

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 1 of 69

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [3- Groton Area boys have clean sweep over Webster Area](#)
- [4- Weather Pages](#)
- [8- Daily Devotional](#)
- [9- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [10- Subscription Form](#)
- [11- News from the Associated Press](#)

## UpComing Events

### 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**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

© 2022 Groton Daily Independent

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 2 of 69

## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

This roller coaster of a Vikings' season finally came to an end today as the team faced off against the lowly Chicago Bears. With both teams already eliminated from the playoffs, today's game was more about records, contract incentives, and draft position, than it was about the 60-year-old rivalry between the two teams.

### First Half

The first half for the Vikings was by far their worst half of football all season. The Vikings' defense was unable to force the Bears to punt at any point as the Bears' offense crossed into Vikings' territory on every one of their drives. Nonetheless, thanks to a couple of DJ Wonnum sacks, the Vikings' defense was able to hold the Bears to only two field goals. However, per usual, the Vikings' defense struggled in the final 2:00 of the half, giving up a late touchdown to extend the Bears' lead to 14-0. For the 2021 season, the Vikings have given up a total 128 points in the final 2:00 of either half, an NFL record.

The offense did absolutely nothing for most of the half as Kirk Cousins faced endless pressure from a Bears defensive line missing two of its starters: Khalil Mack and Akiem Hicks. It was only until their final drive of the half that the Vikings' offense came alive. Cousins was able to complete a 25-yard pass to Justin Jefferson, and a 40-yard pass to Ihmir Smith-Marsette on back-to-back plays, which gave the Vikings the ball on the Bears 11-yard line with 0:13 remaining. However, the chance for the Vikings to get a much-needed touchdown was quickly negated by a holding call on Oli Udoh. The Vikings would settle for a field goal and send the team into halftime down 14-3.

### Second Half

The second half was a lot more exciting to watch for Vikings fans. Kirk Cousins, in what may be his last game as the Vikings' quarterback, completed three touchdown passes to three different wide receivers: a 44-yarder to Ihmir Smith-Marsette, a 45-yarder to Justin Jefferson, and a 21-yarder to KJ Osborn.

The Viking's defense also showed up big in the second half, intercepting Bears' quarterback Andy Dalton twice and even getting the Bears to finally punt. Patrick Peterson finally got his first interception as a Minnesota Viking and even put an exclamation point on it by returning it for a touchdown. After being down 14-3 at halftime, the Vikings suddenly saw themselves with a 31-17 lead with 4:54 remaining in the game.

The final minutes of the game for Vikings fans at US Bank Stadium was spent yelling at the team to get Justin Jefferson the ball one more time. Jefferson came into today's game needing 123 receiving yards to break Randy Moss' franchise record of 1,632 receiving yards in a season. Sadly, Jefferson was unable to break the record as he fell just 17 yards short, finishing the season at 1,616 receiving yards. It is important to note that Jefferson now is the only wide receiver in NFL history to have eclipsed 3,000 total receiving yards through his first two seasons.

Final Score: Vikings 31 – Bears 17. Vikings finish the season 8-9.

### Final Thoughts

Rumors around the NFL indicate that Mike Zimmer will likely not be the Vikings' head coach next year. If these rumors turn out to be true, the Vikings will be starting fresh with a new head coach for the first time in nearly eight years. Although Zimmer never led the Vikings to a Super Bowl, Zimmer's success during his tenure as the Vikings' head coach cannot be understated. When he became the Vikings' head coach in 2014, the team had the lowest-ranked defense in the NFL. That quickly changed under Zimmer and by 2017, the Vikings became the best defense in the NFL. However, lately, the defense has struggled, and it is probably time for the Vikings to find a new head coach.

Furthermore, this may be the last game for several Vikings players as well. Anthony Barr, Danielle Hunter, Kirk Cousins, and Patrick Peterson all have contracts that will give the Vikings organization tough decisions on what to do with them.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 3 of 69

## Groton Area boys have clean sweep over Webster Area

Groton Area had a 17 point rally in the second quarter to put down Webster Area in boys basketball action, 64-38. The game was played Monday in Groton.

Groton Area held a 10 point lead early in the game and led 15-12 at the end of the first quarter. The Bearcats closed to within one, 17-16, before Groton Area rattled off 17 straight points and led at half time, 36-18. It was a 50-33 lead at the end of the third quarter.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 25 points, three rebounds, two assist and one steal. Tate Larson had 12 points, five rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jacob Zak had 11 points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Cole Simon had six points, two rebounds and two steals. Jayden Zak had two points, two rebounds, one assist and five steals. Kaden Kurtz had two points, five rebounds, one assist and four steals. Wyatt Hearnen had two points, one rebound, one steal and one block. Colby Dunker and Logan Ringgenberg each had two points and Cade Larson and Braxton Imrie each had one assist.

Groton Area made 25 of 49 in field goals for 51 percent, two of eight three-pointers for 25 percent, made eight of 11 in free throws for 78 percent, had 22 rebounds, seven turnovers, 10 assists, 17 steals, seven team fouls and one block shot.

Jaydon Keller led the Bearcats with 16 points while Jaiden McCreary and Jacob Pereboom each had seven points, Gavin Sannes had four, Caron Mount two and Tommy Vergeldt and Tayne Dunse each had one point.

Webster Area made 15 of 40 field goals for 38 percent, five of 11 from the line for 45 percent, had 17 turnovers and 15 team fouls.

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

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 45-20. The Tigers led at the quarterstops at 15-6, 30-8 and 43-12. Taylor Diegel led the Tigers with 13 points while Cole Simon had 10, Logan Ringgenberg and Holden Sippel each had eight points and Braxton Imrie and Colby Dunker each had three points.

Tommy Vergelat led Webster Area with 12 points while Martin Dorsett had four and Ian Lesnar two.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Molly and Mike Ringgenberg.

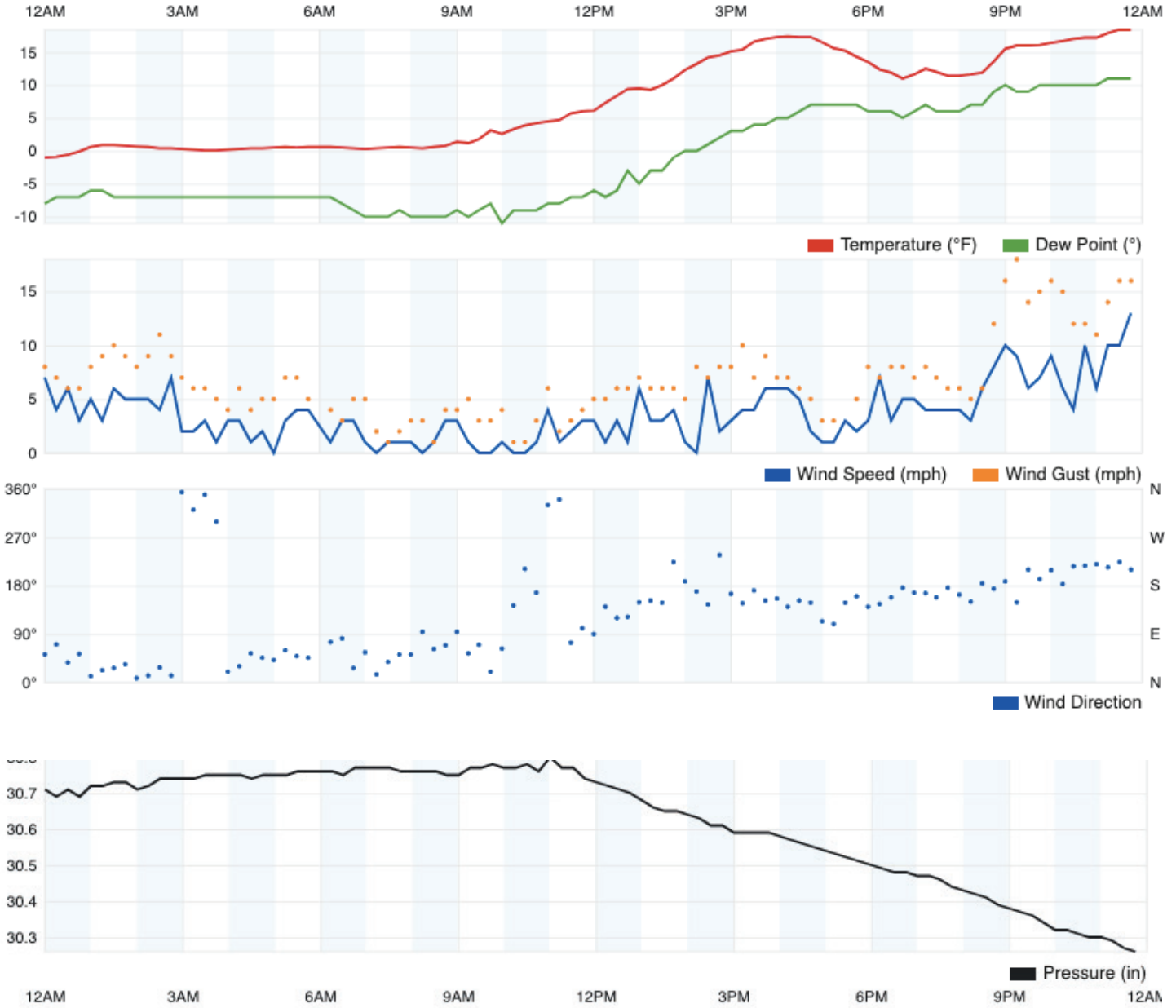
Groton Area made it a clean sweep with a 33-18 win of the C game. Blake Pauli led Groton Area with nine points while Turner Thompson and Keagan Tracy each had six, Ryder Johnson and Caden McInerney each had three points and adding two each were JD Schwan, Karter Moody and Logan Warrington.

- Paul Kosel

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 4 of 69

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





# Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 5 of 69

Today



Mostly Sunny  
then Sunny  
and Breezy

High: 40 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance  
Snow/Sleet

Low: 24 °F

Wednesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 36 °F

Wednesday  
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 21 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny

High: 30 °F

## Mild Weather Through End Of Work Week

Highs 15 to 20° above average through at least Thursday

## Clipper System Late This Week

Today  
35 to 50°



Wed  
28 to 50°



Thu  
26 to 46°



Fri  
27 to 36°



\* Cooler Range of Temps for Northeast SD/Western MN

\* Milder Range of Temps for Central SD

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)



Milder temperatures are expected through the next few days. There is still a system expected for Friday, which will bring snow and wind. Unfortunately not a lot of consensus over timing and track, so will have to wait on the details concerning Fridays system for now.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 6 of 69

## Today in Weather History

January 11, 1980: A strong area of low pressure resulted in strong winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to 70 mph across Minnesota on the 11th and 12th. Blowing and drifting snow made roads hazardous or impossible. The strong winds also caused some damage. There were areas in western Minnesota that had a lot of blowing dirt.

January 11, 1995: A combination of an ice storm, heavy frost accumulation, and strong winds for several days caused widespread damage to electrical systems resulting in power outages across central and north-central South Dakota. The first ice storm occurred on the 11th and the 12th. In the days following, widespread fog developed and resulted in additional heavy deposits of ice and frost on power lines and other surfaces. Much of the damage occurred when strong winds, mainly from the 16 through the 18th, caused the heavily weighted power lines and poles to collapse. Power outages lasted as long as eight days. Several electric cooperatives had never experienced damages of this magnitude. Some traffic accidents resulted from icing, and many vehicles slid off the roads. The property damage was estimated at 3.5 million dollars.

January 11, 2009: A vigorous but fast-moving winter storm system moved through the Dakotas last night and early today. Although snow accumulations from the storm only ranged from 1 to 4 inches, strong winds behind the system produced significant blowing and drifting snow and widespread blizzard conditions across the area. Reports from trained spotters and law enforcement indicated visibility dropped to below one-quarter mile for several hours and near-zero (white-out conditions) in many rural or unsheltered areas. Sustained north to northwest winds at many locations was 20 to 35 mph, with peak wind gusts as high as 60 to 65 mph. As the arctic airmass surged into the region, temperatures fell some 30 degrees from early this morning to mid-afternoon.

1898: An estimated F4 tornado struck the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas, just before midnight. The tornado, which touched down about 100 miles southwest of town, killed 55 people and injured 113 others along its track.

1918: A powerful area of low pressure brought snow and bitterly cold temperatures to Chattanooga, Little Rock, and Shreveport. Birmingham, Alabama, picked up an inch of snow. In far southeastern Alabama, an estimated F3 tornado virtually damaged every building in the town of Webb. The tornado leveled one rural school, killing one teacher and seven students. Please note, the date on the historical marker is an error. January 10th in 1918 was a Thursday.

1963: An F2 tornado was reported in Scott County, Indiana, north of Louisville, Kentucky. It was on the ground for 5 miles north of Scottsburg and damaged or destroyed several homes and barns.

1972: Downslope winds hit the eastern slopes of the Rockies in northern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming. Boulder CO reported wind gusts to 143 mph and twenty-five million dollars property damage.

1987 - A storm in the northeastern U.S. buried the mountains of central Vermont with up to 26 inches of snow, and snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 27 inches at Telos Lake. Winds gusted to 45 mph at Newark NJ and Albany NY. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow and high winds in Utah resulted in a fifty car pile-up along Interstate 15. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 115 mph at Rendezvous Peak. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A cold front which the previous day produced 21 inches of snow at Stampede Pass WA and wind gusts to 75 mph at Mammoth Lakes CA, spread snow across Colorado. Totals in Colorado ranged up to 17 inches at Steamboat Springs. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong northwesterly winds associated with a deep low pressure system crossing the Upper Great Lakes Region ushered cold air into the central U.S. Winds gusted to 72 mph at Fort Dodge IA, and wind gusts reached 75 mph at Yankton SD. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in northwestern Minnesota. Squalls produced heavy snow in parts of Upper Michigan and northern Lower Michigan, with 16 inches reported at Wakefield. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: Bitter cold temperatures gripped central and southern Florida with lows in the teens and 30s.



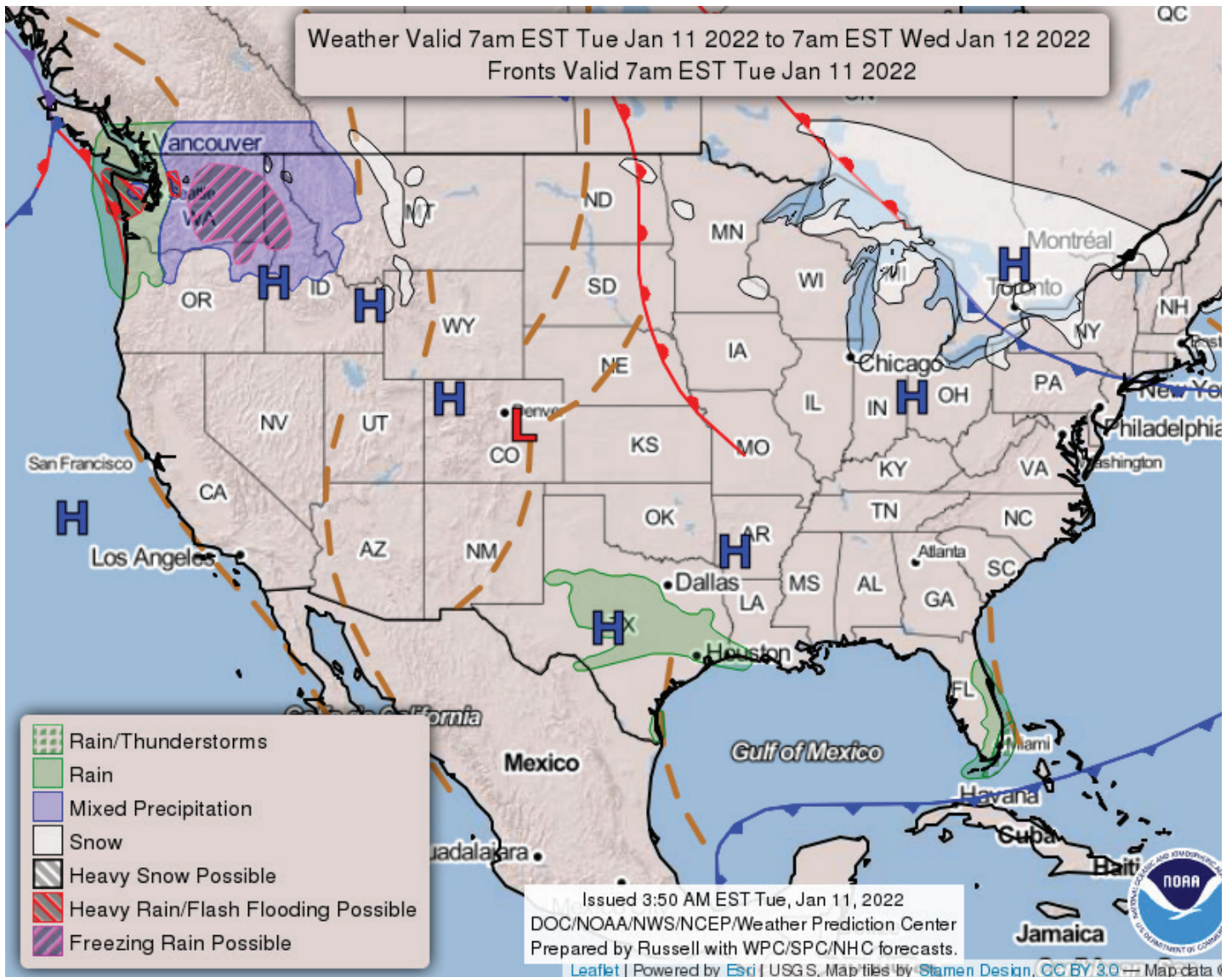
# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 7 of 69

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 19 °F at 11:58 PM**  
**Low Temp: -1 °F at 12:10 AM**  
**Wind: 18 mph at 9:13 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 55 in 1987**  
**Record Low: -31 in 1912**  
**Average High: 23°F**  
**Average Low: 2°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.23**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.23**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:12:19 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08:04 AM**



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 8 of 69



## DOES PRAYER HAVE LIMITS?

It takes time to read the Psalms if we want to understand their meaning. Reading them rapidly makes them sound repetitious or unintelligent. Take for example the words, "But You, O Sovereign Lord, deal well with me for Your name's sake; out of the goodness of Your love, deliver me."

