics suggest his achievements will not be appreciated until he gives New Yorkers some space to miss him.

"I think he's done some things that will last for generations and are so important and won't be appreciated until he's out of the limelight, out of the office, for a few years," said Sid Davidoff, a de Blasio supporter

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 43 of 58

and advisor to several former mayors.

Even de Blasio himself thinks his legacy will take a while to solidify. "A lot of what we were doing was not just for today. It was for tomorrow," he said.

WINS, REGRETS AND FAUX PAUS

After winning a landslide election in 2013, de Blasio became the first Democrat in two decades to serve as mayor of New York, a heavily Democratic metropolis that could serve as a laboratory for liberal policies, such as the \$15 an hour minimum wage that he pushed to achieve.

His arrival marked a departure from the years of Michael Bloomberg — the billionaire former mayor who started as a Republican and ended as an independent — who boasted of the city as a luxury product and defended stop-and-frisk.

De Blasio's progressive agenda and populist message were at times overshadowed by tabloid-delighting blunders, such as a culinary faux pas days into his first term, when he ate a slice of pizza with a knife and fork.

Other notable fumbles included showing up late to a memorial for plane crash victims and dropping a groundhog during a Groundhog Day celebration. The groundhog died a week later.

The mayor said he was not surprised New York City media was tough and that the tabloid headlines were "colorful," such as a recent New York Post cover in which he was photoshopped to appear as a Santa Claus wearing a Fidel Castro hat under the headline, "Santanista Claus."

"I was surprised at sort of the intense coverage around some things I thought were small in the scheme of things but took up a lot of time and energy," he said.

De Blasio notched a victory in his first year by expanding public prekindergarten to every 4-year-old in the city. He built on that, expanding the program to more 3-year-olds with a plan to make it universal by fall of 2023.

TENSIONS WITH POLICE

He's had a difficult relationship with the city's police force. De Blasio started his mayoralty pledging to overhaul the department's interactions with the public and curtailed the department's tactic of stopping, questioning and frisking mostly Black and Hispanic people on the street en masse.

His handling of the summer 2014 police killing of Eric Garner angered officers and many of the police reform advocates who worked to elect de Blasio.

He spoke critically of the officers but largely held off any department punishments until a lengthy federal civil rights investigation concluded. Later that year, when a disturbed gunman angry about police killings of unnamed Black men fatally shot two NYPD officers, the head of the city's largest police union said the mayor had "blood on his hands" and officers turned their backs on the mayor as he spoke at police funerals.

L. Joy Williams, a political strategist and president of the Brooklyn NAACP, said de Blasio seemed to approach the confrontation with the NYPD "as a political crisis, rather than as a humanity crisis."

Williams said that was disappointing and the coalition of groups pushing for police reform who helped elected de Blasio expected him to be tougher against the officers and the union.

"We expected that from him, because that's what he said he was going to do. And he didn't do it," she said.

De Blasio acknowledged the tension with some police union leaders and some police reform activists, saying he doesn't agree with all of them and thinks mainstream New Yorkers wanted something in the middle.

WHAT'S NEXT (AND WHAT'S NOT)

It wasn't just those corners of the city that had their qualms with the mayor. Some New Yorkers questioned de Blasio's focus on the job when he launched a muddling bid for president in 2019. He told The AP that while the experience was "difficult" and "unlikely," it made him realize he needed to communicate with people better.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 44 of 58

He said his presidential ambitions are in the past. "Not on my dance card," he quipped.

De Blasio admits he struggled to address intractable issues such as homelessness.

The population of single adults in shelters rose during his two terms despite a drop in the number of homeless families in shelters and his administration meeting a goal of building or preserving 200,000 affordable housing units.

His last year has been dogged with the slow closing the city's Rikers Island jail, which has been plagued by severe staffing shortages, prisoner deaths and violence amid the pandemic. There have been 16 deaths this year in the city's jail system, the most since 2013.

When New York City became the epicenter of the pandemic, de Blasio's attempts to manage the response were frequently defined by the ongoing public feuding with then Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who fueled their long-simmering tense relationship by swatting down de Blasio's plans for a shelter-in-place order and school closures.

When Cuomo resigned in August amid allegations he sexually harassed at least 11 women, de Blasio had wider latitude in his city's response. He rolled out a series of aggressive mandates, requiring every public employee to get vaccinated. The orders largely survived legal challenges and drove up vaccination rates of reluctant police officers, firefighters and other city workers, prompting de Blasio to extend the mandates to private-sector workers, the most sweeping vaccine mandate of any state or big city in the U.S.

Like Cuomo, de Blasio had his own near-daily televised briefings during the pandemic, but they took a variety-show flavor in recent months, with de Blasio decrying pineapple toppings on pizza as he explained ranked-choice voting and singing with funk music legend George Clinton.

So far, de Blasio has remained coy on his future plans when asked if he's going to run for governor. Equally vague is the Democrat's path to the governor's mansion. Gov. Kathy Hochul has been amassing campaign funds and Democratic endorsements, from upstate officials to leaders in the heart of de Blasio's Brooklyn, leaving him to stitch together an unclear constituency.

