

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

### Tuesday, 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. Groton Area vs. Platte-Geddes at 3:30

### Monday, Jan. 10

Boys' Basketball hosts Webster Area. C game starts at 5 p.m. with JV and Varsity to follow.  
7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

### Tuesday, Jan. 11

5 p.m.: 7th/8th grade basketball game with Wau-bay-Summit at Waubay. Single game so they may play extra quarters.  
6 p.m.: Girls' Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

**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.



### Thursday, Jan. 13

Boys' Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli. at Elementary Gym: 7th grade game at 4 p.m., 8th grade game at 5 p.m. at Roncalli High School: C game at 5 p.m. followed by junior varsity and varsity.

### Friday, Jan. 14

Silver Bowl Debate at Sioux Falls  
No School - Faculty In-Service at Warner School  
6 p.m.: Girls' Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

### Saturday, Jan. 15

Silver Bowl Debate at Sioux Falls  
Boys Basketball Classic at Redfield. Groton Area vs. Deubrook at 7:30  
10 .m.: Junior High boys basketball jamboree in Groton with Aberdeen Christian, Tiospa Zina and Webster Area.  
10 a.m.: Wrestling at Potter County (Gettysburg) Invitational.

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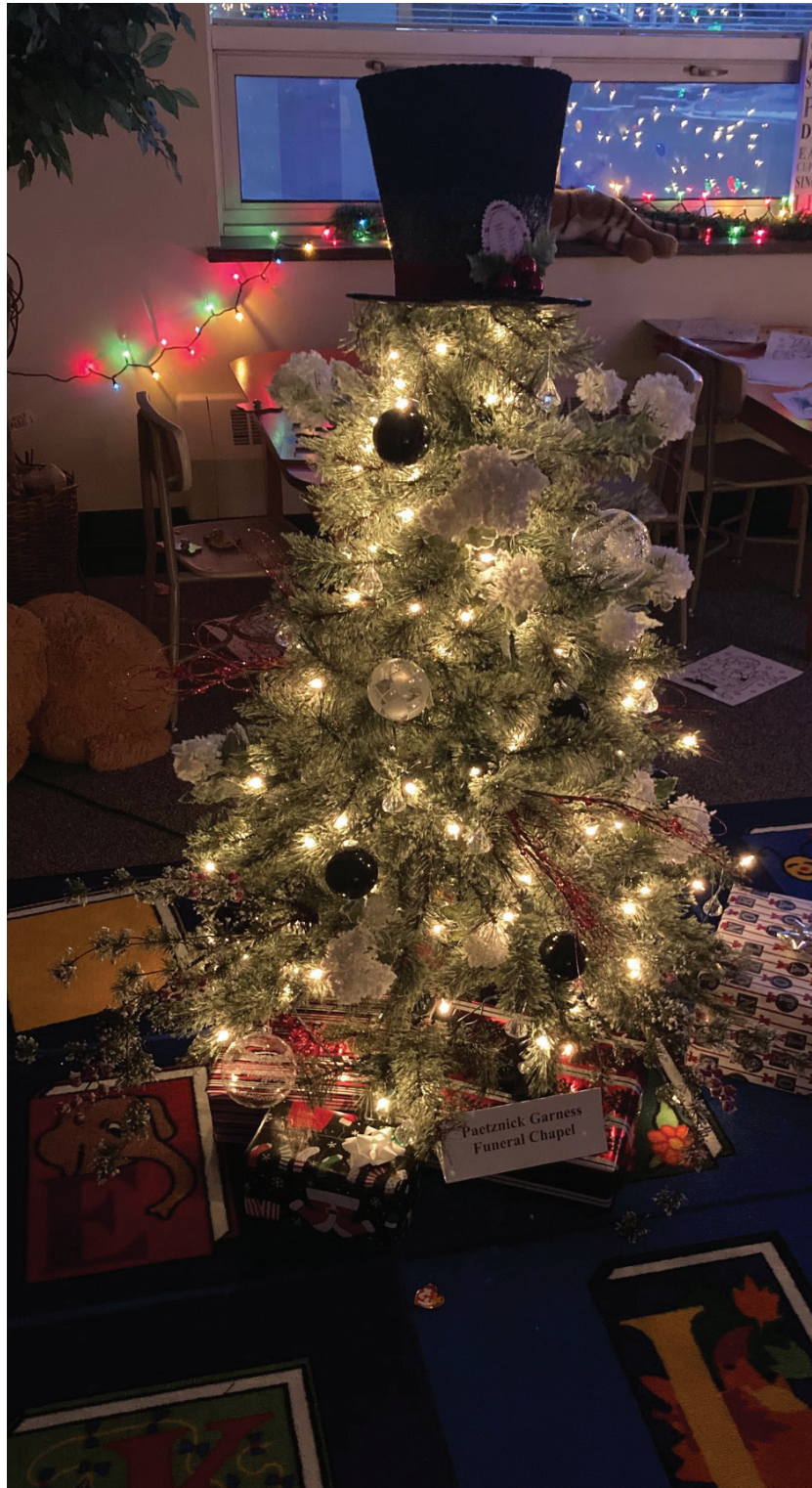
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**The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by Groton OST.**

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**The new city hall has been adorned with many Christmas Trees decorated by area businesses. This one was decorated by Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.**

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## Traphagen has double-double in Groton's win over Webster

Groton Area's girls' basketball team ended a two-game losing streak and ended the 2021 year with a 48-40 Northeast Conference win over Webster Area.

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

Webster Area lit the nets on fire in the first quarter, or more specifically, Jaiden Bauer who made four three-pointers in the first quarter. Webster Area held a 16-13 lead at the end of the first quarter. Groton Area made five of 15 field goals for 33 percent while Webster Area was five of eight for 63 percent. The two inside players for the Tigers, Gracie Traphagen and Jaedyn Penning, teamed for 11 points in the first quarter.

Bauer and Erin Case each threw in a three-pointer to start the second quarter and that prompted Coach Matt Locke to call a time out



**Brooke Gengerke looks inside to the two post players, Jaedyn Penning (41) and Gracie Traphagen.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Gracie Traphagen**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

with Webster holding a 22-15 lead. Some adjustments were made and Webster Area found itself on the receiving end of those adjustments. Groton Area made the final six points of the first half and closed the gap to one at half time, 22-21. In the second quarter, Groton Area made three of 12 shots for 25 percent and Webster Area was two of seven for 28 percent. Traphagen and Penning did all of the scoring in the second quarter for the Tigers.

Brooke Gengerke and Alyssa Thaler each made a three-pointer for the Tigers, but the Bearcats countered with a three-pointer by Case and Harley Johnson as well. Groton got the lead to start the third quarter and after the game was tied at 24 and 27, the Tigers scored six straight points to take a 33-27 lead. Webster Area then called time out. Groton Area led at the end of the third quarter, 35-32. Groton Area made six of 14 field goals for 42 percent while Webster Area was four of nine for 44 percent.

Groton Area watched a seven-point lead dwindle down to two with 1:27 left in the game, 42-40. Webster Area went scoreless the rest of the game and the Tigers made five of six free throws down the stretch to secure the 48-40 win. In the fourth quarter, Groton Area made four of 10 shots for



**Alyssa Thaler and Aspen Johnson**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Alyssa Thaler**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Allyssa Locke**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

40 percent while Webster Area was two of 12 for 17 percent.

Gracie Traphagen led the Tigers with a double-double, having 16 points which included six of six free throws, 14 rebounds, one assist, one steal and one block shot. Jaedyn Penning had 11 points, three rebounds, one assist and one steal. Alyssa Thaler had nine points, two rebounds two assists and two steals. Brooke Gengerke had five points, two rebounds and one assist. Jerica Locke had four points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Allyssa Locke had two points, two rebounds, five assists and three steals. Kennedy Hansen had one free throw and three rebounds. Coach Matt Locke was pleased with the overall effort of everyone, but one player did catch his eye. "Aspen Johnson had a heck of a game," he said. "She was making things happen." Even though she did not score, she did battle for three rebounds and had three steals as well.



**Jerica Locke**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Area made 18 of 52 total shots for 35 percent while Webster Area was 13 of 36 for 36 percent. From the line, Groton Area made 10 of 13 free throws off of Webster Area's 14 team fouls. Webster Area made five of five free throws off of Groton Area's nine team fouls. The Tigers had 33 rebounds and the lucky number 13 was for turnovers, assists and steals. Webster Area had 11 turnovers.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 37-28.

That game was also broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Ken and Teresa Roberts of Tonganoxie, Kan.

Kennedy Hansen led the Tigers with 17 points while Faith Traphagen had six, Brooklyn Hansen and Elizabeth Flihs each had five and Laila Roberts and Jaedyn Penning each had two points. Any Vander Linden led the Bearcats with nine points and Allison Case had eight.

Webster Area won the C game, 18-16. Mia Crank made two free throws with 54 seconds left in the game to give the Tigers a 16-15 lead. Both teams missed free throws and with two seconds left, Bailee Ninke made a three-pointer to give Webster an 18-16 lead. A last second shot by the Tigers was no good and Webster won for the win, 18-16.

Rylee Dunker led Groton Area with six points while Mia Crank had four, Talli Wright three, Elizabeth Flihs had two points and Cali Tolifson had one point.

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**Groton Area Coach Matt Locke got serious into this time-out after Webster Area got a 22-15 lead, pulling up a chair and having a chat with the team. (Photo by Paul Kosel)**

## Groton Prairie Mixed

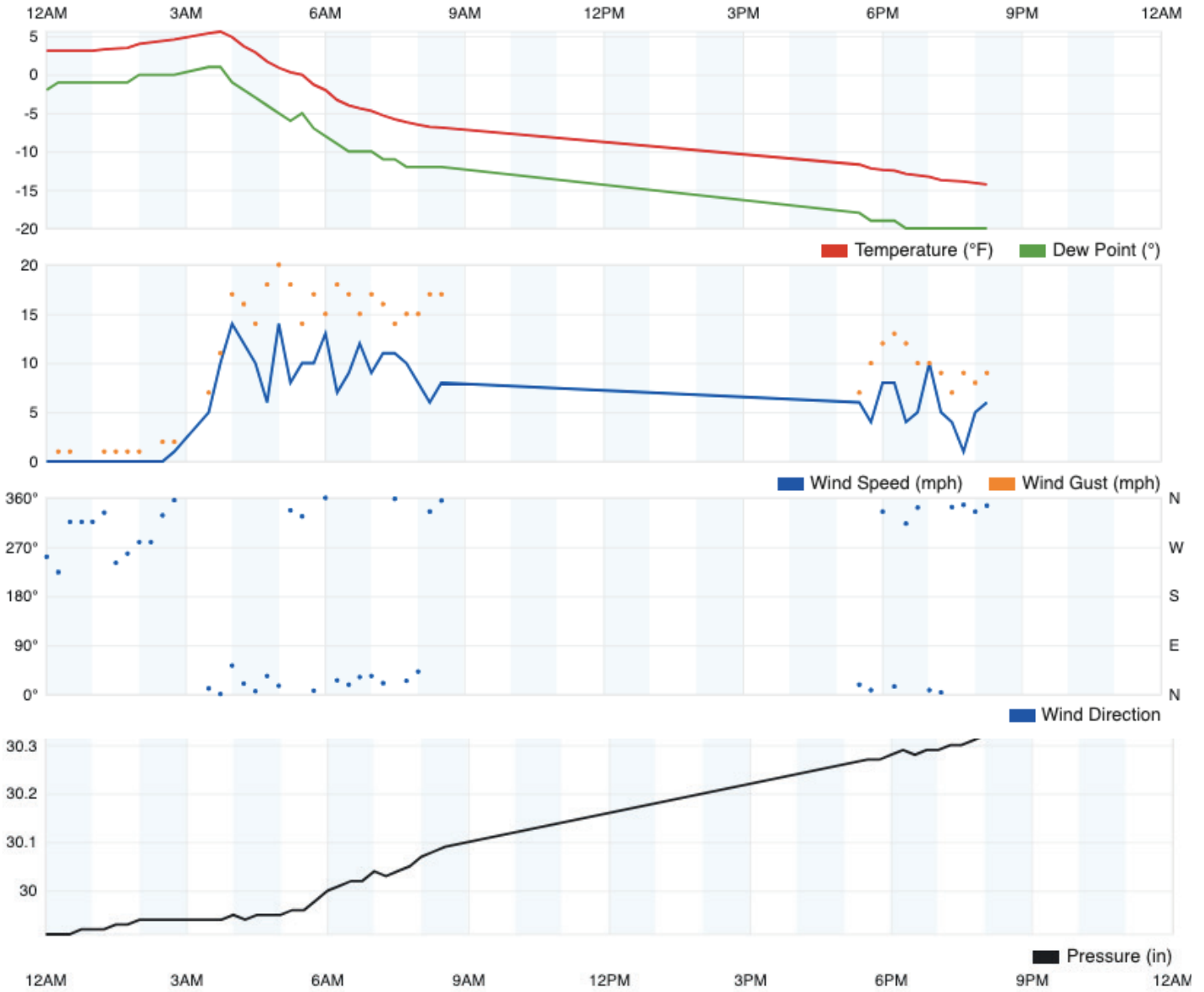
**Dec. 30 Team Standings:** Cheetahs 6, Chipmunks 5, Shih Tzus 4, Foxes 4, Jackelopes 3, Coyotes 2  
**Men's High Games:** Tony Waage 227, Roger Spanier 200, 197, Lance Frohling 196  
**Women's High Games:** Vicki Walter 198, Nancy Radke 178, Sue Stanley 169  
**Men's High Series:** Roger Spanier 566, Tony Waage 564, Brad Waage 521  
**Women's High Series:** Nancy Radke 508, Vicki Walter 481, Darci Spanier 450

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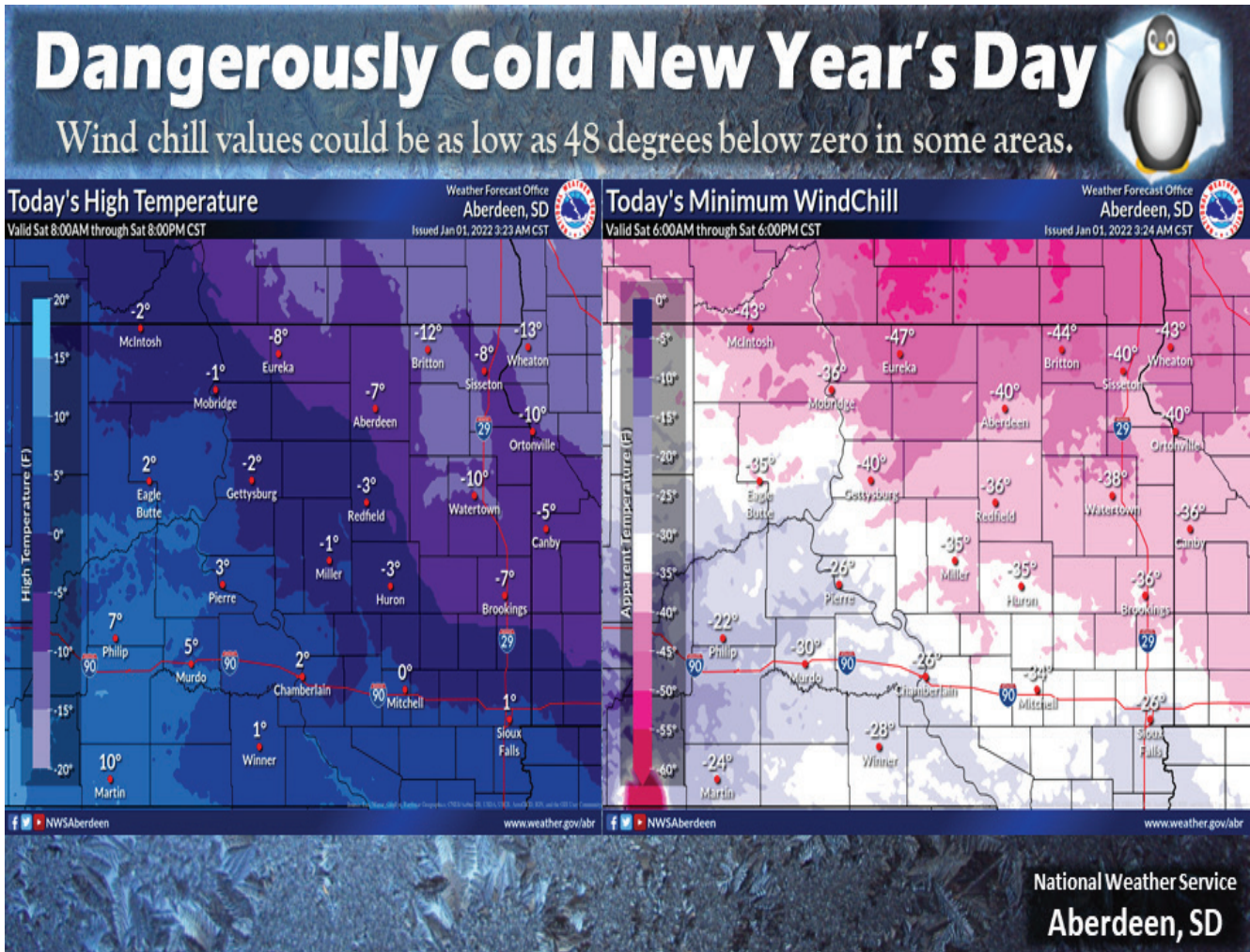
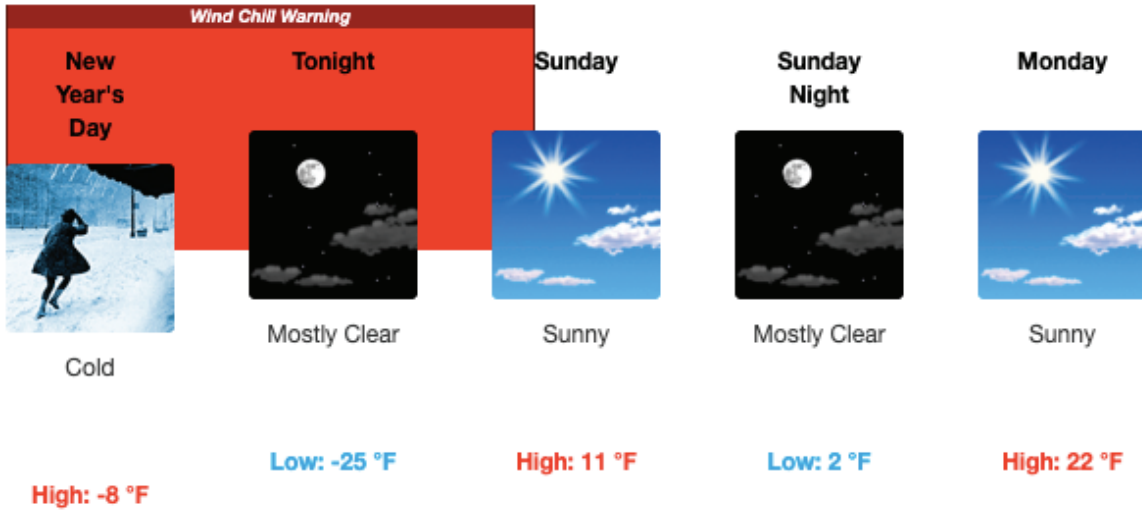
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 31, 2021



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Heading out on New Year's Day? Make sure to dress in layers as arctic air continues to be dominant overhead, with dangerously cold wind chills today through Sunday. Frostbite can occur on exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes. Have an emergency kit in your car if you are traveling and make sure to keep your pets warm and safe!



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## Today in Weather History

January 1, 1960: The winter storm began on New Year's Eve as a low-pressure center moved from Colorado northeast to the Great Lakes. Snowfall ranged from 5 to 10 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. High winds on the 1st and 2nd caused low visibilities and drifted highways over affecting holiday travel. There were scattered power and telephone outages due to breakage from wind and ice. The storm wined down in the afternoon of the 2nd.

1767: The morning temperature in Boston was -8°F! Jan 1, 1767 Boston Cold

1864: A historic cold blast of air charged southeast from the Northern Plains to Ohio Valley. Chicago had a high temperature of -16°. A farmer near Hometown, Indiana, reported the same high temperature as Chicago, with a low of 21 degrees below zero. He remarked "rough day" in his weather diary. Minneapolis had a temperature of 25 degrees below zero at 2 PM. St. Louis, Missouri, saw an overnight low of 24 degrees below zero. The Mississippi was frozen solid with people able to cross it.

1886: Norway's coldest night on record occurred as the low temperature dropped to -60.5°F at Karasjok.

1888: The Signal Corps office opened in Rapid City, South Dakota, on January 1, 1888. It was located in the Sweeney Building at the corner of 7th and Main Streets. The high and low temperature that day was 6 and -17°F.

1892: At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dandelions were in bloom in parks.

1935: The Associated Press Wire Photo Service made its debut, delivering the great weather maps twice each day to newspapers across the country. The first photo transmitted was a plane crash in the Adirondack of New York on this day. The plane crashed during the evening hours on December 28, but the rescue did not occur until New Year's Day.

1961: A three-day-long ice storm was beginning over northern Idaho, which produced an accumulation of ice eight inches thick, a U.S. record. Dense fog, which blanketed much of northern Idaho from Grangeville to the Canadian border, deposited the ice on power and phone lines, causing widespread power outages.

1964: A snowstorm struck the Deep South on December 31st, 1963, through January 1st, 1964. Meridian MS received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans, LA. The University of Alabama Head Football Coach "Bear" Bryant said that the only thing that could have messed up his team's chances in the Sugar Bowl against Ole Miss in New Orleans, LA was a freak snowstorm. Well, much to his chagrin, 4.5 inches of snow fell the night before the big game. Alabama won the game 12-7 anyway. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day.

1999: The start of 1999 was ushered in with snow, ice, and freezing weather across central and south-central Nebraska. On New Year's Day, a steady snowfall along and north of Interstate 80 dumped from 1 to 5 inches of snow. By late morning, freezing drizzle developed southeast of Hastings and eventually coated area roads with a layer of ice. Light snow later that evening made travel even more treacherous. Several accidents occurred on the Interstates and Highway 30. Once the ice and snow ended, arctic air spilled across the area abroad 20 to 30 mph north winds. Blowing and drifting of the fallen snow caused reduced visibilities for a time on the 2nd. Temperatures dropped to 5 to 15 below zero through midday the 3rd.

2011: Southern and central Mississippi saw 11 tornadoes during the night of December 31st into the morning hours of January 1st. Of the 11, two were EF-3 with two more EF-2. Six were EF-1 with one EF-0.

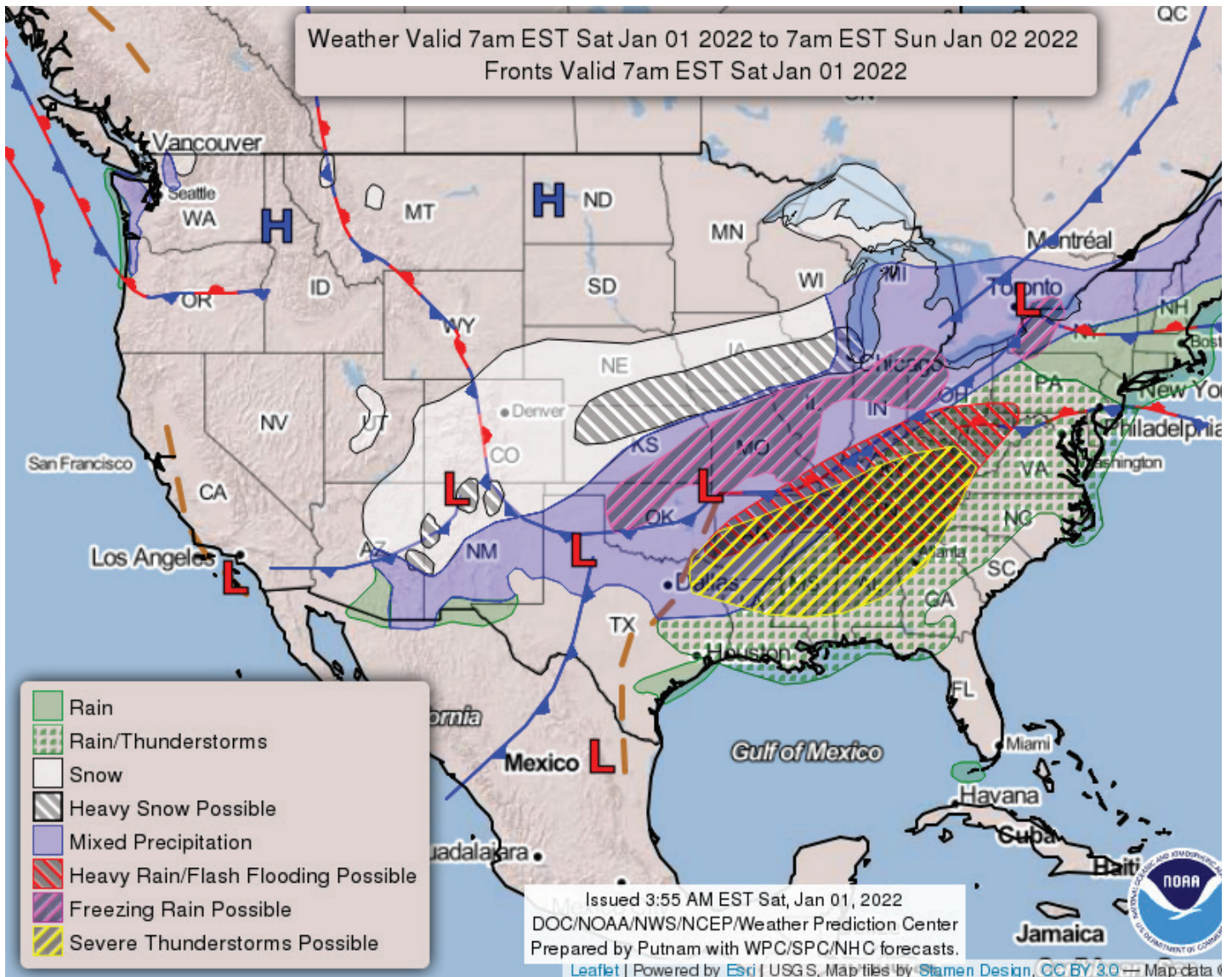
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 6 °F at 3:38 AM**  
**Low Temp: -14 °F at 8:20 PM**  
**Wind: 20 mph at 4:55 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 53° in 1998**  
**Record Low: -32° in 1918**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 4°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.02**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.02**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:01:41 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:29 AM**



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## WHAT TO GIVE TO THE GIVER OF GIFTS

"They cried" when they were in trouble and He "saved them from their distress." Then when "they were in darkness and the deepest gloom," He provided light for their path. And when they were in bondage, He "broke away their chains" and set them free.

