

# Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup  
for the Soul.

“Challenges are gifts that force us to search for a new center of gravity. Don't fight them. Just find a new way to stand.”

-Oprah Winfrey



## UpComing Events

### Monday, Jan. 10

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

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

### Tuesday, Jan. 11

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

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

### 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 a.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.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
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**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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## #504 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The numbers continue to look bleak. New case reports have been over last winter's peak since December 28; since we last talked, we've had one-day reports of 704,000 on Wednesday, 760,000 on Thursday, 895,000 on Friday, and 450,000 yesterday. Our one-day new-case average was 656,478 at midday today, and we're still showing 200+ percent increases in two weeks. Thirty-seven states have had record new-case numbers in the past week. This isn't as alarming as it was last winter when almost no one was vaccinated, but these are still staggering numbers and some proportion of these sick people is going to die. Worse, at this rate, we're racking up more millions of cases at a brisk clip, passing 58 and 59 million since we last talked with 60 million hitting later today. At midday, we're at 59,848,908. Here's what I have so far:

April 28, 2020 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days  
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days  
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days  
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days  
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days  
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days  
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days  
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days  
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days  
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days  
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days  
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days  
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days  
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days  
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days  
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days  
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days  
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days  
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days  
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days  
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days  
April 24 – 32 million – 16 days  
May 18 – 33 million – 23 days  
July 16 – 34 million – 59 days  
July 31 – 35 million – 15 days  
August 11 – 36 million – 11 days  
August 17 – 37 million – 6 days  
August 23 – 38 million – 6 days

August 30 – 39 million – 7 days  
September 5 – 40 million – 6 days  
September 12 – 41 million – 7 days  
September 18 – 42 million – 6 days  
September 27 – 43 million – 9 days  
October 6 – 44 million – 9 days  
October 18 – 45 million – 12 days  
November 1 – 46 million – 14 days  
November 13 – 47 million – 12 days  
November 24 – 48 million – 11 days  
December 4 – 49 million – 10 days  
December 13 – 50 million – 9 days  
December 20 – 51 million – 7 days  
December 25 – 52 million – 5 days  
December 28 – 53 million – 3 days  
December 30 – 54 million – 2 days  
January 2 – 55 million – 3 days  
January 3 – 56 million – 1 day  
January 4 – 57 million – 1 day  
January 6 – 58 million – 2 days  
January 7 – 59 million – 1 day

Hospitalizations at midday were at an average of 125,481 with a count Friday night of 134,000, close to last winter's peak of 142,000 (recorded on January 14). Hospitalizations in children are surging. The number of children under 5 has jumped from 2.6 per 100,000 the last week of 2021 to 4.3 per 100,000 this last week, a 48 percent increase, largest for the age group in the pandemic. Average daily admissions for children under 18 were at 797 last week, also a record and an 80 percent increase from the previous week.

Hospitalization needs to be understood within the context of our current situation. Hospitalization rates are higher than they were with Delta, but still lower

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a bit than they were last winter. Of course, there's still time for growth, so we'll see what the next few weeks bring. Importantly, fewer of these hospitalized folks are landing in ICUs or on vents, most likely (although we are not yet certain) due to a milder course of infection with the Omicron variant. So why are the hospitals hollering about strains on resources? A couple of things are operating here: (1) With the crazy case numbers we are seeing now, even a smaller percentage of the total cases still stacks up to be one hell of a lot of patients. Hospitals in 644 counties in the US are at capacity, and another 619 are at risk of reaching capacity in the next 10 days; this is out of 2224 counties, so more than half. Almost a quarter of 5000 US hospitals reporting to HHS report a "critical staff shortage" with another 100 expecting a shortage this week; this is the worst report of the pandemic. (2) Most of these admissions are unvaccinated. Admissions of unvaccinated people in New York are at 58 per 100,000 residents, whereas only 4.6 of 100,000 fully-vaccinated people are being admitted, and similar reports are coming from all around the county. Big difference. (3) We have fewer health care workers than ever before. They're quitting at historic rates, and the more who quit, the greater the pressure on those who remain, driving further losses. Not only are hospitals finding it difficult to staff Covid-19 beds, they are also struggling to staff beds for patients with other health conditions. (4) Hospitals in the Midwest went directly from a Delta surge to an Omicron surge; they hadn't even come off their peaks when this started. That means they've been operating in crisis mode for months, not weeks. (5) Staffing shortages at long-term care facilities is exacerbating the pressures on hospitals because the facilities are unable to take patients who should be discharged from the hospital. That's plugging up the system too as ready-for-discharge patients occupy beds needed by the folks stacking up in the emergency department waiting for those beds. (6) Elective surgeries are being paused in many places; patients are waiting days or weeks in emergency departments for beds. Some of them aren't coming in for Covid-19, but for other illnesses; but many of these other illnesses are exacerbated by the virus, making their situations worse. Everyone loses in this scenario. Masking and testing help to mitigate these effects, but this is still a surge, and it is compromising the care people receive, even those coming in for something other than Covid-19. It is also putting some institutions on the brink of implementing crisis standards of care—the point at which care is essentially rationed. The good news is that for vaccinated people, hospital stays are shorter and their outcomes are less severe. The more of those we have, the easier things get.

Deaths numbers have finally taken a sharper turn. They've been pretty steady since Christmas, but we had a 25 percent rise in the seven-day average last week to 1524. At midday, we are at 835,835 in the pandemic so far. It's not yet clear what's going to happen with deaths numbers as we go along. No one's predicting we're going to get where we were last winter when we had days with 4000 deaths and averages around 3400; but they're going to keep rising for a while. We do have vaccination coverage, better treatment, and the milder course of Omicron cases to give us hope that we're not going to see these soar. Throughout the pandemic, I've seen a lag of 19 to 21 days between an increase in cases and a corresponding increase in deaths, longer to get records completed and filed when numbers are overwhelming, so it's still early to form a picture. We are seeing some worrisome rises in Northeastern states that hit this surge earliest. We are hopeful the numbers aren't going to be proportionate to the case or hospitalization numbers, but the only way to know for sure is to wait for them to come in.

We are still seeing flight cancelations. On Wednesday, we had 1790 cancelations and 6097 delayed flights in the US. On Thursday, over 2100 US flights were canceled; the reasons are the same as they have been: personnel shortages and weather. It's not letting up: From Friday through today, around 5000 more flights were canceled. This has been going on since Christmas: Staffing shortages caused by Covid-19 compounded by winter storms are playing hell with schedules. Some airlines are asking travelers to consider delaying nonessential travel until later. It's not great for business when you have to ask customers not to buy things from you.

The cruise industry continues to suffer as well. Royal Caribbean is the latest to cancel cruises due to

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Covid-19. Four ships are involved in the latest cancelations. After a ship was held in Hong Kong last week and Norwegian canceled cruises on eight ships, it was starting to look like there was more trouble in store. The CDC is currently recommending no one go on a cruise at this time.

A new variant has popped up in Cyprus. The first report I can find of it is from Saturday, so it's probably really, really new. This is an interesting one; it appears to add some Omicron-like mutations to a basic Delta platform. The researcher at the University of Cyprus reporting on this variant, Leonidios Kostrikis, professor of biological sciences, is calling it "deltacron" for now. It does not yet have a Pango designation assigned: That is the strange combination of letters and numbers we've see on most of the other variants we've discussed. The findings have been sent to GISAID, the international database for viral variants; I'm guessing the Pango number will follow once its genomic features are fully characterized so that the proper lineage can be indicated in the Pango designation. So far, there appear to be just 25 cases of infection with this variant; work is being done now to determine whether there are more than that. It's too soon to have any idea about its characteristics or how much of a threat it might be; but Kostrikis told Sigma TV on Friday that he believes Omicron will out-compete it. I'm not sure what he's basing that on because I haven't seen any analysis; I imagine this information will become available as we go along. It's too soon to worry about this one, but I wanted to let you know it's out there.

I have an update on vaccinations in the US. We're at 62.4 percent fully vaccinated; that's around 207 million people. Twenty-three percent of us are vaccinated and boosted; but over 20 percent of us haven't had a single dose. We're at just over a million doses per day with almost 60 percent of those boosters; only 30,000 people are initiating vaccination each day. We have at least 75 percent of the population fully vaccinated in five states, all in the Northeast: Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. On the other hand, we have four states—Idaho, Wyoming, Mississippi, and Alabama—with fewer than half their populations fully vaccinated. That spells long-term trouble for our population as a whole, but especially those who live in low-vaccination states irrespective of their own vaccination status. Being surrounded by unvaccinated people places everyone at risk; if those unvaccinated people are also taking no precautions—which is the typical picture across the country—then the risk is greater. Turns out we are our brothers' keepers whether we accept the responsibility or not.

On Friday, the FDA amended the emergency use authorization (EUA) for Moderna's vaccine to permit a booster five instead of six months after the initial series is completed; is in line with the scheduling for the other mRNA vaccine from Pfizer/BioNTech. The Moderna vaccine is still authorized only for those 18 and older, but now may be used as a booster just a little bit sooner.

Of course, there are always folks willing, even eager, to take advantage of tragedy to enrich themselves, and the current situation is no exception. The latest in the cavalcade of venality is the fake Covid-19 home test kit, a thing that is apparently readily available online. There is enough concern for the FDA to put some guidelines out. They have a website listing authorized home tests; it is available at <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/in-vitro-diagnostics-euas-antigen-diagnostic-tests-sars-cov-2>. They've also issued a list of known fraudulent tests, available at <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/health-fraud-scams/fraudulent-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-products#Warning%20Letter%20Table>. They also recommend you seek out reviews from expert sources and do a search for a seller along with the words "scam" or "complaint" before buying, one of the good uses to which we can put the Internet. They are recommending you use a credit card when you buy so that you can more easily challenge the charge if the kit turns out to be a fake. And they suggest you will also want to have a look at the expiration date; some sellers are unloading expired kits on the public. If you're going to go to the trouble of a test, best you get one that actually works, right?

So what about herd immunity? With these kinds of numbers, we should be able to get enough people

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protected for herd immunity, right? Even Israel's health officials are talking that way. So is that where we're going?

You may recall that herd immunity is, indeed, a real thing that can happen. How it works is that, when you have enough people immune to a pathogen, it has trouble finding enough new susceptible hosts among host contacts to establish a transmission pattern and the pathogen eventually dies out or at least becomes a far less common sort of thing. The number of people that need to be immune for herd immunity to develop depends on the pathogen: The more transmissible they are, the more people it takes. For this particular permutation of SARS-CoV-2, the estimates are we would need around 94 percent of us worldwide to be immune.

I read a discussion of the subject in Fortune magazine, drawing on the expertise of Dr. Luis Ostrosky, chief of infectious diseases with McGovern Medical School at the University of Texas Health Science Center, and Dr. Gregory Poland, head of the Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group, that I'll summarize for you here. The short version is that Ostrosky thinks it's time to let go of this pipe dream. Here's why:

(1) If we ever achieved it, herd immunity wouldn't last long. It looks like our antibody responses to this virus fade with time, and it's the antibodies that prevent initial infection. So even if we could get 94 percent of us all immune at the same time, fact is the folks whose prior infection was longer ago are going to become susceptible again as time goes on and folks whose vaccination was old would also become susceptible again. So without vaccination, we'd have sort of a rolling slate of once-again susceptible people ready for a new round. Since not everyone is willing to be vaccinated, then there's going to be no way to maintain the herd immunity without those folks continuing to get infected periodically. That's no way to get a virus to die out.

(2) This virus keeps mutating. New variants are going to continue to pop up, and one or more of them may be immune escapes. When that happens, we're going to have a whole lot of susceptible folks running around getting sick as we did way back at the beginning of this thing. Poland mentions the example of influenza virus. We've been battling that one for over a century, and we still see cases and need to revaccinate people every year. This one is looking like it could be in that class.

(3) The human cost of getting 94 percent of our population immune when so many refuse vaccination will be enormous because the unvaccinated are going to attain their protection the hard (and dangerous) way—over and over again. We would need tens of millions of Americans to get sick pretty close together in time to yield herd immunity every time we started to fall below our 94 percent number. There would need to be much more illness, much more strain on our financial resources to care for all those sick people, much more economic strain as people miss work and the economy can't function normally, much more long-Covid and its drain on resources, and much, much more death. Even if the current surge infects more and ends later than we expect, it likely will not leave us with herd immunity. If we consider the disruption and illness and loss it is causing, I think we'd be hard-pressed—and highly irresponsible—to argue more of this would be a desirable thing so we can reach a transient herd immunity.

Bottom line: We need more people vaccinated worldwide. That will take enormous resources, but the alternative is to keep expending resources indefinitely every time there's another surge in cases. Ostrosky said, I see Omicron as our kind of final warning shot." He adds that if we don't do something "drastic and permanent," it will mutate further and produce an immune escape—a variant against which we have no protection, no effective therapeutics, and no tests that identify it. The "drastic" something he thinks we need to do is not news: more vaccination and more masking. He says we need a minimum of 60 to 70 percent of our population across all geographic regions, economic strata, ethnicities, genders, and ages to

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put a dent in this thing. If it's not fairly even through these groups, then we'll continue to have devastating outbreaks. Honestly, I have little, maybe no, hope of that happening. This might just mean what we have now is the way it's going to be, effectively forever.

The CDC dropped a NIH study on its website on Friday; this is not yet peer-reviewed. The research team was looking at effects of vaccination status on morbidity and mortality from Covid-19. Here are the findings, quoted directly from the CDC:

"Among 1,228,664 persons who completed primary vaccination during December 2020-October 2021, severe COVID-19-associated outcomes (0.015%) or death (.0033%) were rare. Risk factors for severe outcomes included age  $\geq 65$  years, were immunosuppressed, and or had at least one of six other underlying conditions. All persons with severe outcomes had at least one risk factor; 78% of persons who died had at least four."

The NIH report also said, "2246 (18.0 per 10,000 vaccinated persons) developed COVID-19 and 189 (1.5 per 10,000) had a severe outcome, including 36 who died (0.3 deaths per 10,000). . . . Severe COVID-19 outcomes after primary vaccination are rare; however, vaccinated persons who are aged  $\geq 65$ , are immunosuppressed, or have other underlying conditions might be at increased risk." One more interesting finding is that there was no association found between race/ethnicity and severe outcomes in these vaccinated people. That means the large differences in outcome seen prior to the availability of vaccines appear to be washed out by vaccination. The authors mention that this suggests "that COVID-19 vaccines are important for helping to mitigate racial and ethnic disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic." Good to know that works, but this makes it more important than ever to reach members of minority groups with vaccines.

I looked at a series of papers, most in preprint so not yet peer-reviewed, comparing cases with the Omicron variant to cases earlier in the pandemic. As we collect data, a picture is emerging that follows along the lines of what's been reported since late November when this variant burst onto the public scene.

We have preliminary evidence from a study done at Case Western Reserve University analyzing the three-day risks of emergency department visit, hospitalization, ICU admission, and mechanical ventilation in 577,938 first-time infected patients across the US between September 1 and December 24 of last year as the Omicron variant emerged. This work found statistically what doctors have been reporting anecdotally right along. It appears the risk of being hospitalized if you have Covid-19 has halved since the Omicron variant became dominant. Data scientist Ron Xu who led the study said, "The difference was huge. We didn't need to do any complicated statistics to see the difference." Once admitted, the risk of being admitted to the ICU was halved as well, and the chance of ending up on a ventilator fell by three-quarters. This fits well with what we've seen from UK and South African studies. So emergency rooms are swamped, but a smaller proportion of cases need admitting. There are some caveats to accompany this finding, mostly that outcomes still depend very much on the vaccination status of the patient, the patient's age and overall health, and the patient's economic situation. We'll note that old people are still on the hook for some increased risk.

Just so no one gets the wrong idea, we should hasten to mention that vaccines still have a large effect on outcomes. We are seeing that even vaccination without a booster is keeping people out of the hospital; at Yale New Haven Hospital, about 80 percent of patients are unvaccinated; among the vaccinated nearly everyone were not boosted. They had very few vaccinated-and-boosted patients admitted. Hard to argue with that. Also important is to note that when Covid-19 progresses to lung disease, it's mostly in the unvaccinated.

Here's a sobering study: A research group at the CDC took a look at records for almost 1.7 million

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pediatric cases of Covid-10 diagnosed between March 1, 2020, and February 26, 2021, and constructed a matched-samples study, matching for age, sex, and prior Covid-19 or other acute respiratory infection diagnosis to compare those with and without Covid-19 or acute respiratory infection and new diabetes diagnoses. They found that “diabetes incidence was significantly higher among those with COVID-19 than among those 1) without COVID-19 . . . and 2) with non-COVID-19 ARI [acute respiratory infections] in the pre-pandemic period.” What this means is that children who have had Covid-19 are at significantly higher risk to develop Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. We’ve already seen this in adults; this study extends that finding to children. There have been reports of increased diabetes incidence in Europe as well. What we don’t know yet is whether this is a transient condition that resolves or something that becomes chronic and lifelong. (If you need brushing up, a matched-samples design is a particularly powerful research means for comparing two groups; we talked about this almost a year ago in my Update #368 posted February 25, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4472116936138011>.)

Another CDC study released Friday took a look at multisystem inflammatory syndrome of children (MIS-C), that uncommon but serious complication, and vaccination status. Studying cases in 24 hospitals in 20 states between July 1 and December 9, 2021, when Delta was the dominant variant, the researchers found that vaccination has an efficacy of 91 percent against MIS-C. Of 38 hospitalized patients 12 to 18 who needed ventilation, all were unvaccinated. Cases were 12 to 18 years old. A matched samples design was employed here too, matching patients by site, age group, and date of hospitalization. There were 102 MIS-C patients in the study.

This is presenting much like the common cold—sniffles, sore throat, congestion. There may be a cough, but it’s likely to be milder; fevers don’t occur as frequently. Work from the UK early in Omicron’s emergence listed the top symptoms as runny nose, headache, fatigue, sneezing, and sore throat. The incubation period is running shorter, generally around three days. Also loss of the senses of taste and smell are far less common. Most important, there are fewer patients with lower respiratory symptoms like shortness of breath. We’ve talked before (Updates #503 posted January 5 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5503283033021391> and #496 posted December 18 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5431513513531677>) about the fact that it appears this variant is not as successful at reaching and replicating in lung tissue as Delta; that fits with the clinical picture that is emerging. It is important to note too that there is still a wide constellation of other symptoms which may occur; we’re just trying to nail down the most common ones here.

We’ve talked from time to time since fairly early in this pandemic about training dogs to sniff out Covid-19 in people. You can find those discussions in my Update #153 posted July 24, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3802390993110612>, Update #177 posted August 18, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3881511635198547> for an interesting side note on Parkinson’s disease diagnosis, Update #213 posted September 23, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4004519329564443> for news of testing in Finland, and Update #467 posted September 15, 2021 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5105243676158664> for news of a trial in the US.

Today’s news is about the use of Covid-sniffing dogs in a Massachusetts school. Two dogs trained to detect the virus in humans are roaming the halls of schools in the Freetown-Lakeville Regional School District, looking for kids who are infected. In a study available in preprint (so not yet peer-reviewed) from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the dogs were able to accurately identify cases 82 to 94 percent of the time, which is as good as or better than many of our lab tests. This development could put an entirely new complexion on things. We do not yet have definitive data on the dogs’ detection abilities in various contexts, for example, we’re not sure how they’ll do in a densely-crowded setting or outdoors; but this is a start.

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Speaking of animals, there's an outbreak of Covid-19 among the big cats at the Miller Park Zoo in Bloomington, Illinois. The first symptoms appeared on November 20 with just one cat who developed a cough. Since then, four cats have become ill, and this week it was reported that an 11-year-old snow leopard, Rilü, had pneumonia. The snow leopard died on Saturday. Snow leopard populations in the wild have been dwindling for years and are estimated at only 4000 to 6500 today, so any untimely demise is a matter for some concern. Fortunately, these deaths, while not rare, have not been frequent either. The exhibit has been closed to protect the animals and the public, although we have no instances of animal-to-human transmission so far in any location. None of the animals at this zoo has been vaccinated yet; the veterinary vaccines are very difficult to obtain.

And that's it for the first full week of the year. Be careful, and stay well. We'll talk in a few days.



## A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Imagine a condition with symptoms that present differently in each person who has it and no currently approved lab test can definitively confirm the diagnosis. Imagine that the symptoms can flare up and then mysteriously disappear, including fatigue, low grade fevers, joint pain, and mouth sores. All these symptoms overlap with multiple other conditions further complicating a diagnosis. Imagine that the best available method for diagnosing this ailment is a manual checklist of eleven criteria and if the patient suffers from at least four, they receive a diagnosis on a scale of definite, probable, or possible.



By Jill Kruse, D.O.

What if I told you this condition is caused by an attack on the body by its own immune system and the main way to treat this is by suppressing the immune system we each depend upon to help protect our bodies from infection. The course of this illness can range from mild to rapidly progressing to organ failure and death. This condition is real and has a most appropriate name which means "the wolf" in Latin. The condition is systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a condition which evades diagnosis and is difficult to treat.

Lupus mainly affects women between the ages of 15 and 40, particularly women of color. For many busy young women with lupus, symptoms are often brushed off by family, friends, and unfortunately sometimes by health care providers who may view the patient as being "tired" or "over worked." Routine wellness lab tests, which serve as an alert system for other illnesses, provide no indication of lupus. Patients who persist and find someone to further investigate their symptoms may be misdiagnosed with a myriad of other conditions sometimes resulting in unnecessary medications, treatments, and further suffering.

Work is underway to better understand lupus. The trigger that causes the immune system to start attacking itself is not known, but scientists suspect it involves a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Research and awareness are making a difference. In the 1950s, the 5-year and 10-year survival of SLE patients was less than 50 percent. Since then, that number has improved to over 90 percent. This increase in survival rate stems from improvements in our ability to diagnosis lupus earlier and to provide better treatments once diagnosed. But we must do better. Early diagnosis of lupus requires patients and health care providers working together to persist in finding this "wolf in sheep's clothing."