"I think I've put plenty of breadcrumbs out there on the trail," he said. "I'm going to stay in public service. As to electoral politics, I'll give an update very, very soon."

This story has been updated to clarify that population of single adults in homeless shelters rose during de Blasio's two terms but the number of families in homeless shelters dropped.

Biden, Putin to hold call over stepped up security demands

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin will speak Thursday as the Russian leader has stepped up his demands for security guarantees in Eastern Europe while maintaining an unsettling buildup of troops near Russia's border with Ukraine.

The two leaders will discuss "a range of topics, including upcoming diplomatic engagements," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said in a statement announcing the call.

The talks come as the U.S. and Western allies have watched the massing of Russian forces along the border, growing to an estimated 100,000 and fueling fears that Moscow is preparing to further invade Ukraine.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Blinken "reiterated the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders."

Price said the two discussed efforts to peacefully resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine and upcoming diplomatic engagements with Russia.

Putin said earlier this week he would ponder a slew of options if the West fails to meet his push for security guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny member-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 45 of 58

ship to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back its military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The U.S. and its allies have refused to offer Russia the kind of guarantees on Ukraine that Putin wants, citing NATO's principle that membership is open to any qualifying country. They agreed, however, to hold talks with Russia next month to discuss its concerns.

The U.S. and Russia are to hold high-level talks on Jan. 10. Moscow and NATO representatives are expected to meet that same week as well as Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which includes the United States.

In Thursday's call, which was requested by the Russians, Biden is expected to stress to Putin that the U.S. is united with its allies but will demonstrate a willingness to engage in "principled diplomacy" with Russia, according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the upcoming call. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity. The two leaders held a video call earlier this month.

The official added that the White House sees the leader-to-leader engagement as important as the administration looks to find a way beyond this "moment of crisis" over growing worries of a further Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In 2014, Russian troops marched into the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea and seized the territory from Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea — one of the darker moments for former President Barack Obama on the international stage — looms large as Biden looks to contain the current smoldering crisis.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan has made clear in public comments that the administration is ready to discuss Moscow's concerns about NATO in talks with Russian officials, but emphasized that Washington is committed to the "principle of nothing about you without you" in shaping policy that affects European allies.

"We're approaching the broader question of diplomacy with Russia from the point of view that ... meaningful progress at the negotiating table, of course, will have to take place in a context of de-escalation rather than escalation," Sullivan said at an event hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations earlier this month. He added "that it's very difficult to see agreements getting consummated if we're continuing to see an escalatory cycle."

The two leaders are also expected during Thursday's call to discuss efforts to persuade Iran to return to the 2015 nuclear accord, which was effectively scrapped by the Trump administration.

Despite differences on Ukraine and other issues, White House officials have said the Iran nuclear issue is one where they believe the U.S. and Russia can work cooperatively.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that Putin would speak with Biden on Thursday but provided no details.

WHO chief worried about 'tsunami' of omicron, delta cases

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The head of the World Health Organization said Wednesday that he's worried about the omicron and delta variants of COVID-19 producing a "tsunami" of cases between them, but he's still hopeful that the world will put the worst of the pandemic behind it in 2022.

Two years after the coronavirus first emerged, top officials with the U.N. health agency cautioned that it's still too early to be reassured by initial data suggesting that omicron, the latest variant, leads to milder disease. First reported last month in southern Africa, it is already the dominant variant in the United States and parts of Europe.

And after 92 of the WHO's 194 member countries missed a target to vaccinate 40% of their populations by the end of this year, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged everyone to make a "new year's resolution" to get behind a campaign to vaccinate 70% of countries' populations by the beginning of July.

According to WHO's figures, the number of COVID-19 cases recorded worldwide increased by 11% last week compared with the previous week, with nearly 4.99 million newly reported from Dec. 20-26. New

cases in Europe — which accounted for more than half of the total — were up 3% while those in the Americas rose 39% and there was a 7% increase in Africa. The global gain followed a gradual increase since October.

“I’m highly concerned that omicron, being more transmissible (and) circulating at the same time as delta, is leading to a tsunami of cases,” Tedros said at an online news conference. That, he said, will put “immense pressure on exhausted health workers and health systems on the brink of collapse.”

WHO said in its weekly epidemiological report that the “overall risk” related to omicron “remains very high.” It cited “consistent evidence” that it has a growth advantage over the delta variant.

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 said that more data is needed.

WHO’s emergencies chief, Dr. Michael Ryan, underlined that note of caution. He said it will be important in coming weeks to “suppress transmission of both variants to the minimum that we can.”

Ryan said that omicron infections began largely among young people, “but what we haven’t seen is the omicron wave fully established in the broader population. And I’m a little nervous to make positive predictions until we see how well the vaccine protection is going to work in those older and more vulnerable populations.”

WHO officials didn’t offer specific comments on decisions by the U.S. and other countries to reduce self-isolation periods. Ryan said “these are judgement calls that countries make” — taking into account scientific, economic and other factors. He noted that the average incubation period to date has been around five to six days.

