

# 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

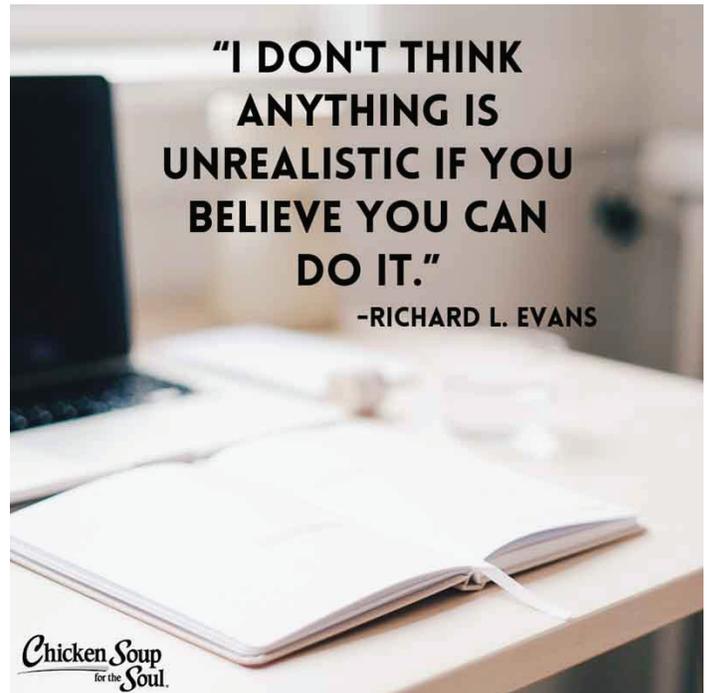
Boys' Basketball hosts Webster Area. C game starts at 5 p.m. with JV and Varsity to follow.

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

### Tuesday, Jan. 11

5 p.m.: 7th/8th grade basketball game with Wauabay-Summit at Waubay. Single game so they may play extra quarters.

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



6 p.m.: Girls' Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

### 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.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

It was a classic late-season game for two Central division rivals, the temperatures hovering in the single digits and a lot on the line for both teams. The Vikings were trying to extend their season while the Packers were looking to lock up home-field advantage and a first-round bye in the playoffs.

The odds were against the Vikings from making the playoffs and even beating the Green Bay Packers in Lambeau Field, but trying to do it with your 6'5" backup quarterback was a tall task. Kirk Cousins was out due to Covid-19. Mike Zimmer predicted this could happen in the most inopportune time when he learned that Kirk wasn't getting vaccinated. They stayed with the Packers early, but after four straight three and outs in the first half, the defense tired out and allowed the Packers to take control at halftime. Green Bay wins the game 37-10, ending the playoff hopes for the Vikings.

After giving up a field goal to start the game, the Vikings appeared to have some momentum moving the ball down the field only to have a 25-yard play negated on an illegal downfield penalty on Christian Darrisaw. The team rarely put any pressure on Rodgers, while wide receivers Davante Adams and Allan Lazard made the Viking defensive backs look silly. The Packers lead at halftime, 20-3.

The second half began much like the first half as the Vikings' punt after going three and out. The Packers quickly took advantage and marched down the field for an AJ Dillon short touchdown run. After giving up another field goal, the Vikings scored a 14-yard touchdown pass to KJ Osborn. The play of the game came on this drive when a deflected pass over the middle ended up in the hands of center Garrett Bradbury, who proceeded to scamper 21 yards to set up the score by Osborn.

The Packers score another AJ Dillon touchdown in the fourth quarter to seal the game.

Statistically, the Packers dominated offensively, outgaining the Vikings 482 to 206 yards while controlling the time of possession from 38:00 to 22:00.

Where does this take the Vikings? Since investing \$88 million in a franchise quarterback after going 13-3 in 2017, they have missed the playoffs for the second year in a row and the third time in four Kirk Cousins seasons. The quarterback investment, along with injuries, has cost the Vikings defense to suffer, going from a top ten unit to being one of the worst in the NFL. Mike Zimmer is frequently referred to as a defensive guru, but you can't succeed if the talent is not there. Bud Grant used to say it's easy being a good coach when you have great players. That may no longer be the case for this aging Viking defense.

Offensively, the Vikings have played pretty well, but there is a lot of angst around the conservative play-calling despite averaging almost 25 points per game. The Viking offensive line is young and improving, and they have a ton of talent at the running back and wide receiver positions. The main question is do they stick with Cousins and his \$42 million salary-cap number in 2022?

The final game will come against another Central Division rival in the Chicago Bears. The Vikings beat the Bears on Monday night just a few weeks ago, but now both teams will be looking to next year. The chatter around the league is both head coaches may be coaching their last game, and the teams will be in the market for a new direction in 2022. The Bears come in after winning two in a row since losing to the Vikings, looking to avenge the earlier season loss on Monday night. A lot of players will be auditioning for next year.

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## Northern Rallies in 3-Point OT Victory over MSU Moorhead

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team battled back from a double digit deficit on Sunday evening, defeating MSU Moorhead in double overtime. The Wolves went on a 14-0 run in the final four minutes of regulation to force the deciding overtime periods.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 83, MSUM 80 (2 OT)

Records: NSU 10-6 (4-4 NSIC), MSUM 9-8 (4-4 NSIC)

Attendance: 2271

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- The Wolves tallied 28 points in the first and 40 in the second, sending the game to extras
- NSU added eight points in the first overtime frame and another seven in the second
- Northern shot 42.3% from the floor, 42.4% from the 3-point line, and 81.8% from the foul line in the win
- The Wolves out-rebounded the Dragons 40-35, scoring 14 second chance points
- They added a game high 17 assists, as well as four blocks and eight steals
- In total, NSU recorded 32 points in the paint, 17 points off turnovers, and 15 points off the bench in a game that saw five lead changes
- Jacksen Moni led three Wolves in double figures, shooting a team high 66.7% from the field, just one point shy of his career high

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Jacksen Moni: 26 points, 8 rebounds, 10-of-15, 2 steals, 2 blocks
- Sam Masten: 15 points, 8 rebounds, 6 assists
- Jordan Belka: 13 points, 6 rebounds, 6-of-11, 1 block
- Kobe Busch: 9 points, 4 rebounds, 3 steals

### UP NEXT

Northern State travels to Wayne State and Augustana next Friday and Saturday. Game times are set for 5:30 p.m. on Friday versus the Wildcats and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday against the Vikings.

## Humanity in Medicine

What does it mean to practice humanity in medicine? The phrase is used as a tagline and in book titles. Humanity and compassion in medicine is touted as something to aspire to, a noble accomplishment. But in reality, the biomedical model of health, the business model for healthcare, is not set up to support it. Algorithms and best practices set forth by insurance companies and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid do not account for the time required to establish meaningful human interaction between patient and caregiver.



Joy Falkenburg, MD

This conundrum can be frustrating. Understanding the nuances of each individual patient and each situation cannot be rushed. Yet opting to practice 'slow medicine' can have negative ramifications; constantly running behind schedule, having more work than you can handle and knowing that there are more critical and needy patients waiting to be seen.

Thankfully, the benefits far outweigh the frustrations. Medical professionals who choose to share in the human condition with patients are better able to care for the whole person in a way that is nurturing and fulfilling to both parties. When we are successful in this effort to see our own fear and our own death and our own vulnerability in our patients, we will meet them and treat them with an open mind and open heart. We will listen actively, without bias or judgement and we will do what is best for them in this moment in their life.

Regardless of our profession, experiencing a sense of powerlessness can creep into us and lead to isolation and avoidance. We can lose connectedness with our own emotions and our own self. Striving to have an awareness and acceptance of grief, pain and knowing when to accept our inability to change circumstances can help us avoid feelings of helplessness.

Being a doctor helped create who I am as a person. I am grateful for all the patients who have enriched my life and taught me lessons of humility, joy, interconnectedness, and impermanence.

My patients and my experiences have indeed opened my mind and my heart. In my exam rooms, my patients and I collaborate in a communion of sorts. We share and connect as we learn about and better understand each other. That is what it means to practice humanity in medicine.

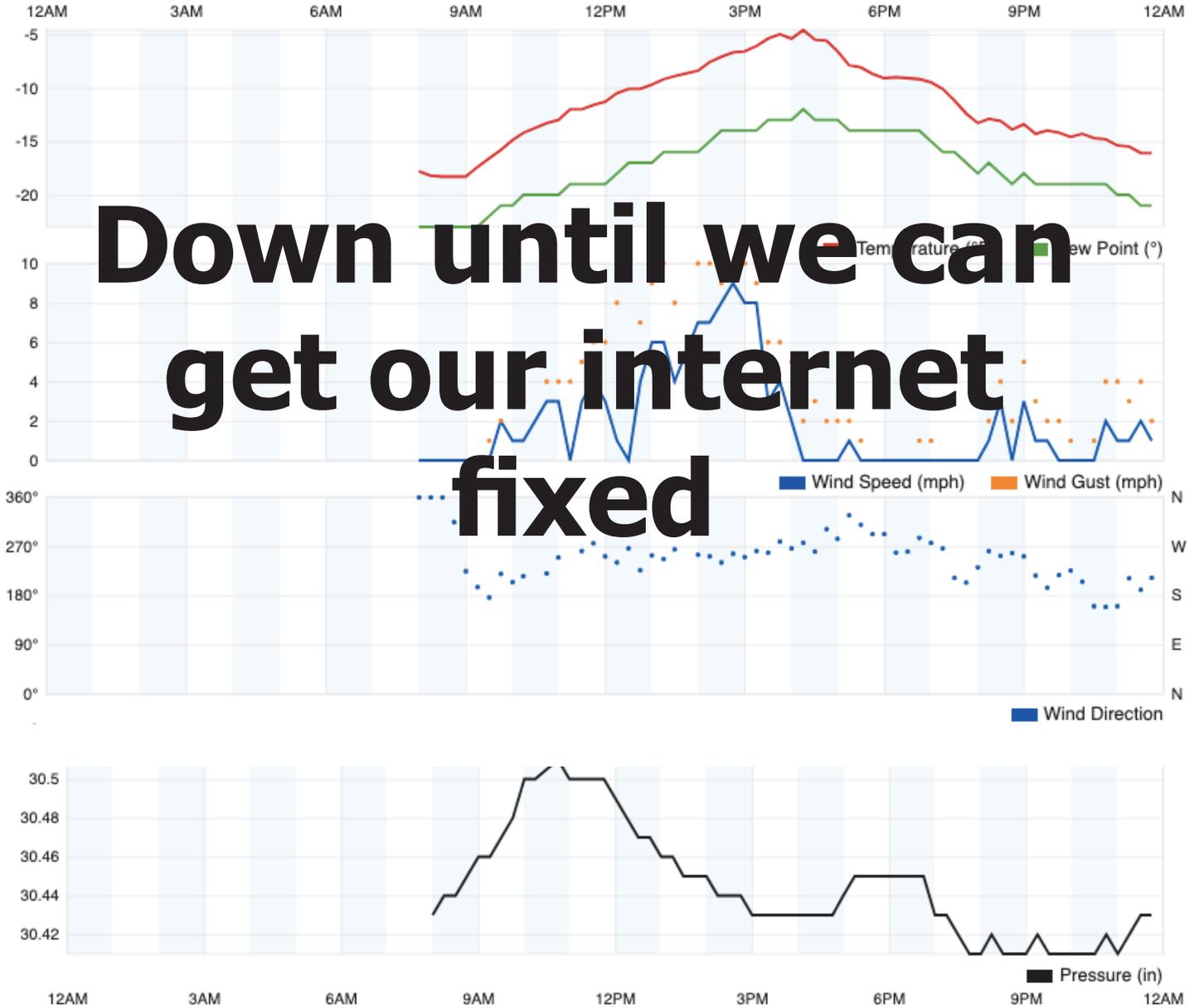
Perhaps these words by one of my favorite authors David Whyte say it best, "Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the conversation. Pay attention to everything in the world as if it is alive. Realize everything has its own discrete existence outside your story. By doing this, you open to the gifts and lessons the world has to give you."

Joy Falkenburg, M.D., a family medicine physician in Custer, South Dakota, is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist and guest host this week on the Prairie Doc® television show. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



**Down until we can  
get our internet  
fixed**

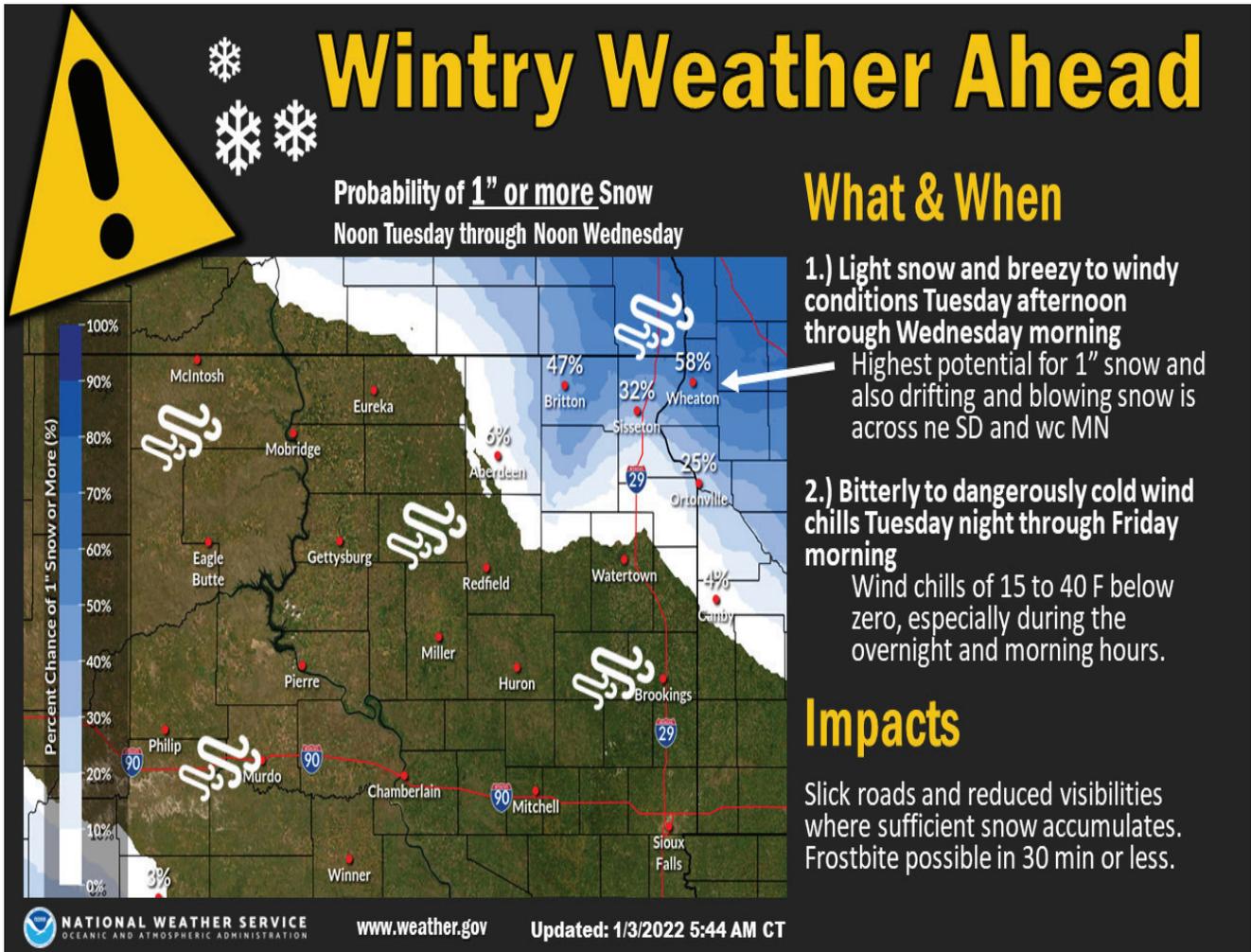
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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery
High: 20 °F	Low: 4 °F	High: 14 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 1 °F

## Wintry Weather Ahead

Probability of 1" or more Snow  
Noon Tuesday through Noon Wednesday



**What & When**

- 1.) Light snow and breezy to windy conditions Tuesday afternoon through Wednesday morning  
Highest potential for 1" snow and also drifting and blowing snow is across ne SD and wc MN
- 2.) Bitterly to dangerously cold wind chills Tuesday night through Friday morning  
Wind chills of 15 to 40 F below zero, especially during the overnight and morning hours.

**Impacts**

Slick roads and reduced visibilities where sufficient snow accumulates. Frostbite possible in 30 min or less.

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
www.weather.gov Updated: 1/3/2022 5:44 AM CT

Enjoy the near normal temperatures today with highs in the upper teens to mid 30s across the area, because an area of low pressure will bring wind gusts of 35 to 45+ mph, some snow, and much colder air beginning Tuesday. Travel may be impacted across portions of northeastern SD and west central MN, where accumulating snow and blowing snow is most likely.

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## Today in Weather History

January 3, 1997: A powerful area of low pressure and deep Arctic high pressure brought almost all winter elements to central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota from the afternoon of the 3rd to the morning of the 5th. The storm began with widespread freezing rain, mainly over northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, where significant accumulations of ice occurred on roads, trees, and power lines. Late in the evening of the 3rd, the freezing rain changed to sleet and then snow, with substantial snowfall accumulations of 6 to as much as 27 inches by late on the 4th. As the Arctic high pressure pushed in through the morning and afternoon of the 4th, northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph gusting to 55 mph, creating widespread blizzard conditions, drifts up to 20 feet, and wind chills from 40 to 70 below. The massive accumulation of ice and snow across parts of central and mainly across northeast South Dakota resulted in the roof collapse of over 150 rural buildings. The roofs collapsed onto farm machinery and livestock with a lot of the machinery damaged and a lot of animals injured or killed. The collapse of so many buildings from snow and ice was believed to be the first in this area. On most other buildings, the snow had to be shoveled or blown off. One man was killed in west-central Minnesota as he was trying to shovel snow off the roof of a building. One roof collapse near Lake Poinsett, seven west of Estelline, killed four horses, damaged a boat, and flattened a car. The significant snow drifts buried a few homes during the storm. Many power outages also occurred across parts of central and northeast South Dakota as power lines and poles were downed from the heavy ice accumulation. Some people were without power for several days in the extreme cold conditions. The cities of Miranda, Rockham, Zell, Garden City, Bryant, Vienna, Glenham, Hazel, and other cities were without power for many hours. Some of the communities were out of power for up to 2 days.

In Aberdeen, heavy snow blocking a furnace exhaust vent sent three family members to the hospital for carbon monoxide poisoning. Also, in Aberdeen, the snowmobile club, the drift busters, were called upon for the first time in several years to deliver medicine, take patients to the hospital, and carry essential workers to work and home. Emergencies were challenging to respond to, making many hours to short distances. Throughout central and northeast South Dakota, many businesses and grocery stores were closed. Interstates 29 and 90 were both closed for a few days, along with most state highways. The rest of the roads were either blocked by huge drifts or had one-lane traffic. Snowplows were called off the streets until conditions improved, and when they did start to clear the roads, they worked 12 to 18 hour days. Many vehicles went into the ditch, with mainly minor injuries. Some people had to be rescued. Travelers and truckers were stranded for several days until the roads opened. When Interstate-29 reopened, there was a logjam of vehicles for 3 miles. One Watertown policeman said he has never seen an impasse as bad as this in 28 years. Area airports were closed, or flights were canceled or delayed. The mail was delayed for several days, most activities were canceled or postponed, and many schools closed on the 6th. The heavy snowfall from this storm brought the widespread snowpack up to 2 to 5 feet. For the winter season so far, the area had record snowfall and recorded cold. Some of the snowfall amounts include 6 inches at McLaughlin, 8 inches 22 SSW Keldron and 4 NW Onida, 9 inches at Pollock, Timber Lake, Highmore, Mobridge, and Kennebec, 10 inches at Castlewood, Clear Lake, Miller, Fort Thompson, and Clark. Snowfall amounts of 1 to over 2 feet include 12 inches at Eureka, and Redfield, 13 inches at Selby and Aberdeen, 14 inches at Pierre and Roscoe, 15 inches at Ortonville MN, 16 inches at Mellette and Browns Valley, MN 18 inches at Faulkton and 1 ENE Stephan, 20 inches at Webster, 22 inches at Britton, 24 inches at Sisseton, 26 inches 10 NW Britton, and 27 inches at Wheaton.