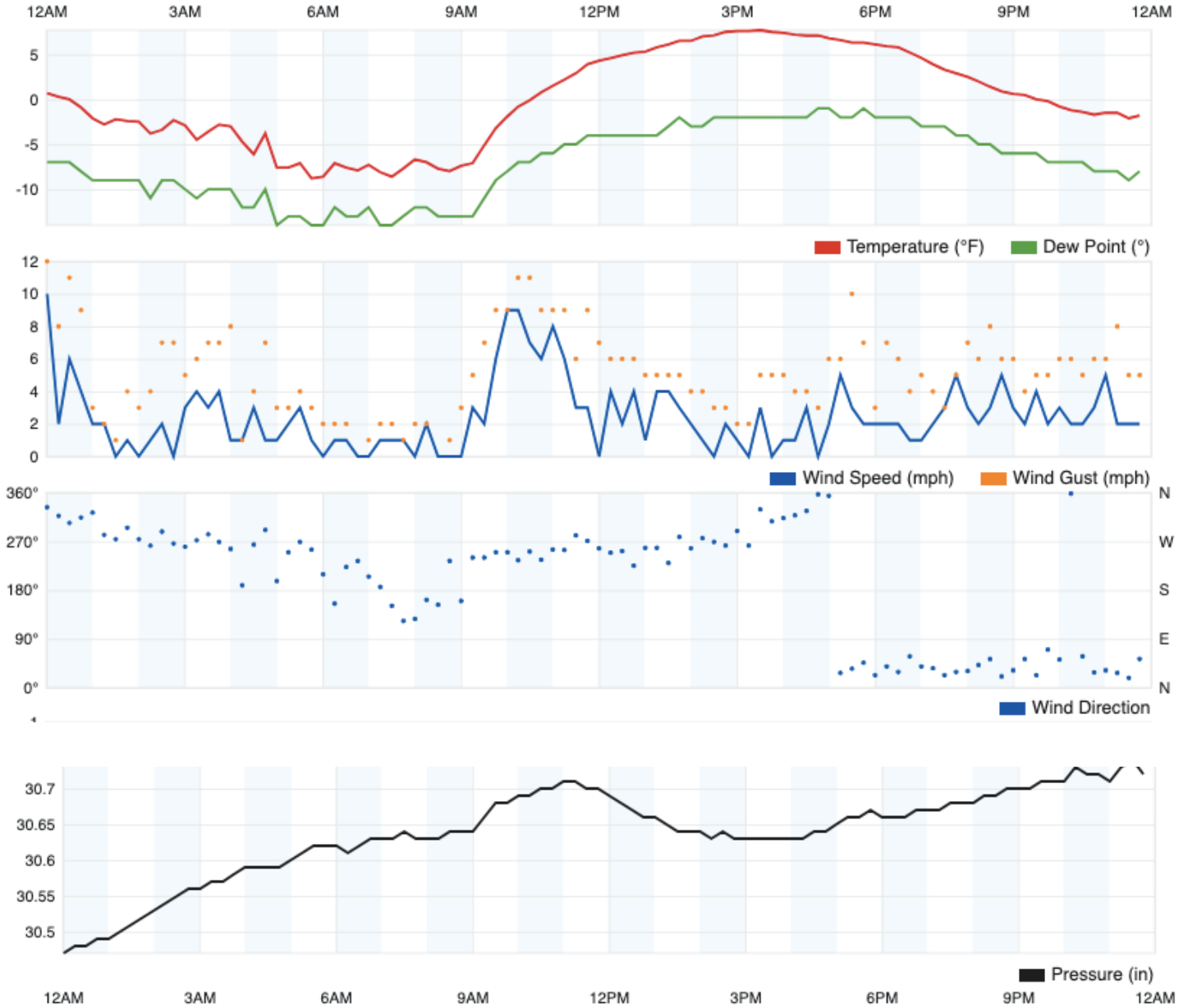
If you or a loved one has a concern about lupus or other autoimmune conditions, talk with your doctor and see if a consultation with a rheumatologist would be beneficial.

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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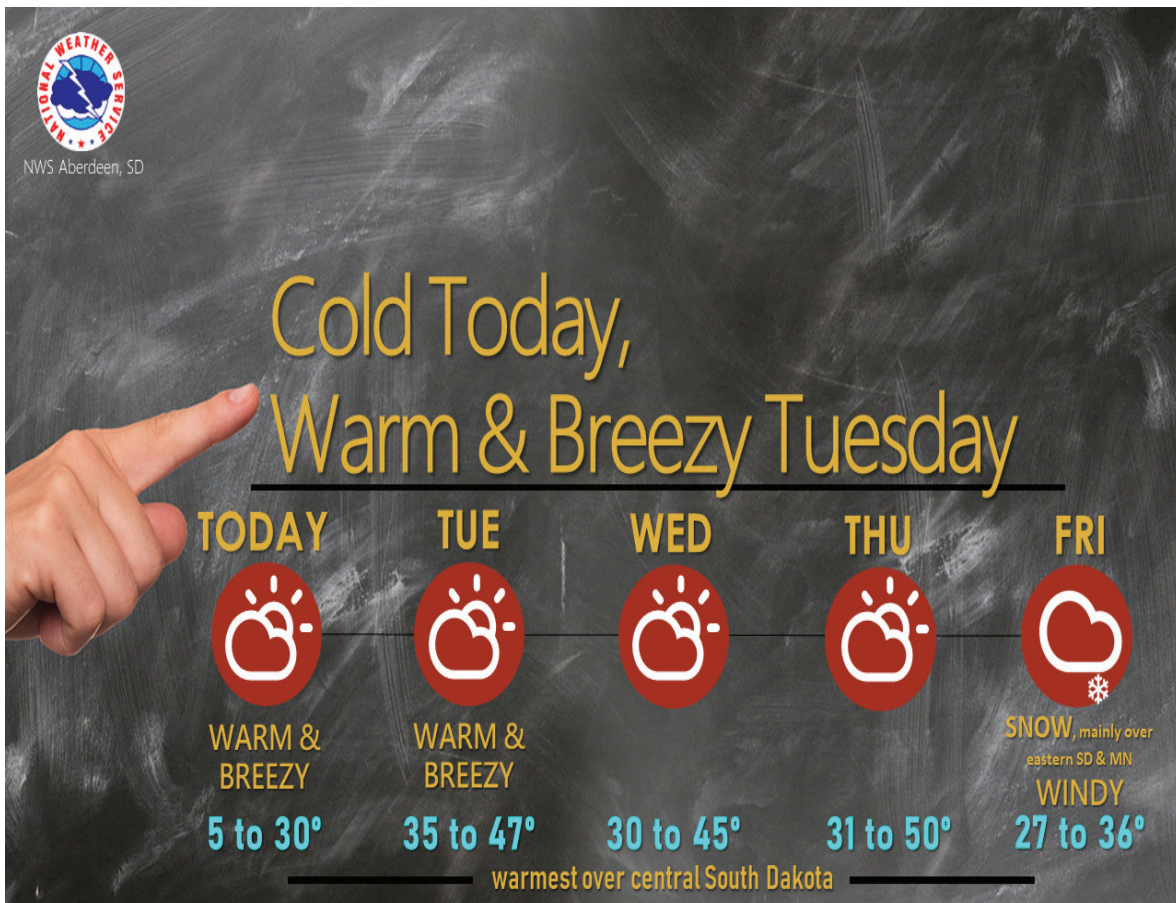
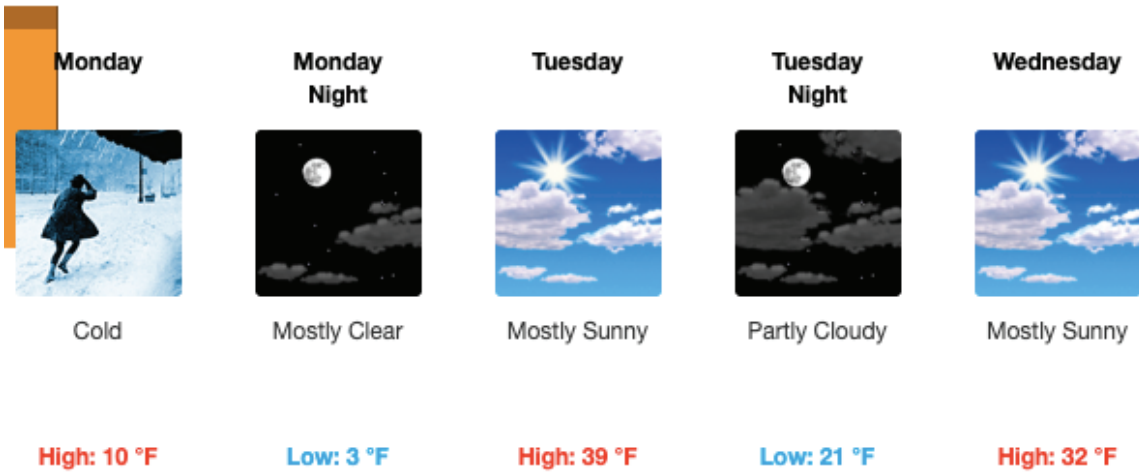
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today will be our last cold day for at least a few days. Highs will be in the single digits above zero over west central Minnesota, while mainly in the teens across much of northeastern South Dakota. Expect highs in the 20s over central South Dakota. A warm front will push across the region tonight into Tuesday morning, ushering in increasing temperatures, and breezy winds out of the west. Mild temperatures will continue through at least Thursday. The next chance of snow will be on Friday. At this point, the highest chance of accumulating snow will be over eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Stay up to date on the latest forecast, as we do expect changes for Friday.

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## Today in Weather History

January 10, 1911: The temperature at Rapid City, South Dakota, plunged 47 degrees in just fifteen minutes. At 7 AM, the temperature was 55 degrees. Fifteen minutes later, it was 4 degrees below zero.

January 10, 1975: An intense area of low pressure moved from eastern Iowa through eastern Minnesota. The storm center set many low-pressure records as it moved across eastern Minnesota. New snow of 3 to 6 inches across much of Minnesota began to blow and drift on the morning of the 10th and then developed into a full-blown blizzard with heavy snowfall developing. The blizzard continued through the 11th with winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts of 60 to 80 mph. Drifts up to 20 feet high in west-central Minnesota paralyzed the area. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 2 feet occurred. Numerous roads were closed due to drifting and low visibility. Numerous sustained power outages occurred, particularly in rural sections. Thousands of people were stranded, with 168 people trapped in a train in Willmar. Wind chills ranged from 50 below to 80 below the storm. Extensive losses to life and property occurred. There were 35 deaths during the storm and many injuries. Tens of thousands of livestock and poultry losses also occurred, with 140 farm buildings damaged or destroyed. Losses to livestock and property were over 20 million. It took 11 days to clear some areas.

In South Dakota, snow began to fall on the 10th in the afternoon, and then the winds increased and reached blizzard conditions by evening. These severe blizzard conditions continued through the 11th and the morning of the 12th. Wind chills fell to 50 below to 70 below zero. Many cars stalled on roads due to poor visibility, icy roads, and blowing and drifting snow. Eight people lost their lives. Thousands of livestock and poultry were lost. During the blizzard, a 2000 foot radio and TV antenna just east of Sioux Falls collapsed.

January 10, 2000: High winds gusting to over 60 mph caused some spotty damage across central and north-central South Dakota. Near Mobridge, the high winds blew a semi-tractor-trailer off the road and tipped it over while heading westbound on Highway 12. The semi-tractor-trailer sustained quite a bit of damage as a result. The high winds also damaged the windmill at the museum in Mobridge, breaking off the tail and bending several blades. Some high wind reports include; 56 mph at McLaughlin, 58 mph at Onida and Mobridge, and 63 mph at Pierre.

1800: According to David Ludlum, Savannah, Georgia, received a foot and a half of snow and ten inches blanketed Charleston, SC. It was the heaviest snowfall of record for the immediate Coastal Plain of the southeastern U.S.

1949: Snow was reported in San Diego, California, for the first time since 1882. The snow was noted on some of the beaches in parts of the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

1973: A powerful F5 tornado struck San Justo, a town in the province of Santa Fe, Argentina, on January 10, 1973. At least 63 people were reported dead, and 350 were reported injured as it cut a 300-yard wide swath through the town.

1975 - The "Storm of the Century" hit Minnesota. A severe blizzard moved northward across the state producing up to two feet of snow. High winds drove wind chill readings to 80 degrees below zero, and at Duluth MN the barometric pressure dipped to 28.55 inches. The storm, which claimed 35 lives, occurred on the 102nd anniversary of the infamous "Pioneer Blizzard" in Minnesota. (David Ludlum)

1982: Bitterly cold weather was found across Illinois. Of the 109 weather reporting stations in the state, 48 of those reported lows of 20 degrees below zero or colder. Some of the most frigid temperatures included 27 below zero at Rockford, 26 below zero at Chicago, and 25 below zero at Kankakee and Peoria. The Freezer Bowl was played between the Cincinnati Bengals and the San Deigo Chargers in bitterly cold wind chills. The air temperature was -9 °F, but the wind chill, factoring in a sustained wind of 27 mph, was -37 °F.

1987 - Bitter cold air invaded the Rocky Mountain Region, with subzero readings reported as far south as Gallop NM. Pocatello ID reported a record low reading of 14 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

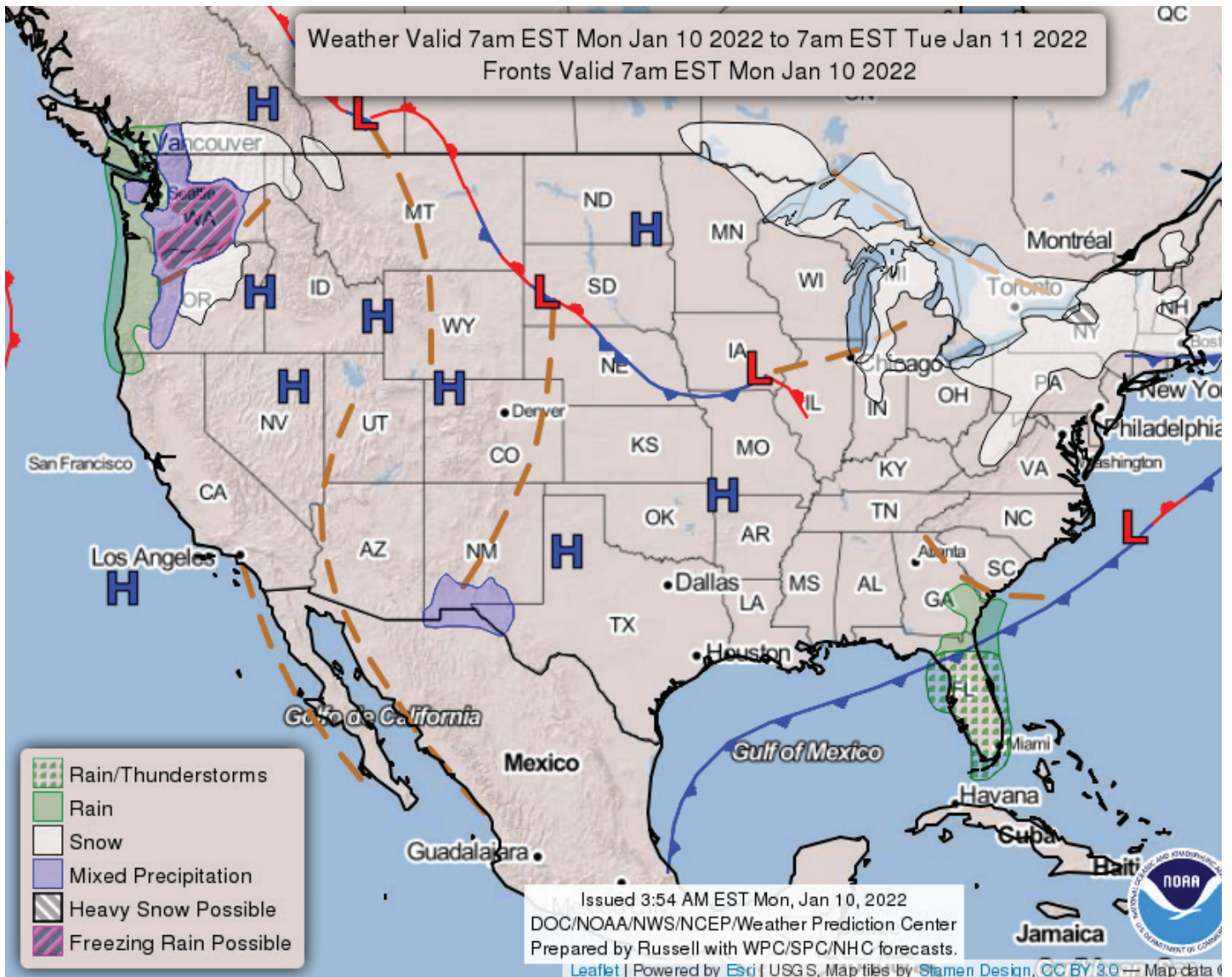
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 8 °F at 3:19 PM**  
**Low Temp: -9 °F at 5:45 AM**  
**Wind: 11 mph at 12:01 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 56 in 2012**  
**Record Low: -30° in 1978**  
**Average High: 23°F**  
**Average Low: 2°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.21**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.21**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:11:09 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08:30 AM**



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## A Heart That Does Kind Things

It was the final set in a tennis match. One of the players had demonstrated his strength and skill as his opponent struggled to stay competitive. Suddenly the player who had been doing so well began to hit the ball out of the lines, into the net and even missed the ball. It seemed as though he lost his focus.

His father approached him during a break and asked, "Keller, what's going on? You were doing so good. Now, you may lose the match and not go to the state finals. What's going on?" he demanded.

"It's O.K., Dad. Leave me alone. I know I can win. I've been missing the balls on purpose. I don't want him to feel bad about losing. I want to encourage him."

Keller did go on to win. But in the process, he not only thought of "doing a kind thing" but showed what kindness "looked like" to someone who was struggling to defeat him and win the match.

Life gives us many opportunities to "do kindness." In fact, God "makes doing kind things available" to us each day. For example, we can open a door for a senior citizen; or be gracious and express our gratitude to a cashier during the rush hour at a grocery store; give a smile to someone who looks like they need encouragement; give a compliment to one who is guiding us when we place an order on the phone; or take care to explain something that is unfamiliar to us.

"Doing kindness" is one of the most important things we Christians can do. It represents what God's grace is all about. If an opportunity to "do kindness" appears, seize it!

Prayer: Help us to be alert, Lord, for opportunities to show Your grace through acts of kindness and love. Help us to show a strong contrast when compared to "the wicked" so people turn to you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. Psalm 109:4

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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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## News from the Associated Press

### **Businesses weather pandemic via e-commerce, social media**

By ARIELLE ZIONTS South Dakota Public Broadcasting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — While some South Dakota businesses have struggled during the pandemic, others have seen success by expanding e-commerce, online messaging, and social media services.

Every week, quilters from around the world can participate in Fabric Friday, a virtual shopping event hosted by Quilter's Corner in the small town of Faulkton.

Fabric Friday is like QVC but sillier, only focused on fabric-related products, and it's on Facebook instead of your TV.

Staff from Quilter's Corner aren't afraid to get festive and a little weird during Fabric Friday. They've dressed up in ugly Christmas sweaters, unicorn costumes, Bob Ross wigs, and construction hats while draped in yellow caution tape as they enthusiastically showcase items for sale, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reports.

"My manager and my daughter-in-law get on and they are very entertaining, they've got a following of people that love to watch them," said owner Lori Holt. "They will go ahead and they will demonstrate new products and talk about new things in the shop and that in itself creates a lot of sales for us."

Viewers post which items they want in the comments section and the CommentSold software then directs them to an online shopping cart.

Quilter's Corner also created an app, added an online chatting feature to its website, and began participating in online "hop shops."

The store participates in the Heart of South Dakota Shop Hop with other quilt shops in the eastern part of the state.

Participants receive a "passport" and earn "stamps" by shopping at each store. They're then entered into a raffle to earn a prize, like a sewing machine.

During the pandemic, Quilter's Corner began joining online shop hops with stores across the country since some customers wouldn't feel comfortable visiting in person.

"And it was really a great experience because we developed a following of customers now from all parts of the country and we probably never would have ventured into that part of the business if it hadn't been for the pandemic," Holt said.

Montgomery's is a furniture store in Sioux Falls, Watertown, Aberdeen, and Madison known for its interior design services.

During the pandemic, Montgomery's added a "what's your design style quiz" and a live chat to its website where customers can ask staff for design advice or inquire into specific products.

Owner Eric Sinclair said he's considering hiring more workers to staff the live chat after store hours. He's already added about 60 positions during the pandemic due to increased demand that he links to people spending more time inside.

"Maybe after the first few months of the pandemic, once everybody knew the world wasn't coming to an end then they just started spending money on their home and it's not stopped. It's been just absolutely a crazy pace," Sinclair said.

Montgomery's has also taken advantage of social media.

"We would have full-on sales where we would have merchandise ready, we would present the merchandise through Facebook and Instagram and take phone calls and sell it right off of there," Sinclair said.

He said Montgomery's saw its online orders triple and that's significant since most people still prefer to buy furniture in-person rather than over the internet.

Sinclair has also noticed that people will browse products online, select items for checkout, and then bring a printed version of their shopping cart into the store to purchase the items in person.

Black Hills Bagels in Rapid City created a website and phone app in 2018 where people can order bagels

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and coffee. Customers can pick up their order or have it delivered.

Co-owner Debra Jensen said the bagel store added these ordering options after noticing the trend toward E-commerce. That gave Black Hills Bagel a leg up when the pandemic began in early 2020.

"Oh we definitely see more people using it in the pandemic," Jensen said. And then what they discover is that they like it and so I don't think that this is going to be a trend that's going to go away."

Jensen said customers like that they save time through online ordering.

But she said there's one downside when business shifts toward social media and online sales: A decrease in forming close relationships with customers.

Before online ordering, Black Hills Bagels knew all of its clients' names and their signature orders. Jensen said it now takes longer to form this relationship when customers are only coming in to pick up food — not order it.

"I always think of ourselves sort of like Cheers. People want to go where you know their name and that is really South Dakota anyways," Jensen said. "I don't want to lose that. I don't want to lose it here and I don't want to lose it for South Dakota."

## US, Russia meet for talks amid tensions linked to Ukraine

By KONSTANTIN MANENKOV and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Senior U.S. and Russian officials formally launched special talks on strategic stability on Monday as part of a flurry of diplomatic activity in Europe this week aimed at defusing tensions over a Russian military buildup on the border with Ukraine, though no major breakthrough was immediately in sight.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and his delegation arrived under Swiss police escort at the U.S. diplomatic mission for face-to-face talks with Wendy Sherman, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, and her team. The meeting is part of "Strategic Security Dialogue" talks launched by Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin during a June summit in the Swiss city.