In this brief, one sentence prayer, David recognizes several critical elements of prayer. The first one is that our God is sovereign. As our "sovereign," He rules and reigns over our lives as the Ultimate Authority. He is the Guard and Guardian over anything and everything that pertains to us or may have power over us and thereby is our personal protector and provider. Whatever invades our lives is there because He allows it to be there - and if things were intended to be different from the way they are, they would be.

And if it is "in" our lives, it is "in" there for His "name's sake." In other words, it is consistent with His nature and character and wisdom. God knows what is best for us what is in keeping with the plan He has designed for us. So, we can be sure of His ways, knowing that what He is doing in us, with us and through us is in His best interests to shape us into the likeness of His Son, our Savior, and Lord.

"Out of the goodness of Your love, deliver me" assures us that God will never abandon us but will ultimately deliver us from what we think will destroy us. Whenever we want to give up on God, remember that He did not spare His Son from the cross, but was with Him and delivered Him through the pain into His presence.

Prayer: Lord, we accept all things in our lives as a gift from You as You shape us into the likeness of Christ. Lead us to protect and project that likeness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: - For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. Psalm 109:16



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 9 of 69

## 2021 Community Events

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 10 of 69

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

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

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

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

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Password \_\_\_\_\_

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

[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 11 of 69

## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$300 million

Powerball

14-17-18-21-27, Powerball: 9, Power Play: 2

(fourteen, seventeen, eighteen, twenty-one, twenty-seven; Powerball: nine; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$27 million

### Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Great Plains Lutheran 40, Wilmot 36

Ipswich 42, Langford 36

Lake Preston 45, Iroquois/Doland 42

Lennox 46, Dell Rapids 42

Mobridge-Pollock 66, Standing Rock, N.D. 38

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 61, Sioux Falls Washington 52

Tea Area 72, Canton 61

Vermillion 52, Bon Homme 42

Wakpala 78, Dupree 35

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 60, Leola/Frederick 45

Bridgewater-Emery 58, Colman-Egan 30

Elkton-Lake Benton 45, Dell Rapids St. Mary 39

Groton Area 64, Webster 38

Herreid/Selby Area 57, South Border, N.D. 48

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 62, Sioux Falls Washington 51

Sisseton 59, Ortonville, Minn. 53

Tea Area 81, Canton 52

Wakpala 80, Dupree 66

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

### Perrott-Hunt carries South Dakota over North Dakota 75-68

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 19 points and six rebounds as South Dakota topped North Dakota 75-68 on Monday night.

Mason Archambault also had 19 points for South Dakota (8-7, 1-3 Summit League), which snapped its five-game road losing streak. Boogie Anderson added 14 points. Tasos Kamateros had 10 points. Hunter Goodrick had a career-high 18 rebounds plus seven points.

Paul Bruns had 21 points and eight rebounds for the Fighting Hawks (4-13, 0-4), whose losing streak reached five games. Tsotne Tsartsidze added 13 points and eight rebounds. Bentiu Panoam had 11 points.

## Rounds dismisses Trump criticism for saying he lost election

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota said Monday he stands by his statement that former President Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, after Trump called his fellow Republican a “jerk” for his comments.

Rounds said he was “disappointed but not surprised” by Trump’s attack.

Since his loss, Trump has made repeated false claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him, even as courts, audits and recounts have repeatedly confirmed the results as free and fair.

“This isn’t new information,” Rounds said in a statement. “If we’re being honest, there was no evidence of widespread fraud that would have altered the results of the election.”

Rounds had said in an interview Sunday on ABC News’ “This Week” that Republicans need to move forward and focus on winning elections, and added that people “can believe and they can have confidence that those elections are fair ... and that is in every single state that we looked at.”

Rounds was also asked whether it was possible that Congress would pass legislation to block Trump from running again for president on the grounds that he betrayed his oath by supporting the Jan. 6 insurrection. Rounds responded that the courts, not Congress, are the appropriate place to answer such questions but said Trump should not be shielded from the court system.

While many Republican senators agree with Rounds, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the South Dakotan’s comments were still somewhat extraordinary in an environment where most GOP politicians have shied from openly criticizing Trump.

The former president’s hold on the party was clear last week, when Republicans stayed away from Washington and declined to join Democrats in commemorating the anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection — the worst attack on the Capitol in more than two centuries.

Trump said Monday that Rounds was only speaking out because he was easily reelected in 2020 with Trump’s endorsement — “so now he thinks he has time, and those are the only ones, the weak, who will break away,” Trump said. “I will never endorse this jerk again,” he added.

Rounds noted that former Vice President Mike Pence acknowledged Joe Biden’s victory “and acted with integrity.”

“It’s time for the rest of us to do the same,” he said.

Rounds’ comments come days after his Republican Senate colleague, John Thune, announced that he would run for reelection after mulling retirement. Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate and a top candidate to succeed McConnell, has also drawn Trump’s criticism for saying he believes Biden won the presidential election.

Ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, Thune said that any attempt to overturn the legitimate results would “go down like a shot dog” in the Senate.

Thune was correct — more than 90 senators voted against two separate objections to the results in the hours after Trump’s supporters violently broke into the Capitol in protest. While both Rounds and Thune voted to certify Biden’s win, neither voted to impeach Trump in the weeks afterward.

On Monday, Thune said “welcome to the club” when asked about Rounds’ statement in response to Trump. Echoing McConnell, Thune said Republicans need to be focusing on the future not the past, and important policy issues like the economy and national security.

“There’s just a whole lot of things that we need to be talking about to win and earn the support of the American people in 2022,” Thune said.

## Noem to start session pulled between social, economic issues

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — As South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem marks the beginning of the state’s legislative session Tuesday, she finds herself in a balancing act, caught between business groups wanting to ratchet up the state’s economic growth and social conservatives pushing some of the country’s most aggressive legislation aimed at transgender people.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 13 of 69

The Republican governor's hands-off approach to the coronavirus pandemic has mostly kept both sides happy, winning her nationwide attention and in-state popularity.

She has consistently trumpeted the state's economic performance — calling it the nation's "strongest economy" — as she has tried to attract businesses to the state while also courting conservative voters with efforts to outlaw abortion, institute prayer in schools and regulate what can be taught in public schools.

But as Noem delivers the final State of the State address of her first term Tuesday, she will be navigating a rift in the GOP between business groups that have long held sway in the party and social conservatives demanding renewed attention from up-and-coming politicians like her.

At times, she has been unable to please both.

Last year's legislative session ended with social conservatives souring on Noem as she effectively killed a bill to ban transgender women and girls from playing in school sports leagues that match their gender identity.

Noem issued a "style and form veto", which limited it to high school and elementary sports, after business groups aggressively lobbied against the bill, warning that it could imperil the state's economic growth if the NCAA pulled tournaments from the state or Amazon canceled its plans to build a distribution center.

But the move angered many leading social conservatives, such as Terry Schilling, president of the American Principles Project, who accused her of capitulating to corporate America instead of demonstrating a commitment to conservative principles.

Defending the move to Fox News' Tucker Carlson last year, Noem explained: "We're a small state, Tucker, we've had to fight hard to get any tournaments to come to South Dakota."

After the bill failed, Noem quickly issued executive orders, much to the same effect. And this year, she has attempted to take the lead on the issue with a bill previewed in December that would keep trans athletes from female sports leagues.

"Every young woman deserves an equal playing field where she can achieve success, but common sense tells us that males have an unfair physical advantage over females in athletic competition," she said in a statement.

The bill won Noem a nod from Schilling, but state lawmakers want to push the governor to take a harder stance on the issue. They have previewed their own legislation on transgender athletes with a sharper enforcement mechanism, as well as proposals that would ban transgender students from using bathrooms that match their gender identity and minors' access to gender-affirming hormone therapies and operations.

"Big picture, we want to protect children," said Republican Rep. Fred Deutsch, a perennial champion of the bills, arguing that the Legislature should step into school athletics, school bathroom access and health care to address what he sees as a growing number of transgender children.

Advocates for transgender people plan to protest and lobby against the legislation, saying it bullies a group of people who are already marginalized.

"These (bills) are attacking transgender people in the form of legislation," said Rep. Jamie Smith, the Democratic House leader. "They have no business taking the time of our Legislature."

However, in the Republican-dominated Capitol, the most effective argument against those types of bills has often been one of dollars and cents.

"When you are just discriminating against a given class of people, that tends to result in canceled conventions, sanctions by event groups like the NCAA," said David Owen, president of the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He also argued that the state's high school athletics association already had an effective policy of evaluating requests from transgender athletes on a case-by-case basis. In the one instance that the association granted a transgender student's request, the competition was not disrupted, according to the athletics association.

When North Carolina passed a so-called bathroom bill in 2016, the state was projected to lose more than \$3.76 billion over a dozen years, according to an Associated Press analysis. And while businesses and the NCAA declined to exact the same economic punishment last year when nine other states restricted

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 14 of 69

transgender students, South Dakota business leaders are still wary.

Thomas Lee, the director of the Sioux Falls Sports Authority, which organizes the state's largest college tournaments, warned that the "NCAA, instead of pulling events, may not award events in the future."

Republican legislative leaders, who are key allies of Noem's, expressed caution over the proposals from the Legislature. The Senate's Republican leader, Sen. Gary Cammack, said his caucus would be addressing women's sports, but he did not want South Dakota to "be on the far extreme" of the issue.

Ian Fury, the governor's spokesman, also indicated she would stay focused on the sports issue, saying, "Political ideology should not be a barrier to our daughters' and granddaughters' opportunity to grow and achieve as student-athletes."

## South Dakota governor headed to Wyoming for GOP fundraiser

JACKSON, Wyo. (AP) — South Dakota's governor will take part in a Republican fundraiser in western Wyoming's wealthy Teton County next month.

The "formal event" with Gov. Kristi Noem will be Feb. 18 at the Four Seasons hotel in Teton Village, according to a Teton County GOP email Friday.

Individual tickets for the "Patriots Dinner" are \$500 and tables of 10 cost \$5,000. About 190 tickets have sold in the past month, county party chairwoman Mary Martin told the Casper Star-Tribune.

Teton County is one of the wealthiest in the U.S. Out of Wyoming's 23 counties, only Teton and Albany counties preferred Democrat Joe Biden over Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

## South Dakota Municipal League endorses Medicaid expansion

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A ballot measure campaign to expand Medicaid eligibility in South Dakota received an endorsement on Monday from an organization that advocates for the state's cities and towns.

The nod from the South Dakota Municipal League shows growing momentum for the proposal, which will appear on ballots in November. It would make Medicaid health coverage available to people who live below 133% of the federal poverty level, which is currently about \$17,000 annually for an individual or \$35,000 for a family of four.

"This would return hundreds of millions of our tax dollars to our state, keep rural hospitals open, and provide affordable care to hard-working South Dakotans all over the state," Steve Allender, the mayor of Rapid City and the president of the Municipal League, said in a statement.

South Dakota is one of 12 states that have not expanded federal health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Even as the federal government has tried to entice those states with financial incentives, key Republican lawmakers have resisted Medicaid expansion — and moved to make it harder for voters to expand it. They have criticized the proposal as an expansion of government that would create higher taxes.

## Refugee resettlement in South Dakota declining

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The agency that oversees refugee resettlement in South Dakota says there has been a noticeable decline in the number of people resettling in the state over the last few years.

South Dakota welcomed 52 refugees in 2021, compared to 439 in 2016, according to the Lutheran Social Services' annual report on resettlement. More than half of the people resettling in the state last year came from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa.

Lutheran Social Service president Rebecca Kiesow-Knudsen says an international slowdown in application processing the past four to five years has caused the low number of arrivals, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

Kiesow-Knudsen says the process for a refugee who is applying for resettlement in the U.S. takes anywhere between 18 months to two years to get through the background check and screening process.

"If you compare the number of arrivals in South Dakota with the number of arrivals into the country as

a whole, you can see a similar decrease," Kiesow-Knudsen said. "And so basically it just has to do with the presidential administration in terms of how they've managed the refugee resettlement program."

The U.S. State Department manages the Refugee Resettlement Program, and states can opt into participating. Every state except Wyoming currently has participating agencies.

Each year in October, the president decides on the maximum number of refugees the country will accept in the following year. In 2020, President Donald Trump set the maximum to 18,000, and then in 2021, President Joe Biden increased the maximum to 62,500. The current threshold is 125,000 for 2022.

## Kazakh leader: Russia-led security group to pull out troops

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The president of Kazakhstan announced Tuesday that a Russia-led security alliance will start pulling out its troops from the country in two days after completing its mission.

The mostly Russian troops were deployed to Kazakhstan last week by the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a military alliance of six former Soviet states, at the president's request amid the worst public unrest the former Soviet nation has faced since gaining independence 30 years ago.

Protests over soaring fuel prices erupted in the oil and gas-rich Central Asian nation of 19 million on Jan. 2 and quickly spread across the country, with political slogans reflecting wider discontent over the authoritarian government. Over the next few days, the demonstrations turned extremely violent, with dozens of civilians and law enforcement officers killed.

In Almaty, Kazakhstan's former capital and largest city, protesters set government buildings on fire and briefly seized the airport. By the weekend, the unrest has been largely quelled.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has blamed the unrest on foreign-backed "terrorists" and insisted that his request for help to the CSTO was justified.

"When this decision was being made, we could have completely lost control over Almaty, which was being torn apart by terrorists. Had we lost Almaty, we would have lost the capital and the entire country," Tokayev told Kazakhstan's parliament Tuesday.

The president said that the CSTO has largely completed its mission in the country and will start withdrawing its troops in two days — a process that will take no longer than 10 days.

Asked whether such a move was premature — the troops only started arriving to Kazakhstan five days ago — Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was "utterly and completely" Kazakhstan's prerogative. "It is their analysis, and we have no right to interfere," Peskov said.

Tokayev also appointed a new prime minister, Alikhan Smailov, on Tuesday. Kazakhstan's government resigned last week in what was seen as one of several concessions aimed at mollifying the protesters, along with a 180-day cap on fuel prices and the ouster of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country's former longtime leader, from his influential post of head of the National Security Council.

Smailov, 49, previously served as Kazakhstan's Minister of Finance and first deputy prime minister, and Tokayev said that Smailov's "view of the future of the economy is valid."

Life in Almaty, which was affected with the violence the most, started returning to normal this week, with public transport resuming operation and malls reopening. Owners of shops that have been looted in the unrest were assessing the damage.

Galina Karpenko's underwear store was ransacked, and she said she lost about \$10,000 in stolen goods and damage.

"This is not a small sum for me, it's really not. I closed several outlets because of the crisis as we couldn't afford the rent. And now, my favorite outlet that was turning a profit and feeding my family took a hit. This is not good at all. I'm so distressed, God is my witness, I don't know how to feed my kids," Karpenko said.

Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry on Tuesday reported that a total of 9,900 people were detained in the country over the unrest. Tokayev's office has also said that 338 criminal probes over mass unrest and assaults on law enforcement officers have been opened.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 16 of 69

## European Parliament President David Sassoli dies at age 65

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — David Sassoli, an Italian journalist who worked his way up in politics while defending the downtrodden and repressed to become president of the European Union's parliament, died at a hospital in Italy early Tuesday. He was 65.

European Council President Charles Michel called Sassoli a "sincere and passionate European. We already miss his human warmth, his generosity, his friendliness and his smile."

No details were provided in a tweet by Sassoli's spokesperson, Roberto Cuillo.

Sassoli, a socialist, had been hospitalized since Dec. 26 because of abnormal functioning of his immune system, Cuillo said in a statement released the day before Sassoli's death.

Sassoli had been struggling for months with poor health after he suffered pneumonia caused by the legionella bacteria in September. His health steadily declined afterward and he was forced to miss several important legislative meetings. Yet, as much as possible, he stayed on the job, where his vigor and easy smile had always been a trademark. He was at his strongest when he took up the cause of migrants who died crossing the Mediterranean or dissidents such as Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is taking on the Kremlin from a jail cell.

"Everyone loved his smile and his kindness, yet he knew how to fight for what he believed in," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, reminiscing how a much younger Sassoli had traveled to Germany to see the infamous Berlin Wall come down well over three decades ago.

European unity was his benchmark, just as much as justice among all Europeans was.

Over the past few months, he improved enough to preside over a European Parliament session in December to give the EU's main human rights award, the Sakharov Prize, to Navalny's daughter. High in symbolism, it showed him at his best. A few weeks later, his wishes for the new year became his political testament as an optimist with great expectations.

"We can be that hope when we don't ignore those in need. When we don't build walls on our borders. When we fight all forms of injustice. Here's to us, here's to hope," he said in the address.

"In the final week of December there was a worsening of the illness, and then the final days of his battle," Cuillo told Italy's Sky TG24.

He is survived by his wife, Alessandra Vittorini, and his children, Livia and Giulio. Flags flew half-staff and the European Parliament opened a condolences register. The European Commission will hold a minute of silence when it meets on Wednesday.

A lifelong fan of Fiorentina football club, he emulated the fine style of the team where Gabriel Batistuta and Roberto Baggio thrived. But in the end, like the Florence club, he also lacked the final touch to reach the very highest level. Being head of the European Parliament doesn't compare to being prime minister or leading the European Commission or Council.

Sassoli came to lead the European legislature in 2019 following an intricate bout of political infighting among EU leaders, which also saw German Christian Democrat von der Leyen become European Commission president and Belgian free-market liberal Michel take the job as EU Council president. Sassoli and von der Leyen were picked by EU leaders practically out of the blue, stunning themselves and the rest of the world.

Even if he was often overshadowed by von der Leyen and Michel, Sassoli led an institution which has become ever more powerful over the years and has become instrumental in charting the course of the European Union in many sectors, be it the digital economy, climate or Brexit.