1824: The oldest known weather information in Oklahoma begins on this today at Fort Gibson in 1824. Now known as Muskogee County.

1883: A remarkably brilliant meteor display occurred on the night of January 3rd. The phenomenon was observed at stations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. This meteor was described as having resembled a large, bright ball of fire.

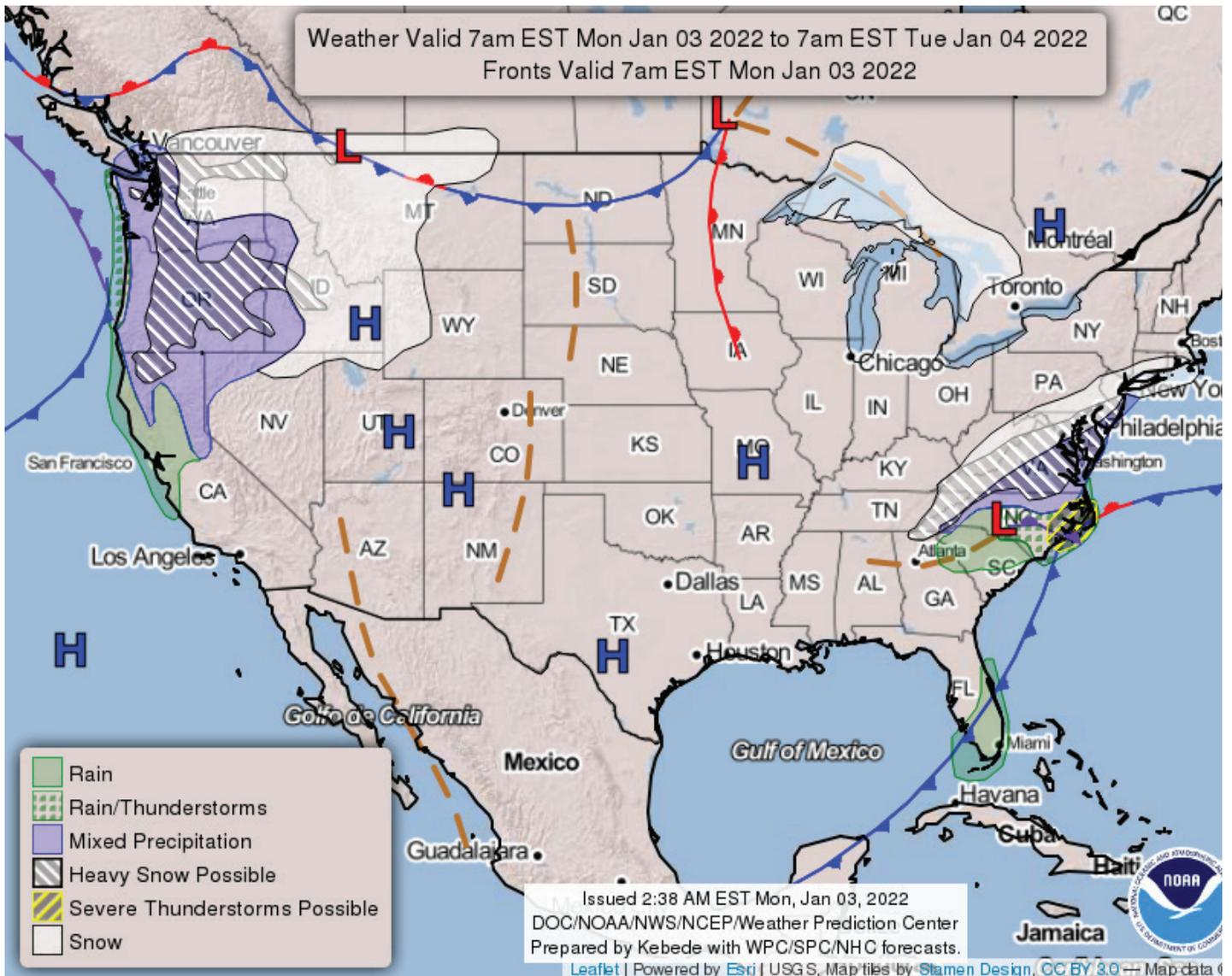
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 17 °F at 4:19 PM**  
**Low Temp: -18 °F at 2:43 AM**  
**Wind: 22 mph**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 51° in 1962**  
**Record Low: -34° in 1912**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 3°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.06**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.06**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:03:35 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:21 AM**



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## WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE

Johnny Bartek grew up in Freehold, New Jersey. He attended one year of high school before "flunking out" at age 16. For the next several years he worked at various jobs but could not find one that he enjoyed. Dissatisfied with his opportunities at home he decided to join the Army Air Force soon after turning 18. He became a flight mechanic and was aboard the aircraft carrying Captain Eddie Rickenbacker that was lost at sea because of bad weather and inadequate navigation equipment. The crew spent three weeks at sea in a crowded life raft, and all but one survived the horrific, harrowing ordeal.

Very few supplies were on the raft, and after three days, they ran out of food and water. One of the few items on the raft was a Bible. The inscription in the Bible read "A Sacred Token, to John F. Bartek by the First Baptist Church, Freehold, NJ, April 7, 1942."

On the eighth day, a few minutes after they read a portion of Scripture from the Bible, a seagull landed on the head of Captain Rickenbacker which became food and fish bait to help keep the men alive until they were rescued. The men on the raft believed that it was a sign from God.

What verse did they read? "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'...for...your Heavenly Father knows that you need them."

Many years before those eight men on that raft needed nourishment the Psalmist wrote, "He sent forth His Word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave."

Prayer: How faithful You are, Father, to keep Your Word, meet our every need and protect us from danger. Your Word does indeed heal and rescue us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today:- He sent forth His Word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave. Psalm 107:20

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## 2021 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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## News from the Associated Press

### North Dakota tourism rebounds despite Canada border closure

By JACK DURA The Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Outdoor recreation surged this year amid the coronavirus pandemic, but the 20-month U.S.-Canada border closure to nonessential travel cut into North Dakota's tourism industry.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, the state's No. 1 tourist attraction, is on track to have its best visitation since 1978, surpassing 791,000 visitors through October.

North Dakota state parks had a consecutive record year for camping nights: nearly 95,000 nights at campsites and cabins.

The Medora Musical had its second-best attendance in 56 years, just shy of 124,000 people.

"Outdoors this year were huge," state Tourism Division Director Sara Otte Coleman said.

Final year statistics are still a couple of months away, "but our third-quarter numbers look really strong," she said.

Last year, 18.7 million visitors spent \$2.1 billion in North Dakota, a 32% drop from 2019 spending due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to a Tourism Economics report.

Through September of this year, visits to major attractions in North Dakota were up 87% over the same period last year, according to a state marketing update.

The national park had increased monthly visitation for several months in 2021, including ones in winter, "not traditionally the July and August months that you would think about," Otte Coleman said.

"That's kind of exciting, too, because it shows us that our season is lengthening," she said.

Many park visitors this year "expressed an interest in enjoying the beautiful open spaces the North Dakota Badlands have to offer," Park Deputy Superintendent Maureen McGee-Ballinger said. "Just as Theodore Roosevelt found the Badlands a healing space, so do many of our visitors."

The park through October had seen 48% more visitors than last year, though the park did close for a few weeks in 2020 due to the pandemic and staffing, The Bismarck Tribune reported.

The state Parks and Recreation Department is "looking at having another busy season in 2022" with the reopening of the border to nonessential travel last month, spokeswoman Kristin Byram said.

Despite the busy park season, the Fort Lincoln Trolley, which runs from Mandan to Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park south of the city, suspended operations in 2021 due to pandemic difficulties and trouble finding workers.

Hotel occupancy through October rose 21% over last year, though statewide hotel occupancy rates have not surpassed 2019, according to Otte Coleman.

And the state is still waiting for business travel to return to pre-pandemic levels, she said.

Taxable sales and purchases for arts, entertainment and recreation, and for accommodation and food service, for the first half of 2021 were up 29% and 24%, respectively, over the same period in 2020, according to the state Tax Office.

But the coronavirus pandemic still took a bite out of tourism this year, largely because of the U.S.-Canada border closure for over a year and a half.

Canadians were missing from northern North Dakota events and attractions and also from Medora, where Western Edge Books, Artwork, Music owner Doug Ellison said "We used to see a lot of Canadian traffic, mainly going to and from the Black Hills."

The Tourism Division estimates North Dakota lost about \$259 million in Canadian visitor spending due to the border closure, according to Otte Coleman.

But attractions such as the National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown, Papa's Pumpkin Patch in Bismarck and ND Country Fest in New Salem "had stellar years," she said.

The Tourism Division's website traffic, "our No. 1 signal of intent to travel," was up about 50% last year over 2019, and this year rose nearly 22% over the record 2020 online traffic, according to Otte Coleman.

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Ninety-three percent of that traffic is from first-timers to the site, she said.

"That tells us that our marketing's working, and that people are piquing interest ... and people are taking that next step to learn more," Otte Coleman said.

Web traffic from Canada jumped in the last two months, she added.

Visitation from some states including Florida, Maine, Pennsylvania and Washington doubled this year from 2020, according to a Tourism Division report.

The division has focused on Illinois, a market with "potential for large numbers" of visitors, and newly on Denver, due to the population of ex-North Dakotans who have moved there, many for outdoor recreation, according to Otte Coleman.

Colorado has had a lot more pressure on its outdoors, she said. North Dakota's new marketing campaign boosted Tourism Division website traffic from the Centennial State by 141%.

"That (strategy) really focused on the fact that we still have pristine, wide open spaces without crowds," she said.

Travel and tourism have "such a statewide impact" compared to other industries, Otte Coleman said.

Visitors spend more on restaurants and retail than on accommodations, she said.

"Maybe (some counties only) have a campground, and they're known for a great fishing lake, or they may just have really limited resources, but they still get traffic and travelers spending money, which helps sustain those businesses in the community," she said.

## Dakota, Ojibwe memorial ride draws large crowd from 2 states

By JORDAN SMITH Mankato Free Press

MANKATO, Minn. (AP) — Todd Finney and five generations of his Dakota family members stood out in the cold last weekend at the spot where, exactly 159 years ago, 38 Dakota akicita — warriors — were hanged at the order of a U.S. president.

A Wahpekute Dakota from Medford, Finney said his people were told they would never be able to come back to Mankato. The return each year of the Dakota Wokiksuye Memorial Ride, which his uncle Jim Miller took part in founding in 2005, ensures that dozens of Dakota continue to honor their ancestors in Reconciliation Park.

"To see this many people here," Finney said to a large crowd gathered around the buffalo monument, vapor clouding from his breath, "people that come in a good way — it's hard for me not to cry tears of joy."

Men, women and children of the Dakota and Ojibwe nations rode 330 miles on horseback from South Dakota over 17 days. Native American runners, supported by a caravan, also traveled to Mankato for the 34th annual 38+2 Memorial Run, leaving Fort Snelling in St. Paul on Christmas Day, the Mankato Free Press reported.

The traveling groups and other spectators gathered at the site where on Dec. 26, 1862, about 4,000 spectators came to watch 38 Dakota men die.

The hangings followed the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, which arose when the government failed to provide goods promised to the Dakota in contentious treaty negotiations led by Henry Sibley, who later became Minnesota's first governor.

The July 1851 Treaty of Traverse Des Sioux was an agreement to exchange vast swaths of Dakota homeland for payments and goods. The Dakota believed they would get a lump-sum land payment but were given only \$305,000. Much of the immediate cash went to cover debts fur traders such as Sibley claimed were owed to them.

The U.S. said the remainder would be doled out in annual payments of money and goods.

After a bad crop year and widespread hunger in 1861, the payment owed to the Dakota in June 1862 didn't arrive on time. A federal agent refused to give them food without the money.

After a disagreement about whether to steal a white farmer's eggs, four Dakota men shot and killed five settlers in Acton on Aug. 17, 1862. A band of Dakota agreed to fight area settlers after the men reported their killings and persuaded a reluctant Chief Little Crow.

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In a short period that fall, estimates say more than 600 white settlers and 75-100 Dakota were killed.

The initial list of Dakota to be hanged, after haphazard trials convened by Sibley, numbered 303. Dismayed at the quantity, the office of President Abraham Lincoln reviewed trial transcripts and ordered that only men guilty of raping women be hanged. When only two men were found guilty of rape, Lincoln expanded the criteria to include those who had participated in "massacres" of civilians rather than just "battles." He then made his final decision and forwarded a list of 39 names to Sibley. The number was later reduced to 38.

It remains the largest mass execution in American history.

Two more Dakota, Medicine Bottle and Shakopee, were hanged two years later.

Finney said the event seeks to promote history that subverts narratives long told by U.S. victors of the Dakota war with white settlers. His favorite moment came in 2019, when Mankato native Gov. Tim Walz attended the ceremony and gave a tearful apology.

He said Walz quietly asked leaders of the event, "What more can we do?"

Finney told him nothing was needed but to continue the process of healing and sharing his ancestors' story.

"Healing is a process," Finney said Sunday. "Forgiveness is a gift."

Speakers also used the memorial to advocate for current issues plaguing Native Americans.

Mary Kunesh, the first Indigenous woman elected to the Minnesota Senate, led a task force that focused for 18 months on investigating cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The effort culminated this year with a 163-page report to the Legislature and creation of a statewide Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office.

Several others lamented the imprisonment of Leonard Peltier, who for 44 years has been behind bars for his alleged involvement in the 1975 killing of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Peltier says he was present for the shoot-out, which also left one Native American dead, but steadfastly denies having killed anyone.

Riders carried a staff made for Peltier and had a moment of silence to pray for the man whom human rights groups designate a political prisoner. A 77-year-old diabetic with heart problems, Peltier has grown increasingly frail in prison.

Finney and others hope the chosen theme of Reconciliation Park, "Forgive everyone everything," resonates as the Dakota seek to rebuild their culture.

"If you hear my voice," Finney said, "you are my relative."

## **Snow moves into mid-Atlantic; federal offices closed in DC**

The Associated Press undefined

A winter storm packing heavy snow was blowing into the nation's capital on Monday, closing government offices and schools with fierce winds and as much as 10 inches of snow forecast for the District of Columbia, northern Virginia and central Maryland through the afternoon.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for the area until 4 p.m. EST Monday. Wind gusts of up to 35 mph (56 kph) were forecast, and travel was expected to be very difficult because of the hazardous conditions, the weather service said.

"The timing of this isn't great," said National Weather Service meteorologist David Roth. "For the D.C. area, it's morning rush hour. At least for places to the northeast, it'll be closer to midday."

More than half the flights were delayed or cancelled Monday morning at Ronald Reagan National Airport, Baltimore/Washington International Airport and Washington Dulles International Airport, according to FlightAware.com's misery map. A quarter of the flights at New York's three major airports

The Weather Prediction Center said 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow per hour could fall in some areas, and thunder snow was possible. Localized snowfall totals could reach 10 inches (25 centimeters).

Snow began falling Sunday night in parts of Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee. A winter storm warning was also issued in parts of northern Alabama and southern Tennessee, and portions of Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and West Virginia. By early Monday, more than 400,000 customers were without power in

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Tennessee, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia.

Impacts from the winter storm were expected across the South, Appalachian states, the mid-Atlantic and up the East Coast.

In Washington, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management announced that federal offices in the area would be closed on Monday. Emergency employees and telework employees would continue to work, the OPM said on its website.

Several school districts in the region said they would be closed, delayed or have virtual learning Monday. DC Public Schools said students and staff wouldn't be returning to school until Thursday.

Associated Press reporter Julie Walker contributed from New York.

## **Brazilian President Bolsonaro hospitalized in Sao Paulo**

SAO PAULO, Brazil (AP) — Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was taken to a Sao Paulo hospital for tests early Monday after experiencing abdominal discomfort, the government said.

Bolsonaro is "doing well" and further information will be provided later in a medical bulletin, a government statement published by the Globo media outlet said.

Bolsonaro returned to the financial capital during the night from a New Year break on the coast and was immediately taken to Hospital Vila Nova Star, according to Globo.

Globo quoted Bolsonaro's doctor, Antônio Luiz Macedo, as saying Bolsonaro had stomach pains.

Macedo operated on Bolsonaro after he was stabbed at a political rally in 2018.

Globo said that Macedo was on holiday in the Bahamas and was waiting for a flight back to Brazil to see Bolsonaro, who reportedly had no public appearances scheduled on Monday.

Since his stabbing during the 2018 presidential election, Bolsonaro has undergone stomach surgery several times.

Last July, he was hospitalized due to a severe case of hiccups.

## **Yemen rebels seize UAE ship; hackers hit Israeli newspaper**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels seized an Emirati-flagged ship in the Red Sea, officials said Monday, the latest sign of Mideast tensions as hackers targeted a major Israeli newspaper's website to mark America's 2020 killing of a top Iranian general.

The seizure of the Rwabee marks the latest assault in the Red Sea, a crucial route for international trade and energy shipments. The Iranian-backed Houthis acknowledged the incident off the coast of Hodeida, a long-contested prize of the grinding war in Yemen.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the hacking of the Jerusalem Post. The hackers replaced the Post's homepage with an image depicting a missile coming down from a fist bearing a ring long associated with Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian general killed by a U.S. drone strike in Iraq two years ago.

First word of the Rwabee's seizure came from the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which only said an attack targeted an unnamed vessel around midnight. The coordinates it offered corresponded to the Emirati-flagged landing craft Rwabee, which hadn't given its location via satellite-tracking data for hours, according to the website MarineTraffic.com.

A statement from the Saudi-led coalition, carried by state media in the kingdom, acknowledged the attack hours later, saying the Houthis had committed an act of "armed piracy" involving the vessel. The coalition asserted the ship carried medical equipment from a dismantled Saudi field hospital in the distant island of Socotra, without offering evidence.

"The Houthi militia must immediately release the ship, otherwise the coalition forces shall take all necessary measures and procedures to deal with this violation, including the use of force," Brig. Gen. Turki al-Malki said in a statement.

A Houthi military spokesman, Yahia Sarei, announced that rebel forces had seized what he described as

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an Emirati "military cargo ship" carrying equipment into Yemen's territorial waters "without any license" to engage in "hostile acts" against Yemen's stability. He said the rebels would offer more details on the seizure later.

An employee at the vessel's owners, Abu Dhabi-based Liwa Marine Services, told The Associated Press that the Rwabee appeared to have been the target but said they had no other information and declined to comment further. The employee did not give her name and hung up.

A similar incident happened in 2016 involving the Emirati vessel SWIFT-1, which had been sailing back and forth in the Red Sea between an Emirati troop base in Eritrea and Yemen. The vessel came under attack by Houthi forces in 2016. The Emirati government asserted the SWIFT-1 had carried humanitarian aid; U.N. experts later said of the claim that they were "unconvinced of its veracity."

In the attack targeting the Jerusalem Post's website, the image posted by the hackers depicts an exploding target from a recent Iranian military drill designed to look like the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center near the city of Dimona. The facility is already home to decades-old underground laboratories that reprocess the reactor's spent rods to obtain weapons-grade plutonium for Israel's nuclear bomb program.

Under its policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel neither confirms nor denies having atomic weapons.

In a tweet, the Post acknowledged being the target of hackers.