After an informal working dinner on Sunday, Ryabkov predicted "difficult" talks in Geneva that are to be followed by a NATO-Russia meeting in Brussels on Wednesday and a meeting of the multilateral Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Thursday.

Moscow has sought to wrest a string of concessions from the U.S. and its Western allies, including guarantees that NATO will no longer expand eastward into former Soviet states like Ukraine, along whose border Russia has amassed an estimated 100,000 troops in steps that have raised concerns about a possible deeper military intervention there.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said that during Sunday's dinner Sherman "stressed the United States' commitment to the international principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the freedom of sovereign nations to choose their own alliances," a reference to Ukraine and its aspirations of joining NATO. Many analysts say any such accession would be years away at best.

Sherman "affirmed that the United States would welcome genuine progress through diplomacy," Price said in a statement.

The U.S. has played down hopes of significant progress this week and said some demands — like a possible halt to NATO expansion — go against countries' sovereign rights to set up their own security arrangements, and are thus non-negotiable.

But U.S. officials have expressed openness to other ideas, like curtailing possible future deployments of offensive missiles in Ukraine and putting limits on American and NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe — if Russia is willing to back off on Ukraine.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said bluntly Sunday that he doesn't expect any breakthroughs in the coming week. Instead, he said a more likely positive outcome would be an agreement to de-escalate tensions in the short term and return to talks at an appropriate time in the future. But the U.S. will have to see a de-escalation for there to be actual progress.

"It's very hard to see that happening when there's an ongoing escalation, when Russia has a gun to the head of Ukraine with 100,000 troops near its borders, the possibility of doubling that on very short order,"

Blinken said on ABC's "This Week."

The United States, which has emphasized that Ukraine's government and those of other European countries need to be included in the discussions, plans to discuss some bilateral issues in Geneva "but will not discuss European security without our European allies and partners," Price said Sunday.

Amid the Russian military buildup, concerns have risen about a broader Russian military incursion in Ukraine — and the United States and its Western allies have vowed "severe costs" for Russia if it happens.

Putin's government has laid out a list of demands, such as seeking guarantees that the NATO military alliance won't seek to expand any further eastward to countries like Ukraine or Georgia, which are former Soviet republics.

Russia was coming into the talks seeking a clearer understanding of the U.S. position, and cited signals from Washington that some of the Russian proposals can be discussed, Ryabkov said, according to state news agency Tass on Sunday.

He laid out Russia's three demands: no further NATO expansion, no missiles on Russia's borders, and for NATO no longer to have military exercises, intelligence operations or infrastructure outside of its 1997 borders.

"The Russian side came here with a clear position that contains a number of elements that, to my mind, are understandable and have been so clearly formulated — including at a high level — that deviating from our approaches simply is not possible," Ryabkov told reporters Sunday.

Asked whether Russia was ready for compromise, he said: "The Americans should get ready to reach a compromise."

## Australian judge reinstates tennis star Djokovic's visa

By ROD McGUIRK and MARK D. BAKER Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Tennis star Novak Djokovic won a court battle Monday to stay in Australia to contest the Australian Open despite being unvaccinated against COVID-19, but the government threatened to cancel his visa a second time.

Federal Circuit Court Judge Anthony Kelly reinstated Djokovic's visa, which was canceled after his arrival last week because officials decided he didn't meet the criteria for an exemption to an entry requirement that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated.

The judge also ordered the government to release Djokovic within 30 minutes from a Melbourne quarantine hotel where he has spent the last four nights.

Government lawyer Christopher Tran told the judge after the ruling that the minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, Alex Hawke, "will consider whether to exercise a personal power of cancellation."

That would mean Djokovic could again face deportation and could miss the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 17.

Speaking with television network Prva in Belgrade, Serbia, the tennis star's brother, Djordje Djokovic, described the judge's ruling as a "great defeat for Australian authorities."

He also alleged that "the latest information is that they want to arrest him," in an apparent reference to Australian authorities. He did not immediately provide further details on the claim.

"This is definitely politics, all this was politics," he added.

The office of Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews confirmed that Novak Djokovic has not been arrested. Kelly said the threat of a further visa cancellation meant the "stakes have now risen rather than receded."

"If this man is to be summarily removed upon a personal exercise of cancellation power, he cannot return to this country for three years, am I right about that?" Kelly asked lawyers for Home Affairs Minister Andrews, under whose authority Djokovic's visa was earlier canceled.

Tran and colleague Naomi Wootten confirmed that Djokovic would be banned from Australia for three years.

The government canceled 34-year-old Djokovic's visa shortly after he arrived in Melbourne late Wednes-

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day to play in the Australian Open.

There was a public backlash at news that Djokovic, who has previously declined to reveal his vaccination status, would compete in Melbourne because Australians who aren't vaccinated, or are inoculated with vaccines that aren't recognized by Australian medical authorities, face tough travel and quarantine restrictions. Court documents say he is unvaccinated.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government is seeking re-election for a fourth three-year term at polls due by May.

While his government was widely praised for containing the nation's COVID-19 death toll at the start of the pandemic, omicron cases have been rapidly surging. He has been criticized for shortages of rapid antigen tests and for refusing to make the tests available to all for free.

He has sought to place the blame for the controversy on Tennis Australia, which is organizing the Australian Open.

Djokovic has been under guard in hotel quarantine since Thursday, when his visa was canceled.

He appealed the cancellation at the virtual court hearing Monday amid a growing public debate over the positive coronavirus test that his lawyers used as grounds in applying for a medical exemption to Australia's strict vaccination rules.

Djokovic argued he did not need proof of vaccination because he had evidence that he had been infected with the coronavirus last month.

Australian medical authorities have ruled that a temporary exemption for the vaccination rule can be provided to people who have been infected with COVID-19 within six months.

Judge Kelly noted that Djokovic had provided officials at Melbourne's airport with a medical exemption given him by Tennis Australia and two medical panels.

"The point I'm somewhat agitated about is what more could this man have done?" Kelly asked Djokovic's lawyer, Nick Wood.

Wood agreed with the judge that Djokovic could not have done more.

Transcripts of Djokovic's interview with Border Force officials and his own affidavit revealed a "repeated appeal to the officers with which he was dealing that to his understanding, uncontradicted, he had done absolutely everything that he understood was required in order for him to enter Australia," Wood said.

Djokovic's lawyers submitted 11 grounds for appeal against his visa cancellation. The lawyers described the cancellation as "seriously illogical," irrational and legally unreasonable.

Lawyers for Home Affairs Minister Andrews said in their submission that the vaccination requirement could only be deferred for arriving travelers who have had a COVID-19 infection if their illness was acute.

"There is no suggestion that the applicant (Djokovic) had 'acute major medical illness' in December" when he tested positive, the written submission said.

Andrews' lawyers eventually conceded that the authorities' decision to proceed with interviewing Djokovic in the early hours of Thursday and cancel his visa before he could contact Tennis Australia or his lawyers was unreasonable in the circumstances.

Djokovic was told at 5.20 a.m. on Thursday that he had until 8.30 a.m. to respond to a notice of intention to cancel his visa. His comments were sought instead at 6.14 a.m.

The decision to cancel his visa was made just over an hour later.

Judge Kelly said if Djokovic had been given until 8.30 a.m. he could have consulted others about the decision.

Neither Ministers Andrews nor Hawke immediately responded to requests for comment.

The virtual hearing crashed several times because of an overwhelming number of people from around the world trying to watch the proceedings.

At one point, an expired court link was apparently hacked and broadcast pornography, The New Daily News website reported.

Djokovic is a nine-time Australian Open champion. He is the defending champion and has won the last three titles at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic has 20 Grand Slam singles titles, a men's record he shares with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

## Nearly 8,000 detained in Kazakhstan amid unrest

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The authorities in Kazakhstan said Monday that nearly 8,000 people were detained by police during protests that descended into violence last week and marked the worst unrest the former Soviet nation has faced since gaining independence 30 years ago.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Monday described the events of last week as a "terrorist aggression" against the country and dismissed reports of the authorities fighting peaceful demonstrators as "disinformation."

Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry reported that a total of 7,939 people have been detained across the country. The National Security Committee, Kazakhstan's counterintelligence and anti-terrorism agency, said Monday that the situation in the country has "stabilized and is under control."

The authorities have declared Monday a day of mourning for dozens of victims of the unprecedentedly violent unrest. The country's Health Ministry said Sunday that 164 people, including three children, were killed in the unrest.

The demonstrations began on Jan. 2 over a near-doubling of prices for a type of vehicle fuel and quickly spread across the country, apparently reflecting wider discontent with the authoritarian government.

In a concession, the government announced a 180-day price cap on vehicle fuel and a moratorium on utility rate increases. As the unrest mounted, the ministerial cabinet resigned and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev replaced Nursultan Nazarbayev, former longtime leader of Kazakhstan, as head of the National Security Council.

One of the main slogans of the past week's protests, "Old man out," was a reference to Nazarbayev, who served as president from Kazakhstan's independence until he resigned in 2019 and anointed Tokayev as his successor. Nazarbayev had retained substantial power at the helm of the National Security Council.

Despite the concessions, the protests turned extremely violent for several days, with government buildings set ablaze and dozens of people killed. In Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, the protesters stormed and briefly seized the airport. For several days, sporadic gunfire was reported in the city streets.

The authorities declared a state of emergency over the unrest, and Tokayev requested help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led military alliance of six former Soviet states. The group has authorized sending about 2,500 mostly Russian troops to Kazakhstan as peacekeepers.

Tokayev has said the demonstrations were instigated by "terrorists" with foreign backing, although the protests have shown no obvious leaders or organization. On Friday, he said he ordered police and the military to shoot to kill "terrorists" involved in the violence.

In a statement on Monday morning, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said that peaceful protests throughout the country "were hijacked by terrorist, extremist and criminal groups."

"According to preliminary data, the attackers include individuals who have military combat zone experience in the ranks of radical Islamist groups. Currently, the law enforcement agencies and armed forces of Kazakhstan are confronting terrorists, not 'peaceful protesters' as some foreign media misrepresent it," the statement said.

Speaking at an extraordinary virtual summit of CSTO on Monday, Tokayev promised to reveal to the world "additional evidence" of a "terrorist aggression" against Kazakhstan. He stressed that the demands of peaceful protesters have been "heard and met by the state," and the unrest that followed involved "groups of armed militants" whose goal was to overthrow the government.

Russian President Vladimir Putin echoed his sentiment and called the unrest "an attack on the country" and "an act of aggression" masterminded from abroad.

"We understand that the events in Kazakhstan are not the first and not the last attempt at interfering in the internal affairs of our states from the outside," Putin said at the summit.

The Kazakh president added that "constitutional order" in the country has been restored, and the "large-

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scale anti-terrorist operation" in the country will soon wrap up, along with the CSTO mission.

The National Security Committee said Monday that "hotspots of terrorist threats" in the country have been "neutralized." The committee also told Russia's Interfax news agency that the authorities released well-known Kyrgyz musician Vikram Ruzakhunov, whose arrest over his alleged participation in the unrest sparked outrage in neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

Ruzakhunov was shown in a video on Kazakh television saying that he had flown to the country to take part in protests and was promised \$200. In the video, apparently taken in police custody, Ruzakhunov's face was bruised and he had a large cut on his forehead.

Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Ministry has demanded Ruzakhunov's release, and the country's authorities on Monday sought to open a probe on charges of torture.

## India starts booster shots for vulnerable amid omicron surge

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — Healthcare and front-line workers along with people above age 60 with health problems lined up Monday at vaccination centers across India to receive a third dose as infections linked to the omicron variant surge.

The doses, which India is calling a "precautionary" shot instead of a booster, were given as new confirmed coronavirus infections rocketed to over 179,000 on Monday, nearly an eightfold increase in a week. Hospitalizations, while still relatively low, are also beginning to rise in large, crowded cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata.

Dr. Ravindra Kumar Dewan, who heads the National Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases in New Delhi, queued up for his shot. He said boosters are a "significant step" because there are still many unknowns about the omicron variant.

"Yesterday, the mortality ... has increased in Delhi. So, whether our health care system will get overwhelmed or not is yet to be seen," he said.

India is better prepared now than it was last year when the delta variant overwhelmed hospitals. When cases spiked in March last year, not even 1% of its population of nearly 1.4 billion was fully vaccinated. India's creaky medical infrastructure meant millions likely died.

Since then, the government has bolstered healthcare, built oxygen plants and added beds to hospitals. About 47% of the population is now fully vaccinated and many have antibodies from previous infections. This may provide "hybrid immunity" -- a combination of immunity from previous infections and vaccines -- comparable to boosters, said Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, an Indian epidemiologist.

Although the omicron variant seems to cause less severe illness than the delta variant, India's massive population, crowded cities, and understaffed hospitals mean that health systems may still become strained. Elections may further spread the more infectious variant, allowing it to infect vulnerable people that previous variants didn't reach. But the biggest fear is that hospitals will be overwhelmed because of sick medical personnel, said Dr. Vineeta Bal, an immunologist at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research in the city of Pune.

"There would be beds (in hospitals) but no people to take care of individuals," she said.

India's hospitals are short-staffed at the best of times and health workers are distributed unevenly across states. Already, hospitals are becoming crippled as hundreds of health workers fall sick with the variant. Federal hospitals have been forced to relax quarantine rules and some have stopped routine services.

"Every third doctor is either symptomatic or positive. There is an acute shortage of staff. And there is an acute crisis," said Dr. Anuj Aggarwal at New Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, one of India's largest government hospitals.

At the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences in Ranchi city, the capital of Jharkhand state, a quarter of the 800 health workers were down with mild infections, said Dr. Prabhat Kumar, in charge of COVID-19 treatment there.

The delay in providing boosters could be costly, said Dr. T. Jacob John, former chief of virology at Chris-

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tian Medical College in southern India. He said that having to administer third shots as a surge threatens to overwhelm hospitals would put an additional burden on health workers.

The belated boosters are being given to high-risk groups who were among the first to receive vaccines last year and whose immunity may be waning. Unlike other countries, where many people receive a different vaccine as a booster, most Indians will receive the same type, in most cases the AstraZeneca vaccine produced by India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine maker. The benefits of this are "relatively limited," and India had been hoping to have more vaccines available so it could mix the booster shots Lahariya said.

"India does not have that kind of choice," he said.

Serum Institute's AstraZeneca vaccine accounts for nearly 90% of all doses that have been administered in India, even though emergency approvals have been given to eight vaccines.

Some Indian vaccine makers have had manufacturing woes, while others such as Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have asked for protection from lawsuits over side effects, which India has been reluctant to grant.

India's vaccine drive has also been patchy. Around 30% of the population over the age of 60 wasn't fully vaccinated as of the end of 2021 and vaccinations for those below 18, about a third of India's population, started just last week.

The rate of vaccinations also varies vastly among states, from 75% in northern Himachal Pradesh state to 31% in eastern Jharkhand state, among India's poorest.

"These gaps will certainly get exposed," said Bal, the immunologist.

## **EXPLAINER: Main issues at Russia-US security talks**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Officials from Russia, and the United States and its NATO allies, are meeting this week for negotiations on Moscow's demand for Western security guarantees and the West's concerns about a recent buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine.

Russian and U.S. negotiators have a round of talks scheduled in Geneva on Monday that will be followed by Russia-NATO talks in Brussels and a meeting in Vienna of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe over the course of the week.

Here is a look at the agenda of the security talks and the main issues of contention:

### **RUSSIAN INVASION FEARS**

The amassing of Russian troops and equipment near Ukraine's border has caused worries in Kyiv and in the West that Moscow could be planning to launch an invasion.

Moscow has denied such an intention and in turn accused Ukrainian authorities of planning an offensive to reclaim control over territories in eastern Ukraine held by Russia-backed separatists — allegations Ukraine has rejected.

U.S. President Joe Biden twice discussed the Russian troop buildup with Russian President Vladimir Putin last month, warning that Moscow would face "severe consequences," including unprecedented economic and financial sanctions, if it attacked its neighbor.

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and has backed the separatist rebellion that started the same year in the country's east, where more than seven years of fighting has killed over 14,000 people. The West has responded with sanctions that have battered the Russian economy but failed to persuade Moscow to change course.

### **RUSSIA'S SECURITY DEMANDS**

Putin has described the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO and the alliance deploying weapons there as a "red line" for Moscow. The Kremlin demanded that Washington and its allies make a binding pledge excluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine, Georgia or any other ex-Soviet nations.

Moscow has also demanded that the U.S. and its allies make a commitment not to deploy weapons or conduct any military activities in Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations.

The Kremlin has presented a draft Russia-U.S. security treaty and a blueprint for a Russia-NATO agree-

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ment as a starting point for this week's negotiations. They would oblige the alliance not to station any troops in areas where they weren't present in 1997 — before NATO moved to incorporate former Soviet bloc countries and ex-Soviet republics.

Moscow's proposals also suggest a freeze on patrols by Russian and U.S. naval ships and bombers near each other's frontiers. In addition, they call for efforts to reduce the risk of incidents involving Russia and NATO warships and aircraft, primarily in the Baltic and the Black Seas; a reduction in the scope of military drills; greater transparency and other confidence-building measures.

## U.S. AND NATO REACTION

The U.S. and its allies have roundly rejected the demand for NATO not to admit Ukraine or any other new members, emphasizing that a key alliance principle is that membership is open to any qualifying country and no outsiders have veto power.

While Ukraine and Georgia aren't yet ready for NATO membership and have little prospect of being invited to join soon, the Western allies insist that NATO's doors must remain open to them. In 2008, NATO promised to eventually embrace the two nations, although it hasn't offered them a specific road map to membership.

Even though the allies firmly rejected a halt to NATO's expansion as a non-starter, Washington and NATO say they are ready to discuss arms control, confidence-building measures, greater transparency and risk reduction if Russia takes a constructive stance.

U.S. officials said they are open to discussions on curtailing possible future deployments of offensive missiles in Ukraine and putting limits on American and NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe if Russia is willing to back off on Ukraine.

At the same time, the White House has urged Russia to help create a positive environment for the upcoming talks by pulling back its troops from areas near Ukraine. Moscow has dismissed the suggestion, saying it can deploy its forces wherever it deems necessary on its own territory and describing the buildup as a response to "hostile" moves by NATO.

## TIME LIMITS

Putin has called the negotiations with the U.S. a "positive" move but said he wants quick results, warning the West against trying to drown Russia's demands in "idle talk."

Asked during a news conference last month if he could guarantee that Russia won't invade Ukraine, Putin responded angrily and said the West "must give us guarantees and give them immediately, now."

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who heads the Russian delegation at the security talks, described the demand for guarantees that NATO won't expand to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations as "absolutely essential" and warned that the U.S. refusal to discuss it would make further talks senseless.

"We are going there not with a hand outstretched but with a precisely formulated task that we need to solve on conditions that we formulated," Ryabkov said. He warned that Russia wouldn't make any concessions under threats and pressure and noted that the talks may end after the first round if the U.S. and its allies are uncooperative.

The Kremlin's blunt demands combined with a push for quick results have fueled U.S. suspicions that Moscow could make unrealistic requests just to see the talks collapse and then use it as a pretext for aggressive action. Russian diplomats have repudiated the claim.

## MILITARY-TECHNICAL OPTIONS

While Moscow has denied planning to attack Ukraine, Putin has warned that he would be forced to take unspecified "military-technical measures" if the West stonewalled on his security demands.

He didn't elaborate beyond saying the Russian response in that scenario "could be diverse" and "will depend on what proposals our military experts submit to me."

Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov said Putin had told Biden that Russia would act just as if the U.S. would have acted if it saw offensive weapons deployed next to its borders.

Putin has noted that the new Zircon hypersonic cruise missile could give Russia a previously unseen precision strike potential if fitted to warships deployed to neutral waters. The launch of a salvo of Zircons in late December heralded the completion of tests for the new weapon, which Putin said flies at nine times



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the speed of sound to a range of more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

While voicing concern that NATO could potentially use Ukrainian territory for the deployment of missiles capable of reaching Moscow in just five minutes, Putin noted that Zircon would give Russia a similar capability.

"It would also need just five minutes to reach those who issue orders," Putin said.

## Bob Saget, beloved TV dad of 'Full House,' dead at 65

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bob Saget, the actor-comedian known for his role as beloved single dad Danny Tanner on the sitcom "Full House" and as the wisecracking host of "America's Funniest Home Videos," died while on a stand-up tour. He was 65.

Deputies in Orange County, Florida, were called Sunday about an "unresponsive man" in a hotel room at the Ritz-Carlton in Orlando and found Saget dead, according to a sheriff's statement on Twitter. Detectives found "no signs of foul play or drug use in this case."

Saget was in Florida as part of his "I Don't Do Negative Comedy Tour." After warm audience receptions to his gigs Friday in Orlando and Saturday in the Ponte Vedra Beach resort area, he celebrated online.

"I'm back in comedy like I was when I was 26. I guess I'm finding my new voice and loving every moment of it," he posted Saturday on Instagram.

Fellow comedians and friends praised Saget not only for his wit, but his kindness.

"I am broken. I am gutted. I am in complete and utter shock. I will never ever have another friend like him," wrote John Stamos, who co-starred with Saget on "Full House." "I love you so much Bobby."

"I have no words. Bob was one of the best humans beings I've ever known in my life. I loved him so much," said Candace Cameron Bure, who played Saget's daughter on "Full House."

"In often a ruthless business he was historically not just hilarious but more importantly one of the kindest human beings I ever met in my career," actor Richard Lewis wrote on Twitter.

In a statement Sunday, Saget's family members said they are "devastated to confirm that our beloved Bob passed away today.... Though we ask for privacy at this time, we invite you to join us in remembering the love and laughter that Bob brought to the world."

Saget the stand-up showed his flip side with what become a much-talked-about cameo in the 2005 documentary "The Aristocrats" — in which 100 comics riffed on the world's dirtiest joke — that revealed his notoriously filthy sense of humor.

Raunchy comedy wasn't part of his long-running network TV shows. He hosted the family friendly "America's Funniest Home Videos" and played the squeaky clean widower and dad to three young girls on "Full House," the ABC sitcom that also brought fame to Olsen twins Mary-Kate and Ashley when it debuted in 1987.

"Bob was the most loving, compassionate and generous man. We are deeply saddened that he is no longer with us but know that he will continue to be by our side to guide us as gracefully as he always has," the Olsens said in a joint statement.