“We need to be careful about changing tactics and strategies immediately on the basis of what we’re seeing” about omicron, Ryan said.

Tedros renewed longstanding warnings that “ending health inequity remains the key to ending the pandemic.” He said that missing the target of getting 40% of populations vaccinated this year “is not only a moral shame — it cost lives and provided the virus with opportunities to circulate unchecked and mutate.”

Countries largely missed the target because of limited supply to low-income nations for most of the year and then vaccines arriving close to their expiry date, without things such as syringes, he said.

All the same, “I still remain optimistic that this can be the year we can not only end the acute stage of the pandemic, but we also chart a path to stronger health security,” Tedros said.

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

Candace Parker voted AP Female Athlete of Year for 2nd time

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Candace Parker wrestled with the decision to make a huge change in her life and leave Los Angeles — where she had played her entire WNBA career — and head home to Chicago.

In the end, the appeal of a homecoming was too much for Parker to ignore, and it couldn’t have worked out better.

The 35-year-old Parker staved off Father Time to help the Chicago Sky win the franchise’s first WNBA championship and capped off 2021 by being named The Associated Press’ Female Athlete of the Year for a second time.

“There was something about going to where you started playing the game,” Parker said in a phone interview. “It’s exciting to play in front of the people who first saw me pick up a basketball. To win at home, I’m just now recognizing it a little bit. How special that really is. Something that is top on my list.”

It’s a list that keeps the working mom and basketball analyst for TNT pretty busy. Parker is finally beginning to appreciate bringing a title to her hometown in the twilight of her career.

As the final seconds ticked off the clock in the WNBA Finals, Parker sprinted to the corner of the court where she hugged family and friends, celebrating becoming one of the rare elite athletes to return home

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 47 of 58

and win a championship.

It was a long shot ending not many saw coming when Parker made the move. Winning it all seemed an even more remote possibility at the start of the WNBA season when the Sky lost seven of their first nine games. Parker was sidelined with an ankle injury, but when she returned, Chicago started winning and earned a No. 6 seed in the playoffs.

"I'm really thankful for those who made my journey and the people who supported me making it as smooth as possible. My daughter, my wife, my immediate family, we rolled with it. We wanted it," she said. "Things are going to get hard, but stick with it."

It is an approach to life that made Parker second-guess her decision.

Parker was concerned that she would be viewed as a quitter by leaving Los Angeles. This despite being named the AP award winner her rookie year with the Sparks in 2008, when she was honored as the WNBA's MVP and top rookie. She also guided the Sparks to the championship in 2016 and is one of 14 players to have won a college, WNBA and Olympic title. She played college ball at Tennessee, where she won two titles.

"I'm a big believer when you start something you finish it. When you say something, you do it. I'm not perfect, as I do say stuff and don't follow through," said Parker, a two-time Olympic gold medalist. "My parents taught me don't quit. I wanted to finish my career in LA, but I also finished my contract, I committed to that amount of time. I didn't ask to be traded. The better opportunity for me and my family was to go back home."

The 13 years since her first AP athlete of the year honors ties Parker with Babe Didrikson Zaharias for the longest time between winning in the 80-year history of the award. The award was voted on by a panel of sports editors. Parker received 11 first-place votes, edging out swimmer Katie Ledecky and gymnast Simone Biles.

"You couldn't write a better story than the one of Candace Parker bringing the WNBA championship to her hometown in her first season with the Chicago Sky," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said. "On top of her accomplishments on the court and in the studio, she has continued to be a leader and role model to many, including working moms around the world. The WNBA is proud to have players like Candace who continually raise the bar and elevate the game and our league to the highest level."

Parker is the only WNBA player to win the AP Female Athlete of the Year award. She hopes that changes soon as the league continues to get more national exposure.

"The more visibility we get as a league, which seems like it is coming, the more we'll see," Parker said. "If you see it, see ... more and more talented players ... that are capable and deserving. This next wave of athletes that are able to have their career followed from the time it starts till the end are going to change the face of the WNBA."

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 seven current and former editors, board members and a journalist 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.

They later also arrested a seventh person, a former Apple Daily editor who is married to the arrested former Stand News editor.

More than 200 officers were involved in the search, police said. They had a warrant to seize relevant

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 48 of 58

journalistic materials under a national security law enacted last year.

The seven 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.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 49 of 58

"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."

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 stor-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 50 of 58

age 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 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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 51 of 58

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.

Bringing home the bacon tops new California laws in 2022

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — It's not often that bacon leads a roundup of new laws taking effect with the New Year in California.

But even in progressive California, that's the headline-grabber.

It's among a host of other legislation designed to safeguard employees, shield those seeking abortions, protect protesters from police, spare children from gender influence in store displays, and further ease criminal penalties to reduce mass incarceration.

Several of the laws mark national "firsts" — first minimum wage to reach \$15 an hour, first to protect warehouse workers from quotas, first to mandate hourly wages for garment workers, first to require the gender-neutral displays.