"We are aware of the apparent hacking of our website, alongside a direct threat to Israel," the English-language newspaper wrote. "We are working to resolve the issue & thank readers for your patience and understanding."

The newspaper later restored its website. It noted Iran-supporting hackers previously targeted its homepage in 2020 "with an illustration of Tel Aviv burning as then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu swam" with a life preserver.

There was no immediate response from the Israeli government. The hack comes after Israel's former military intelligence chief in late December publicly acknowledged his country was involved in Soleimani's killing. The U.S. drone killed Soleimani as he was leaving Baghdad's international airport.

In Iraq on Monday, troops shot down two so-called "suicide drones" at the Baghdad airport, American and Iraqi officials said. No group immediately claimed the attack, though one of the drones' wings had words "Soleimani's revenge" painted on it in Arabic. Militias backed by Iran have been suspected in similar assaults. No injuries or damage were reported in the incident.

Iran also did not immediately acknowledge the hack. However, the country has in recent days stepped up its commemorations of the slain Revolutionary Guard general. Memorial services were scheduled to be held Monday for Soleimani.

As the head of the Quds, or Jerusalem, Force of the Revolutionary Guard, Soleimani led all of its expeditionary forces and frequently shuttled between Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Quds Force members have deployed into Syria's long war to support President Bashar Assad, as well as into Iraq in the wake of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, a longtime foe of Tehran.

Soleimani rose to prominence by advising forces fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq and in Syria on behalf of the embattled Assad.

U.S. officials say the Guard under Soleimani taught Iraqi militants how to manufacture and use especially deadly roadside bombs against U.S. troops after the invasion of Iraq. Iran has denied that. Many Iranians to this day see Soleimani as a hero who fought Iran's enemies abroad.

Tensions have been high in the region amid a shadow war between Iran and Israel, as well as the collapse of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers after then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from the accord. Negotiations aimed at resuscitating the deal continue in Vienna.

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Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre in Dubai, Samy Magdy in Cairo and Qassim Abdul-Zahra in Baghdad contributed to this report.

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Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP](https://www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP).

## Hong Kong news site to shut; pro-Beijing lawmakers sworn in

By HUIZHONG WU and ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — A group of lawmakers loyal to China's Communist Party were sworn in to Hong Kong's Legislature on Monday following an election without opposition candidates, as yet another pro-democracy news outlet announced it could no longer operate amid a growing crackdown on freedoms in the territory.

The former British colony that was returned to China in 1997 was once known as a haven for dissent and freedoms of the press and expression not seen on the mainland. But the central government in Beijing has clamped down in the last year, leading to the closure of independent news outlets, the removal of monuments to dissent, and a poorly attended election swept by pro-Beijing politicians.

The founders of news outlet Citizen News said the news site will stop publishing on Tuesday. While they have received no order to close, they said Monday that deteriorating media freedoms in the financial hub put them in an impossible position.

"We all love this place, deeply. Regrettably, what was ahead of us is not just pouring rains or blowing winds, but hurricanes and tsunamis," Citizen News said in a statement on Sunday, when it announced the closure.

The outlet is the third to close in recent months, following the shuttering of the territory's last pro-democracy print newspaper, Apple Daily, and the online site Stand News.

Citizen News was founded in 2017 by a group of veteran journalists. The small site focused on political news and analysis pieces, as well as investigations — and in recent months became a refuge for many journalists who had lost their jobs when other outlets closed or faced other pressures.

"With Apple Daily's sudden closure in the past summer, the journalism majors who were originally supposed to intern with them, Citizen News made arrangements to take them in, so that students wouldn't lose this internship opportunity," said Vivian W.W. Tam, a senior lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong's journalism school, in a public Facebook post. Tam declined to be interviewed.

But a new sweeping National Security Law — imposed on Hong Kong by China's central Legislature — has made independent reporting increasingly dangerous. Journalists and political activists have been arrested under the law, and it has forced civil rights groups and unions to disband. Many more activists have fled.

Meanwhile, new laws have changed how Hong Kongers vote for their representatives, including a requirement that any who seek office must be "patriots," effectively bringing the body under Beijing's control.

"What we understood about press freedom has changed a lot," said Chris Yeung, founder and chief writer at Citizen News.

Yeung said at a news conference on Monday that the trigger for their decision to shut down was what happened to Stand News. Last week, authorities raided Stand News and arrested seven people — including editors and former board members — for allegedly conspiring to publish seditious material. Stand News announced on the same day that it would cease to operate.

Two of Stand News' former editors who were arrested were later formally charged with sedition.

In the summer, authorities forced the closure of Apple Daily, the newspaper owned by media tycoon and democracy activist Jimmy Lai. Lai is currently in jail and was newly charged with sedition last week.

The Society of Publishers in Asia, a group based in Hong Kong that hosts an annual journalism award, said Monday it is concerned about pressures against independent media in the city.

"We call on the Hong Kong authorities to respect freedom of expression and the press which are vital to the success of our industry," it said in a statement.

The U.S. and other Western governments have condemned the limits on media and civil freedoms that Beijing promised to uphold for 50 years following Hong Kong's 1997 handover.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam last week defended the raid on Stand News, telling reporters that "inciting other people ... could not be condoned under the guise of news reporting."

The only remaining independent news media with reach in the city are Hong Kong Free Press, an English-language news outlet, and Inition, a Chinese-language news outlet which moved its headquarters to

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Singapore in August, but still has staff in the city.

Citizen News likened itself to a small dinghy in rough waters.

"At the center of a brewing storm, we found (ourselves) in a critical situation. In the face of a crisis, we must ensure the safety and well-being of everyone who are on board," it said.

This story has been updated to correct that the National Security Law was passed in 2020, not 2019.

Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan.

## Biden's words on voting rights meet call to action after 1/6

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has gotten the same troubling questions from worried world leaders, ones that he never thought he would hear.

"Is America going to be all right?" they ask. "What about democracy in America?"

While Biden has tried to offer America's allies assurances, he has only occasionally emphasized the gravity of the threat to democracy from the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and the repeated lie from the man he defeated, Donald Trump, that the 2020 election was stolen.

Now, as the anniversary of that deadly day nears, the president is being urged to reorder priorities and use the powers of his office to push voting rights legislation that its adherents say could be the only effective way to counter the rapidly emerging threats to the democratic process.

The tension in Biden's approach reflects his balancing of the urgent needs of Americans to make progress on the highly visible issues of the coronavirus pandemic and the economy and the less visible, but equally vital, issue of preserving trust in elections and government.

The president plans to deliver a speech on Jan. 6 focused on sustaining democracy — voting rights won't be part of the remarks but will be the topic of another speech soon, White House aides said.

In his recent commencement address at South Carolina State University, Biden's tone on the need for voting rights legislation took on added urgency.

"I've never seen anything like the unrelenting assault on the right to vote. Never," Biden said, adding, "This new sinister combination of voter suppression and election subversion, it's un-American, it's undemocratic, and sadly, it is unprecedented since Reconstruction."

And the world is taking notice. Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, also has said that the riot at the Capitol has altered the view many countries have of the United States.

"Jan. 6 has had a material impact on the view of the United States from the rest of the world, I believe from allies and adversaries alike," Sullivan said recently at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Allies look at it with concern and worry about the future of American democracy. Adversaries look at it, you know, more sort of rubbing their hands together and thinking, How do we take advantage of this in one way or another?"

In contrast, Republicans in numerous states are promoting efforts to influence future elections by installing sympathetic leaders in local election posts and backing for elective office some of those who participated in the insurrection.

White House officials insist Biden's relative reticence should not be interpreted as complacency with the growing movement to rewrite history surrounding the Jan. 6 riot. Rather, they say, the president believes the most effective way to combat Trump, election denialism and domestic extremism is to prove to the rest of the country — and to the world — that government can work.

"I know progress does not come fast enough. It never has," Biden said last fall. "The process of governing is frustrating and sometimes dispiriting. But I also know what's possible if we keep the pressure up, if we never give up, we keep the faith."

In Biden's view, many of Trump's voters didn't wholly embrace Trumpism. Instead, Trump exploited long-standing dissatisfaction with the nation's political, economic and social systems to build his coalition.

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So Biden tailored his first-year domestic agenda to combating what he believed to be the root causes of the unease — the shaky economy and the pandemic's drag on it — essentially to prove that government can work effectively.

He has directed federal law enforcement to shore up security at national institutions and improve communication systems and procedures that were in part to blame for U.S. Capitol Police being left overwhelmed for hours during the mob assault.

The Justice Department has undertaken the largest prosecution in its history, charging more than 700 defendants and still looking for more.

But it is voting rights that many Democrats and activists concerned about what may happen in 2022 and beyond are urging the president to make a key priority.

"The insurrection was part of a larger movement to suppress elections and overthrow our democracy," said Christina Baal, a longtime organizer and the executive director of Public Wise, a group that researches and publishes information on candidates running for office who support the election lies.

Baal said efforts to discredit election integrity not only galvanize Trump supporters, they also make other voters less likely to vote. "We know — we've done some research on trust in the system — if voters don't trust elections, they may not vote. This is part of a larger movement of voter suppression and why it's so necessary for Biden to speak out."

The House has approved far-reaching voting rights legislation, but Democratic Sens. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia have been impediments, saying they oppose changing Senate rules to get around a GOP filibuster of the bill.

That legislation would restore the Justice Department's ability to review changes to election laws in states with a history of discrimination, a provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. According to the Brennan Center, 19 states have recently passed laws making it harder to vote.

Manchin and Sinema have helped draft separate voting rights legislation, but it lacks enough Republican support to overcome the filibuster.

"People are taking sides as opposed to looking at what the institutional threats are to maintaining our democracy," said Democratic Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont, a candidate to replace Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy, who announced his retirement.

Welch was at the Capitol on Jan. 6, and the violence that day is etched in his memory.

"The norms that have been the bedrock of our democracy, the free and peaceful transition of power and the renunciation of violence, they've been shattered," he said.

After Biden's speech in South Carolina, Senate Democrats renewed their push to pass voting rights legislation early in 2022. And the president said in an interview with ABC that he supported creating an exception to the Senate filibuster if that's what it takes to pass voting rights legislation.

For Biden, who served four decades in the Senate, it was a remarkable concession and underscored the gravity of the threat. And, he acknowledged, he knows the world is watching to see how the nation responds — and wondering if the country's democracy will survive.

"Did you ever think you'd be asked that question by another leader?" Biden said.

## How will pandemic end? Omicron clouds forecasts for endgame

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writers

Pandemics do eventually end, even if omicron is complicating the question of when this one will. But it won't be like flipping a light switch: The world will have to learn to coexist with a virus that's not going away.

The ultra-contagious omicron mutant is pushing cases to all-time highs and causing chaos as an exhausted world struggles, again, to stem the spread. But this time, we're not starting from scratch.

Vaccines offer strong protection from serious illness, even if they don't always prevent a mild infection. Omicron doesn't appear to be as deadly as some earlier variants. And those who survive it will have some refreshed protection against other forms of the virus that still are circulating — and maybe the next mu-

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tant to emerge, too.

The newest variant is a warning about what will continue to happen “unless we really get serious about the endgame,” said Dr. Albert Ko, an infectious disease specialist at the Yale School of Public Health.

“Certainly COVID will be with us forever,” Ko added. “We’re never going to be able to eradicate or eliminate COVID, so we have to identify our goals.”

At some point, the World Health Organization will determine when enough countries have tamped down their COVID-19 cases sufficiently — or at least, hospitalizations and deaths — to declare the pandemic officially over. Exactly what that threshold will be isn’t clear.

Even when that happens, some parts of the world still will struggle — especially low-income countries that lack enough vaccines or treatments — while others more easily transition to what scientists call an “endemic” state.

They’re fuzzy distinctions, said infectious disease expert Stephen Kissler of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He defines the endemic period as reaching “some sort of acceptable steady state” to deal with COVID-19.

The omicron crisis shows we’re not there yet but “I do think we will reach a point where SARS-CoV-2 is endemic much like flu is endemic,” he said.

For comparison, COVID-19 has killed more than 800,000 Americans in two years while flu typically kills between 12,000 and 52,000 a year.

Exactly how much continuing COVID-19 illness and death the world will put up with is largely a social question, not a scientific one.

“We’re not going to get to a point where it’s 2019 again,” said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. “We’ve got to get people to think about risk tolerance.”

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, is looking ahead to controlling the virus in a way “that does not disrupt society, that does not disrupt the economy.”

Already the U.S. is sending signals that it’s on the road to whatever will become the new normal. The Biden administration says there are enough tools — vaccine boosters, new treatments and masking — to handle even the omicron threat without the shutdowns of the pandemic’s earlier days. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention just reduced to five days the time that people with COVID-19 must stay in isolation so they don’t sicken others, saying it’s become clear they’re most contagious early on.

India offers a glimpse of what it’s like to get to a stable level of COVID-19. Until recently, daily reported cases had remained below 10,000 for six months but only after a cost in lives “too traumatic to calculate” caused by the earlier delta variant, said Dr. T. Jacob John, former chief of virology at Christian Medical College in southern India.

Omicron now is fueling a rise in cases again, and the country in January will roll out vaccine boosters for frontline workers. But John said other endemic diseases, such as flu and measles, periodically cause outbreaks and the coronavirus will continue to flare up every so often even after omicron passes through.

Omicron is so hugely mutated that it is slipping past some of the protection of vaccinations or prior infection. But Dr. William Moss of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health expects “this virus will kind of max out” in its ability to make such big evolutionary jumps. “I don’t see this as kind of an endless cycle of new variants.”

One possible future many experts see: In the post-pandemic period, the virus causes colds for some and more serious illness for others, depending on their overall health, vaccine status and prior infections. Mutations will continue and might eventually require boosters every so often that are updated to better match new variants.

But human immune systems will continue to get better at recognizing and fighting back. Immunologist Ali Ellebedy at Washington University at St. Louis finds hope in the body’s amazing ability to remember germs it’s seen before and create multi-layer defenses.

Memory B cells are one of those layers, cells that live for years in the bone marrow, ready to swing into action and produce more antibodies when needed. But first those memory cells get trained in immune

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system boot camps called germinal centers, learning to do more than just make copies of their original antibodies.

In a new study, Ellebedy's team found Pfizer vaccinations rev up "T helper cells" that act as the drill sergeant in those training camps, driving production of more diverse and stronger antibodies that may work even if the virus changes again.

Ellebedy said baseline population immunity has improved so much that even as breakthrough infections inevitably continue, there will be a drop in severe illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths — regardless of the next variant.

"We are not the same population that we were in December of 2019," he said. "It's different ground now."

Think of a wildfire tearing through a forest after a drought, he said. That was 2020. Now, even with omicron, "it's not completely dry land," but wet enough "that made the fire harder to spread."

He foresees a day when someone gets a coronavirus infection, stays home two to three days "and then you move on. That hopefully will be the endgame."

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## Packers rout Vikings 37-10 in cold to take NFC's No. 1 seed

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers once again have made sure they won't have to leave Lambeau Field for the conference playoffs.

They're hoping it works out better for them this time.

Rodgers threw two touchdown passes, A.J. Dillon ran for two more scores and the Packers routed the Minnesota Vikings 37-10 on Sunday night to wrap up the NFC's No. 1 playoff seed.

"It definitely feels amazing," Dillon said. "It's something we're continuously working toward, we're striving toward, to get that. We know how important it is to have teams come through Lambeau."

Green Bay (13-3) is the lone NFL team with an unbeaten home record and has a chance to reach the Super Bowl without leaving Lambeau Field. Sunday night's game exemplified the potential advantage the Packers have playing home games in January, as the temperature was 11 degrees with a wind chill of 1 just before kickoff.

The Packers have won 13 straight regular-season home games but lost 31-26 at home to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in last season's NFC championship game. The Packers haven't reached the Super Bowl since their 2010 title and have lost in the conference championship game four of the last seven seasons.

"Last year we didn't get that good Green Bay weather," Rodgers said. "Tonight was one of those nights. We haven't had a game like this in a while temperature-wise. This was different. It is different, the whole feel of it. I feel like teams can break a little bit easier when it is this cold because there's an excuse — the weather."

Green Bay's victory, coupled with Philadelphia's 20-16 triumph at Washington earlier in the day, dropped the Vikings (7-9) from postseason contention and gave the Eagles a playoff berth. The Vikings were playing without quarterback Kirk Cousins after he was placed on the reserve/COVID-19 list Friday.

"Disappointing tonight," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said. "I didn't feel like we gave ourselves a chance to win."

Rodgers went 29 of 38 for 288 yards with a 20-yard touchdown pass to Allen Lazard and an 11-yarder to Adams, who caught 11 passes for 136 yards.

Adams has 117 receptions to break the Packers' season record he set last year.

"It means that I'm continuing to push," Adams said. "I said at the end of last year when I did my farewell post on Instagram at end of the season. At the end of that post, I said don't be surprised if I come back better, when I come back better. I hope people aren't surprised because I said it ahead of time."

Over his last six games, Rodgers has thrown 18 touchdown passes without an interception despite play-

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ing with an injured left pinky toe.

The reigning MVP has thrown 56 career regular-season touchdown passes against the Vikings, the most they have allowed to any quarterback. Brett Favre, who preceded Rodgers as the Packers' quarterback, threw 54 career touchdown passes against the Vikings before ending his career with Minnesota.

Packers coach Matt LaFleur broke George Seifert's 30-year-old NFL record for the most regular-season wins by a coach in his first three seasons. LaFleur has a 39-9 regular-season mark and 41-11 overall record. Seifert had a 38-10 regular-season record from 1989-91 in his first three seasons with the San Francisco 49ers.

Dillon ran for two second-half touchdowns and gained 63 yards on 15 carries. Aaron Jones gained 76 yards on just eight carries as the Packers outrushed the Vikings 174-27.

Minnesota had won its last two matchups with the Packers but never had much of a chance in this one without Cousins, who had thrown for 341 yards and three touchdowns in a 34-31 home victory over the Packers on Nov. 21.

The Packers have won five straight since that loss in Minnesota.

Sean Mannion started in place of Cousins and went 22 of 35 for 189 yards, including a 14-yard touchdown pass to K.J. Osborn. Mannion was making his third career start, and first since the final week of the 2019 regular season.

"I feel like Cousins gets the ball out a little bit faster than the quarterback that played today," Packers outside linebacker Rashan Gary said. "We just came to work as a defense and got the outlook that we wanted."

The Packers reached the red zone on three of their first four possessions but only had a 6-0 lead to show for it, thanks to Mason Crosby's two field goals. But they broke through by reaching the end zone on their next three possessions, including two touchdowns in the final 4 1/2 minutes of the first half.

"Give them credit," Zimmer said. "They're a good team and they got after us tonight."

## INJURED

Umpire Fred Bryan went to the medical tent and then headed to the locker room in the first quarter.

Vikings tight end Tyler Conklin left the game after taking a big hit from Packers safety Adrian Amos late in the third quarter. Amos' hit broke up a pass, though center Garrett Bradbury alertly snared the ball from the air and ran upfield for a 21-yard gain.

## UP NEX

Vikings: Host Chicago on Sunday.

Packers: At Detroit on Sunday.

More AP NFL coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Ashli Babbitt a martyr? Her past tells a more complex story

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first time Celeste Norris laid eyes on Ashli Babbitt, the future insurrectionist had just rammed her vehicle three times with an SUV and was pounding on the window, challenging her to a fight.

Norris says the bad blood between them began in 2015, when Babbitt engaged in a monthslong extra-marital affair with Norris' longtime live-in boyfriend. When she learned of the relationship, Norris called Babbitt's husband and told him she was cheating.

"She pulls up yelling and screaming," Norris said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, recounting the July 29, 2016, road-rage incident in Prince Frederick, Maryland. "It took me a good 30 seconds to figure out who she was. ... Just all sorts of expletives, telling me to get out of the car, that she was going to beat my ass."