The show's popularity didn't deter critics, some calling it cheesy and others deeming it unreal. Saget, as amiable and droll in an interview as he was on TV screens, took the brickbats in stride.

"Full House' was a loving kind of show but obviously over the top. It had its heightened reality, a glossy Willy Wonka quality to it," he told The Associated Press in a 2001 interview.

That year, Saget took another pass at playing a widowed dad with winsome kids on the short-lived sitcom "Raising Dad."

He said he found himself repeatedly fielding questions about his habit of playing sitcom widowers, and had a ready response: "(Kevin) Costner does three, four baseball movies and that's OK. There's my rationale."

Saget was born in Philadelphia on May 17, 1956, to Benjamin, a supermarket executive, and Rosalyn, who worked in hospital administration. He graduated Temple University and enrolled briefly in the University

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of Southern California to study film.

He left the college but stayed in Los Angeles and shifted to stand-up comedy, which led to small roles in TV and film before he found success with "Full House." He also appeared in some episodes of the sitcom's "Fuller House" 2016-20 sequel and was heard as the narrator on "How I Met Your Mother," which ran for nine seasons on CBS.

"Bob Saget was the older wiser 'me' for nine years on How I Met Your Mother," tweeted cast member Josh Radnor. "He was the kindest, loveliest, funniest, most supportive man. The easiest person to be around. A mensch among mensches."

In guest appearances on the Hollywood-set dark comedy "Entourage," Saget played a warped character named Bob Saget who was foul-mouthed but, unlike the man himself, was a misogynist and worse.

In early 2020, Saget was preparing for the start of his comedy tour when the pandemic put it on hold. He turned his energies to a podcast, "Bob Saget's Here For You," which gave fans an open mic to comment and ask him questions.

He focused occasionally on directing over the years, including on HBO's "The Mind of the Married Man," and the Norm Macdonald film "Dirty Work," and appeared on Broadway in "Hand to God" and in "The Drowsy Chaperone."

He drew praise as producer-director of the 1996 TV film "For Hope," loosely based on the battle of his late sister, Gay, with the tissue disease scleroderma, and appealed for increased federal support for research funds.

He remembered his sister in a January 2020 post, noting that she died when she was 47 and would have been 73 that month.

Saget had daughters Aubrey, Lara and Jennifer with first wife Sherri Kramer before divorcing in 1997. He married Kelly Rizzo in 2018.

## Grave injuries remain following NYC fire that killed 19

By DAVID PORTER, BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Hospitals worked Monday to save the lives of multiple people gravely injured by smoke in a fire that killed 19 people, including nine children, in a Bronx apartment building.

Dozens of people were hospitalized, and as many as 13 were in critical condition after Sunday's blaze, already New York City's deadliest in three decades.

Investigators determined that a malfunctioning electric space heater, plugged in to give extra heat on a cold morning, started the fire in the 19-story building.

The flames damaged only a small part of the building, but smoke escaped through the apartment's open door and billowed through stairwells and halls, trapping many people in their apartments and incapacitating others as they fled.

Multiple limp children were seen being given oxygen after they were carried out. Evacuees had faces covered in soot.

Firefighters found victims on every floor, many in cardiac and respiratory arrest, said Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro. Some could not escape because of the volume of smoke, he said.

Firefighters continued making rescues even after their air supplies ran out, Mayor Eric Adams said.

"Their oxygen tanks were empty and they still pushed through the smoke," Adams said.

Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said an investigation was underway to determine how the fire spread and whether anything could have been done to prevent or contain the blaze.

The building is equipped with smoke alarms, but several residents said they initially ignored them because alarms were so common in the 120-unit building.

Large, new apartment buildings in the city are required to have sprinkler systems and interior doors that swing shut automatically to contain smoke and deprive fires of oxygen, but those rules don't apply to thousands of the city's older buildings.

The smoke turned stairwells — the only method of flight in a building too tall for fire escapes — into

dark, ash-choked horrors.

Building resident Sandra Clayton grabbed her dog Mocha and ran for her life when she saw the hallway fill with smoke and heard people screaming, "Get out! Get out!"

Clayton, 61, said she groped her way down a darkened stairway, clutching Mocha. The smoke was so black she couldn't see, but she could hear neighbors wailing and crying nearby.

"I just ran down the steps as much as I could but people was falling all over me, screaming," Clayton recounted from a hospital where she was treated for smoke inhalation.

In the commotion, her dog slipped from her grasp and was later found dead in the stairwell.

Jose Henriquez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who lives on the 10th floor, said the building's fire alarms would frequently go off, but would turn out to be false.

"It seems like today, they went off but the people didn't pay attention," Henriquez said in Spanish.

He and his family stayed, wedging a wet towel beneath the door once they realized the smoke in the halls would overpower them if they tried to flee.

Luis Rosa said he also initially thought it was a false alarm. By the time he opened the door of his 13th-floor apartment, the smoke was so thick he couldn't see down the hallway. "So I said, OK, we can't run down the stairs because if we run down the stairs, we're going to end up suffocating."

"All we could do was wait," he said.

The fire was New York City's deadliest since 1990, when 87 people died in an arson at the Happy Land social club, also in the Bronx. The borough was also home to a deadly apartment building fire in 2017 that killed 13 people and a 2007 fire, also started by a space heater, that killed nine.

## Myanmar's Suu Kyi sentenced to 4 more years in prison

BANGKOK (AP) — A court in Myanmar sentenced ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi to four more years in prison on Monday after finding her guilty of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies and violating coronavirus restrictions, a legal official said.

Suu Kyi was convicted last month on two other charges and given a four-year prison sentence, which was then halved by the head of the military-installed government.

The cases are among about a dozen brought against the 76-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate since the army seized power last February, ousting her elected government and arresting top members of her National League for Democracy party.

If found guilty of all the charges, she could be sentenced to more than 100 years in prison.

Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say the charges against her are contrived to legitimize the military's seizure of power and prevent her from returning to politics.

Monday's verdict in the court in the capital, Naypyitaw, was conveyed by a legal official who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities, who have restricted the release of information about Suu Kyi's trials.

He said she was sentenced to two years in prison under the Export-Import Law for importing the walkie-talkies and one year under the Telecommunications Law for possessing them. The sentences are to be served concurrently. She also received a two-year sentence under the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly violating coronavirus rules while campaigning.

Suu Kyi was convicted last month on two other charges — incitement and breaching COVID-19 restrictions — and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Hours after that sentence was issued, the head of the military-installed government, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, reduced it by half.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in a 2020 general election, but the military claimed there was widespread electoral fraud, an assertion that independent poll watchers doubt.

Since her first guilty verdict, Suu Kyi has been attending court hearings in prison clothes — a white top and a brown longyi skirt provided by the authorities. She is being held by the military at an unknown location, where state television reported last month she would serve her sentence.

The hearings are closed to the media and spectators and the prosecutors do not comment. Her lawyers,

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who had been a source of information on the proceedings, were served with gag orders in October.

The military-installed government has not allowed any outside party to meet with Suu Kyi since it seized power, despite international pressure for talks including her that could ease the country's violent political crisis.

It would not allow a special envoy from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a member, to meet her. The refusal received a rare rebuke from fellow members, who barred Min Aung Hlaing from attending its annual summit meeting.

Even Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who took over as the regional group's chair for this year and advocates engagement with the ruling generals, failed to meet her last week when he became the first head of government to visit Myanmar since the army's takeover.

The military's seizure of power was quickly met by nonviolent nationwide demonstrations, which security forces quashed with deadly force, killing over 1,400 civilians, according to a detailed list compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Peaceful protests have continued, but amid the severe crackdown, an armed resistance has also grown, to the point that U.N. experts have warned the country could be sliding into civil war.

"The Myanmar junta's courtroom circus of secret proceedings on bogus charges is all about steadily piling up more convictions against Aung San Suu Kyi so that she will remain in prison indefinitely. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and the junta leaders obviously still view her as a paramount political threat who needs to be permanently neutralized," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch.

"Once again, Aung San Suu Kyi has become a symbol of what is happening to her country and returned to the role of political hostage of military hell-bent on controlling power by using intimidation and violence," Robertson said in a statement. "Fortunately for her and the future of Myanmar, the Myanmar people's movement has grown well beyond just the leadership of one woman, and one political party."

Suu Kyi was charged right after the military's takeover with having improperly imported the walkie-talkies, which served as the initial justification for her continued detention. A second charge of illegally possessing the radios was filed the following month.

The radios were seized from the entrance gate of her residence and the barracks of her bodyguards during a search on Feb. 1, the day she was arrested.

Suu Kyi's lawyers argued that the radios were not in her personal possession and were legitimately used to help provide for her security, but the court declined to dismiss the charges.

She was charged with two counts of violating coronavirus restrictions during campaigning for the 2020 election. She was found guilty on the first count last month.

She is also being tried by the same court on five counts of corruption. The maximum penalty for each count is 15 years in prison and a fine. A sixth corruption charge against her and ousted President Win Myint in connection with granting permits to rent and buy a helicopter has not yet gone to trial.

In separate proceedings, she is accused of violating the Official Secrets Act, which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years.

Additional charges were also added by Myanmar's election commission against Suu Kyi and 15 other politicians in November for alleged fraud in the 2020 election. The charges by the military-appointed Union Election Commission could result in Suu Kyi's party being dissolved and unable to participate in a new election the military has promised will take place within two years of its takeover.

## Some Palestinians get legal status after years in Gaza limbo

By WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Khader al-Najjar has been unable to leave the Gaza Strip since he returned to the Palestinian territory 25 years ago, not even to seek medical treatment for a spinal ailment or to bid farewell to his mother, who died in Jordan last year.

The reason: Israel refused to allow the Palestinian Authority to issue him a national ID. That made it virtually impossible to leave, even before Israel and Egypt imposed a punishing blockade when the Hamas

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militant group seized control of Gaza in 2007.

In recent months, Israel has approved residency for thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza in an attempt to ease tensions while maintaining its decades-long control over the lives of more than 4.5 million Palestinians.

"My suffering was huge," said al-Najjar, a 62-year-old carpenter, who described a "nightmarish" series of failed attempts to get permits to leave the tiny coastal territory. Now he is among more than 3,200 Palestinians in Gaza who will soon get a national ID.

That will make it easier to travel, but he will still have to navigate a maze of bureaucratic obstacles linked to the blockade. Israel says the restrictions are needed to contain Hamas, while rights groups view the blockade as a form of collective punishment for Gaza's 2 million Palestinians.

Israel withdrew soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, and Hamas drove out PA forces two years later. But Israel still controls the Palestinian population registry, a computerized database of names and ID numbers. The Palestinians and most of the international community view Gaza as part of the occupied territories.

An estimated tens of thousands of Palestinians do not have legal residency, making it virtually impossible to cross international borders or even the Israeli military checkpoints scattered across the West Bank. Most are people who returned to the territory after living abroad, and Israel refused to place them into the registry.

Ahed Hamada, a senior official in the Hamas-run Interior Ministry, says there are more than 30,000 status-less residents in Gaza alone.

Israel agreed to grant residency to some 13,500 Palestinians in what it presented as a goodwill gesture following recent meetings between Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. It is the first batch since peace talks broke down more than a decade ago.

Israel's current government, which consists of parties that support and oppose Palestinian statehood, has ruled out any major initiatives to resolve the conflict but has said it wants to improve living conditions in the territories. It also wants to shore up the increasingly unpopular PA, which governs parts of the West Bank and coordinates security with Israel.

In a statement after meeting with Abbas, Gantz pledged to continue advancing "confidence-building measures in economic and civilian areas."

Palestinians in Gaza rejoiced and danced as they lined up to receive letters from the PA's civil affairs authority that will allow them to apply for national IDs and passports. Some shed tears of joy, while others looked on distraught after learning they were not on the list.

Hamas, which has fought four wars with Israel — most recently in May — criticized the Abbas-Gantz meetings, saying they "deviate from the national spirit" of the Palestinian people.

The residency issue dates back to 1967, when Israel seized east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in a war with neighboring Arab states. The Palestinians want the three territories to form their future state alongside Israel.

Israel conducted a census three months after the war and only registered Palestinians who were physically present. Israel later allowed some without legal status to visit family on visitor permits. Many Palestinians returned after the Oslo accords in the 1990s and overstayed their permits, hoping their status would be resolved in a final peace agreement that never materialized. Family unifications largely ground to a halt after the outbreak of the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule, in 2000.

Palestinians are also largely prohibited from moving to the West Bank from Gaza. The latest approvals grant West Bank residency to some 2,800 Palestinians who moved there from Gaza prior to 2007 and who had been at risk of deportation.

Gisha, an Israeli rights group that advocates freedom of movement, says that by presenting the expansion of residency as a goodwill gesture, Israel is merely repackaging something it is obliged to do under international law.

"This is a start, in some ways, but this whole problem has been created by Israel's stringent policies to-

ward Palestinians under occupation," said Miriam Marmur, a spokeswoman for Gisha. "There are of course thousands that remain status-less and millions that are still subject to the permit regime."

Al-Najjar, who lived in Jordan before moving to Gaza, was one of the lucky ones. This month he, his wife and their four children were all granted residency. "Thank God, I can go and visit my sisters and my family (in Jordan) now that we have passports," he said.

Foreign nationals — mostly Palestinians born in other countries — who have married Palestinians in the territories have found themselves in a similar predicament.

Tareq Hamada said he is still waiting to get residency for his wife, a Palestinian who moved to Gaza from Kuwait in 1997. He said she has dreamed her whole life of making the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca but has been unable to do so.

Fayeq al-Najjar, a distant relative of Khader, tried to return to Gaza from Libya in 2008 but was turned away by Egypt because he did not have a national ID. Instead, he snuck in through the smuggling tunnels on the Egyptian border that have since been largely destroyed. He has applied for an ID but does not know if he will be granted one.

"I have sisters in Egypt who I wish to visit," he said. "I'm 60 years old, when will I get an ID? When I'm on death's doorstep?"

## Bronx apartment fire kills 19, including 9 children

By DAVID PORTER, BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A malfunctioning space heater sparked a fire that filled a high-rise Bronx apartment building with thick smoke Sunday morning, killing 19 people including nine children in New York City's deadliest blaze in three decades.

Trapped residents broke windows for air and stuffed wet towels under doors as smoke rose from a lower-floor apartment where the fire started. Survivors told of fleeing in panic down darkened hallways and stairs, barely able to breathe.

Multiple limp children were seen being given oxygen after they were carried out. Evacuees had faces covered in soot.

Firefighters found victims on every floor, many in cardiac and respiratory arrest, said Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro. Some could not escape because of the volume of smoke, he said.

Some residents said they initially ignored wailing smoke alarms because false alarms were so common in the 120-unit building, built in the early 1970s as affordable housing.

More than five dozen people were hurt and 13 were hospitalized in critical condition. Nigro said most of the victims had severe smoke inhalation.

Firefighters continued making rescues even after their air supplies ran out, Mayor Eric Adams said.

"Their oxygen tanks were empty and they still pushed through the smoke," Adams said.

Investigators said the fire, triggered by the electric heater, started in a duplex apartment on the second and third floors of the 19-story building.

The flames didn't spread far — only charring the one unit and an adjacent hallway. But the door to the apartment and a door to a stairwell had been left open, letting smoke quickly spread throughout the building, Nigro said.

New York City fire codes generally require apartment doors to be spring-loaded and slam shut automatically, but it was not immediately clear whether this building was covered by those rules.

Building resident Sandra Clayton grabbed her dog Mocha and ran for her life when she saw the hallway fill with smoke and heard people screaming, "Get out! Get out!"

Clayton, 61, said she groped her way down a darkened stairway, clutching Mocha. The smoke was so black she couldn't see, but she could hear neighbors wailing and crying nearby.

"I just ran down the steps as much as I could but people was falling all over me, screaming," Clayton recounted from a hospital where she was treated for smoke inhalation.

In the commotion, her dog slipped from her grasp and was later found dead in the stairwell.

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About 200 firefighters responded to the building on East 181st Street around 11 a.m.

Jose Henriquez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who lives on the 10th floor, said the building's fire alarms would frequently go off, but would turn out to be false.

"It seems like today, they went off but the people didn't pay attention," Henriquez said in Spanish.

He and his family stayed, wedging a wet towel beneath the door once they realized the smoke in the halls would overpower them if they tried to flee.

Luis Rosa said he also initially thought it was a false alarm. By the time he opened the door of his 13th-floor apartment, the smoke was so thick he couldn't see down the hallway. "So I said, OK, we can't run down the stairs because if we run down the stairs, we're going to end up suffocating."

"All we could do was wait," he said.

The children who died were 16 years old or younger, said Stefan Ringel, a senior adviser to the mayor. Adams said at a news conference that many residents were originally from the West African nation of Gambia. Many survivors were brought to temporary shelter in a nearby school.

The drab, brown apartment building looms over an intersection of smaller, aging brick buildings on Webster Avenue, one of the Bronx's main thoroughfares.

By Sunday afternoon, all that remained visible of the unit where the fire started was a gaping black hole where the windows had been smashed.

"There's no guarantee that there's a working fire alarm in every apartment, or in every common area," U.S. Rep. Ritchie Torres, a Democrat who represents the area, told the AP. "Most of these buildings have no sprinkler system. And so the housing stock of the Bronx is much more susceptible to devastating fires than most of the housing stock in the city."

Nigro and Torres both compared the fire's severity to a 1990 blaze at the Happy Land social club where 87 people were killed when a man set fire to the building after getting into an argument with his former girlfriend and being thrown out of the Bronx club.

Sunday's death toll was the highest for a fire in the city since the Happy Land fire, other than the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

It was also the deadliest fire at a U.S. residential apartment building in years. In 2017, 13 people died in an apartment building, also in the Bronx, according to data from the National Fire Protection Association.

That fire started with a 3-year-old boy playing with stove burners and also spread because the door to an apartment that lacked a closing mechanism had been left open. The fire led to several changes in New York City, including having the fire department create fire safety education plans for children and parents.

Sunday's fire happened just days after 12 people, including eight children, were killed in a house fire in Philadelphia. In 1989, a Tennessee apartment building fire claimed the lives of 16 people.

## Comedians, friends, co-stars react to death of Bob Saget

Bob Saget, the comedian and actor known for his role as a widower raising a trio of daughters in the sitcom "Full House," was found dead Sunday in Florida. His death at 65 shocked peers and fans and tributes came flooding in on Twitter, praising the veteran comedian for his talent and kindness.

"Bob Saget was as lovely a human as he was funny. And to my mind, he was hilarious. We were close friends and I could not have loved him more." — Norman Lear, via Twitter

"I am broken. I am gutted. I am in complete and utter shock. I will never ever have another friend like him. I love you so much Bobby." — John Stamos, via Twitter

"I don't know what to say. I have no words. Bob was one of the best humans beings I've ever known in my life. I loved him so much." — Candace Cameron Bure, who played Saget's daughter on "Full House," via Twitter.

"Bob was the most loving, compassionate and generous man. We are deeply saddened that he is no longer with us but know that he will continue to be by our side to guide us as gracefully as he always has." — Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen, in a statement.

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"I don't even know what to say about Bob Saget. I loved him and was so lucky to work with someone so funny, soulful and kind. His role on himym was a voice in the future, looking back on all of life's complexity with a smile, and that's how I'll always remember him." — "How I Met You Mother" co-creator Craig Thomas, via Twitter

"I'm endlessly grateful that HIMYM brought Bob Saget into my life. I'll hear his voice in my head for the rest of my days." — "How I Met Your Mother" star Josh Radnor, via Twitter.

"Four decades of friendship. Had Thanksgiving with Bob once when we were coming up. He cooked the turkey but had no idea you were supposed to take the innards out. We completely lost it...Love you, my friend." —George Wallace, via Twitter.

"Oh no. RIP Bob Saget. Truly one of the nicest guys and so funny. Very sad." — Marc Maron, via Twitter

"He had a big, big heart and a wonderfully warped comic mind. He gave the world a lot of joy and lived his life for goodness' sake." — Jim Carrey, via Twitter.

"Still in shock. I just spoke with Bob a few days ago. We stayed on the phone as usual making each other laugh. RIP to friend, comedian & fellow Aristocrat Bob Saget." — Gilbert Gottfried, via Twitter

"I know that people lose loved ones, good people, every day. No one gets a pass. But the loss of Bob Saget hits deep. If you didn't know him, he was kind and dear and cared about people deeply. He was the definition of "a good egg". Too soon he leaves." — Jason Alexander, via Twitter.

"The only people who said terrible things about Bob Saget were his best friends. — Tom Arnold, via Twitter.

"Oh god. Bob Saget!!! The loveliest man. I was his TV daughter for one season and he was always so kind and protective. So so sorry for his family." — Kat Dennings, via Twitter

"You couldn't find a nicer or sharper wit than Bob Saget. Shocked and devastated." — Kathy Griffin, via Twitter

"R.I.P. buddy....Life can turn to (expletive) in one moment. My heart aches for his whole family. In often a ruthless business he was historically not just hilarious but more importantly one of the kindest human beings I ever met in my career." — Richard Lewis, via Twitter

"I had the pleasure of a once in a lifetime candid interaction with Bob Saget and Norman Lear a few months ago that had a warmth generally reserved for long time friends. Every story I heard about Bob was confirmed that night. His dark humor, generosity, and love for ppl." — Jeremy O. Harris, via Twitter

## China's Tianjin on partial lockdown after omicron found

BEIJING (AP) — The numbers are small, but the major port of Tianjin may be facing China's first local outbreak of omicron of any size, less than a month before the Winter Olympics open in nearby Beijing.

State broadcaster CCTV said the government has divided Tianjin and its 14 million residents into three levels of restrictions, starting with lockdown areas where people are not allowed to leave their homes at all. In control areas, each household is allowed to have one family member leave to buy groceries every other day, while in prevention areas, people must remain inside their immediate neighborhoods.

Buses and trains from Tianjin to Beijing have been suspended and people are being told not to leave the city unless they have pressing business.

The city began mass testing of all its residents on Sunday after a cluster of 20 children and adults tested positive for COVID-19, including at least two with the omicron variant. Another 20 people tested positive on Sunday, bringing the total to 40. Officials said earlier that the virus has been circulating so the number of cases could rise.

China has stepped up its strict zero tolerance strategy in the runup to the Olympics, which open Feb. 4. The Chinese capital is 115 kilometers (70 miles) northwest of Tianjin and many people regularly travel back and forth by car or on a high-speed rail link that takes less than one hour.