An adroit political shaker, using his bonhomie to the hilt, he helped steer several of the most important political issues facing the EU to a successful conclusion — and none more so than the 1.8 trillion-euro pandemic recovery fund and seven-year budget.

Yet his 2 1/2 years in charge was affected by both the pandemic, which often turned the European parliament into a remote digital institution where his human warmth lost impact, and his own deteriorating health.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 17 of 69

The European Parliament represents the EU's 450 million citizens and refers to itself as "the heart of European democracy." It has more than 700 members directly elected by its member nations.

"I am deeply saddened by the terrible loss of a great European & proud Italian," von der Leyen said. "David Sassoli was a compassionate journalist, an outstanding President of the European Parliament and, first & foremost, a dear friend."

He was just as respected in Italy.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi sent condolences on behalf of the Italian government and paid tribute to Sassoli as "a man of institutions, a profound pro-European, a passionate journalist, Sassoli was a symbol of balance, humanity, generosity."

The head of Sassoli's Democratic Party and a longtime friend, Enrico Letta, praised Sassoli's European passion and vision and vowed to carry them forward, though "we know we're not up to it."

In a tweet, Letta called Sassoli "someone of extraordinary generosity, a passionate European" and a man of "vision and principles, theoretical and practical."

Another former Italian premier of the center-left, Paolo Gentiloni, called his death a "terrible loss."

"I will always remember his leadership, his passion, his generous friendship. #CiaoDavid," Gentiloni tweeted.

Sassoli was first elected to the European Parliament in 2009. He won another term in 2014 and served as its vice president. He started out as a newspaper journalist before entering broadcasting as a high-profile presenter in Italy. It was a stepping stone for his political career.

He had considered running for the second part of the five-year term which starts next week, but decided not to run for reelection when lawmakers choose their new president in Strasbourg, France.

Roberta Metsola, the Christian Democrat who was already set to take over from Sassoli next week, said "I am heartbroken. Europe has lost a leader, I have a lost a friend, democracy has lost a champion." She said Sassoli "dedicated his life to making the world a better, fairer place."

## UK's Johnson faces lockdown-breach claims over garden party

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a wave of public and political outrage on Tuesday over allegations that he and his staff flouted coronavirus lockdown rules by holding a garden party in 2020 while Britons were barred by law from mingling outside the home.

Opposition politicians called for a police investigation after broadcaster ITV published a leaked email invitation to "socially distanced drinks" in the garden of the prime minister's Downing Street office and residence in May 2020. The email from the prime minister's private secretary, Martin Reynolds, was sent to dozens of people and urged attendees to "bring your own booze."

The event was scheduled for May 20, 2020 — the same day the government at a televised news conference reminded people they could only meet up with one person outside their household. London's Metropolitan Police force also published reminders about the rules that day.

The police force said Tuesday it was "in contact with" the government over the party claims, which follow allegations of several other rule-breaking gatherings in Downing Street during the pandemic.

During Britain's first lockdown, which began in March 2020 and lasted for more than two months, gatherings were banned with a few exceptions, including work and funerals. Millions of people were cut off from friends and family, and even barred from visiting dying relatives in hospitals. On the day of the garden party, 268 people with the coronavirus died in Britain, according to official figures, bringing total deaths to more than 36,000. The total now stands at over 150,000, the highest toll in Europe after Russia.

Lyndsay Jackson, whose mother died of COVID-19 in May 2020, said the government showed "contempt for ordinary people and for the difficulties we were all facing."

"I wasn't able to be with her when she died, I wasn't able to hold her hand. ... I couldn't even hug my brother after the funeral," said Jackson, a member of the group COVID-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. She told Sky News that Johnson was "beneath contempt."

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 18 of 69

Johnson's Conservative government has repeatedly been accused of flouting the rules it imposed on others during the pandemic, which brought the most severe restrictions on Britons' individual freedoms since World War II.

The latest claims will be investigated by senior civil servant Sue Gray who was appointed by the government to look into earlier allegations that staff in Johnson's office flouted coronavirus rules with lockdown-breaching Christmas parties in 2020.

Johnson has insisted he personally broke no rules, but British media reported Tuesday that the prime minister and his wife Carrie Johnson attended the May 2020 garden gathering.

Health Minister Edward Argar said he understood why people would be "upset and angry," but said he would not "pre-judge" the outcome of Gray's inquiry.

But Labour Party lawmaker Ed Miliband said the allegations were "incredibly damning" and said Johnson must explain whether he attended the party.

"How can he lead the country through these difficult times, get people to follow public health advice, if he has so flagrantly breached the rules?" Miliband said on BBC radio.

Worryingly for Johnson, it was not just opposition politicians expressing anger. The latest claims added fuel to growing concern inside the governing Conservatives about the prime minister's leadership.

The right-of-center party picked Johnson as leader in 2019 for his upbeat manner and popular touch, a choice that appeared vindicated when he led the Tories to a big election win in December 2019.

But the pandemic has shaken his authority. Support for Johnson is being eroded by discontent over social restrictions — which some Conservatives view as draconian — and disquiet about his judgment after a slew of financial and ethical misconduct allegations.

Ruth Davidson, former leader of the Conservatives in Scotland, said many people would "never forgive" the "utterly indefensible" garden party.

"It just makes a mockery of this idea that we were doing a national endeavor to keep each other safe," she said.

## **Biden to back filibuster changes to push voting rights bill**

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, COLLEEN LONG and JEFF AMY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will use a speech in Georgia to endorse changing Senate filibuster rules that have stalled voting rights legislation, saying it's time to choose "democracy over autocracy." But some civil rights groups won't be there, in protest of what they say is administration inaction.

Biden on Tuesday will pay tribute to civil rights battles past — visiting Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once held forth from the pulpit, and placing a wreath at the crypt of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King — before turning to today's challenge.

With Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., setting up Martin Luther King Jr. Day as the deadline to either pass voting legislation or consider revising the rules, Biden is expected to evoke the memories of the U.S. Capitol riot a year ago in more forcefully aligning himself with the effort.

Biden plans to tell his audience, "The next few days, when these bills come to a vote, will mark a turning point in this nation."

"Will we choose democracy over autocracy, light over shadow, justice over injustice? I know where I stand. I will not yield. I will not flinch," he'll say, according to prepared remarks. "I will defend your right to vote and our democracy against all enemies foreign and domestic. And so the question is where will the institution of United States Senate stand?"

A White House official, previewing the speech on the condition of anonymity, said Biden would voice support for changing the Senate filibuster rules to ensure the right to vote is defended — a strategy Democrats have been looking to the president to embrace.

Some voting rights advocates planned to boycott the speech and instead spend the day working. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, known for her untiring voting rights work, also was skipping the event. Aides said Abrams had a conflict but didn't explain further.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 19 of 69

"We're beyond speeches. At this point, what we need, what we are demanding, is federal legislation," said LaTosha Brown, co-founder of Black Votes Matter. And it can't happen soon enough, she said.

So far, Democrats have been unable to agree among themselves over potential changes to the Senate filibuster rules to allow action on voting rights, despite months of private negotiations.

Biden in the past has waded more cautiously into the debate — he is a former longtime senator who largely stands by existing rules but is also under enormous political pressure to engineer a breakthrough.

Voting rights advocates in Georgia and nationwide are increasingly anxious about what may happen in 2022 and beyond, following enactment of Republican-pushed laws that make it harder to vote coming off Donald Trump's loss in 2020 and his subsequent push to overturn the results, despite no evidence of widespread fraud.

Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, who is senior pastor of the church Biden will visit and who made history as the first Black senator elected in Georgia, said ahead of the speech that "anything that can happen that will continue to shine a bright light on the urgency of this issue is important."

Warnock planned to travel with Biden to Georgia on Tuesday. He said he believes Biden understands that "democracy itself is imperiled by this all-out assault that we've been witnessing by state legislatures all across the country, and this is a moral moment. Everybody must show up."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki rejected some activists' complaints that Biden hasn't been a strong enough advocate.

"I think we would dispute the notion that the president hasn't been active or vocal. He's given a range of speeches, he's advocated for voting rights to pass," she said. "We understand the frustration by many advocates that this is not passed into law, yet. He would love to have signed this into law himself."

But laws have already passed in at least 19 states that make it more difficult to vote. Voting rights groups view the changes as a subtler form of the ballot restrictions like literacy tests and poll taxes once used to disenfranchise Black voters, now a key Democratic constituency.

And Republicans who have fallen in line behind Trump's election misinformation are separately promoting efforts to influence future elections by installing sympathetic leaders in local election posts and backing for elective office some of those who participated in the violent Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol a year ago.

Georgia is at the center of it all, one of the key battleground states in the 2020 elections. As the votes were being recounted, Trump told a top state election official he wanted the official to "find" enough votes to overturn his loss. The state's votes nonetheless went to Biden, and both of its Senate seats went to Democrats as well.

Then last year, the Republican governor signed a sweeping rewrite of election rules that, among other things, gives the State Election Board new powers to intervene in county election offices and to remove and replace local election officials. That has led to concerns that the Republican-controlled state board could exert more influence over the administration of elections, including the certification of county results.

The Georgia voting activists said they worked tirelessly to give Democrats control of the Senate and White House, and it's time for Washington to step up.

Congressional Democrats, for their part, have written voting legislation that would usher in the biggest overhaul of U.S. elections in a generation by 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 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.

But to pass the legislation — which Republicans have outright rejected -- the Democrats say they must change the Senate rules that allow a minority of 41 senators to block a bill.

"The fight for the ballot is as old as the Republic," Schumer wrote to his colleagues. "Over the coming weeks, the Senate will once again consider how to perfect this union and confront the historic challenges facing our democracy."

## World Economic Forum warns cyber risks add to climate threat

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Cybersecurity and space are emerging risks to the global economy, adding to existing challenges posed by climate change and the coronavirus pandemic, the World Economic Forum said in a report Tuesday.

The Global Risks Report is usually released ahead of the annual elite winter gathering of CEOs and world leaders in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, but the event has been postponed for a second year in a row because of COVID-19. The World Economic Forum still plans some virtual sessions next week.

Here's a rundown of the report, which is based on a survey of about 1,000 experts and leaders:

### WORLD OUTLOOK

As 2022 begins, the pandemic and its economic and societal impact still pose a "critical threat" to the world, the report said. Big differences between rich and poor nations' access to vaccines mean their economies are recovering at uneven rates, which could widen social divisions and heighten geopolitical tensions.

By 2024, the global economy is forecast to be 2.3% smaller than it would have been without the pandemic. But that masks the different rates of growth between developing nations, whose economies are forecast to be 5.5% smaller than before the pandemic, and rich countries, which are expected to expand 0.9%.

### DIGITAL DANGERS

The pandemic forced a huge shift — requiring many people to work or attend class from home and giving rise to an exploding number of online platforms and devices to aid a transformation that has dramatically increased security risks, the report said.

"We're at the point now where cyberthreats are growing faster than our ability to effectively prevent and manage them," said Carolina Klint, a risk management leader at Marsh, whose parent company Marsh McLennan co-authored the report with Zurich Insurance Group and SK Group.

Cyberattacks are becoming more aggressive and widespread, as criminals use tougher tactics to go after more vulnerable targets, the report said. Malware and ransomware attacks have boomed, while the rise of cryptocurrencies makes it easy for online criminals to hide payments they have collected.

While those responding to the survey cited cybersecurity threats as a short- and medium-term risk, Klint said the report's authors were concerned that the issue wasn't ranked higher, suggesting it's a "blind spot" for companies and governments.

### SPACE RACE

Space is the final frontier — for risk.

Falling costs for launch technology has led to a new space race between companies and governments. Last year, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' space tourism venture Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson took off, while Elon Musk's Space X business made big gains in launching astronauts and satellites.

Meanwhile, a host of countries are beefing up their space programs as they chase geopolitical and military power or scientific and commercial gains, the report said.

But all these programs raise the risk of frictions in orbit.

"Increased exploitation of these orbits carries the risk of congestion, an increase in debris and the possibility of collisions in a realm with few governance structures to mitigate new threats," the report said.

Space exploitation is one of the areas that respondents thought had among the least amount of international collaboration to deal with the challenges.

Experts and leaders responding to the survey "don't believe that much is being done in the best possible way moving forward," World Economic Forum's managing director, Saadia Zahidi, said at a virtual press briefing from Geneva.

Other areas include artificial intelligence, cyberattacks and migration and refugees, she said.

### CLIMATE CRISIS

The environment remains the biggest long-term worry.

The planet's health over the next decade is the dominant concern, according to survey respondents, who



cited failure to act on climate change, extreme weather, and loss of biodiversity as the top three risks.

The report noted that different countries are taking different approaches, with some moving faster to adopt a zero-carbon model than others. Both approaches come with downsides. While moving slowly could radicalize more people who think the government isn't acting urgently, a faster shift away from carbon intense industries could spark economic turmoil and throw millions out of work.

"Adopting hasty environmental policies could also have unintended consequences for nature," the report added. "There are still many unknown risks from deploying untested biotechnical and geoengineering technologies."

## China locks down 3rd city, raising affected to 20 million

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A third Chinese city has locked down its residents because of a COVID-19 outbreak, raising the number confined to their homes in China to about 20 million people.

The lockdown of Anyang, home to 5.5 million people, was announced late Monday after two cases of the omicron variant were reported. Residents are not allowed to go out and stores have been ordered shut except those selling necessities.

Another 13 million people have been locked down in Xi'an for nearly three weeks, and 1.1 million more in Yuzhou for more than a week. It wasn't clear how long the lockdown of Anyang would last, as it was announced as a measure to facilitate mass testing of residents, which is standard procedure in China's strategy of identifying and isolating infected people as quickly as possible.

The lockdowns are the broadest since the shutting down of Wuhan and most of the rest of Hubei province in early 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Since then, China's approach has evolved into one of targeting smaller areas hit by outbreaks for lockdowns.

The approach of the Winter Olympics, which open Feb. 4 in Beijing, and the emergence of omicron have brought back citywide lockdowns in a bid to snuff out outbreaks and prevent them from spreading to other parts of China.

A Beijing Olympics official responsible for disease control, Huang Chun, said organizers are counting on the cooperation of athletes and officials to prevent an outbreak that could affect participation.

"If the mass cluster transmission happens, it will impact the Games and the schedule for sure," Huang said. "The worst scenario, if it happens, is independent of man's will, so we leave our options open."

In Hong Kong, city leader Carrie Lam announced the closure of kindergartens and primary schools after infections were reported in students. Schools are to close by Friday and remain shut until at least the Lunar New Year holiday in the first week of February.

The semiautonomous Chinese city has tightened pandemic-related restrictions in recent days after discovering the omicron variant had spread beyond people arriving from overseas.

The Anyang omicron cases are believed to be linked to two other cases found Saturday in Tianjin. It appears to be the first time omicron has spread in mainland China beyond people who arrived from abroad and their immediate contacts.

Anyang is an important archeological site, the ancient capital of the Shang dynasty and where the earliest Chinese writing has been found on what are called oracle bones.

The city said that non-essential vehicles are banned from streets in a lockdown notice shared online by state media late Monday. The number of cases is still relatively low, with 58 new ones confirmed from the start of Monday to 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

Tianjin, a major port that is less than an hour from Beijing by high-speed rail, has locked down only affected areas as it carries out mass testing. As of noon Tuesday, 97 people had tested positive in the city of 14 million people: 49 with symptoms, 15 without symptoms and 33 awaiting further verification.

Xi'an and Yuzhou are both battling the delta variant and neither has reported any omicron cases.

More than 2,000 people have been infected in Xi'an in China's largest outbreak since the initial one in Wuhan. The ancient capital is a popular tourist stop that is home to the Terracotta Warriors ruins and also

a Samsung computer chip factory.

Authorities have credited the lockdown with curtailing the spread, though it disrupted lives and emergency medical treatment for some. The city reported 13 new cases in the latest 24 hour period, down from more than a hundred a day at the peak of the outbreak.

## **US announces \$308 million in aid for Afghans as crisis grows**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House has announced \$308 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, offering new aid to the country as it edges toward a humanitarian crisis since the Taliban takeover nearly five months ago.

White House spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement Tuesday that the new aid from the U.S. Agency for International Development will flow through independent humanitarian organizations and will be used to provide shelter, health care, winterization assistance, emergency food aid, water, sanitation and hygiene services.

The country's long-troubled economy has been in a tailspin since the Taliban takeover. Nearly 80% of Afghanistan's previous government's budget came from the international community. That money, now cut off, financed hospitals, schools, factories and government ministries.

Desperation for such basic necessities has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as health care shortages, drought and malnutrition.

The USAID called on the Taliban to allow "all aid workers, especially women ... to operate independently and securely" as humanitarian groups look to assist those suffering.

"The United States continues to urge the Taliban to allow unhindered humanitarian access, safe conditions for humanitarians, independent provision of assistance to all vulnerable people, and freedom of movement for aid workers of all genders," the agency said in a statement.

The new aid brings U.S. humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan to more than \$780 million since the chaotic ending of the 20-year-old war in August. The United Nations says 22% of Afghanistan's 38 million people are living near famine and another 36% are facing acute food insecurity.

In addition, the White House pledged that it would send Afghanistan 1 million additional COVID-19 vaccine doses through COVAX, an initiative by the World Health Organization to improve access to vaccines. With the new influx of doses, the U.S. will have sent 4.3 million doses to Afghanistan, which has struggled to deal with the unrelenting pandemic.

International funding to Afghanistan was suspended and billions of dollars of the country's assets abroad, mostly in the United States, were frozen after the Taliban took control of the country in mid-August.

The decision by the U.S. and the international community not to recognize the Taliban government, which governed with a strict interpretation of Islamic law when it was in control from 1996 to 2001, has created a quandary for Western powers about how to provide enough aid without giving the Taliban legitimacy or putting money directly into its hands.

The lack of funding has led to increased poverty, and aid groups have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe. State employees, from doctors to teachers and administrative civil servants, haven't been paid in months. Banks, meanwhile, have restricted how much money account holders can withdraw.