Terrified and confused, Norris dialed 911 and waited for law enforcement. Babbitt was later charged with numerous misdemeanors.

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The attack on Norris is an example of erratic and sometimes threatening behavior by Babbitt, who was shot by a police officer while at the vanguard of the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol. Former President Donald Trump and his supporters have sought to portray her as a righteous martyr who was unjustly killed.

Trump has called her "an incredible person" and he even taped a posthumous birthday greeting to her in October. Trump has also demanded the Justice Department reinvestigate Babbitt's death, though the officer who shot her was cleared of any wrongdoing by two prior federal investigations.

But the life of the Air Force veteran from California, who died while wearing a Trump campaign flag wrapped around her shoulders like a cape, is far more complicated than the heroic portrait presented by Trump and his allies.

In the months before her death, Babbitt had become consumed by pro-Trump conspiracy theories and posted angry screeds on social media. She also had a history of making violent threats.

Babbitt, 35, was fatally shot while attempting to climb through the broken window of a barricaded door leading to the Speaker's Lobby inside the Capitol, where police officers were evacuating members of Congress from the mob supporting Trump's false claim that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. She was one of five people who died during or immediately after the riot, including a Capitol Police officer.

On social media, Babbitt identified as a Libertarian and ardent supporter of the Second Amendment. Her posts included videos of profane rants against Democrats, COVID-19 mask mandates and illegal immigration.

Her Twitter account, which was taken down after her death, was rife with references to the QAnon conspiracy theory, which centers on the baseless belief that Trump has secretly battled deep-state enemies and a cabal of Satan-worshiping cannibals that includes prominent Democrats who operate a child sex trafficking ring.

"Nothing will stop us," Babbitt tweeted Jan. 5. "They can try and try and try but the storm is here and it is descending upon DC in less than 24 hours....dark to light!"

Among Q followers, "The Storm" refers to the predicted day Trump would finally unmask the pedophile cabal, arrest and execute those deemed traitors and restore America to greatness.

Trump has repeatedly insisted Babbitt was murdered, and she has achieved martyr status among Trump supporters. Her name and likeness now appear on T-shirts and flags at pro-Trump rallies.

A Maryland personal injury lawyer representing Babbitt's husband, Aaron Babbitt, has raised \$375,000 through a Christian crowdfunding site and has threatened to file a lawsuit against the Capitol Police.

Key to that wrongful death claim is the contention that Babbitt, a former military police officer who was 5-foot-2 and weighed 115 pounds, would have peacefully surrendered had Capitol officers attempted to arrest her.

Aaron Babbitt declined to comment in October when a reporter knocked on the door of the San Diego apartment he shared with Ashli and another woman. In a June interview with Tucker Carson of Fox News, Babbitt said he has been sickened by some of what he has seen written about his deceased wife.

"There's never been a person who Ashli ran across in her daily life that didn't love her," said Babbitt, 40. That is not how Norris felt about her.

Court records involving the violent 2016 confrontation between Babbitt and Norris have previously been reported by media outlets, including the AP. But Norris, now 39, agreed to speak about it publicly for the first time in an interview with the AP and shared previously unreported details. She also provided documents and photos from the crash scene to support her account.

Norris was in a six-year relationship with Aaron Babbitt when she said she learned he was cheating on her with a married co-worker from his job as a security guard at a nuclear power plant near the Chesapeake Bay. She eventually found out the other woman was Ashli McEntee, who at the time went by the last name of her then-husband.

"He was telling me about this foulmouthed chick that's on his shift, blah, blah, blah," Norris recounted. "Come to find out a few months later ... they were basically having this relationship while they were at work."

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When she learned of the affair, she reached out to Babbitt's husband, Timothy McEntee.

"You know, I was trying to keep my home life together," she said.

Norris said she tried for a few months to salvage her relationship with Aaron Babbitt before finally deciding to move out of their house. Within days, Norris said, Ashli moved in.

A few weeks later, Norris was waiting at a stop sign in Prince Frederick, about an hour southeast of Washington, D.C., when she says a white Ford Explorer passed her going the other direction.

Norris saw the SUV pulling a U-turn before speeding up behind her. She recounts that the SUV's driver began swerving erratically, laying on the horn and attempting to pass a Chevrolet Suburban that was in between them on the narrow two-lane road.

When the driver of the Chevy pulled over, Norris said the white Ford SUV accelerated and rammed into her rear bumper. She said the SUV rammed her a second time and then a third, all while the vehicles continued to roll down the road.

After Norris dialed 911, an emergency dispatcher advised her to pull over to the shoulder and stop. As she waited for help, Babbitt got out of her vehicle and came up to Norris' driver's-side window, banging on the glass.

Norris said the force of the impact caused her seatbelt to lock tight, preventing her from getting out of her car. Within minutes, deputies arrived.

A case report from the Calvert County Sheriff's Office obtained by the AP shows Ashli Babbitt was issued a criminal summons on charges of reckless endangerment, a misdemeanor defined under Maryland law as engaging in conduct "that creates a substantial risk of death or serious physical injury to another" and punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine. She was also charged with malicious destruction of property for the damage to Norris' vehicle.

Court records show those charges were later updated to include traffic offenses — reckless driving, negligent driving and failure to control a vehicle's speed to avoid a collision.

Photos from the scene provided to the AP by Norris show Babbitt's white Ford Explorer with its front bumper smashed in. The SUV's grill is also pushed in and the hood dented. The rear bumper of Norris' Escape is pushed in on the passenger side, with the detached Maryland license plate from the front bumper of Babbitt's SUV wedged into it.

Following the altercation, Norris and a friend went to the courthouse in neighboring St. Mary's County, where she lived at the time, and petitioned for a peace order, a type of restraining order, against Ashli Babbitt. The resulting judicial order barred Ashli Babbitt from attempting to contact Norris, committing further acts of violence against her and going to her home or workplace.

A copy of the order, dated the same day as the altercation, contains Norris' contemporaneous account of what occurred, as written down by her friend. Norris' hands were still shaking so badly she couldn't write down what happened for herself, according to a note on the document.

In the weeks after the incident, Norris said, Babbitt falsely claimed to authorities that the collisions had occurred when Norris repeatedly backed her vehicle into Babbitt's SUV. But when the case went to trial, Norris said, Babbitt changed her story, admitting under oath that she had collided with Norris' vehicle but portraying it as an accident.

No transcript from the hearing was available, but Norris said the lawyer defending Babbitt made repeated references to her employment at the local nuclear power plant and years of military service, which included deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Babbitt served on active duty with the U.S. Air Force, and then in the reserves and the Air National Guard until 2016. A judge acquitted Babbitt on the criminal charges.

In February 2017, records show Norris asked for and received a second peace order against Ashli Babbitt, citing ongoing harassment and stalking. In a handwritten petition, Norris says that Babbitt had recently followed her home from work and that she had also received repeated calls in the middle of the night from an unlisted number.

"I lived in fear because I didn't know what she was capable of," Norris told the AP. "I was constantly looking over my shoulder."

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In 2019, Norris filed a personal injury lawsuit against Ashli Babbitt, seeking \$74,500 in damages, and she said she settled out of court with Babbitt's insurance carrier for an undisclosed sum.

By then, Aaron and Ashli had moved to California, where she grew up and still had family. Timothy McEntee was granted a divorce in Maryland in May 2019. McEntee did not respond to voicemails and messages left at his home.

Ashli posted on Facebook that she married Aaron Babbitt the following month. Records show the couple owned a pool cleaning service with Ashli's brother. When a reporter visited the business the day after her death, a large sign on the locked door declared the building to be "Mask Free Autonomous Zone Better Known as America."

In the year since Babbitt's death, Trump and many Republicans in Congress have sought to recast the Jan. 6 insurrection as nonviolent — a contention directly contradicted by hours of video footage and the public testimony of Capitol Police officers, 140 of whom were injured in the melee.

In his video on Babbitt's birthday, Trump also said: "Together we grieve her terrible loss. There was no reason Ashli should have lost her life that day. We must all demand justice for Ashli and her family, so on this solemn occasion as we celebrate her life, we renew our call for a fair and nonpartisan investigation into the death of Ashli Babbitt."

Aaron Babbitt's lawyer, Terrell Roberts III, did not respond to numerous phone messages and emails seeking comment. But in written statements to the media, he has said her shooting "was tantamount to an execution without trial."

"Given her background as a 14-year veteran of the Air Force, it is likely that Ashli would have complied with simple verbal commands, thereby making the use of any force unnecessary," Roberts said.

The Capitol Police officer who shot Babbitt, Lt. Michael Byrd, said in a televised interview in August that he fired as a "last resort." When he pulled the trigger, he said, he had no idea whether the person jumping through the window was armed.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia cleared Byrd of wrongdoing in April, concluding that he acted in self-defense and in the defense of members of Congress. The U.S. Capitol Police announced in August that they had also cleared Byrd.

"I tried to wait as long as I could," Byrd said. "I hoped and prayed no one tried to enter through those doors. But their failure to comply required me to take the appropriate action to save the lives of members of Congress and myself and my fellow officers."

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Associated Press correspondent Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

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Contact AP's global investigative team at [Investigative@ap.org](mailto:Investigative@ap.org).

## Angst over China, Russia lessens chance of US nuke changes

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden's arrival in the White House nearly a year ago seemed to herald a historic shift toward less U.S. reliance on nuclear weapons and possibly a shrinking of their numbers. Even an American "no first use" pledge — a promise to never again be the first to use a nuclear weapon — seemed possible.

Then China happened — revelations about its expanding nuclear force and talk of potential war with Taiwan.

And then Russia happened — signs that it might be preparing to invade Ukraine.

Now, major shifts in U.S. nuclear weapons policy seem much less likely, and while Biden may insist on certain adjustments, momentum toward a historic departure from the Trump administration's policy appears to have stalled.

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The outlook will be clearer when the Biden administration completes its so-called nuclear posture review — an internal relook at the numbers, kinds and purposes of weapons in the nuclear arsenal, as well as the policies that govern their potential use. The results could be made public as early as January.

The biggest unknown is how forcefully Biden will weigh in on these questions, based on White House calculations of the political risk. During his years as vice president, Biden talked of new directions in nuclear policy. But heightened concerns about China and Russia would seem to improve the political leverage of Republicans seeking to portray such change as a gift to nuclear adversaries.

Russia became a more urgent focus of Biden's attention after President Vladimir Putin in recent weeks sent an estimated 100,000 troops to positions near Ukraine's border and demanded U.S. security guarantees. Biden and Putin discussed Ukraine by phone on Thursday, and senior American and Russian officials are scheduled to follow up with more detailed talks in Geneva on Jan. 9-10.

Tom Z. Collina, policy director at Ploughshares Fund, an advocate for nuclear disarmament, says the China and Russia problems complicate the politics of Biden's nuclear review but should not stop him from acting to reduce nuclear dangers.

"We do not want a new nuclear arms race with either nation and the only way to prevent that is with diplomacy," Collina said. "We must remember the main lesson we learned in the Cold War with Russia — the only way to win an arms race is not to run."

In March, in what the White House called interim national security guidance, Biden said China and Russia had changed "the distribution of power across the world."

"Both Beijing and Moscow have invested heavily in efforts meant to check U.S. strengths and prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world," the guidance said. Biden pledged to counter with actions to strength the United States at home, repair its alliances abroad and elevate the role of diplomacy. Nuclear weapons were mentioned only briefly.

"We will take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy," the guidance said without offering details, while also ensuring a safe and reliable U.S. nuclear force and seeking arms control opportunities.

Since then, worries about China and Russia have only increased. Private satellite imagery revealed last summer that China was building large numbers of new underground silos for nuclear missiles, and in November a Pentagon report said China may quadruple the size of its nuclear stockpile by 2030.

"Because of what China has done, it has really changed the complexion of this review," says Robert Soofer, who was the Pentagon's top nuclear policy official during the Trump administration and led a 2018 nuclear review.

"Rather than it being a review that examines reducing the role of nuclear weapons and even eliminating a leg of the triad, now they've been obliged to basically stay the course and determine how to tweak it at the margins."

In June, even before the latest Russian troop buildup near Ukraine, the Pentagon's policy chief, Colin Kahl, said the outlook for U.S. nuclear policy was colored not only by China's nuclear ambitions but also by "real anxiety" among U.S. allies in Europe over Russian defense and nuclear policy.

"And so, obviously Russia is the wolf closest to the shed as it relates to the nuclear issue, but close behind is China's desire to grow their nuclear arsenal, both quantitatively and qualitatively," Kahl said June 23 at a nuclear policy conference sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Kahl did not preview the policy review outcome, but he said it is intended to fit inside a broader defense strategy, which also is to be published early in 2022.

The Pentagon has not publicly discussed details of the nuclear review, but the administration seems likely to keep the existing contours of the nuclear force — the traditional "triad" of sea-, air- and land-based weapons, which critics call overkill. It also may embrace a \$1 trillion-plus modernization of that force, which was launched by the Obama administration and continued by Trump.

It's unclear whether Biden will approve any significant change in what is called "declaratory policy," which states the purpose of nuclear weapons and the circumstances under which they might be used.

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The Obama administration, with Biden as vice president, stated in 2010 that it would “only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.” It did not define “extreme circumstances.”

Eight years later, the Trump administration restated the Obama policy but got more specific. “Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities.”

Some believed that Biden as president would go a different direction, following his own advice on a “no first use” pledge. He said in a January 2017 speech: “Given our non-nuclear capabilities and the nature of today’s threats, it’s hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary, or make sense.”

But some argue that China and Russia this year have changed “today’s threats,” perhaps keeping Biden on a cautious path.

## Holmes jury to resume deliberations after holiday break

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — After an extended holiday break, the jury weighing fraud charges against former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes will get back to work Monday.

The eight men and four women who will determine Holmes’ fate spent much of their holiday season behind closed doors in a San Jose, California, courthouse, weighing reams of evidence presented during a three-month trial that captivated Silicon Valley.

When they were still unable to reach a verdict by the middle of last week, the jurors were given Thursday off before an already scheduled court holiday on Friday. They hadn’t provided any inkling where they stood in their deliberations last week after sending two notes to the federal judge presiding over the case the previous week.

No reason was given for pausing the deliberations earlier than expected last week. The jury so far has spent a total of roughly 40 hours across six days discussing the charges against Holmes, a tarnished technology star facing up to 20 years in prison if she is found guilty.

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

Before those problems were exposed in 2015 and 2016 by stories in The Wall Street Journal and a regulatory audit, Holmes briefly realized her aspirations for fame and fortune while raising more than \$900 million from a list of renowned investors that included media mogul Rupert Murdoch, software mogul Larry Ellison and the Walton family behind Walmart.

At Theranos’ height, Holmes had amassed a fortune of \$4.5 billion on paper and was being lionized as a visionary on cover stories in business magazines.

The jury will now spend its seventh day trying to decide if she was a crook.

## 2 missing in huge Colorado fire as investigation continues

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Colo. (AP) — Search teams looked for two missing people in the smoldering debris from a massive Colorado wildfire while people who escaped the flames sorted through the charred remnants of their homes to see what was left.

Investigators were still trying to determine what caused flames to tear through at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), leaving nearly 1,000 houses and other buildings destroyed in suburbs between Denver and Boulder.

The inferno broke out Thursday, unusually late in the year following an extremely dry fall and amid a

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winter nearly devoid of snow. Experts say those conditions, along with high winds, helped the fire spread.

Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle says authorities are pursuing a number of tips and had executed a search warrant at "one particular location." The sheriff refused to give details Sunday, including whether he thought the fire was arson.

"It's complicated and it's all covered with a foot of snow," Pelle said of the scene where the fire started. "The outcome of that investigation is vital — there is so much at stake. We are going to be professional. We are going to be careful."

Rex and Barba Hickman sifted through the ashes of their Louisville home with their son and his wife.

Their son Austin cut a safe open with a grinding tool to reveal gold and silver coins, melted credit cards, keys and the charred remains of the couple's passports.

They evacuated with their dog, their iPads and the clothes on their back. Rex Hickman said he was heartbroken to see there was nothing left of their home of 23 years.

"There's a numbness that hits you first. You know, kind of like you go into crisis mode. You think about what you can do, what you can't do," he said. "The real pain is going to sink in over time."

The couple have to find a rental property and clothes in the short-term, and their insurance company told them Sunday it would take at least two years to rebuild their home.

"We know how fortunate we are," Rex Hickman said. "We have each other. We have great friends, wonderful family. So many people have got to be suffering much more than we are, and we feel for them."

While homes that burned to the foundations were still smoldering in some places, the blaze was no longer considered an immediate threat — especially with Saturday's snow and frigid temperatures.

Authorities initially said everyone was accounted for after the fire. But Boulder County spokesperson Jennifer Churchill said the reports of three people missing were later discovered amid the scramble to manage the emergency. One was found alive, officials said Sunday.

Crews were still looking for a woman at a home in Superior and a man living near Marshall. Pelle said their homes were "deep in hot debris and covered with snow. It is a difficult task."

Other investigators were seeing if the missing people might have made it out, but not contacted their families or friends, Pelle said.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and federal emergency officials visited some of the damaged neighborhoods Sunday morning.

"I know this is a hard time in your life if you've lost everything or you don't even know what you lost," Polis said after the tour. "A few days ago you were celebrating Christmas at home and hanging your stockings and now home and hearth have been destroyed."

Of at least 991 buildings destroyed by the fire, most were homes. But the blaze also burned through eight businesses at a shopping center in Louisville, including a nail salon and a Subway restaurant. In neighboring Superior, 12 businesses were damaged, including a Target, Chuck E. Cheese, Tesla dealership, a hotel and the town hall.

The two towns are about 20 miles (30 kilometers) northwest of Denver and have a combined population of 34,000.

The flames stopped about 100 yards (90 meters) from Susan Hill's property in Louisville. She slept Saturday night in her home using a space heater and hot water bottles to stay warm since her natural gas service had not been turned back on.

She choked up as she remembered seeing the sky change color and recalled nervously sprinting out of town with her college-age son and the dog, cat and a fire box with birth certificates and other documents.

"I don't even know how to describe it," she said. "It's so sad. It's so awful. It's just devastating."

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The Associated Press receives support from the Walton Family Foundation for coverage of water and environmental policy. The AP is solely responsible for all content. For all of AP's environmental coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/environment>.

## Hong Kong news outlet to close amid crackdown on dissent

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — A Hong Kong online news site said Sunday that it will cease operations in light of deteriorating press freedoms, days after police raided and arrested seven people for sedition at a separate pro-democracy news outlet.

Citizen News announced its decision in a Facebook post Sunday. It said it would stop updating its site on Jan. 4, and it would be shuttered after that.

"We all love this place, deeply. Regrettably, what was ahead of us is not just pouring rains or blowing winds, but hurricanes and tsunamis," it said in a statement.

"We have never forgotten our original intent. Sadly, we can no longer strive to turn our beliefs into reality without fear because of the sea change in the society over the past two years and the deteriorating media environment."

Citizen News is the third news outlet to close in recent months, following pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily and online site Stand News. Authorities have moved to silence dissent in the semi-autonomous city, once known as a hub for vibrant media outlets, after Beijing implemented a sweeping national security law following massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The impending closure of Citizen News came days after authorities raided Stand News and arrested seven people — including editors and former board members — for allegedly conspiring to publish seditious material. Stand News announced on the same day that it would cease to operate.

Two of Stand News' former editors who were arrested were later formally charged with sedition.

In December, the opposition was shut out from elections under a new law that puts all candidates to a loyalty test, and monuments commemorating the bloody 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing were taken down.

The U.S. and other Western government have condemned diminishing press and civil freedoms that Beijing promised to uphold for 50 years following Hong Kong's 1997 handover from Britain.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam last week defended the raid on Stand News, telling reporters that "inciting other people ... could not be condoned under the guise of news reporting."