Elsewhere, millions of people are being confined to their homes in Xi'an and Yuzhou, two cities that are farther away but have larger outbreaks traced to the delta variant. Residents of Xi'an have been under lockdown for more than two weeks, but the number of new cases in the city of 13 million fell to just 15 on Monday in a sign that restrictions could soon be lifted. Yuzhou is a city of about 1.1 million people in



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neighboring Henan province.

Another 60 cases were reported Monday in Henan, two of them of the omicron variant, found in the city of Anyang and apparently brought from Tianjin by a college student on Dec. 28, state media outlet The Paper reported. The provincial capital of Zhengzhou has been conducting mass testing and closed its schools. Another 24 cases were reported in the city on Monday.

The first two cases confirmed in Tianjin were a 10-year-old girl and a 29-year-old woman working at an after-school center. Both were infected by the omicron variant. In subsequent testing of close contacts, 18 others tested positive and 767 tested negative as of Saturday night.

Those infected include 15 students from 8 to 13 years old, the after-school center staff member and four parents. The citywide testing is to be completed over two days. Tianjin has also closed some subway stations on two lines to try to prevent further spread.

China had reported about a dozen omicron cases previously, most among people who had arrived from abroad and were isolated. In one case in mid-December, the infection was not detected until after the person had completed two weeks of quarantine, and it spread to a few close contacts in the southern city of Guangzhou.

## Invoking Jan. 6, Dems pivot to fight for voting legislation

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are mounting an impassioned bid to overhaul Senate rules that stand in the way of their sweeping voting legislation, arguing dark forces unleashed by Donald Trump's falsehoods about the 2020 election demand an extraordinary response.

In fiery speeches and interviews, President Joe Biden and top congressional Democrats have seized on the one-year anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection as a reason to advance their long-stalled voting, ethics and elections package. Senate Republicans, who have repeatedly blocked the legislation, excoriate the measures as a "partisan power grab" and warn that any rule changes will haunt Democrats someday under a GOP majority.

Trump's false claims of a stolen election not only incited the mob that stormed the Capitol, Democrats say. His unrelenting campaign of disinformation also sparked a GOP effort to pass new state laws that have made it more difficult to vote, while in some cases rendering the administration of elections more susceptible to political influence.

Many Democrats say the moment has come to act decisively in what they view as the civil rights fight of the era. Changing Senate rules early in 2022 offers perhaps the last best chance to counteract Republicans' state-level push before the midterm elections, when Democrats' House majority and slim hold in the 50-50 Senate could be wiped out.

"If Republicans continue to hijack the rules of the chamber to prevent us from protecting our democracy, then the Senate will debate and consider changes to the rules," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Friday.

Yet what action they will take remains highly uncertain, depending on the often elusive support of Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. Key Democrats have been meeting with Manchin for weeks, brainstorming options while also enlisting outside allies to lobby his support.

Manchin has made no firm commitments. He has repeatedly said he will not support lowering the filibuster's 60-vote threshold for passing most legislation, a stance shared by fellow centrist Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz. Until the threshold is lowered, enacting election legislation could prove difficult, if not impossible.

But Democrats say they are focused on what's achievable now, amid escalating pressure from allies for action. Even modest changes to Senate rules, they say, would be a significant step forward.

Leaning into the fight, Biden is set to deliver a speech in Atlanta on Tuesday focused on voting rights. And Schumer has added to the civil rights symbolism by setting the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, on Jan. 17, as the deadline to either pass the voting legislation or consider revising the rules. The Senate is likely to hold a series of test votes this week intended to underscore Republican opposition.

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"I'm not going to say 'yes' or 'no,' because I don't know what votes will come to the floor," Manchin said last week, noting that he has supported some changes to Senate rules in the past. One proposal Democrats are discussing would eliminate the filibuster on the so-called "motion to proceed" that is needed before a bill can be debated on the Senate floor.

Republicans say invoking the Jan. 6 insurrection is offensive. The voting bills, they say, were largely written before the attack and include a liberal wish list of priorities that will do little to combat vulnerabilities in the law exposed by Trump's attempts to overturn the election.

"It is beyond distasteful for some of our colleagues to ham-fistedly invoke the Jan. 6 anniversary to advance these aims," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "The fact that violent criminals broke the law does not entitle Senate Democrats to break the Senate."

The renewed focus on voting rights comes as much of Biden's agenda has stalled out in Congress. Before Christmas, Manchin singlehandedly halted work on Biden's roughly \$2 trillion package of social and environmental initiatives, delaying the bill indefinitely.

Civil rights activists are deeply frustrated by the turn of events, saying precious months have been wasted. They view the GOP-backed changes in voting laws as a subtler form of ballot restrictions like literacy tests and poll taxes once used to disenfranchise Black voters, a key Democratic constituency.

"Unfortunately many policymakers have not truly appreciated the gravity of where we are in this nation at this moment," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said in an interview, singling out both Biden's White House as well as Senate Democrats. "African Americans have seen this before. We've experienced this before. We must get beyond procedural conversations and get to the substance of protecting this fragile thing called democracy."

If signed into law, Democrats' legislation would usher in the biggest overhaul of U.S. elections in a generation, striking down hurdles to voting enacted in the name of election security, reducing the influence of big money in politics and limiting partisan influence over the drawing of congressional districts. The package would create national election standards that would trump the state-level GOP laws. It would also restore the ability of the Justice Department to police election laws in states with a history of discrimination.

McConnell has ridiculed the effort as one inspired by "scary stories that liberal activists keep repeating about how democracy is at death's door." He recently dangled the possibility of narrower bipartisan action to shore up a convoluted 19th century law called the Electoral Count Act that governs the certification of presidential elections — a law Trump sought to exploit to overthrow his 2020 defeat. A compromise on that could be attractive to Manchin, who has said any election legislation ought to be enacted on a bipartisan basis.

Last week, Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine held bipartisan talks with Republican Sens. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Mitt Romney of Utah, as well as Manchin and fellow Democrats Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. An update to the Electoral Count Act was part of the discussion, according to a Collins spokeswoman.

Democrats have blasted the GOP overture on the Electoral Count Act as a "cynical" political maneuver aimed at doing the bare minimum at the federal level while leaving laws in place in GOP-controlled swing states like Georgia.

"What good is it to certify the election, if I don't get to cast my vote in the first place?" said Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock, the first African American to represent Georgia in the Senate. He is up for reelection this year.

Republicans warn that Democrats will come to regret any changes to the filibuster, which is intended to foster compromise by making legislation intentionally difficult to pass.

"They barely have a majority now," said Sen. John Thune, of South Dakota, the chamber's No. 2 Republican. "Even the strongest majorities eventually end up back in the minority."

## **Inflation up, virus down as priorities in US: AP-NORC poll**

By WILL WEISSERT and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Heading into a critical midterm election year, the top political concerns of Americans are shifting in ways that suggest Democrats face considerable challenges to maintaining their control of Congress.

A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that management of the pandemic, once an issue that strongly favored President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats, is beginning to recede in the minds of Americans. COVID-19 is increasingly overshadowed by concerns about the economy and personal finances — particularly inflation — which are topics that could lift Republicans.

Just 37% of Americans name the virus as one of their top five priorities for the government to work on in 2022, compared with 53% who said it was a leading priority at the same time a year ago. The economy outpaced the pandemic in the open-ended question, with 68% of respondents mentioning it in some way as a top 2022 concern. A similar percentage said the same last year, but mentions of inflation are much higher now: 14% this year, compared with less than 1% last year.

Consumer prices jumped 6.8% for the 12 months ending in November, a nearly four-decade high. Meanwhile, roughly twice as many Americans now mention their household finances, namely, the cost of living, as a governmental priority, 24% vs. 12% last year.

The poll was conducted in early December, when worries about the virus were rising as omicron took hold in the country, but before it sparked record caseloads, overwhelmed testing sites and hospitals and upended holiday travel. Still, in recent follow-up interviews with participants, including self-identified Democrats, many said those developments didn't shake their views.

"If we say anything along the lines of, 'Let's wait until the pandemic dies down,' well, this son of a gun virus has unlimited ability to mutate," said Mary Small, a 65-year-old pharmaceutical research contractor in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, who hopes efforts to promote gun safety will take center stage in November's elections, including her state's race for an open Senate seat. "We might never be done with this."

That sentiment reflects the challenge for Democrats at the onset of the election year. The party won the White House and control of Congress in 2020 with pledges to manage the pandemic more competently than the Trump administration. After initially earning high marks — roughly 70% approved of Biden's handling of the pandemic from late February through mid-July — the virus' persistence has undermined the new president's message.

Administration officials acknowledge that the public is growing increasingly weary of COVID-19.

"Pandemic fatigue is real, and all of us feel it at some point," Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said in an interview. "As a doctor, I've certainly seen it with my patients over the years. When you get tired and beaten down by a health problem — whether it's a personal health problem or a broader public health challenge — it can lead to disengagement."

The White House says COVID-19's waning as a preeminent concern actually underscores its success rolling out preventative measures, including vaccines. It argues that economic jitters now exacerbated by the pandemic eventually will ease.

Still, with Democrats likely struggling to campaign on the idea that they've now defeated the virus, the other issues gaining attention among voters pose more immediate political headaches.

Judy Kunzman doesn't blame Biden for the ongoing pandemic, calling it "just one of those events that are impossible to predict and almost as impossible to fix." But she's worried about continued supply chain disruptions, which affect "a lot of the other issues that we're having: The rising food prices. The fact that I can't buy my new car."

"Everything has chips and the chips aren't there," said Kunzman, 75, of Middletown, Pennsylvania, referring to a pandemic-fueled, global shortage of microchips many electronics depend on. She's waited months for the car she'd like to become available and noted that her sister faced difficulties finding a new cellphone.

"It's certainly not the victory the Democrats thought it would be," Adam Brandon, president of the conservative activist group FreedomWorks, said of the government's virus response. "We'll have another wave next year, and I just don't think anyone's going to care. I think we're going to get to a point where everyone's just going to have to learn to live with it. This will die with a whimper as people just lose interest."

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Many respondents in the survey said they're not suggesting the country ignore the pandemic. But compared with last year, higher percentages of people called out other issues, including immigration among Republicans and gun control among Democrats, as pressing in 2022. Some said they were encouraged by early indications that the latest outbreak, while spreading fast, could have milder effects for many.

"I'm hopeful with omicron," said Samantha Flowers, a 33-year-old community college teacher in Columbia, Missouri, which has its own open Senate seat on November's ballot. "Even though more people are getting it, the sickness hasn't been as harsh for most people. Since we're all going to end up sick anyway, let it be one that we can recover from better."

Dorrie Keough from Garrettsville, Ohio, said she's vaccinated against COVID-19 and gotten a booster shot, but is still staying home as much as possible because of omicron.

"Whoever's not in power is going to spin it in such a way to make it look worse than it might be," said Keough, 68, whose state also has an open Senate seat this year. "As much reading as I do — and as much investigating that I do — it's real hard for me to parse out what is actually happening versus what people are saying is happening."

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said the key to Democrats' 2022 success is easing COVID-19 fears — but also delivering tangible policy results. That includes passing Biden's "Build Back Better," the massive social spending bill that remains stalled in the Senate.

"I don't think we're going to win an election for lack of anxiety," Green said, "if we've achieved nothing else."

## Chicago fight with teachers union stretches into 2nd week

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago school leaders canceled class a fourth day in the nation's third-largest district as negotiations with the teachers' union over remote learning and other COVID-19 safety protocols failed to produce an agreement over the weekend.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez said in a joint statement Sunday evening that there wasn't "sufficient progress" in talks to resume in-person classes Monday, extending disruptions into a second school week. But they vowed negotiations would continue "through the night."

Disputed issues included testing and metrics to close schools. The Chicago Teachers Union wants the option to revert to districtwide remote instruction, and most members have refused to teach in-person until there's an agreement, or the latest COVID-19 spike subsides. But Chicago leaders reject districtwide remote learning, saying it's detrimental to students and schools are safe. Instead, Chicago opted to cancel classes as a whole two days after students returned from winter break.

Chicago faces the same pandemic issues as other districts nationwide, with more reverting to remote learning as infections soar and staff members are sidelined. But the situation in union-friendly Chicago has been amplified in a labor dispute that's familiar to families in the mostly low-income Black and Latino district who have seen disruptions during a similar safety protocol fight last year, a 2019 strike and a one-day work stoppage in 2016.

The announcement for the roughly 350,000-student district came as the principals of some schools had already notified families their schools would be closed for instruction Monday because of staffing shortages.

The tone of Lightfoot and Martinez's Sunday evening statement suggested more progress than a day earlier when shortly after the union made its latest offer public, they said, "CTU leadership, you're not listening" and vowed not to "relent." The offer she rejected included teachers reporting to schools Monday to distribute laptops for remote learning to temporarily start Wednesday. Both sides have filed complaints to a state labor board.

Union leaders have accused Lightfoot of bullying, saying they agree that in-person instruction is better, but the pandemic is forcing difficult decisions. Attendance was down ahead of the cancellations due students and teachers in isolation from possible exposure to the virus and families opting to keep children home voluntarily.

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"Educators are not the enemy Mayor Lightfoot wants them to be," the union said in a statement Sunday, adding that the desire to be in the classroom "must be balanced by ensuring those classrooms are safe, healthy and well-resourced, with the proper mitigation necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19."

Union leaders did not immediately have a response after the district's Sunday evening cancelation.

There appeared to be some headway over the weekend toward a deal.

The district, which deems the fight an "illegal walkout," said late Saturday it will allow more incentives for substitute teachers, provide KN95 masks for all teachers and students, and that Illinois will provide about 350,000 antigen tests. But both sides remained at odds on key issues including COVID-19 metrics that will lead to individual school closures and compensation. The district said it won't pay teachers failing to report to schools, even if they tried to log into remote teaching systems. The union doesn't want any of its roughly 25,000 members to be disciplined or lose pay.

District leaders had said some schools, where enough staff showed up, may offer instruction Monday even without an agreement; all buildings have remained open for meal pickup. However, only a handful of principals anticipated having staff to open.

School leaders have touted a \$100 million safety plan, which includes air purifiers in each classroom. Also, roughly 91% of staff are vaccinated and masks are required indoors.

Since the start of the academic year, some individual classrooms have temporarily switched to remote instruction when there are infections. But in rejecting a widescale return to remote learning, city health officials argue most students directed to quarantine because of possible classroom exposure don't get COVID-19. The district is piloting a "test to stay" program to cut isolation times.

The union argues that the measures fall short, especially considering the omicron-fueled surge that has upended the return to work and class. It has also criticized the district for not enrolling enough students in a testing program and an unreliable database of COVID-19 infections.

Several district families, represented by the conservative Liberty Justice Center in Chicago, filed a lawsuit in Cook County over the closures last week, while more than 5,000 others have signed a petition urging a return to in-person instruction.

## Golden Globe Awards carry on, without stars or a telecast

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The Golden Globe Awards, Hollywood's so-called biggest party that regularly drew 18 million television viewers, was reduced to a live-blog Sunday night for its 79th edition.

The embattled Hollywood Foreign Press Association proceeded with its film awards Sunday night without a telecast, nominees, a red carpet, a host, press or even a livestream. Instead, members of the HFPA and some recipients of the group's philanthropic grants gathered at the Beverly Hilton Hotel for a 90-minute private event, announcing the names of the film and television winners on the organization's social media feeds.

Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" won several big awards, for best picture comedy or musical, best actress for Rachel Zegler and best supporting actress for Ariana DeBose.

Netflix's gothic Western "The Power of the Dog" was named best picture drama, along with other honors for Jane Campion's direction and Kodi Smit-McPhee's supporting performance.

Other film winners included Will Smith for "King Richard," Nicole Kidman for "Being the Ricardos" and Andrew Garfield for "tick, tick...BOOM!" The Japanese film "Drive My Car," also a critics' group darling, got best non-English language motion picture, while "Encanto" won for animation.

Though announcing winners on social media might seem like a straightforward task, those following along on Twitter only might have been somewhat confused at times. The tweets often left out exactly which project a person had won for.

To announce the winner for best actor, motion picture musical or comedy, the organization tweeted, "It takes 43 muscles to smile. Thanks for the workout Andrew Garfield and congratulations for taking home the #GoldenGlobe for Best Actor—Motion Picture—Musical/Comedy," failing to mention that the award

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was for his turn in "tick, tick...BOOM!"

Other times, the tweets were just downright baffling. In announcing the "West Side Story" win, the group initially wrote, "If laughter is the best medicine @WestSideMovie is the cure for what ails you" about the drama that's full of death and tragedy. They later deleted the tweet and wrote a new one about "music" being the best medicine.

Television winners included: Sarah Snook and Jeremy Strong for "Succession," which won best television drama, Jean Smart for "Hacks," which also won best television comedy, Jason Sudeikis for "Ted Lasso," Kate Winslet for "Mare of Easttown," O Yeong-su for "Squid Game" and Michael Keaton for "Dopesick." Barry Jenkins' "The Underground Railroad" got best limited series. The group said on its website that "Pose" star Michaela Jaé Rodriguez became the first trans person to win a Golden Globe.

None of the winners appeared to be present at the event, nor did they immediately comment on their awards.

Jamie Lee Curtis, however, chimed in with a video message shared on the group's Twitter, talking about the HFPA's charitable work.

"I just wanted to honor and stand with them in this continued advocacy," Curtis said. "I'm proud to be associated with them in this venture."

The HFPA enlisted leaders of the groups it has given grants to to announce the winners. Arnold Schwarzenegger chimed in with a video message as well, thanking the group for recognizing him as the "new star of the year" in 1977.

That the organization proceeded with any kind of event came as a surprise to many in Hollywood. The HFPA came under fire after a Los Angeles Times investigation revealed in February ethical lapses and a stunning lack of diversity — there was not a single Black journalist in the 87-person group. Studios and PR firms threatened to boycott. Tom Cruise even returned his three Golden Globes, while other A-listers condemned the group on social media.

They pledged reform last year, but even after a public declaration during the 78th show, their longtime broadcast partner NBC announced in May that it would not air the 2022 Golden Globes because "Change of this magnitude takes time and work." The broadcaster typically pays some \$60 million for the rights to air the show, which ranks among the most-watched awards shows behind the Oscars and the Grammys.

Though often ridiculed, Hollywood had come to accept the Golden Globes as a legitimate and helpful stop in a competitive awards season. And for audiences around the world, it was a reasonably lively night, with glamorous fashion, major stars, the promise of champagne-fueled speeches, and hosts — from Tina Fey and Amy Poehler to Ricky Gervais — that regularly poked fun at the HFPA.

After the NBC blow, it was widely expected that the HFPA would simply sit the year out. Hollywood studios and publicists also largely opted out from engaging with the group as they had in years past, with some declining to provide screeners of films for consideration. When nominees were announced last month, few celebrated publicly.

The press association claims that in the months since its 2021 show, it has remade itself. The group has added a chief diversity officer; overhauled its board; inducted 21 new members, including six Black journalists; brought in the NAACP on a five-year partnership; and updated its code of conduct.

## Producer Dwayne Hickman, who played Dobie Gillis, has died

By MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

Dwayne Hickman, the actor and network TV executive who despite numerous achievements throughout his life would always be remembered fondly by a generation of baby boomers for his role as Dobie Gillis, has died. He was 87.

Hickman died of complications from Parkinsons on Sunday at his home in Los Angeles, according to a statement from a family representative, B. Harlan Boll. He was surrounded by family members when he died, it said.

Although Hickman went on to appear on other TV shows and in movies, as well as to successful behind-

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the-scenes careers as a publicist, talent booker for a prominent Howard Hughes-owned casino in Las Vegas and TV programming executive for CBS, he could never escape his public connection to Dobie.

"Oh, my gosh — it's Dobie Gillis! I grew up with you!" former President Clinton told him when the two met while Clinton was governor of Arkansas.

"Now it's nice," Hickman, who was also an accomplished painter, told a reporter during an exhibition of his work in St. Louis in 2003. "It's very sweet to see how much Dobie Gillis meant to a lot of baby boomers, who are always nice when I meet them."

His autobiography, co-written with Joan Roberts Hickman, his wife, was published in 1995. It was titled "Forever Dobie."

Hickman had small parts in movies and TV shows as a youngster, but had given up acting by 1950 to concentrate on his studies at Los Angeles' Cathedral High School. After graduation, he entered Loyola University.

"I was in the art program and was heading toward architecture when I got a call from my old agent toward the end of my freshman year," he recalled in a 2003 interview. "He said he had a role for me in 'The Bob Cummings Show.'"

Hickman went on to play Chuck MacDonald, the teenage nephew who tried to get a piece of his Uncle Bob's action as Cummings' Bob Collins character worked as a photographer of glamour girls. Hickman, meanwhile, continued his studies on the side, eventually earning a degree in economics from Loyola.

"The Bob Cummings Show" (later called "Love That Bob") lasted from 1955 to 1959, and toward the end of its run Hickman made a pilot for author Max Shulman about a lovelorn 16-year-old named Dobie Gillis who pursued, but could never win the heart of, almost every girl he saw.

"The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis," marked by sharp humor and a brilliant young cast that also included Bob Denver, Warren Beatty and Tuesday Weld, was an instant hit when it debuted in 1959.

"The chief contradiction is that Dobie never gets the girl," Hickman once said. "His is a false aggressiveness; everything he attempts in life backfires and pushes him into last place." As a result, Hickman's Dobie would often spend a part of the show standing in front of a copy of the statue of Rodin's "The Thinker," philosophizing about his bumbling efforts at life and love.

As "Dobie Gillis" continued on until 1963, and Hickman's and Denver's characters aged (both actors were already in their mid-20s when the show began), viewers saw them go from high school to college, as well as to a brief, bumbling stint in the U.S. military,

At both high school and college, veteran character actor William Schallert was their put-upon teacher. Although Steve Franken soon replaced Beatty as Gillis' wealthy archrival, Sheila James Kuehl (later elected to several terms in the California Legislature) remained Dobie's only arduous suitor. Kuehl's Zelda Gilroy was also the only girl Dobie never realized loved him, although by the 1988 TV reunion movie "Bring Me The Head of Dobie Gillis" Dobie and Zelda had finally married.

After the TV show folded in 1963, Hickman went on to appear in such films as "Cat Ballou" with Jane Fonda and Lee Marvin and such popular 1960s youth-oriented pictures as "How to Stuff a Wild Bikini," "Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine" and "Ski Party." Although his acting career slowed in the 1970s, he continued to appear in such TV shows as "The Mod Squad," "Love, American Style" and "Clueless."