They are among hundreds of new laws also addressing everything from stealthily removing condoms to handing out disposable packages of condiments.

But first...

WHAT ABOUT THE BACON?

The sausage-making stems from a 2018 ballot measure where California voters set the nation's toughest living space standards for breeding pigs starting Jan. 1.

Industry lawsuits opposing the initiative failed, but grocers and restauranteurs are now suing to force a 28-month delay. Critics including some lawmakers of both parties have called for putting off enforcement until 2024 for fear prices will rise and jobs will be lost.

California is allowing the continued sale of pork processed under the old rules, which proponents say should blunt any shortage and price surge.

\$15 MINIMUM WAGE

California becomes the first state to require a \$15-an-hour minimum wage for businesses with more than 25 employees, though Washington, D.C., and many California cities in the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas already reached that milestone.

The minimum for businesses with 25 or fewer employees bumps to \$14 with the new year and will increase to \$15 per hour on Jan. 1, 2023. From then on, the wage will rise annually based on inflation.

The increases were set in motion by a 2016 law. Similarly, Illinois and New Jersey are boosting their minimum wage by \$1 each year until they hit \$15 an hour in 2025.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Gov. Gavin Newsom promised to double down on addressing California's affordable housing and related homelessness problem after he handily defeated a recall election in September.

Days later, he approved two measures designed to sidestep local zoning ordinances. One allows local governments to rezone neighborhoods near mass transit for up to 10 housing units.

The second requires cities to approve up to four housing units on what was a single-family lot, over the objections of municipal leaders. Some cities were rushing to pass ordinances undercutting the law before it takes effect, while other opponents are gathering signatures for a ballot measure that would restore local control.

PROTECTING EMPLOYEES

California becomes the first U.S. state to bar warehouse retailers like Amazon from firing workers for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 52 of 58

missing quotas that interfere with bathroom and rest breaks. It also becomes the first state to require the garment industry to pay workers by the hour.

It also now bars secret employment settlements involving discrimination based on race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, expanding on a 2018 law.

EDUCATION

Among two-dozen new higher education laws are two that try to make it easier for students in community colleges to transfer into public universities. One streamlines an application process that students have described as a maze, while another requires community college classes to have the same course numbers as the comparable courses in four-year colleges to reduce confusion.

RECYCLING AND WASTE

California is expanding on its existing law that allows restaurants to distribute single-use straws only upon request. Now take-out places can give consumers single-use condiment packages like ketchup and mustard and utensils like knives, forks and spoons only if asked.

It's among numerous new laws designed to cut waste. One sets what advocates call the nation's strictest standards for the "chasing arrows" recycling symbol. Another toughens regulations for what can be used in compost.

Yet what California regulators say is the "biggest change to trash in 30 years" comes from a law passed in 2016 that takes effect Jan. 1.

It requires local governments to provide organics recycling collection to all residents and businesses, and phases in a requirement for businesses and large food generators to donate unsold food to distribute to Californians in need.

GENDER-NEUTRAL STORE DISPLAYS

California becomes the first state to require large department stores — those with at least 500 employees — to display products like toys and toothbrushes in gender-neutral ways.

The requirement does not include clothes and does not ban traditional boys' and girls' sections. But it says large stores must also have a gender-neutral section displaying a "reasonable selection" of items "regardless of whether they have been traditionally marketed for either girls or for boys."

Enforcement won't start until Jan. 1, 2024.

RESTRICTING POLICE

Several laws that fizzled in 2020 despite national unrest over the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis officer were signed into law in 2021.

They include measures limiting police use of rubber bullets against protesters and providing a way to decertify troubled officers, though some of the certification process doesn't take effect until January 2023.

Other new laws bar a type of restraint hold that has led to deaths and specify when officers have a duty to intervene to prevent or report excessive force. Another expands the list of police misconduct records that must be made public.

The state also is increasing the minimum age to become a police officer from 18 to 21 and requiring the state attorney general to investigate all fatal shootings by police of unarmed civilians, including those where there is a reasonable dispute over whether that civilian was armed.

EASING CRIMINAL PENALTIES

California is taking additional steps to ease criminal penalties, building on a decade of efforts to reduce mass incarceration.

Among them, it is ending mandatory minimum prison or jail sentences for nonviolent drug offenses, thus giving judges more discretion to impose probation or other alternative sentences.

It is expanding on a 2019 law that limited the use of the felony murder rule, which previously allowed accomplices in felonies to be convicted of murder if someone died but now is restricted to people who intended to kill or directly participated.

And it is creating the presumption that those arrested on allegations of violating their probation be freed on their own recognizance unless a judge deems them to be a public safety or flight risk.

It is also limiting prison terms for those associated with street gangs, considering mitigating circum-

stances in applying sentencing enhancements, and retroactively removing other enhancements for repeat offenders and certain prior drug crimes.

How democracy was dismantled in Hong Kong in 2021

By ZEN SOO and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — As the days of 2021 dwindled, so did any remaining traces of democracy in Hong Kong.