## Snow storms and pandemic ground flights, delay holiday's end

By MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

Wintry weather combined with the pandemic to frustrate air travelers whose return flights home from the holidays were canceled or delayed in the first days of the new year.

More than 2,600 U.S. flights and more than 4,400 worldwide were grounded Sunday, according to tracking service FlightAware.

That followed Saturday's mass cancellations of more than 2,700 U.S. flights, and more than 4,700 worldwide.

"It was absolute mayhem," said Natasha Enos, who spent a sleepless Saturday night and Sunday morning at Denver International Airport during what was supposed to be a short layover on a cross-country trip from Washington to San Francisco.

Saturday's single-day U.S. toll of grounded flights was the highest since just before Christmas, when airlines began blaming staffing shortages on increasing COVID-19 infections among crews.

A winter storm that hit the Midwest on Saturday made Chicago the worst place in the country for travelers throughout the weekend. About a quarter of all flights at O'Hare Airport were canceled Sunday.

Denver's airport also faced significant disruptions. Enos, who was flying on Frontier Airlines, didn't learn that her connecting flight home to California was canceled until she had already landed in Denver. Then it was a rush to find alternative flights and navigate through baggage claims packed with stranded and confused travelers, amid concerns about the spread of the highly transmissible omicron variant of COVID-19.

"It was a lot of people in a very small space and not everybody was masking," said the 28-year-old financial analyst. "There were a lot of exhausted kids and some families were so stressed out."

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In Michigan, the authority that runs Detroit International Airport said crews were working around the clock to remove snow and maintain the airfield. Atlanta's airport authority advised travelers to arrive earlier than usual because of high passenger volume, potential weather issues and pandemic-fueled staffing shortages that could lengthen the time it takes to get through security gates.

And thousands of miles from the closest snow storms, Hawaiian Airlines said it had to cancel several flights between islands and across the Pacific due to staffing shortages.

Southwest Airlines said it was working to help customers affected by about 400 flights canceled around the country Sunday, about 11% of its schedule. The Dallas-based airline anticipates even more operational challenges to come as the storm system pushes into the Eastern seaboard.

Delta Air Lines said Sunday it was issuing a travel waiver for planned flights this week out of mid-Atlantic airports in Baltimore and Washington in preparation for forecasted winter weather.

American Airlines said most of Sunday's canceled flights had been canceled ahead of time to avoid last-minute disruptions at the airport.

SkyWest, a regional carrier that operates flights under the names American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express, grounded more than 500 flights Sunday, about 20% of its schedule, according to FlightAware.

Airlines have said they are taking steps to reduce cancellations caused by workers affected by the pandemic. United is offering to pay pilots triple or more of their usual wages for picking up open flights through most of January. Spirit Airlines reached a deal with the Association of Flight Attendants for double pay for cabin crews through Tuesday, a union spokesperson said.

Airlines hope that extra pay and reduced schedules get them through the holiday crush and into the heart of January, when travel demand usually drops off. The seasonal decline could be sharper than normal this year because most business travelers are still grounded.

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AP Airlines Writer David Koenig contributed to this report.

## Twitter bans Rep. Greene's personal account for COVID claims

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Twitter said Sunday it had banned the personal account of far-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene for multiple violations of the platform's COVID-19 misinformation policy, the latest strike against the firebrand whose embrace of conspiracy theories has been called "a cancer" for the GOP and led the House to boot her from committees.

The Georgia Republican's account was permanently suspended under the "strike" system Twitter launched in March, which uses artificial intelligence to identify posts about the coronavirus that are misleading enough to cause harm to people. Two or three strikes earn a 12-hour account lock. Four strikes prompt a weeklong suspension. Five or more strikes can get someone permanently removed from Twitter.

In a statement on the messaging app Telegram, Greene blasted Twitter's move as un-American. She wrote that her account was suspended after tweeting statistics from the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, a government database that includes unverified raw data.

"Twitter is an enemy to America and can't handle the truth," Greene said. "That's fine, I'll show America we don't need them and it's time to defeat our enemies."

Twitter had previously suspended Greene's personal account for periods ranging from 12 hours to a full week. The ban applies to Greene's personal account, @mtgreeee, but does not affect her official Twitter account, @RepMTG.

The first-term lawmaker has repeatedly stirred controversy over inflammatory commentary.

On social media, she has voiced support for racist views, unfounded QAnon pro-Donald Trump conspiracy theories such as the lie that the 2020 election was stolen and calls for violence against Democratic politicians, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Last February, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell called her embrace of conspiracy theories and "loony lies" a "cancer for the Republican Party." The Democratic-led House that same month tossed her

from her two committee assignments, the House Education and Labor Committee as well as the House Budget Committee.

In July, Twitter suspended Greene for a week after President Joe Biden urged tech companies to take stronger action against bogus vaccine claims that are "killing people." Twitter has defended its efforts to keep dangerous misinformation about COVID-19 off its site, saying it has removed thousands of tweets and challenged millions of accounts worldwide.

Among Greene's final tweets was one Saturday that falsely referenced "extremely high amounts of covid vaccine deaths," according to tweets stored in the Internet Archive.

Last week, Greene also boasted on Twitter about talking to the former president by phone. She said she had received Trump's permission to clarify his stance that he is against vaccine mandates though he encourages people to get the vaccine and booster. Trump was booed by some audience members in Dallas on Dec. 19 when he said he had received a COVID-19 booster shot.

On Sunday, the White House's top medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said the U.S. has been seeing almost a "vertical increase" of new COVID-19 cases, now averaging 400,000 cases a day, with hospitalizations also up. The omicron variant of COVID-19 has driven a surge in new cases across the country.

## **Fauci: CDC mulling COVID test requirement for asymptomatic**

By HOPE YEN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the COVID-19 omicron variant surges across the United States, top federal health officials are looking to add a negative test along with its five-day isolation restrictions for asymptomatic Americans who catch the coronavirus, the White House's top medical adviser said Sunday.

Dr. Anthony Fauci said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now considering including the negative test as part of its guidance after getting significant "pushback" on its updated recommendations last week.

Under that Dec. 27 guidance, isolation restrictions for people infected with COVID-19 were shortened from 10 days to five days if they are no longer feeling symptoms or running a fever. After that period, they are asked to spend the following five days wearing a mask when around others.

The guidelines have since received criticism from many health professionals for not specifying a negative antigen test as a requirement for leaving isolation.

"There has been some concern about why we don't ask people at that five-day period to get tested," Fauci said. "Looking at it again, there may be an option in that, that testing could be a part of that, and I think we're going to be hearing more about that in the next day or so from the CDC."

Fauci, the nation's top infectious diseases expert, said the U.S. has been seeing almost a "vertical increase" of new cases, now averaging 400,000 cases a day, with hospitalizations also up.

"We are definitely in the middle of a very severe surge and uptick in cases," he said. "The acceleration of cases that we've seen is really unprecedented, gone well beyond anything we've seen before."

Fauci said he's concerned that the omicron variant is overwhelming the health care system and causing a "major disruption" on other essential services.

"When I say major disruptions, you're certainly going to see stresses on the system and the system being people with any kind of jobs ... particularly with critical jobs to keep society functioning normally," Fauci said. "We already know that there are reports from fire departments, from police departments in different cities that 10, 20, 25 and sometimes 30% of the people are ill. That's something that we need to be concerned about, because we want to make sure that we don't have such an impact on society that there really is a disruption. I hope that doesn't happen."

The surging variant is ravaging other sectors of the workforce and American life.

Wintry weather combined with the pandemic were blamed for Sunday's grounding of more than 2,500 U.S. flights and more than 4,100 worldwide. 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. Many companies that had been allowing office workers to work remotely but

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that were planning to return to the office early in 2022 have further delayed those plans.

The White House Correspondents' Association announced on Sunday that the number of journalists allowed in the briefing room for at least the first few weeks of the year would be scaled back because of concerns about the fast-spreading virus. Typically 49 reporters have seats for the daily briefing, but only 14 reporters will be seated under the restrictions. The White House limited capacity in the briefing room early in the pandemic but returned to full capacity in June 2021.

While there is "accumulating evidence" that omicron might lead to less severe illness, he cautioned that the data remains early. Fauci said he worries in particular about the tens of millions of unvaccinated Americans because "a fair number of them are going to get severe disease."

He urged Americans who have not yet gotten vaccinated and boosted to do so and to mask up indoors to protect themselves and blunt the current surge of U.S. cases.

The Food and Drug Administration last week said preliminary research indicates at-home rapid tests detect omicron, but may have reduced sensitivity. The agency noted it's still studying how the tests perform with the variant, which was first detected in late November.

Fauci said Americans "should not get the impression that those tests are not valuable."

"I think the confusion is that rapid antigen tests have never been as sensitive as the PCR test," Fauci said. "They're very good when they are given sequentially. So if you do them like maybe two or three times over a few-day period, at the end of the day, they are as good as the PCR. But as a single test, they are not as sensitive."

A PCR test usually needs to be processed in a laboratory. The test looks for the virus's genetic material and then reproduces it millions of times until it's detectable with a computer.

Fauci said if Americans take the necessary precautions, the U.S. might see some semblance of more normal life returning soon.

"One of the things that we hope for is that this thing will peak after a period of a few weeks and turn around," Fauci said. He expressed hope that by February or March, omicron could fall to a low enough level "that it doesn't disrupt our society, our economy, our way of life."

Fauci spoke on ABC's "This Week" and CNN's "State of the Union."

Madhani reported from Wilmington, Delaware.

## **Pentagon chief Austin says he has tested positive for COVID**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Sunday he has tested positive for COVID-19 and was experiencing mild symptoms while quarantining at home.

In a statement Sunday night, Austin said he plans to attend key meetings and discussions virtually in the coming week "to the degree possible." He said Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks would represent him in appropriate matters.

Austin said he last met with President Joe Biden on Dec. 21, more than a week before he began to experience symptoms, and had tested negative the morning of that day.

"I have informed my leadership team of my positive test result, as well as the President," Austin said. "My staff has begun contact tracing and testing of all those with whom I have come into contact over the last week."

Austin, 68, said he was fully vaccinated and received a booster in October. He said he requested a test Sunday morning after experiencing symptoms while at home on leave and, given the result, planned to remain in quarantine for five days, per guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The vaccines work and will remain a military medical requirement for our workforce. I continue to encourage everyone eligible for a booster shot to get one. This remains a readiness issue," he said.

In October, another member of Biden's Cabinet, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, tested positive for COVID-19.

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## Last parent of a child killed in 1963 church bombing dies

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Maxine McNair, the last living parent of any of the four Black girls killed in a 1963 Alabama church bombing, died Sunday. She was 93.

McNair's family announced her death in a press release. A cause of death was not given.

McNair's daughter, 11-year-old Denise McNair, was the youngest girl killed in the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, the deadliest single attack of the civil rights movement. Also killed were three 14-year-olds: Addie Mae Collins, Carole Rosamond Robertson and Cynthia Dionne Wesley.

Three members of the Ku Klux Klan were eventually convicted in the case, the first in 1977 and two more in the early 2000s.

Maxine McNair worked as a teacher for over three decades in Birmingham public schools. Her daughter, Lisa McNair, said she changed many lives through education and left a lasting legacy through the students she touched.

"Mrs. McNair was an amazing wife and mother and as a teacher of 33 years in the Birmingham public school system imparted knowledge in the lives of hundreds. We are going to miss her laughter and her humor. The family would appreciate all of your thoughts and prayers," the family's statement said.

Maxine McNair's husband, Chris McNair, died in 2019 at the age of 93. He was one of the first Black members of the Alabama legislature since Reconstruction, and a Jefferson County commissioner.

In 2013, Maxine McNair attended an Oval Office ceremony in which President Barack Obama awarded the four girls the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the country's highest civilian honors.

Funeral arrangements for a celebration of Maxine McNair's life are pending.

Denise McNair was one of five girls who had gathered in a downstairs bathroom at the 16th Street Baptist Church on Sept. 15, 1963, when a timed bomb planted by KKK members went off outside under a set of stairs.

The fifth girl and sister of Addie Mae Collins, Sarah Collins Rudolph, was blinded in one eye by the blast. She later provided testimony that helped lead to the convictions of the men accused of planting the bomb.

The church bombing came during the height of the fight for Civil Rights in America, and as Birmingham's public schools were being desegregated. The four girls became emblems of the racist hatred that emanated from much of the opposition to equal rights.

## Late Sen. Harry Reid to lie in state in US Capitol Rotunda

WASHINGTON (AP) — The late Sen. Harry Reid, the Nevada Democrat who served as majority leader during a 30-year career in the Senate, will lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda next week.

The leaders of Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, said in a statement Sunday night that ceremonies honoring Reid at the Capitol will take place on Jan. 12.

Events will include a formal arrival and departure ceremony. Details were to be announced later. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was being limited to invited guests only.

"Few dedicated their life and career to working for and delivering for working families like Harry Reid, and it will be an honor to pay tribute to him in the Capitol next week," Schumer said. Pelosi said it was her "solemn honor" to pay tribute to "a legendary leader, a great American and my dear friend."

Reid, 82, died last Tuesday at his home in Henderson, Nevada, after battling pancreatic cancer. A memorial service was planned for Saturday in Las Vegas.

Beginning with his election to the U.S. House in 1982, Reid served in Congress longer than anyone in Nevada history. He retired from the Senate in 2016.

## Sudan's PM announces resignation amid political deadlock

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced his resignation Sunday amid political deadlock and widespread pro-democracy protests following a military coup that derailed the country's fragile transition to democratic rule.

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Hamdok, a former U.N. official seen as the civilian face of Sudan's transitional government, had been reinstated as prime minister in November as part of an agreement with the military following the October coup. In that time he had failed to name a Cabinet and his resignation throws Sudan into political uncertainty amid uphill security and economic challenges.

In a televised national address Sunday, Hamdok called for a dialogue to agree on a "national charter" and to "draw a roadmap" to complete the transition to democracy in accordance with the 2019 constitutional document governing the transitional period.

"I decided to return the responsibility and declare my resignation as prime minister," he said, adding that his stepping down would allow a chance for another person to lead the nation and complete its transition to a "civilian, democratic country." He did not name a successor.

The prime minister said his efforts to bridge the widening gap and settle disputes among the political forces have failed.

He warned that the ongoing political stalemate since the military takeover could become a full-blown crisis and damage the country's already battered economy.

"I tried as much as I possibly could to prevent our country from sliding into a disaster. Now, our nation is going through a dangerous turning point that could threaten its survival unless it is urgently rectified," he said.

The October coup had upended Sudan's plans to move to democracy after a popular uprising forced the military's overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019.

Four months after al-Bashir's ouster, the generals and the protesters reached a power-sharing deal to rule the country through elections in 2023. However, military-civilian ties have been frayed by the military takeover that has threatened to return Sudan to international isolation.

Hamdok's resignation comes amid a heavy security crackdown on protesters denouncing not only the takeover but the subsequent deal that reinstated him and sidelined the pro-democracy movement. He was returned to office in November amid international pressure in a deal that calls for an independent technocratic Cabinet under military oversight led by him.

"I have had the honor of serving my country people for more than two years. And during his period I have sometimes done well, and I have sometimes failed," Hamdok said.

The Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change, an umbrella group of Sudanese political parties and pro-democracy organizations, has rejected the November deal and remains committed to ending military rule. The alliance accused Hamdok of allowing the military to dominate the government, and continued to organize anti-coup street protests which were met with heavy crackdown.

Over the past two weeks, there was increasing speculation that he would step down. National and international efforts have failed to convince him to stay in office.

The U.S. State Department urged on Twitter Sudan's leaders to "set aside differences, find consensus, and ensure continued civilian rule" following Hamdok's resignation.

It also called for the appointment of the next premier and Cabinet to "in line with the (2019) constitutional declaration to meet the people's goals of freedom, peace, and justice."

"Its time for the deployment of an international mediator who can do the job Hamdok was incapable of -- finding political compromise between the military, the street and the FFC, to rewrite a roadmap for going forward," said Cameron Hudson, a former U.S. State Department official and Sudan expert at the Atlantic Council's Africa Center

Hours before Hamdok's resignation speech, Sudanese security forces violently dispersed pro-democracy protesters, killing at least three people, according to the Sudan Doctors Committee, which is part of the pro-democracy movement. The group said dozens of protesters were injured.

The protests came despite tightened security and blocked bridges and roads in Khartoum and Omdurman. Internet connections were also disrupted ahead of the protests, according to advocacy group NetBlocs. Authorities have used such tactics repeatedly since the Oct. 25 coup.

Sunday's fatalities have brought the death toll among protesters since the coup to at least 57, according

to the medical group. Hundreds have also been wounded.

Allegations surfaced last month of sexual violence, including rape and gang rape by security forces against female protesters, according to the United Nations.

The ruling sovereign council has vowed to investigate violence against the protesters.

On Saturday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged security forces to "immediately cease the use of deadly force against protesters" and to hold those responsible for violence accountable.

"We do not want to return to the past, and are prepared to respond to those who seek to block the aspirations of the Sudanese people for a civilian-led, democratic government," he added.

## 2 missing; survivors count blessings after Colorado fire

By THOMAS PEIPERT, BRITTANY PETERSON and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Colo. (AP) — Search teams looked for two missing people on Sunday in the snow-covered but still smoldering debris from a massive Colorado wildfire, while people who barely escaped the flames sorted through what was left after the blaze and investigators tried to determine its cause.

The flames ripped through at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers) and left nearly 1,000 homes and other buildings destroyed in suburbs between Denver and Boulder. It came unusually late in the year following an extremely dry fall and amid a winter nearly devoid of snow. Experts say those conditions, along with high winds, helped the fire spread.

Rex and Barba Hickman sifted through the ashes of their Louisville home with their son and his wife.

Their son Austin cut a safe open with a grinding tool to reveal gold and silver coins, melted credit cards, keys and the charred remains of the couple's passports.

They evacuated with their dog, their iPads and the clothes on their back. Rex Hickman said he was heartbroken to see there was nothing left of their home of 23 years.

"There's a numbness that hits you first. You know, kind of like you go into crisis mode. You think about what you can do, what you can't do," he said. "The real pain is going to sink in over time."

The couple have to find a rental property and clothes in the short-term, and their insurance company told them Sunday it would take at least two years to rebuild their home.

"We know how fortunate we are," Rex Hickman said. "We have each other. We have great friends, wonderful family. So many people have got to be suffering much more than we are, and we feel for them."

While homes that burned to the foundations were still smoldering in some places, the blaze was no longer considered an immediate threat — especially with Saturday's snow and frigid temperatures.

Authorities initially said everyone was accounted for after the fire. But Boulder County spokesperson Jennifer Churchill said the reports of three people missing were later discovered amid the scramble to manage the emergency. One was found alive, officials said Sunday.

Crews were still looking for a woman at a home in Superior and a man living near Marshall. Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said their homes were "deep in hot debris and covered with snow. It is a difficult task."

Other investigators were seeing if the missing people might have made it out, but not contacted their families or friends, Pelle said.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and federal emergency officials visited some of the damaged neighborhoods Sunday morning.

"I know this is a hard time in your life if you've lost everything or you don't even know what you lost," Polis said after the tour. "A few days ago you were celebrating Christmas at home and hanging your stockings and now home and hearth have been destroyed."

The cause of the fire is still under investigation. Utility officials found no downed power lines around where the fire broke out.

Pelle said Saturday authorities were pursuing a number of tips and had executed a search warrant at "one particular location." The sheriff refused to give details again Sunday, including whether he thought the fire was set.

"It's complicated and it's all covered with a foot of snow," Pelle said of the scene where the fire started. "The outcome of that investigation is vital — there is so much at stake. We are going to be professional."

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We are going to be careful.”

Of at least 991 buildings destroyed by the fire, most were homes. But the blaze also burned through eight businesses at a shopping center in Louisville, including a nail salon and a Subway restaurant. In neighboring Superior, 12 businesses were damaged, including a Target, Chuck E. Cheese, Tesla dealership, a hotel and the town hall.