God's grace and goodness for the children of Israel remind me of His grace and goodness for His children today. Many speak of God comforting them when He "saved" them from the distress of an emotional crisis that would have destroyed them. Often, we hear stories of God's Word providing light for His children who had a difficult time in finding direction for their lives. Quite frequently we hear testimonies of individuals who were in "bondage" caused by alcohol or other drugs who were set free by His grace.

But the stories and testimonies of God's goodness must never end with the release from distress and the restoration of His blessings. His light for our path or the joy that comes from being set free from the bondage of sin must always lead to words of thanksgiving and times of worship. The words "must always lead" were selected to emphasize the importance and obligation we have to be grateful to God and honor Him for His goodness and grace.

Self-centeredness will reign in our hearts and control our lives until we honor God publicly for everything He does for us. When we honor Him in praise and worship for His "unfailing love and wonderful deeds," we show others how dependent we are on God for all that we are or have.

Prayer: Father, fill our hearts with gratitude and our lives with humility so others can see Your greatness. Let us lead them with our visible thankfulness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains. Psalm 107:13-15

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## 2021 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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- Colored ..... \$74.55/year
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## Groton Daily Independent

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News from the  Associated Press

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Beresford 66, Parker 58

Sioux Falls Lincoln 76, Marshall, Minn. 49

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 65, Aberdeen Christian 64

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 71, Harrisburg 55

Entringer Classic=

Arlington 77, Waverly-South Shore 54

Castlewood 60, Garretson 35

Chester 67, Lake Preston 26

DeSmet 55, Sioux Valley 47

Dell Rapids 58, Hamlin 51

Deuel 68, Dell Rapids St. Mary 56

Estelline/Hendricks 73, Colman-Egan 46

Flandreau 59, Deubrook 46

Madison 56, Elkton-Lake Benton 50

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 53, Baltic 42

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Beresford 47, Parker 40

Groton Area 48, Webster 40

Pentagon Classic=

Canton 54, Chamberlain 49

Corsica/Stickney 54, Tea Area 49

Sioux Valley 63, Madison 38

Vermillion 44, Hill City 43

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Dakota Valley vs. White River, ccd.

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

## Noem extends Child Support Commission report for 3 months

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday granted a three-month extension to a commission tasked with recommending changes to the state's child support payment laws.

The Child Support Commission faced a deadline to issue a report to the governor and Legislature by the end of 2021, but Noem extended the commission until the end of March through an executive order. In its quadrennial report, the commission is tasked with recommending updates to state child support payment laws and had moved towards recommending a reduction of child support payments for parents with lower incomes.

The commission had met during the fall and planned to finalize its recommendations earlier this month, but has not done so. It was initially supposed to meet in 2020 and finish its report by the end of last year, but did not meet last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In her executive order, Noem made technical changes to several previous orders, as well as rescinded orders that applied to situations that are no longer emergencies.

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## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

02-05-30-46-61, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 3

(two, five, thirty, forty-six, sixty-one; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$221 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$483 million

## South Dakota film to feature Native American elders' voices

By MICHAEL NEARY Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Urla Marcus has hoped for a long time to preserve the voices of area elders in a carefully crafted, artistic format. Now Marcus, director of the Center for American Indian Studies at Black Hills State University, will help to shape a documentary to do just that.

Staff members at the Center for American Indian Studies at Black Hills State University are preparing to work on a documentary – and to bolster many of the Center's services – by drawing from a \$242,769 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that took effect earlier this school year. The grant was made possible by the American Rescue Plan.

The university announced earlier this month that it had been awarded the grant "to restore and expand BHSU Center for American Indian Studies (CAIS) public programming."

Marcus, a member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, said the grant facilitated the hiring of Tiarra Little as program manager of the Center for American Indian Studies. Little, a member of the Oglala Lakota Oyate who grew up in the Pine Ridge and Oglala areas, began her position on Nov. 1 and will play a key role in shaping the documentary, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Little earned her master's degree in Education Policy and Management from Harvard University, and she's slated to work for a year in the Center for American Indian Studies as she prepares for Ph.D. studies.

"She's going to be spearheading the documentary, and she's going to be looking at our American Indian Studies program, specifically at our assessment," Marcus said.

The position was added, Marcus said, after the Center's assistant director's post was frozen in March.

The grant will also be used to sustain and grow CAIS programs such as the annual Wacipi, or Powwow; American Indian Awareness Week; a speaker series and various course work, according to an announcement from the university.

Little, in addition to her master's degree from Harvard, brings a bachelor of arts from Stanford University in comparative studies in race and ethnicity, with an emphasis on education, access, and equity.

"I was heavily involved in the Native communities at Stanford and Harvard during my time at school," she said. "I think it's a strength to be able to tap into those experiences as I contribute to student support at BHSU."

At Stanford, during her sophomore year, she co-taught an alternative spring break course – part of a service learning program – designed to help students make contributions to various communities during spring break. The course focused on Native American and rural education, and she traveled to Pine Ridge during spring break, with the students and the other co-teacher, to perform service.

"We visited with organizations to hear first-hand about Indigenous education," she said. "That was the very first time that I saw the behind-the-scenes part of my home community. It was stepping into the professional side of Indigenous education for the first time."

Little has worked on a sprawling array of other service projects, as well, including those in several countries around the world. Much of her experience working with people, though, hits close to home.

"I come from a big family, a blended family, and so just being able to mentor and give advice to my younger relatives has been a constant," she said.

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She said her work at the Center for American Indian Studies will encompass a wide swath of tasks. "So far it's been giving pep talks," she said. "Sometimes it's giving people a ride back home – people who need a ride home during the break."

She said she also wants to help people stay connected to "what's happening in our communities back home" and to consider "how that connects with what's happening here at school."

She noted the importance of working with Lakota Omnicieye, a student organization on campus, along with other activities.

For the documentary, Marcus said the Center has tapped three consultants: Jace DeCory, professor emeritus at BHSU, along with filmmakers Kenn and John Little – not related to Tiarra Little. The two brothers created the film "More Than a Word," a project described at <http://morethanawordfilm.com/>.

Both are members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that straddles the South Dakota and North Dakota border.

DeCory is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

"She's an elder herself," Marcus said of DeCory. "She's very well-known, not only in our state but in our region."

Marcus lauded DeCory's expertise and said DeCory will be conducting much of the interviewing in the documentary, Marcus explained.

Marcus said people from the Center for American Indian Studies have recorded the voices of speakers before, including at BHSU's celebration of American Indian Awareness Week. But the documentary moves a step further.

"We've always wanted the opportunity to capture what these speakers are saying – and what our elders, more specifically, are saying – in a professional way," she said. She added that "we can use (the documentary) in our classes and make it more widely distributed so the public can use it as well."

Marcus said plans are in the works to visit with five elders.

"We're going to travel to their home and do (the interviews) in their home communities," she said.

Marcus noted that this has been a trying, and in some cases a devastating, time for elders in the community.

"We lost so many of our elders due to the pandemic, and we didn't have the opportunity to get their information and hear their stories," she said. "We always listened to them, but we never really had the opportunity to record them."

This will be the first time the Center for American Indian Studies has produced a documentary, Marcus said.

"This is brand new," she said. "That's why it's important for us to work closely with John and Kenn. They have done documentaries, and we're relying heavily on them to guide us."

In January, she said, the Littles, who both live outside of the area, will come to campus and help train interns and to establish groundwork for the film. Later, they'll work with the material that's been recorded.

"We're going to be sending them all the footage, and Kenn specifically will be piecing it together working with his equipment," Marcus said.

Marcus mentioned plans to conduct interviews in February and March and then assemble the film during the summer. She said the film will likely be available online, and she noted the possibility of a public showing.

"We would like to have a release," she said.

The grant is also sponsoring five interns to work in the Center for American Indian Studies, and they will also be contributing to the documentary.

Marcus reflected on some of the other activities that the NEH grant will help to sustain and develop, as well. She said two interns will be working this spring on the annual Wacipi, or Powwow, doing planning, fundraising and organization. The Wacipi has been canceled the past two years due to the pandemic, she added.

"It's a large cultural event, and a lot of our community participates," she said.



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And Marcus said a key function of the grant would be its funding of Tiarra Little's position as program manager.

"It's really important for us to have our assistant back in the Center to work with the students," she said. "She's from Pine Ridge, and so she shares a lot of the background with the students. She's a recent (university) graduate herself, so she knows the challenges our students are facing, and she also knows how to celebrate their successes."

## New year brings more canceled flights for air travelers

By The Associated Press undefined

For air travelers, the new year picked up where the old one left off – with lots of frustration.

By late morning Saturday on the East Coast, more than 2,400 U.S. flights and nearly 4,200 worldwide had been canceled, according to tracking service FlightAware.

That is the highest single-day toll yet since just before Christmas, when airlines began blaming staffing shortages on increasing COVID-19 infections among crews. More than 12,000 U.S. flights have been canceled since Dec. 24.

Saturday's disruptions weren't just due to the virus, however. Wintry weather made Chicago the worst place in the country for travelers, with 800 flights scrubbed at O'Hare Airport and more than 250 at Midway Airport. Forecasts called for nine inches of snow. Denver, Detroit and Newark, New Jersey, were hit with at least 100 cancellations each.

Southwest Airlines, which has major operations at Chicago Midway and Denver, canceled more than 450 flights nationwide, or 13% of its schedule, by midmorning. American, Delta, United and JetBlue scrubbed more than 100 flights apiece.

SkyWest, a regional carrier that operates flights under the names American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express, grounded more than 400 flights, or 21% of its schedule.

Among international carriers, China Eastern scrubbed more than 500 flights, or about one-fourth of its total, and Air China canceled more than 200 flights, one-fifth of its schedule, according to FlightAware.

Airlines say they are taking steps to reduce cancellations. United is offering to pay pilots triple or more of their usual wages for picking up open flights through mid-January. Southwest and others have also raised premium pay for some workers.

When winter weather hit the Pacific Northwest earlier this week, Alaska Airlines urged customers to delay any "non-essential" trips that were planned through this weekend. With full flights over the New Year's holiday, the airline said it wasn't sure it could rebook stranded passengers for at least three days.

Travelers who stuck to the roads instead of the skies faced challenges, too. Transportation officials in the Midwest warned motorists that a mix of rain and snow could make roads slippery and reduce visibility, leading to hazardous driving conditions.

## Colorado fire victims begin new year surveying destruction

By BRITTANY PETERSON, PATTY NIEBERG and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

SUPERIOR, Colo. (AP) — An overnight dumping of snow and frigid temperatures compounded the misery of hundreds of Colorado residents who started off the new year trying to salvage what remains of their homes after a wind-whipped wildfire tore through the Denver suburbs.

At least 6 inches (0.15 meters) of snow and temperatures in the single digits cast an eerie scene Saturday amid the still-smoldering remains of homes destroyed in Thursday's wildfire that raced through a suburban area that lies between Denver and Boulder. Despite the shocking change in weather, the smell of smoke still permeated empty streets blocked off by National Guard troops in Humvees.

For the thousands of residents whose homes survived the conflagration, Red Cross shelter volunteers distributed electric space heaters as utility crews struggled to restore natural gas and electricity.

At least seven people were injured, but remarkably there had been no reports of any deaths in the wildfire that erupted in and around Louisville and Superior, neighboring towns about 20 miles (32 kilometers)

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northwest of Denver with a combined population of 34,000. More than 500 homes were feared destroyed. The blaze, which burned at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), was no longer considered an immediate threat.

Families forced to flee the flames with little warning began returning to their neighborhoods Friday to find a patchwork of devastation. On some blocks, homes reduced to smoking ruins stood next to ones practically unscathed by the fires.

"For 35 years I walked out my front door, I saw beautiful homes," Eric House said. "Now when I walk out, my home's standing. I walk out my front door and this is what I see."

Cathy Glaab found that her home in Superior had been turned into a pile of charred and twisted debris. It was one of seven houses in a row that were destroyed.

"The mailbox is standing," Glaab said, trying to crack a smile through tears. She added sadly, "So many memories."

Despite the devastation, she said they intend to rebuild the house she and her husband have had since 1998. They love that the land backs up to a natural space, and they have a view of the mountains from the back.

Rick Dixon feared there would be nothing to return to after he saw firefighters try to save his burning home on the news. On Friday, Dixon, his wife and son found it mostly gutted with a gaping hole in the roof but still standing.

"We thought we lost everything," he said, as he held his mother-in-law's china in padded containers. They also retrieved sculptures that belonged to Dixon's father and piles of clothes still on hangers.

As the flames swept over drought-stricken neighborhoods with alarming speed, propelled by gusts up to 105 mph (169 kph), tens of thousands were ordered to flee.

The cause of the blaze was under investigation. Emergency authorities said utility officials found no downed power lines around where the fire broke out.

With some roads still closed, people walked back to their homes to get clothes or medicine, turn the water off to prevent the pipes from freezing, or see if they still had a house. They left carrying backpacks and pulling suitcases or wagons down the sidewalk.

David Marks stood on a hillside overlooking Superior with others, using a pair of binoculars and a long-range camera lens to see if his house, and those of his neighbors, were still there, but he couldn't tell for sure whether his place was OK. He said at least three friends lost their homes.

He had watched from the hillside as the neighborhood burned.

"By the time I got up here, the houses were completely engulfed," he said. "I mean, it happened so quickly. I've never seen anything like that. ... Just house after house, fences, just stuff flying through the air, just caught on fire."

President Joe Biden on Friday declared a major disaster in the area, ordering federal aid be made available to those affected.

The wildfire broke out unusually late in the year, following an extremely dry fall and amid a winter nearly devoid of snow until the overnight snowfall.

Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said more than 500 homes were probably destroyed. He and Gov. Jared Polis said as many as 1,000 homes might have been lost, though that won't be known until crews can assess the damage.

"It's unbelievable when you look at the devastation that we don't have a list of 100 missing persons," the sheriff said.

The sheriff said some communities were reduced to just "smoking holes in the ground." He urged residents to wait for the all-clear to go back because of the danger of fire and fallen power lines.

Superior and Louisville are filled with middle- and upper-middle-class subdivisions with shopping centers, parks and schools. The area is between Denver and Boulder, home to the University of Colorado.

Scientists say climate change is making weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

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Ninety percent of Boulder County is in severe or extreme drought, and it hadn't seen substantial rainfall since mid-summer. Denver set a record for consecutive days without snow before it got a small storm on Dec. 10, its last snowfall before the wildfires broke out.

Bruce Janda faced the loss of his Louisville home of 25 years in person Friday.

"We knew that the house was totaled, but I felt the need to see it, see what the rest of the neighborhood looked like," he said. "We're a very close knit community on this street. We all know each other and we all love each other. It's hard to see this happen to all of us."

Associated Press writers Thomas Peipert in Louisville, Colorado; Thalia Beaty in New York; Brady McCombs in Salt Lake City contributed to this report. Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues.

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## Austrian Holocaust survivor "Mrs. Gertrude" dies at 94

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER undefined

BERLIN (AP) — The Holocaust survivor Gertrude Pressburger, who became famous during Austria's 2016 presidential campaign with a video message in which "Mrs. Gertrude" warned of hatred and exclusion triggered by the far right, has died at 94.

Pressburger died Friday after a long illness, her family told the Austrian press agency APA on Saturday.

Pressburger was born and raised in Vienna, the daughter of a carpenter. Her Jewish family converted to Catholicism in the early 1930s, but that did not keep them from being prosecuted by the Nazis after Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938.

After her father was arrested and tortured by the Nazis' Gestapo secret police for alleged political activity, the family was able to escape to Yugoslavia and later to Italy, APA reported.

In 1944, the family was captured and deported to the Nazis' Auschwitz death camp in Germany-occupied Poland, where her mother and two younger brothers were murdered. Her father was also killed by the Nazis.

Pressburger returned to Vienna after the war, but initially did not talk about her horrific sufferings during the Holocaust. Eventually, she decided to open up about the Holocaust and about the antisemitic experiences she suffered in post-war Austria.

"I did not come back to Vienna to be oppressed again. I swear to myself that I will not put up with anything anymore. I'm going to fight with my mouth," APA quoted her as saying.

Pressburger also published a memoir that she co-wrote with author Marlene Groihofer.

In the book "Gelebt, Erlebt, Ueberlebt" or "Lived, Experienced, Survived" she described her family's arrival in Auschwitz in 1944.

Her mother and the two brothers were sent away on a truck. Gertrude herself was sent in another direction and she quickly lost sight of her father too. Pressburger constantly looked for her family members in the death camp until a stranger approached her, pointed to the smoke coming out of the chimneys behind the barracks and told her that all the people driven away on the truck were gassed and burned already. That, Pressburger, wrote, was the moment when she understood that they had been murdered.

In 2016, Pressburger addressed Austria's younger generation in an online video, warning against the humiliations and exclusion of minorities amid the far-right rhetoric in the country's presidential election. She called on young Austrians to go out and vote. The video was watched and shared several million times.

"I just said what I thought. That's it. And that hit home. I never understood why," she told APA afterwards.

Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen from the Green Party later said he was sure her video appeal had some influence on the election result, which saw him narrowly win only after a re-run against

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the far-right Freedom Party's candidate Norbert Hofer.

"We will never know for sure, but that it had an impact, that is to say an effect, and especially on young and very young people, I am convinced of that," Van der Bellen said.

## Former Broncos, Falcons, Giants coach Dan Reeves dies at 77

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Dan Reeves, who won a Super Bowl as a player with the Dallas Cowboys but was best known for a long coaching career that included four blowout losses in the title game with the Denver Broncos and the Atlanta Falcons, died Saturday. He was 77.

A statement released by his family through former Falcons media relations director Aaron Salkin said Reeves died of complications from dementia. The statement said he died "peacefully and surrounded by his loving family at his home in Atlanta."

"His legacy will continue through his many friends, players and fans as well as the rest of the NFL community," the family said.

Reeves was a versatile player who played a key role in the Cowboys becoming an NFL powerhouse in the 1960s under Tom Landry, but his own coaching career — stretching over three teams and 23 seasons — is where he truly left his mark on the league.

Including a stint with the New York Giants, Reeves totaled 190 coaching victories — the ninth-most in NFL history. But he was never able to win the biggest game of all, going 0-4 in the Super Bowl, each of them by double-digit margins.

Reeves, Marv Levy and Bud Grant are the only coaches to lose four times in the Super Bowl.

"Dan Reeves leaves a lasting legacy in our game as a player and coach," said Falcons owner Arthur Blank, who fired Reeves from his final job in 2003. "His track record of success in Dallas, Denver, New York and Atlanta over several decades speaks for itself, marking a long and successful life and career in football."

Just 37 when he took over as coach of the Broncos in 1981, Reeves acquired quarterback John Elway in a trade and built a team that made three Super Bowl appearances, earned six trips to the playoffs and won five AFC West titles over his 12-year tenure.

But Denver never won an NFL title under Reeves, losing 39-20 to the Giants in the 1987 Super Bowl, 42-10 to Washington in 1988 and 55-10 to the San Francisco 49ers in 1990 — still the most lopsided loss in the game's history.

Despite those defeats and a bitter parting after the 1992 season, Reeves is remembered fondly in Denver, where the Broncos inducted him into their Ring of Honor in 2014.

"Coach Reeves set the foundation for the Broncos' decade of dominance in the 1980s and championship tradition for years to come," the team said in a statement. "Reeves coached the Broncos with integrity, character and toughness along with sincere appreciation for his players and coaches."

After a falling out with Elway and allegations that the star quarterback had colluded with then-offensive coordinator (and eventual head coach) Mike Shanahan to force a change, Reeves was fired by the Broncos.

He took over the Giants in 1993 and led the team to the playoffs in his first season, but that would be his only postseason appearance in New York. He was fired after four seasons but quickly caught on in 1997 with the Falcons, a homecoming of sorts for the Georgia native.

In just his second season with a franchise that had experienced little success, Reeves guided a team known as the "Dirty Birds" to a 14-2 record in the regular season and their first trip to the Super Bowl.

After Reeves underwent emergency heart surgery, the Falcons beat the heavily favored Minnesota Vikings in an overtime thriller at the Metrodome to claim the NFC championship, prompting the coach to attempt the arm-flapping dance that star running back Jamal Anderson and other players had made the team's trademark.

"My guy!" Anderson wrote on Twitter. "I am going to miss DR, a first class human, and a most excellent coach. My thoughts and prayers are with (his wife) Pam, his family. A family man first. Respect & love, RIP Coach Reeves!"

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Reeves again came up short of a championship, losing to Shanahan, Elway and the Broncos 34-19.

Reeves engineered a trade that brought Michael Vick to the Falcons and made his final playoff appearance in 2002, when Atlanta became the first road team to win a playoff game in Green Bay.

But Vick was injured during the 2003 preseason, and Reeves was fired after the team won just three of its first 13 games.

He ended his coaching career — and 39 uninterrupted years in the NFL — with a record of 190-165-2.

Reeves remained in Atlanta after his retirement, most notably serving as an adviser to Georgia State when it launched a football program that now plays in the Sun Belt Conference.

Daniel Edward Reeves was born in Rome, Georgia, but grew up in the Americus, in the southwestern part of the state, where he played football, basketball and baseball in high school.

Reeves attended college at South Carolina, where he was a three-year starter at quarterback from 1962-64 and also played baseball for the Gamecocks.

Better known as a runner than a passer, Reeves was not drafted after college. He signed a free-agent deal with the Cowboys, who initially wanted him to play safety but wound up moving him to running back.

Reeves emerged as one of the team's key players just as the Cowboys were establishing themselves as the successful franchise that would become known as "America's Team."

He started all 14 games at halfback in 1966, leading the Cowboys in rushing with 757 yards and eight touchdowns. Dallas made its first playoff appearance but lost to the Green Bay Packers in a 34-27 shootout for the NFL championship, missing a chance to play in the first Super Bowl.

The following season, Reeves rushed for 603 yards and five TDs, again starting every game, as the Cowboys made another run to the playoffs. Again, they were thwarted by Green Bay one win shy of the Super Bowl, losing to the Packers on a touchdown in the closing seconds of the famed "Ice Bowl" game at frigid Lambeau Field.

A knee injury in 1968 limited his effectiveness, and Reeves played only a limited role the rest of his career. But Landry recognized his abilities off the field, asking Reeves to serve as a player-coach while runner such as Duane Thomas and Calvin Hill took on more prominent backfield roles.

The Cowboys made their first Super Bowl during the 1970 season, losing to the Baltimore Colts on a last-second field goal, but finally won the championship the following year with a 24-3 victory over the Miami Dolphins.

Reeves retired as a player after the 1972 season, becoming a full-time assistant on Landry's staff.

As a head coach, Reeves was known for his gruff, no-nonsense approach and an offensive philosophy that favored a physical running game. But he also coached two of the game's most dynamic offensive players, Vick and Elway, defying those who labeled him as old-fashioned.

With his distinctive Southern drawl, Reeves could be honest to a fault, such as when he spoke openly of the rift that led to his departure in Denver — and opened up a lot of old wounds — during the lead-up to the Falcons facing the Broncos in the 1999 Super Bowl.