On Wednesday, a vocal pro-democracy media outlet -- one of the last openly critical voices in the city -- closed after a police raid. Earlier in December, the opposition was shut out from elections under a new law that puts all candidates to a loyalty test. And monuments commemorating the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 were taken down.

Again and again throughout the year, the city's authorities and the central government in Beijing stamped out nearly everything the pro-democracy movement had stood for. Activists fled abroad or were locked up under the draconian National Security Law imposed on the city 18 months ago. Unions and other independent organizations closed down.

Where once Hong Kong allowed "open opposition and questioning of the government's core policies and legitimacy ... any meaningful policy debates will now take place among a small circle of government loyalists," said Kurt Tong, partner at The Asia Group and former U.S. consul general in Hong Kong and Macao.

The days when the former British colony was considered a bastion of freedom fade in memory. Returned to China in 1997, Hong Kong has endured an overhaul of its political system and a crackdown on political dissent. Authorities sought to suppress antigovernment sentiment that led to months of political strife in 2019.

The most recent example was Wednesday's raid by Hong Kong police on the online pro-democracy news outlet Stand News. Seven people were arrested — among them two current and former editors and four former board members, including a popular singer, Denise Ho — for alleged sedition under a colonial-era ordinance.

The outlet announced that afternoon that it would halt operations.

Stand News is the second media outlet to shut down after being targeted by Hong Kong authorities. The Apple Daily newspaper closed earlier in 2021 after authorities raided its offices for a second time and froze millions in assets.

"Democracy has been under a sustained assault for well over a year in Hong Kong," said Luke de Pulford, a coordinator for the London-based Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, a group of legislators from democratic countries focused on relations with China. "No democracy can function without a free press."

"If no critical information is able to be published about the administration in Hong Kong or in China, then what last vestiges of democracy there were, I think we have to say, have been snuffed out."

In a string of tweets, Hong Kong activist Nathan Law called upon the world to "publish about Hong Kong ... (and) about the brave journalists who risk so much." Law, who fled to London after the security law was implemented, said he feared "a domino effect" that would lead other outlets to close.

Little remains of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. More than 100 pro-democracy figures and others have been arrested under the security law, which penalizes actions seen as separatist or subverting the Hong Kong or Chinese governments.

That includes 47 people charged with subversion in February over their roles in an unofficial primary election held in 2020 to determine the best candidates to field in planned legislative elections.

Authorities accused the activists of subversion, saying they planned to win a majority and use it to paralyze the government and eventually force Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam to step down.

The government postponed the 2020 elections, citing public health risks from COVID-19. Then, the central government in Beijing announced new election laws earlier this year that reduced the proportion of directly elected seats to less than a quarter and required all candidates to be loyal to Beijing.

The results were predictable: Earlier this month, when the election finally was held, pro-Beijing lawmak-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 54 of 58

ers won a landslide victory. The city's largest opposition party, the Democratic Party, fielded no candidates for the first time since the 1997 handover.

Several pro-democracy trade unions and organizations have also been dissolved this year. The city's largest teachers' union disbanded in August due to the political climate, followed later by the city's largest independent trade union.

The Civil Human Rights Front, a pro-democracy group that organized some of the biggest protests in 2019, also disbanded following a police investigation under the National Security law.

Other pro-democracy activists have also been arrested for involvement in unauthorized protests and the annual Tiananmen candlelight vigil, which has been banned for two consecutive years. Most of the city's pro-democracy activists are behind bars or have fled abroad.

As the year drew to a close, several artworks were removed that commemorated the Tiananmen massacre.

Two days before Christmas, the University of Hong Kong cited legal risks in ordering the removal of the Pillar of Shame monument, which depicts a pile of torn and twisted bodies of Tiananmen victims. Several other universities followed suit, making away with pro-democracy and Tiananmen statues.

China's Communist Party has long sought to erase Tiananmen from the public consciousness in the mainland, forbidding any commemorative events. Now it seems determined to do the same in Hong Kong in the name of restoring stability to the city.

Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan.

Friendly family man's 50-year secret: He was fugitive, too

BY JOHN SEEWER and JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Just before Thomas Randeale died, his wife of nearly 40 years asked his golfing buddies and his co-workers from the dealerships where he sold cars to come by their home.

They gathered to say goodbye to a guy they called one of the nicest people they'd ever known — a devoted family man who gushed about his daughter, a golfer who never bent the rules, a friend to so many that a line stretched outside the funeral home a week later.

By the time of their final visit last May at Randeale's house in suburban Boston, the cancer in his lungs had taken away his voice. So they all left without knowing that their friend they'd spent countless hours swapping stories with never told them his biggest secret of all.

For the past 50 years, he was a fugitive wanted in one of the largest bank robberies in Cleveland's history, living in Boston under a new name he created six months after the heist in the summer of 1969. Not even his wife or daughter knew until he told them in what authorities described as a deathbed confession.

How he was able to leave behind one family and create a new life — while evading a father and son from the U.S. Marshals Service who never gave up their hunt — is just now being pieced together.

Ted Conrad quickly figured out that security was fairly loose at the Society National Bank in Cleveland after he started as a teller in January 1969.