The two towns are about 20 miles (30 kilometers) northwest of Denver with a combined population of 34,000.

The flames stopped about 100 yards (90 meters) from Susan Hill’s property in Louisville. She slept Saturday night in her home using a space heater and hot water bottles to stay warm since her natural gas service had not been turned back on.

She choked up as she remembered seeing the sky change color and recalled nervously sprinting out of town with her college-age son and the dog, cat and a fire box with birth certificates and other documents.

“I don’t even know how to describe it,” she said. “It’s so sad. It’s so awful. It’s just devastating.”

Utility crews expected to restore electricity to the homes still standing Sunday, but warned gas service might take longer to get back.

People lined up to get donated space heaters, bottled water and blankets at Red Cross shelters. Xcel Energy urged other residents to use fireplaces and wood stoves to stay warm and keep their pipes at home from freezing.

Superior resident Jeff Markley arrived in his truck to pick up a heater. He said he felt lucky to be “just displaced” since his home is intact.

“We’re making do, staying with friends, and upbeat for the new year. Gotta be better than this last one,” Markley said.

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This story has been updated to correct the wording in the quote from Gov. Polis.

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## **Biden vows US to act decisively if Russia invades Ukraine**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden conferred on Sunday with Ukraine’s leader over the Russian troop buildup near its border, promising that the U.S. and allies will act “decisively” if Russia further invades the Eastern European nation.

Biden and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s call came as the U.S. and Western allies prepared for a series of diplomatic meetings to try to de-escalate a crisis that Moscow said could rupture ties with Washington.

“President Biden made clear that the United States and its allies and partners will respond decisively if Russia further invades Ukraine,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement following the call.

Psaki added that Biden underscored his commitment to the principle of “nothing about you without you,” the tenet that it won’t negotiate policy that impacts Europe without its allies’ input.

Biden has spoken of hitting Russia with economy-jarring sanctions if it moves on Ukraine’s territory, but he said last month that U.S. military action is not on the table.

The Kremlin has demanded that any further expansion of NATO exclude Ukraine and other former Soviet countries. The Russians have also demanded that the military alliance remove offensive weaponry from countries in the region.

The White House has dismissed Russia’s demands on NATO as a non-starter. A key principle of the NATO alliance is that membership is open to any qualifying country. And no outsider has membership veto power. While there’s little prospect that Ukraine would be invited into the alliance anytime soon, the U.S. and its allies won’t rule it out.

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Zelenskyy said in a Twitter posting after Sunday's call that "keeping peace in Europe, preventing further escalation, reforms, deoligarchization were discussed."

"We appreciate the unwavering support," Zelenskyy said.

The United States has made little progress in efforts to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to ease tensions. Senior U.S. and Russian officials are scheduled to meet Jan. 9-10 in Geneva to discuss the situation. Those talks are to be followed by meetings at the NATO-Russia Council, and at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Biden spoke with Putin for nearly an hour on Thursday. He told reporters the next day that he warned Putin that his economy would pay a "heavy price" if Russia, which has massed some 100,000 troops near the border, made further moves against Ukraine.

"I'm not going to negotiate here in public, but we made it clear that he cannot — I emphasize cannot — move on Ukraine," Biden said Friday.

Biden said he told Putin it was important for the Russians to take steps before those meetings toward easing the crisis. Putin's foreign affairs adviser, in describing the presidents' conversation this past week, said Biden's pursuit of sanctions "could lead to a complete rupture of relations between our countries and Russia-West relations will be severely damaged."

U.S. intelligence findings indicate Russia has made preparations for a potential invasion in early 2022. But White House officials say it remains unclear whether Putin has already made a decision to move forward with military action.

Still, Biden said he remained hopeful for the upcoming talks. White House officials say they will consult closely with Western allies.

"I always expect if you negotiate you make progress, but we'll see," he said Friday. "We'll see."

Past military incursions by Putin loom large as Biden weighs his next steps.

In 2014, Russian troops marched into the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea and seized the territory from Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea was one of the darker moments for President Barack Obama on the international stage.

The U.S.-Russia relationship was badly damaged near the end of President George W. Bush's administration after Russia's 2008 invasion of its neighbor Georgia after Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered his troops into the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said Sunday he feared that Putin was intent on invading Ukraine and "nothing other than a level of sanctions that Russia has never seen will deter him."

"Russia needs to understand we are united in this," Schiff told "Face the Nation" on CBS. "I also think that a powerful deterrent is the understanding that if they do invade, it is going to bring (NATO) closer to Russia, not push it farther away."

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Associated Press writer Yuras Karmanau in Kyiv contributed to this report.

## **Brown walks away from Bucs; Brady rallies team past Jets**

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Antonio Brown was apparently frustrated and angry. So he walked away. From the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. And possibly his NFL career.

The mercurial wide receiver was kicked off the Buccaneers after a bizarre, shirtless exit from the field before Tom Brady coolly led the Bucs on a 93-yard drive in the final minutes for a 28-24 victory over the New York Jets on Sunday.

Coach Bruce Arians said after the game Brown was off the team.

"He is no longer a Buc," Arians said. "All right? That's the end of the story. Let's talk about the guys who went out there and won the game."

Brown's mid-game meltdown came late in the third quarter with Tampa Bay trailing 24-10. He appeared

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animated while talking to Mike Evans, who tried to calm his teammate. But Brown stripped off his pads, jersey, gloves and T-shirt — tossing the gloves and T-shirt into the stands — and then walked bare-chested down the sideline and into the end zone. He then waved to fans as jogged through the end zone and into the tunnel at MetLife Stadium.

It appeared to be a show of frustration by Brown, who had three catches for 26 yards.

"I'm not talking about it," Arians said. "He's not part of the Bucs."

Brown was suspended last month for three games for violating the league's COVID-19 protocols. He also has a history of personal conduct issues and bizarre behavior.

"It's a difficult situation," Brady said. "Everybody should do what they can to help him in ways that he really needs it. We all love him. We care about him deeply. We want to see him be at his best. Unfortunately, it won't be with our team. ... I think everyone should be very compassionate and empathetic toward some very difficult things that are happening."

Brady connected with Cameron Brate for a touchdown on fourth-and-goal from the 4 shortly after Brown's exit, and the QB finished the Bucs' rally with a 33-yard touchdown pass to Cyril Grayson with 15 seconds left.

The Bucs stuffed Jets QB Zach Wilson on fourth-and-2 at the 7 for no gain with New York trying to seal the victory. New York coach Robert Saleh said the play should've been a reverse to wide receiver Braxton Berrios, but Wilson had the option to sneak it based on the look.

"We did a very poor job of communicating that," Saleh said, adding that "it just makes you sick" because a handoff to Berrios would've likely been a first down.

Instead, it gave Brady and the Bucs the ball back with 2:12 left.

And that was more than enough time.

Brady marched the Buccaneers (12-4) down the field on nine plays, zipping a pass to Grayson — who was elevated from the practice squad — for the go-ahead score. It was Brady's third TD pass of the game and 40th of the season, joining him with Drew Brees as the only players to throw for 40 touchdowns in consecutive seasons.

He finished 34 of 50 for 410 yards, the three TDs and an interception for Tampa Bay, which had Arians back after he tested positive for the coronavirus earlier in the week.

Le'Veon Bell ran in the 2-point conversion against his former team, forcing New York to need a touchdown. But the Jets (4-12) ran out of time.

"We've been in some crazy situations before," Arians said, "but this was a very special one to come back and win that game."

The game featured the largest age gap between starting quarterbacks since at least 1950, with the 22-year-old Wilson facing the 44-year-old Brady.

The Jets took a two-touchdown lead on Ty Johnson's 1-yard run that capped their opening drive of the second half.

After Brown's exit and Brady's TD to Brate, Ryan Succop kicked a 27-yard field goal to cut New York's lead to 24-20 with 7:36 left.

"It's unfortunate that we're going to be talking about the last sequence of events there," Saleh said, "but I thought our guys were outstanding today. They deserved better."

JETS FLY EARLY

New York took a 7-0 lead on a razzle-dazzle play to cap an impressive opening drive. Running back Michael Carter lined up in the wildcat — with Wilson behind the right guard — took the direct snap and flipped it to Berrios, who went in untouched.

Carter had a 55-yard run early in the drive to get the Jets to the Buccaneers 12.

Brady and the Bucs marched right down the field on their opening possession with Evans — back after missing last week's game with a hamstring issue and spending time on the COVID-19 list this week — catching a 4-yard touchdown pass to tie it at 7.

Wilson, who was 19 of 33 for 234 yards and a TD, answered right back with a 9-yard TD pass to Berrios

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for a 14-7 lead.

It was a costly 13-play, 74-yard drive for the Jets, though, as both Carter (concussion) and left tackle George Fant (left knee) were injured and didn't return.

A 39-yarder by Succop made it 14-10.

Brandin Echols intercepted Brady on Tampa Bay's last possession of the first half and returned it 30 yards to the Jets 48. New York turned it into points on Eddy Pineiro's 51-yard field goal with 1 second left.

**MORE HISTORY**

Brady, who improved to 31-8 against the Jets, also tied Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers as the only players with three seasons of 40 or more TD passes.

**INJURIES**

Buccaneers: RB Ronald Jones (ankle) and DB Rashard Robinson (groin) didn't come back after leaving in the second half.

Jets: In addition to Carter and Fant, TE Dan Brown left in the second quarter with a hip injury and didn't return.

**UP NEXT**

Buccaneers: Finish the regular season by hosting the Carolina Panthers next Sunday.

Jets: Wrap up their season at Buffalo next Sunday against AFC East rival Bills.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and <https://apnews.com/hub/pro-32> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Live updates: 2,500 US flights canceled due to storms, virus

By The Associated Press undefined

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island — Wintry weather combined with the pandemic to frustrate air travelers whose return flights home from the holidays were canceled or delayed in the first days of the new year.

More than 2,500 U.S. flights and more than 4,100 worldwide were grounded Sunday, according to tracking service FlightAware.

That followed Saturday's mass cancellations of more than 2,700 U.S. flights, and more than 4,700 worldwide. Saturday's single-day U.S. toll was the highest since just before Christmas, when airlines began blaming staffing shortages on increasing COVID-19 infections among crews.

A winter storm that hit the Midwest on Saturday made Chicago the worst place in the country for travelers throughout the weekend as the region's airports continued to recover Sunday morning. About a quarter of all flights at O'Hare Airport were canceled Sunday.

American Airlines said most of Sunday's canceled flights had been canceled ahead of time to avoid last-minute disruptions at the airport.

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

- Fauci says CDC may add test requirement for infected people ending isolation
- No end in sight for widespread flight cancellations due to US storms, pandemic
- UK makes contingency plans in case omicron leads to big staff shortages in hospitals, schools
- National Basketball Association calls up minor league referees to keep games going
- Dozens of US colleges and universities adapt to virus surge by returning to online classes

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

**HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TODAY:**

WASHINGTON — As the omicron variant surges across the United States, top federal health officials are looking to add a negative test along with its five-day isolation restrictions for asymptomatic Americans who catch the coronavirus, the White House's top medical adviser said Sunday.

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Dr. Anthony Fauci said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now considering including the negative test as part of its guidance after getting significant "pushback" on its updated recommendations last week.

Under that Dec. 27 guidance, isolation restrictions for people infected with COVID-19 were shortened from 10 days to five days if they are no longer feeling symptoms or running a fever. After that period, they are asked to spend the following five days wearing a mask when around others.

The guidelines have since received criticism from many health professionals for not specifying a negative antigen test as a requirement for leaving isolation.

"There has been some concern about why we don't ask people at that five-day period to get tested," Fauci said. "Looking at it again, there may be an option in that, that testing could be a part of that. And I think we're going to be hearing more about that in the next day or so from the CDC."

**JERUSALEM** — Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett says authorities have decided to expand the country's second booster campaign to people over the age of 60 as it copes with the omicron variant.

Israel last week approved the booster for a limited population of people with underlying illnesses.

Speaking on national TV, Bennett said Sunday that giving older Israelis an additional booster shot -- their fourth vaccination overall -- will provide a "new layer" of protection.

Earlier Sunday, Bennett warned that Israel will soon see tens of thousands of cases a day as the variant continues to spread. Bennett spoke at the start of the weekly Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem. He said despite rolling out more than 4.2 million coronavirus booster shots to the country's population of 9.3 million since July, "the storm is coming to us these very days."

Daily cases in Israel have risen around 700 to the more than 4,000 reported on Sunday.

**PARIS** — Despite a surge in coronavirus infections in France, Health Minister Olivier Veran struck an optimistic cord on Sunday, saying that "the fifth wave of COVID-19 is perhaps the last" in what for many around the world has become an endless pandemic.

President Emmanuel Macron's government insists that getting as many people vaccinated – and boosted — as possible is the best way to contain fast-spreading omicron variant, Veran the weekly *Le Journal Au Dimanche*. It's also the only way to avoid new lockdowns, damage to the country's economic recovery and the pressure on already overburdened hospitals, he added.

France has vaccinated 77% of its population and is rushing out booster shots to combat omicron. But more than 4 million adults remain unvaccinated, including more than 1 million people over age 65.

And for them, public life will be severely restricted as the government rushes out vaccine passes.

Unvaccinated people who contract the virus will be "watched and punished," Veran said. They will have to self-isolate for 10 days and for seven days if they were in contact with an infected person. For infected and inoculated residents, the quarantine has been reduced to seven days and further to five with a negative test. Starting Monday, those vaccinated and in contact with an infected person will not have to quarantine at all, Veran said.

Authorities registered 58,432 new cases on Sunday, a number well below the past four days when infections soared over 200,000.

**PARIS** — Soccer great Lionel Messi is isolating at home in Argentina.

Messi was among four Paris Saint-Germain players testing positive for the coronavirus ahead of the team's French Cup game at Vannes on Monday night as it returns to action after the winter break.

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is uncertain when the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner will be able to return to France, or whether Messi can recover in time to play away to Lyon in the French league next Sunday.

Pochettino says Messi "tested positive in Argentina (and) until he's negative, he won't be able to travel to France. We'll see when he gets back."

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LONDON — The U.K. government has been making contingency plans in case hospitals, schools and other workplaces are hit by major staff shortages amid the country's record-breaking spike in coronavirus infections.

Public sector workplaces have been preparing for staff absences ranging from 10% to 25% as COVID-19 sickens more people or forces them to isolate, the Cabinet Office said.

The highly transmissible omicron variant has caused Britain's daily new caseload to soar over Christmas and the New Year, with a new daily high of 189,000 on Dec. 31. About 1 in 25 people in England — or about 2 million people — had COVID-19 in the week before Christmas, the Office of National Statistics estimated. In London, the figure was 1 in 15.

Cabinet Office Minister Stephen Barclay said there had already been "significant" absences and the government was preparing for "every eventuality." He cited increased support for virus testing in schools and warehouses, and perhaps better ventilation, as an example of how to prevent disruptions.

LONDON — Secondary school students in England will be required to wear face masks when they return to classes after the Christmas holidays.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said Sunday the move was an attempt to "minimize disruption" in schools as the highly transmissible omicron variant drives coronavirus infections in the U.K. to record levels.

Similar guidance on masks for students ages 11 and above was already in place for schools in Scotland and Wales.

Students and teachers are set to return to classrooms on Tuesday after more than two weeks off, during which Britain's daily caseload has climbed as high as 189,000 on Dec. 31.

SOFIA, Bulgaria — Bulgarian health authorities have identified the country's first cases of the highly transmissible omicron variant.

Twelve people were found to have the variant, the country's chief health inspector Angel Kunchev said Sunday. He warned that the new variant can be expected to spread faster and soon become dominant.

All but one of the cases are from the capital Sofia and all of them have mild symptoms, Kunchev said adding that no one needs hospitalization. Seven of the people were not vaccinated, while the other five are fully vaccinated.

Bulgaria is the least vaccinated country in the 27-member European Union as just one-third of the population has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Balkan country of 7 million has reported a total of 748,184 cases, including 30,983 fatalities. Authorities on Sunday reported 1,076 confirmed new cases of coronavirus and 28 deaths.

PARIS — Unvaccinated people traveling from the United States will have to self-isolate in France for 10 days under supervision from local authorities in line with new government restrictions Sunday.

All passengers from the U.S. have to provide a negative COVID-19 test — a PCR or an antigen test — no older than 48 hours in addition to proof of vaccination before boarding a flight to France.

Unvaccinated travelers from the U.S. previously were required to self-quarantine without supervision for seven days.

New COVID-19 cases in France have surpassed 200,000 for four consecutive days, fueled by the highly contagious omicron variant.

French authorities also are stepping up pressure on unvaccinated residents. The government is pushing parliament to pass a law in the next two weeks that would allow only vaccinated residents to enter restaurants, cinemas, theaters, museums, and sports arenas.

AMSTERDAM — Thousands of people defied a ban on gatherings to assemble on an Amsterdam square for a demonstration against the Dutch government's coronavirus lockdown measures.

The municipality of the Dutch capital had outlawed the protest, saying police had indications some

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demonstrators could be attending “prepared for violence.”

But thousands of people made their way to the square on Sunday, with some unfurling a banner that read, “less repression, more care” near the Van Gogh Museum. A group of people in white overalls and white masks held up signs, including one that said: “It’s not about a virus, it’s about control” on one side and “Freedom.” on the other.

There was a heavy police presence on the square and in nearby streets. The municipality designated the area a security risk region, a decision that gave police powers to preventatively frisk people.

**NEW DELHI** — India has reported over 27,000 new COVID-19 cases, data from the Health Ministry showed amid growing concerns of a potential new surge stoked by the highly contagious omicron variant.

Sunday’s confirmed cases represented the highest daily count since October. The country also reported 284 deaths, bringing India’s total death toll in the pandemic to over 481,000 people.

The country now has more than 1,500 confirmed omicron cases, with the highest number in the western state of Maharashtra. India plans to start vaccinating children between 15 and 18 on Monday.

Various states have brought in a slew of restrictions to curb cases, including nighttime curfews, restricted seating at bars and restaurants, and bans on large public gatherings.

**ATLANTA** — Another one of Georgia’s largest school districts has decided to start 2022 classes virtually because of high numbers of COVID-19 cases.

Atlanta Public Schools announced students will be virtual when classes start back after winter break on Tuesday.

The district is also asking all teachers and other staff to report to their jobs for mandatory COVID-19 testing unless they are ill and will use that information for planning, the district said in a statement.

Currently, Atlanta schools plan to return to regular classes on Jan. 10.

Atlanta schools join Fulton County, Dekalb County, Clayton County and Rockdale County schools in a virtual return after Christmas.

Georgia’s two largest school districts — Gwinnett County and Cobb County — have not announced any changes to returning to school in person as of Saturday.

## Chelsea takes a stand, pioneers end to all-seater EPL games

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

**LONDON (AP)** — Coming to watch his beloved Chelsea since the 1960s, Gary Owen has witnessed firsthand the changing matchday experience.

From the dangers that saw soccer fans penned behind barbed wire — and threatened with electric fences — to stadiums becoming too placid, the 63-year-old Owen had been lamenting the loss of the raw passion of Stamford Bridge.

No longer.

For the first time since Premier League stadiums were ordered to be all-seater in 1994, Owen and thousands of other Chelsea supporters could legally stand again on Sunday — without being ordered to sit.

Chelsea’s stadium was the pioneer as trials began with the visit of Liverpool with what’s called “safe standing” in the Shed End where Owen had a ticket, and in a stand behind the other goal.

“It brings back the old days,” the 63-year-old Owen said. “It might create a bit more atmosphere. Football now has gone a sort of corporate way, so you lose the old-fashioned atmosphere.”

It would have been hard to keep fans off their feet as Chelsea conjured a comeback to draw 2-2 with Mateo Kovacic and Christian Pulisic scoring in a high-intensity clash with Liverpool.