"There's still a lot of hurt that won't ever go away," Reeves said. "You never will forget those things."

But Reeves rarely held grudges, even with members of the media that he had clashed with.

In his later years, he would gladly take phone calls to discuss the issues of the day, once joking when a reporter identified himself, "OK, what did I do wrong now?"

Reeves is survived by wife Pam, his high school sweetheart; children Dana, Lee and Laura; as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements have yet to be announced.

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**In nation at war with itself, one town tries cup of civility**

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By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

LOVETTSVILLE, Va. (AP) — When Maureen Donnelly Morris came from nearby Leesburg to open her café in Lovettsville, she got a warm welcome. Neighbors rallied to her aid. Divisions ripping at their town and their country were set aside. America's thunderous rage felt distant.

They sank posts for her parking signs. They brought solar lights for the cheery space outdoors, sharpened her bagel-slicing blades and contributed plants, all to herald what would become the town's social hub and civil common ground, Back Street Brews.

Forget, at least for one split second, red, blue, left, right, pro-Trump, anti-Trump. No one asked the woman from Leesburg: Which side are you on? (And she wouldn't have said, if they did. Still won't.)

In this community of some 2,200 and others like it across the United States, neighborly ways and social ties persist, even in a country that seems to be at war with itself. It's a quieter force than all the yelling that is driving Americans apart. But the redemption of a nation and future of its democracy may depend on it as the anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol approaches.

At least among neighbors in the café, says Moe, as everyone calls her, "You're allowed to be a Republican and I don't hate your guts. And you're allowed to be a Democrat and hopefully you like me if I'm not."

In a terribly fractious America, that sentiment can no longer be taken for granted.

A year after the violent assault on the Capitol by supporters of a defeated president, Donald Trump, the United States is split in nearly every conceivable way. Shared sacrifice seems to be an artifact. Against the coronavirus and other problems, we're conspicuously not "all in this together," as the pandemic cliché claims. There's no common set of facts.

Still menaced and now exhausted by COVID-19, Americans can't agree that it's better to be vaccinated. Elected officials, even the No. 2 Republican in the House, refuse to say that the duly proper, legal and fair election of President Joe Biden was not stolen from Trump. To be clear, it was not.

The battles have filtered into professional sports, where some players were willing to forfeit \$400,000 a game to preserve their right to expose themselves and others to a disease that has killed over 800,000 in this country. Abortion, a subject of long-settled constitutional law but ongoing political debate, is dividing the U.S. even more than usual as the Supreme Court considers whether to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Deeply complicated questions about race, parental rights, schooling and the teaching of history gave rise to fiery, simplistic slogans and a sense among voters in Virginia and elsewhere in November's elections that Democrats are out of touch. Virginians put the brakes on their drift from red to blue, electing a Republican governor for the first time in a decade.

The Republican Party remains in thrall of a man who peddled conspiracy theories from the highest office, eggs on local Republicans to skew election laws to make it easier for them — and perhaps him — to win, and threatens Republicans in primaries who do not endorse his lie that the 2020 election was a fraud.

The public is deeply split over whether to believe an unassailable fact — that Democrat Biden was honestly elected. In the Jan. 6 aftermath, about two-thirds of Republicans agreed with the idea that Biden's election was illegitimate and by the fall, their interest in seeing the insurrectionists prosecuted had declined.

To Fiona Hill, who served the previous three presidents across party lines as a Russia analyst, it all adds up to politics in the United States as "Mortal Kombat, the video game."

"You have to kind of slay your enemy," said Hill, whose new book examines the root causes of the rise of Trump and other populist leaders. "It's all basically framed as win-loss, victory-defeat, red versus blue, different factions and shades of blue fighting with themselves. ... The Republican Party, the party of the people that I worked with when I was new in the Bush administration, they've all disappeared."

That's the warring America. It plays out in Washington, in decidedly uncivil town meetings across the country and over the airwaves. It infects social media, where people, by their own admission, lose their minds.

There's another, quieter, America, too. It asks about the family. It commiserates about the water bill and shoots the breeze. It's a place where people who can be Facebook-nasty are face-to-face polite. Often it meets over coffee.

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## 'BLESS YOU'

There's no question that Trump drove people further into their political corners and made things louder, coarser and more chaotic. And the one-two punch of political distancing and social distancing has taken a toll.

Trump and the pandemic "pretty much ripped a hole through the center of town," says Kris Consaul, a left-leaning activist and a former town planning commissioner in Lovettsville.

Into the breach came Back Street Brews, which set up in a building shared with the Painted Pig craft shop in late 2017, then expanded in 2021 to fill the space after pandemic-plagued months of serving people only out a window. The town got its first place to hang out, sit with a laptop or strum a guitar.

Worship groups, a new-mom gathering and various other coffee klatches have taken root. Political discussions pop up, though rarely a heated argument. And when you sneeze in one cubbyhole, a stranger in another calls out, "Bless you."

"It's not really a pot-stirrer kind of place," said Moe, who turns a brilliant smile on everyone who walks in. "I just don't invite it. And if it comes up, you know, as long as it's respectful, you can talk about whatever your beliefs are. I don't care. If you are a staunch this or staunch that, I always say, keep that out of here."

John Ferguson, a long-retired foreign service officer who moved here five years ago, contributed flags and solar lights to Back Street on Lovettsville's Pennsylvania Avenue, a lane barely wide enough for two cars to pass. He's there often and makes runs to Costco for Moe. He was massively relieved when Trump vacated the big white house on that other Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington.

Ferguson was raised in the "FDR Democrat" tradition in Hartford, Connecticut, where the Republicans were wealthy businessmen and Democrats were almost everyone else.

A student of history as well as a career diplomat, Ferguson shudders at the fresh memories of Trump on rally stages, "strutting around, jutting out his chin ... like Mussolini," the Italian fascist of World War II.

"A colossal mess and a tragedy," Ferguson says of the Trump legacy. When it comes to defending the integrity of elections and standing on guard against more insurrections like Jan. 6, "I don't think you can pussyfoot around right now and certainly not for as long as Trump is on the scene."

But what of the Democrats?

"They seem to take a sort of smug attitude," Ferguson said. "They are treating Trump voters as if they're stupid. That's a huge mistake. It's tremendously dangerous to alienate them."

Erik Necciai, a consultant to federal agencies, brought his family to the Lovettsville outskirts just more than 10 years ago. In the early 2000s, he worked as a Senate aide to Democrat John Kerry of Massachusetts and Republican Olympia Snowe of Maine on the Small Business Committee. He knows about quaint bipartisanship. He's also handy with a shovel.

So when another neighbor made wooden posts for Back Street's tight parking, Necciai bought the concrete, dug the holes and poured the footings.

"We all have different political views," he says, describing his own only as moderate. "It's very hard to have conversations nowadays in public spaces. But I sat here in this coffee shop not long ago ... and some topic came up, and then all of a sudden, we were solving five or six different political problems. Russia, what do we do about that? China?"

"Everybody's opinion was greatly accepted. And I think we need a little bit more of that. We live in a world now where we are learning better to not judge people on their exterior. Yet, if somebody were to come with a particular hat — a red hat ... we instantly judge them. When we don't necessarily know them."

Jessica Sullivan, a professional tarot-card reader who also works behind the counter at Back Street, moved to Lovettsville 15 years ago to take a job teaching at a private school across the river in Maryland. The town had a reputation then as a backwater of Loudoun County, a fast-growing area of northern Virginia encompassing the tech corridor outside Washington and rural towns and farms.

"I remember thinking, dear God please let me not die here because this place has nothing in it and I don't know anybody," she said. But as the town grew in the years since, so did her attachment to the people.

Now, she says, "I don't want to live anywhere else. ... I'm very relaxed and chill and I don't need anybody

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to think the same things that I think in order for them to be a good person to me.”

## PERILS OF 'MASKBOOK'

Still, Sullivan said, “we do have a kind of dark undercurrent at times.”

In one provocation, a pro-Trump parade that came through town during the 2020 campaign diverted off the main street and stopped outside the home of the activist, Consaul, and her wife, Sheryl Frye, blaring horns to intimidate the couple.

It was also in 2020 when the couple turned their sprawling fence line into a showpiece, painting it the colors of the gay pride rainbow flag. It was meant as a statement of support for LGBT youth who, like others, were isolated at home in the pandemic.

The festive decoration has delighted many in town while upsetting some on the cultural right.

As Consaul describes how 20 people showed up to help paint the fence, her cat sits on her lap on her porch and her roaming chickens stop to listen, heads cocked sideways.

The parade was an overt sign of friction. But behind the shield of social media, where you can spout an opinion and not have to look someone in the eye, the tone has been harsh and confrontational.

The local gun store owner, who routinely posts inflammatory, liberal-hating slogans on a sign outside his store and rages on social media, in 2020 announced a sale on AR-style rifles. The sign named the sale after “krazy” Kris and her neighbor — with a mangled spelling of their names — in a call to “Be Armed.”

Yet on both sides of the divide, people share a consensus on a few things. One is that Lovettsville is a family-friendly place where you can send your 10-year-old to the 7-Eleven alone without worry.

Another point of agreement is that Facebook has given a few ugly voices an outsized megaphone — half-hiding behind the online veil that Moe calls “Maskbook.”

In raw exchanges on the local Facebook group, a downtown home and family displaying multiple pro-Trump banners were denounced as a “Trump dump.” From the other side, vile insults have been flung at gay people and anyone on the left.

Many in town have quit this online competition of cruelties. As if rubbernecking a car wreck, others can't quite look away.

In that forum, “people feel more free to just say whatever they want and attack,” said the woman whose yard boldly displays the pro-Trump sentiments of her husband and herself. “I've heard it all.” She asked not to be identified because of local tensions.

As she spoke, her cat jumped on the chest-high fence with the 2024 Trump banner and rubbed insistently against the interviewer's face.

Off Facebook, the Trump supporter has got some liberal friends and doesn't hesitate to visit Back Street, sizing up Moe as “definitely down the middle.” “We take our little one for milkshakes and things like that.”

So do the radical lefties. So do the moderates. So do the just plain people.

They'll all shoot the breeze, ask about family, complain about the water bill or something.

Then it's back to the ramparts. That's America for you.

“It's affecting people,” Moe said of the perils of this era. “Not me. Not in my bubble. We're going to be fine, everyone! We're going to land on our feet in my coffee bubble.”

## New Year's Rose Parade proceeds despite COVID-19 surge

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — A year after New Year's Day passed without a Rose Parade due to the coronavirus pandemic, the floral spectacle celebrating the arrival of 2022 proceeded Saturday despite a new surge of infections due to the omicron variant.

The 133rd edition of the Pasadena, California, tradition featured actor LeVar Burton as grand marshal, 20 marching bands, 18 equestrian units and dozens of floats reflecting the theme of “Dream. Believe. Achieve.”

After days of record-smashing rains, there were sunny skies for the 8 a.m. start of the parade, which has an uncanny history of postcard weather.

LeAnn Rimes kicked off the event with a performance of “Throw My Arms Around the World” followed by



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a military flyover of a B-2 bomber. Also on the performance list were "American Idol" winner Laine Hardy aboard Louisiana's "Feed Your Soul" float and country singer-songwriter Jimmie Allen.

The parade and the afternoon Rose Bowl football game between the Ohio State Buckeyes and the Utah Utes remained on track despite an explosion of COVID-19 infections in Los Angeles County, where daily new cases topped 27,000 on Friday.

The county Department of Public Health said it was the highest number of new cases.

The soaring infections had already prompted Kaiser Permanente to announce that its float, "A Healthier Future," would not have 20 "front-line medical heroes" riding or walking alongside.

"We must prioritize the health and safety of our front-line medical staff and ensure we are able to treat patients during this recent surge of COVID-19 cases caused by the omicron variant," the health care network said.

The parade drew thousands of fans as usual along its 5.5-mile (8.8-kilometer) route. Many camped out on sidewalks overnight, staking out their spots in the afternoon on New Year's Eve.

Pasadena authorities urged people to wear masks, upgrading to the N95 or KN95 types, and avoid mingling with anyone outside their own groups.

The Tournament of Roses Association said ticketholders for parade bleachers and the Rose Bowl game would be required to show proof of full vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours, and masks would be required for everyone age 2 and up.

The 2021 Rose Parade was canceled months ahead of time. The Rose Bowl football game was played after being moved to Arlington, Texas.

Previously, the parade was canceled for several years during World War II and the 1942 Rose Bowl game was played in North Carolina after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

## Repeat or revenge: Alabama vs. Georgia, again, for CFP title

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Alabama has a chance to repeat. Georgia has a chance for revenge.

The rematch is set, and it will decide the College Football Playoff national championship. After a pair of easy wins in the semifinals on Friday night, the Crimson Tide and the Bulldogs — the only two teams to be ranked No. 1 in the AP Top 25 this season — will meet again to decide the title on Jan. 10 in Indianapolis.

Alabama will be seeking a seventh national championship in the last 13 years under coach Nick Saban. Georgia is playing with hopes of claiming its first national title since Herschel Walker led the Bulldogs to the title in the 1980 season.

"I think we're good enough," Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett said in the din of the Orange Bowl postgame celebration. "Obviously, they're a great team. But we're going to enjoy this one tonight and start preparing for them tomorrow."

This matchup comes after Alabama — big underdogs entering that game — had little trouble in what became a 41-24 win over Georgia in the SEC championship game back on Dec. 4, costing the Bulldogs a chance at an undefeated season and giving the defending national champion Crimson Tide a trip back into the playoff mix.

Alabama needed that win.

Weirdly, Georgia felt it needed that loss.

"For our team, it was a wake-up call," Georgia offensive lineman Jamaree Salyer said that night. "I think we needed one. We got a wake-up call from a really good team. If we get a chance in the playoffs, I think that wake-up call will help propel us forward."

Oh, the Bulldogs were awake on Friday night.

They blew out Michigan 34-11 in the Orange Bowl, taking the field not long after Alabama had little trouble dismissing Cincinnati 27-6 in the other CFP semifinal at the Cotton Bowl.

"To have another opportunity to play for a national championship ... it's like a dream come true," Alabama running back Brian Robinson Jr. said after the Cotton Bowl.

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Predictably, the Tide didn't do much talking about Georgia following their win. Most teams would never go down that road, talking about an opponent in tournament play before the next matchup is actually set. But Georgia, playing the later game on Friday, probably could have let Alabama begin entering its thoughts probably somewhere around halftime when the Bulldogs had a 27-3 lead over the Wolverines.

"We've got a lot of things to fix," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said after the Orange Bowl. "We got to fix some of them over the break. They got about a five-, six-hour head start on us. We've got to get back and get to work for what is a really good football team."

With all due respect to Michigan, by then, it was clear: The All-SEC rematch was happening. The first CFP title game saw Ohio State defeating Oregon. All seven editions since have featured at least one SEC team — Alabama six times, LSU once and now Georgia twice.

"Well, the team has an opportunity to win the national championship," Saban said Saturday in an appearance on ESPN's "College GameDay." "So you expect to play a good team. We're still probably going to be underdogs in the game, I would assume. Georgia played an outstanding game last night. The part that I saw against Michigan, they were dominant."

Alabama has gone 3-2 in its previous CFP title game appearances, alternating wins and losses every time. Nobody in the CFP era has won back-to-back titles; Alabama is 0-2 in its opportunities to do so, and Clemson also lost when it had a bid for consecutive CFP crowns.

Georgia can only hope that trend continues.

Not only is this an SEC title game rematch, but it's also a rematch of the best — or at least, closest and arguably most dramatic — title game of the CFP era, now in its eighth season.

Alabama and Georgia played for the CFP crown in Atlanta to close the 2017 campaign. Georgia led 13-0 at the half, but Tua Tagovailoa came off the bench and threw a game-ending 41-yard touchdown pass to DeVonta Smith that capped the Tide's 26-23 overtime win.

The title game has been nothing but routs since: Clemson beating Alabama 44-16, LSU beating Clemson 44-25, Alabama beating Ohio State 52-24 last season.

Odds makers don't expect a blowout this time around: Georgia was quickly established as a 2 1/2 point favorite over Alabama by FanDuel Sportsbook, that line being set before the Bulldogs-Michigan game had even gone final.

"We think we play in the greatest conference in the world," Smart said. "We've got an opportunity to play a really good football team in Indianapolis."

And it makes tons of sense that these are the last two teams standing.

The Tide and the Bulldogs spent six weeks ranked No. 1 and No. 2, in some order, in the AP Top 25 this season. Big things were expected of both teams from the outset: Alabama started No. 1, Georgia began at No. 5.

But even though Saban is 25-1 against his former assistant coaches — including 4-0 against Smart, who spent 11 years with him in Tuscaloosa — history says a rematch for the national title is a great sign for the Bulldogs.

In the 2011 season, LSU beat Alabama in the regular season. Alabama won the rematch for the Bowl Championship Series national title.

In 1996, Florida State topped Florida in the regular season. The Gators rolled past the Seminoles for the national title in what was then called the Bowl Alliance.

Now, it's Georgia with a shot at turning the tide.

All it has to do is beat the Tide.

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More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25). Sign up for the AP's college football newsletter: <https://apnews.com/cfbtop25>

**Live updates: 2,300 U.S. flights cancelled amid outbreak**

By The Associated Press undefined

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DALLAS -- For air travelers, the new year picked up where the old one left off – with lots of frustration. By midmorning Saturday on the East Coast, more than 2,300 U.S. flights had been canceled, according to tracking service FlightAware. That's the highest single-day toll yet since airlines began blaming staffing shortages on increasing COVID-19 infections among crews just before Christmas. Saturday's disruptions weren't just due to the virus, however. Wintry weather made Chicago the worst place in the country for travelers, with 800 flights scrubbed at O'Hare Airport and more than 250 at Midway Airport. Southwest had canceled more than 450 flights, or 13% of its schedule. SkyWest, which operates flights as American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express, grounded more than 400 flights, or 21% of its schedule. American, Delta, United and JetBlue all scrubbed more than 100 flights each.

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

- Dozens of U.S. colleges move classes online temporarily to counter surge of infections
- Muted New Year's Eve celebrations around the world as omicron rages on
- US children hospitalized with COVID in record numbers
- UK estimates 1 in 15 had virus in London before Christmas amid omicron surge
- New COVID-19 cases in US soar to highest levels on record

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

## HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TODAY:

LISBON, Portugal — A cruise ship carrying over 4,000 people has been held in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon after a COVID-19 outbreak infected crew members, the German news agency dpa reported Saturday. German company Aida Cruises told dpa that it discovered the positive coronavirus cases during routine health checks and has accommodated those infected ashore in coordination with Portuguese authorities in Lisbon.

Portuguese media reported that 52 members of the crew of over 1,000 workers tested positive. None of the nearly 3,000 passengers had tested positive. All on board had passed a screening test and were vaccinated with two doses before the ship set sail from Germany.

The ship is waiting for the arrival of new crew members to continue its journey to Spain's Canary Islands, dpa said.

BOSTON — With COVID-19 cases surging just as students are about to return from winter break, dozens of U.S. colleges are moving classes online again for at least the first week or so of the semester — and some warn it could stretch longer if the wave of infection doesn't subside soon.

Harvard is moving classes online for the first three weeks of the new year, with a return to campus scheduled for late January, "conditions permitting." The University of Chicago is delaying the beginning of its new term and holding the first two weeks online. Some others are inviting students back to campus but starting classes online, including Michigan State University.

Many colleges hope that an extra week or two will get them past the peak of the nationwide spike driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Still, the surge is casting uncertainty over a semester many had hoped would be the closest to normal since the start of the pandemic.

For some U.S. students, starting the term remotely is becoming routine — many colleges used the strategy last year. But some fear the latest shift could extend well beyond a week or two.

Jake Maynard, a student at George Washington University in the nation's capital, said he is fine with a week of online classes, but beyond that, he hopes officials trust in the booster shots and provide a traditional college experience.

TOKYO — Japan's Emperor Naruhito offered prayers for those who died during the pandemic, taking to video for the second straight year for his New Year's greeting on Saturday, having canceled public palace gatherings to curb coronavirus infections.

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Sitting before a bonsai tree with his wife Masako, Naruhito praised and thanked doctors and other health care workers, and expressed concern for countries lacking access to vaccines and adequate hospital systems.

"By treasuring more than ever the connections among people, sharing our pain and supporting each other, I hope from the bottom of my heart that we will overcome these hard times," he said.

Japan has recorded more than 18,000 COVID-19-related deaths, but the pace of deaths has fallen in recent months. Naruhito also voiced worries about the fast-spreading omicron variant.

**LAS VEGAS** — The annual CES gadget convention will be three days instead of four amid a jump in COVID-19 cases and the withdrawal of some of its best-known tech presenters.

Convention organizer The Consumer Technology Association announced Friday that CES will run from Jan. 5-7, one day shorter than planned. The event still has over 2,200 exhibitors confirmed to show off their products at the Las Vegas convention, spokeswoman Jeanne Abella said.

The announcement follows the withdrawal of tech giants from CES last week citing health risks of the omicron variant, including cellphone carriers like T-Mobile, whose CEO had been slated to deliver a key-note speech.

Computer maker Lenovo and social media companies like Twitter and Facebook parent company Meta also canceled plans to attend. News outlets including CNN said they would cancel or reduce coverage.

CES was held entirely virtually last year. It will be a hybrid of online and in-person this year, with organizers offering digital registration allowing access to around 40 livestreamed events, Abella said.

**TAMPA, Fla.** — The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday reported more than 75,900 new cases of COVID-19 in Florida.

That tally raises the 7-day average daily to 42,600, which is twice as high as it was at the peak of this summer's surge when the delta variant fueled a surge of infections in the state.

Friday's report marks a single-day record for the number of new cases in Florida. It breaks the record set a day earlier when more than 58,000 cases were reported in the state. The omicron variant of the coronavirus has spiked in Florida and across the nation over the past few weeks.

Soaring numbers during the holiday season have sent tens of thousands of people to COVID-19 testing centers across Florida, resulting in long lines in many areas.

Three people collapsed while waiting in line at a Tampa testing site on Friday morning.

**CARSON CITY, Nev.** — Hundreds of unvaccinated employees who work at public colleges and universities in Nevada were being fired Friday, a day after the state Board of Regents voted to keep a staff vaccine mandate in effect.

The Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents on Thursday deadlocked 6-6 on a measure to repeal the staff vaccine mandate and then rejected a measure to push the effective termination date back two weeks. Without majority support for a repeal, the mandate — which Gov. Steve Sisolak and the Nevada Faculty Alliance support — remained in effect.

Higher education officials said on Friday that 379 employees were being terminated, 188 attribution employees ended their contracts and 18 more voluntarily resigned. Employees who are fired can seek reinstatement if they show proof of vaccination in January, regents said.

**PARIS** — Describing himself as "resolutely optimistic," French President Emmanuel Macron has used the last New Year's address of his current term to express the hope that, with vaccinations, 2022 will see the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

Macron stopped short of saying that he will stand for re-election in April. He said only that he intends to continue serving the French "whatever my place and the circumstances."

The president appealed to the 5 million unvaccinated but eligible people in France to get coronavirus

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jobs, saying: "All of France is counting on you."

France has lost 123,000 people to COVID-19 and new cases are at unprecedented levels, surging with the highly contagious omicron variant. France reported a record 232,200 new cases on Friday, its third day running above the 200,000 mark.

ROME — Italy's president, Sergio Mattarella, has used the last New Year's Eve speech of his term to task those who "waste" opportunities to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, calling that choice an "offense" to all those who haven't been able to receive the injection.

In a televised speech to the nation Friday night, Mattarella, who is head of state, noted that he was serving in the final days of his seven-year term, with Parliament to elect his successor in the first weeks of 2022. Referring to recent COVID-19 surges in Italy and many other countries driven by virus variants, Mattarella noted a "sense of frustration" over the setbacks.

ALBANY, N.Y. — Federal ambulance teams and additional National Guard members are headed for New York City, and western New York hospitals are getting more federal help as coronavirus cases and hospitalizations keep rising.

State officials announced the new deployments Friday.

Gov. Kathy Hochul also said students at state universities and the City University of New York will have to get coronavirus vaccine booster shots to be on campus in the spring semester and must test negative before returning from the holiday break.

New confirmed case counts have been breaking records by the day in the state, topping 76,500 on Thursday, Hochul said at a news briefing.

An average of 53,000 New Yorkers a day tested positive in the week that ended Thursday, compared to 13,000 per day two weeks earlier. Over 7,900 people with COVID-19 are hospitalized statewide, up 67% in a week.

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas officials on Friday requested federal aid for increased COVID-19 testing and treatment following reports that the state is running low on the antibody treatment that has proved most effective against the omicron variant.

In a statement, Gov. Greg Abbott said the Texas Division for Emergency Management and the Texas Department of State Health Services made the request.