He told his buddies it would be easy to rob the place, said Russell Metcalf, his best friend from high school.

A day after his 20th birthday that July, Conrad walked out with \$215,000 from the vault, a haul worth \$1.6 million today. By the time the missing money was noticed, Conrad was flying across the country.

In a letter sent to his girlfriend, he mistakenly thought he could return when the statute of limitations expired. But once he was indicted, that was no longer true.

Conrad apparently cut off contact with his family. Some eventually presumed he was dead, said Matt Boettger, whose mother was Conrad's older sister.

His mom, he said, was relieved to find out her brother had lived a happy life. "She thought she would go to her grave and never know," he said.

The bank heist in 1969 didn't capture the attention of the nation, or even of Cleveland. Everyone else was focused on Apollo 11's historic flight to the moon.

But for John Elliott, a deputy U.S. marshal, it was personal because he and Conrad came from the same

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 55 of 58

side of town.

The problem was Conrad had a head start and was disciplined enough not to make missteps.

Elliott traveled across the U.S. looking for Conrad and even after retiring would check on the case, said his son, Pete Elliott, now the top U.S. marshal in Cleveland, who inherited the hunt for Conrad nearly 20 years ago.

His father died in March 2020 before investigators pieced together details from Randle's obituary and signatures from his past. Then in November, Randle's family confirmed that just before he died, he told them what he had done, Elliott said.

Why Conrad committed the robbery has been analyzed endlessly.

"It wasn't about the money. He always wanted to impress people," said Metcalf, his high school pal.

Investigators believe he was inspired by the 1968 movie "The Thomas Crown Affair," about a bank executive who got away with \$2.6 million and turned the heist into a game.

After the real-life robbery in Cleveland, Conrad wound up in the Boston area, where much of the movie was filmed.

Thomas Randle came into existence in January 1970 when Conrad applied for a Social Security number in Boston, Elliott said.

During the 1970s, Randle worked at a country club outside Boston and became its manager. He also met his future wife not long after arriving in Boston. They were married in 1982.

Around then, he began working in the car business, selling Land Rovers and Volvos until he retired after nearly 40 years.

What's not clear yet is what happened to the money. The Marshals Service is looking into whether he lost it early through bad investments.

While Randle and his wife, Kathy, lived most of their years in a pleasant Boston suburb, they filed for bankruptcy protection in 2014. She told Cleveland.com in November that her husband was a great man. She has declined interview requests.

No one would have guessed that Randle, who was 71 when he died, was someone trying to hide from authorities.

Among the many people he became friends with over the years was an FBI agent in Boston, Elliott said.

"He was just a gentle soul, you know, very polite, very well spoken," said Jerry Healy, who first met Randle at a Woburn, Massachusetts, dealership where they talked daily for years.

Matt Kaplan, who managed two dealerships where Randle worked and golfed with him for many years, called him a gentleman.

"The only way it makes sense is that at that age he was just a kid, and it was a challenge kind of thing," Kaplan said.

"If he would have told us way back when, I don't think we would have believed him because he wasn't that kind of guy," he said. "The man was different than the kid."

In the early days after Randle's identity was revealed, his friends couldn't believe it. But now looking back, some things make sense. How he always had a beard. His reluctance to talk about where he grew up or his extended family.

"You know all the years I knew Tommy, I never heard him mention a sister or a mother or a brother or a father," Healy said.

"You could never pry anything from him," said Brad Anthony, another close friend.

Still, he said it's almost impossible to believe. "It just seems so out of character for the Tom I knew," he said.

In the rainforest's shadow, Brazilian surf capital blossoms

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and CHRISTIAN PRENDERGAST Associated Press

SAO SEBASTIAO, Brazil (AP) — As most of Brazil tuned in to watch two local clubs battle for the continent's soccer championship last month, 14-year-old Luana Reis was far from a television set.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 56 of 58

She was surfing blue-green waves with a soaring rainforest backdrop, competing with dozens of other teens in the yearly municipal tournament at one of the country's premier surf beaches, Maresias.

She deployed snaps, cutbacks and aerials to win the under-18 women's title and then emerged from the water sitting atop the shoulders of four friends, mimicking her idol, Gabriel Medina — a world champion raised at Maresias who has helped make Brazil's surfers as admired as its soccer stars worldwide.

Next year, Reis said, she aims to contend for the national under-18 women's championship.

"Everyone here dreams of being the next great surfer from Brazil," Reis told The Associated Press. "There's a lot of competition, especially here in Maresias. Doing it here is hard."

The beach in the town of Sao Sebastiao is ground zero for surfing in a nation that unleashed "the Brazilian Storm" on the world — a generation of professional surfers who have won five of the past seven men's world championships.

Many came into their own along a 200-kilometer (120-mile) stretch of shoreline in Sao Paulo state. Reis' parents moved here largely so she could train every day.

Medina, 28, has led that crusade, winning three world championships — a feat accomplished by only four others since the modern surfing league began in 1983.