“Sitting is like being in your front room, which is not the same,” Owen said. “I think a lot of grounds you go into, they’ve lost the atmosphere when you used to come here 30 years ago, this place used to go mad, jumping at the rafters. But now it’s really, really quiet from what it used to be.”

All-seater stadiums became mandatory in the top two tiers of English football following safety recom-

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recommendations made after the crush at Liverpool's 1989 FA Cup semifinal against Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough Stadium that led to the deaths of 97 fans.

"We have learnt a lot of lessons since the Hillsborough tragedy, and football has been as safe in the last 30 years as it has ever been," said Chief Constable Mark Roberts, who leads on football policing in England. "However we must not get complacent and, whenever measures such as this are introduced, the safety of those attending football must be absolutely paramount to any decisions made."

So much has changed since then, with the inception in 1992 of the Premier League which has become the wealthiest soccer competition in the world and spurred investment in stadiums.

"Things have moved on, obviously for the better because the old days we had a bad reputation," Owen said.

The government determined that now was the time to start testing procedures for fans to no longer be required to sit.

"It's the evolution of football," Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston said. "What we're not doing is going back to the old days of terraces — this is very, very different.

"Everybody has a seat, and there are bars in front and behind them, and that's really good because that will stop any surges going backwards or forwards, particularly in those heightened moments when there's a goal or something. So this is safe standing — exactly what it says on the tin."

Police are more cautious over new risks potentially being introduced, especially after some England fans highlighted the dangers of areas becoming overcrowded after violently forcing their way into the European Championship final against Italy at Wembley Stadium in north London in July.

Police believe fans standing could make it harder to identify any offenders — particularly with racist abuse still a blight on games — and also change the mix of the stands.

"Perhaps fewer females might want to stand in that area," Roberts told the BBC. "Certainly people with disabilities, older people. So you start to get a crowd that is predominantly maybe 16-55 male.

"There is a threat that you get these areas that are almost no-go areas, which obviously would lead to a deterioration in behavior. If this all goes well and there are no issues I'll be delighted. I just think there are risks that could have been avoided and mitigated had the advice of the police been listened to."

But for younger fans, the return of standing is not just welcome but logical.

"Everyone stands up anyway? Let's be honest," 22-year-old Kyle West said at Chelsea's Shed End. "I always stand up regardless, to be honest. Maybe you shouldn't. But I think it's just the heat of the moment, isn't it?"

"It will encourage more people to not feel like they are being a nuisance standing up. I want to see people standing on their chairs, singing every week."

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Climate change, new construction mean more ruinous fires

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

The winter grassland fire that blew up along Colorado's Front Range was rare, experts say, but similar events will be more common in the coming years as climate change warms the planet — sucking the moisture out of plants — suburbs grow in fire-prone areas and people continue to spark destructive blazes.

"These fires are different from most of the fires we've been seeing across the West, in the sense that they're grass fires and they're occurring in the winter," said Jonathan Overpeck, a professor in the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan. "Ultimately, things are going to continue to get worse unless we stop climate change."

Flames swept over drought-stricken grassy fields and neighborhoods northwest of Denver on Thursday with alarming speed, propelled by gusts up to 105 mph (169 kph). Tens of thousands were ordered to flee with little notice.

"I came out of Whole Foods, which is about a half mile from ground zero, and felt like I had to jump in

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my car and make a dash for my life as the smoke and wind and nearby flames were engulfing the area," Susie Pringle of Lafayette said in an email. "It was scary!"

Two people were missing as of Sunday and at least seven were injured. Officials estimated nearly 1,000 homes and other buildings were destroyed.

The blaze burned at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers). The cause is still under investigation, but experts say its clear what allowed it to spread so fast.

"With any snow on the ground, this absolutely would not have happened in the way that it did," said Keith Musselman, a snow hydrologist in Boulder. "It was really the grass and the dry landscape that allowed this fire to jump long distances in a short period of time."

Three ingredients were needed to start this fire — fuels, a warm climate and an ignition source, said Jennifer Balch, a fire scientist with the University of Colorado, Boulder. "And then you add a fourth ingredient, wind, and that's when it became a disaster."

Temperatures in Colorado between June and December were the warmest on record, Balch said. The grasses grew thick because they had a wet spring, but saw no moisture until snow flurries arrived Friday night.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis on Sunday called the blaze a "a horrific convergence" of destructive wind gusts that hit the area following the unseasonably dry and warm winter.

"We know that with the climate we face higher risks," Polis said. "Right here in city and suburbs."

Balch said Colorado is a dry landscape filled with flammable material for much of the year - "and those chunks of time are getting longer with climate change."

The lesson learned throughout this event is that the "wildland-urban interface is way bigger than we thought it was," Balch said. That means a wider area is under threat of wildfire.

That border area — where structures built by people meet undeveloped wildland prone to fire — has always been the foothills, she said. Fire-fighters in Boulder consider the interface west of Broadway — a busy road that passes through the center of town. But Thursday's fire sparked east of that line, next to thousands of houses that have sprouted up on the east side of the Rockies since the 1990s, Balch said.

"There were stretches between Denver and Fort Collins that had no development, but now it's just like one long continuous development track," Balch said. "And those homes are built with materials that are very flammable — wood siding, asphalt roofing."

"We need to completely rethink how we're building homes."

The other important change is understanding how these fires start in the first place, she said.

"There's no natural source of ignition at this time of year. There's no lightning," she said. "It's either going to be infrastructure-related or it's going to be human caused."

"The way we live in the landscape and our daily activities make us vulnerable," she said.

Over the last two decades, 97% of wildfires were started by people, according to a recent study by the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Causes have ranged from accidents at construction sites, to a car with a hot tailpipe, to tossed cigarettes.

"I like to say, we need Smokey Bear in the suburbs," she said. "We need to be thinking about how our daily activities can contribute ignitions or sparks that start wildfires."

Unless people stop climate change by cutting back on fossil fuels, wildfires will threaten communities, Overpeck said.

"There's little doubt in my mind that the conditions conducive to really bad wildfire, whether it's grass or forest, are only going to get worse," he said.

As more people move to areas where wildfires occur, the threat goes up.

"We're building towns and cities and infrastructure and so it's just a matter of time before we have whole towns burning down like we had in California and events like this in Colorado."

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Associated Press reporter Brittany Peterson contributed to this report.

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Follow Martha Bellisle on Twitter @marthabellisle

## Jan. 6 committee prepares to go public as findings mount

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They've interviewed more than 300 witnesses, collected tens of thousands of documents and traveled around the country to talk to election officials who were pressured by Donald Trump.

Now, after six months of intense work, the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection is preparing to go public.

In the coming months, members of the panel will start to reveal their findings against the backdrop of the former president and his allies' persistent efforts to whitewash the riots and reject suggestions that he helped instigate them. The committee also faces the burden of trying to persuade the American public that their conclusions are fact-based and credible.

But the nine lawmakers — seven Democrats and two Republicans — are united in their commitment to tell the full story of Jan. 6, and they are planning televised hearings and reports that will bring their findings out into the open.

Their goal is not only to show the severity of the riot, but also to make a clear connection between the attack and Trump's brazen pressure on the states and Congress to overturn Joe Biden's legitimate election as president.

"The full picture is coming to light, despite President Trump's ongoing efforts to hide the picture," said Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the committee's vice chairwoman and one of its two Republican members.

"I don't think there's any area of this broader history in which we aren't learning new things," she said.

While the fundamental facts of Jan. 6 are known, the committee says the extraordinary trove of material they have collected — 35,000 pages of records so far, including texts, emails and phone records from people close to Trump — is fleshing out critical details of the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries, which played out on live television.

They hope to fill in the blanks about the preparations before the attack, the financing behind the Jan. 6 rally that preceded it and the extensive White House campaign to overturn the 2020 election. They are also investigating what Trump himself was doing as his supporters fought their way into the Capitol.

True accountability may be fleeting. Congressional investigations are not criminal cases and lawmakers cannot dole out punishments. Even as the committee works, Trump and his allies continue to push lies about election fraud while working to place similarly minded officials at all levels of state and local government.

"I think that the challenge that we face is that the attacks on our democracy are continuing — they didn't come to an end on Jan. 6," said another panel member, Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., also chairman of the House Intelligence Committee.

Still, the lawmakers hope they can present the public with a thorough accounting that captures what could have been "an even more serious and deeper constitutional crisis," as Cheney put it.

"I think this is one of the single most important congressional investigations in history," Cheney said.

The committee is up against the clock. Republicans could disband the investigation if they win the House majority in the November 2022 elections. The committee's final report is expected before then, with a possible interim report coming in the spring or summer.

In the hearings, which could start in the coming weeks, the committee wants to "bring the people who conducted the elections to Washington and tell their story," said the panel's chairman, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss. Their testimony, he said, will further debunk Trump's claims of election fraud.

The committee has interviewed several election officials in battleground states, including Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Pennsylvania, about Trump's pressure campaign. In some cases, staff have traveled to those states to gather more information.

The panel also is focusing on the preparations for the Jan. 6 rally near the White House where Trump told his supporters to "fight like hell" — and how the rioters may have planned to block the electoral count if they had been able to get their hands on the electoral ballots.

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They need to amplify to the public, Thompson said, "that it was an organized effort to change the outcome of the election by bringing people to Washington ... and ultimately if all else failed, weaponize the people who came by sending them to the Capitol."

About 90% of the witnesses called by the committee have cooperated, Thompson said, despite the defiance of high-profile Trump allies such as Steve Bannon and former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows. Lawmakers said they have been effective at gathering information from other sources in part because they share a unity of purpose rarely seen in a congressional investigation.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, a close Trump ally, decided not to appoint any GOP members to the committee after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., rejected two of his picks last summer.

Pelosi, who created the select committee after Republican senators rejected an evenly bipartisan outside commission, subsequently appointed Republicans Cheney and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, Trump critics who shared the Democrats' desire to investigate the attack.

"I think you can see that Kevin made an epic mistake," Kinzinger said. "I think part of the reason we've gone so fast and have been so effective so far is because we've decided and we have the ability to do this as a nonpartisan investigation."

Kinzinger said the investigation would be "a very different scene" if Republicans allied with Trump were participating and able to obstruct some of their work.

"I think in five or 10 years, when school kids learn about Jan. 6, they're going to get the accurate story," Kinzinger said. "And I think that's going to be dependent on what we do here."

Democrats say having two Republicans working with them has been an asset, especially as they try to reach conservative audiences who may still believe Trump's falsehoods about a stolen election.

"They bring to the table perspectives and ability to translate a little bit what is being reflected in conservative media, or how this might be viewed through a conservative lens," says Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla. "And that's been really helpful."

There is "no division, no hostility, no partisan bickering — it's like, let's just get this job done," said California Rep. Zoe Lofgren, another member and a veteran of congressional investigations going back to the Watergate investigation of President Richard Nixon when she was a staffer on the House Judiciary Committee.

The nine-member group has bonded over a friendly text chain where they discuss business and occasionally their personal lives. There are messages wishing a happy birthday, for example, or congratulating another on a child's wedding.

"It's good, it's how Congress should be," said Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif.

Aguilar says the biggest challenges for the committee are the calendar and the small group of Trump loyalists who are trying to run out the clock by stonewalling or suing them. In the end, he said, he thinks the committee's final report will stand the test of time, similar to the investigations of the 9/11 attacks and Watergate.

For now, though, "we are still in the eye of the hurricane," Aguilar said.

## Crews rescue 21 people on stuck tram cars in New Mexico

By PAUL DAVENPORT Associated Press

New Mexico search and rescue crews used ropes and helicopters Saturday to rescue 21 people who were stranded overnight in two tram cars after an iced-over cable caused the cars to get stuck high up in the Sandia Mountains overlooking Albuquerque.

Lt. Robert Arguelles a Bernalillo County Fire Department spokesperson, said early Saturday afternoon that crews first rescued 20 people stranded in one car and several hours later rescued a 21st person stranded by themselves in a second car.

All the people on the two cars were employees of the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway or a mountaintop restaurant, and the 20 in one car were being ferried down to the base of the mountains at the end of

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their workdays, Arguelles said.

The other employee had been heading up the mountain to provide overnight security when the tram system shut down Friday night due to icing, Arguelles said.

There were no reported injuries among those stranded, Arguelles said. "More just pretty frustrated."

To rescue the 20 people in the one car, operators were able to move it to a nearby support tower more than halfway up the mountain, and search and rescue personnel early Saturday morning hiked to the area and climbed the tower to deliver blankets and other supplies to those inside the heated car, Arguelles said.

Search and rescue personnel over several hours used ropes and other equipment to lower the stranded employees about 85 feet (26 meters) to the ground before escorting them to a nearby landing zone in the steep and rocky terrain where the tower was located, Arguelles said.

The 20 people were then ferried by helicopter several at a time to the base of the mountains, he said.

Arguelles said the second car with the one employee aboard was higher up the mountain and at location where the car was too high above the ground to lower people by ropes.

But the tram system was able to inch the second car down the cable to the rescue site at the support tower, and rescuers then used ropes to lower the 21st person as was done with the others, Arguelles said.

Brian Coon, a tramway system manager, said there was an unusually fast accumulation of ice on one of the cables that made it droop below the tram, making it dangerous to keep going, KOB-TV reported.

This story was updated to correct the spelling of the Bernalillo County Fire Department spokesperson Lt. Robert Arguelles' name.

## Egypt pushes for calm after flare-up in Gaza hostilities

By ILAN BEN ZION and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Egyptian officials Sunday pushed for Israel and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip to rein in hostilities and adhere to a cease-fire in place since the war in May.

The Egyptian efforts came a day after Hamas militants launched rockets into the Mediterranean Sea off central Israel, prompting Israel to carry out airstrikes on militant positions in Gaza early Sunday. No casualties were reported.

The Israeli military said it struck "a rocket manufacturing site and military posts" belonging to Hamas in the Gaza Strip overnight in response to Saturday's rocket fire.

"Whoever points missiles at Israel bears responsibility," Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said at the start of the government's weekly Cabinet meeting.

On Wednesday, Palestinian militants shot an Israeli contractor working along the border fence and Israel responded with tank fire at militant positions in what was the first exchange of fire in months.

Egyptian officials called on Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza to stop their actions seen by Israel as "provocative," and for Israel to accelerate arrangements agreed upon as part of the cease-fire, an Egyptian diplomat with knowledge of the ongoing efforts said. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

"Neither side wants a full-blown war," the diplomat said. "They just want guarantees and steps on the ground."

The cease-fire, brokered by Egypt and other mediators, has been fragile but largely held since the 11-day war between Hamas and Israel in May. But the militant group says Israel has not taken serious steps to ease the blockade it imposed on Gaza with Egypt after the Islamic movement seized control of the coastal enclave in 2007.

At the same time, the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group has threatened military action against Israel if a hunger-striking Palestinian prisoner dies. Hisham Abu Hawash, an Islamic Jihad member held by Israel under administrative detention, has staged a hunger strike for over 130 days.

Israel's controversial policy of administrative detention allows suspects to be held without charge indefinitely. Israel says the practice is necessary to keep dangerous suspects in custody without disclosing

critical intelligence that could expose sources. Palestinians and rights groups decry the policy as a violation of due process.

Magdy reported from Cairo.

## Mexican fish extinct in wild successfully reintroduced

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — There once was a small fish called “tequila splitfin” or “zoogoneticus tequila” that swam in a river in western Mexico, but disappeared in the 1990s. Scientists and residents, however, have achieved the return of a species extinct in nature — but conserved in captivity — to its native habitat.

Its success is now intertwined with the community’s identity and being touted internationally.

It began more than two decades ago in Teuchitlán, a town near the Tequila volcano. A half-dozen students, among them Omar Domínguez, began to worry about the little fish that fit in the palm of a hand and had only ever been seen in the Teuchitlán river. It had vanished from local waters, apparently due to pollution, human activities and the introduction of non-native species.

Domínguez, now a 47-year-old researcher at the University of Michoacán, says that then only the elderly remembered the fish called “gallito” or “little rooster” because of its orange tail.

In 1998, conservationists from the Chester Zoo in England and other European institutions arrived to help set up a laboratory for conserving Mexican fish. They brought several pairs of tequila splitfin fish from the aquariums of collectors, Domínguez said.

The fish began reproducing in aquariums and within a few years Domínguez and his colleagues gambled on reintroducing them to the Teuchitlán river. “They told us it was impossible, (that) when we returned them they were going to die.”

So they looked for options. They built an artificial pond for a semi-captivity stage and in 2012 they put 40 pairs there.

Two years later, there were some 10,000 fish. The result guaranteed funding, not only from the Chester Zoo but also a dozen organizations from Europe, the United States and the United Arab Emirates, to move the experiment to the river.

There they studied parasites, microorganisms in the water, the interaction with predators, competition with other fish, and then introduced the fish in floating cages.

The goal was to re-establish the fragile equilibrium. For that part, the key was not so much the scientists as the local residents.

“When I started the environmental education program I thought they were going to turn a deaf ear to us ... and at first that happened,” Domínguez said.

But the conservationists succeeded with patience and years of puppet shows, games and explanations about the ecological and health value of “zoogoneticus tequila” — the fish help control mosquitos that spread dengue.

Some residents made up a nickname for the little fish: “Zoogy.” They made caricatures and formed the “River Guardians,” a group mostly of children. They collect garbage, clean the river and remove invasive plants.

Domínguez said it is difficult to say if water quality is better because there is no previous data to compare, but the entire ecosystem has improved. The river is cleaner, there are fewer non-native species and cattle are no longer permitted to drink in some areas.

The fish rapidly multiplied inside their floating cages. Then they were marked so they could be followed and set free. It was late 2017 and in six months the population increased 55%. Last month, the fish had expanded to another part of the river.

The reintroduction into nature of species that were extinct in the wild is complex and time-consuming. Przewalski’s horse and the Arabian oryx are among successful examples. The Chester Zoo said Dec. 29 that the tequila splitfin had joined that small group.

“The project has been cited as an International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) case study

for successful global reintroductions – with recent scientific studies confirming the fish are thriving and already breeding in the river,” the zoo said in a statement.

“This is an important moment in the battle for species conservation,” said Gerardo García, the zoo’s curator of lower vertebrates and invertebrates.

The IUCN’s red list of threatened species lists the tequila splitfin as endangered. Mexico’s freshwater ecosystems are under pressure from pollution, over-extraction of water resources and other factors. More than one-third of 536 species of freshwater fish that were assessed in the country are threatened with extinction, according to a 2020 report led by the IUCN and the ABQ BioPark in the United States.

Still, in Mexico, Domínguez and his team are already beginning work on another fish that is considered extinct in the wild: the “skiffia francesae.” The Golden Skiffia could some day join “Zoogy” in the Teuchitlán river.

## Schools adapt for return from break as COVID-19 cases surge

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Mask requirements are returning in some school districts that had dropped them. Some are planning to vastly ramp up virus testing among students and staff. And a small number of school systems are switching to remote learning — for just a short while, educators hope.

With coronavirus infections soaring, the return from schools’ winter break will be different than planned for some as administrators again tweak protocols and make real-time adjustments in response to the shifting pandemic. All are signaling a need to stay flexible.

“Change has been the only constant in this fight,” Newark Schools Superintendent Roger León wrote in a notice to parents before break. He announced Thursday that students will learn remotely for at least the first two weeks of the new year. The virus, León said, continues “to be a brutal, relentless and ruthless virus that rears its ugly head at inopportune times.”

Long after the widespread closures in the pandemic’s early days, school and elected leaders say they are using the lessons and tools of the past two years to try to navigate the latest surge without long-term shutdowns, which had woeful effects on learning and students’ well-being.

Still, pressure from parents and teachers unions has added to the urgency surrounding safety measures as the omicron-fueled surge sends up caseloads and puts children in the hospital in close to record numbers.