They are seeking federal resources for additional COVID-19 testing locations in six counties, increased medical personnel and more sotrovimab, the monoclonal antibody treatment that has proved most effective against the more-transmissible omicron.

Abbott called on the Biden administration "to step up in this fight and provide the resources necessary to help protect Texans."

GAITHERSBURG, Md. — Novavax Inc. said it filed data Friday with the Food and Drug Administration to support clearance of its long-anticipated COVID-19 vaccine, a different kind of shot than current U.S. options.

Novavax said the data package is the last requirement before the company formally submits its emergency-use application next month to become the fourth U.S. COVID-19 vaccine. The announcement comes shortly after the European Commission and World Health Organization cleared use of the Maryland-based company's two-dose shot.

Novavax developed a protein vaccine, similar to shots used for years against other diseases and a strategy that might appeal to people hesitant to use COVID-19 vaccines made with newer technologies. But Novavax, a small biotech company, faced months of delays in finding manufacturers to mass-produce its vaccine.

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ROME — Italian health officials are warning that the rate of occupation by COVID-19 patients of hospital beds both in intensive care units and in regular wards has surpassed the “critical level” nationally.

A top Health Ministry official, Gianni Rezza, also said on Friday evening that the incidence of cases is growing, with 783 confirmed COVID-19 infections per every 100,000 residents in Italy. The country hit another high for daily new caseloads — 144,243 confirmed cases in the last 24 hours.

Nearly 12% of some 1.234 million swab tests conducted since Thursday resulted positive, according to the ministry, which urged vaccinated persons to get a booster shot if they are eligible.

With the nation slammed by a surge of infections largely driven by the omicron variant, the government banned public New Year’s Eve celebrations.

DALLAS — Flight cancellations surged again on the last day of 2021, with airlines blaming it on crew shortages related to the spike in COVID-19 infections.

By late morning Friday on the East Coast, airlines scrubbed more than 1,300 flights, according to tracking service FlightAware. That compared with about 1,400 cancellations for all of Thursday.

The remnants of the delta variant and the rise of the new omicron variant pushed the rate of new daily infections in the U.S. well above 200,000 a day, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University.

## **‘Moral compass’: Requiem for South Africa’s Archbishop Tutu**

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has been remembered at a state funeral Saturday for his Nobel Peace Prize-earning role in ending South Africa’s apartheid regime of racial oppression and for championing the rights of LGBTQ people.

“When we were in the dark, he brought light,” Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, the head of the worldwide Anglican church, said in a video message shown at a requiem Mass celebrated for Tutu at St. George’s Cathedral in Cape Town.

“For me to praise him is like a mouse giving tribute to an elephant,” Welby said. “South Africa has given us extraordinary examples of towering leaders of the rainbow nation with President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Tutu .... Many Nobel winners’ lights have grown dimmer over time, but Archbishop Tutu’s has grown brighter.”

Tutu died last Sunday at age 90. His plain pine coffin, the cheapest available at his request to avoid any ostentatious displays, was the center of the service, which also featured African choirs, prayers and incense.

Tutu, who became an Anglican priest in the early 1960s, was awarded the Nobel prize in 1984 for his non-violent opposition to apartheid. He later became the first Black archbishop of Cape Town.

After South Africa achieved democracy in 1994, Mandela named Tutu to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body created to report on human rights violations that took place during apartheid.

Throughout his life, Tutu actively promoted equal rights for all people and denounced corruption and other failures he saw in South Africa’s government, led by the African National Congress party.

“Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been our moral compass and national conscience,” South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who delivered the funeral eulogy, said. “Even after the advent of democracy, he did not hesitate to draw attention, often harshly, to our shortcomings as leaders of the democratic state.”

Ramaphosa handed a national flag to Tutu’s widow, Leah, as she sat in a wheelchair.

The cathedral can hold 1,200 worshippers, but only 100 mourners were allowed to attend the funeral because of COVID-19 restrictions.

A few dozen people braved stormy weather to watch the service on a large screen in front of Cape Town City Hall. The municipal government building is where Tutu held hands aloft with Nelson Mandela on the day in 1990 when Mandela was released after serving 27 years in prison because of his opposition to apartheid.

Michael Nuttall, the retired bishop of Natal, delivered the sermon. Nuttall called his relationship with Tutu “an unlikely partnership at a truly critical time in the life of our country from 1989 through 1996, he

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as archbishop of Cape Town and I as his deputy," With humor, he described himself as "No. 2 to Tutu."  
"Our partnership struck a chord, perhaps, in the hearts and minds of many people: a dynamic Black leader and his white deputy in the dying years of apartheid," Nuttall continued. "And hey, presto, the heavens did not collapse. We were a foretaste, if you like, of what could be in our wayward, divided nation."

Two of Tutu's daughters, Mpho and Nontombi, both church ministers, participated in the service along with former Irish President Mary Robinson and Graca Machel, the widow of two African presidents, Samora Machel of Mozambique and Nelson Mandela.

The cathedral's bells rang as Tutu's casket was taken away after the funeral for a private cremation.

In keeping with Tutu's commitment to the environment, his body will be "aquamated," a process that uses water to prepare remains for final disposition. Tutu's remains are to be interred at the cathedral where his funeral was held.

In the days before the funeral, several thousand people paid their respects to Tutu by filing by his casket in the cathedral and signing condolence books.

## Pope on new year: Pandemic is hard, but focus on the good

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — In his New Year's wishes to the world, Pope Francis encouraged people Saturday to focus on the good which unites them and decried violence against women while acknowledging that the coronavirus pandemic has left many scared and struggling amid economic inequality.

"We are still living in uncertain and difficult times due to the pandemic," Francis said. "Many are frightened about the future and burdened by social problems, personal problems, dangers stemming from the ecological crisis, injustices and by global economic imbalances."

Thousands of Rome residents and tourists, wearing face masks as protection against the spread of the coronavirus, gathered in St. Peter's Square on a sunny, mild day to hear Francis lay out his recipe for world peace, cheering his appearance.

Peace, the pope said, "demands concrete actions. It is built by being attentive to the least, by promoting justice, with the courage to forgive, thus extinguishing the fire of hatred."

Francis also championed embracing a positive attitude, "one that always sees, in the Church as well as in society, not the evil which divides us, but the good that unites us."

Earlier Saturday, in his homily during a Mass at St. Peter's Basilica, Francis publicly ushered in 2022 by praising the skills which women bring to promoting peace in the world, and he equated violence against women to an offense against God.

The Roman Catholic Church marks Jan. 1 as a day dedicated to world peace, and the basilica ceremony a paid tribute to the Virgin Mary's special place in the faith as the mother of Jesus.

Mothers "know how to overcome obstacles and disagreements, and to instill peace," Francis said. "In this way, they transform problems into opportunities for rebirth and growth. They can do this because they know how to 'keep,' to hold together the various threads of life," the pontiff said. "We need such people, capable of weaving the threads of communion in place of the barbed wire of conflict and division."

He called for efforts to protect women.

"How much violence is directed against women! Enough! To hurt a woman is to insult God, who from a woman took on our humanity," the pope said, referring to the Christian belief that Jesus was the son of God.

He said women, including mothers, "look at the world not to exploit it but so that it can have life. Women who, seeing with the heart, can combine dreams and aspirations with concrete reality, without drifting into abstraction and sterile pragmatism."

While pledging during his papacy to give women greater roles in the church, Francis has also made clear that the priesthood is reserved for men.

Except for the pope and members of a chorus made up of boys and adults, participants in the Mass wore face as part of COVID-19 precautions.

Francis, who is 85 and vaccinated against the coronavirus, wore a surgical mask during a New Year's

Eve prayer service which a Vatican cardinal presided over at the basilica. It was a rare departure from his shunning of masks during public ceremonies throughout the two-year pandemic.

In a tweet early Saturday morning, Francis elaborated on his hope and strategy for peace.

"All can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations," Francis tweeted.

## Rally in Baghdad on anniversary of Iranian general's death

BAGHDAD (AP) — Chanting anti-American slogans, hundreds of people rallied in the Iraqi capital Saturday to mark the anniversary of the killing of a powerful Iranian general and a top Iraqi militia leader in a U.S. drone strike.

The crowd called for the expulsion of remaining American forces from Iraq during the demonstration commemorating the airstrike at Baghdad airport. The strike killed Gen. Qassim Soleimani, who was the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

"We will not let you stay after today on in the land of the martyrs," some of the placards read. American and Israeli flags were strewn on the ground, with people trampling on them.

The killing of Soleimani and al-Muhandis at Baghdad's airport pushed Iran and the United States perilously close to all-out conflict and sparked outrage in Iraq, leading parliament to pass a non-binding resolution days later calling for the expulsion of all foreign troops from Iraq.

The U.S.-led coalition formally ended its combat mission supporting Iraqi forces in the ongoing fight against the Islamic State group at the end of December. Some 2,500 troops will remain for the foreseeable future, however, to continue supporting Iraqi forces in an advisory role. Some militia leaders have insisted on the departure of all U.S. troops.

"We will not accept anything less than full withdrawal as revenge for the blood of our martyrs," said Hadi al-Ameri, head of an Iran-aligned coalition.

Supporters of Iran-aligned Shiite factions were bused in from various Iraqi provinces to the rally in Jadriyah, near the headquarters of the powerful militias.

## Taking a step back: US colleges returning to online classes

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

With COVID-19 cases surging just as students are about to return from winter break, dozens of U.S. colleges are moving classes online again for at least the first week or so of the semester — and some warn it could stretch longer if the wave of infection doesn't subside soon.

Harvard is moving classes online for the first three weeks of the new year, with a return to campus scheduled for late January, "conditions permitting." The University of Chicago is delaying the beginning of its new term and holding the first two weeks online. Some others are inviting students back to campus but starting classes online, including Michigan State University.

Many colleges hope that an extra week or two will get them past the peak of the nationwide spike driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Still, the surge is casting uncertainty over a semester many had hoped would be the closest to normal since the start of the pandemic.

For some students, starting the term remotely is becoming routine — many colleges used the strategy last year amid a wave of cases. But some fear the latest shift could extend well beyond a week or two.

Jake Maynard, a student at George Washington University in the nation's capital, said he is fine with a week of online classes, but beyond that, he hopes officials trust in the booster shots and provide a traditional college experience.

He has already taken a year of online learning, which he said "did not work" and wasn't what he expected from a school that charges more than \$50,000 a year.



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"I'm a junior, but about half my schooling experience has been online," said Maynard, 20, of Ellicott City, Maryland. "You lose so much of what makes the school the school."

The university is inviting students back to campus starting Monday, but classes will be held online until Jan. 18 as officials ramp up virus testing and isolate any infected students. The school has more than doubled its isolation space and moved up the deadline for a new booster shot requirement by three weeks because of omicron.

"The omicron variant hit us at a terrible time, basically the last couple weeks of the fall semester, which doesn't give us much time to prepare for spring," said Dr. Lynn Goldman, dean of George Washington's school of public health.

The university was among many that saw infections soar in the days before winter break. The campus averaged more than 80 cases a day during finals week, compared with just a few a day for much of the fall. And while most recent cases were mild, nearly all were among students who had received at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

As for the mid-January target date for resuming in-person learning, Goldman said officials "recognize there's some possibility that it won't be possible."

So far, more than 70 colleges across 26 states are starting the term online, and others say they are considering it. Many making the move now use quarter systems that start earlier than those with semesters.

Many of those shifting online are in recent virus hot spots, including George Washington, Yale and Columbia on the East Coast, along with Wayne State University in Detroit and Northwestern University near Chicago. The list also includes most of the University of California campuses and Rice University in Houston.

At the University of California, Riverside, students can return on Monday but face two weeks of online classes. They are also being asked to sequester for five days while they undergo two rounds of virus testing.

It's the first time since last spring that the school has moved fully remote, but Chancellor Kim Wilcox said it is the best way to prevent the virus from spreading after students return from holiday travel.

"We think about it as rebuilding our bubble," he said. "It gives us a chance to reset things and then hopefully be off and running."

Some other colleges are delaying the new term without offering remote classes. Syracuse University pushed its semester back a week, citing projections that the first three weeks of January will be "the most challenging of this surge."

Others are pressing ahead with in-person learning, saying the health risks are low with masks and booster shots.

At Northeastern University in Boston, one of a growing number of schools requiring boosters, students are returning as planned. Officials said the school is shifting its focus from preventing all cases to warding off serious illness or hospitalization.

"As we move into this endemic phase of the pandemic, our job is to continue to control COVID effectively, not let COVID control us," Ken Henderson, chancellor and senior vice president for learning, said in a message to the campus.

The move drew praise from Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, who said COVID-19 poses little risk to college students, while "prolonged isolation is a very real risk to their growth and mental health."

The University of Florida plans to return to in-person learning at the start of the semester, despite a request from a faculty union to teach remotely for the first three weeks.

Paul Ortiz, president of the campus chapter of the United Faculty of Florida, said older faculty members will be at higher risk, especially with no mask or vaccine mandates, which have been outlawed by GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis.

"We do not want our campus to become a super-spreader," Ortiz said. "There's just a lot of uncertainty right now, a lot of stress."

At some colleges starting remotely, officials say they are committed to a quick return to the classroom. The 50,000-student campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign plans to resume in-person

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classes after one week of online instruction. Students are being encouraged to return during that first week so they can take two virus tests, which will clear them to resume in-person activities if they test negative.

"Every semester we've had a spike when students come back," university spokesperson Robin Kaler said. "We want to make sure we're on top of that so we can crush it as quickly as possible."

## Angry Dawgs: No. 3 Georgia beats No. 2 Michigan 34-11 in CFP

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — With one overwhelming half at the Orange Bowl, No. 3 Georgia showed that a humbling loss to Alabama did not break the Bulldogs.

In fact, it might have made them even stronger.

Stetson Bennett threw three touchdown passes, Nakobe Dean led an angry defense and Georgia returned to its dominant ways, beating No. 2 Michigan 34-11 on Friday night to advance to the College Football Playoff championship.

"Answered a million questions about our team, bouncing back and how you played," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. "We've got a lot of high-character guys on this team and they played their tail off today."

Georgia (13-1) earned a rematch with Southeastern Conference nemesis Alabama (13-1) in the title game Jan. 10 in Indianapolis.

It was 27 days ago the Crimson Tide rolled through the Bulldogs, shattering their air of invincibility after a 12-0 regular season in which they were hardly challenged.

"All our guys did was work," Smart said about how they responded to the loss and three weeks of being asked what went wrong.

The Bulldogs quickly answered any questions about whether the damage from that 41-24 setback would linger.

Georgia became the first team in the eight-year history of the CFP to score on each of its first five possessions and led 27-3 at halftime.

"We knew we were better than what we showed that last game," Bennett said.

Michigan (12-2) entered its first playoff appearance off a milestone season, having ended a long drought against rival Ohio State on the way to winning the Big Ten.

"Let'er rip," Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh told ESPN moments before kickoff.

The Bulldogs most certainly did, playing like a team out to prove a point.

Georgia scored touchdowns the first two times it had the ball, moving it at will against Heisman Trophy runner-up Aidan Hutchinson and the Michigan defense.

Bennett found freshman tight end Brock Bowers for an 8-yard touchdown pass to cap an 80-yard opening drive.

"That set the tone for the game," Smart said.

Georgia grabbed a two-touchdown lead, hitting Michigan with some of the trickery the Wolverines have used so well. Tailback Kenny McIntosh swept to the right and let loose a perfect pass to Adonai Mitchell for an 18-yard TD that made it 14-0 less than five minutes into the game.

The Wolverines had rolled to their first Big Ten championship since 2004 without trailing by as many as seven points this season.

"I mean, we gave everything we got, and we got beat tonight," quarterback Cade McNamara said. "But I think once we give it a little time, we'll be able to appreciate a lot of the great things we were able to accomplish this season."

The Bulldogs tacked on field goals on their next two possessions and Bennett connected on a 57-yard touchdown pass to Jermaine Burton streaking down the sideline to make it 27-3 with 1:38 left in the half.

And that was pretty much that. The Bulldogs outgained the Wolverines 330-101 in the first 30 minutes.

"I thought our (defensive) front controlled the line of scrimmage. I thought our offensive line controlled the line of scrimmage," Smart said. "That's a total team effort."

The Georgia defense that was setting an historic pace, allowing less than a touchdown per game before

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getting shredded by Alabama, smothered a Michigan offense built to bully opponents.

The Bulldogs were having none of that.

Dean, the Butkus Award-winning linebacker, diagnosed plays before the snap and chased down ball carriers from sideline to sideline.

Dean said he made note of how heading into this game, for the first time all season, Georgia's defensive dominance seemed to be in doubt.

"We always want to play with a chip on our shoulder," said Dean, who had seven tackles, two for losses, and a forced a fumble.

Massive nose tackle Jordan Davis collapsed the middle of a Michigan offensive line that won the Joe Moore Award as the best in the country.

"That was our plan going in, being a physical, more dominant front," the All-American Davis said.

Cornerback Derion Kendrick, a transfer for Clemson, had two interceptions and was the defensive player of the game.

The Wolverines finished with 88 yards rushing after coming in averaging 223 per game. McNamara was 11 for 19 for 106 yards passing.

Simply, it was no contest and now the Bulldogs will get a shot at redemption against Alabama, trying to win their first national title since 1980.

All that stands in the way is the most accomplished dynasty in the history of college football, and the rival Smart, a longtime Nick Saban assistant at Alabama, has tried to model his program after.

Smart dodged the celebratory Gatorade bath from his players after the game, Smart said he wanted to get a real shower and get to work on catching the team Georgia has been chasing for five years.

"(Alabama) got a five, six-hour head start," Smart said. "To be honest with you guys, I'm not interested in celebrating that."

Georgia opened as 2 1/2-point favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

## THE TAKEAWAY

Georgia: There was plenty of talk about whether Bennett should remain the Bulldogs' starting quarterback after he threw two interceptions against Alabama. Georgia fans wondered if it was time to make the switch back to USC transfer JT Daniels, who was QB1 to start the season before an injury opened the door for Bennett.

The former walk-on completed his first nine passes against Michigan on the way to 307 yards and showed more than enough arm strength on a 53-yard bomb to James Cook in the second quarter. Bennett was named offensive MVP.

Michigan: The 2021 season will provide plenty for the Wolverines to look back upon fondly.

"This is the start," Harbaugh told ESPN afterward. "In Michigan history, it is one of the best teams ever."

The Orange Bowl showed that closing the gap on Ohio State is one thing, but there are two teams currently at the top of college football in an entirely different class as the rest.

## UP NEXT

Georgia: The Bulldogs will face Alabama for the second time in the CFP title game. The Bulldogs have lost seven straight overall meetings against the Tide, including the 2017 CFP championship in overtime.

Michigan: The Wolverines open the 2022 season at home against Colorado State.

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## 12 dead in crowd surge at popular Hindu shrine in Kashmir

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — A crowd surge at a popular Hindu shrine in Indian-controlled Kashmir killed at

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least 12 people and injured 15 others on New Year's Day, officials said.

Initial reports suggested an altercation between a group of devotees led to the crush early Saturday at the Mata Vaishnav Devi shrine, where tens of thousands of Hindus gathered to pay respects in the hilly town of Katra near southern Jammu city.

"Something happened near one of the gates and I found myself under a crush of people. I suffocated and fell but somehow managed to stand up," said Mahesh, who gave only one name.

"I saw people moving over the bodies. It was a horrifying sight, but I managed to help in rescuing some injured people," he said.

Press Trust of India news agency quoted police chief Dilbag Singh as saying that authorities were quick to respond and the order within the crowd was immediately restored.

The pilgrimage resumed after nearly four hours, officials said. An investigation was underway.

Another devotee named Priyansh said he and 10 friends from New Delhi arrived Friday night to visit the shrine. He said two of his friends died in the crush.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences in a message on Twitter.

"Extremely saddened by the loss of lives due to a stampede," Modi wrote.

Pilgrims often trek on foot to reach the hilltop temple, which is one of the most visited shrines in northern India.

Deadly crowd surges are fairly common during Indian religious festivals where huge gatherings, sometimes in the millions, cover small areas with few safety or control measures.

In 2013, pilgrims visiting a temple for a popular Hindu festival in central Madhya Pradesh state trampled over each other amid fears that a bridge would collapse, and at least 115 people were crushed to death or died in the river below.

More than 100 Hindu devotees died in a 2011 crush at a religious festival in the southern state of Kerala.

## Omicron's New Year's cocktail: Sorrow, fear, hope for 2022

By JOHN LEICESTER and NICK PERRY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Sorrow for the dead and dying, fear of more infections to come and hopes for an end to the coronavirus pandemic were — again — the bittersweet cocktail with which the world said good riddance to 2021 and ushered in 2022.

New Year's Eve, which used to be celebrated globally with a free-spirited wildness, felt instead like a case of *deja vu*, with the fast-spreading omicron variant again filling hospitals.

"We just need enjoyment," said Karen Page, 53, who was among the fed-up revelers venturing out in London. "We have just been in so long."

The mostly muted New Year's Eve celebrations around the world ushered in the fourth calendar year framed by the global pandemic. More than 285 million people have been infected by the coronavirus worldwide since late 2019 and more than 5 million have died.

In Paris, officials canceled the fireworks amid surging infections and reintroduced mandatory mask-wearing outdoors, an obligation followed by the majority of people who milled about on the Champs-Élysées as the final hours of 2021 ticked away.

In Berlin, police urged people not to gather near the Brandenburg Gate, where a concert was staged without a live audience. In Madrid, authorities allowed only 7,000 people into the city's Puerta del Sol downtown square, a venue traditionally hosting some 20,000 revelers.

In the United States, officials took a mixed approach to the year-end revelry: nixing the audience at a countdown concert in Los Angeles, scaling it back in New York yet going full speed ahead in Las Vegas, where thousands turned up for performances and a fireworks show on the Strip that got off to a late start because of gusty winds.

President Joe Biden noted the losses and uncertainty caused by the pandemic but said: "We're persevering. We're recovering."

"Back to work. Back to school. Back to joy," Biden said in a video posted on Twitter. "That's how we

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made it through this year. And how we'll embrace the next. Together."

In New York, officials allowed just 15,000 people — vaccinated and masked — inside the perimeter around Times Square, a sliver of the 1 million that typically squeeze in to watch the famed ball drop. Outgoing Mayor Bill de Blasio, defending the event, said people need to see that New York is open for business.

Yet by Thursday, rapper LL Cool J had dropped out of the New York telecast after a positive COVID-19 test and restaurant owners battered by staffing shortages and omicron cancelations throughout the holiday season struggled to stay open.

"I'm really scared for our industry," said New York restaurateur David Rabin, who watched reservations and party bookings disappear this month. "No one made any money in December. The fact they may have a good night tonight, it has no impact."

Airlines also struggled as the year came to a close, canceling thousands of flights after the virus struck flight crews and other personnel and amid bad weather.

The pandemic game-changer of 2021 — vaccinations — continued apace. Pakistan said it had fully vaccinated 70 million of its 220 million people this year and Britain said it met its goal of offering a vaccine booster shot to all adults by Friday.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin mourned the dead, praised Russians for their strength in difficult times and soberly warned that the pandemic "isn't retreating yet." Russia's virus task force has reported 308,860 COVID-19 deaths but its state statistics agency says the death toll has been more than double that.

"I would like to express words of sincere support to all those who lost their dear ones," Putin said in a televised address broadcast just before midnight in each of Russia's 11 time zones.

Elsewhere, the venue that many chose for New Year's celebrations was the same place they became overly familiar with during lockdowns: their homes.

Pope Francis also canceled his New Year's Eve tradition of visiting the life-sized manger set up in St. Peter's Square, again to avoid a crowd. In an unusual move for Francis, the 85-year-old pontiff donned a surgical mask for a Vespers service of prayer and hymns Friday evening as he sat in an armchair. But he also delivered a homily standing and unmasked.

"A sense of being lost has grown in the world during the pandemic," Francis told the faithful in St. Peter's Basilica.

France, Britain, Portugal and Australia were among countries that set new records for COVID-19 infections as 2021 gave way to 2022.

In London, the normal fireworks display, which would have attracted tens of thousands of people to the city center and the banks of the Thames, was replaced by a light and drones show broadcast on television. Location details about the spectacle were kept secret in advance to avoid crowds gathering.

"The last two years have been so difficult for so many people, so many have suffered and there is a point when we need to start coming together finally," said Mira Lluk, 22, a special needs teacher.

France's unprecedented 232,200 new cases Friday marked its third day running above the 200,000 mark. The U.K. was close behind, with 189,846 new cases, also a record. In London, officials said as many as 1 in 15 people were infected with the virus in the week before Christmas. Hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients in the U.K. rose 68% in the last week, to the highest levels since February.

In Brazil, Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach welcomed a small crowd of a few thousand for 16 minutes of fireworks. Rio's New Year's bash usually brings more than 2 million people to Copacabana beach. In 2020 there was no celebration due to the pandemic. This year there was music on loudspeakers, but no live concerts like in previous editions.