At one moment in this year's championship heat in San Clemente, California, Medina snagged a small, clean peak and veered his board to the left as he popped to his feet. He watched patiently as the wave walled up, then completed a few turns while casually throwing in a few air reverses along the way.

He "turns a mediocre wave into something of substance," said television commentator Mick Fanning, himself a three-time champion. "That first air was incredible."

When the buzzer sounded, sealing Medina's victory, runner-up Filipe Toledo paddled over to offer a congratulatory hug. The two grew up surfing the same waves, with Toledo's home just up the coast, in Ubatuba. Third place went to another Brazilian, 2019 world champ and gold medallist in the Tokyo Olympics, Italo Ferreira.

Sao Paulo state's string of North Shore beaches were relatively unknown before Medina put Maresias on the professional surfing map with his first world title in 2014, and he lifted the trophy again in 2018.

Speaking to the AP by phone, Medina said Maresias' simple lifestyle is an asset for surfers.

"We don't have any tall buildings here. It is just houses, beaches and a lot of nature," Medina said. "I travel all over the world, but I still value the place where I live, where I came from. I feel complete here. This place gives me peace and ease to do everything I'm able to do."

The surf towns dotting the coastline are inside the Serra do Mar park, which the state says is Brazil's largest continuous protected area of Atlantic Forest. It acts as a barrier to the urban sprawl of metropolitan Sao Paulo. Thick forest blankets rugged mountains and valleys, where waterfall pools drain into streams that wind through mangroves before emptying into an emerald sea.

The area's waves went virtually unriden until construction in the 1970s of a coastal highway, which surfing trailblazers followed to explore.

"Back in the 1980s, there were just a few of us; this was an isolated region of the coast," said 58-year-old Adriano Garcia, a fisherman born in Sao Sebastiao who has surfed for four decades. "The championships started, surfers from here became dominant and -- boom!"

When Frank Constâncio started organizing competitions in 1985, he had to fill many roles himself — from security guard to referee to commentator.

"Years ago, only açai and surfwear brands would sponsor events here. Now there's real estate developers and banks," said Constâncio, who is president of the Sao Sebastiao Surfers' Association.

Today, hotels and restaurants are plastered with pictures of local legends, particularly Medina, who also features on billboards promoting a television manufacturer, phone carrier, dental services provider and an automaker.

"Medina is only one of the surfers who came from this (municipal) tournament," Constâncio said, surveying the competitors in the water. "The next Medina could be here today."

Henrique Tricca, an Ubatuba-based surf photographer, competed along the North Shore in the 1990s and 2000s and went on to win contests in Europe. He said Sao Paulo's surf associations helped develop

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 57 of 58

local pros. They were the first in Brazil to organize competitions with live electronic scoring and a running clock that surfers could see from the water.

The waves were another factor.

"They're far from perfect," Tricca stated as he pulled his head back from his camera and grinned, pointing to a man attempting to enter a wave's barrel but instead getting swallowed in an explosion of white water.

"Being mostly beach breaks, the waves break faster and hollower here. It's hard to know which waves to choose and where to paddle into them. The swells come from the south, the southeast, the east and sometimes all three directions at the same time. On top of that, the tide changes and the sandbars move, so every day and even every hour it's like surfing a completely different wave."

Such irregularity paired with consistent swells during the peak season, from May to November, makes the coast hallowed training ground.

Though most waves break only 1 to 3 meters high (up to about 10 feet), they offer all kinds of conditions. So the world-class waves of international competitions — typically more perfect, predictable reef and point breaks — are easier to read and ride for natives of Sao Sebastiao and nearby towns.

Medina said his early days at the municipal championship were key to his success.

"The truth is I had more defeats than victories in my childhood," Medina said. "At first, I just had fun surfing. Then I fell in love with the sport, and only then did I start competing. Every time I lost here, I was very upset. In the beginning, you dream about winning, going professional, being a world champion. But it didn't happen just like that."

Several other North Shore towns have representatives in the Brazilian Storm, from Guaruja's Adriano de Souza and Caio Ibele to Ubatuba's Toledo and Wiggolly Dantas.

Eduardo Tanimoto, 52, is one of the originals. A native of Sao Paulo's countryside, he started surfing at Sao Sebastiao when the sport revolved around lifestyle rather than competition. His daughter, Rayana Tanimoto, caught the surfing bug from him.

Together, they opened a small hotel on Maresias beach so she could raise her 5-year-old twin daughters, make a living and get in the water as often as possible.

"There are other places where you see surfers and the Atlantic Forest sort of merge, but here is special," she said.

Sipping on a glass of passion fruit juice at the reception desk and looking at the surfboards resting against her hotel's entrance, Rayana Tanimoto said Maresias and surfing have strengthened her family's bonds. Earlier in the day, she and her twins were catching waves, the girls taking turns standing on the board with their mom. Someday soon, her girls hope to enter competitions.

It was early evening, with the moon showing above the lush mountainside. The surfers would be back at it early the next morning before the wind kicked up.

"There aren't many places that allow you to connect with something bigger than yourself," she said. "For me, this is it."