“They say kids do well (if infected), but who’s to say my kid is not going to be that one,” said Rebecca Caldwell, who is considering petitioning her Charleston, Illinois, district for a remote option that would let her keep her four sons, ages 17, 10, 7 and 5, home through the winter.

The first half of the school year brought Caldwell’s family three scares from exposures. One, from a family member, kept the whole family in quarantine for 10 days. Her 17-year-old and 10-year-old saw classmates infected, and each underwent a nerve-wracking series of COVID-19 tests as part of a more recent “test-to-stay” policy.

“It’s really scary because you worry about the domino effect, too,” said Caldwell, whose own health issues led her to leave her restaurant job more than a year ago to lessen her risk.

In the nation’s largest school system, New York City, 2 million at-home test kits provided by the state will be used to increase testing following the break, officials announced this week. Students whose classmates test positive can keep coming to school as long as their at-home tests are negative and they don’t have symptoms.

Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents New York City educators, questioned whether the new testing initiatives will be available in every school by the time schools reopen Monday.

“We are moving closer to a safe reopening of school next week. But we are not there yet,” he said.

In Chicago, the nation’s third-largest school district, officials announced the purchase of 100,000 laptops over the holidays in case they are needed for remote learning in January, though district leaders said they hope to avoid a system-wide closure. The Chicago Teachers Union has proposed pausing in-person learn-

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ing unless new safety measures are introduced, including negative COVID tests for returning students.

Los Angeles health officials last week announced tightened testing and masking rules for all employees and students when LA County public and private schools return to campuses on Monday. Concerned by a spike of the Omicron variant, the county health department mandated that teachers must wear medical grade masks in class and students and staff must wear masks outdoors in crowded spaces. Schools will have two weeks to comply.

To help keep as many students in school as possible, the Centers for Disease Control and U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona endorsed test-to-stay in December as an alternative to the previously recommended 10-day quarantines. Hundreds of schools have adopted test-to-stay policies for students who have had contact with an infected classmate.

"The goal remains to keep all schools open for in-person learning five days a week throughout the 2021-22 school year and beyond," Cardona said in a message to schools marking the halfway point of the academic year. He said 99% of schools were open in-person in December, compared with 46% last January.

Out of more than 13,000 school districts nationwide, relatively few have announced plans to start remotely after winter break.

Like Newark, those districts generally plan to resume in-person instruction within a couple weeks. They include Cleveland, Ohio; Prince George's County, Maryland; Mount Vernon, New York; Taos, New Mexico; Chester County, South Carolina; and several New Jersey school systems.

Citing the city's high infection rate, Detroit Superintendent Nikolai Vitti on Friday extended the winter break for nearly 50,000 students through at least Jan. 5 and urged them to get tested through the district. Tests are required for employees.

Ronald Taylor, superintendent of the South Orange-Maplewood School District in New Jersey, said a spike in cases and subsequent quarantining heading into the break had disrupted operations by forcing consolidation of classes where there weren't enough staff. He said the district would be remote the first week back.

"Like many other school districts, we have seen a consistent trend, after each of our school breaks, both Thanksgiving and our fall break in early November, there has been a sharp increase in our student/staff population of COVID cases," he said.

Masks also will make a return in some districts after break, including Hopkinton High School, the first Massachusetts public school to lift the mandate, in October. It was reinstated just before break.

In Florida's Miami-Dade County, where one in four people was testing positive for the virus, the school system announced Thursday that all employees, volunteers and visitors will be required to wear face coverings at schools and facilities, and students will be strongly encouraged to wear them. A state law prevents school districts from imposing mask mandates for students.

Some school systems are moving toward requiring vaccinations for students, but not anytime soon. In the Los Angeles school district, which was among the first to announce mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for students, a Jan. 10 deadline for students 12 and older was postponed until fall of 2022. Officials said the earlier date would have barred about 27,000 unvaccinated students from campuses.

The District of Columbia on Dec. 22 said all students, whether in public, private or charter schools, must be fully vaccinated by March 1.

Much about the omicron coronavirus variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less severe illness. Scientists say omicron spreads even easier than other coronavirus strains, including delta, and it is expected to become dominant in the U.S. by early 2022.

In Ohio, where hospitalizations for COVID-19 hit a record high this week, the Ohio Hospital Association is asking schools statewide to consider mandatory mask wearing as cases continue to spike.

The patchwork of responses also includes Woodbury, New Jersey's plans to bring students in for half days for the first week, sending them home with lunch so they don't have to remove masks in the building to eat.

## Fire ravages South Africa's historic Parliament complex

By ANDREW MELDRUM and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A major fire ripped through South Africa's 138-year-old Parliament complex on Sunday, gutting offices and causing some ceilings to collapse at a site that has hosted some of the country's pivotal moments. As firefighters struggled to tame the blaze, a dark plume of smoke and flames rose high into the air above the southern city of Cape Town.

Around 70 firefighters were still battling the fire hours after it started in the early morning, Cape Town's Fire and Rescue Service spokesman Jermaine Carelse said. Some were lifted up on a crane to spray water on the blaze from above. No injuries have been reported and Parliament itself had been closed for the holidays.

Visiting the scene, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said a person was "being held and is being questioned" by police in connection with the blaze. Police later confirmed a 51-year-old man had been detained.

"The fire is currently in the National Assembly chambers," Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Patricia de Lille told reporters as smoke billowed behind her from the roof of the historic white building with grand entrance columns. "This is a very sad day for democracy, for Parliament is the home of our democracy."

"We have not been able to contain the fire in the National Assembly," she added. "Part of the ceilings have collapsed."

Officials said the fire started in the Old Assembly building, which was built in 1884 and originally housed the South African Parliament but is now used for offices. It spread to the newer National Assembly building, built in the 1980s, which is where the Parliament now sits.

Authorities feared extensive damage to both buildings, which have stark white facades, elaborate roof linings and majestic columns, now all obscured by flames and smoke. There were also fears that priceless artifacts inside, including a manuscript where the composer first wrote some lyrics for South Africa's national anthem, would be lost forever.

Carelse warned that both buildings were at risk of collapsing.

"The bitumen on the roof is even melting, an indication of the intense heat. There have been reports of some walls showing cracks, which could indicate a collapse," the News24 website quoted Carelse as saying.

J.P. Smith, the Cape Town official in charge of safety and security, said at least one floor of the Old Assembly building was "gutted" and its entire roof had collapsed. The firefighters were now focusing efforts toward saving the National Assembly building, he said.

While the Old Assembly building was closely connected to South Africa's colonial and apartheid history, the National Assembly building was where former President F.W. de Klerk stood up at the opening of Parliament in 1990 and announced he was freeing Nelson Mandela from prison and effectively ending the apartheid system of white minority rule. The news electrified the country and reverberated around the world.

Security guards first reported the fire at around 6 a.m. Sunday, Carelse said, and the 35 firefighters initially on the scene quickly called for reinforcements. Cape Town activated its Disaster Coordinating Team, which reacts to major emergencies. Police cordoned off the complex and closed nearby roads.

De Lille said an investigation was underway into the cause of the blaze. Authorities were reviewing video camera footage and questioning the man arrested at the precinct.

Parliament speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula cautioned against speculation that it was a deliberate attack on South Africa's seat of democracy.

"Until such a time that a report has been furnished that there was arson, we have to be careful not to make suggestions that there was an attack," she said.

Ramaphosa and many of South Africa's top politicians were in Cape Town for the funeral Saturday of retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu at St. George's Cathedral, about a block away from the Parliament.

South Africans viewed the fire as a double blow on the first two days of the new year, after saying fare-

well to Tutu and then seeing their Parliament burn.

"It's just really a terrible setback," Ramaphosa said. "The Arch (Tutu) would've been devastated as well. This is a place he supported and prayed for."

South Africa has three capital cities. Cape Town is the legislative capital, as Parliament is located there. Pretoria is the administrative capital where government offices are and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital and hosts the Supreme Court.

Cape Town has seen arson attacks before. A huge wildfire on the slopes of Cape Town's famed Table Mountain last year spread to buildings below and destroyed part of a historic library at the University of Cape Town as well as other structures. A report concluded that fire was started deliberately.

## Jake's mice: Searching for answers to the puzzle of autism

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Jake Litvag leaned in for a closer look as a lab mouse scurried around an enclosure, stopping to sniff a large block.

"Hi, Jakob 1. I'm Jake," the 16-year-old said, naming the little furry creature engineered to have the same genetic abnormality he has.

That mouse and its lab-grown relatives are the first in the world to mirror the missing gene that causes Jake's autism. Scientists at Washington University in St. Louis bred the mice, and grew stem cells derived from Jake's blood, to study and find ways to treat his rare disorder – and look for answers to the larger puzzle of autism.

Jake's family raised money for the early research, which scientists then parlayed into a \$4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to delve more deeply into Jake's gene, one of more than 100 implicated in autism. They hope to find "points of convergence" that could someday help people with all forms of the neurodevelopmental condition affecting one in 44 U.S. children.

Jake knows he inspired their work. And that's helped him see autism as something to be proud of rather than something that makes him different from other kids. His parents, Joe and Lisa Litvag, figured meeting the scientists – and the mice – would show him firsthand what he had brought into being.

"Oh wow. Cool!" Jake said as he watched a mouse climb down a pole while others scampered in a bin.

Walking out of the lab, tears welled up in Lisa Litvag's eyes as she thought about the language within her son's cells helping other kids.

"We're deeply proud and humbled to be part of this," said Joe Litvag. "What do we live this life for? It's ultimately to try to, in one way, shape or form, be of service to others."

### JAKE'S GIFT

The Litvags realized early on that Jake wasn't reaching childhood milestones. He couldn't walk without assistance until he was 4. He struggled to string sentences together in first grade.

At first, no one could pin down why. Jake had a mix of different traits. He was hyperactive and impulsive but also social, warm and funny. It took until he was 5 to get a firm diagnosis of autism.

Around that time, the Litvags heard that child psychiatrist Dr. John Constantino, an expert on the genetic underpinnings of autism, was giving a talk at the Saint Louis Science Center. They decided to go in the hopes of meeting him. They did, and he began seeing Jake as a patient.

About five years later, Constantino proposed genetic testing. It revealed the missing copy of the MYT1L gene believed to cause one out of every 10,000 to 50,000 autism cases. Having an extra copy can cause schizophrenia.

The finding brought the family peace. They'd heard lots of people say autism was mostly caused by external factors, like birth trauma. "For a long time," Lisa Litvag said, "I thought it was something that I did."

Actually, a large multinational study suggests that up to 80% of the risk for autism can be traced to inherited genes.

"One of the big things it did for us as a family is it made us realize that it's nothing that we did wrong," Joe Litvag said. "It's just that people are born all the time" with genetic differences.

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The couple, whose younger son Jordan doesn't have the condition, talked openly with Jake about his autism and tried to bolster his self-esteem when he worried about being seen as different. They sent him to a small private school that tailors its curriculum to each child's learning abilities. And they encouraged his social tendencies, cheering him on when he and some classmates formed a band, the Snakes.

"We never wanted him to feel there was shame around his diagnosis," Lisa Litvag said. "We continued to kind of reinforce that this is a superpower, you are special, you are awesome ... and because you have autism, there are gifts you have to give other people."

## GIFTS BLOSSOM

When Constantino suggested studying the little-understood MYT1L gene, the Litvags enthusiastically agreed to help. Constantino – who is on the local board of a group they've long been active in called Autism Speaks – asked if they'd be interested in raising money for early research.

Joe Litvag, an executive in the live music industry, and Lisa Litvag, a partner in a marketing firm, reached out to family and friends and raised the \$70,000 needed in about six months.

With half the money, researcher Kristen Kroll and her team reprogrammed cells from Jake's blood into "induced pluripotent stem cells," which can be prodded into becoming various cell types. With the other half, scientist Joseph Dougherty and his team followed the blueprint of Jake's genome and induced his mutation in mice using the gene-editing tool CRISPR.

Like the people they're meant to model, mice with the mutation tended to be more hyperactive than siblings without it, running around their cages much more. They were nonetheless generally heavier, especially the first generation of mice. They had slightly smaller brains and a little less of the white matter that speeds communication between different brain regions.

Since starting the research about three years ago, scientists have bred around 100 mice with Jake's mutation and are now using the great-great grandchildren of the first one they engineered. They recently published about the mice in the journal *Neuron*.

While scientists can't go back and see how Jake's brain developed, Dougherty said, mice allow them to watch the mutation play out through generations.

## A GIFT IN RETURN

Dougherty and his colleagues hope what they learn about how MYT1L functions ultimately leads to medicines or gene therapies that improve or even correct the problems the mutation causes.

They are sharing their findings with scientists studying other autism-causing genes or trying to figure out how various genes work together to cause the condition. According to the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative, more than 100 genes have strong evidence linking them to autism and a growing list contains several hundred more genes thought to be linked to the condition.

In cases where autism is caused by a single gene, Dougherty said that gene probably does many things to brain development. A key to understanding autism overall is to find one or two things shared across different forms of autism — which could then be targets for treatment. Though not everyone with autism wants treatment, Dougherty said it could help those who do.

Since the research began, Dougherty has been writing notes to the Litvags explaining the latest discoveries. But as a lab scientist, he's mostly removed from the people sparking the research and first met the family when they were invited by the school to visit in December.

After meeting the mice, they stopped into another lab, where Jake peered through a microscope at his blue-stained stem cells.

"That's me! That's cool stuff. I never saw anything like that in my life," he said, stepping back to lean into his dad, who pulled him close.

Dougherty used the visit as an opportunity to share some news, a gift of sorts that he wanted to tell the family in person.

The missing gene doesn't seem to shorten life. The mice live 2 to 3 years, the same as their siblings.

"So, a normal life span?" Joe Litvag asked hopefully.

"Yes," Dougherty answered. "As far as we can tell, identical. I know that's a big relief, too."

Joe Litvag turned to his son. "So Jake, maybe you will live to be 100."

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"I will be 112!" Jake replied with a grin.

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## **S Korea: Unidentified person crosses border into North Korea**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's military said Sunday that an unidentified person crossed the heavily fortified border into North Korea.

The person was earlier spotted by surveillance equipment at the eastern portion of the border, known as the Demilitarized Zone, but avoided capture by South Korean troops on Saturday night. The surveillance later detected the person crossing the border, Joint Chiefs of Staff officers said.

South Korea sent a message to North Korea on Sunday morning to ensure the safety of the person, but the North hasn't responded, the officers said requesting anonymity citing department rules.

It was unclear if this was a rare case of a South Korean hoping to defect to the North, or it could be a North Korean who briefly entered the South Korean territory for some reason before returning to the North.

In September 2020, North Korea fatally shot a South Korean fisheries official found floating in its waters along a poorly marked sea boundary. South Korea said that North Korea troops were under orders to shoot anyone illegally crossing the border to protect against the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier in 2020, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un placed a border city under total lockdown after a North Korean defector with COVID-19-like symptoms sneaked back home. The fate of that defector, who had lived in South Korea, is not known.

On Saturday, North Korea announced it had decided to place top priority on strict virus restrictions at a high-profile ruling party meeting last week.

The two Koreas are split along the world's most heavily armed border, called the Demilitarized Zone. An estimated 2 million mines are peppered inside and near the 248-kilometer (155-mile) -long, 4-kilometer (2.5-mile) -wide DMZ, which is also guarded by barbed wire fences, tank traps and combat troops on both sides.

Defecting via the DMZ is rare. At the height of their Cold War rivalry, both Koreas sent agents and spies to each other's territory through the DMZ, but no such incidents have been reported in recent years.

About 34,000 North Koreans have defected to South Korea since the late 1990s to avoid poverty or political oppression, but a vast majority of them have come via China and Southeast Asian countries.

North Korea has yet to report any cases of the coronavirus while experts have questioned its claim of a perfect record.

## **Today in History**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 3, the third day of 2022. There are 362 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 3, 1990, ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. forces, 10 days after taking refuge in the Vatican's diplomatic mission.

On this date:

In 1777, Gen. George Washington's army routed the British in the Battle of Princeton, New Jersey.

In 1861, more than two weeks before Georgia seceded from the Union, the state militia seized Fort Pulaski at the order of Gov. Joseph E. Brown. The Delaware House and Senate voted to oppose secession from the Union.

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration re-established the authority of Japan's emperor and heralded the fall of the military rulers known as shoguns.

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In 1959, Alaska became the 49th state as President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a proclamation.

In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced the United States was formally terminating diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba.

In 1967, Jack Ruby, the man who shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, died in a Dallas hospital.

In 1977, Apple Computer was incorporated in Cupertino, California, by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Mike Markkula (MAHR'-kuh-luh) Jr.

In 2002, a judge in Alabama ruled that former Ku Klux Klansman Bobby Frank Cherry was mentally competent to stand trial on murder charges in the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four black girls. (Cherry was later convicted, and served a life sentence until his death in November 2004.)

In 2007, Gerald R. Ford was laid to rest on the grounds of his presidential museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, during a ceremony watched by thousands of onlookers.

In 2008, Illinois Sen. Barack Obama won Democratic caucuses in Iowa, while Mike Huckabee won the Republican caucuses.

In 2013, students from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, reconvened at a different building in the town of Monroe about three weeks after the massacre that had claimed the lives of 20 first-graders and six educators. The new 113th Congress opened for business, with House Speaker John Boehner (BAY'-nur) re-elected to his post despite a mini-revolt in Republican ranks.

In 2020, the United States killed Iran's top general in an airstrike at Baghdad's international airport; the Pentagon said Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds force, had been "actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members" in Iraq and elsewhere. Iran warned of retaliation.

Ten years ago: The Iowa Republican Party held its caucuses; although Mitt Romney was originally considered the winner by an extremely narrow eight-vote margin, officials later said that Rick Santorum had in fact beaten Romney by 34 votes; in the Democratic caucuses, President Barack Obama ran unopposed.

Five years ago: Ford Motor Co. canceled plans to build a new \$1.6 billion factory in Mexico, and said it would invest at least some of the savings in new electric and autonomous vehicles. The national president of the NAACP and five others were arrested after staging a sit-in at the Alabama office of Sen. Jeff Sessions, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for U.S. attorney general. It was announced that Fox News star Megyn Kelly would be leaving the network to work at NBC News.

One year ago: An outpouring of current and former Republican officials warned that President Donald Trump's effort to overturn the election result was undermining Americans' faith in democracy. A bipartisan group of 10 senators issued a statement saying that the election was over, and that further efforts to cast doubt on the result were "contrary to the clearly expressed will of the American people." All 10 living former secretaries of defense, writing in the Washington Post, warned against any move to involve the military in pursuing claims of election fraud, saying it would take the country into "dangerous, unlawful and unconstitutional territory." Nancy Pelosi was narrowly reelected as speaker, giving her the reins of Democrats' slender House majority. Gerry Marsden, lead singer of the 1960s British group Gerry and the Pacemakers, died at 78.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dabney Coleman is 90. Journalist-author Betty Rollin is 86. Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Hull is 83. Singer-songwriter-producer Van Dyke Parks is 79. Musician Stephen Stills is 77. Rock musician John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin) is 76. Actor Victoria Principal is 72. Actor-director Mel Gibson is 66. Actor Shannon Sturges is 54. Actor John Ales is 53. Jazz musician James Carter is 53. Contemporary Christian singer Nichole Nordeman is 50. Musician Thomas Bangalter (Daft Punk) is 47. Actor Jason Marsden is 47. Actor Danica McKellar is 47. Actor Nicholas Gonzalez is 46. Singer Kimberley Locke (TV: "American Idol") is 44. Actor Kate Levering is 43. Former NFL quarterback Eli Manning is 41. Actor Nicole Beharie is 37. Pop musician Mark Pontius is 37. R&B singer Lloyd is 36. Pop-rock musician Nash Overstreet (Hot Chelle (shel) Rae) is 36. Actor Alex D. Linz is 33.