Yet boisterous New Year's Eve celebrations kicked off in the Serbian capital of Belgrade where, unlike elsewhere in Europe, mass gatherings were allowed despite fears of the omicron variant. One medical expert predicted that Serbia will see thousands of new COVID-19 infections after the holidays.

At Expo 2020, the sprawling world's fair outside Dubai, 26-year-old tourist Lujain Orfi prepared to throw caution to the wind on New Year's Eve — her first time ever outside Saudi Arabia, where she lives in the holy city of Medina.

"If you don't celebrate, life will pass you by," she said. "I'm healthy and took two (vaccine) doses. We

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just have to enjoy.”

Australia went ahead with its celebrations despite reporting a record 32,000 new cases. Thousands of fireworks lit up the sky over Sydney’s Harbor Bridge and Opera House at midnight. Yet the crowds were far smaller than in pre-pandemic years.

In Japan, writer Naoki Matsuzawa said he would spend the next few days cooking and delivering food to the elderly because some stores would be closed. He said vaccinations had made people less anxious about the pandemic, despite the new variant.

“A numbness has set in, and we are no longer overly afraid,” said Matsuzawa, who lives in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo. “Some of us are starting to take for granted that it won’t happen to me.”

South Korean authorities closed many beaches and other tourist attractions along the east coast, which usually swarm with people hoping to catch the year’s first sunrise.

In India, millions of people rang in the new year from their homes, with nighttime curfews and other restrictions taking the fizz out of celebrations in New Delhi, Mumbai and other large cities.

In mainland China, the Shanghai government canceled an annual light show along the Huangpu River that usually draws hundreds of thousands of spectators. There were no plans for public festivities in Beijing, where popular temples have been closed or had limited access since mid-December.

In the Philippines, a powerful typhoon two weeks ago wiped out basic necessities for tens of thousands of people ahead of New Year’s Eve. More than 400 were killed by Typhoon Rai and at least 82 remain missing.

Leahmer Singson, a 17-year-old mother, lost her home to a fire last month, and then the typhoon blew away her temporary wooden shack in Cebu city. She will welcome the new year with her husband, who works in a glass and aluminum factory, and her 1-year-old baby in a ramshackle tent in a clearing where hundreds of other families erected small tents from debris, rice sacks and tarpaulins.

Asked what she wants for the new year, Singson had a simple wish: “I hope we won’t get sick.”

Perry reported from Wellington, New Zealand. Associated Press reporters Daniel Cole in Marseille; Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow; Frances D’Emilio in Rome; Sylvia Hui in London; Darko Vojinovic in Belgrade, Serbia; Isabel DeBre in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo; Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea; Ashok Sharma in New Delhi; Niniek Karmini and Edna Tarigan in Jakarta, Indonesia; Hau Dinh in Hanoi, Vietnam; Zen Soo in Hong Kong; Tassanee Vejpongsa in Bangkok; Jim Gomez in Manila, Philippines; Freida Frisaro in Miami; Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia; and AP researcher Chen Si in Shanghai contributed to this report.

## Conspiracy theories paint fraudulent reality of Jan. 6 riot

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Millions of Americans watched the events in Washington last Jan. 6 unfold on live television. Police officers testified to the violence and mayhem. Criminal proceedings in open court detailed what happened.

Yet the hoaxes, conspiracy theories and attempts to rewrite history persist, muddying the public’s understanding of what actually occurred during the most sustained attack on the seat of American democracy since the War of 1812.

By excusing former President Donald Trump of responsibility, minimizing the mob’s violence and casting the rioters as martyrs, falsehoods about the insurrection aim to deflect blame for Jan. 6 while sustaining Trump’s unfounded claims about the free and fair election in 2020 that he lost.

Spread by politicians, broadcast by cable news pundits and amplified by social media, the falsehoods are a stark reminder of how many Americans may no longer trust their own institutions or their own eyes.

Several different conspiracy theories have emerged in the year since the insurrection, according to an analysis of online content by media intelligence firm Zignal Labs on behalf of The Associated Press. Unfounded claims that the rioters were members of antifa went viral first, only to be overtaken by a baseless claim blaming FBI operatives. Other theories say the rioters were peaceful and were framed for crimes that never happened.

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Conspiracy theories have long lurked in the background of American history, said Dustin Carnahan, a Michigan State University professor who studies political misinformation. But they can become dangerous when they lead people to distrust democracy or to excuse or embrace violence.

"If we're no longer operating from the same foundation of facts, then it's going to be a lot harder to have conversations as a country," Carnahan said. "It will fuel more divisions in our country, and I think that ultimately is the legacy of the misinformation we're seeing right now."

An examination of some of the top falsehoods about the Capitol riot and the people who have spread them:

## CLAIM: THE RIOTERS WEREN'T TRUMP SUPPORTERS

In fact, many of those who came to the Capitol on Jan. 6 have said — proudly, publicly, repeatedly — that they did so to help the then-president.

Different versions of the claim suggest they were FBI operatives or members of the anti-fascist movement antifa.

"Earlier today, the Capitol was under siege by people who can only be described as antithetical to the MAGA movement," Laura Ingraham said on her Fox News show the night of Jan. 6, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "They were likely not all Trump supporters, and there are some reports that antifa sympathizers may have been sprinkled throughout the crowd."

The next day, Ingraham acknowledged the inaccuracy when she tweeted a link to a story debunking the claim.

Another Fox host, Tucker Carlson, has spread the idea that the FBI orchestrated the riot. He cites as evidence the indictments of some Jan. 6 suspects that mention unindicted co-conspirators, a common legal term that merely refers to suspects who haven't been charged, and not evidence of undercover agents or informants.

Yet Carlson claimed on his show that "in potentially every single case, they were FBI operatives."

Carlson is a "main driver" of the idea that Jan. 6 was perpetrated by agents of the government, according to Zignal's report. It found the claim spiked in October when Carlson released a documentary series about the insurrection.

Members of Congress, including Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., have helped spread the theories.

"Some of the people who breached the Capitol today were not Trump supporters, they were masquerading as Trump supporters and, in fact, were members of the violent terrorist group antifa," Gaetz said.

Spokespeople for Carlson and Gaetz say they stand by their claims.

In truth, the rioters are just who they said they were.

One was a recently elected state lawmaker from West Virginia, a Republican Trump supporter named Derrick Evans who resigned following his arrest. Evans streamed video of himself illegally entering the Capitol.

"They're making an announcement now saying if Pence betrays us you better get your mind right because we're storming the building," Evans said on the video. "The door is cracked! ... We're in, we're in! Derrick Evans is in the Capitol!" Vice President Mike Pence was in the building to preside over the Senate's certification of Democrat Joe Biden's election victory. Pence went ahead despite Trump's pleas to get Pence to block the transfer of power.

During testimony before Congress, FBI Director Christopher Wray was asked whether there was any reason to believe the insurrection was organized by "fake Trump protesters."

"We have not seen evidence of that," said Wray, who was appointed by Trump.

## CLAIM: THE RIOTERS WEREN'T VIOLENT

Dozens of police officers were severely injured. One Capitol Police officer who was attacked and assaulted with bear spray suffered a stroke and died a day later of natural causes.

Former Metropolitan Police Officer Michael Fanone, who rushed to the scene, said he was "grabbed, beaten, tased, all while being called a traitor to my country." The assault stopped only when he said he

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had children. He later learned he had suffered a heart attack. Fanone resigned from the department in December 2021.

Rioters broke into the Senate chamber minutes after senators had fled under armed protection. They rifled through desks and looked for lawmakers, yelling, "Where are they?" In House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office, staffers hid under desks while rioters called out the name of the California Democrat.

That's not how some Republican politicians have described the insurrection.

Appearing on Ingraham's show in May, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., said he condemned the Capitol breach as well as the violence, but said it was wrong to term it an insurrection.

"By and large it was a peaceful protest, except for there were a number of people, basically agitators, that whipped the crowd and breached the Capitol," Johnson said.

Johnson has since said that he doesn't want the violent actions of a few to be used to impugn all.

Rep. Andrew Clyde, after watching video footage of rioters walking through the Capitol, said it resembled a "normal tourist visit." Other video evidence from Jan. 6 showed Clyde, R-Ga., helping barricade the House doors in an attempt to keep the rioters out.

Trump called the insurrection a display of "spirit and faith and love."

Rioters also broke windows and doors, stole items from offices and caused an estimated \$1.5 million in damage. Outside the Capitol someone set up a gallows with a noose.

"The notion that this was somehow a tourist event is disgraceful and despicable," Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., said in May. "And, you know, I won't be part of whitewashing what happened on Jan. 6. Nobody should be part of it. And people ought to be held accountable."

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## CLAIM: TRUMP DID NOT ENCOURAGE THE RIOTERS

Trump may now want to minimize his involvement, but he spent months sounding a steady drumbeat of conspiracy theory and grievance, urging his followers to fight to somehow return him to power.

"Big protest in D.C. on January 6th," Trump tweeted on Dec. 19, 2020. "Be there, will be wild!"

Immediately before the mob stormed the Capitol, Trump spoke for more than an hour, telling his supporters they had been "cheated" and "defrauded" in the "rigged" election by a "criminal enterprise" that included lawmakers who were now meeting in the Capitol.

At one point, Trump did urge his supporters to "peacefully and patriotically make your voice heard." The rest of his speech was filled with hostile rhetoric.

"We fight. We fight like hell," he told those who would later break into the Capitol. "And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

Now, Trump says he had nothing to do with the riot.

"I wasn't involved in that, and if you look at my words and what I said in the speech, they were extremely calming actually," Trump said on Fox News in December.

Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe Trump bears some responsibility for the Capitol breach, according to a survey last year by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

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## CLAIM: ASHLI BABBITT WAS KILLED BY AN OFFICER WORKING FOR DEMOCRATS

Babbitt died after being shot in the shoulder by a lieutenant in the Capitol Police force as she and others pressed to enter the Speaker's Lobby outside the House chamber.

Babbitt, a 35-year-old Air Force veteran, was unarmed. An investigation cleared the officer of wrongdoing.

The Capitol Police Department protects all members of Congress, as well as employees, the public and Capitol facilities. The officer wasn't assigned to any particular lawmaker.

Trump falsely claimed the officer was the head of security "for a certain high official, a Democrat," and was being shielded from accountability. He also misstated where Babbitt was shot.

"Who is the person that shot ... an innocent, wonderful, incredible woman, a military woman, right in the head?" Trump asked on Fox News.

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CLAIM: THE JAN. 6 SUSPECTS ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS AND ARE BEING MISTREATED

No, they are not, despite some assertions from members of Congress.

"J6 defendants are political prisoners of war," Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., tweeted in November. She said she had visited some suspects in jail who complained about the food, medical care and "re-education" they were receiving in custody.

Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., said the Justice Department was "harassing peaceful patriots" by investigating their involvement in the insurrection.

While it's true some of the suspects have complained about their time in jail, it's wrong to argue they're being held as political prisoners. Authorities have said the suspects in custody are being given the same access to food and medical care as any other inmate.

One of the most notorious rioters, Jacob Chansley, known as the QAnon Shaman, was given organic food in his jail cell after he complained about the food options.

## New York City ushers in 2022 with ball drop in Times Square

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City welcomed the new year — and bid good riddance to 2021 — as confetti and cheers spread across Times Square as a New Year's Eve tradition returned to a city beleaguered by a global pandemic.

The new year marched across the globe, time zone by time zone, and thousands of New Year's revelers stood shoulder to shoulder in a slight chill to witness a 6-ton ball, encrusted with nearly 2,700 Waterford crystals, descend above a crowd of about 15,000 in-person spectators — far fewer than the many tens of thousands of revelers who usually descend on the world-famous square to bask in the lights and hoopla of the nation's marquee New Year's Eve event.

It did so as an uneasy nation tried to muster optimism that the worst days of the pandemic are now behind it — even as public health officials cautioned Friday against unbridled celebrations amid surging COVID-19 infections from the omicron variant.

Last year's ball drop was closed to the public because of the pandemic.

As the ball dropped and euphoria filled the streets, Maya Scharm, a dog trainer visiting from New Jersey, felt 2021 slide away.

"It's symbolic of getting back to normal," she said, just minutes after the stroke of midnight.

"Hopefully it's different this year," said her companion, Brandon Allen. "We already have that sense of stability. We know what's going on — there's a new strain going around now — but it's like we've kind of been through it for two years at this point."

Though the crowds were smaller, the throngs nevertheless stretched for blocks to soak in the celebration, with many traveling from afar to take part. Confetti lit up by electronic billboards swirled in a light wind on a mild winter night in New York City.

Mary Gonzalez stood a few feet behind a crowd, wanting to keep her distance from anyone unwittingly carrying the virus.

"I'm happy that 2021 is over because it caused a lot of problems for everybody," said Gonzalez, who was visiting from Mexico City and wanted to take in an American tradition. "We hope that 2022 is much better than this year."

The annual ball drop took place as the clock ticked into midnight and ushered in the new year, an occasion usually commemorated with the uncorking of Champagne, clinking of pints, joyous embraces and renewed hope for better times ahead.

Times Square is often referred to as the crossroads of the world, and city officials insisted on holding the marquee New Year's Eve event to demonstrate the city's resiliency even amid a resurgence of the coronavirus.

But 2022 begins just as the year prior began — with the pandemic clouding an already uncertain future.

Doubts swirled about whether the city would have to cancel this year's bash, as the city posted record

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numbers of COVID-19 cases in the days leading to it, even as some cities like Atlanta had decided to cancel their own celebrations.

COVID-19 cases in the U.S. have soared to their highest levels on record at over 265,000 per day on average. New York City reported a record number of new, confirmed cases — nearly 44,000 — on Wednesday and a similar number Thursday, according to New York state figures.

Officials required those attending the spectacle would have to wear masks and show proof of vaccination. Organizers had initially hoped that more than 50,000 revelers would be able to join in, but plans were dramatically scaled back because of widespread infections.

Rap artist and actor LL Cool J was supposed to be among the performers taking the stage in Times Square on Friday night, but announced he would pull out of the event because he had tested positive for COVID-19.

But Mayor Bill de Blasio, who relinquished oversight of the nation's most populous city at the stroke of midnight, said the festivities at Times Square would "show the world that New York City is fighting our way through this."

New York City's incoming mayor, Eric Adams, took his oath in Times Square soon after the ball drop. He made a brief appearance earlier on the main stage to affirm the city's resiliency.

"It's just great when New York shows the entire country how we come back," he said. "We showed the entire globe what we're made of. We're unbelievable. This is an unbelievable city and, trust me, we're ready for a major comeback because this is New York."

That hopeful sentiment was shared by ordinary people.

"I look back and I see it as a sort of a stressful year, but it wasn't a terrible year," said Lynn Cafarchio, who braved the crowds to attend the festivities with her husband Pete.

A New York City tour guide, she was unemployed for a spell as the economy was shuttered and tourism tanked.

"We're standing here glad that 2021 will soon be over," she said, "but really positive about next year."

Even if the crowds were considerably smaller, people gathered across block after block to witness the ball drop.

Nursing student Ashley Ochoa and her boyfriend, Jose Avelar, traveled from the central valley of California specifically to be at Times Square.

"COVID did hold a lot of stuff back for me," Ochoa said, "but I mean, I'm here today, so that's what I'm thankful for."

## **NKorea's Kim vows to boost military, maintain virus curbs**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further bolster his military capability, maintain draconian anti-virus measures and push hard to improve the economy during a speech at a key political conference this week, state media reported Saturday.

A state media report on Kim's speech at the five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party didn't carry any specific comments on dealings with the United States and South Korea. Some experts say this implies Kim has no interest in resuming talks with Washington and Seoul anytime soon and would rather keep his country's borders closed while seeking a stronger self-reliant economy to overcome pandemic-related difficulties.

"The increasingly unstable military environment on the Korean Peninsula and international politics have instigated calls to vigorously push forward with our national defense build-up plans without any delay," Kim was quoted as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim ordered the production of powerful, modern weapons systems to improve his military forces and called for the military's "absolute loyalty and allegiance" to the ruling party led by him, according to KCNA.

KCNA said the plenary meeting set forth "tactical directions" for North Korea's external relations including with South Korea, but didn't elaborate. It made no mention of the United States.

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The meeting, which was meant to review past projects and determine new policies, came as Kim marked 10 years in power last month. Since inheriting control upon his dictator father's death in December 2011, Kim Jong Un has established absolute power at home and bolstered his nuclear and missile arsenals. But North Korea's economy has suffered major setbacks in the past two years due to pandemic-caused border shutdowns, persistent U.N. sanctions and the fallout from natural disasters.

There are no signs of political instability in North Korea, but some experts say the long-term stability of Kim's leadership could be questioned if the current difficulties continue. High-profile political conferences like the plenary meeting give Kim an opportunity to solidify unity behind his leadership and show that he is firmly in control of the government. But it's unclear whether such meetings offer any fundamental solutions to North Korea's difficulties, which are largely attributed to decades-long mismanagement, a self-imposed isolation and its nuclear drive, which has made it one of the world's most heavily sanctioned countries.

During a party congress in January last year, Kim admitted his previous economic development plans had failed and said his country faced "the worst-ever" situation.

But during this week's plenary session, Kim claimed progress in new development plans, saying last year was "a year of great victory" and that this year's objectives are "a great life-and-death struggle" that must be achieved. Kim cited progress in the agricultural, construction, electricity, mining, forestry and many other sectors, which couldn't be independently confirmed.

According to South Korean estimates, North Korea's trade with China, its biggest trading partner and an economic pipeline, shrank by about 80% in 2020 before it plunged again by two-thirds in the first nine months of last year. In 2020, North Korea's economy suffered its biggest contraction since 1997 while its grain production also dropped to its lowest level since Kim took power in 2011. Seoul officials said the North's grain production last year improved slightly.

During the plenary meeting, Kim ordered officials to prioritize emergency anti-pandemic campaigns, saying negligence and loopholes would not be tolerated. Analysts say Kim fears that his country's fragile public health care infrastructure could not handle a major virus outbreak — though he maintains a questionable claim that North Korea is coronavirus-free.

"North Korea is expected to keep sealing off its borders and resort to self-reliance while doing a minimum level of essential trade with China due to the new (omicron) variant and the continuation of the pandemic worldwide," said analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute.

Cheong said there is "a very low possibility" that North Korea accepts U.S. calls to restart nuclear diplomacy or South Korea's calls for a symbolic, political declaration to end the 1950-53 Korean War as a way to ease tensions.

"North Korea has been able to endure its draconian border restrictions and claim the success of 'juche' self-reliance because covert trade and assistance from China help meet minimum national needs," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear program in return for economic and political benefits collapsed in 2019 when then-President Donald Trump rejected Kim's demands for extensive sanctions relief in return for partial denuclearization steps. Kim has since threatened to enlarge his nuclear arsenal and introduce high-tech weapons targeting the United States and its allies.

## Actors, comedians and president react to Betty White's death

By The Associated Press undefined

Tributes from fellow actors and comedians poured in on social media Friday in reaction to the death of Betty White. "The Golden Girls" star was 99. Henry Winkler thanked White for her humor, warmth and activism. Seth Meyers says White was the only "Saturday Night Live" host he ever saw get a standing ovation at the after party. Kathy Griffin shared a few stories in a Twitter thread and wrote that White treated her like an equal in the comedy world. Dan Rather said our world would be better if more people followed White's example. White was a television mainstay for more than 60 years.

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"It's a shame. She was a lovely lady .... Ninety-nine years old. As my mother would say, God love her."  
— President Joe Biden, to reporters Friday.

"Sad news. No more Betty White. Too bad we couldn't get another ten years of her always warm, gracious, and witty personality. She was one of a kind!" — Mel Brooks, on Twitter.

"Betty White : I is very hard to absorb you are not here anymore.. But the memories of your deLIGHT are ..Thank you for yur humor, your warmth and your activism ... Rest now and say Hi to Bill." — Henry Winkler, on Twitter

"The world looks different now. She was great at defying expectation. She managed to grow very old and somehow, not old enough. We'll miss you, Betty. Now you know the secret." — Ryan Reynolds, on Twitter

"Rest in peace, sweet Betty. My God, how bright heaven must be right now." — Valerie Bertinelli, on Twitter.

"Too much sadness! I posted once how she changed my life. She was the first person who made me believe I could be a writer. What an enormous thing to do for another person. I bet there's hundreds of us who she helped over the years." — Nancy Meyers, on Instagram

"RIP Betty White, the only SNL host I ever saw get a standing ovation at the after party. A party at which she ordered a vodka and a hotdog and stayed til the bitter end." — Seth Meyers, on Twitter

"Betty, who was gracious enough to be a guest star on the episode of "Kathy Griffin My Life on the D List", where we get my mom Maggie a play date with Betty White, was a bucket list memory, touching and hilarious at the same time. We surprised Maggie, so when Betty shows up... at Sizzler Senior Early Bird Special, my Mom about fell OUT! And I got to spend the day on film and off camera, with my mom and Betty White. It was basically a dream girls day. Betty legit treated my mom like a friend. She answered every question, acted very shocked at...every word out of my mouth, which was mandatory. She hung out with my mom, like a peer. She treated me like we were in the same club or something. She actually treated me like an equal in the comedy gurrll world. She was as sharp and funny as she was soft and wise...and no matter how long this world continues to spin, there will be only one Betty White." — Kathy Griffin, on Twitter

"Today, we lost a beloved TV icon. Betty White was a pioneering actress, who blessed generations of Americans with her talent and humor for 8 decades. May it be a comfort to her loved ones and many admirers that so many mourn with them during this sad time." — Nancy Pelosi, on Twitter

"Another brilliant talent has made her transition. I had the pleasure of getting to know Betty White and shared a few giggles with her. May she rest in well-earned peace." — Dionne Warwick, on Twitter

"Peace and love, Betty White." — Susanna Hoffs, on Twitter

"Betty White will go down in the history books as ageless..99 or 100, the numbers belie the fact that she lived the best life EVER! RIP Betty White." — Marlee Matlin, on Twitter

"A spirit of goodness and hope. Betty White was much beloved because of who she was, and how she embraced a life well lived. Her smile. Her sense of humor. Her basic decency. Our world would be better if more followed her example. It is diminished with her passing." — Dan Rather, on Twitter

"Y'all, with the passing of #BettyWhite we have lost one of the best humans ever!" — LeVar Burton, on Twitter

"So we're eating cheesecake in honor of Betty White. Who's with me?" — Ariana DeBose, on Twitter

"RIP to Betty White who was charming, delightful, hilarious, talented and unproblematic for 99.9 years." — Roxane Gay, on Twitter

"I hosted one of the many attempted reboots of the Pyramid game show in 2010 and Betty was a celebrity guest. The only thing she asked for all day was two bean and cheese burritos from Taco Bell." — Andy Richter, on Twitter

## Run Tide! No. 1 Bama over non-P5 Cincy 27-6 in CFP semi

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Brian Robinson Jr. grew up near the Alabama campus watching the Crimson

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Tide win championships, and wanting to play a big part in one.

With the fifth-year senior and first-year featured back running for a career-high 204 yards and Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young throwing three touchdown passes, the Crimson Tide earned the chance to play for yet another national title with a 27-6 victory over Cincinnati on Friday in the College Football Playoff semifinal at the Cotton Bowl.

It was a bitter finish for Desmond Ridder and for the Bearcats, the first non-Power Five team ever to get a taste of the CFP. They were physically overwhelmed on the big stage.

"B-Rob was huge for us all night," Young said. "Making that first guy miss, falling forward fighting for those extra yards. He was a constant."

"As a young kid, just always wanted to be a part of this program. Just always wanted to play for a national championship," Robinson said. "Just being able to go out there and just lead this team in this big game on this big stage ... it's like a dream come true."

Alabama (13-1) has missed the four-team playoff only once and will try to win its second national title in a row and fourth in the eight seasons of the CFP format. The Crimson Tide will play No. 3 Georgia, the previously undefeated team Alabama beat for the SEC title, in the national championship game Jan. 10 in Indianapolis after the Bulldogs beat No. 2 Michigan 34-11 in the Orange Bowl on Friday night.

Alabama clearly was doing what it could to minimize the impact of standout Cincinnati cornerbacks Ahmad Gardner and Coby Bryant, and pretty much succeeded with Robinson rushing 26 times and Young throwing a lot of short, safe passes — though he did find hit Ja'Corey Brooks for a 44-yard catch-and-run TD on a play away from the standout defenders for a 17-3 lead just before halftime.

"I'm really, really proud of our team, our players. I think they showed great competitive character out there," said Alabama coach Nick Saban, who in his 15th season at Alabama has six national titles overall. "Guys showed a lot of resiliency all year, to be able to have the opportunity to get to this game."

The Tide opened the game with 10 consecutive runs, the first four and six overall for 37 yards by Robinson, before putting three receivers opposite of Gardner, who hasn't given up a TD in coverage in his college career. Young found Slade Bolden open in the left flat for an 8-yard TD pass that put Alabama ahead to stay.