When Denver, who went from playing beatnik Maynard G. Krebs on "Dobie Gillis" to the title role in "Gilligan's Island," made the 2001 biopic "Surviving Gilligan's Island: The Incredibly True Story of the Longest Three Hour Tour in History," Hickman appeared in flashback scenes as a TV network executive.

After his acting career slowed in the 1970s, Hickman became talent director at Hughes' Landmark Hotel and worked 10 years as a program director at CBS, overseeing such series as "M.A.S.H.," "Dukes of Hazard," "Maude" and "Designing Women."

He began to study painting in the late 1980s "so I could learn to do it right," he said, and eventually saw his works exhibited at art galleries across the country. Dwayne Bernard Hickman, brother of veteran character actor Darryl Hickman, was born May 18, 1934, in Los Angeles. He began acting at age 6, following his older brother into the business.

He was married three times: to Carol Christensen, 1963-1972; Joanne Papile, 1977-81; and Joan Roberts, whom he married in 1983 and who survives him. Hickman and his first wife had a son, John, and he and his third wife had a son, Albert.

## Harrowing tales of escape after fire hits NYC building

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN, ANDREW SELSKY and DAVID PORTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rancid black smoke filling hallways, rising from floor to floor. People tripping and falling as they rushed down darkened stairwells, unable to see. Panic turning to sorrow, as residents who escaped a fire at a high-rise Bronx apartment building learned of neighbors who did not survive.

"We all got out. My friend, her husband didn't make it out. So I'm just thanking God that my family made it," said one resident, Winter Thomas, who escaped from the ninth floor with her mother, stepfather and siblings.

In all, Sunday's fire killed 19 people, including nine children ages 16 and under, fire officials said.

"It don't make no sense. These is kids I grew up with, kids we went to school with," Thomas said.

On the way down, they sidestepped unresponsive bodies laying on the ground.

Sandra Clayton, 61, heard neighbors screaming in the hallway: "Get out! Get out!"

She dashed for the stairs, scooping up her dog named Mocha, a 2-year-old Maltese Shih Tzu.

The smoke smelled of putrid chemicals, she said. It was already thick and black when she found the stairwell.

She fumbled with her cellphone flashlight, but was too much in shock. Unable to see, she groped her way down the stairs, soon crowded with other tenants. She described panicked wails and crying that echoed up and down the stairs.

"I just ran down the steps as much as I could but people was falling all over me, screaming," she recounted from St. Barnabas Hospital, where she was treated for smoke inhalation.

She fell three times, sometimes trampled by others trying to escape in the darkness.

At one point, she let go of her dog as she braced herself from a fall.

"I tried feeling for her, but there was so much smoke," she said, her voice growing emotional. "I had to save my own life."

After minutes that seemed to last forever, she found her way out of the building. She gasped for air, wondering in tears about what happened to Mocha back on the stairs.

"It was so horrific," she said of the ordeal. "I was so scared."

Mocha didn't make it. The dog was later found suffocated by the smoke, she said.

As evening fell over the scene, Nicole Anderson counted her blessings. She suspects the fire was already burning when she and her family rode down the elevator to their car.

After driving just a few minutes, the family saw firetrucks barreling down the street, sirens and lights blaring.

"I didn't think much of it," said Anderson, 43, who grew up in the building. Soon a neighbor was calling saying their building was on fire. She turned back but could only get as close as a few blocks from her home. She walked the rest of the way.

"It was dark black smoke," she said, coming from a lower floor.

Jose Henriquez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, was taking care of two young grandkids and a niece with his wife. At first, he thought the fire alarm was just an irritating interruption to their morning, since he said false alarms in the building were frequent.

Henriquez said those previous false alarms might've caused residents not to take action as soon as the fire broke out.

As the dark smoke filled the hallway outside, Henriquez shut the door tight and wedged a wet towel in the gap below.

He cracked open a window, letting in the wintry air. In video he shot, the kids can be heard expressing alarm at the smoke, looking out the 10th-floor window as fire trucks rushed to the scene.

Eventually, the family squeezed past ascending firefighters, using dampened COVID-19 masks for protec-



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tion against the lingering smoke, careful not to slip in pools of water.

On the way down, they passed a dog lying dead on the sooty staircase.

Luis Rosa, also on the 13th floor, had awakened to the fire alarm, also annoyed that it was probably another false alarm.

But when a notification popped up on his phone, he and his mother began to worry.

By then, smoke began wafting into his 13th floor apartment. Sirens began wailing in the distance.

He opened the front door, but smoke had gotten too thick for an escape, he said.

"OK, we can't run down the stairs because if we run down the stairs, we're going to end up suffocating," he recalled.

He looked out the window trying to figure out his options.

"All we could do was wait," he said.

About 45 minutes later — perhaps longer, he said — he heard pounding on the door. It was a firefighter giving the all clear.

## UK plans holiday weekend to honor queen's 70 years on throne

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The United Kingdom will celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne with a military parade, neighborhood parties and a competition to create a new dessert for the Platinum Jubilee, Buckingham Palace said Monday.

Elizabeth will become on Feb. 6 the first British monarch to reign for seven decades, and festivities marking the anniversary will culminate in a four-day weekend of events June 2-5. It wasn't immediately clear which events the queen, 95, would take part in after doctors recently advised her to get more rest.

The weekend, which includes an extra public holiday in honor of the queen, will begin on Thursday June 2, with Trooping the Colour — the annual military parade that marks the queen's official birthday.

That will be followed on June 3 by a service of thanksgiving honoring the queen's service to the U.K., her other realms and the Commonwealth.

In a nod to coronation chicken — the concoction of cold chicken, curry powder, mayonnaise and other ingredients served at garden parties marking the queen's formal ascent to the throne — the palace will sponsor the Platinum Pudding competition to create a new dessert dedicated to the monarch.

The competition will be open to U.K. residents as young as 8 and will be judged by television cooking personalities Mary Berry and Monica Galetti, together with Buckingham Palace head chef Mark Flanagan. The winning recipe will be published ahead of Jubilee weekend so it can be part of the celebrations.

Some 1,400 people have already registered to host Jubilee lunches on June 5, with flagship events set to take place in London and at the Eden Project in Cornwall. The palace expects there will be some 200,000 neighborhood events across the U.K.

The weekend will end with a pageant honoring the monarch's service and looking ahead to the next 70 years. Dancers, musicians, military personnel and key workers will "tell the story of the Queen's reign," while children will create a picture of their hopes and aspirations for the planet, the palace said.

## NY Rep. Ocasio-Cortez recovering after positive COVID test

WASHINGTON (AP) — New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has tested positive for COVID-19 and "is experiencing symptoms and recovering at home," her office said in a statement Sunday evening.

The Democratic congresswoman's office said Ocasio-Cortez received a booster shot last fall, adding that she "encourages everyone to get their booster" and follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With the nation dealing with another surge of the virus since the emergence of the highly contagious omicron variant, numerous members of Congress have reported breakthrough cases despite being fully vaccinated and boosted.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, tweeted last week that he had tested positive on an at-home virus test, but

said he was asymptomatic and felt "fine."

## Djokovic detention draws focus to Australia's asylum-seekers

SYDNEY (AP) — Novak Djokovic spent a fourth day on Sunday among the unwilling occupants of Melbourne's Park Hotel.

The tennis superstar awaited court proceedings on Monday that will determine whether he can defend his Australian Open title or whether he will be deported — and the world has shown keen interest in his temporary accommodation.

His fellow residents in the immigration detention hotel include refugees and asylum-seekers who are challenging their own proceedings that have all lasted much longer than Djokovic's. So long in some cases they feel forgotten.

Djokovic's mere presence at the hotel, a squat and unattractive building on the leafy fringe of the city's downtown, has drawn the world's eyes to those other residents and their ongoing struggles with the Australian immigration system.

Refugee activists have been quick to capitalize on the media attention as one of the world's most feted athletes shares the hotel and its sparse amenities with some of the world's most vulnerable and dispossessed people.

Djokovic was denied entry at the Melbourne airport late Wednesday after border officials canceled his visa for failing to meet its entry requirement that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

His lawyers filed court papers Saturday challenging the deportation that show Djokovic tested positive for COVID-19 last month and recovered, grounds he used in applying for a medical exemption to the country's strict vaccination rules. A decision on his appeal is expected Monday.

Renata Voracova, a 38-year-old Czech doubles player, was detained in the same hotel over a vaccine dispute before leaving Australia on Saturday.

The Park Hotel was once a thriving tourist hotel, popular for its central location near Melbourne's network of trams and across the road from the home ground of the Carlton Australian Rules Football Club.

But for the past two years it has often been referred to as the "notorious" or "infamous" Park Hotel. At the outbreak of the pandemic it was a quarantine hotel for Australians returning from overseas and reportedly a source of a delta-variant outbreak that swept Melbourne and forced the city into months of lockdown while claiming hundreds of lives.

More recently it has been home to travelers of a different kind: refugees and asylum-seekers who have been transferred for medical reasons from Australia's off-shore detention centers on Manus Island and Nauru in the Pacific.

There are 32 asylum-seekers sharing the hotel with Djokovic. Among them is Mehdi Ali of Iran who was 15 when he made the dangerous journey to Australia by boat. He had spent the past nine years in an off-shore processing facility for asylum-seekers and refugees, and was recently moved to the Park Hotel, where armed police guard the entrance and residents cannot leave.

Mehdi says the hotel is "like a jail" with its lengthy confinement, lack of fresh air and poor food.

In October, a COVID-19 outbreak infected more than half of the hotel's then 46 residents. In December, small fires broke out on one floor, residents were evacuated and one person was treated for smoke inhalation. Damage caused by the fires affected residents' access to outdoor exercise areas, and asylum-seekers frequently complain they are confined to their rooms.

Refugee advocates regularly protest outside the hotel, mostly in small numbers and unnoticed by passersby. Djokovic's sudden arrival has energized the protesters as they seek to draw global attention to the asylum-seekers and their treatment in Australia.

An Amnesty International campaign manager, Shankar Kasynathan, was among several groups protesting outside the Park Hotel on Friday. One large group of Serbian-Australians protested Djokovic's detention while another smaller group of protesters celebrated his opposition to vaccine mandates.

"The world is watching at this point because we have one of the world's most celebrated athletes ...

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under the same roof as the world's most vulnerable people, namely refugees," Kasynathan said.

"We hope that Novak Djokovic will use his influence, his support base to potentially put pressure on (Home Affairs Minister) Karen Andrews and the Australian government to end this senseless cruelty," he added.

Australia first introduced offshore processing at Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and Nauru in 2001 as part of its "Pacific Solution" to asylum-seekers and refugees attempting to reach Australia by boat, often with the help of traffickers. Offshore processing was suspended in 2008 but resumed in August 2012.

Since July 2013, successive Australian governments have said no refugees will be resettled in Australia from Nauru or Manus Island. By mid-2021, about 1,000 refugees from the offshore centers had been resettled in other countries, including more than 900 in the United States.

Many in the offshore centers have been transferred back to Australia for medical reasons and have been detained at places like the Park Hotel.

Djokovic will be granted his freedom from the hotel on Monday one way or another. If his legal challenge to the cancellation of his visa is successful he will be able to defend his Australian Open title next month. If not, he will have to return home.

For others at the Park Hotel there will be no such choice. Their wait will continue.

## Death toll in rockfall on Brazilian lake rises to 10

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — The death toll from an accident in which a slab of cliff rock toppled onto pleasure boaters on a Brazilian lake has risen to 10, police said Sunday. Authorities worked to identify the dead and divers were searching the lake in case there were more victims.

Police Chief Marcos Pimenta said there was a possibility that some people were missing following the accident Saturday in Minas Gerais state. At least 32 people were injured, though most were released from hospitals by Saturday evening.

The accident occurred between the towns of Sao Jose da Barra and Capitolio, from which the boats had left. Video images showed a gathering of small boats moving slowly near the sheer rock cliff on Furnas Lake when a fissure appeared in the rock and a huge piece toppled onto several of the vessels.

The bodies were taken to Passos city, where coroners worked to identify them. The work was difficult because of the "high energy impact" of the rock on the boaters, said a regional civil police official, Marcos Pimenta. He said one victim had been identified as 68-year-old Júlio Borges Antunes.

Furnas Lake, which was created in 1958 for the installation of a hydroelectric plant, is a popular tourist draw in the area roughly 420 kilometers (260 miles) north of Sao Paulo.

Officials suggested the wall coming loose could have been related to heavy rains recently that caused flooding in the state and forced almost 17,000 people out of their homes.

The head of the Applied Geology Division of the Brazilian Geological Service, Tiago Antonelli, said the cliff wall is subject to centuries of erosion and susceptible to rain, heat and cold.

"It's normal to happen in many canyons, even with rocks of that size. But nowadays, with the intensification of tourism, people are starting to get closer to these places and to register these phenomena with their cell phones," Antonelli said.

Joana Sánchez, geology professor at the Federal University of Goiás, said authorities should have been controlling the site to prevent accidents, especially in the rainy season. The boats should have been kept at least one kilometer (0.6 miles) away from the waterfall where the accident happened, she said.

## Russia, US hold working dinner to open Geneva talks

By KONSTANTIN MANENKOV and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A top Russian diplomat predicted "difficult" talks with the United States this week after attending a working dinner with U.S. officials in Geneva on Sunday as part of the kickoff to a string of meetings in three European cities this week, with ties at a low over Russia's military buildup near Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and other Russian officials met for over two hours with

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U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the head of the U.S. delegation, and her team at the luxury residence of the U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament that overlooks Lake Geneva.

The dinner was a prelude to a broader discussion between the two teams at the U.S. mission in Geneva starting Monday — culminating a string of meetings both virtual and in person among U.S. officials, their Western allies, and Russian leaders in recent days and weeks as tensions over Russian pressure against Ukraine have grown.

“We plunged into the substance of the forthcoming issues, but the talks are going to be difficult,” Ryabkov told reporters as he left the dinner meeting. “They cannot be easy. They will be business-like. I think we won’t waste our time tomorrow.”

State Department spokesman Ned Price said that during Sunday’s dinner Sherman “stressed the United States’ commitment to the international principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the freedom of sovereign nations to choose their own alliances,” a reference to Ukraine and its aspirations of joining NATO.

Sherman “affirmed that the United States would welcome genuine progress through diplomacy,” Price said in a statement.

The talks are seen a first step toward rekindling dialogue as ties have worsened because Russia has deployed an estimated 100,000 troops along its border with Ukraine. Concerns have risen about a broader Russian military incursion in the country.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s government has laid out a list of demands, such as seeking guarantees that the NATO military alliance won’t seek to expand any further eastward to countries like Ukraine or Georgia, which are former Soviet republics.

“The Russian side came here with a clear position that contains a number of elements that, to my mind, are understandable and have been so clearly formulated — including at a high level — that deviating from our approaches simply is not possible,” Ryabkov said.

Asked whether Russia was ready for compromise, he said: “The Americans should get ready to reach a compromise.”

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told ABC’s “This Week” on Sunday he didn’t expect any breakthroughs in talks with the Russians in Geneva or during conversations in Brussels, at a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, and at the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe in Vienna later this week.

The United States and other Western allies have pledged “severe costs” to Russia if it moves against Ukraine.

“The question really now is whether President Putin will take the path of diplomacy and dialogue or seeks confrontation,” Blinken said, suggesting that a Russian move deeper into Ukraine might run counter to Moscow’s interests in the long run.

“If Russia commits renewed aggression against Ukraine, I think it’s a very fair prospect that NATO will reinforce its positions along its eastern flank, the countries that border Russia,” he told ABC.

Russia was coming into the talks seeking a clearer understanding of the U.S. position, and cited signals from Washington that some of the Russian proposals can be discussed, Ryabkov said earlier Sunday, according to state news agency Tass.

He laid out Russia’s three demands: no further NATO expansion, no missiles on Russia’s borders, and for NATO no longer to have military exercises, intelligence operations or infrastructure outside of its 1997 borders.

U.S. officials expressed openness Saturday to discussions on curtailing possible future deployments of offensive missiles in Ukraine and putting limits on American and NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe — if Russia is willing to back off on Ukraine.

But they warned of hard economic sanctions in case of a Russian intervention, including direct sanctions on Russian entities and restrictions on products exported from the U.S. to Russia.

Ambassador Thomas Greminger, director of the Swiss government-supported Geneva Center for Security Policy who hosted Ryabkov for a conference in October, said the Geneva talks were “an opportunity to

spell out mutual concerns, to spell out mutual expectations. But it would be way too early to expect any clarity, for instance, regarding Ukraine's bid for NATO membership.

"What we're seeing is a lot of posturing," added Greminger, who is also a former head of the OSCE. "I think at the end, both Putin and (U.S. President Joe) Biden have absolutely no interest to push towards an escalation."

## Prospects dim as US, Russia prepare to meet over Ukraine

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the fate of Ukraine and potentially broader post-Cold War European stability at stake, the United States and Russia are holding critical strategic talks that could shape the future of not only their relationship but the relationship between the U.S. and its NATO allies. Prospects are bleak.

Though the immediacy of the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine will top the agenda in a series of high-level meetings that get underway on Monday, there is a litany of festering but largely unrelated disputes, ranging from arms control to cybercrime and diplomatic issues, for Washington and Moscow to overcome if tensions are to ease. And the recent deployment of Russian troops to Kazakhstan may cast a shadow over the entire exercise.

With much at risk and both warning of dire consequences of failure, the two sides have been positioning themselves for what will be a nearly unprecedented flurry of activity in Europe this week. Yet the wide divergence in their opening positions bodes ill for any type of speedy resolution, and levels of distrust appear higher than at any point since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said bluntly Sunday that he doesn't expect any breakthroughs in the coming week. Instead, he said a more likely positive outcome would be an agreement to de-escalate tensions in the short term and return to talks at an appropriate time in the future. But the U.S. will have to see a de-escalation for there to be actual progress.

"It's very hard to see that happening when there's an ongoing escalation when Russia has a gun to the head of Ukraine with 100,000 troops near its borders, the possibility of doubling that on very short order," Blinken said on ABC's "This Week."

U.S. officials on Saturday unveiled some details of the administration's stance, which seem to fall well short of Russian demands. The officials said the U.S. is open to discussions on curtailing possible future deployments of offensive missiles in Ukraine and putting limits on American and NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe if Russia is willing to back off on Ukraine.

But they also said Russia will be hit hard with economic sanctions should it intervene in Ukraine. In addition to direct sanctions on Russian entities, those penalties could include significant restrictions on products exported from the U.S. to Russia and potentially foreign-made products subject to U.S. jurisdiction.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who will lead Russia's delegation at the Geneva talks, responded harshly to Blinken's statement.

"Demands of the United States and other NATO countries that we carry out some de-escalation measures on our territory are excluded from the discussion. This is a non-starter in the literal sense of the word," Ryabkov said in an interview with the Tass news agency.

Russia wants the talks initially to produce formally binding security guarantees for itself with a pledge that NATO will not further expand eastward and the removal of U.S. troops and weapons from parts of Europe. But the U.S. and its allies say those are non-starters intentionally designed by Moscow to distract and divide. They insist that any Russian military intervention in Ukraine will prompt "massive consequences" that will dramatically disrupt Russia's economy even if they have global ripple effects.

In a bid to forestall efforts by Russia to sow discord in the West, the Biden administration has gone out of its way to stress that neither Ukraine nor Europe more broadly will be excluded from any discussion of Ukraine's or Europe's security.

Biden administration officials allow that neither topic can be entirely ignored when senior American and Russian diplomats sit down in Geneva in Monday ahead of larger, more inclusive meetings in Brussels and

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Vienna on Wednesday and Thursday that will explore those issues in perhaps more depth.

Still, the mantras “nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine” and “nothing about Europe without Europe” have become almost cliché in Washington in recent weeks, and senior U.S. officials have gone so far as to say they expect Russia to lie about the content of Monday’s meeting to try to stoke divisions.

“We fully expect that the Russian side will make public comments following the meeting on Monday that will not reflect the true nature of the discussions that took place,” said one senior U.S. official who will participate in the talks. The official was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

That official and others have urged allies to view with “extreme skepticism” anything Moscow says about the so-called Strategic Stability Talks and wait until they are briefed by the American participants to form opinions.

Blinken has accused Russia of “gaslighting” and mounting a full-scale disinformation campaign designed to blame Ukraine, NATO and particularly the United States for the current tensions and undercut Western unity. He said Russian President Vladimir Putin is engaged in an all-out war on the truth that ignores Russia’s own provocative and destabilizing actions over the course of the past decade.

“Russia seeks to challenge the international system itself and to unravel our trans-Atlantic alliance, erode our unity, pressure democracies into failure,” Blinken said on Friday, going through a list of offending Russian activity ranging from military intervention in Ukraine and Georgia to chemical weapons attacks on Putin critics to election interference in the U.S. and elsewhere, cybercrime and support for dictators.

Despite several conversations between President Joe Biden and Putin, including an in-person meeting last summer, Blinken said such behavior continues, at increasing risk to the post-World War II global order.

Thus, the intensified U.S. and allied effort to forge common positions on both the warnings and the “severe costs” to Russia if it moves against Ukraine. While expressions of unity have been forthcoming, Blinken was not optimistic about prospects for success in the talks.

“To the extent that there is progress to be made — and we hope that there is — actual progress is going to be very difficult to make, if not impossible, in an environment of escalation by Russia,” he said.

Russia, meanwhile, has spun a narrative that it is a threatened victim of Western aggression and wants quick results from the meetings despite what appear insurmountable differences.

Putin has repeatedly warned that Moscow will have to take unspecified “military-technical measures” if the West stonewalls Russia’s demands, and affirmed that NATO membership for Ukraine or the deployment of alliance weapons there is a red line for Moscow that it wouldn’t allow the West to cross.

“We have nowhere to retreat,” Putin said last month, adding that NATO could deploy missiles in Ukraine that would take just four or five minutes to reach Moscow. “They have pushed us to a line that we can’t cross. They have taken it to the point where we simply must tell them; ‘Stop!’”

Ryabkov and Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who will lead the U.S. delegation, met over a working dinner Sunday night to discuss the upcoming talks.

## Kazakhstan says 164 killed in last week’s protests

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Kazakhstan authorities said Sunday that 164 people, including a 4-year-old girl, were killed in a week of protests that marked the worst unrest since the former Soviet republic gained independence 30 years ago.