The Taliban have called on the international community to release funds and help stave off a humanitarian disaster.

## **Georgia snaps 41-year title drought with 33-18 win over Bama**

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Confetti rained down on Georgia. The Bulldogs fans chanted "Kir-by, Kir-by!"

Four decades of pent-up emotion were unleashed Monday night as the Bulldogs snapped a frustrating national championship drought by vanquishing their nemesis.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 23 of 69

Stetson Bennett delivered the biggest throws of his storybook career and Georgia's defense sealed the sweetest victory in program history, beating Alabama 33-18 in the College Football Playoff for its first title in 41 years.

"I've never been around a group of players that really wanted it so bad and wouldn't be denied," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. "I told the guys in the locker room, just take a picture of this."

Smart, a Bulldogs defensive back in the mid-1990s, returned to his alma mater in 2016 after helping Nick Saban build a dynasty as an assistant at Alabama.

Georgia has become an elite program under Smart, but has not been able to chase down its Southeastern Conference rival.

Until now.

"This was for all the glory, we took it," defensive tackle Jordan Davis said.

And they did it the way Alabama has broken their hearts so many times in recent years: Coming from behind and finishing with a flourish.

Bennett connected with Adonai Mitchell on a 40-yard touchdown to give No. 3 Georgia a 19-18 lead with 8:09 left and then hooked up with Brock Bowers for a 15-yard TD on a screen to put the Bulldogs up eight with 3:33 left.

The final blow came from Georgia's dominant defense. Kelee Ringo intercepted an underthrown deep ball down the sideline by Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young.

"I just saw the ball in his hands and that was all she wrote," said safety Lewis Cine, the game's defensive MVP.

With just over a minute left, Ringo took off behind a convoy of blockers and went 79 yards, Smart chasing and yelling at him to go down so he wouldn't risk a fumble. The touchdown set off a wild celebration by the relieved Georgia fans who packed Lucas Oil Stadium.

"There's going to be some property torn up in Indianapolis tonight," Smart said, paraphrasing the late Georgia play-by-play man Larry Munson.

The Bulldogs (14-1) hadn't won a national title since freshman Herschel Walker led them there in 1980. If simply snapping the drought wasn't good enough, doing it against No. 1 Alabama (13-2) made it even better.

"I cried, so pretty good," Bennett said when asked how it felt.

Saban's Tide had won seven straight against the Bulldogs.

The Bulldogs lost two SEC championship games, including one five weeks ago, and the 2018 CFP title game to Alabama under Smart.

"I told them we burned the boats. The only way home was through them," Smart said.

Mission accomplished.

Bennett, the former walk-on turned starter, finished 17 for 26 for 224 yards and no interceptions.

For most of the first three quarters, the first CFP title game to be a rematch of a regular-season game was an ol' fashion SEC defensive struggle in the heart of Big Ten country.

The first touchdown came with 1:20 left in the third quarter. After James Cook broke a 67-yard run to get the Bulldogs into the red zone, three more running plays — and a facemask penalty by Alabama — got them into the end zone. Zamir White went in standing up from a yard out with massive defensive tackles Jalen Carter and Davis leading the way as blockers. The Bulldogs led for the first time, 13-9.

After Alabama added another field goal, the Tide caught a break on strange turnover.

As Bennett was being taken down deep in Georgia territory, he tried to throw the ball away. The ball slipped loose, and bounced toward the sideline, seemingly harmless. Alabama's Drew Sanders casually caught it as he was jogging out of bounds.

Surprisingly, the ruling on the field was a fumble, recovered by the Tide and replay upheld it, giving the Tide the ball in the red zone. A few plays later, Young eluded the rush and found Cameron Latu for a 3-yard touchdown that put Alabama up 18-13 with 10:14 left.

Once again, it seemed as if Georgia would not be able to break the 'Bama curse.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 24 of 69

Bennett was 13 for 22 for 141 yards as the next drive started, and you could practically hear all skeptical Georgia fans wondering why Smart didn't turn to his four-star back-up QB, J.T. Daniels, for a spark.

As he has done so many times during a career that started on the scout team and took a detour through junior college in Mississippi, the small-town Georgia kid nicknamed The Mailman came through.

Bennett completed all three of his passes for 68 yards, including a long strike to Mitchell for a touchdown with 8:09 left that gave the Bulldogs a one-point lead after a failed 2-point conversion.

The Bulldogs' defense clamped down on Young, forcing a three-and-out on the Tide's next drive, and then Georgia went to work on sealing a long-awaited championship.

"It's a little tough that I let them down today," Young said. "I've got to do better with it."

The sophomore finished 35 for 57 for 359 yards with two interceptions, playing without his top two receivers for most of the game. All-American Jameson Williams went out early in the second quarter with a knee injury, and John Metchie III was injured in the SEC title game.

Young was sacked three times after Georgia didn't bring him down once in the first meeting.

"We played a heck of a game against a heck of a team for the first three quarters of the game," said Saban, who was denied his eighth national title, seventh with Alabama in the last 13 years. "Nobody can take the SEC championship away from this team, the Cotton Bowl championship.

"We just didn't finish the way we needed to finish."

After more than 40 years, it was Georgia's time to finish.

"You put as much time as we do in this thing, blood, sweat, tears," Bennett said, "it means something."

## EXPLAINER: Why Australia faces a tough call on Djokovic

By STEVE McMORRAN Associated Press

When Australian immigration officials rejected tennis star Novak Djokovic's medical exemption from a COVID-19 vaccination requirement and canceled his Australian visa, they set off a storm of ramifications — bureaucratic, political and legal.

The world's top male tennis player spent four days in a dowdy Melbourne immigration detention hotel among asylum seekers and undocumented migrants before Federal Circuit Court Judge Anthony Kelly upheld his appeal and ordered him released and his visa reinstated.

Australian Immigration Minister Alex Hawke now must make the politically charged decision of whether to use his authority to overturn the judge's ruling.

### WHERE NOW?

First, a better class of accommodation. When the judge ruled in his favor on Monday, Djokovic was immediately released from Melbourne's Park Hotel to join his team at an up-market apartment for the rest of his Australian stay.

Djokovic quickly headed to the Australian Open venue, Melbourne Park, for a late-night training session. He also trained on Tuesday, suggesting his sights are still firmly set on his bid for a 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He's not in the clear yet. Immigration Minister Hawke has put off until Wednesday his decision on whether to revoke the unvaccinated tennis star's visa on public health grounds under Australia's Migration Act.

A spokesperson for Hawke said "in line with due process, Minister Hawke will thoroughly consider the matter. As the issue is ongoing, for legal reasons it is inappropriate to comment further."

Another issue under scrutiny is whether Djokovic might have incorrectly filled out his travel entry form when he ticked a box to indicate he hadn't traveled in the 14 days prior to his arrival in Australia on Jan. 6. In fact, Djokovic did travel to Spain to train in that period.

### WHAT DID THE COURT SAY?

Perhaps the key to the whole affair and the hardest question to answer is whether Djokovic has a valid claim to a medical exemption to enter Australia while unvaccinated.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 25 of 69

Tennis Australia, the Victoria state government and the federal government have differing views. Before leaving for Australia, Djokovic had been coy on his vaccination status. When interviewed at Melbourne Airport by border officers early Thursday morning he admitted he was not.

His application for a medical exemption to the rule that all non-Australian arrivals must be vaccinated was based on his claim that he tested positive to COVID-19 on Dec. 16.

Medical panels established by Tennis Australia and the Victoria government granted Djokovic exemption from vaccination to play at the Australian Open on that basis. Djokovic's lawyers argued that he had every reason to believe the same standard applied at the border.

The Australian Border Force wasn't satisfied with the documents provided by Djokovic at Melbourne Airport and canceled his visa. Judge Kelly found the Border Force should have given Djokovic more time to get his documents in order before proceeding with the interview which resulted in his visa being annulled. "The decision to proceed with the interview and cancel that visa ... was unreasonable," he said.

## WHAT ABOUT DJOKOVIC'S COVID-19 CASE?

Djokovic was quick to welcome the court's decision. During his four days in immigration detention he tweeted only once, to thank his fans for their support.

Early Tuesday morning he tweeted again to express gratitude that the court had upheld his case.

"I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation," Djokovic said. "Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete (at the Australian Open). I remain focused on that. I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans."

Questions still remain about Djokovic's recent positive test. He had a PCR test on Dec. 16 and received his positive result that night.

Photographs and videos since then have shown a maskless Djokovic attending public events, including a junior tennis prize ceremony in Belgrade after his positive test. Serbia's COVID-19 protocols should have required him to isolate for 11 days.

## WHAT ROLE DOES POLITICS PLAY?

Djokovic arrived in Melbourne as it faced record daily numbers of COVID-19 cases. Numbers also were increasing across Australia because of the omicron variant.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government was facing criticism for relaxing some virus restrictions as omicron cases began to spike and for not making rapid antigen tests readily available.

Morrison had little to say when Tennis Australia and the Victoria government upheld Djokovic's application for a medical exemption. But when Djokovic's visa was canceled he was quick to own the decision, sensing public approval.

He tweeted "rules are rules" and repeated that in interviews on subsequent days. At first it seemed a certain political win.

Australia's strict border controls during most of the pandemic separated families by preventing Australians living overseas from returning home. The possibility that one of the world's most feted athletes and prominent vaccine skeptics might receive special treatment at the border was one Morrison couldn't countenance.

Residents of Melbourne also have cause to reject special treatment for Djokovic. Melbourne has been one of the most locked-down cities in the world as residents spent 256 days under strict restrictions during various COVID-19 waves.

But as Djokovic languished among asylum seekers in Melbourne, attitudes may have softened. And since the judge ruled against the government's lawyers, there has been anger that the poor handling of Djokovic's case has painted Australia in a bad light.

## Djokovic back into swing in Australia despite visa concerns

By JOHN PYE and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

# Groton Daily Independent

**Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 26 of 69**

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Tennis star Novak Djokovic held a practice session at Melbourne Park on Tuesday, his second day out of detention, focusing on his Australian Open title defense while still facing the prospect of deportation because he's not vaccinated for COVID-19.

The top-ranked Djokovic hit the show courts within hours of winning a legal battle Monday against the cancellation of his visa, based on procedural grounds. He returned Tuesday afternoon for a closed practice, with doors locked and only his support team allowed into Rod Laver Arena.

Aerial images taken by Australian TV networks from a helicopter showed the nine-time Australian Open winner back at work, less than a week before the first Grand Slam tournament of the year is due to start.

Video showed Djokovic hitting shots from behind the baseline, taking feedback from his coach, and stretching beside the court with a trainer on a sunny but mild summer afternoon.

Soon after, organizers released the seedings for the Australian Open tournament, and Djokovic was listed at No. 1 for the men's singles draw.

While he's trying to make up time after spending four days confined to an immigration detention hotel, Djokovic is conscious he could again have his visa revoked.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke is considering exercising his power to deport the 34-year-old Serbian under separate legislation, assessing a medical exemption that the unvaccinated Djokovic relied on to fly into Melbourne and the information supplied in the visa application.

The Australian Associated Press reported the decision was not expected Tuesday, after Hawke's office issued a statement saying the matter was still under consideration "in line with due process."

The prime ministers of Australia and Serbia discussed Djokovic's precarious visa earlier Tuesday.

The deportation drama has polarized opinions and elicited strong support for the 20-time Grand Slam winner in his native Serbia.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Serbian counterpart, Ana Brnabić, agreed in their telephone conversation to keep in touch over the disputed visa, Morrison's office said.

"The PM explained our non-discriminatory border policy and its role in protecting Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic," Morrison's office said in a statement.

Brnabić asked Morrison to ensure Djokovic was treated with dignity, public broadcaster Radio Television of Serbia reported.

"The (Serbian) prime minister especially emphasized the importance of the conditions for training and physical preparation for the upcoming competition, considering that Novak Djokovic was not allowed to train in the previous days," RTS reported.

Djokovic posted an image of himself and three members of his team at Melbourne Park in the very early hours of Tuesday on social media.

"I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation. Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen. I remain focused on that," Djokovic tweeted. "I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans."

A border official canceled Djokovic's visa at Melbourne's airport last Thursday, hours after he arrived in Australia from Marbella, Spain to compete in the tournament.

A judge restored his visa and ordered Djokovic be released from detention on Monday, citing procedural errors by the border officials at the airport.

Djokovic had been given a medical exemption by the Victoria state government and Tennis Australia, the tournament organizer, from its vaccination rules to compete because he was infected with COVID-19 last month.

But the Australian Border Force declined to allow him an exemption from national vaccination rules for incoming non-citizens.

It said an infection in the previous six months was only a ground for a vaccine exemption in cases in which the coronavirus caused severe illness.

There were also new questions over Djokovic's application to enter the country after documents released by the Federal Circuit Court revealed he told authorities he had not traveled in the 14 days before his

flight to Australia.

Monte Carlo-based Djokovic touched down in Melbourne just before midnight Wednesday, answering "no" to the question about previous travel on his Australian Travel Declaration form.

But the reigning Australian Open champion was filmed playing tennis in the streets of the Serbian capital, Belgrade, on Dec. 25, and training in Spain on Dec. 31 — both dates within the 14-day window.

The declaration notes that giving false or misleading information is a serious offense, and civil penalties are also available.

Djokovic told border officers that Tennis Australia completed the declaration on his behalf, but it was noted by the officer who canceled his visa that the sporting body would have facilitated that "based on information the visa holder provided."

Since Djokovic's visa was canceled, Czech tennis player Renata Voráčová and an unnamed European tennis official have been deported for similar reasons.

Morrison's conservative government has blamed the debacle on Tennis Australia, which ministers accuse of misleading players about Australia's vaccine requirements. But newspapers have reported that Tennis Australia had pleaded with the Department of Home Affairs to check the visa paperwork of Djokovic and other players before their in-bound flights.

The opposition home affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, blamed the confusion on a lack of planning by the government and said the saga made Australia "look like a bit of a joke" on the world stage.

"It does incredible damage to Australia" if Djokovic gets deported, Keneally told the Seven Network television, but "if he gets to stay it does incredible damage to our tough border laws and is a real insult to the Australians who did the hard work of lockdowns and vaccination."

Daniel Andrews, premier of Victoria state which is hosting the Australian Open, said the federal government had changed its border rules in recent months.

"When we talked about exemptions previously, you would recall that Minister Hawke had said that it was his expectation that if you weren't double vaxxed, you wouldn't get into the country whether you're playing tennis or doing anything else," said Andrews, who like Keneally is a member of the center-left Labor Party.

"Turned out that wasn't the Commonwealth government's position and that they have been letting people in who haven't been double vaxxed," Andrews added.

## Safety doors failed in NYC high-rise fire that killed 17

By DAVID PORTER, MICHELLE L. PRICE and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Investigators sought answers Monday for why safety doors failed to close when fire broke out in a New York high-rise, allowing thick smoke to rise through the tower and kill 17 people, including eight children, in the city's deadliest blaze in more than three decades.

A malfunctioning electric space heater apparently started the fire Sunday in the 19-story building in the Bronx, fire officials said. The flames damaged only a small part of the building, but smoke poured through the apartment's open door and turned stairwells into dark, ash-choked death traps. The stairs were the only method of escape in a tower too tall for fire escapes.

Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said the apartment's front door and a door on the 15th floor should have been self-closing and blunted the spread of smoke, but the doors stayed fully open. It was not clear if the doors failed mechanically or if they had been manually disabled. Nigro said the apartment door was not obstructed.

The heavy smoke blocked some residents from escaping and incapacitated others as they tried to flee, fire officials said. Firefighters carried out limp children and gave them oxygen and continued making rescues even after their air supplies ran out.

Glenn Corbett, a fire science professor at John Jay College in New York City, said closed doors are vital to containing fire and smoke, especially in buildings that do not have automatic sprinkler systems.

"It's pretty remarkable that the failure of one door could lead to how many deaths we had here, but that's the reality of it," Corbett said. "That one door played a critical role in allowing the fire to spread and

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 28 of 69

the smoke and heat to spread vertically through the building.”

Dozens of people were hospitalized, including several in critical condition. Mayor Eric Adams called it an “unspeakable tragedy” at a news conference near the scene Monday.

“This tragedy is not going to define us,” Adams said. “It is going to show our resiliency.”

Adams lowered the death toll from an initial report Sunday, saying that two fewer people were killed than originally thought. Nigro said patients were taken to seven hospitals and “there was a bit of a double count.”

The dead included children as young as 4 years old, City Council Member Oswald Feliz said.

An investigation was underway to determine exactly how the fire spread and whether anything could have been done to prevent or contain the blaze, Nigro said.

A fire department official said the space heater had been running for a “prolonged period” before the fire began. What caused it to malfunction remains under investigation, spokesman Frank Dwyer said. Fire then spread quickly to nearby furniture and bedding, Dwyer said.

Nigro said the heat was on in the building before the fire started, and the space heater was being used to supplement it.

But Stefan Beauvogui, who lived with his wife in the building for about seven years, said cold was an ongoing problem in his fourth-floor apartment. Beauvogui said he had three space heaters for the winter — for the bedrooms and the sitting room. The heating system that was supposed to warm the apartment “don’t work for nothing.” He said he had complained, but it had not been fixed.

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

The building was equipped with self-closing doors and smoke alarms, but several residents said they initially ignored the alarms because they were so common in the 120-unit building.

Bronx Park Phase III Preservation LLC, the group that owns the building, said it was cooperating fully with the fire department and the city and working to assist residents.

“We are devastated by the unimaginable loss of life caused by this profound tragedy,” the statement said.

A spokeswoman for the ownership group, Kelly Magee, said maintenance staff in July fixed the lock on the front door of the apartment in which the fire started and, while doing that repair, checked that the apartment’s self-closing door was working. No issues were reported with the door after that point, Magee said.

New York City inspectors have issued violations for problems with self-closing doors on five apartments in the building and one opening to a stairwell stretching back a dozen years, according to a database maintained by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The records state that all the violations were corrected.