With Ridder, the dynamic quarterback and NFL prospect who returned for an extra season for just this chance, the Bearcats (13-1) were the nation's only undefeated team until facing the playoff standard bearer.

"Obviously, this is gut-wrenching and really, really difficult for everybody, but most importantly for the 30 or so seniors that have brought this program and this team so far," Bearcats coach Luke Fickell said.

Ridder was sacked six times and outside of a 9-yard run on the opening play of the second half never got to hurt Bama with his feet. He was 17-of-32 passing or 144 yards.

"It's one thing to sit there and watch on film, and to sit there and draw the twists and stunts they do on the board and work it through practice," Ridder said. "It's another thing to come down here and play it on a big stage."

Young, a 20-year-old sophomore, has a chance to become the fifth Alabama quarterback in 13 seasons to win a national title as a first-year starter. He completed 17 of 28 passes for 181 yards in the playoff game, four weeks after setting an SEC championship game record with 421 yards passing in a win over Georgia and three weeks after being the first Crimson Tide QB to win a Heisman Trophy.

His only interception came late in the third quarter when he overthrew All-America receiver Jameson Williams in a crowd of defenders and the pass was picked off by Bryan Cook on the logo at midfield. Williams caught the other seven passes thrown his way for 62 yards, the longest being 20 yards.

After Cook's interception, the Bearcats went three-and-out for the fifth time in the game, with Ridder sacked for 10-yard loss on third down.

Cincinnati's breakthrough into the four-team playoff was bolstered by a win the first Saturday of October at Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish, who lost 31-14 to Alabama in a CFP semifinal Rose Bowl played at AT&T Stadium last New Year's Day, didn't lose another game this season and finished fifth in the final CFP rankings behind the history-making Bearcats.

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The American Athletic Conference champion Bearcats had a season-low 218 total yards and held without a touchdown for the first time since a 42-0 loss at Ohio State in the second game of the 2019 season, the last time they played a top-five team.

"We knew the battle in the trenches was going to be a big deal, and that's kind of where the game was won," Fickell said. "In no phase of it did we give ourselves an opportunity."

## THE TAKEAWAY

**Cincinnati:** It was only the second loss in two seasons for the Bearcats, both setbacks coming in their final games. They lost 24-21 to Georgia on a last-second field goal in the Peach Bowl last New Year's Day. ... Cincinnati drove for field goals by Cole Smith (37 and 31 yards) on the opening drive of each half, but struggled to move the ball outside of those two drives.

**Alabama:** After the Tide never got on track with their running game most of the season, fifth-year senior Robinson and the rushers led them in the semifinal game with 301 yards. Trey Sanders had 14 carries for 67 yards. Going into the Cotton Bowl, the Crimson Tide were averaging 147.6 yards per game, their lowest total in 15 seasons under Saban.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25). Sign up for the AP's college football newsletter: <https://apnews.com/cfbtop25>

## 2 wounded during Mall of America shooting, suspect sought

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Two people were shot and wounded Friday following an apparent altercation at the Mall of America, sending New Year's Eve shoppers scrambling for safety and placing the Minneapolis mall on temporary lockdown, authorities said.

One man suffered a gunshot wound to the leg during the shooting that happened about 4:30 p.m. on the third floor of the mall and another person was grazed, police said. Shoppers ran for cover and the mall was evacuated until the lockdown ended about 45 minutes later, a mall official said during a news briefing.

Deputy Bloomington Police Chief Kim Clauson said police and mall security arrived within a minute of shooting. The man shot in the leg was taken to a hospital, while a second victim was treated at the scene and released. Both injuries were considered non-life-threatening.

No arrests have been made and the suspect is believed to have fled the mall, police said. Clauson said the shooting did not appear to be random.

"It does appear there was an altercation between two males before the shot was fired," Clauson said.

Alexis Gonzalez, who works at the mall, told the Star Tribune that "when we heard the shot and heard the screams we all got frazzled."

Gonzalez said he saw people running as the mall lockdown alarms began, and people rushed into his store.

Media reports showed New Year's Eve shoppers screaming and running from the mall. Police said the lockdown was lifted by Friday evening and officers were no longer searching for a suspect inside. The mall, which had been scheduled to close at 6 p.m., remained closed.

The Mall of America bans guns on its premises, according to its website. The mall does not utilize metal detectors and shoppers are not searched upon entry. Mall spokesperson Dan Jasper said lockdown drills are performed each month to prepare for shooting scenarios.

## 'So many memories': Over 500 homes feared destroyed by fire

By BRITTANY PETERSON, PATTY NIEBERG and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

SUPERIOR, Colo. (AP) — One couple returned home Friday to find the mailbox about the only thing left standing. Charred cars and a burned trampoline lay outside smoldering houses. On some blocks, homes reduced to smoking ruins stood next to ones practically unscathed by the flames.

Colorado residents driven from their neighborhoods by a terrifying, wind-whipped wildfire got their first, heartbreaking look at the damage the morning after, while others could only wait and wonder whether their homes were among the more than 500 feared destroyed.

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At least seven people were injured, but remarkably there were no immediate reports of any deaths or anyone missing in the aftermath of the blaze outside Denver.

Cathy Glaab found that her home in the town of Superior where she lives with her husband had been turned into a pile of charred and twisted debris. It was one of seven houses in a row that burned to the ground.

"The mailbox is standing," Glaab said, trying to crack a smile through tears. She added sadly, "So many memories."

Despite the devastation, she said they intend to rebuild the house they had since 1998. They love that the land backs up to a natural space, and they have a view of the mountains from the back.

Rick Dixon feared there would be nothing to return to after he saw firefighters try to save his burning home on the news. On Friday, Dixon, his wife and 21-year-old son found it mostly gutted with a gaping hole in the roof but still standing. Only smoldering rubble remained where several neighboring homes once stood in a row immediately next to theirs.

"We thought we lost everything," he said, as he held his mother-in-law's china in padded containers. They also retrieved sculptures that belonged to Dixon's father and piles of clothes still on hangers.

The wildfire erupted Thursday in and around Louisville and Superior, neighboring towns about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Denver with a combined population of 34,000.

Tens of thousands were ordered to flee as the flames swept over drought-stricken neighborhoods with alarming speed, propelled by gusts up to 105 mph (169 kph).

At a Costco in Superior, two store employees came running toward the checkout lines, one of them shouting, "Everyone evacuate, evacuate, evacuate!" said Katrina Peterson, who was inside.

A video she made showed dark skies and whirling debris outside. The falling ash filled her ears, and she had to squint to keep it from getting in her eyes. The store was left standing.

The cause of the blaze was under investigation. Emergency authorities said utility officials found no downed power lines around where the fire broke out.

With some roads still closed Friday, people walked back to their homes to get clothes or medicine, turn the water off to prevent the pipes from freezing, or see if they still had a house. They left carrying backpacks and pulling suitcases or wagons down the sidewalk.

David Marks stood on a hillside overlooking Superior with others, using a pair of binoculars and a long-range camera lens to see if his house, and those of his neighbors, were still there, but he couldn't tell for sure whether his place was OK. He said at least three friends lost their homes.

He had watched from the hillside as the neighborhood burned.

"By the time I got up here, the houses were completely engulfed," he said. "I mean, it happened so quickly. I've never seen anything like that. ... Just house after house, fences, just stuff flying through the air, just caught on fire."

By first light Friday, the towering flames that had lit up the night sky had subsided and the winds had died down. Light snow soon began to fall, and the blaze, which burned at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), was no longer considered an immediate threat.

"We might have our very own New Year's miracle on our hands if it holds up that there was no loss of life," Gov. Jared Polis said, noting that many people had just minutes to evacuate.

The wildfire broke out unusually late in the year, following an extremely dry fall and amid a winter nearly devoid of snow so far.

Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said more than 500 homes were probably destroyed. He and the governor said as many as 1,000 homes might have been lost, though that won't be known until crews can assess the damage.

"It's unbelievable when you look at the devastation that we don't have a list of 100 missing persons," the sheriff said.

The sheriff said some communities were reduced to just "smoking holes in the ground." He urged residents to wait for the all-clear to go back because of the danger of fire and fallen power lines.

Sarah Owens, her husband, adult son and their dog got out of their Superior home within 10 minutes of

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learning about the evacuation from a Facebook post. But as everyone tried leaving by way of the winding streets of the well-to-do Rock Creek neighborhood, it took them 1 ½ hours to go 2 miles (3.2 kilometers).

"The good news is I think our house may be OK," Owens said.

But from now on, she said, she plans to have a bag packed in case of another fire.

"I never thought a brush fire could cause this kind of destruction," Owens said. "I want to stay here. No matter where you live, there are always going to be natural disasters."

Superior and Louisville are filled with middle- and upper-middle-class subdivisions with shopping centers, parks and schools. The area is between Denver and Boulder, home to the University of Colorado.

Scientists say climate change is making weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

Ninety percent of Boulder County is in severe or extreme drought, and it hasn't seen substantial rainfall since mid-summer. Denver set a record for consecutive days without snow before it got a small storm on Dec. 10, its last snowfall before the wildfires broke out.

Bruce and Mary Janda faced the loss of their Louisville home of 25 years in person Friday after learning it had been destroyed through a neighbor's photos.

"We knew that the house was totaled, but I felt the need to see it, see what the rest of the neighborhood looked like," Bruce Janda said. "We're a very close knit community on this street. We all know each other and we all love each other. It's hard to see this happen to all of us."

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Associated Press writer Thomas Peipert in Louisville, Colorado, and Thalia Beaty in New York contributed to this report. Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues. Associated Press writer Brady McCombs contributed to this story from Salt Lake City.

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## Chief justice: Judges must better avoid financial conflicts

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts says the federal judiciary needs to do more to ensure judges don't participate in cases where they have financial conflicts of interest.

Roberts made the comments as part of his annual report on the federal judiciary released Friday evening.

Roberts pointed to a series of stories recently in The Wall Street Journal that found that "between 2010 and 2018, 131 federal judges participated in a total of 685 matters involving companies in which they or their families owned shares of stock." Federal judges and Supreme Court justices are required under a federal ethics law to recuse themselves from cases where they have a personal financial interest.

"Let me be crystal clear: the Judiciary takes this matter seriously. We expect judges to adhere to the highest standards, and those judges violated an ethics rule," Roberts wrote in the nine-page report.

Roberts is one of three justices on the nine-member Supreme Court to hold individual stocks. Those holdings sometimes result in the justices recusing themselves from a case or selling stock in order to participate. The other justices who own individual stocks are Stephen Breyer and Samuel Alito. In the past those holdings have occasionally resulted in issues.

In 2016, Roberts heard arguments in a patent case but discovered after arguments that he held more than 1,200 shares of stock in a parent company of one of the parties. He notified the parties that he would not continue to participate in the case.

In 2015, Breyer participated in a high-profile energy case involving a subsidiary of Wisconsin-based Johnson Controls Inc. A routine check Breyer's office does failed to flag that his wife owned stock in Johnson



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Controls. After the case was argued an inquiry from the news media brought the issue to Breyer's attention and his wife sold 750 shares worth about \$33,000.

Alito took part in a case about curse words on television involving ABC Inc. and other networks. At the time the case was argued in 2008, Alito owned about \$2,000 of stock in ABC's parent, Walt Disney Co. The case came out 5-4 with Alito voting with the majority and against ABC's interests. He later said his participation was an oversight.

Roberts did not write about recusals on his own court for financial or other reasons. He did note that in the instances the The Wall Street Journal identified, the paper did not find that any of the conflicts affected the judges' actions in cases. And Roberts underscored that conflicts were identified in "less than three hundredths of one percent of the 2.5 million civil cases filed in the district courts in the nine years included in the study," a 99.97% compliance rate.

But Roberts said, "We are duty-bound to strive for 100% compliance because public trust is essential, not incidental, to our function." The Wall Street Journal says subsequent reporting has increased the number of violations it found from 685 to at least 950.

Roberts said ethics training programs need to be more rigorous and "the information systems that help courts catch and prevent conflicts are due for a refresh," among other things. He said officials are working to address the issue.

While coronavirus cases are surging, Roberts mentioned the pandemic only briefly. Last year, Roberts' annual report focused on the pandemic's impact on federal courts, with Roberts praising the work of judicial branch personnel during the pandemic.

Roberts and his colleagues are scheduled to return to the courtroom Jan. 7 for a special set of arguments to weigh challenges to two Biden administration policies covering vaccine requirements for millions of workers. The cases involve policies that affect large employers and health care workers.

Because of the pandemic the courtroom is not open to the public, and only the justices, lawyers, court personnel and journalists will be present. The justices spent nearly 19 months hearing arguments by telephone because of the pandemic but returned to the courtroom in October.

## US and Russia face deep differences ahead of Ukraine talks

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — After tough talk between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin over the Russian troop buildup on the Ukraine border, both sides insist they are hopeful that a pathway to easing tensions could open during diplomatic talks set for January.

But with less than two weeks to go before senior U.S. and Russian officials are to meet in Geneva, the chasm is deep and the prospect of finding an exit to the crisis faces no shortage of complications.

Biden on Friday told reporters that he advised Putin when they spoke by phone a day earlier that the upcoming talks could only work if the Russian leader "deescalated, not escalated, the situation" in the days ahead. The U.S. president said he also sought to make plain to Putin that the U.S. and allies stood ready to hit Russia with punishing sanctions if the Russians further invade Ukraine.

"I made it clear to President Putin that if he makes any more moves into Ukraine we will have severe sanctions," Biden said. "We will increase our presence in Europe with NATO allies."

Meanwhile, Biden's national security team on Friday turned their attention to preparation for the Geneva talks, set for Jan. 9 and 10, to discuss the Russian massing of some 100,000 troops on its border with Ukraine.

The Geneva talks, which are to be led on the U.S. side by senior State Department officials, are slated to be followed by Russia-NATO council talks and a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Biden is scheduled to speak by phone Sunday with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The two leaders plan to review preparations for the upcoming diplomatic engagements, according to the White House.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday debriefed Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, Italian

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Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the Biden-Putin call and discussed preparations for the upcoming summit.

"The two weeks ahead are going to be tough," said Daniel Fried, a former U.S. ambassador to Poland who was a top adviser on Eastern Europe to Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. "The Biden administration has done a pretty credible job of outlining, framing up the negotiations. But the toughest test is yet to come because Putin will continue to engage in threats and brinksmanship to see how determined we are."

While Biden reiterated that he stood ready to exact sanctions that would reverberate throughout Russia, Kremlin officials doubled down on its warning to Biden about making a "colossal mistake" that could have enormous ramifications for an already fraught U.S.-Russian relationship.

A top Putin aide on Friday reinforced that Russia stands by its demands for written security guarantees. Moscow wants it codified that any future expansion of NATO must exclude Ukraine and other former Soviet bloc countries and demands that the bloc remove offensive weaponry from countries in the Russian neighborhood.

"We will not allow our initiatives to be drowned in endless discussions," Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the state RIA-Novosti news agency Friday. "If no constructive answer comes in a reasonable time and the West continues its aggressive course, Russia will have to take all necessary measures to maintain a strategic balance and remove unacceptable threats to our security."

The Biden administration and NATO allies have made clear that the Russian demands are non-starters.

The seemingly unrealistic rhetoric has made some in Washington question of how effective talks can be.

Following the Biden-Putin call, a group of 24 former U.S. national security officials and Russia experts— a group that includes several officials who served in the Obama, George W. Bush and Clinton's administrations — released a statement calling on Biden to immediately, and publicly, lay out the penalties Russia would face if Putin were to move forward with military action.

The signatories of the statement included several former U.S. ambassadors, including Fried, Russia envoys Michael McFaul and Alexander Vershbow, and Ukraine envoys Steven Pifer and John Herbst.

"We believe the United States should, in closest consultation with its NATO allies and with Ukraine, take immediate steps to affect the Kremlin's cost-benefit calculations before the Russian leadership opts for further military escalation," the group wrote. "Such a response would include a package of major and painful sanctions that would be applied immediately if Russia assaults Ukraine. Ideally, the outline of these sanctions would be communicated now to Moscow, so that the Kremlin has a clear understanding of the magnitude of the economic hit it will face."

The Russians for their part continue to make the case that they are facing an existential threat with Ukraine.

Lavrov on Friday noted an increase in weapons supplies to Ukraine and the growing number and scope of joint military drills conducted by Western powers with Ukraine, charging that "the Kyiv regime naturally perceives this support as a carte blanche for the use of force." He added that Russia will protect its citizens living in eastern Ukraine.

"As for residents of Donbas, where hundreds of thousands of our citizens live, Russia will take all necessary measures to protect them," he said. "An adequate response will be given to any possible military provocations by Kyiv against Donbas."

Simon Miles, a diplomatic and international historian of the Cold War at Duke University, said it would be a mistake for the White House to let "Russia unilaterally set the tempo of what is about to unfold."

"Whatever the U.S. can do to keep the Russians on their back foot, as opposed to letting the Kremlin set the agenda, is going to be important to securing a favorable resolution," Miles said.

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Associated Press writer Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

## **Pedestal where Lee statue stood in Va. capital fully removed**

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — The enormous pedestal where the Robert E. Lee monument in Virginia's capital

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resided for over 130 years until September has been completely removed and hauled away.

Every piece of the 40-foot-tall (12-meter-tall) pedestal where the bronze statue stood over Monument Avenue in Richmond was gone from a traffic circle as of Friday afternoon, WRIC-TV reported. The ground was leveled, with straw spread about to encourage grass growth.

Gov. Ralph Northam announced in early December that the pedestal — which had been covered in graffiti following the 2020 protests related to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis — would be removed, marking a course reversal from September. An early December news release said the project was expected to be “substantially complete” by Friday.

Amid the Floyd demonstrations, Northam had ordered the dismantling of the one-of-a-kind equestrian piece, which was installed in 1890. Litigation had delayed the statue’s removal until 2021.

Construction superintendent Mike Spence told WRIC on Friday it took roughly 1,300 hours and a crew of 21 people to complete the entire project.

“For me it’s a relief to know that people can walk by here now and it has a greater community purpose than what it had before,” Spence said, making clear he could not speak for his company or the state.

The pedestal’s removal led to the unearthing of two time capsules in December, including one that contemporaneous news accounts indicate was placed during a cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1887. Conservation experts removed books, money, ammunition, documents and other artifacts from that capsule on Tuesday.

A fence around the circle will remain until quality control work is completed, according to Northam’s office.

The property, including the statue and pedestal pieces, will be transferred from the state to the city of Richmond.

## Wave of canceled flights from omicron closes out 2021

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

More canceled flights frustrated air travelers on the final day of 2021 and appeared all but certain to inconvenience hundreds of thousands more over the New Year’s holiday weekend.

Airlines blamed many of the cancellations on crew shortages related to the spike in COVID-19 infections, along with wintry weather in parts of the United States.

United Airlines, which suffered the most cancellations among the biggest U.S. carriers, agreed to pay pilot bonuses to fix a staffing shortage.

By early evening Friday on the East Coast, airlines had scrubbed more than 1,550 U.S. flights — about 6% of all scheduled flights — and roughly 3,500 worldwide, according to tracking service FlightAware.

That pushed the total U.S. cancellations since Christmas Eve to more than 10,000 and topped the previous single-day peak this holiday season, which was 1,520 on Dec. 26.

The disruptions come just as travel numbers climb higher going into the New Year’s holiday weekend. Since Dec. 16, more than 2 million travelers a day on average have passed through U.S. airport security checkpoints, an increase of nearly 100,000 a day since November and nearly double last December.

Led by Southwest and United, airlines have already canceled 1,500 U.S. flights on Saturday — about 700 at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, where the forecast called for a winter storm — and 700 more on Sunday.

Canceled flights began rising from a couple hundred a day shortly before Christmas, most notably for United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and JetBlue Airways.

On Friday, United canceled more than 200 flights, or 11% of its schedule — and that did not include cancellations on the United Express regional affiliate. CommutAir, which operates many United Express flights, scrubbed one-third of its schedule, according to FlightAware.

United decided to spend more money to fill empty cockpits. The airline reached a deal with the pilots’ union to pay 3.5 times normal wages to pilots who pick up extra trips through Monday and triple pay for flights between Tuesday and Jan. 29, according to a memo from Bryan Quigley, United’s senior vice president for flight operations.

JetBlue canceled more than 140 flights, or 14% of its schedule, and Delta grounded more than 100,

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or 5% of its flights by midday Friday. Allegiant, Alaska, Spirit and regional carriers SkyWest and Mesa all scrubbed at least 9% of their flights.

FlightAware reported fewer cancellations at Southwest, 3%, and American, 2%.

The virus is also hitting more federal air traffic controllers. The Federal Aviation Administration said that more of its employees have tested positive – it didn't provide numbers Friday – which could lead controllers to reduce flight volumes and "might result in delays during busy periods."

While leisure travel within the U.S. has returned to roughly pre-pandemic levels, international travel remains depressed, and the government is giving travelers new ore cause to reconsider trips abroad. On Thursday, the State Department warned Americans that if they test positive for coronavirus while in a foreign country it could mean a costly quarantine until they test negative.

Since March 2020, U.S. airlines have received \$54 billion in federal relief to keep employees on the payroll through the pandemic. Congress barred the airlines from furloughing workers but allowed them to offer incentives to quit or take long leaves of absence – and many did. The airlines have about 9% fewer workers than they had two years ago.

Kurt Ebenhoch, a former airline spokesman and later a travel-consumer advocate, said airlines added flights aggressively, cut staff too thinly, and overestimated the number of employees who would return to work after leaves of absence. It was all done, he said, "in the pursuit of profit ... and their customers paid for it, big time."

Many airlines are now rushing to hire pilots, flight attendants and other workers. In the meantime, some are trimming schedules that they can no longer operate. Southwest did that before the holidays, JetBlue is cutting flights until mid-January, and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific is suspending cargo flights and reducing passenger flights because it doesn't have enough pilots.

Other forms of transportation are also being hammered by the surge in virus cases. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that it is monitoring more than 90 cruise ships because of COVID-19 outbreaks. The health agency warned people not to go on cruises, even if they are fully vaccinated against the virus.

The remnants of the delta variant and the rise of the new omicron variant pushed the seven-day rolling average of new daily COVID-19 cases in the U.S. above 350,000, nearly triple the rate of just two weeks ago, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University.

## Should kids be vaccinated? Brazil turns to online survey

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES, MAURICIO SAVARESE and MARCELO SILVA DE SOUSA Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — As world leaders rely on public health specialists to inform their decisions about whether and how to vaccinate children against the coronavirus, Brazil's government is asking the online public for guidance.

In recent weeks, President Jair Bolsonaro has staked out a position against immunizing kids aged between 5 and 11, and his administration took the unusual step of creating a platform that could validate a stance that is widely opposed by experts. Since his government on Dec. 23 unveiled its online questionnaire on the issue, the president's supporters have been highly engaged on messaging apps trying to pressure parents to swing the results.

One widely shared post Wednesday on the Telegram group 'Bolsonaro Army,' which has about 37,000 members, said the vaccine is experimental and suggested that receiving shots could be more harmful than getting infected, although several studies have shown the opposite is true. It also included a link to the government's survey, which other people were posting along with instructions to relay to friends and family.

The rally for resistance resembles online behavior observed earlier this month, which catapulted Bolsonaro to the top of the heap in TIME magazine's readers poll for Person of the Year, David Nemer, an expert on Brazil's far-right groups on messaging apps, told The Associated Press. Bolsonaro garnered about one-quarter of the more than 9 million votes — nearly triple that of the runner-up, former U.S. President Donald Trump. The magazine's editors instead chose Elon Musk as 2021 Person of the Year.

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This time, however, online efforts are aimed at something far more significant than bestowing an honorific on the president. The survey, which concludes Jan. 2, stands to shape vaccination policy in Latin America's most populous nation, home to 20 million kids aged 5 to 11. Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga has said they will soon be eligible for vaccination, but survey results will help determine guidelines including whether shots could only be administered with parental consent and a doctor's prescription.

"This is a tool of democracy, it widens the discussion on the topic and it will bring more ease for parents so they can take their children to immunize against COVID-19," Queiroga said Wednesday.

Health experts, for their part, are aghast. Some Brazilian states' health secretariats have already pledged to ignore any health ministry guidelines on childhood vaccination if based on the public consultation. Gonzalo Vecina, founder and director of Brazil's health regulator between 1999 and 2003, says public consultation on vaccines is "unprecedented".

"Bolsonaro is against the vaccine and his employee, the health minister, believes that health is a matter of public opinion. It is a spurious and nonsensical approach," Vecina told the AP. "If only deniers send their opinion in the public consultation, is the government going to say that the vaccine doesn't have to be used?"