___ Prendergast reported from Tibau do Sul, Brazil.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 30, the 364th day of 2021. There is one day left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 30, 1922, Vladimir Lenin proclaimed the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which lasted nearly seven decades before dissolving in December 1991.

On this date:

In 1813, British troops burned Buffalo, New York, during the War of 1812.

In 1853, the United States and Mexico signed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to buy some 45,000 square miles of land from Mexico for \$10 million in a deal known as the Gadsden Purchase.

In 1860, 10 days after South Carolina seceded from the Union, the state militia seized the United States

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 176 ~ 58 of 58

Arsenal in Charleston.

In 1903, about 600 people died when fire broke out at the recently opened Iroquois Theater in Chicago.

In 1954, Olympic gold medal runner Malvin G. Whitfield became the first Black recipient of the James E. Sullivan Award for amateur athletes.

In 1972, the United States halted its heavy bombing of North Vietnam.

In 1994, a gunman walked into a pair of suburban Boston abortion clinics and opened fire, killing two employees. (John C. Salvi III was later convicted of murder; he died in prison, an apparent suicide.)

In 1999, former Beatle George Harrison fought off a knife-wielding intruder who'd broken into his mansion west of London and stabbed him in the chest. (The attacker was later acquitted of attempted murder by reason of insanity.)

In 2004, a fire broke out during a rock concert at a nightclub in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 194 people. Bandleader and clarinetist Artie Shaw died in Thousand Oaks, California, at age 94.

In 2006, a state funeral service was held in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda for former President Gerald R. Ford.

In 2009, seven CIA employees and a Jordanian intelligence officer were killed by a suicide bomber at a U.S. base in Khost (hohst), Afghanistan.

In 2015, Bill Cosby was charged with drugging and sexually assaulting a woman at his suburban Philadelphia home in 2004; it was the first criminal case brought against the comedian out of the torrent of allegations that destroyed his good-guy image as "America's Dad." (Cosby's first trial ended in a mistrial after jurors deadlocked; he was convicted on three charges at his retrial in April 2018 and was sentenced to three to 10 years in prison, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned the conviction in June 2021 and Cosby went free.)

Ten years ago: North Korea warned the world there would be no softening of its position toward South Korea's government following Kim Jong Il's death as Pyongyang strengthened his son and heir's authority with a new title: "Great Leader."

Five years ago: Two luxury retreats in New York and Maryland where Russian diplomats had gone for decades to play tennis, sail and swim were shut down by the Obama administration in retaliation for Moscow's cyber-meddling in the presidential election.

One year ago: Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri said he would raise objections when Congress met to affirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory, forcing House and Senate votes. President Donald Trump asked the Supreme Court to overturn his election loss in Wisconsin; it was his second unsuccessful appeal in as many days to the high court over the result in the battleground state. Jonathan Pollard, who spent 30 years in U.S. prison for spying for Israel, arrived in Israel with his wife, kissing the ground as he disembarked from the aircraft. Dawn Wells, who played the wholesome Mary Ann on the 1960s sitcom "Gilligan's Island," died in Los Angeles at age 82 from what her publicist said were causes related to COVID-19. Samuel Little, who authorities said was the most prolific serial killer in U.S. history with nearly 60 confirmed victims, died at the age of 80 in California, where he was serving a life sentence.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Russ Tamblyn is 87. Baseball Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax is 86. Folk singer Noel Paul Stookey is 84. TV director James Burrows is 81. Actor Fred Ward is 79. Actor Concetta Tomei (toh-MAY') is 76. Singer Patti Smith is 75. Rock singer-musician Jeff Lynne is 74. TV personality Meredith Vieira is 68. Actor Sheryl Lee Ralph is 66. Actor Patricia Kalember is 65. Country singer Suzy Bogguss is 65. Actor-comedian Tracey Ullman is 62. Radio-TV commentator Sean Hannity is 60. Sprinter Ben Johnson is 60. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is 58. Actor George Newbern is 58. Movie director Bennett Miller is 55. Singer Jay Kay (Jamiroquai) is 52. Rock musician Byron McMackin (Pennywise) is 52. Actor Meredith Monroe is 52. Actor Daniel Sunjata is 50. Actor Maureen Flannigan is 49. Actor Jason Behr is 48. Golfer Tiger Woods is 46. TV personality-boxer Laila Ali is 44. Actor Lucy Punch is 44. Singer-actor Tyrese Gibson is 43. Actor Eliza Dushku is 41. Rock musician Tim Lopez (Plain White T's) is 41. Actor Kristin Kreuk is 39. Folk-rock singer-musician Wesley Schultz (The Lumineers) is 39. NBA star LeBron James is 37. R&B singer Andra Day is 37. Actor Anna Wood is 36. Pop-rock singer Ellie Goulding (GOL'-ding) is 35. Actor Cavity Lotz is 35. Actor Jeff Ward is 35. Country musician Eric Steedly is 31. Pop-rock musician Jamie Follesé (FAHL'-es-ay) (Hot Chelle (shel) Rae) is 30.