Residents smoking in the stairwells sometimes tripped the fire alarms, and property managers had been working with them to address the problem, Magee said. She said the alarms appeared to work properly on Sunday.

The tower was required by building codes to have sprinklers only in its trash compactor and laundry room because it has concrete ceilings and floors, she said.

Camber Property Group is one of three firms in the ownership group that purchased the building in 2020 as part of \$166 million purchase of eight affordable housing buildings in the borough. One of Camber’s founders, Rick Gropper, served on Adams’ transition team, advising him on housing. He contributed to a dozen politicians in the past few elections, including \$400 to Adams’ campaign last year.

New York City has been slow to require sprinklers for older apartment buildings, passing laws to mandate them in high-rise office towers after 9/11 but punting in recent years on a bill that would require such measures in residential buildings.

In 2018, a city lawmaker proposed requiring automatic fire sprinklers in residential buildings 40 feet or taller by the end of 2029, but that measure never passed, and the lawmaker recently left office.

A sprinkler system set off by heat in the apartment might have saved lives, said Ronald Siarnicki, executive director of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

“Most likely it would have extinguished that fire or at least held it in check and not produced the amount



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 29 of 69

of toxic smoke," said Siarnicki, adding that firefighter groups have been lobbying for stricter sprinkler requirements for years.

The building is home to many families originally from Gambia in West Africa.

Resident Karen Dejesus said she was used to hearing the fire alarm go off.

"Not until I actually saw the smoke coming in the door did I realize it was a real fire, and I began to hear people yelling, 'Help! Help! Help!'" she said.

Dejesus, who was in her two-floor apartment with her son and 3-year-old granddaughter, immediately called family members and ran to get towels to put under the door. But smoke began coming down her stairs before the 56-year-old resident could get the towels, so the three ran to the back of the apartment.

"It was so scary," she said. "Just the fact that we're in a building that's burning and you don't know how you're going to get out. You don't know if the firefighters are going to get to you in time."

Firefighters broke down her door and helped all three out the window and down a ladder to safety. Dejesus clung to her rescuer on the way down.

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. Sunday's fire happened just days after 12 people, including eight children, were killed in a house fire in Philadelphia.

## Chicago union leaders OK plan to resume in-person class

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Students are poised to return to Chicago Public Schools after leaders of the teachers union approved a plan with the nation's third-largest district over COVID-19 safety protocols, ending a bitter standoff that canceled classes for five days.

While school districts nationwide have faced similar concerns amid skyrocketing COVID-19 cases, the labor fight in union-friendly Chicago amplified concerns over remote learning and other pandemic issues.

The deal approved late Monday would have students in class Wednesday and teachers back a day earlier. It still requires approval with a vote of the union's roughly 25,000 members. Issues on the table have been metrics to close schools amid outbreaks and expanded COVID-19 testing.

Neither side immediately disclosed full details of the proposal Monday evening, but leaders generally said the agreement included metrics to close individual schools and plans to boost district COVID-19 testing. The district notified parents in the largely low-income Black and Latino school district of about 350,000 students that classes would resume Wednesday.

"We know this has been very difficult for students and families," Mayor Lori Lightfoot said at an evening news conference. "Some will ask who won and who lost. No one wins when our students are out of the place where they can learn the best and where they're safest."

In a dueling news conference, union leaders acknowledged it wasn't a "home run" but teachers wanted to be back in class with students.

"It was not an agreement that had everything, it's not a perfect agreement, but it's certainly something we can hold our heads up about, partly because it was so difficult to get," Union President Jesse Sharkey said.

The Chicago Teachers Union's house of delegates voted Monday evening to suspend their work action from last week calling for districtwide online learning until a safety plan had been negotiated or the latest COVID-19 surge subsided. The district, which has rejected districtwide remote instruction, responded by locking teachers out of remote teaching systems two days after students returned from winter break.

While there has been some progress on smaller issues like masks, negotiations over the weekend on a safety plan failed to produce a deal and rhetoric about negotiations became increasingly sharp. Some principals canceled class Tuesday preemptively and warned of further closures throughout the week.

Earlier Monday, Union President Jesse Sharkey said the union and district remained "apart on a number of key features, accusing Lightfoot of refusing to compromise on teachers' main priorities.

"The mayor is being relentless, but she's being relentlessly stupid, she's being relentlessly stubborn,"

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 30 of 69

Sharkey said, playing on a reference the former prosecutor mayor made about refusing to “relent” in negotiations. “She’s relentlessly refusing to seek accommodation and we’re trying to find a way to get people back in school.”

Lightfoot accused teachers of “abandoning” students and shot back at the union president.

“If I had a dollar for every time some privileged, clouted white guy called me stupid, I’d be a bazillionaire,” Lightfoot, who is Black, told WLS-TV.

By evening, she had said she was optimistic with the latest proposal, which went to union leaders for a vote.

Her first term in office has been marked by other battles with the influential union, which supported her opponent in the 2019 election, including a safety protocol fight last year and a 2019 teachers strike.

Developments in the fight, with pending complaints before a state labor board, made international headlines and attracted attention from the White House. Press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that President Joe Biden, who has pressed for schools to stay open, had remained in touch with Lightfoot and Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker during negotiations.

Parents and advocacy groups also stepped up calls Monday for quicker action.

A group of parents on the city’s West Side — near the intersection of largely Black and Latino neighborhoods — demanded students return immediately.

Cheri Warner, the mother of 15-year-old twins, said the sudden loss of in-person learning has taken a toll on her family.

One of her daughters has depression and anxiety, and winter is always difficult. Losing touch with her friends and teachers adds to that burden, Warner said.

The girls “missed their whole eighth grade year and it felt like they weren’t really prepared for high school,” Warner said. “They’re all trying to figure out how to catch up and it’s a really stressful situation.”

Other parents said the district needs to do more.

Angela Spencer, an organizer with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization and a nurse, said she’s concerned about her two kids’ safety in schools. Spencer said her kids’ schools weren’t adequately cleaned before the pandemic and she has “no confidence” in the district’s protocols now.

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

District officials, who call the union action “an illegal stoppage” had kept buildings open for student meal pickup and said that schools with enough staff were allowed to open their doors to students. Some teachers showed up despite union directives; district officials estimated about 16% of teachers did so Monday.

Three schools, including Mount Greenwood Elementary, were able to offer instruction Monday, according to district officials. Parents at the largely white school on the city’s southwest side expressed relief.

City officials argued that schools are safe with protocols in place. School leaders have touted a \$100 million safety plan, including air purifiers in each classroom. Roughly 91% of staff are vaccinated and masks are required indoors.

Union officials have argued the safety measures fall short and the district has botched testing and a database tracking infections.

There were small signs of agreement in recent days.

The district has purchased KN95 masks for students and teachers, agreed to bring back daily COVID-19 screening questions for anyone entering schools, and added more incentives for substitute teachers.

## **Brrr! Some schools close as extreme cold grips US Northeast**

BOSTON (AP) — The Northeast girded Tuesday for extreme cold that was expected to reach a wind chill value of minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 40 Celsius) in some northern areas and closed some schools elsewhere.

Boston’s public school system, the largest in Massachusetts, announced Monday that schools will not

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 31 of 69

open on Tuesday because of expected extremely cold temperatures. The high in the city Tuesday is expected to be 12 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 11 C), with wind chills making it feel as low as minus 8 (minus 22 C), according to National Weather Service forecasters.

New York City, too, was in for subzero temperatures with wind chill factored in, the weather service warned.

It could feel as low as minus 15 F (minus 26 C) in some areas of Massachusetts, according to the weather service. And it could be even colder elsewhere in New England, as forecasters said wind chill could approach minus 40 F (minus 40 C) in some parts of western Maine.

Low temperatures below zero, not including the wind chill, are also expected in Burlington, Vermont, and Concord, New Hampshire. Forecasters said Providence, Rhode Island, should expect a wind chill value of as low as minus 1 degree Fahrenheit (minus 17 C).

Low temperatures can result in frostbite to exposed skin in as little as 30 minutes.

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services announced Monday that four COVID-19 testing sites overseen by the state would be closed Tuesday because of the cold. The sites are in Claremont, Manchester, Nashua and Newington.

Central Maine Power said it is encouraging customers to weather strip windows and open drapes to let in heat from the sun and allow sunlight to reduce reliance on electricity during the cold spell.

## Tarnished Gold: Aircraft, fuel key to illegal Amazon mining

By SAM COWIE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

BOA VISTA, Brazil (AP) — The scorching Amazon sun beats down as a group of agents inspect the body of a black helicopter. Nearby, in the backyard of the federal police headquarters in the city of Boa Vista, sit more than twenty aircraft — all seized.

Some bear signs of violent crashes: caved-in cockpits with wings broken off. Others feature interiors with stripped-out passenger seats in order to load up with more men and women, plus additional motors, fuel, food, and other cargo. Before they were confiscated, the aircraft were allegedly used for flying in and out of illegal gold mining sites.

Here in Roraima state, where all gold mining is illegal, they are essential for transporting prospectors and equipment to far-flung Indigenous reserves, including Brazil's largest, Yanomami. Environmental and Indigenous rights groups estimate some 20,000 illegal miners are present on the reserve that is roughly the same size as Portugal. Government officials, including Brazil's Vice President Hamilton Mourão, put the number closer to 3,500.

"Our focus over this last year has been to go after the logistics of illegal mining," José Roberto Peres, the police superintendent for the state, told the Associated Press during an interview in November. "These are expensive machines; we can deduce that there is a lot of money involved."

Police have intensified their efforts to identify and capture aircraft supporting illegal mining, but tracking down planes' owners is stymied by the fact they're usually registered to fronts — relatives, workers, or spouses who refuse to name names. Still, police said they have identified the true owners of most of the planes they've seized, and keep them as evidence while the investigations advance. Generally, the illegal aircraft owners are local elites who launder their money in Boa Vista hotels, restaurants, gyms, and gasoline stations, according to police officials, who declined to disclose names.

Drawn by high gold prices, reduced state and federal oversight, and outdated mining legislation, plus pro-mining rhetoric and proposed legislation from far-right President Jair Bolsonaro that would make it legal to mine on reserves, thousands of miners have flocked to the Yanomami reserve in search of the precious metal, exacerbating a longstanding problem that has only grown worse in recent years.

An Associated Press investigation, which includes interviews with prosecutors, federal law enforcement agents, miners, and industry insiders, shows that the unauthorized aircraft — and the countless liters of fuel needed to power them and other mining equipment — form the backbone of the shadowy economy of illicit mining here in Roraima state. Without that network functioning smoothly, law enforcement officials

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 32 of 69

and environmental experts say illegal mining operations would collapse.

But attempts to disrupt the illicit operations have been met with just as many countermeasures to subvert the authorities.

## AERIAL EVASION

Dozens of pilots arrived recently in Boa Vista from other states looking for work during Brazil's economic downturn, a time that coincided with high gold prices and a drop in inspections due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Potential rewards for the pilots outweigh the risks which include possible arrest by police or getting lost in the vast, pristine expanse of the Amazon. Last year, one pilot crash-landed in the jungle and survived on his own for five weeks, losing 57 pounds in the process. Another vanished flying between two regions of Yanomami territory known for illegal mining. Local media reports have documented numerous lost and missing pilots.

Small aircraft frequently make trips carrying supplies to and illegally mined gold from the Yanomami reserve, which borders Venezuela. Nimble helicopters used for internal logistics, moving from one mining site to another within the reserve, can quickly hop the border beyond Brazilian authorities' reach.

Adding to law enforcement's difficulties, illegal mining pilots fly low to avoid radar detection, according to Superintendent Peres. In addition, identifying tail numbers on the planes are often altered or removed to make them harder to trace.

A former illegal miner who said he used to operate on the reserve until he was indicted, and spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity, said aircraft serving illegal sites are usually kept in one location, loaded with supplies in another, and then flown to the Yanomami reserve. Locations are constantly switched up to try and avoid seizures, he said in an interview at a riverside public square in Boa Vista.

It is possible to reach parts of Yanomami reserve by boat. But rivers are difficult to navigate and the trip can take several days, making it an inefficient option to rely solely upon. So smugglers depend heavily on aircraft.

The former prospector and a federal police spokesperson told the AP said that the average cost to reach Yanomami land by plane is 10 grams of gold, worth more than \$500 at black market prices.

The rush for gold and the building of illegal airstrips have created frictions with Indigenous groups and have led to a reported uptick in violence. Last year, miners gunned down two young Yanomami men that were hunting near a clandestine helicopter landing spot.

Months later, according to a federal police statement at the time, when they raided the properties searching for one of the suspects, police found guns, cash, and gold – but the suspects were long gone.

## 'THEY'VE TAKEN IT OVER'

Those involved in the illegal gold trade represent a cross-section of individuals and companies ranging from shady fly-by-night operators to legitimate businesses. And a variety of federal agencies have been clamping down on criminal enterprises that profit from illegal mining in protected areas.

Brazil's civil aviation agency is investigating an air taxi company, Icará Turismo Táxi Aéreo, that was awarded government contracts by the country's health ministry to transport Indigenous people and medical equipment. The agency has said it was probing whether the company was also using its planes to bring in prospectors and supplies for illegal mining. The company didn't respond to requests for comment from the AP.

Federal police also froze 9.5 million reais (\$1.7 million) in assets from a group thought to be operating illegal aerial logistics on the Yanomami reserve. Investigations suggest that the group had transactions totaling 425 million reais (\$75 million) over a two-year period. But reports from Brazil's Council for Financial Activities Control indicated the amount of money was beyond the individuals' means, suggesting possible money laundering, the police said.

Police investigators found that the main suspect, who wasn't named, had leased land bordering a protected forest and installed an aviation fuel storage tank. He had permission from the state environmental agency, despite it being illegal, according to the federal police. Investigations said the man used his air taxi company in order to supply wildcat mining operations. Police said those involved include his two children,



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 33 of 69

three others, and frontmen.

Brazil's environmental regulator, Ibama, has also ramped up its efforts against illegal gold mining operations. Last September, the agency closed 59 clandestine airstrips, five helicopter pads, and three river ports within the Yanomami reserve. Agents also seized 11 aircraft, eight vehicles, and three tractors.

More than 300 mostly short videos filmed by agents — part of a report obtained by the AP — show planes hidden with brush and tarps, plus stockpiles of fuel under the forest canopy, sometimes after agents have set them ablaze. Videos shot by agents from helicopters often show people on the ground fleeing the scene — by car, motorcycle, or small boat. Three videos show helicopters taking off just as the agents' aircraft draws close.

In his office in Boa Vista, Roraima state, Alisson Marugal, a federal prosecutor, stood beside a map of the Yanomami reserve and pointed to its outside border. There, he said, are "many more" illegal airstrips, mostly on private properties like farms.

"There is a huge demand inside (coming from the wildcat mines on the reserve)," said Marugal. "For food, for fuel... And if this demand is not met, they (the miners) will leave."

"At the same time, such huge demand always guarantees that there are willing suppliers," he said.

According to data provided exclusively to the AP by MapBiomass, a network of nonprofits, universities, and technology companies that study Brazilian land use, there are at least 40 landing strips within the Yanomami reserve, most of them illegal.

Even airstrips that are supposed to be used by the government to send doctors and medical supplies for the Indigenous people are used by illegal miners, according to Marugal.

Last year, a young Yanomami tribesman was killed when struck by a plane piloted by illegal miners.

"It is supposed to be a landing strip for us, but they've taken it over," Junior Hekurari Yanomami, president of the Yanomami and Ye'kwana Indigenous Health Council, said angrily in an interview in his office.

Superintendent Peres, of the federal police, said despite the beefed-up efforts to go after illegal gold mining and clandestine airstrips in Roraima state, cracking down remains a challenge.

"It's very easy to make a landing strip," he said.

## 'CAPITAL INVESTMENT'

Brazil's Amazon gold prospecting is a far cry from the folkloric image of a man with a pan and a dream wading into the river. Nor does it resemble the low-tech operations of massive pits filled with thousands of men carrying sacks of dirt, immortalized in pictures by Brazil's famous photographer Sebastião Salgado.

Instead, it has become increasingly mechanized. High-powered backhoes manufactured by international brands like Hyundai and Caterpillar are capable of tearing up immense trenches of earth and trees. Prospecting sites in the upper Tapajos River basin, where the Munduruku ethnic group lives, look as though a bomb laid waste to the forest, leaving behind toxic pools.

Authorities earlier last year raided a huge illegal mining camp on the Munduruku Indigenous territory, destroying multiple backhoes.

The prospectors are invaders "who want to destroy, who are sick with hatred," Maria Leusa Munduruku, president of the Munduruku Womens' Association, whose house was burned to the ground by the miners in retaliation, said during a panel discussion last October.

"People who are sick wanting to exploit us, take the gold. We can't eat gold. Gold isn't worth anything to us. What's valuable to us is the water, the river and the forest."

Prospecting on the Yanomami Indigenous land mostly takes two forms: dredging of waterways with barges and surface mining. In the latter, prospectors dig pits and blast away sediment with powerful hoses, from which they separate the water then use mercury to extract the gold.

Due to illegal satellite internet networks that are ubiquitous on Yanomami land, miners are alerted when law enforcement operations begin, giving them time to hide themselves and their valuable equipment.

"When an operation begins, people there are already talking about it," said Superintendent Peres. "They hide machinery in the forest and even sink their dredger barges into the rivers. After they retrieve them, they still work."

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 34 of 69

## FUELING DESTRUCTION

The spread of clandestine communications networks on Yanomami land is one of the many new challenges authorities are scrambling to adapt to in Roraima's modern-day gold rush.

Authorities have long considered seizing or destroying costly planes, helicopters, excavators, and dredging barges an effective means of kneecapping the investors financing the illegal mining.

"Investigations into individuals are slow and take time, proof is difficult to acquire," said Marugal, the federal prosecutor in Roraima state.

But they told the AP they are targeting a new flank in their fight: fuel. Huge amounts of diesel are needed to keep mining machines running and highway police regularly seize large quantities they believe are being supplied to illegal mining operators.