The office of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said order has been restored in the Central Asian country and that the government has regained control of all buildings that were taken over by the protesters. Some of the buildings were set on fire.

Sporadic gunfire was heard Sunday in Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan, according to the Russian TV station Mir-24, but it was unclear whether those were warning shots by law enforcement. Tokayev said Friday he had authorized a shoot-to-kill order for police and the military to restore order.

The demonstrations, which began in the western part of Kazakhstan, began Jan. 2. over a sharp rise in fuel prices and spread throughout the country, apparently reflecting wider discontent with the authoritar-

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ian government. They prompted a Russia-led military alliance to send troops to the country.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Tokayev's order "something I resolutely reject."

"The shoot-to-kill order, to the extent it exists, is wrong and should be rescinded," he said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

"And Kazakhstan has the ability to maintain law and order, to defend the institutions of the state, but to do so in a way that respects the rights of peaceful protesters and also addresses the concerns that they've raised – economic concerns, some political concerns," Blinken added.

The same party has ruled Kazakhstan since it gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Anyone aspiring to oppose the government has either been repressed, sidelined, or co-opted, amid widespread economic hardship despite the country's enormous reserves of oil, natural gas, uranium and minerals.

About 5,800 people were detained during the unrest, Tokayev's office said.

The death toll of 164, reported by the state news channel Khabar-24 and citing the Health Ministry, was a significant increase from previously announced totals. It was unclear if that number referred only to civilians or if law enforcement deaths were included. Kazakh authorities said earlier Sunday that 16 members of the police or national guard had been killed.

The ministry said 103 of the deaths occurred in Almaty, and Kazakhstan's ombudswoman for children's rights said three of those killed were minors, including a 4-year-old girl.

The ministry earlier reported more than 2,200 people sought treatment for injuries, and the Interior Ministry said about 1,300 security officers were injured.

Almaty's airport, which had been taken over by protesters last week, remained closed but was expected to resume operations Monday.

Tokayev said the demonstrations were instigated by "terrorists" with foreign backing, although the protests have shown no obvious leaders or organization. Sunday's statement from his office said the detentions included "a sizable number of foreign nationals," but gave no details.

It was unclear how many of those detained remained in custody.

The foreign ministry of neighboring Kyrgyzstan on Sunday called for the release of well-known Kyrgyz musician Vikram Ruzakhunov, who was shown in a video on Kazakh television saying that he had flown to the country to take part in protests and was promised \$200. In the video, apparently taken in police custody, Ruzakhunov's face was bruised and he had a large cut on his forehead.

The former head of Kazakhstan's counterintelligence and anti-terrorism agency has been arrested on charges of attempting to overthrow the government. The arrest of Karim Masimov, which was announced Saturday, came just days after he was removed as head of the National Security Committee by Tokayev.

No details were given about what Masimov was alleged to have done that would constitute an attempted overthrow of the government. The National Security Committee, a successor to the Soviet-era KGB, is responsible for counterintelligence, the border guards service and anti-terrorist activities.

As the unrest mounted, Kazakhstan's ministerial cabinet resigned but remained in their posts temporarily. Tokayev spokesman Brisk Uali said the president would propose a new cabinet on Tuesday.

At Tokayev's request, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led military alliance of six former Soviet states, authorized sending about 2,500 mostly Russian troops to Kazakhstan as peacekeepers.

Some of the force is guarding government facilities in the capital, Nur-Sultan, which "made it possible to release part of the forces of Kazakhstani law enforcement agencies and redeploy them to Almaty to participate in the counterterrorist operation," according to a statement from Tokayev's office.

In a sign that the demonstrations were more deeply rooted than just over the fuel price rise, many demonstrators shouted "Old man out," a reference to Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was president from Kazakhstan's independence until he resigned in 2019 and anointed Tokayev as his successor.

Nazarbayev retained substantial power as head of the National Security Council. But Tokayev replaced him as council head amid the unrest, possibly aiming at a concession to mollify protesters. However, Nazarbayev adviser Aido Ukibay said Sunday that it was done at Nazarbayev's initiative, according to the Kazakh news agency KazTag.

## Stay home or work sick? Omicron poses a conundrum

By ANNE D'INNOENZIO and DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writers

As the raging omicron variant of COVID-19 infects workers across the nation, millions of those whose jobs don't provide paid sick days are having to choose between their health and their paycheck.

While many companies instituted more robust sick leave policies at the beginning of the pandemic, some of those have since been scaled back with the rollout of the vaccines, even though omicron has managed to evade the shots. Meanwhile, the current labor shortage is adding to the pressure of workers having to decide whether to show up to their job sick if they can't afford to stay home.

"It's a vicious cycle," said Daniel Schneider, professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. "As staffing gets depleted because people are out sick, that means that those that are on the job have more to do and are even more reluctant to call in sick when they in turn get sick."

Low-income hourly workers are especially vulnerable. Nearly 80% of all private sector workers get at least one paid sick day, according to a national compensation survey of employee benefits conducted in March by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But only 33% of workers whose wages are at the bottom 10% get paid sick leave, compared with 95% in the top 10%.

A survey this past fall of roughly 6,600 hourly low-wage workers conducted by Harvard's Shift Project, which focuses on inequality, found that 65% of those workers who reported being sick in the last month said they went to work anyway. That's lower than the 85% who showed up to work sick before the pandemic, but much higher than it should be in the middle of a public health crisis. Schneider says it could get worse because of omicron and the labor shortage.

What's more, Schneider noted that the share of workers with paid sick leave before the pandemic barely budged during the pandemic — 50% versus 51% respectively. He further noted many of the working poor surveyed don't even have \$400 in emergency funds, and families will now be even more financially strapped with the expiration of the child tax credit, which had put a few hundred dollars in families' pockets every month.

The Associated Press interviewed one worker who started a new job with the state of New Mexico last month and started experiencing COVID-like symptoms earlier in the week. The worker, who asked not to be named because it might jeopardize their employment, took a day off to get tested and two more days to wait for the results.

A supervisor called and told the worker they would qualify for paid sick days only if the COVID test turns out to be positive. If the test is negative, the worker will have to take the days without pay, since they haven't accrued enough time for sick leave.

"I thought I was doing the right thing by protecting my co-workers," said the worker, who is still awaiting the results and estimates it will cost \$160 per day of work missed if they test negative. "Now I wish I just would've gone to work and not said anything."

A Trader Joe's worker in California, who also asked not to be named because they didn't want to risk their job, said the company lets workers accrue paid time off that they can use for vacations or sick days. But once that time is used up, employees often feel like they can't afford to take unpaid days.

"I think many people now come to work sick or with what they call 'allergies' because they feel they have no other choice," the worker said.

Trader Joe's offered hazard pay until last spring, and even paid time off if workers had COVID-related symptoms. But the worker said those benefits have ended. The company also no longer requires customers to wear masks in all of its stores.

Other companies are similarly curtailing sick time that they offered earlier in the pandemic. Kroger, the country's biggest traditional grocery chain, is ending some benefits for unvaccinated salaried workers in an attempt to compel more of them to get the jab as COVID-19 cases rise again. Unvaccinated workers enrolled in Kroger's health care plan will no longer be eligible to receive up to two weeks paid emergency leave if they become infected — a policy that was put into place last year when vaccines were unavailable.



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Meanwhile, Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, is slashing pandemic-related paid leave in half — from two weeks to one — after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reduced isolation requirements for people who don't have symptoms after they test positive.

Workers have received some relief from a growing number of states. In the last decade, 14 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws or ballot measures requiring employers to provide paid sick leave, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

On the federal front, however, the movement has stalled. Congress passed a law in the spring of 2020 requiring most employers to provide paid sick leave for employees with COVID-related illnesses. But the requirement expired on Dec. 31 of that same year. Congress later extended tax credits for employers who voluntarily provide paid sick leave, but the extension lapsed at the end of September, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

In November, the U.S. House passed a version of President Joe Biden's Build Back Better plan that would require employers to provide 20 days of paid leave for employees who are sick or caring for a family member. But the fate of that bill is uncertain in the Senate.

"We can't do a patchwork sort of thing. It has to be holistic. It has to be meaningful," said Josephine Kalipeni, executive director at Family Values @ Work, a national network of 27 state and local coalitions helping to advocate for such policies as paid sick days.

The U.S. is one of only 11 countries worldwide without any federal mandate for paid sick leave, according to a 2020 study by the World Policy Analysis Center at the University of California, Los Angeles.

On the flipside are small business owners like Dawn Crawley, CEO of House Cleaning Heroes, who can't afford to pay workers when they are out sick. But Crawley is trying to help in other ways. She recently drove one cleaner who didn't have a car to a nearby testing site. She later bought the cleaner some medicine, orange juice and oranges.

"If they are out, I try to give them money but at the same time my company has got to survive," Crawley said. "If the company goes under, no one has work."

Even when paid sick leave is available, workers aren't always made aware of it.

Ingrid Vilorio, who works at a Jack in the Box restaurant in Castro Valley, California, started feeling sick last March and soon tested positive for COVID. Vilorio alerted a supervisor, who didn't tell her she was eligible for paid sick leave — as well as supplemental COVID leave — under California law.

Vilorio said her doctor told her to take 15 days off, but she decided to take just 10 because she had bills to pay. Months later, a co-worker told Vilorio she was owed sick pay for the time she was off. Working through Fight for \$15, a group that works to unionize fast food workers, Vilorio and her colleagues reported the restaurant to the county health department. Shortly after that, she was given back pay.

But Vilorio, who speaks Spanish, said through a translator that problems persist. Workers are still getting sick, she said, and are often afraid to speak up.

"Without our health, we can't work," she said. "We're told that we're front line workers, but we're not treated like it."

## Wisconsin Republican Sen. Ron Johnson will seek reelection

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Republican U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, one of former President Donald Trump's biggest backers, announced Sunday that he will seek reelection in the battleground state, breaking his promise not to seek a third term.

Johnson announced his decision via email two days after a pair of Republicans with knowledge of his decision told The Associated Press that he was close to launching a bid. Johnson over the past year has been a leading voice in downplaying the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot and the coronavirus pandemic, in addition to remaining a vocal Trump supporter.

The race is sure to be one of the most hotly contested in the country next year in purple Wisconsin. President Joe Biden won the state by fewer than 21,000 votes in 2020 after a similarly narrow win by

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Trump in 2016. Johnson won by nearly 5 points in 2010, his first race for office, and then by just over 3 points in 2016. Both times he defeated Democrat Russ Feingold.

Johnson's announcement that he will run again came a day after Republican Sen. John Thune, of South Dakota, said he would seek a fourth term. No other Senate retirements are likely beyond the five Republicans and one Democrat, Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, who have already announced plans to step down.

Johnson, 66, had long said his preference was to serve just two terms and pledged in 2016 not to run a third time.

But Johnson rescinded the pledge in the lead-up to announcing his reelection bid, saying circumstances have changed after Democrats won the White House and control of Congress.

"Much as I'd like to ease into a quiet retirement, I don't feel I should," Johnson wrote in an editorial announcing his reelection bid. He said the response to the coronavirus pandemic also played a part in his decision to run again.

Johnson, who contracted COVID-19 in October 2020 and is not vaccinated, has cast doubt over the efficacy of vaccines and pushed for unproven treatments. Just last week, Johnson on conservative talk radio said, "Why do we think that we can create something better than God in terms of combating disease? Why do we assume that the body's natural immune system isn't the marvel that it really is?"

Johnson has espoused conspiracy theories related to last year's Capitol raid that attempted to shift blame for what happened away from Trump supporters.

Johnson has since downplayed the violence, saying it "didn't seem like an armed insurrection to me."

Just before the U.S. Capitol was stormed a year ago, Johnson objected to counting the Electoral College votes from Arizona. Last year, he told Republicans who control the Wisconsin Legislature that they should take over control of federal elections. Republican Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos told the AP on Friday that there is "zero chance" of the Legislature taking over the awarding of the state's 10 presidential elector votes in 2024.

Johnson said he did not make the decision to run again lightly.

"Having already experienced a growing level of vitriol and false attacks, I certainly don't expect better treatment in the future," he said in his announcement.

Johnson said he never voted with reelection in mind.

"An extension of that promise is that I don't conduct myself worrying about re-election," he wrote. "When re-election is not your primary motivation, those are easy promises to keep -- and I have faithfully done so."

Johnson's opponent won't be known this time until after an Aug. 9 primary. Several high-profile and well-funded Democrats are running, including Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is seeking to become the state's first Black senator; Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry; state Treasurer Sarah Godlewski and Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson.

"The only people celebrating Ron Johnson's announcement are his donors and the corporate special interest groups he's bailed out time and time again," Barnes said in a statement. "Let's get to work and retire this failed senator."

Barnes, Godlewski, Nelson and other Democrats faulted Johnson for breaking his promise to serve only two terms.

Johnson's decision also has ripple effects on Wisconsin's governor's race. Kevin Nicholson, a former Marine who ran for U.S. Senate and lost in the GOP primary in 2018, has said he would run for governor if Johnson sought reelection.

Nicholson had been focused on running for Senate. His website urges supporters to "help Kevin take back Washington." In a series of tweets Sunday, Nicholson said it was no secret he was mulling a run for governor and would announce a decision soon.

Earlier this week, former U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy bowed out of running for Senate or governor.

History is on Johnson's side in the midterm election. The party that does not hold the White House generally gains seats in midterm congressional elections. Former President Barack Obama's Democratic Party, for example, lost 63 seats in the House and six in the Senate in 2010.

Johnson, who rose out of the tea party movement in 2010, has long been aligned with Trump's hardline

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policies and politics. The two have remained close following Trump's defeat, with Trump in April endorsing Johnson for a third term and encouraging him to run.

## With CFP title on line, Georgia gets another crack at 'Bama

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Georgia coach Kirby Smart got an inside look at what it takes to build a college football juggernaut working for Nick Saban at Alabama for eight seasons.

Blueprint in hand, Smart took over at his alma mater in 2016, and the Bulldogs have been ascending ever since, going 57-10 in the last five seasons.

"I think the University of Georgia, Kirby's program is probably one of the elite programs in the country," Saban said Sunday.

But to truly be like 'Bama you have to beat 'Bama. Smart and the Bulldogs are 0-4 against the Tide.

No. 3 Georgia gets another shot to take down the king Monday night. The Bulldogs face the top-ranked and defending national champion Tide in all-Southeastern Conference College Football Playoff title game played in the heart of Big Ten country.

Five weeks after Alabama once again asserted its dominance over Georgia in the SEC title game, the Bulldogs drag the weight of a seven-game losing streak against the Tide and a 41-year national title drought into a rematch at Lucas Oil Stadium.

"I mean, it's definitely motivation," Georgia tackle Jamaree Salyer said of the losing streak to Alabama. "It's the truth. You can't really run away from the truth."

The last meeting was especially painful for Georgia. The Bulldogs entered the SEC championship favored and undefeated, the unanimous No. 1 team in the country.

Georgia had stomped everything in its path behind a defense that was smothering opponents at an historically stingy pace before Bryce Young and the Tide picked the Bulldogs apart 41-24 in Atlanta.

"He is elite at what he does," Smart said. "We've talked about him as Houdini because he can he can make people miss."

Young adeptly avoided Georgia's pass rush while throwing for 421 yards in a performance that essentially won him the Heisman Trophy.

"He's slippery," Georgia All-America nose tackle Jordan Davis said.

How much of an outlier was the Alabama game for Georgia? The Bulldogs have allowed only 15 touchdowns this season. Five came against Alabama.

"I think no game's going to be the same," said Tide All-America linebacker Will Anderson, who had two sacks in Alabama's 27-6 semifinal victory against No. 4 Cincinnati. "What happened last game is what happened last game. We have to worry about what happens this game."

Georgia reverted back to form in the CFP semifinals, beating No. 2 Michigan 34-11 in the Orange Bowl. Davis and All-America linebacker Nakobe Dean led the charge defensively and quarterback Stetson Bennett rebounded from a tough game against Alabama with three touchdown passes.

"If you want to have any success in this game, offensively, you have to be able to at least control those guys up front and their front seven to some degree," Saban said. "They have a very good defense in total but it starts with that."

While Georgia is trying to win its first national title since Herschel Walker led the Bulldogs to the championship as a freshman in 1980, Alabama is looking to add to an unprecedented run.

The Tide is trying to go back-to-back as national champs for the second time under Saban. It would be title No. 7 for Alabama in the last 13 seasons, and its 13th overall in college football's poll era (1936-present), more than any other school.

To find more successful runs in college football, you have look beyond the top of the sport.

North Dakota State currently has an even tighter grip on the second-tier of Division I than Alabama has in the first. The Bison won their ninth FCS championship in the past 11 years on Saturday.

Mount Union 13 won Division III championships over 25-year span from 1993-2017, including a string

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of six in seven seasons.

Georgia often has to go through Alabama just to win the SEC, though being in opposite divisions means regular-season meeting are rare.

The Tide's winning streak in the series dates back to Mark Richt's time as Bulldogs coach, and includes three SEC championship games and the 2017 national title game.

That game in Atlanta was the first — and until now the only — CFP title game matching conference rivals. The Bulldogs led 13-0 at half before freshman quarterback Tua Tagovailoa came off the bench to rally the Tide and force overtime. Georgia took an OT lead and had Alabama facing second-and-26 when Tagovailoa threw a 41-yard touchdown to fellow freshman DeVonta Smith for the win.

Georgia has not been back in the playoff since.

Smart said he didn't return to the school where he played in the mid-1990s with the goal of building Alabama East and derailing the dynasty.

He understood the ceiling was high in Athens, Georgia, and those who support the program yearned for championships.

Smart insists he and his team do not feel the burden of history heading into Monday night.

"What I feel is how do we stop Bryce Young and how do we control their front and how do we run the ball, how do we throw the ball with efficiency, how do we convert third downs and stop them in the red area," Smart said. "That's the furthest from my concern because I don't at all control that."

## **Iraq's new parliament holds 1st session marked by disarray**

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's new parliament reelected its speaker for a second term Sunday, the first step toward forming a new government after a general election whose results have been contested by powerful Iran-backed factions.

In a reflection of tensions, the meeting was marked by disarray, with the eldest member of Parliament who was leading the session being evacuated to the hospital apparently due to the stress.

The chaotic meeting ushers in what is likely to be a lengthy period of political wrangling among rival groups to choose a new president and prime minister. As leader of the biggest bloc, Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr — a maverick leader remembered for leading an insurgency against U.S. forces after the 2003 invasion — has the upper hand in forming a new government. But he will have to manage tensions with rival Shiite groups who continue to reject the election results and are demanding to have a say in the government formation process.

According to Iraq's constitution, the largest bloc in Parliament has the right to choose the new prime minister. But as the meeting got underway Sunday, a coalition known as the Shiite Coordination Framework, an alliance of Shiite factions which object to the vote results, submitted a list of lawmakers' names it claimed now hold the biggest parliamentary bloc with 88 seats, rather than al-Sadr.

Chaos erupted briefly in the chamber, during which lawmakers crowded around Mahmood al-Mashhadani, who was leading the session. Within minutes, the 73-year-old lawmaker was carried out of the room by security forces and bundled in an ambulance that took him to hospital, where he was visited by some of the heads of political and militia factions. The lawmaker appeared to be in good condition, according to witnesses who later saw him there.

Following the disruption, the parliament session resumed, although the issue of the majority was not immediately resolved.

Later, 200 lawmakers picked incumbent Parliament Speaker Mohamed al-Halbousi for a second term, while 14 voted for al-Mashhadani.

Al-Halbousi, whose Sunni party came in second with 37 seats, is the former governor of Anbar province and was supported by al-Sadr, Kurdish and Sunni groups.

Earlier Sunday, lawmakers from al-Sadr's bloc arrived early to the parliament building in Baghdad, donning white shrouds Muslims use to wrap their dead in a sign of their willingness to die for him. Al-Sadr,

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one of Iraq's most influential political leaders, was the biggest winner in the Oct. 10 vote, securing 73 out of Parliament's 329 seats.

Pro-Iran factions that alleged voter fraud lost around two-thirds of their seats — a significant blow. Supporters of armed groups pitched tents and staged a sit-in around the capital's so-called Green Zone, which houses the Iraqi government and many foreign diplomatic missions, for more than two months, while they appealed Iraq's top court.

Tensions culminated in November with an assassination attempt with armed drones against Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's residence — an attack blamed on Iran-aligned groups. The premier was unharmed.

The Court rejected the appeal filed by Iran-backed factions and ratified the election results late last month, clearing the way for a government to be formed.

Lawmakers at Sunday's session are expected to elect a parliamentary speaker and two deputies. Parliament will then have to elect a new president, who in turn will have 15 days to appoint a prime minister nominated by the largest bloc to form a new government.

Under an unofficial agreement dating back to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Iraq's presidency — a largely ceremonial role — is held by a Kurd, while the prime minister is Shiite and the parliament speaker is Sunni.

The election was held months ahead of schedule in response to mass protests in late 2019, which saw tens of thousands in Baghdad and predominantly Shiite southern provinces rally against endemic corruption, poor services and unemployment. They also protested against the heavy-handed interference of neighboring Iran in Iraq's affairs through Iran-backed militias.

Independent candidates drawn from the October 2019 protest movement who ran under the Imtidad list won nine seats. Some of them arrived to the parliament building riding a tuk tuk from Tahrir square, the epicenter of the protest movement. The colorful three-wheeled motorcycle vehicles ferried demonstrators back and forth from the square and became a symbol of the protest movement.

Hamzeh Hadad, a political analyst, said the makeup of the new parliament could help make elected officials more accountable to the public due to the new smaller electoral districts.

"With many independents and new political parties elected like Imtidad Movement, we could see a true opposition formed in parliament for the first time," he said. "This is what Iraqis will be hoping to see from the new legislature."

## Michael Lang, Woodstock festival co-creator, dies at 77

By DAVID PORTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Lang, a co-creator and promoter of the 1969 Woodstock music festival that served as a touchstone for generations of music fans, has died.

Michael Pagnotta, a spokesperson for Lang's family, said Sunday the 77-year-old had been battling non-Hodgkin lymphoma and passed away Saturday at New York's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

"He was absolutely an historic figure, and also a great guy," Pagnotta, who said he had known Lang for about 30 years, told The Associated Press. "Both of those things go hand in hand."

Along with partners Artie Kornfeld, John Roberts and Joel Rosenman, Lang put together the festival billed as "three days of peace and music" in the summer of 1969 as the Vietnam War raged and led increasing numbers of disaffected young Americans to turn away from traditional mores and embraced a lifestyle that celebrated freedom of expression.