Denialism from the top in Brazil is a bit of *deja vu*. Even as COVID-19 exploded, driving the nation's death toll to the second highest in the world, Bolsonaro spent months sowing doubts about vaccines and was obstinate in his refusal to get a shot. He has cited the fact he contracted the coronavirus in 2020 to claim, incorrectly, that he is already immune, and routinely characterizes vaccination as an issue of personal choice rather than a means for ensuring the common good.

So when Brazil's health regulator authorized use of Pfizer's shot for children on Dec. 16, Bolsonaro was stunned.

"Kids are something very serious," he said the same night in his weekly live broadcast on social media. "We don't know about possible adverse future effects. It's unbelievable — I'm sorry — what the agency did. Unbelievable."

A study released Thursday by U.S. health authorities confirmed that serious side effects from the Pfizer vaccine in children ages 5 to 11 are rare. The findings were based on approximately 8 million doses dispensed to youngsters in that age group.

Bolsonaro added that he would name and expose the public servants who issued the approval, prompting a union representing health agency workers to express concern about online abuse or even physical attacks.

Despite fervent support among his base, Bolsonaro's anti-vaccine stance hasn't gained as much traction in Brazil — which has a proud history of inoculation campaigns — as in the U.S. More than two-thirds of Brazilians are fully vaccinated, as compared to 63% in the U.S., according to Johns Hopkins University's vaccination tracker, though American children have been eligible for shots since early November.

In neighboring Argentina, the government has allowed kids 12 years and older to be vaccinated since August, and more recently began giving shots to children as young as 3. In the face of subsequent criticism, the nation's health ministry cited the recommendation of the nation's association of pediatricians. In Chile, two-thirds of kids aged between 3 and 17 have already received both their shots, after the nation's health regulator analyzed an immunization study of 100 million children.

For the time being, Mexico isn't vaccinating children except those 12 years or older with illnesses that put them at greater risk. Mexico's point man for the pandemic, Hugo López-Gatell, said Tuesday the World Health Organization hasn't recommended vaccinating children aged 5 to 11, and that countries with ample vaccine coverage, like Mexico, shouldn't vaccinate kids until developing nations with limited coverage can raise their adult vaccination rates.

In Brazil, Mauro Paulino, general director of prominent pollster Datafolha, said one problem with the Bolsonaro government's survey is the way questions are framed, repeatedly asking interviewees, "Do you agree that...?" Such failure to present questions neutrally can induce responses.

"Datafolha always gives the two possible alternatives: whether the interviewee agrees or disagrees with the statement," he said. "Both sides of the question are necessary."

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Bolsonaro told supporters on Tuesday that pressure to inoculate kids stems from the “vaccine lobby” — a veiled reference to pharmaceutical companies. Many Bolsonaro supporters the next day were sharing a post from the Telegram group “Doctors for life,” which has more than 60,000 followers and frequently echoes the president’s unscientific COVID-19 advice.

One Telegram post with more than 200,000 shares said no child should be a guinea pig for the pharmaceutical industry. Tens of millions of doses have been administered to children around the world, with rare serious side effects. While few children die from COVID-19, vaccinating them can minimize the virus’ spread in society.

Bolsonaro also said this week he won’t allow the vaccination of his 11-year-old daughter. Meantime, his wife and politician sons received their shots, along with at least 16 of his 22 ministers — including Health Minister Queiroga.

Politicians from the party Bolsonaro joined to run for re-election in 2022 have advocated not only for vaccination, but also requiring proof of vaccination to enter certain places — another supposed infringement on personal liberties Bolsonaro opposes.

His chaotic management of the pandemic since its onset has been roundly criticized, and a Senate investigative committee recommended he face criminal charges.

But the president and his die-hard supporters on Telegram and WhatsApp aren’t backing down. Many interpreted his comments regarding his daughter in particular as a directive to reject the immunization of kids.

“There are a lot of messages about the dangers of vaccines, studies that aren’t true,” said Nemer, the expert on far-right groups, and an assistant professor of media studies at the University of Virginia. “They’re bringing a lot of disinformation about vaccinating kids to motivate the base.”

Pro-Bolsonaro messaging app groups brought the topic back hours before the New Year arrived after the president once more attacked child vaccination in a six-minute national address on television.

“We defend that vaccines for kids between ages 5 and 11 are only given with the consent of parents and a medical prescription. Liberty must be respected,” Bolsonaro said.

Many Brazilians went to their balconies to bang on their pots in protest against the president.

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Associated Press writer Debora Alvares reported this story in Brasilia, AP writer Mauricio Savarese reported from Sao Paulo and AP writer Marcelo Silva de Sousa reported from Rio de Janeiro. AP writers Eva Vergara in Santiago, Chile, Debora Rey in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Christopher Sherman in Mexico City contributed to this report.

## Betty White, TV’s Golden Girl, dies at 99

By LYNN ELBER and FRAZIER MOORE Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Betty White, whose saucy, up-for-anything charm made her a television mainstay for more than 60 years, whether as a man-crazy TV hostess on “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” or the loopy housemate on “The Golden Girls,” has died. She was 99.

White’s longtime agent and friend Jeff Witjas confirmed her death Friday. She had no diagnosed illness, and it was unclear if she died Thursday night or Friday, he said.

She would have turned 100 on Jan. 17.

Her death brought tributes from celebrities and politicians alike.

“We loved Betty White,” first lady Jill Biden said as she left a Delaware restaurant with President Joe Biden, who added: “Ninety-nine years old. As my mother would say, God love her.”

“She was great at defying expectation,” Ryan Reynolds, who starred alongside her in the comedy “The Proposal,” tweeted. “She managed to grow very old and somehow, not old enough. We’ll miss you, Betty.”

White launched her TV career in daytime talk shows when the medium was still in its infancy and endured well into the age of cable and streaming. Her combination of sweetness and edginess gave life to a roster of quirky characters in shows from the sitcom “Life With Elizabeth” in the early 1950s to oddball

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Rose Nylund in "The Golden Girls" in the '80s to "Boston Legal," which ran from 2004 to 2008.

But it was in 2010 that White's stardom erupted as never before.

In a Snickers commercial that premiered during that year's Super Bowl telecast, she impersonated an energy-sapped dude getting tackled during a backlot football game.

"Mike, you're playing like Betty White out there," jeered one of his chums. White, flat on the ground and covered in mud, fired back, "That's not what your girlfriend said!"

The instantly-viral video helped spark a successful Facebook campaign to have her host "Saturday Night Live." The much-watched episode won her a seventh Emmy.

A month later, cable's TV Land premiered "Hot In Cleveland," which starred Valerie Bertinelli, Jane Leeves and Wendie Malick as three past-their-prime show-biz veterans who move to Cleveland to escape the youth obsession of Hollywood.

They move into a home being looked after by an elderly Polish widow — a character, played by White, who was meant to appear only in the pilot episode.

But White stole the show, and became a key part of the series, an immediate hit. She was voted the Entertainer of the Year by members of The Associated Press.

"It's ridiculous," White said of the honor. "They haven't caught on to me, and I hope they never do."

By then, White had not only become the hippest star around, but also a role model for how to grow old joyously.

"Don't try to be young," she told the AP. "Just open your mind. Stay interested in stuff. There are so many things I won't live long enough to find out about, but I'm still curious about them."

White remained youthful in part through her skill at playing bawdy or naughty while radiating niceness. The horror spoof "Lake Placid" and "The Proposal" were marked by her characters' surprisingly salty language. And her character Catherine Piper killed a man with a skillet on "Boston Legal."

Her role as "Happy Homemaker" Sue Anne Nivens in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," which was already a huge hit, was planned as a one-off appearance in 1973, but it would last until the show ended in 1977.

"While she's icky-sweet on her cooking show, Sue is really a piranha type," White once said. The role brought her two Emmys as supporting actress in a comedy series.

In 1985, White starred on NBC with Bea Arthur, Rue McClanahan and Estelle Getty in "The Golden Girls." Its cast of mature actors, playing single women in Miami retirement, presented a gamble in a youth-conscious industry. But it proved a solid hit and lasted until 1992.

White played Rose, a gentle, dim widow who drove her roommates crazy with off-the-wall tales of childhood in fictional St. Olaf, Minnesota.

The role won her yet another Emmy, and she reprised it in a short-lived spinoff, "The Golden Palace."

White began her television career as \$50-a-week sidekick to local Los Angeles TV personality Al Jarvis in 1949. White proved to be a natural for the new medium.

"I did that show 5½ hours a day, six days a week, for 4½ years," she recalled in 1975.

A sketch she had done with Jarvis turned into a syndicated series, "Life With Elizabeth," which won her first Emmy.

Off-screen, White tirelessly raised money for animal causes, hosting a syndicated TV show and writing three books on her animal love, which she said stemmed from her family taking care of as many as 15 dogs at a time during the Depression.

Are there any critters she doesn't like?

"No," White told the AP. "Anything with a leg on each corner."

Then what about snakes?

"Ohhh, I LOVE snakes!"

She was born Betty Marion White in Oak Park, Illinois, and the family moved to Los Angeles when she was a toddler.

"I'm an only child, and I had a mother and dad who never drew a straight line: They just thought funny," she told The Associated Press in 2015. "We'd sit around the breakfast table and then we'd start kicking it around."

Her early ambition was to be a writer, and she wrote her grammar school graduation play, giving herself the leading role.

At Beverly Hills High School, her ambition turned to acting, and she appeared in several school plays. Her parents hoped she'd go to college, but instead she took roles in a small theater and played bit parts in radio dramas.

After two very brief marriages in the 1940s, White wed her third and final husband, actor and game show host Allen Ludden, in 1963. They remained married until his death in 1981.

When asked in 2011 how she had managed to be universally beloved during her decades-spanning career, she summed up with a dimpled smile: "I just make it my business to get along with people so I can have fun. It's that simple."

Associated Press writers Lindsey Bahr, Lynn Berry and the late Bob Thomas contributed.

## Hall of Famer Sam Jones, winner of 10 NBA titles, dies at 88

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Basketball Hall of Famer Sam Jones, the Boston Celtics' "Mr. Clutch" whose sharp shooting fueled the league's longest dynasty and earned him 10 NBA titles — second only to teammate Bill Russell — has died, the team said. He was 88.

Jones died Thursday night in Florida, where he had been hospitalized in failing health, Celtics spokesman Jeff Twiss said.

"Sam Jones was one of the most talented, versatile, and clutch shooters for the most successful and dominant teams in NBA history," the team said in a statement.

"His scoring ability was so prolific, and his form so pure, that he earned the simple nickname, 'The Shooter,'" the Celtics said. "The Jones family is in our thoughts as we mourn his loss and fondly remember the life and career of one of the greatest champions in American sports."

The Celtics paused for a moment of silence before Friday afternoon's game against the Phoenix Suns, showing a video tribute on the screen hanging among the championship banners above the parquet floor at the TD Garden. His No. 24, which was retired by the Celtics in 1969 while he was still an active player, also was displayed on the monitor in the hushed arena before a still photo of him in a suit and the words "Sam Jones 1933-2021."

"Another one of my dear friends lost," Celtics broadcaster Cedric Maxwell wrote on Twitter. "Well, the banks are open in heaven this #NYE."

Often providing the offense while Russell locked things down at the other end, Jones averaged 17.7 points per game over 12 seasons. The number went up in the postseason, when he averaged 18.9 points and was usually the No. 1 option for the game's final shot for the teams that won 10 titles from 1959-69.

"We never flew first class in my 12 years of playing basketball," Jones told The Associated Press this fall in an interview for the league's 75th anniversary. "But we always won NBA championships."

In 1964, Jones was a member of the NBA's first starting lineup to include five Black players, joining Russell, Tom "Satch" Sanders, K.C. Jones and Willie Naulls. Although coach Red Auerbach maintained he was thinking only of his best chance to win, the lineup broke with an unwritten rule that pressured teams to have at least one white player on the floor.

Sam Jones, a North Carolina native who served two years in the Army before returning to college, told the AP that the NBA of the 1960s was little different than the segregated South where he grew up and went to school.

"I'm fighting for the freedom of everybody here in the United States. And when I come back, I still got to fight for my freedom," Jones said. "Something is wrong with that, and has always been and is happening even today."

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Jones will be remembered as "one of the most prolific champions in all of professional sports."



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"His selfless style, clutch performances and signature bank shot were hallmarks of an incredible career," Silver said. "Sam was a beloved teammate and respected competitor who played the game with dignity and class. We mourn the passing of a basketball giant and send our deepest condolences to Sam's family and the Celtics organization."

Born in Wilmington, Jones attended North Carolina Central, a Division II, historically Black university in Durham. Auerbach first heard of Jones when he went to North Carolina to scout the national champion Tar Heels and was told that the best player in the state was actually at Central playing for Hall of Fame coach John McLendon.

Auerbach selected Jones in the first round of the 1957 draft, eighth overall, despite never seeing him play. "Russell and I are the most successful players in winning championships in the NBA. Yet he never saw us play a game because they had no scouts," Jones told the AP. "The coaches called other coaches to see how other players were playing. They took their word for it."

Jones led the Celtics in scoring five times — including the 1963 champions, when he was one of eight future Hall of Famers on the roster. When he retired in 1969 at the age of 36, Jones held 11 Celtics records and was the only player in franchise history to score more than 50 points in a game.

"You look at the championships and what he did, it's obviously a big loss for the community here," Celtics coach Ime Udoka said before Friday's game.

Using a bank shot that was unconventional even then, Jones came to be known as "Mr. Clutch" after a series of game-winners, including a buzzer-beater to clinch the 1962 Eastern Conference finals. He hit an off-balance, wrong-footed jumper to win Game 4 of the '69 Finals; instead of heading to Los Angeles trailing 3-1, the Celtics tied the series against the Lakers at two games apiece and went on to win in seven.

Jones retired after that title, having won his 10 championships in 12 seasons. A five-time All-Star, he was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1984.

Jones was named to the NBA's 25th, 50th and 75th anniversary teams. His death comes a year after teammate Tommy Heinsohn and 13 months following the death of K.C. Jones.

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AP freelancer Doug Alden contributed to this story.

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More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/nba> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Germany shuts down half of its 6 remaining nuclear plants

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany on Friday shut down half of the six nuclear plants it still has in operation, a year before the country draws the final curtain on its decades-long use of atomic power.

The decision to phase out nuclear power and shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy was first taken by the center-left government of Gerhard Schroeder in 2002. His successor, Angela Merkel, reversed her decision to extend the lifetime of Germany's nuclear plants in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan and set 2022 as the final deadline for shutting them down.

The three reactors now being shuttered were first powered up in the mid-1980s. Together they provided electricity to millions of German households for almost four decades.

One of the plants — Brokdorf, located 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of Hamburg on the Elbe River — became a particular focus of anti-nuclear protests that were fueled by the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe in the Soviet Union.

The other two plants are Grohnde, 40 kilometers south of Hannover, and Gundremmingen, 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Munich.

Some in Germany have called for the decision on ending the use of nuclear power to be reconsidered because the power plants already in operation produce relatively little carbon dioxide. Advocates of atomic energy argue that it can help Germany meet its climate targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

But the German government said this week that decommissioning all nuclear plants next year and then

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phasing out the use of coal by 2030 won't affect the country's energy security or its goal of making Europe's biggest economy "climate neutral" by 2045.

"By massively increasing renewable energy and accelerating the expansion of the electricity grid we can show that this is possible in Germany," Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck said.

Renewable energy sources delivered almost 46% of the electricity generated in Germany in 2021. Coal accounted for more than 51%, while nuclear power provided over 13%, according to the Fraunhofer Institute.

Several of Germany's neighbors have already ended nuclear power or announced plans to do so, but others are sticking with the technology. This has prompted concerns of a nuclear rift in Europe, with France planning to build new reactors and Germany opting for natural gas as a "bridge" until enough renewable power is available, and both sides arguing their preferred source of energy be classed as sustainable.

Germany's remaining three nuclear plants — Emsland, Isar and Neckarwestheim — will be powered down by the end of 2022.

While some jobs will be lost, utility company RWE said more than two-thirds of the 600 workers at its Gundremmingen nuclear power station will continue to be involved in post-shutdown operations through to the 2030s. Germany's nuclear power companies will receive almost \$3 billion for the early shutdown of their plants.

Environment Minister Steffi Lemke has dismissed suggestions that a new generation of nuclear power plants might prompt Germany to change course yet again.

"Nuclear power plants remain high-risk facilities that produce highly radioactive atomic waste," she told the Funke media group this week.

A final decision has yet to be taken about where to store the most potent nuclear waste produced in German power plants. Experts say some material will remain dangerously radioactive for 35,000 generations.

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## Parents selling children shows desperation of Afghanistan

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

SHEDAI CAMP, Afghanistan (AP) — In a sprawling settlement of mud brick huts in western Afghanistan housing people displaced by drought and war, a woman is fighting to save her daughter.

Aziz Gul's husband sold the 10-year-old girl into marriage without telling his wife, taking a down-payment so he could feed his family of five children. Without that money, he told her, they would all starve. He had to sacrifice one to save the rest.

Many of Afghanistan's growing number of destitute people are making desperate decisions such as these as their nation spirals into a vortex of poverty.

The aid-dependent country's economy was already teetering when the Taliban seized power in mid-August amid a chaotic withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops. The international community froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted all funding, unwilling to work with a Taliban government given its reputation for brutality during its previous rule 20 years ago.

The consequences have been devastating for a country battered by four decades of war, a punishing drought and the coronavirus pandemic. Legions of state employees, including doctors, haven't been paid in months. Malnutrition and poverty stalk the most vulnerable, and aid groups say more than half the population faces acute food shortages.

"Day by day, the situation is deteriorating in this country, and especially children are suffering," said Asuntha Charles, national director of the World Vision aid organization in Afghanistan, which runs a health clinic for displaced people just outside the western city of Herat.

"Today I have been heartbroken to see that the families are willing to sell their children to feed other family members," Charles said. "So it's the right time for the humanitarian community to stand up and stay with the people of Afghanistan."

Arranging marriages for very young girls is a frequent practice throughout the region. The groom's

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family — often distant relatives — pays money to seal the deal, and the child usually stays with her own parents until she is at least around 15 or 16. Yet with many unable to afford even basic food, some say they'd allow prospective grooms to take very young girls or are even trying to sell their sons.

But Gul, unusually in this deeply patriarchal, male-dominated society, is resisting. Married off herself at 15, she says she would kill herself if her daughter, Qandi Gul, is forcibly taken away.

Gul remembers well the moment she found out her husband had sold Qandi. For around two months, the family had been able to eat. Eventually, she asked her husband where the money came from, and he told her.

"My heart stopped beating. I wished I could have died at that time, but maybe God didn't want me to die," Gul said. Qandi sat close to her mother, her hazel eyes peering shyly from beneath her sky-blue headscarf. "Each time I remember that night ... I die and come back to life. It was so difficult."

She asked her husband why he did it.

"He said he wanted to sell one and save the others. 'You all would have died this way,' (he said.) I told him, 'Dying was much better than what you have done.'"

Gul rallied her community, telling her brother and village elders that her husband had sold her child behind her back. They supported her, and with their help she secured a "divorce" for her child, but only on condition she repays the 100,000 afghanis (about \$1,000) that her husband received.

It's money she doesn't have. Her husband fled, possibly fearing Gul might denounce him to the authorities. The Taliban government recently announced a ban on forcing women into marriage or using women and girls as exchange tokens to settle disputes.

The family of the prospective groom, a man of around 21 or 22, has already tried several times to claim the girl, she says. She is not sure how long she can fend them off.

"I am just so desperate. If I can't provide money to pay these people and can't keep my daughter by my side, I have said that I will kill myself," Gul said. "But then I think about the other children. What will happen to them? Who will feed them?" Her eldest is 12, her youngest — her sixth — just two months.

Now alone, Gul leaves the children with her elderly mother while she goes to work in people's homes. Her 12-year-old son works picking saffron after school. It's barely enough to keep them fed, and the saffron season is short, only a few weeks in the fall.

"We don't have anything," Gul said.

In another part of the same camp, father-of-four Hamid Abdullah was also selling his young daughters into arranged marriages, desperate for money to treat his chronically ill wife, pregnant with their fifth child.

Abdullah borrowed money to pay for his wife's treatments and can't pay it back, he said. So three years ago, he received a down-payment for his eldest daughter Hoshran, now 7, in an arranged marriage to an 18-year-old in their native Badghis province. He's now looking for someone to buy his second daughter, 6-year-old Nazia.

"We don't have food to eat," Abdullah explained, adding he also had to buy medicine for his wife, who soon would need more treatment. "She needs another surgery, I don't have one afghani to pay for the doctor."

The family that bought Hoshran is waiting until she is older before the full amount is settled, he explained.

But he needs money now for food and treatments, so he is trying to arrange a marriage for Nazia for about 20,000-30,000 afghani (\$200-\$300).

"What should we do? We have to do it, we have no other option," said his wife, Bibi Jan. "When we made the decision, it was like someone had taken away a body part from me."

In the neighboring province of Badghis, another displaced family is considering selling their son, 8-year-old Salahuddin.

His mother, Guldasta, said that after days with nothing to eat, she told her husband to take the boy to the bazaar and sell him to bring food for the others.

"I don't want to sell my son, but I have to," the 35-year-old said. "No mother can do this to her child, but when you have no other choice, you have to make a decision against your will."

Salahuddin blinked and looked on silently. Surrounded by some of his seven brothers and sisters, his lip

quivered slightly.

His father, Shakir, who is blind in one eye and has kidney problems, said the children had been crying for days from hunger. Twice, he said, he decided to take the boy to the bazaar and twice he faltered, unable to go through with it. "But now I think I have no other choice than to sell him."

Buying of boys is believed to be less common than girls, and when it does take place, it appears to be cases of infant boys bought by families who don't have any sons. In her despair, Guldasta thought perhaps such a family would want an 8-year-old.

The desperation of millions is clear as more and more people face hunger. By the end of the year, some 3.2 million children under 5 years old are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition, according to the U.N.

Nazia is one of them. The 4-year-old lay listlessly in her mother's arms after visiting the World Vision health clinic.

Two years ago, Nazia was a plump toddler, her mother Fatima said. Now, her emaciated limbs are just skin covering bone. Her little heart beats visibly beneath her ribcage.

"The prices are high. Flour is expensive, cooking oil is expensive, everything is expensive," Fatima said. "All day she is asking me to give her meat, yogurt and fruit. We don't have anything, and we don't have money to buy it for her."

Charles, World Vision's national director for Afghanistan, said humanitarian aid funds are desperately needed.

"I'm happy to see the pledges are made," she said. But the pledges "shouldn't stay as promises, they have to be seen as reality on the ground."

Abdul Qahar Afghan in Shedai Camp, Afghanistan, and Rahim Faiez in Islamabad contributed to this report.

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## Roe lawyer Sarah Weddington helped redefine abortion rights

By ACACIA CORONADO and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Sarah Weddington, who as a young lawyer from Texas won the Roe v. Wade case at the U.S. Supreme Court, is being remembered this week as a champion of feminism whose work impacted the nation's politics as views shifted on abortion. She died Sunday at age 76.

Weddington was 26 when she successfully argued the case that legalized the right to abortion throughout the United States. The Supreme Court's ruling in 1973 cemented her place in history.

"I just see her role at that time as being so courageous," said Sarah Wheat, a spokeswoman for Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas. "For all of us who work in what is, you know — it can be a very challenging field — I feel like that's a lesson she has shared with me and so many others."

Roe v. Wade changed the alignment of the major political parties and helped define the playbook U.S. presidents would have to follow to confirm their Supreme Court nominees, said Florida State University law professor Mary Ziegler, who specializes in the legal history of reproduction.

Weddington was "one important part of a bigger picture," Ziegler said. "She was instrumental in reframing how abortion rights are understood."

Prior to the Roe decision, the coalition in favor of abortion rights included family planning advocates, medical professionals concerned about the consequences of so-called back alley abortions and groups that favored curbs on population growth. Roe validated the notion of a woman's right to have an abortion.

The Supreme Court decided the right to privacy under the U.S. Constitution was "broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy," Justice Harry Blackmun — nominated by Republican President Richard Nixon — wrote in the 7-2 decision.

Longtime women's rights lawyer Judy Waxman witnessed part of the Roe arguments. In framing the question as a matter of individual self-determination, Weddington "really stood up for the rights of women to control their destiny," Waxman said.

"Some people said, 'The issue is over now, and others said, 'No it's just beginning,'" Waxman said.

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It was far from over.

Abortion rights has since become one of the most divisive issues in American politics, and Weddington's death comes as it is again reaching a decisive point before the nation's highest court. The Supreme Court is considering a case over Mississippi's ban on abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy that could undermine Roe and the court's 1992 ruling in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, which allow states to regulate but not ban abortion up until the point of fetal viability, at roughly 24 weeks. A decision is not expected until spring.

In Texas, a separate law that took effect in September has banned most abortions in the state, meaning some patients have traveled hundreds of miles to Louisiana, Oklahoma and other states for the procedure.