The former prospector, who agreed to speak on the condition of anonymity, said that illegal mining fuel providers constantly switch up which gas stations they use to avoid detection.

Superintendent Peres confirmed the federal police are also investigating the source of fuel used in aircraft engaged in illegal mining operations.

"It is a concern of ours to identify where this fuel is coming from," Peres said, declining to provide details on the probe. "It would be very difficult to supply the mining sites without this fuel."

Last month, Brazil's environment regulator dismantled a scheme by a company to resell fuel taken from Boa Vista's airport to clandestine airstrips, according to an agency statement. The company was fined 1.5 million reais. The company, Pioneiro Fuels, faces additional fines of up to 5 million reais from the oil regulator for presenting insufficient documentation of where and how it moved aircraft fuel, the regulator said in an emailed statement. The company and Pioneiro director Lindinalva Lobato declined to comment when reached by the AP.

The internal report from Brazil's environment regulator obtained by the AP shows a list of Pioneiro's clients from Jan. to Oct. 2021, and detailed investigator notes that revealed some of the alleged buyers had no planes or activities requiring aircraft fuel. Some 868,000 liters (229,000 gallons) of the fuel had no known destination -- more than half what the company sold in the 10-month period, according to the report.

In addition, the report said Pioneiro supplied fuel to illegal airfields and planes that are unlicensed, grounded for technical reasons or for other violations. The tail numbers of at least two planes seized by authorities on the outskirts of Yanomami territory matched those of planes that were previously found fueling up at an airfield supplied by Pioneiro.

"The direct connection between the airfields supplied irregularly by the Pioneiro company with aircraft used in logistical support for irregular mining operations in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory was clear," the report said. "As such, there is indisputable evidence of the link between the company and illegal activities in the Indigenous Territory."

The civil aviation agency, with support from the federal police and environment regulator, last September raided a property where Cataratas Poços Artesianos, a well-drilling contractor, is based. Inside, they found thousands of liters of aviation fuel, mining equipment, and aircraft with illegal modifications -- such as stripped interiors.

One of the business partners is Rodrigo Martins de Mello. He is also a partner in the government-contracted air transport company investigated for possibly flying equipment and miners to illegal gold mining sites.

Since 2018, the health ministry has awarded contracts worth a total 26 million reais (\$4.6 million) to the air taxi company, according to an AP review on the government's transparency database.

De Mello's lawyer, Ana Paula Cruz, said in a statement to the AP that neither he nor his companies have any involvement in illegal mining on Yanomami territory nor the logistics to support it, and that aircraft were seized while parked on his company's property in Boa Vista, not on Yanomami lands. Cruz said she is prevented from discussing details regarding the investigations because of a court decision placing them under seal.

While De Mello is under criminal investigation, he has not been charged with a crime. He has alleged that the lead police detective and some agents of the environment regulator and aviation agency have committed crimes including abuse of authority and producing evidence illegally, Cruz said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 35 of 69

A judge found those arguments partially convincing and last month ruled that half of De Mello's seized assets must be released. The ruling hasn't yet been carried out; for now, his aircraft remain parked behind the federal police headquarters in Boa Vista.

## 'CAT AND MOUSE'

Attempts to crack down on illegal mining in Roraima state face fierce local resistance, despite the fact all mining in the state is illegal. Mining has long been a fixture in the region and deeply ingrained in its history.

In downtown Boa Vista, there is a seven-meter statue adorned with the names of prominent past miners. The monument stands adjacent to the state's legislative assembly.

There, on a recent Thursday morning, members of the Association of Independent Prospectors of Roraima gathered for a public hearing to protest recent operations by environmental agency Ibama and federal police that destroyed mining equipment, during which a miner was shot and killed.

Dozens of them, donning yellow T-shirts emblazoned with a print of the Boa Vista miner's monument and the words "The Prospector is a Worker," sang Brazil's national anthem.

"We are the founders of the state," said Isa Carine Farias, the association's president, and who told the AP she previously worked with illegal mining. "They take an Indigenous person to the United Nations (climate summit); why not take a miner, too?"

Earlier last year, the vast majority of state legislators voted to pass a law allowing gold mining in the state as long as it wasn't on Indigenous lands. The measure was later struck down by the Supreme Court, which deemed it unconstitutional.

Critics feared the law could have allowed the gold mined on Indigenous lands to be fraudulently passed off as gold mined elsewhere, which has occurred in other Brazilian states.

Meanwhile, Sen. Telmário Motta, who represents Roraima state, has proposed legislation to prevent the destruction of mining equipment by federal officials. By law in Brazil, agents are permitted to destroy equipment that cannot be seized and auctioned because it is too costly or difficult to move, which is often the case with mining equipment or aircraft found on far-flung lands.

President Bolsonaro, who is popular in Roraima state, has also repeatedly spoken out against the destruction of equipment.

But the biggest legislative flashpoint is a bill presented by Bolsonaro's mining minister, which would regulate mining on Indigenous territories nationwide. Bolsonaro has pressured lawmakers to bring it to a vote, even as federal prosecutors have called it unconstitutional and activists warn it would wreak vast social and environmental damages.

Vice President Mourão, who oversees the government's Amazon Council, said in response to an AP question during a meeting with the foreign press that authorities face great challenges in combating mining on Indigenous lands.

"This is a game of cat and mouse," Mourão said on Oct. 25. "It will end in one of two ways: either the community approves legal production, and that would be considering all environmental norms, or else we will have to keep soldiers all over that whole jungle area."

But while soldiers can provide an additional show of force to aid law enforcement operations, they do little to help the investigations by understaffed environmental agencies, police, and prosecutors working to disrupt a sprawling illicit network bent on outfoxing them.

"If a big figure is arrested, another simply steps in... There is no big boss; there are too many," said Marugal, the federal prosecutor in Roraima state.

He added that the time between enforcement operations by federal police and environmental agencies is often too long, allowing the miners to reorganize quickly and resume their mining of Yanomami lands.

"In certain regions (of the territory), even after operations this year, with equipment seized and destroyed, wildcat mining grew," he said.

## **GOP steps up bid to persuade Hogan to run for Senate in Md.**

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and other top Republicans are stepping up a personal campaign

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 36 of 69

to persuade Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan to run for the Senate and help the party's chances of regaining control of the chamber.

The recruitment effort has included McConnell's wife, Elaine Chao, who held Cabinet positions in the Trump and George W. Bush administrations. Moderate Senate Republicans, including Susan Collins of Maine, have also been in direct contact with Hogan to note that his centrist brand of politics would be welcome in a chamber riven with partisanship. Several other Washington officials have made financial pledges or shared internal polling to try to convince Hogan that he has a path to victory.

President Joe Biden carried Maryland by 32 percentage points in 2020 and a Republican hasn't won a statewide federal office in more than 30 years. Hogan, who is prevented by term limits from running for reelection, has long resisted the idea of challenging Democratic incumbent Sen. Chris Van Hollen. One of the GOP's most prominent critics of former President Donald Trump, Hogan has toyed with mounting a presidential campaign in 2024.

Still, his willingness to recently engage with high-profile recruiters suggests Hogan has not ruled out a Senate run. If he were to enter the Senate race instead, it would force Democrats to devote money and other resources in a longtime blue state at a time when they're already bracing for a difficult campaign season across the country.

Hogan maintained on Monday that he remains focused on his work as governor.

"While I appreciate all the encouragement and outpouring of support in Maryland and across the country, my focus continues to be on leading Maryland through the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing our economic recovery and addressing rising violent crime," Hogan told The Associated Press. "As long as I have the honor to serve as governor, I'm going to give this job everything I've got."

The recruitment effort was described by multiple people with direct knowledge of the talks. They requested anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Hogan's decision, which must come before the Feb. 22 filing deadline, is among the last major unanswered questions as the Senate landscape begins to settle heading into the first midterm election cycle of Biden's presidency.

Publicly, Democrats remain confident about their standing in state where Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-to-1.

"Our campaign is totally prepared for whoever Mitch McConnell recruits to run here," Van Hollen spokesman Keith Presley said. "Senator Van Hollen is busy working to get results for the people of Maryland and to protect our democracy."

For their part, McConnell and Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who leads the GOP's Senate campaign arm, have held multiple recruitment conversations with Hogan in recent months. McConnell's lieutenant, Steven Law, who leads a McConnell-allied super PAC, also spoke to the Republican governor.

More recently, however, the GOP recruitment push has gotten more personal.

With Hogan unpersuaded by McConnell's pitches, Chao encouraged a Senate bid during a private lunch with Hogan's wife in the Maryland governor's mansion, which Hogan briefly attended. Chao was scheduled to bring her father to another private lunch with Mrs. Hogan, although it was canceled due to a COVID-19 concern.

During the lunch, Chao emphasized the sense of community on Capitol Hill with the other senators' families. She also appealed to Mrs. Hogan's sense of patriotism, pitching the Senate as a great way for the Hogans to serve their country. Chao and Yumi Hogan, both prominent Asian Americans, were friends before the Senate race became a focus.

At the same time, a handful of Republican senators, including Collins, have reached out to Hogan directly to encourage him to run. And more than one suitor, including at least one fellow Republican governor, has made the case that the Senate could be a stepping stone to a future presidential bid, which Hogan has openly contemplated.

Those close to Hogan are skeptical he will ultimately decide to run for the Senate. So far, he has done nothing to prepare for a Senate campaign aside from agreeing to speak to his Republican recruiters.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 37 of 69

Washington Republicans are betting that Hogan could break their losing streak in Maryland. He's already won statewide office twice, including in 2018, an election year that favored Democrats nationally. He's enjoyed strong approval ratings throughout his time in office.

But history suggests that appeal in statewide elections may not transfer to higher office. Montana's former two-term governor, Steve Bullock, was a prized Democratic recruit for Senate in 2020 who went on to lose his race by 10 percentage points in a campaign dominated by national issues.

Facing a similar dynamic and decrying partisanship in Washington, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu in November resisted an aggressive lobbying push from McConnell and his allies and instead announced plans to seek another term as governor.

Should Hogan run, his team knows he will be tested as never before.

For example, he has so far largely avoided the stain of a developing ethics scandal involving his former chief of staff, Roy McGrath, who is facing multiple state and federal criminal charges related to a severance package he sought when he left the top job at a quasi-public state agency to serve as Hogan's top aide.

The messy situation is just the kind of political ammunition critics in both parties might use to attack Hogan in a well-funded television advertising campaign.

"The fact that Hogan would vote to make Mitch McConnell majority leader and turn the Senate over to Republicans — coupled with his escalating corruption and ethics scandals — would provide voters more than enough reasons to decisively reject his campaign," said David Bergstein, spokesman for the Senate Democrats' campaign arm. "If he does run, all he'll do is join the 40-year long history of Republicans losing statewide federal elections in Maryland."

## Families separated at border now fear extortion attempts

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, BEN FOX and CLAUDIA TORRENS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the 30-year-old Honduran woman, the worst seemed to be over. She's been reunited with her son who, as a 6-year-old, was separated from her under the Trump administration. She's working construction in North Carolina. And attorneys were negotiating a payment for families like hers that endured separations.

But reports about those negotiations have created a new worry: extortion attempts stemming from the mistaken belief that she received a huge payout. Her family has already received demands for \$5,000 a month.

"Apparently, I am a millionaire now," said the woman, who, like others interviewed by The Associated Press, spoke on condition of anonymity due to fears for her family's safety. "I don't have the money to pay for something like that and I don't know what to do. I am desperate, really."

While specific reports are isolated, widespread extortion in Central America explains why many seek asylum in the United States in the first place. Some advocates fear prospects of large payments will fuel many more threats. An attorney for the woman and other families has asked U.S. officials to consider admitting more relatives because of the threats.

It is far from clear whether families will receive any money at all from the U.S. government. Negotiations to settle claims for damages ended amid political outrage over payments erupted following a report in the *The Wall Street Journal* that the Justice Department was considering \$450,000 a person to compensate for suffering — or \$900,000 for a parent and child. A person familiar with the talks who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because discussions were private confirmed that figure had been floated.

"People here think that I have lots of money," said a 47-year-old business owner in northern Guatemala whose wife was separated from their son. He has become more nervous because of news reports on the settlement talks and now changes his cellphone number every two weeks.

The man lives in Guatemala with his 14-year-old daughter, while his wife and now 18-year-old son live in Atlanta after being separated at the border for more than a month in 2018. The man said he was getting text messages at the time threatening to kidnap his son if he didn't pay money.

"My neighbor told me the other day, 'So you have money, because money was given to people who

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 38 of 69

were separated in the United States.' And I told him that I did not know anything about that," he said.

The man said he and his daughter tried going to the U.S. in 2019. They were kidnapped in Mexico for two weeks, released to Mexican authorities after paying more than \$3,000 and deported to Guatemala.

"I don't live in peace," he said. "I am always looking over my shoulder."

Ricardo de Anda, an attorney for the Honduran woman and Guatemalan man, said five of the 72 families he represents have told him they were threatened after news coverage of the possible payments. One in Guatemala was targeted in an attempted kidnapping.

"These families have told us that they are now the subject of rumors in their communities as to the apparent wealth of family members in the U.S., that they have been subjected to surveillance by apparent criminal elements, and that they have been warned to be vigilant as criminal gangs are considering them the subjects of extortion," he wrote to Michelle Brané, executive director of the Homeland Security Department's Family Reunification Task Force. "As a result of the (news) leaks, family members in the U.S., and those trapped in home country, now live in constant fear."

The task force, which is aiming to reunite nearly 2,000 children with their parents in the United States, had planned for the possibility of extortion, realizing that such threats are common in Central America, and set up a system to channel reports through the U.N. refugee agency, Brane said in an interview last month.

Brané said she had not yet received any specific reports but the potential danger underscores the need for the task force to complete its work.

"If families are in unsafe situations and need reunification, we are here to work and get that done as soon as possible," she said.

The task force has reunited about 112 children with their parents in the U.S. as of last week. They are being granted permission to stay in the country for at least three years while they pursue asylum or seek permanent status through another program.

Other attorneys for the families said they had no direct knowledge of threats tied to possible payments but said they were inevitable, if they haven't happened already. The attorneys suspect some attempts have gone unreported or word hasn't reached them.

"I have no doubt that it's happening in more cases than we know about," said Trina Realmuto, executive director of the National Immigration Litigation Alliance, which was involved in settlement talks over financial compensation.

The talks are delicate for the administration, which has been criticized for considering large payouts. President Joe Biden himself said, "That's not going to happen," when asked in November about the \$450,000 figure, and later clarified that he backed some compensation.

Last month, the Justice Department withdrew from talks over financial compensation after eight months but didn't rule out an agreement.

"While the parties have been unable to reach a global settlement agreement at this time, we remain committed to engaging with the plaintiffs and to bringing justice to the victims of this abhorrent policy," the department said in a statement.

This month, attorneys for families renewed a request for the administration to turn over troves of records on how the policy was conceived and executed, signaling a potentially long court battle.

Talks have continued over non-monetary issues, including reunifying families in the United States and other services, such as mental health, attorneys said.

De Anda asked the administration to consider admitting family members who were threatened since the news reports. The administration has focused on parents and children who were separated but says it will consider additional families case by case.

The Honduran woman said her 56-year-old mother has received notes asking for \$5,000 a month. The mother cares for the woman's other children, an 11-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter. The woman wants all to join her in North Carolina.

Acquaintances have warned that the children may be unsafe in Honduras.

"I am scared," said the woman, who takes pills for anxiety and went to the emergency room with chest

pains after the threats against her mother. "I don't know what can happen to my kids."

## **IOC major sponsors mostly muted in runup to Beijing Olympics**

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

The Beijing Winter Olympics are fraught with potential hazards for major sponsors, who are trying to remain quiet about China's human rights record while protecting at least \$1 billion they've collectively paid to the IOC.

That could reach \$2 billion when new figures are expected this year. Sponsors include big household names like Coca-Cola, Procter & Gamble, Visa, Toyota, Airbnb, and Panasonic.

The International Olympic Committee's so-called TOP sponsors are being squeezed by a diplomatic boycott led by the United States, the economic power of 1.4 billion Chinese — and the fear of retaliation by China's authoritarian government.

China, itself, was part of a full-fledged boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"They (sponsors) are trying to walk a fine line between trying to get the best exposure, but also not trying to be perceived as too close to the actions of the Chinese government," Mark Conrad, who teaches sports law and ethics at Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business, said in an email.

The IOC created the strain by returning to a country whose rights abuses were well documented in the runup to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. They now rival the pandemic for attention with the Winter Games opening on Feb. 4.

The rights violations committed against Muslim Uyghurs and other minorities clash with the lofty principles in the Olympic Charter. The Charter speaks of putting "sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity."

It further adds: "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, color, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

The Associated Press contacted most of the major Olympic sponsors, but was met largely with silence about their plans, or told the focus was on the athletes. One sponsor that replied, German financial services company Allianz, said it was "in regular contact with the IOC" and stood behind ideals of the Games.

One person in touch with sponsors, who was not authorized to speak and asked not to be named, said the general mood, especially for those focused outside the China market, was to avoid mentioning Beijing and to work around the edges.

"I would not be surprised that the sponsors would remain silent," said Dae Hee Kawk, director of the Center for Sports Marketing at the University of Michigan. "You could potentially lose business."

Retaliation is a concern. The NBA experienced it in 2019 when a Houston Rockets executive sided in a tweet with democracy protests in Hong Kong. Last month, Olympic sponsor Intel had to apologize after publishing a letter on its website that asked suppliers to avoid sourcing from China's Xinjiang region.

Sponsors usually saturate the space around the Olympics. Less so now with lucrative hospitality programs also shelved by the pandemic.

"The sponsors' silence speaks volumes — more than any news release can," wrote Conrad, the sports law professor at Fordham.

The pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics stymied sponsors. Fans were banned, officials shuttered an enclosure brimming with sponsor marquees, and Toyota, one of Japan's three major Olympic sponsors, pulled its ads off local TV to avoid being linked to the Olympics. This raised the question of sponsors seeking compensation from the IOC.