Roughly 400,000 people descended on the hamlet of Bethel, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northwest of New York City and endured miles-long traffic jams, torrential rains, food shortages and overwhelmed sanitary facilities. More than 30 acts performed on the concert's main stage at the base of a hill on land owned by farmer Max Yasgur, and concertgoers were treated to iconic performances from artists including Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, The Who and Jefferson Airplane.

Lang, sporting a head of bushy brown hair, is seen throughout Michael Wadleigh's 1970 documentary movie that chronicled the festival.

"From the beginning, I believed that if we did our job right and from the heart, prepared the ground and set the right tone, people would reveal their higher selves and create something amazing," Lang wrote in

his memoir, "The Road to Woodstock."

Lang and others sought to mount a concert in 2019 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the original Woodstock, but the endeavor ultimately was scrapped due to financial issues and difficulty securing a venue. In an interview with the AP at the time, Lang called the experience "a really bizarre trip," and said he still hoped to hold the concert in the future.

Although Woodstock often is viewed as creating the template for large-scale music festivals, it wasn't the first to take place in the U.S. Two years earlier, the Monterey Pop festival drew about 200,000 people to California, and in 1968 the Miami Pop Festival followed, which Lang also organized. But Woodstock nonetheless holds an indelible place in history.

"A lot of them are modeled after Woodstock — Bonnaroo and Coachella, in particular," Lang said of other festivals in a 2009 interview. "There was a ritual that was created that keeps getting replicated."

## **Biden shied away from news conferences, interviews in Year 1**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In what's become a familiar scene, President Joe Biden lingered after delivering a recent speech on the pandemic as reporters fired a barrage of questions.

He bristled at a query about the shortage of COVID-19 rapid tests, answered another about omicron-spurred travel restrictions and sidestepped a third about whether Sen. Joe Manchin failed to keep his word when he torpedoed Biden's social services and climate spending plan.

"I'm not supposed to be having this press conference right now," Biden said at the end of a meandering response that didn't directly answer the question about Manchin.

Seconds later, Biden turned and walked out of the State Dining Room, abruptly ending what's become his preferred method for his limited engagements with the press.

As Biden wraps up his first year in the White House, he has held fewer news conferences than any of his five immediate predecessors at the same point in their presidencies, and has participated in fewer media interviews than any of his recent predecessors.

The dynamic has the White House facing questions about whether Biden, who vowed to have the most transparent administration in the nation's history, is falling short in pulling back the curtain on how his administration operates and missing opportunities to explain his agenda.

Biden does more frequently field questions at public appearances than any of his recent predecessors, according to new research published by Martha Joynt Kumar, a professor emerita in political science at Towson University and director of the White House Transition Project.

He routinely pauses to talk to reporters who shout questions over Marine One's whirring propellers as he comes and goes from the White House. He parries with journalists at Oval Office photo ops and other events. But these exchanges have their limitations.

"While President Biden has taken questions more often at his events than his predecessors, he spends less time doing so," Kumar notes. "He provides short answers with few follow-ups when he takes questions at the end of a previously scheduled speech."

Biden has done just 22 media interviews, fewer than any of his six most recent White House predecessors at the same point in their presidencies.

The 46th president has held just nine formal news conferences — six solo and three jointly with visiting foreign leaders. Ronald Reagan, whose schedule was scaled back early in his first term in 1981 after an assassination attempt, is the only recent president to hold fewer first-year news conferences, according to Kumar. Reagan did 59 interviews in 1981.

Former President Donald Trump, who regularly pilloried the media, did 92 interviews in his first year in office, more than two dozen of those with friendly interlocutors at Fox News. But Trump also held lengthy sessions with ABC News, The Associated Press, the New York Times, Reuters and other outlets whose coverage he impugned throughout his presidency.

Biden's 22 media interviews have included one-on-one sessions with journalists at three of the major

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television networks, three CNN town halls, an appearance on MSNBC, a trio of regional television interviews via Zoom, as well as conversations with late night host Jimmy Fallon and ESPN'S Sage Steele. He's given just three print interviews.

The White House has fielded requests from media outlets — and complaints from the White House Correspondents' Association — for Biden to do more one-on-one interviews and formal news conferences.

Press secretary Jen Psaki has pushed back, arguing that a formal news conference with "embroidered cushions" on journalists' seats is unnecessary since Biden answers questions several times a week.

But those exchanges often don't allow for follow-up questions, and Biden can ignore questions he might not want to answer.

"Fleeting exchanges are insufficient to building the historical record of the president's views on a broad array of public concerns. We have had scant opportunities in this first year to learn the president's views on a broad range of public concerns," said Steven Portnoy, president of the White House Correspondents' Association and a reporter for CBS New Radio. "The more formal the exchange with the press, the more the public is apt to learn about what's on the man's mind."

Psaki also holds daily press briefings, unlike her Trump administration predecessors.

The president has answered questions at 55% of events where he's delivered remarks or an address, more than even two of the more loquacious presidents, Bill Clinton (48%) and Trump (41%).

White House officials pointed to such frequent interactions with reporters as evidence that Biden has demonstrated a commitment to transparency. Officials also suggested that the pandemic has also affected the number of interviews and news conferences in the administration's first year.

"I think that we have been very transparent," White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "I don't think you can just piecemeal and I think you have to look at it as a whole."

Trump had regular, and sometimes lengthy exchanges, with reporters as a thwapping Marine One awaited him on the South Lawn.

Biden has continued the tradition of "chopper talk," a nickname coined by late-night host Stephen Colbert for strained exchanges, though he tends to keep the exchanges brief.

At other moments, Biden has used the exchanges to drive the news cycle.

Asked after a private visit with Pope Francis at the Vatican in October whether they discussed abortion, Biden said it didn't come up. But then he quickly pivoted to asserting that Francis told him he was "a good Catholic and I should keep receiving communion." The entire back-and-forth with reporters lasted about a minute.

The administration has put a premium on finding ways to speak to Americans where they are as it tries to maximize the president's limited time for messaging efforts, according to a White House official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the administration's communications strategy.

To that end, Biden has been interviewed by YouTube personality Manny Mua and went on the "The Tonight Show" to push his domestic agenda and encourage people to get vaccinated. The White House believes such platforms can help the president more easily reach middle-class workers or young Americans who aren't glued to the cable networks or The New York Times.

Biden has also leaned on celebrities with big social media followings — including actress and songwriter Olivia Rodrigo and Bill Nye The Science Guy — who have done videos with Biden to help bolster his vaccination push and plug his major domestic spending initiatives.

Biden is hardly the first president to look beyond the mainstream media to try to connect with the public.

Former President Barack Obama appeared on Zach Galifianakis's "Between Two Ferns" to help sell his signature health care law and visited comedian Marc Maron's garage to record an episode on the popular WTF podcast days after the 2015 Charleston church shooting. Obama spoke bluntly about racism in the wide-ranging interview with Maron.

Trump frequently called into Fox News' opinion shows, directly reaching his base without the filter of journalists.

Brian Ott, a Missouri State University communications professor who studies presidential rhetoric, said

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the scarcity of Biden news conferences and interviews with mainstream news media may help explain why Biden's approval ratings are near historic lows even though most polls show that much of his domestic agenda remains popular with a majority of Americans.

While pop culture and social media offer opportunities to connect with a segment of America, Ott said, the president connecting to the electorate through traditional broadcast and print news outlets — and holding formal news conferences — will be critical to correcting that disconnect.

"The presidency has always been a predominantly rhetorical enterprise," Ott said. "You can't drive an agenda without vision casting and part of that has to go through the mainstream press."

## **Biden's low profile on Guantanamo rankles as prison turns 20**

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Advocates for closing the Guantanamo Bay detention center were optimistic when President Joe Biden took office. And they were relieved this summer after the U.S. released a prisoner for the first time in years. Many are now increasingly impatient.

In the months since that release, there have been few signs of progress in closing the notorious off-shore prison on the U.S. base in Cuba. That has led to increased skepticism about Biden's approach as the administration completes its first year and the detention center reaches a milestone Tuesday — the 20th anniversary of the first prisoners' arrival.

"President Biden has stated his intention to close Guantanamo as a matter of policy but has not taken substantial steps toward closure," said Wells Dixon, an attorney with the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which has long taken a leading role in challenging the indefinite confinement without charge at the base.

"There's a lot of impatience and a lot of frustration among advocates and people who have been watching this," said Daphne Eviatar, director of the security with the human rights program at Amnesty International USA.

Without a more concerted effort, those who want the center to close fear a repeat of what happened under President Barack Obama. Obama made closing Guantanamo a signature issue from his first days in office, but managed only to shrink it in the face of political opposition in Congress.

"We can't forget what this country did 20 years ago and is continuing to do today," Eviatar said. "This administration has a lot on its plate, certainly, but this is such an egregious human rights offense."

There are 39 prisoners left. It's the fewest since the detention center's earliest days, when the initial groups, suspected of having a connection to al-Qaida or the Taliban, arrived on flights from Afghanistan — hooded, shackled and clad in orange jumpsuits — to what at the time was a sleepy U.S. outpost on the southeastern coast of Cuba.

Guantanamo became the focus of international outrage because of the mistreatment and torture of prisoners and the U.S. insistence that it could hold men indefinitely without charge for the duration of a war against al-Qaida that seemingly has no end. The critics grew to include Michael Lehnert, a now retired Marine Corps major general who was tasked with opening the detention center but came to believe that holding mostly low-level fighters without charge was counter to American values and interests.

"To me, the existence of Guantanamo is anathema to everything that we represent, and it needs to be closed for that reason," Lehnert said.

At its peak, in 2003, the detention center held nearly 680 prisoners. President George W. Bush released more than 500 and Obama freed 197 before time ran out on his effort to whittle down the population.

President Donald Trump rescinded the Obama order to close Guantanamo, but largely ignored the place. He pledged during his first campaign to "load it up with some bad dudes" but never sent anyone there and said the annual cost of operating the detention center was "crazy," at around \$13 million per prisoner.

Of the remaining prisoners, 10 face trial by military commission in proceedings that have bogged down for years. They include Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, the self-proclaimed mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Two others still at Guantanamo have been sentenced and one of them, former Maryland resident



Majid Khan, is expected to complete his sentence next month.

The other 27 include 13 who have been cleared for release, including eight under Biden who could now be returned to their homeland or resettled elsewhere. Two dozen have not been cleared and have never been charged, and likely never will be, a status that some Republicans continue to defend, including in a Senate hearing last month.

"We're not fighting a crime. We're fighting a war. I don't want to torture anybody. I want to give them due process consistent with being at war, and, if necessary, I want to hold them as long as it takes to keep us safe or we believe that they're no longer a threat," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.

A senior Biden administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal policy, said the National Security Council is "actively" working with the Defense, State and Justice departments and other agencies to reduce the population within restrictions imposed by Congress. The restrictions include a ban on returning prisoners to certain countries, including Yemen and Somalia, or sending any to the U.S., even for further imprisonment.

The official said the administration is committed to closing the detention center, an effort it "jump-started" after four years of inaction under Trump.

One sign of progress is the eight approved for release through a review process created under Obama. Under Trump, just one detainee was cleared and the only release was a Saudi sent back to his homeland as part of an earlier military commission plea deal.

Critics want the Biden administration to get busy repatriating or resettling the detainees who have been cleared and to restore a State Department unit devoted to the effort that was eliminated under Trump.

"Until I see some visible signs that the administration is going to do something about it, I am not heartened," said Lehnert, the retired Marine Corps general. "If there is somebody in charge of closing Guantanamo, I have not talked to anybody that knows who they are."

Advocates argue the administration could resolve the fate of the rest through plea agreements with those charged in the military commission cases and releasing the rest.

Biden's low-key approach could be a smart strategy considering the political opposition encountered by Obama, argues Ramzi Kassem, a law professor at the City University of New York who with his students has represented 14 Guantanamo prisoners since 2005.

"President Biden appears to have learned from Obama's missteps, transferring one prisoner and clearing many without being too loud about it and painting a target on his own back," Kassem said. "Still, the administration must up the pace because, at the rate of one prisoner a year, it won't come close to shuttering the prison."

## **Social workers' field safety remains concern after killing**

By JOHN O'CONNOR AP Political Writer

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — Illinois officials are seeking answers after the killing last week of a state child welfare worker during a home visit — the second such tragedy to occur in less than five years.

Deidre Silas, an investigator with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, was stabbed to death last Tuesday when she responded to a call of possible endangerment of children in a home in the central Illinois town of Thayer.

A man related to one or more of the six children who were at home at the time, 32-year-old Benjamin Reed, is being held in the Sangamon County Jail without bond on first-degree murder and other charges. An attempt by The Associated Press to reach Reed's attorney on Friday was unsuccessful.

Silas' death is the second time in four-and-a-half years that state officials and the social work community are asking what should have been done, but wasn't, to prevent it. DCFS investigator Pamela Knight, 59, died following a brutal beating while attempting to remove an endangered child from his father in September 2017.

Like Silas, Knight was alone when she was attacked. Officials at DCFS, which has 23,000 children under its care, have not released details about the circumstances behind Silas' visit to the home in Thayer,

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located 23 miles (37 kilometers) south of Springfield, but DCFS Director Marc Smith said last week that agency protocol was followed.

The attack on Silas also marked the 21st time since 2017 that caseworkers were subject to “threats or acts of violence” during 2.5 million home visits in Illinois, agency spokesman Bill McCaffrey said.

Her death has raised questions of why case workers are sent into potentially volatile environments alone, and whether understaffing — a problem that has plagued DCFS for decades despite a federal consent decree regulating it — affects the response of caseworkers in the field.

“DCFS, if you’re sending someone into a situation like this, just send two at a time,” Silas’ father, Roy Graham, said last week. “Whether it’s a male and female or two males or two females, either way, but send two per visit, not just one.”

Police agencies historically have been willing and able to help. That cooperation was strengthened after Knight’s death. A law signed in 2018 allows law enforcement officers to cross into another jurisdiction to back up a home visit. Knight, who was based in Sterling, did have police backup initially.

But the boy Knight was seeking was not at his father’s home, forcing Knight to check his grandparents’ home in the next county. She decided that waiting for a new police agency to accompany her jeopardized the boy’s safety. The boy’s father met her at the second stop, and beat and kicked her so severely that she suffered brain damage and died five months later.

Arnold Black, a child protection specialist and supervisor in the DCFS Urbana office, said that any time a case worker or a supervisor believes there should be two workers on a home visit, it’s approved. And there is no hesitancy to seek police backup, as outlined in the agency’s administrative procedures on field safety.

“Sometimes, taking the police can agitate the client. You’ve got to know the family ... You have some families that are going to yell and scream at you for the first five minutes, but then they’re going to let you in,” Black said. “But if it’s a newer case, or if it’s in a rural area, I have no problem pulling another worker to go.”

The problem, though, is that pairing workers stretches the workforce, sometimes resulting in plucking employees from other offices, Black said. The Urbana office has a worker shortage of more than 6% and agents on Black’s team have caseloads of 30 to 50 families per worker, in many cases exceeding the limit of a 1988 federal consent decree that limits to 12 the number of new cases assigned monthly to each worker.

The Knight tragedy also resulted, with a push from the DCFS employees’ union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31, in office-based security guards and improved access to law enforcement records of people to be visited.

Black, a member of the AFSCME committee which quarterly discusses issues with DCFS management, said the workforce continues to push for other changes it supports.

Those changes include ongoing self-defense and de-escalation training from the Illinois State Police, public service announcements to familiarize the public with caseworkers and their duties and a law enforcement database like in Cook County that records not only arrests and convictions but any interaction police have with a particular address.

Newly hired investigators, who make about \$55,000 a year, must successfully complete a six-week “foundations” training session that includes safety precautions, DCFS spokesman Bill McCaffrey said. Once in the field, they continue under a supervisor’s tutelage and must complete a “workplace and field safety” training session within 90 days of starting.

Sen. Sara Feigenholtz, a Chicago Democrat and leader on child-welfare issues, said DCFS needs to build an infrastructure, with private sector cooperation, to recruit and retain employees. She anticipates more immediate safety legislation when the facts of Silas’ death are public.

“If there are any other resources we can give our frontline workers, you’ll be sure that we’re going to be looking to see how we avoid this kind of situation,” Feigenholtz said.

## **Watershed moment in NYC: New law allows noncitizens to vote**

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — More than 800,000 noncitizens and “Dreamers” in New York City will have access to the ballot box — and could vote in municipal elections as early as next year — after Mayor Eric Adams allowed legislation to automatically become law Sunday.

Opponents have vowed to challenge the new law, which the City Council approved a month ago. Unless a judge halts its implementation, New York City is the first major U.S. city to grant widespread municipal voting rights to noncitizens.

More than a dozen communities across the U.S. already allow noncitizens to cast ballots in local elections, including 11 towns in Maryland and two in Vermont.

Noncitizens still wouldn’t be able to vote for president or members of Congress in federal races, or in the state elections that pick the governor, judges and legislators.

The Board of Elections must now begin drawing an implementation plan by July, including voter registration rules and provisions that would create separate ballots for municipal races to prevent noncitizens from casting ballots in federal and state contests.

It’s a watershed moment for the nation’s most populous city, where legally documented, voting-age noncitizens comprise nearly one in nine of the city’s 7 million voting-age inhabitants. The movement to win voting rights for noncitizens prevailed after numerous setbacks.

The measure would allow noncitizens who have been lawful permanent residents of the city for at least 30 days, as well as those authorized to work in the U.S., including “Dreamers,” to help select the city’s mayor, city council members, borough presidents, comptroller and public advocate.

“Dreamers” are young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children who would benefit from the never-passed DREAM Act or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows them to remain in the country if they meet certain criteria.

The first elections in which noncitizens would be allowed to vote are in 2023.

“We build a stronger democracy when we include the voices of immigrants,” said former City Council member Ydanis Rodriguez, who led the charge to win approval for the legislation.

Rodriguez, who Adams appointed as his transportation commissioner, thanked the mayor for his support and expects a vigorous defense against any legal challenges.

Adams recently cast uncertainty over the legislation when he raised concern about the monthlong residency standard, but later said those concerns did not mean he would veto the bill.

While there was some question whether Adams could stop the bill from becoming law, the 30-day time limit for the mayor to take action expired at the stroke of midnight.

Adams said he looked forward to the law bringing millions more into the democratic process.

“I believe that New Yorkers should have a say in their government, which is why I have and will continue to support this important legislation,” Adams said in a statement released Saturday night. He added that his earlier concerns were put at ease after what he called productive dialogue with colleagues.

Former Mayor Bill de Blasio had similar concerns but did not move to veto the measure before vacating City Hall at the end of the year.

Opponents say the council lacks the authority on its own to grant voting rights to noncitizens and should have first sought action by state lawmakers.

Some states, including Alabama, Arizona, Colorado and Florida, have adopted rules that would preempt any attempts to pass laws like the one in New York City.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 10, the 10th day of 2022. There are 355 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Jan. 10, 2002, Marines began flying hundreds of al-Qaida prisoners in Afghanistan to a U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

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On this date:

In 1776, Thomas Paine anonymously published his influential pamphlet, "Common Sense," which argued for American independence from British rule.

In 1860, the Pemberton Mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, collapsed and caught fire, killing up to 145 people, mostly female workers from Scotland and Ireland.

In 1861, Florida became the third state to secede from the Union.

In 1863, the London Underground had its beginnings as the Metropolitan, the world's first underground passenger railway, opened to the public with service between Paddington and Farringdon Street.

In 1870, John D. Rockefeller incorporated Standard Oil.

In 1920, the League of Nations was established as the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY') went into effect.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson, in his State of the Union address, asked Congress to impose a surcharge on both corporate and individual income taxes to help pay for his "Great Society" programs as well as the war in Vietnam. Massachusetts Republican Edward W. Brooke, the first Black person elected to the U.S. Senate by popular vote, took his seat.

In 1971, French fashion designer Coco Chanel died in Paris at age 87.

In 1984, the United States and the Vatican established full diplomatic relations for the first time in more than a century.

In 2003, North Korea withdrew from a global treaty barring it from making nuclear weapons.

In 2007, President George W. Bush said he took responsibility for any mistakes in Iraq and announced an increase in U.S. troops there to quell violence. The Democratic-controlled House voted 315-116 to increase the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour.

In 2011, a judge in Austin, Texas, ordered former U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay to serve three years in prison for his money laundering conviction. (DeLay's conviction was ultimately overturned.) No. 1 Auburn beat No. 2 Oregon 22-19 on a last-second field goal to win the BCS national title.

Ten years ago: Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney won the New Hampshire Republican primary; Ron Paul finished second, with Jon Huntsman, Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum trailing. Alabama was voted No. 1 in the final AP poll for the eighth time after winning a rematch with LSU in the BCS championship.

Five years ago: An unrepentant Dylann Roof was sentenced to death in Charleston, South Carolina, for fatally shooting nine black church members during a Bible study session, becoming the first person ordered executed for a federal hate crime. President Barack Obama bid farewell to the nation in an emotional speech in Chicago.

One year ago: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the House would proceed with legislation to impeach President Donald Trump, even as she pushed the vice president and the Cabinet to invoke constitutional authority to force him out in the aftermath of the deadly assault on the Capitol. A second Republican senator, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, called on Trump to resign, joining Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. The Capitol's attending physician notified lawmakers that they may have been exposed to someone testing positive for COVID-19 while they sheltered in an undisclosed location during the Capitol siege.

Today's Birthdays: Opera singer Sherrill Milnes is 87. Rock singer-musician Ronnie Hawkins is 87. Movie director Walter Hill is 82. Actor William Sanderson is 78. Singer Rod Stewart is 77. Rock singer-musician Donald Fagen (Steely Dan) is 74. Boxing Hall of Famer and entrepreneur George Foreman is 73. Roots rock singer Alejandro Escovedo is 71. Rock musician Scott Thurston (Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers) is 70. Singer Pat Benatar is 69. Hall of Fame race car driver and team owner Bobby Rahal is 69. Rock musician Michael Schenker is 67. Singer Shawn Colvin is 66. Rock singer-musician Curt Kirkwood (Meat Puppets) is 63. Actor Evan Handler is 61. Rock singer Brad Roberts (Crash Test Dummies) is 58. Actor Trini Alvarado is 55. Rock singer Brent Smith (Shinedown) is 44. Rapper Chris Smith (Kris Kross) is 43. Actor Sarah Shahi is 42. American roots singer Valerie June is 40.