The Supreme Court ruled in December that the law could stand under its unusual structure of allowing lawsuits against abortion clinics and anyone who "aids or abets" the procedure to be performed after cardiac activity is detected in an embryo, which is at around the sixth week of pregnancy and before some women even know they're pregnant.

Ruth Pennebaker, 72, had an abortion in Texas in 1974, just over a year after the Supreme Court made it legal. She said having the freedom to make her choice safely allowed her to finish her studies at the University of Texas School of Law and build a life with her husband of almost 50 years, with two children and four grandchildren. Pennebaker, who became an author and columnist, said Weddington and her co-counsel, Linda Coffee, were inspiring.

"She was a 26-year-old lawyer who had never tried a case before the Supreme Court," Pennebaker said. "That two people could make such a difference in the world. I think for those of us who have seen more history, things that can be seen as progress are not necessarily a given. Things can be taken away."

Conservatives are now rallying behind that principle.

Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee, said Weddington's legacy can be summed up in millions of abortions. As medical science advances, Tobias said, Weddington's arguments will find less support.

"The technology is proving that these are human beings," Tobias said, "and they just can't be swept under the rug with some private rights issues."

In January 1973, fresh off her Supreme Court victory, Weddington was sworn in as a Democratic Texas state representative for Austin. One of the other six female members of the Texas House — which at the time was its largest group of women ever — was Eddie Bernice Johnson, who has been a member of Congress since 1993.

As state lawmakers, Johnson said she and Weddington worked with other female legislators, including one Republican, to advocate for women's rights. That included passing a law that allowed women to obtain credit on their own, without needing a husband to cosign.

Policies affecting women were personal to Weddington. While in law school at the University of Texas, she became pregnant and felt unprepared. Abortion was illegal in Texas, so she and her boyfriend — whom she would later marry — drove to Mexico for the procedure.

After leaving the Legislature, Weddington went on to become a White House advisor on women's issues to President Jimmy Carter.

"She was widely celebrated, but it didn't seem to alter her in any way in terms of getting a big head. She was very humble and quietly worked on these issues," Johnson said.

Johnson — the first African American and woman to chair the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology — announced she is retiring from Congress after this year. She doesn't want Weddington's work and legacy to fall by the wayside.

"We don't know what the ruling with the Supreme Court will be, but it doesn't look good," Johnson said. "But I don't know that any woman should give up at that point, to say, 'That is just the way it is.' I think we need to re-engage our spirit and efforts to let this nation know we do not intend for these men to make our decisions."

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Associated Press writers Jake Bleiberg in Dallas and Alexandra Jaffe in Washington contributed to this report. Alonso-Zaldivar reported from Washington. Coronado is a corps member for the Associated Press/

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## Party-goers urged not to travel across UK as omicron surges

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Officials have warned revellers in Scotland and Wales to think twice before travelling to England to ring in the new year, highlighting how the four parts of the U.K. were again taking starkly different approaches to coronavirus restrictions amid record-high infections and soaring hospitalizations.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has resisted tightening restrictions in England despite the rapid spread of the highly transmissible omicron variant, instead focusing on frequent self-testing and an expanded vaccine booster program to control the spread of infections.

Meanwhile Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which set their own public health rules, imposed new restrictions this week that closed all nightclubs and limited social gatherings. Bars and pubs have had to return to table service only. In Edinburgh, which traditionally hosts one of Europe's largest New Year's Eve parties, people have been urged to stay at home.

While no formal travel ban is in place to stop Scottish party-goers from making their way to England on Friday, Scotland's deputy leader John Swinney said travelling would be the "wrong course of action."

Opinions have been divided on whether Johnson's Conservative government was taking a risky gamble in not enforcing tougher coronavirus measures in England as the omicron variant drives infections to record high numbers.

About one in 25 people in England — or about 2 million people — had COVID-19 in the week before Christmas, the Office of National Statistics estimated Friday. That figure jumped to 1 in 15 in London, the capital, the body estimated.

Figures released Friday showed the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 in the U.K. rose to 12,395, up 68% from a week earlier and the highest number recorded since February. Confirmed new daily cases hit another record, at 189,846, and the government reported a further 203 deaths.

"Although the numbers are going up and going up increasingly rapidly, the absence of large numbers of seriously ill older people is providing significant reassurance," Chris Hopson, the head of NHS Providers, told The Times.

But immunologist and government scientific adviser Peter Openshaw warned that while U.K. hospitals haven't yet reached the "threshold" of being overwhelmed, "it looks like that will be reached quite quickly."

Johnson has urged people to take a rapid coronavirus test before going out and meeting with others on Friday, or to celebrate outdoors if possible. While firework displays have been cancelled in London for the second year in a row, many parties were going ahead and many revellers were still expected to turn out in the capital later in the day.

Some believe Johnson's strategy is dangerous and that large crowds gathering indoors for New Year's Eve will likely lead to a further rise in infections.

"It is quite risky, given the fact we're now approaching 200,000 cases per day — there is a high rate of infection in the community," Dr. Azeem Majeed, head of primary care and public health at Imperial College London, told Times Radio.

Health officials said the government has met its goal of offering a vaccine booster shot to all adults in the country by Dec. 31. About 82% of all over 12-year-olds in the U.K. have received a second vaccine dose, officials said.

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

## 'A moral giant': South Africans pay their respects to Tutu

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — South Africans from all corners of retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu's

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"rainbow nation" filed past his plain pine casket by the hundreds on Friday to pay their respects to his life of activism for equality for all races, creeds and sexual orientations.

"He was a moral giant. He was a moral and spiritual giant loved and revered for fighting for equality for all people," said the Rev. Michael Lapsley, on the steps of the historic St. George's Cathedral after Tutu's coffin was carried in amid music, incense and prayers.

Anglican clergy — women and men, Black and white, young and old — lined the street to honor the cortege carrying Tutu's body to the church. Members of the Tutu family accompanied the casket into the cathedral.

People began filing through the lofty cathedral to light candles and view the small, simple coffin with rope handles which Tutu had said he wanted to avoid any ostentation or lavish expenditures. Many sat in the pews to pray and reflect on Tutu's life.

More than 2,000 people visited the cathedral on the first day of viewing on Thursday and on Friday the line stretched for more than a kilometer (nearly a mile). A requiem mass for Tutu will be held on New Year's Day before he is cremated and his remains placed in a columbarium in the cathedral.

"His work did not stop with the end of apartheid," Lapsley said, in reference to South Africa's regime of racial oppression which Tutu prominently opposed and which ended in 1994 when South Africa held a democratic election.

"Archbishop Tutu bravely championed the equality of all people. He transformed the church by bringing women into the clergy. He championed the LGBTQ community, for whom he is a hero all over the world," said Lapsley, Canon of Healing at the cathedral.

An anti-apartheid activist priest whose hands and one eye were blown off by a letter bomb sent by South African agents in 1994, Lapsley said Tutu helped him find reconciliation and a new role in the church.

One of the first women priests ordained by Tutu, the Rev. Wilma Jakobsen, said Tutu radically changed South Africa's Anglican church.

"The face of the church has changed. It has women priests and women in positions of leadership. It has people of all colors. Our church welcomes LGBTQ people. That's all thanks to the leadership of Archbishop Tutu," said Jakobsen, who served as Tutu's personal chaplain when he was archbishop.

At the height of apartheid, Tutu mixed all races in the church, said Jakobsen.

"I was intentionally placed in Mitchells Plain and other white priests were intentionally put in Black communities. And Black priests were intentionally placed in white communities," said Jakobsen. "Archbishop Tutu did not wait for approval to do that, he just did it. It was a direct challenge to the apartheid regime."

Among those viewing Tutu's casket Friday was Mohamed De Bruyn.

"It was very emotional for me," said De Bruyn. "I could feel his great soul in that little wooden box ... He was like Moses. He led our nation from all that sadness and grief."

Vuyo Wara said Tutu "was a great leader. He fought corruption. I just hope that our current leaders will take his baton and follow his principles going forward."

After the viewing Friday, Tutu's body will remain alone overnight in the cathedral, "a place that he loved," according to a statement from Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba.

The cathedral, the Anglican church's oldest in southern Africa, dating back to 1847, shows the changes encouraged by Tutu. The Crypt Memory and Witness Center has public education programs to encourage healing and social justice.

The graceful stone structure built by British colonialists beneath Cape Town's soaring Table Mountain was converted by Tutu into a center of anti-apartheid activity. When the apartheid regime banned political gatherings, Tutu held meetings in the cathedral where participants bowed their heads ostensibly in prayer and heard political speeches. Nelson Mandela called it the "People's Cathedral."

With her gray hair pulled back in a ponytail tinged with purple, and wearing a brightly colored rainbow mask, the Rev. Maria Claassen said she was paying homage to Tutu.

"He was a very humble man but to sit in the same room with him, you could feel the strength of his presence, of his convictions," said Claassen, an Anglican priest in Cape Town's Durbanville area. "He inspired us and now we celebrate his life."

## 'A hell of a year': GOP eyes big 2022, but weaknesses remain

By STEVE PEOPLES and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This time last year, the Republican Party was hitting bottom.

Having already lost the presidency and House, the GOP would soon squander its Senate majority and watch with horror as thousands of Donald Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in a violent attack last Jan. 6 that will be forever linked to the Republican president's legacy.

What a difference 12 months make.

Entering a pivotal election year, a resurgent GOP is poised to reclaim one, if not both, chambers of Congress and retain its lock on dozens of state legislatures and governor's offices. While victory is far from assured, the GOP's confidence is fueled by President Joe Biden's underwhelming poll numbers, a Democratic economic and social agenda that's faltering, intensifying concerns about inflation, and deepening frustration with the pandemic, which is unleashing yet another wave of infections upon an exhausted nation.

But at its most basic level, the Republican Party's optimism is born of the same political headwinds that have shaped U.S. politics for decades. The party that controls the White House — Democrats, in this case — has a tremendous disadvantage in the first election of a new presidency. Adding to that challenge, Democrats are struggling to prevent a far-reaching Republican campaign to make voting more difficult for core Democratic constituents while installing a slate of election officials allied with Trump.

GOP leaders are brimming with confidence.

"We're going to have a hell of a year," said Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who leads the national GOP's Senate campaign arm. "Every state that Biden won by less than 10 is now a battleground state."

Lest there be any doubt, Republicans dominated the off-year elections this fall across Virginia, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, where Democrats in races from governor to county recorder of deeds were defeated — or barely held on — in regions that Biden had comfortably carried by more than 10 percentage points a year earlier. Perhaps most disturbing for Democrats, suburban voters and independents who fled Trump's Republican Party in recent years shifted back — without him on the ballot.

Democratic strategists privately concede that the party will be lucky to hold either congressional chamber in November, although the House may be in the most immediate peril.

They point to the surge of recent Democratic congressional retirements, dozens of Republican-controlled state legislatures that are actively reshaping House districts in the GOP's favor, a struggle to enact all of Biden's campaign promises, and a disengaged political base — especially African Americans. Their priorities on policing and voting rights have gone unfulfilled in Democratic-controlled Washington, even after last year's supposed national awakening on race.

Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said too many Americans believe the country is moving in the wrong direction. But he attributes the pessimism to lingering anxiety from a pandemic that will soon enter its third year. With new COVID-19 medication coming onto the market and expanded vaccine access for children, he predicted the country would return to a sense of normalcy by the end of March.

"We know that the economy is roaring in some aspects. But it's about how you feel at this moment," Harrison said, noting that many people are still grappling with fear and anxiety. "I believe in the midst of the first quarter, end of the first quarter, that feeling will start to shift."

### GOP CHALLENGES

While Republicans believe the dynamics work in their favor, they face their own formidable challenges. Democrats believe that GOP efforts to curb access to the ballot, combined with a Supreme Court decision expected next summer that could dramatically erode or dismantle abortion rights, could suddenly galvanize Democrats' most loyal supporters.

But for the GOP, perhaps no challenge is bigger than Trump himself.

The former president has waged an unprecedented war against fellow Republicans whom he deems insufficiently loyal, encouraging primary challenges against sitting members of Congress and governors in more than a dozen states. At the same time, some Republican operatives fear that Trump's continued



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lies about election fraud could depress turnout among the millions of loyalists who believe his baseless conspiracy theories.

"We just have to limit the damage that he's causing," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who sits on the executive board of the Republican Governors Association.

"If we have big battles in primaries, either we're going to nominate people who are unelectable in purple states or swing districts, or we're going to beat up our incumbents so bad that they lose the general election," added Hogan. He isn't seeking reelection because of term limits but plans to travel the country promoting Republican officeholders in Trump's crosshairs.

That includes Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington State, and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski. The most vulnerable may be officeholders such as Herrera Beutler, who was among 10 House Republicans voting to impeach Trump for inspiring the January attack on the Capitol.

Two of the 10 have already announced they're not seeking reelection.

Republican officials tasked with leading the GOP's 2022 election efforts are disturbed by Trump's sustained attacks on fellow party members, although few are willing to speak out publicly against him. Instead, Republican candidates in Arizona, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and elsewhere are battling each other in increasingly nasty primary contests for Trump's favor.

With the primary election season running from March through September, GOP infighting is likely to dominate the narrative for months even as Trump's role in national politics probably still continues to grow.

He considers himself his party's kingmaker. He's expected to play a more active campaign role next year after shying away from high profile governor's races this past fall in Virginia and New Jersey, where he's less popular with suburban voters. Already, Trump has endorsed 60-plus Republican candidates and plans to weigh in on dozens more contests. That including Missouri's combative Senate primary in which conservative commentator Hugh Hewitt recently begged Trump not to endorse Eric Greitens, a divisive former governor.

## HISTORIC HEADWINDS FOR DEMOCRATS

Even if Trump's politics hurt his party over the coming months, history suggests it may not matter. Just once this century has the party holding the White House not lost congressional seats in the first midterm election of a new presidency. That was in 2002, after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Democrats lost 54 seats in the House and eight in the Senate under President Bill Clinton in 1994. They lost 63 House seats and another six Senate seats under President Barack Obama in 2010. In 2018, Republicans lost 40 House seats under Trump, while gaining a pair in the Senate.

Republican-controlled legislatures have aided the GOP's potential House fortunes by drawing new congressional districts that are even more favorable to the party, including in Iowa, Texas and North Carolina, where — with legal challenges still pending — at least two new districts will be safely Republican.

Democratic legislators could pad their own advantages in places such as New York, but the GOP is positioned to help its standing elsewhere far more.

Redistricting will not affect the Senate landscape, where Republicans have to defend 20 seats compared with 14 for the Democrats. That's a positive for Democrats, but six of the top Senate contests are playing out in states Biden won by no more than 2 percentage points or lost, including Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and North Carolina.

Beyond congressional races, the stakes are especially high for Democrats in statehouses. Republican-run legislatures from Texas to Georgia have enacted laws making it more difficult to vote in response to Trump's false claims of voter fraud — a shift that's expected to have a disproportionate effect on Democratic-leaning African Americans and Latinos.

Democratic governors will be playing defense in much-watched Michigan and Wisconsin, and trying to hold an open seat in Pennsylvania. All three races are probably Democrats' best chance to slow the GOP's years-long ascendancy in the industrial heartland. But the GOP currently controls the governor's office in 27 states, compared with Democrats' 23, with 36 up nationwide in 2022.

If Republicans win in Michigan, Pennsylvania or Wisconsin while holding those state legislatures, the

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GOP would take total control of state government in those critical Midwestern battlegrounds that Biden narrowly won. That could give Republicans the power to change voting procedures in the next presidential contest, as their colleagues have in other states.

Prominent Black leaders have become increasingly concerned with the Democratic-controlled Congress' inability to enact federal legislation to supersede restrictive state laws. Senate Republicans have effectively blocked such efforts, while Democrats have resisted calls to bypass Senate rules that require at least 60 votes to advance legislation.

Many Black voters, a group that represents Democrats' most reliable supporters, are equally frustrated by the party's inability to enact policing reform in response to the national outcry that followed George Floyd's murder more than a year ago.

'WE HAVE TO DO MORE'

"Yes, we have to do more, and we want it to be faster," said Stacey Abrams, a Democrat making her second bid for Georgia governor. She said Democrats must have "deep conversations" with the Black community — "not preaching, but having conversations about what's being done and what it's going to take to get more done."

"I understand why people are despondent right now. This has been a terrible two years," Abrams said of the broader political landscape. "It's been hard for so many. And the promise of hope can be sometimes disappointing. But this is going to take a while. It took four years to get us where we are. It's going to take a little longer than a year to get us out of it."

At the same time, top national Republicans, including South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, his party's only Black senator, are leading a national GOP effort to prioritize electing more women and candidates of color to state-level offices.

Republicans made unexpected gains with Latino voters in many parts of the country in 2020, and Virginia provided hints that some minority voters are sticking with the party even without Trump running. Republican Winsome Sears, who is Black and a former Marine, was the first woman of color elected as the state's lieutenant governor. Jason Miyares will become the state's first Latino attorney general.

While Democrats will feature far more minority incumbents and candidates on 2022 House and Senate ballots, former NFL running back Herschel Walker, who is Black, has been endorsed by Trump in Georgia's Republican Senate primary — despite allegations of a violent past, including threatening his former wife with a gun.

"The winning formula is getting people who are from Main Street. We look for the best candidates that are out there and we allow the districts that they want to represent select them," said Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer, head of the House Republican campaign arm. "I think that's what's changed around here, rather than having Washington say, 'This is the right person for the seat.'"

ABORTION POLITICS

Despite disturbing signs as 2022 begins, some Democrats insist there is cause for optimism. The pandemic, the economy and inflation will be critical factors to the party's success. But no issue may be bigger than a looming Supreme Court decision on abortion rights. The conservative-leaning court is considering whether to weaken or even overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision, which legalized abortion across America.

Democrats are hopeful that a major shift on the politically charged case would help rally suburban women to their side — voters who lifted the party in 2018, though polling this year hasn't been conclusive

"We are the tortoise and they are the hare," said New York Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney, head of the House Democratic campaign arm. "I don't want to do anything to deprive them of the overconfidence that will lead them to take a nap while we go slowly chugging by them."

For now, however, the numbers are daunting for Democrats.

Just 33% of Americans say things in the country are on the right track, according to a recent Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll. Sixty-six percent say things are headed in the wrong direction. That's a stark departure from the first few months of Biden's term, when roughly half said things were going the right way.

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About one-third of Americans call national economic conditions "good," down from roughly half last March. Only 41% say they approve of Biden's stewardship, down from 60% in March.

"Even though the diagnostics are pretty tough for the president and Democrats, it's not because they love Republicans. The Republican Party has terrible standing with the American people," said John Anzalone, the pollster for Biden's presidential campaign. "This isn't people defaulting to Republicans because they like them. And that can catch up to them as the environment changes."

"I have to remind people that there will probably be, what, \$6 billion spent on this election cycle, and we'll spend \$3 billion," Anzalone continued. "We have something to say."

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writers Jeff Amy in Decatur, Georgia; Jill Colvin in New York; Hannah Fingerhut in Washington; and Nicholas Riccardi in Denver contributed to this report.

## Putin wishes Russians happier new year, hails their strength

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday wished Russians positive changes in the new year, hailing their solidarity and strength in the face of tough challenges like the coronavirus pandemic.

In a televised address broadcast just before midnight in each of Russia's 11 time zones, Putin said the nation of nearly 146 million has faced "colossal challenges but has learned to live in those harsh conditions and solve difficult tasks thanks to our solidarity."

"We have continued to battle the dangerous pandemic that has engulfed all continents and isn't retreating yet," Putin said. "The treacherous disease has claimed tens of thousands of lives. I would like to express words of sincere support to all those who lost their dear ones."

Russia's state coronavirus task force has registered a total of about 10.5 million confirmed infections and 308,860 deaths, but the state statistics agency that uses broader criteria in its tallying system has reported nearly 626,000 virus-linked deaths in Russia since the start of the pandemic.

Russia has seen a drop in contagion in recent weeks with new daily infections currently just above 20,000 after peaking at more than 40,000 in early November. The government so far has reported only about 100 infections with the new omicron variant, but it is bracing up for a new wave of contagion after the holidays.

Just 51% of Russians have been fully vaccinated, and the government has sought to speed up the uptake, claiming that Russia's Sputnik V vaccine and other domestically designed shots offer a good protection from the omicron variant.

Authorities across Russia have restricted access to museums, theaters and concerts allowing only those who have been vaccinated or tested negative, but restaurants, clubs and cinemas have remained accessible for all in most regions. Moscow and other big cities planned to mark the New Year with fireworks and shopping malls were brimming with customers on a holiday buying spree.

"We are all united by the hope for positive changes in the future," Putin said, adding that raising living standards is the main goal that would "help make Russia even stronger."

Putin's address to the nation was broadcast hours after his phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden that focused on next month's talks to discuss Moscow's demand for Western security guarantees amid a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine.

Biden reaffirmed the U.S. threat of new sanctions against Russia in case of an escalation or invasion, to which Putin responded with a warning of his own that such a U.S. move could lead to a complete rupture of ties between the nations.

"We have firmly and consistently defended our national interests, the security of the country and its citizens," Putin said.

Russian authorities have tightened controls over the domestic political scene this year, with Putin's main political foe Alexei Navalny handed a 2 1/2 year prison sentence, his organizations outlawed as "extremist" and scores of media outlets, civil society groups and activists branded "foreign agents," a pejorative label implying additional government scrutiny.

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Earlier this week, Russia's court capped a year of crackdown by shutting the country's oldest and most prominent human rights group in a move that drew an international outrage.

Putin, 69, who has been in power for more than two decades — longer than any other Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin — is entitled to seek two more six-year terms and remain in power until 2036. He has said he would decide later whether to run again in 2024.

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

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 1, the first day of 2022. There are 364 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that slaves in rebel states shall be "forever free."

On this date:

In 1892, the Ellis Island Immigrant Station in New York formally opened.

In 1942, the Rose Bowl was played in Durham, North Carolina, because of security concerns in the wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor; Oregon State defeated Duke, 20-16.

In 1953, country singer Hank Williams Sr., 29, was discovered dead in the back seat of his car during a stop in Oak Hill, West Virginia, while he was being driven to a concert date in Canton, Ohio.

In 1954, NBC broadcast the first coast-to-coast color TV program as it presented live coverage of the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California.

In 1959, Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries overthrew Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista, who fled to the Dominican Republic.

In 1975, a jury in Washington found Nixon administration officials John N. Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and Robert C. Mardian guilty of charges related to the Watergate cover-up (Mardian's conviction for conspiracy was later overturned on appeal).

In 1979, the United States and China held celebrations in Washington and Beijing to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In 1984, the breakup of AT&T took place as the telecommunications giant was divested of its 22 Bell System companies under terms of an antitrust agreement.

In 1985, the music cable channel VH-1 made its debut with a video of Marvin Gaye performing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

In 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two new countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

In 2006, President George W. Bush strongly defended his domestic spying program, calling it legal as well as vital to thwarting terrorist attacks. The Medicare prescription drug plan went into effect.

In 2014, the nation's first legal recreational pot shops opened in Colorado at 8 a.m. Mountain time.

Ten years ago: A second NASA probe braked into orbit around the moon, a day after its twin probe executed the same maneuver; it was part of the latest mission to understand how Earth's closest neighbor formed.

Five years ago: Antonio Guterres took the reins of the United Nations as its new secretary-general. A gunman killed 39 New Year's revelers at a crowded nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey, in an attack claimed by Islamic State. At least 57 inmates were killed in a prison riot in the northern Brazilian state of Amazonas.

One year ago: The number of confirmed U.S. coronavirus cases surpassed 20 million, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. At a rare New Year's Day session, Senate Republicans rejected President Donald Trump's demand for \$2,000 COVID-19 aid checks. The Senate overrode Trump's veto of a defense policy bill after an earlier House vote to override; it was the first time Congress had overridden a Trump veto, and it came just weeks before he was to leave the White House. Floyd Little, the versatile running

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back who starred at Syracuse and for the Denver Broncos, died at his Nevada home at 78 after a long bout with cancer. Top-ranked Alabama beat Notre Dame 31-14 in the Rose Bowl, and No. 3 Ohio State beat Clemson 49-28 to reach the national championship game.

Today's Birthdays: Documentary maker Frederick Wiseman is 92. Actor Frank Langella is 84. Rock singer-musician Country Joe McDonald is 80. Writer-comedian Don Novello is 79. Actor Rick Hurst is 76. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., is 68. The former head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, is 66. Rapper Grandmaster Flash is 64. Actor Renn Woods is 64. Actor Dedee Pfeiffer is 58. Country singer Brian Flynn (Flynnville Train) is 56. Actor Morris Chestnut is 53. R&B singer Tank is 46. Model Elin Nordegren is 42. Actor Jonas Armstrong is 41. Actor Eden Riegel is 41. Olympic gold medal ice dancer Meryl Davis is 35. Rock musician Noah Sierota (Echosmith) is 26.