The Games were unpopular in Japan when they opened, but polls showed they were seen as successful once they closed.

Asked about its planning for Beijing, Toyota spokeswoman Rina Naruke offered the following to the AP in a brief statement.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 40 of 69**

"We are unable to provide any specific details at this time. We will update you once we have more information."

Terrence Burns, who has worked for the IOC in marketing and branding but is better known as an independent consultant who helped land five successful Olympic bids, disputed a suggestion that the Beijing Olympics were very different, or that sponsors were treading lightly.

"The marketing opportunity for Beijing 2022 has always been the ability to promote a Chinese Games in the Chinese market; just as it was for the 2008 Games," Burns wrote in an email to AP.

"The biggest commercial impact of the Beijing Games for TOP partners will be in the Chinese market. And realistically, that's not too different from any past Games."

Burns said the IOC's sponsors were in it for the long haul. Coca-Cola has been associated with the Olympics since 1928, and the next few Games look financially promising.

"I see zero commercial evidence of a consumer backlash or concern against any TOP partner. None," Burns wrote.

Upcoming Olympics are 2024 in Paris, followed by Milan-Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, and Los Angeles. The IOC has also announced Brisbane, Australia, for the 2032 Summer Olympics, and Sapporo, Japan, is a top contender for the 2030 Winter Games.

Host cities are no longer selected in a bid process, which was subject to well-reported corruption by some rank-and-file IOC members. The IOC leadership now picks the venues with rubber-stamp approval from members.

IOC sponsors have come under pressure from human rights advocates and some members of the U.S. Congress, who have called for moving the Olympics or a full-fledged boycott. Last month an unofficial body set up in Britain concluded that the Chinese government committed genocide and crimes against humanity.

China has called this the "lie of the century" and says the interment camps in northwestern Xinjiang are used for job training.

The five U.S.-based sponsors — Coca-Cola, Intel, Airbnb, Procter & Gamble, and Visa — were grilled in a bi-partisan hearing in July by the Congressional Executive Committee on China.

Most dodged pointed questions, said they had to follow Chinese law, had nothing to do with choosing Beijing as the venue, and focused on the athletes no matter the Games.

Intel's Steven Rodgers, an executive vice president and general counsel, was the only one of five to say he believed the conclusions of the U.S. State Department that China was "committing genocide against the Uyghur people."

Olympic sponsors and NBCUniversal, the broadcast rights holder for the United States, were asked in a letter from Human Rights Watch to be aware of the rights climate in China, and to scrutinize supply chains.

President Joe Biden signed a bill last month that bans goods made in northwestern China's Xinjiang region, unless companies can show forced labor was not involved.

NBC has paid \$7.75 billion for the next six Olympics (2022 through 2032) and the network accounts for almost 40% of all IOC income, serving as its main partner. It has begun promoting the Olympics in the United States but minimizes references to Beijing.

IOC President Thomas Bach has repeatedly said the Olympics must be "politically neutral." But they seldom are. Four years ago in the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, Bach aggressively promoted his bid to drive talks between the two Koreas.

Late last year, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Olympic Truce Resolution by a consensus of the 193 member states; 173 co-sponsored the resolution.

However, 20 nations did not sign up as co-sponsors including the United States, Britain, Japan, Canada, Australia, India and North Korea. The United States and Australia are future Olympic hosts, Japan just held the Summer Olympics and is a candidate for 2030, and North Korea is China's staunchest ally.

Bach has declined to condemn the alleged genocide or speak out on human rights in China. He seldom mentions the Uyghurs by name.

"We have our full focus on the athletes," Bach said. "We welcome that they can participate, that they



are supported by their national governments. The rest is politics.”

## **EXPLAINER: Why are Chicago schools, teachers union fighting?**

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago scrapped classes for five days in a confusing standoff that ended late Monday with the teachers’ union over COVID-19 safety measures in the nation’s third-largest school district.

From remote instruction to testing, both sides have been negotiating nearly a dozen complex points of a safety plan that loomed over students’ return from winter break. The fight came as other districts have had to increasingly shift online amid soaring COVID-19 cases.

Leaders on both sides described the tentative agreement, which requires a full union vote, in general terms, but did not offer specific details.

Here is a closer look:

### REMOTE LEARNING

The issue that caused the most chaos in the roughly 350,000-student district was when and how to revert to remote learning.

The Chicago Teachers Union wanted the ability to switch to districtwide remote instruction and offered a lower bar for closing individual schools. Initially, they proposed metrics similar to last year’s safety agreement, which expired before the school year and remained under negotiation.

School leaders flat out opposed any districtwide return online, so much that they opted to cancel classes rather than allow it temporarily as the union argued was necessary amid the spike. Chicago Public Schools leaders said the pandemic is different now compared to a year ago with availability of vaccines and roughly 91% of staff vaccinated. School officials also said remote learning is detrimental to students.

Two days after students returned from winter break, the union voted to return to remote instruction on its own and most union members stayed out of schools, saying they would return when there’s a deal or the latest surge of infections subsided. The district responded by locking them out of teaching platforms allowing them to teach remotely and canceling class.

During this year, individual classes have temporarily gone remote during smaller outbreaks.

The tentative agreement did not include a provision for districtwide closures, but both sides agreed to metrics to shut down individual schools, depending on many students and staff were absent related to COVID-19.

### COVID-19 TESTING

The union wanted to expand COVID testing districtwide, requiring tests unless families opt out with the goal of randomly testing at least 10% of the student and staff population weekly. The union has blasted the district for being slow to roll out school testing and botching a holiday testing program, in which issues with mailing tests back to the district ultimately made thousands of samples invalid.

Under the tentative agreement, the district will expand testing, but rejected the opt-out system. Earlier on, Mayor Lori Lightfoot had said testing was a “quasi-medical procedure” and cited liability issues.

Families have been hesitant to enroll in the existing district program, which requires consent for guided weekly nasal swabs. In October, only about 7% of students had signed up. The number has slowly increased, but under the proposal the district and union committed to increasing participation.

Over the weekend, the district did secure about 350,000 antigen tests from the state of Illinois, but district leaders haven’t spelled out how they will be used.

### LABOR DISPUTE

The COVID-19 safety fight in union-friendly Chicago is the latest extension of the contentious relationship between Lightfoot and the union. The CTU backed Lightfoot’s opponent in the 2019 election and went on an 11-day strike later that year.

Both sides have filed complaints with a state labor board over unfair practices and the rhetoric outside

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 42 of 69

of the bargaining table became increasingly sharp.

Union President Jesse Sharkey called Lightfoot "relentlessly stupid" in her response to school closures, while the mayor accused teachers of an "illegal walkout," saying they've "abandoned kids."

The district has refused to pay teachers who don't show up.

During negotiations, the union asked that no members be disciplined or docked pay and wanted an outside party to resolve disputes. The district did not offer any assurances that pay would be restored.

## OTHER ISSUES

Over the past two weeks, both sides publicized areas of agreement.

The district purchased KN95 masks for students and teachers, agreed to bring back daily COVID-19 screening questions for anyone entering schools, and added more incentives to increase the number of substitute teachers. Also, teachers will be able to take unpaid leave related to the pandemic, either for their own illness or increased risk.

## The Latest: Georgia beats Alabama 33-18 for national title

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The Latest on the College Football Playoff championship game (all times local): 11:57 p.m.

Stetson Bennett threw two touchdown passes to lead Georgia to a 33-18 win over Alabama on Monday night for its first national championship in 41 years.

Bennett, a former walk-on, threw scoring passes of 40 yards to Adonai Mitchell and 15 yards to Brock Bowers.

Georgia again leaned on its defense. The clinching touchdown came on cornerback Kelee Ringo's 79-yard interception return of Bryce Young's pass with less than a minute remaining.

Georgia won its first national title since 1980. Vince Dooley, the 89-year-old coach of that team, attended the game.

The Bulldogs lost to Alabama 41-24 in the Southeastern Conference championship game on Dec. 4.

Bennett's lost fumble set up an Alabama touchdown for an 18-13 lead with about 10 minutes remaining. Georgia dominated the remainder of the game.

It was the first win for Georgia coach Kirby Smart, the former Alabama defensive coordinator, in five meetings with Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban.

11:28 p.m.

Stetson Bennett's 40-yard touchdown pass to Adonai Mitchell has given Georgia a 19-18 lead over Alabama in the national championship game.

Bennett lost a fumble on Georgia's previous drive, leading to an Alabama touchdown.

The Bulldogs responded with their most pass-happy drive of the game. Jermaine Burton had a 10-yard catch to open the drive before drawing a pass-interference penalty.

Bennett was sacked but answered quickly with the scoring pass to Mitchell, a freshman.

Georgia's James Cook was stopped on the 2-point run.

11:15 p.m.

Alabama regained the lead in the national championship game with its first touchdown, thanks to a nonchalant-looking fumble recovery and Bryce Young's short touchdown pass to Cameron Latu.

Young's 3-yard scoring pass gave the Crimson Tide an 18-13 lead with 10:14 left against Georgia. Young was tackled behind the line on a 2-point attempt.

The score was set up when Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett lost the ball while Christian Harris was dragging him to the turf. Bennett was trying to throw the ball, but it appeared to come out before his arm moved forward and it was ruled a fumble on the field. Replay upheld the call.

Alabama safety Brian Branch almost casually collected the ball as he was headed out of bounds, getting

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 43 of 69

one foot in bounds.

10:50 p.m.

Georgia took its first lead of the national championship game with the first touchdown by either team. A 67-year-old run by James Cook set up Zamir White's 1-yard score that put the Bulldogs ahead of Alabama 13-9 with 1:20 left in the third quarter.

Before White found the end zone, the Southeastern Conference rivals had combined for five field goals.

10:35 p.m.

Alabama receiver Jameson Williams' national championship game ended early, but his team still led 9-6. The All-American, a transfer from Ohio State, returned to the sideline in street clothes midway through the third quarter. Williams appeared to hurt his left knee in the first half at the end of a 40-yard catch. It was a non-contact injury. He had four catches for 65 yards.

Alabama spread the ball around without Williams, with eight different players catching passes. The Tide also used running back Brian Robinson Jr. more after Williams was hurt.

9:50 p.m.

No. 1 Alabama leads No. 3 Georgia 9-6 at halftime of the CFP championship game, a contest that has turned into a defensive struggle.

The two teams combined for five field goals and have just 31 yards rushing.

The Crimson Tide lost top receiver Jameson Williams with what appeared to be an injured left knee early in the second quarter. He has not returned.

Coach Nick Saban told ESPN at halftime that young receivers would have to step up.

"They've got talent. So they've got to play with competitive character and have a chance to make some plays. They're capable," Saban said. "They don't have the experience, but they're going to get it tonight."

Georgia coach Kirby Smart says his team needs to avoid mistakes on offense.

"We've got to settle down," he said. "We haven't had probably one drive where we didn't have negative yards starting where we had to back up."

Georgia will receive the second half kickoff.

9:18 p.m.

Alabama wide receiver Jameson Williams went down with an apparent left knee injury.

The Crimson Tide All-American clutched his left knee lying on the ground after a 40-yard catch in the second quarter against Georgia. Williams was helped off the field, putting minimal weight on his left leg. He walked toward the locker room minutes later.

Alabama scored on the drive to take a 6-3 lead.

Alabama was already without 1,000-yard receiver John Metchie III, lost to a knee injury in the Southeastern Conference championship game. Freshman Agiye Hall was pressed into action.

Williams is one of the nation's top deep threats, with four touchdown catches of 70-plus yards to lead the nation. He had four catches for 65 yards at the time of the injury.

Williams had seven catches for 184 yards and two touchdowns in the SEC title game against the Bulldogs.

8:10 p.m.

A sellout crowd, clad largely in red, filled Lucas Oil Stadium arrived early for the national championship game between SEC rivals No. 1 Alabama and No. 3 Georgia.

Organizers were following the county health department's guidelines — strongly encouraging masks be worn but not requiring it. Unlike last year's title game in Miami, fans were not socially distanced.

Capacity of the stadium is about 70,000.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 44 of 69

7:30 p.m.

New College Football Hall of Fame inductee Andrew Luck returned to Lucas Oil Stadium for what is believed to be his first appearance at the Indianapolis Colts home field since he retired unexpectedly in August 2019.

Luck was one of 21 former players or coaches named as part of this year's Hall of Fame class earlier in the day.

The two-time Heisman Trophy runner-up looked much thinner than he did when playing for the Colts from 2012-18. He was the No. 1 overall draft pick in 2012 and replaced Peyton Manning as the Colts starter.

When word leaked of Luck's retirement near the end of a preseason game, Indy fans began booing. After the game, Luck made his official retirement announcement — a little sooner than he had planned.

3 p.m.

Indianapolis' city streets were bustling Monday afternoon, almost five hours before No. 1 Alabama and No. 3 Georgia played for college football's national championship.

The blue Colts attire that local fans usually wear was replaced with red hats, shirts, jackets and jerseys of the two Southeastern Conference teams, playing for a title in the Midwest.

Fans waited in long lines inside and outside restaurants despite temperatures hovering in the mid-20s, while others flocked to Monument Circle for afternoon concerts with Breland and Sam Hunt underneath the sun-drenched skies.

Alabama beat Georgia five weeks ago in the SEC title game, but the Bulldogs are a slight favorite. This is the first rematch for the championship in the playoff era.

The game kicks off at Lucas Oil Stadium at 8 p.m. and airs on ESPN.

## Home COVID tests to be covered by insurers starting Saturday

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Starting Saturday, private health insurers will be required to cover up to eight home COVID-19 tests per month for people on their plans. The Biden administration announced the change Monday as it looks to lower costs and make testing for the virus more convenient amid rising frustrations.

Under the new policy, first detailed to the AP, Americans will be able to either purchase home testing kits for free under their insurance or submit receipts for the tests for reimbursement, up to the monthly per-person limit. A family of four, for instance, could be reimbursed for up to 32 tests per month. PCR tests and rapid tests ordered or administered by a health provider will continue to be fully covered by insurance with no limit.

President Joe Biden faced criticism over the holiday season for a shortage of at-home rapid tests as Americans traveled to see family amid the surge in cases from the more transmissible omicron variant. Now the administration is working to make COVID-19 home tests more accessible, both by increasing supply and bringing down costs.

Later this month, the federal government will launch a website to begin making 500 million at-home COVID-19 tests available via mail. The administration also is scaling up emergency rapid-testing sites in areas experiencing the greatest surges in cases.

The insurer-covered testing would dramatically reduce costs for many Americans, and the administration hopes that by easing a barrier to more regular at-home testing, it can help slow the spread of the virus, get kids back into school more quickly and help people gather safely.

"This is all part of our overall strategy to ramp up access to easy-to-use, at-home tests at no cost," Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a statement. "By requiring private health plans to cover people's at-home tests, we are further expanding Americans' ability to get tests for free when they need them."

Biden announced the federal requirement late last year, and it kicks in on Jan. 15, but the administration had been silent until now on details of the plan.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 45 of 69

The administration is trying to incentivize private insurers to cover the tests up-front and without a cumbersome reimbursement process. Insurance plans that work with pharmacies and retailers to cover the up-front costs of the tests will be required to reimburse only up to \$12 per test if purchased through an out-of-network retailer. Plans that don't move proactively to set up a network of pharmacies would have to cover the full retail price that the customer paid — which could be more than \$12 per test.

The two main health insurance industry groups said insurers would carry out the administration's order, but cautioned consumers it won't be as easy as flipping a switch.

"Health insurance providers will work as quickly as possible to implement this guidance in ways that limit consumer confusion and challenges," Matt Eyles, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, said in a statement. "While there will likely be some hiccups in early days, we will work with the administration to swiftly address issues as they arise."

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association had a more direct response. "We are concerned that the policy does not solve for the limited supply of tests in the country and could cause additional consumer friction as insurers stand up a program in just four days' time," Kim Keck, the group's president, said in a statement.

Both groups said they support provisions in the Biden administration plan to counteract potential price gouging on tests.

Only tests purchased on or after Jan. 15 will be required to be reimbursed, the administration said. Some insurers may choose to cover the costs of at-home tests purchased earlier, but they won't have to.

Mina Bressler, a mother of two and a therapist in San Mateo, California, was able to buy rapid test kits online and shared some with a parent who works in the service industry and doesn't have time to "sit at her computer every hour refreshing the Walmart page to see when tests are in stock."

"I gave her some and her kids went to school. That's one time and there's a million of her," Bressler said.

"Just like vaccines becoming available really shone a light on the inequity of what's going on in this pandemic, I think testing is the new flashlight for that because who's going online stalking Walmart? It's not the most vulnerable people in the county," Bressler added.

Americans on Medicare won't be able to get tests reimbursed through the federal insurance plan, but Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program plans are required to cover the cost of at-home tests fully. Those who are not on a covered insurance plan can receive free tests through the forthcoming federal website or from some local community centers and pharmacies.

## California governor proposes tax cuts, expanded health care

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — With state revenues at an all-time high, California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday proposed a budget that would cut taxes while also promising to pay the health care expenses of all of the state's low-income adults who are living in the country illegally.

It will cost state taxpayers about \$2.2 billion per year to cover the cost of health care for the state's low-income immigrants. Meanwhile, Newsom's tax cuts would reduce revenue by more than \$6.5 billion.

But the numbers still balance because California has a projected \$45.7 billion surplus, driven by incredible growth in tax collections during the pandemic. California taxes the wealthy more than people with lower incomes to the point that, in 2019, the top 1% of earners paid nearly 45% of all the state's income tax collections.

That top 1% has only gotten richer during the pandemic. While California has the highest unemployment rate in the country, it is on pace to collect at least \$25 billion in capital gains taxes in 2021, the most ever. A "capital gain" is income that comes from selling an asset, like a stock, and is how most wealthy people make their money.

"We have the capacity to invest in our growth engines, invest in the future, as well as make sure that we prepare for the uncertainties that the future presents," Newsom said, touting his plan to put \$34.6 billion in reserves.

California taxpayers already pay the health care costs for low-income immigrants 26 and younger and

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 46 of 69

plans to cover people 50 and older this May. Newsom's proposal would cover everyone else starting in January 2024.

Immigrant health advocates have been pushing for this since the federal Affordable Care Act took effect in 2014. That dramatically reduced the number of people in California without health insurance.

"The glaring gap was those who were left out because of immigration status," said Sarah Dar, director of health and public benefit policies for the California Immigrant Policy Center.

Newsom's plan, if it becomes law, would cover nearly 700,000 additional people. California Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly said the state already supports these people through charity, emergency and other forms of free care, and that officials believe insuring this population, over time, will reduce these costs.

The biggest tax cut would be for businesses. At the start of the pandemic in 2020, California temporarily raised taxes on businesses to help offset what they thought would be a huge deficit. Instead, California posted record surpluses. That tax increase was scheduled to expire at the end of this year. Newsom wants to end it one year early, which would cost the state about \$5.5 billion in revenue.

But the tax cut that will get the most attention is at the pump, where Californians are paying the highest gas prices in the nation. California taxes gasoline at 51.1 cents per gallon. That tax is scheduled to increase on July 1 because of inflation.

Newsom wants to halt that increase, at least for this year. Doing so would cost the state about \$523 million in revenue for things like roads and bridges. But Newsom says the state can cover that loss with its surplus.

Last year, California spent billions of dollars on stimulus checks, with most people getting about \$1,000 in addition to the federal stimulus package. This year, Newsom wants to give \$1,000 to every low-income family that has a child age 5 or younger.

The state did this last year, but families with no incomes weren't eligible. This year, Newsom wants to also give that money to families with no incomes. That would cost about \$55 million a year. He also wants to give \$1,000 to people who have come through the state's foster care system but are still 25 or younger. That would cost about \$20 million.

But it's possible California could again hand out stimulus checks to residents this year. Newsom said revenues are growing so quickly that the state is projected to exceed a constitutional spending limit by about \$2.6 billion. If that happens, the state could give some of that money back to taxpayers.

Newsom cautioned that the spending limit calculations are complex, saying the figure will change substantially by May when he updates his proposal before lawmakers vote on it.

"There likely will be substantial contributions back to the taxpayers," Newsom said. "In what form they come in, we'll work with the Legislature."

Newsom's proposal now heads to the state Legislature, where Democrats have majorities so large they can pass any spending plan without Republican votes. Several Democratic leaders issued statements on Monday praising Newsom's plan but pledging to work with him over the next month on changes.

For example, Newsom is asking the Legislature to pass a law giving workers more paid time off if they get sick from the coronavirus. California had a law like this last year, but it expired in September.

Last year, companies could get reimbursed from the federal government for money they paid workers who took time off for the coronavirus. But the federal government isn't doing that anymore. Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, a Democrat from Los Angeles, said if California requires companies to give workers more paid time off, the state should help them pay for it.

"I support augmenting the Governor's budget to add state funding for this purpose, and we have already had a productive discussion on this," Rendon said.

Senate Republican Leader Scott Wilk praised Newsom for proposals like halting the gas tax increase, boosting law enforcement spending to investigate and prevent retail theft and cutting taxes for businesses. But in general, Republicans criticized Newsom for throwing money at the state's problems.

"The mentality that success is defined by how much is spent instead of by real, measurable, and actual results is mindboggling," said Vince Fong, the Republican vice chair of the Assembly Budget Committee.

"Californians are living a different reality seeing problems only getting worse."

## 14-year-old girl shot by police remembered at LA funeral

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A 14-year-old girl who was killed when a Los Angeles police officer fired at a suspect at a clothing store and the bullet pierced a wall was remembered Monday as a happy teen with many friends who loved sports, adored animals and excelled in school.

The body of Valentina Orellana-Peralta was displayed in a pink dress inside a flower-draped casket next to large photos of the girl during a funeral at City of Refuge, United Church of Christ in Gardena, near Los Angeles.

The teen's father, Juan Pablo Orellana Larenas, said he and her mother will never get over the devastation of losing Valentina so violently.

"As parents, we ask ourselves, is it just for our daughter to die in this way? It's an answer we will never have," he said.

Orellana-Peralta died in the arms of her mother, Soledad Peralta, Dec. 23 at a Burlington store in the San Fernando Valley's North Hollywood neighborhood. Police officers shot and killed a suspect who was behaving erratically and brutally attacked two women.

One of the police bullets went through drywall behind the man and killed the girl, who was hiding in a changing room with her mother, police said.

"We pray for peace and justice for this innocent blood spilled," said Benjamin Crump, an attorney for the girl's family. An emotional Crump led mourners in a chant of "Valentina is innocent!" during Monday's service.

The eulogy was delivered by civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton, who recalled coming to Los Angeles three decades ago to protest the beating of Rodney King by police.

"How long will it take for you to get it right?" Sharpton asked, addressing the LAPD. He called the shooting reckless and said the girl's death is "not only a tragedy but a travesty."

Orellana-Peralta looked forward to becoming an American citizen and hoped to attend a Los Angeles Lakers game with her father. She was a big fan of Lakers star LeBron James.

"This could've been my daughter. This could've been your daughter," Sharpton said.

The girl's mother said last month that the family had left Chile to get away from violence and injustice in search of a better life in the U.S. Monday's ceremony was translated in real time by a Spanish interpreter.

Her father said the teen loved skateboarding and had dreams of becoming an engineer to build robots. He said she earned good grades, even though English was her second language and she'd only been in the U.S. for about six months.

The shooting is the subject of an internal Los Angeles Police Department investigation. The California Department of Justice is also investigating.

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

## 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 48 of 69

Trump's false claims of a stolen election not only incited the mob that stormed the Capitol. 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 Senate to turn this chamber into a deep freezer, we are going to consider the appropriate steps necessary," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Monday, calling the Republican line of argument "gaslighting, pure and simple."

Their 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.

Yet what action they will take to advance the package 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.

If Democrats don't reach an agreement with Manchin by the Monday holiday, they plan to push ahead with a vote on a rule change, which would force senators to show where they stand, said one Democrat familiar with the planning.

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.

"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.

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."

On Monday, McConnell warned Democrats that he would use the chamber's complicated rules to force tough votes if even minor rule changes are made. Included among the roughly one-dozen bills he has proposed for votes are measures to stop Biden's private-sector vaccine mandate; block so-called sanctuary cities from getting federal grant money; and make it easier for those convicted of killing law enforcement officers to receive the death penalty.

"Since Sen. Schumer is hellbent on trying to break the Senate, Republicans will show how this reckless action would have immediate consequences," McConnell said.

The renewed focus on voting rights comes as much of Biden's agenda has stalled out in Congress. Be-



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 49 of 69

fore 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."

McConnell has ridiculed "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 a group of senators that included Manchin, as well as 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 person who insisted on anonymity to reveal details about the deliberations.

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.

## Health officials let COVID-infected staff stay on the job

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Health authorities around the U.S. are increasingly taking the extraordinary step of allowing nurses and other workers infected with the coronavirus to stay on the job if they have mild symptoms or none at all.

The move is a reaction to the severe hospital staffing shortages and crushing caseloads that the omicron variant is causing.

California health authorities announced over the weekend that hospital staff members who test positive but are symptom-free can continue working. Some hospitals in Rhode Island and Arizona have likewise told employees they can stay on the job if they have no symptoms or just mild ones.

The highly contagious omicron variant has sent new cases of COVID-19 exploding to over 700,000 a day in the U.S. on average, obliterating the record set a year ago. The number of Americans in the hospital with the virus is running at about 110,000, just short of the peak of 124,000 last January.

Many hospitals are not only swamped with cases but severely shorthanded because of so many employees out with COVID-19.

At the same time, omicron appears to be causing milder illness than the delta variant.

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that health care workers who have no symptoms can return to work after seven days with a negative test, but that the isolation time can be cut further if there are staffing shortages.

France last week announced it is allowing health care workers with mild or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than isolate.

In the Phoenix area, Dignity Health, a major hospital operator, sent a memo to staff members saying those infected with the virus who feel well enough to work may request clearance from their managers to go back to caring for patients. Dignity Health hospitals in California have not yet implemented the new

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 50 of 69

guidelines but said it may need to do so in the coming days and weeks.

"We are doing everything we can to ensure our employees can safely return to work while protecting our patients and staff from the transmissibility of COVID-19," Dignity Health said in a statement.

In California, the Department of Public Health said the new policy was prompted by "critical staffing shortages." It asked hospitals to make every attempt to fill openings by bringing in employees from outside staffing agencies.

Also, infected workers will be required to wear extra-protective N95 masks and should be assigned to treat other COVID-19-positive patients, the department said.

"We did not ask for this guidance, and we don't have any information on whether hospitals will adopt this approach or not," said Jan Emerson-Shea, a spokesperson for the California Hospital Association. "But what we do know is that hospitals are expecting many more patients in the coming days than they're going to be able to care for with the current resources."

Emerson-Shea said many hospital workers have been exposed to the virus, and are either sick or caring for family members who are.

The 100,000-member California Nurses Association came out against the decision and warned it will lead to more infections.

Gov. Gavin Newsom and other state health leaders "are putting the needs of health care corporations before the safety of patients and workers," Cathy Kennedy, the association's president, said in a statement. "We want to care for our patients and see them get better — not potentially infect them."

Earlier this month in Rhode Island, a state psychiatric hospital and a rehabilitation center allowed staff who tested positive for COVID-19 but were asymptomatic to work.

At Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital, chief medical officer Dr. Hany Atallah said they are not yet at the breaking point and that workers who test positive are staying away for five days. "We still have to be very careful to prevent spread in the hospital," he said.

Kevin Cho Tipton, a nurse at Jackson Memorial, said he understands why hospitals are eager to have employees come back after five days of isolation. Yet he worries about the potential risk, especially for patients at higher risk of infection, such as those receiving transplants.

"Yes, omicron is less deadly, but we still don't know much," he said.

## North Carolina voters dispute Cawthorn candidacy over Jan. 6

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A group of North Carolina voters urged state officials Monday to disqualify U.S. Rep. Madison Cawthorn as a congressional candidate, citing his participation in a rally last January in Washington that questioned the presidential election outcome and preceded the Capitol riot.

Cawthorn's office quickly condemned the candidacy challenge, filed on behalf of 11 voters before the State Board of Elections, which oversees the scrutiny of candidates' qualifications. The voters contend that Cawthorn, a Republican who formally filed as a candidate for the 13th District seat last month, can't run because he fails to comply with an amendment in the U.S. Constitution ratified shortly after the Civil War.

The 14th Amendment says no one can serve in Congress "who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress . . . to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same."

The written challenge says events on Jan. 6, 2021 "amounted to an insurrection" and that Cawthorn's speech at the rally supporting then-President Donald Trump, his other comments and information in published reports provide a "reasonable suspicion or belief" that he helped facilitate the insurrection.

"The importance of defending the bedrock constitutional principle that oath breakers who engage in insurrection cannot be trusted in future office is essential to maintain," said Ron Fein, legal director of Free Speech for People, a national election and campaign finance reform group backing the challenge.

He told The Associated Press the Cawthorn challenge will be the first of many his group intends to file against other members of Congress associated with the insurrection. Free Speech for People and the

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 51 of 69

group Our Revolution announced last week that it would urge state election administrators to bar Trump and members of Congress from appearing on future ballots

The "leading national precedent" for such cases was created in 1869 by the North Carolina Supreme Court, which described the meaning of "engage" when it comes to a disqualifying act of insurrection or rebellion under the 14th Amendment, the filing states.

State law says Cawthorn has the burden to "show by a preponderance of the evidence" that he's qualified to run.

In response, Cawthorn spokesperson Luke Ball pointed out that "over 245,000 patriots from western North Carolina elected Congressman Cawthorn to serve them in Washington" — a reference to his November 2020 victory in the current 11th District.

Now "a dozen activists who are comically misinterpreting and twisting the 14th Amendment for political gain will not distract him from that service," Ball wrote in an email.

The state board scheduled a meeting Wednesday to create a five-member panel or panels from counties within the proposed 13th District required to hear the challenge. The ruling by such a panel can be appealed to the state board and later to an appeals court. Three of the five state board members are Democrats.

Cawthorn, 26, became the youngest member of Congress after his November 2020 election in the far-western 11th District. A social media favorite of Trump supporter, he plans to run in a new congressional district that appears friendlier to Republicans. He formally filed candidacy papers with the State Board of Elections last month, just before filing was suspended while redistricting lawsuits are pending.

The 11 voters, identified in paperwork filed with the board, are from four counties within the new 13th District, which stretches from the state's foothills east to parts of Charlotte.

Speaking at the "Save America Rally" on the morning of the riot, days after he was sworn in to Congress, Cawthorn said the "crowd has some fight in it."

"The Democrats, with all the fraud they have done in this election, the Republicans hiding and not fighting, they are trying to silence your voice," he added. "Make no mistake about it, they do not want you to be heard."

Cawthorn voted against certifying Joe Biden's presidential victory, although later he signed a letter with other GOP members of Congress congratulating Biden. Cawthorn has said he had a constitutional duty to vote against him. He condemned the Capitol violence, but compared it to the summer 2020 protests over police brutality. Still, last summer Cawthorn warned North Carolinians of potential "bloodshed" over future elections he claims could "continue to be stolen," and questioned whether Biden was "dutifully elected."

The challengers also asked the board to let them question Cawthorn under oath in a deposition before the regional panel convenes, and to subpoena him and others to obtain documents.

One challenger, identified as Jay Walsh of Morganton, is a registered unaffiliated voter. He said in a news release that while serving in the Navy he took the same oath to defend the Constitution that members of Congress do. He accused some of them of "subverting the very democracy they swore to protect. Madison Cawthorn's actions are damaging our country and eroding our freedoms."

## In 1st, US surgeons transplant pig heart into human patient

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

In a medical first, doctors transplanted a pig heart into a patient in a last-ditch effort to save his life and a Maryland hospital said Monday that he's doing well three days after the highly experimental surgery.

While it's too soon to know if the operation really will work, it marks a step in the decades-long quest to one day use animal organs for life-saving transplants. Doctors at the University of Maryland Medical Center say the transplant showed that a heart from a genetically modified animal can function in the human body without immediate rejection.

The patient, David Bennett, a 57-year-old Maryland handyman, knew there was no guarantee the experiment would work but he was dying, ineligible for a human heart transplant and had no other option, his son told The Associated Press.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 52 of 69

"It was either die or do this transplant. I want to live. I know it's a shot in the dark, but it's my last choice," Bennett said a day before the surgery, according to a statement provided by the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

On Monday, Bennett was breathing on his own while still connected to a heart-lung machine to help his new heart. The next few weeks will be critical as Bennett recovers from the surgery and doctors carefully monitor how his heart is faring.

There's a huge shortage of human organs donated for transplant, driving scientists to try to figure out how to use animal organs instead. Last year, there were just over 3,800 heart transplants in the U.S., a record number, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, which oversees the nation's transplant system.

"If this works, there will be an endless supply of these organs for patients who are suffering," said Dr. Muhammad Mohiuddin, scientific director of the Maryland university's animal-to-human transplant program.

But prior attempts at such transplants — or xenotransplantation — have failed, largely because patients' bodies rapidly rejected the animal organ. Notably, in 1984, Baby Fae, a dying infant, lived 21 days with a baboon heart.

The difference this time: The Maryland surgeons used a heart from a pig that had undergone gene-editing to remove a sugar in its cells that's responsible for that hyper-fast organ rejection. Several biotech companies are developing pig organs for human transplant; the one used for Friday's operation came from Revivicor, a subsidiary of United Therapeutics.

"I think you can characterize it as a watershed event," Dr. David Klassen, UNOS' chief medical officer, said of the Maryland transplant.

Still, Klassen cautioned that it's only a first tentative step into exploring whether this time around, xenotransplantation might finally work.

The Food and Drug Administration, which oversees such experiments, allowed the surgery under what's called a "compassionate use" emergency authorization, available when a patient with a life-threatening condition has no other options.

It will be crucial to share the data gathered from this transplant before extending it to more patients, said Karen Maschke, a research scholar at the Hastings Center, who is helping develop ethics and policy recommendations for the first clinical trials under a grant from the National Institutes of Health.

"Rushing into animal-to-human transplants without this information would not be advisable," Maschke said.

Over the years, scientists have turned from primates to pigs, tinkering with their genes.

Just last September, researchers in New York performed an experiment suggesting these kinds of pigs might offer promise for animal-to-human transplants. Doctors temporarily attached a pig's kidney to a deceased human body and watched it begin to work.

The Maryland transplant takes their experiment to the next level, said Dr. Robert Montgomery, who led that work at NYU Langone Health.

"This is a truly remarkable breakthrough," he said in a statement. "As a heart transplant recipient, myself with a genetic heart disorder, I am thrilled by this news and the hope it gives to my family and other patients who will eventually be saved by this breakthrough."

The surgery last Friday took seven hours at the Baltimore hospital. Dr. Bartley Griffith, who performed the surgery, said the patient's condition — heart failure and an irregular heartbeat — made him ineligible for a human heart transplant or a heart pump.

Griffith had transplanted pig hearts into about 50 baboons over five years, before offering the option to Bennett.

"We're learning a lot every day with this gentleman," Griffith said. "And so far, we're happy with our decision to move forward. And he is as well: Big smile on his face today."

Pig heart valves also have been used successfully for decades in humans, and Bennett's son said his father had received one about a decade ago.

As for the heart transplant, "He realizes the magnitude of what was done and he really realizes the importance of it," David Bennett Jr. said. "He could not live, or he could last a day, or he could last a couple



of days. I mean, we're in the unknown at this point."

## No progress seen after Russia-US talks over Ukraine tensions

By MATTHEW LEE and KONSTANTIN MANENKOV Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The United States and Russia locked horns over Ukraine and other security issues Monday with no sign of progress from either side at highly anticipated strategic talks.

Low expectations from both Washington and Moscow about the high-stakes session in Geneva appeared to have been met as senior diplomats from the two countries emerged without offering any hint of success.

Neither side characterized the meeting as a complete failure, but neither did they offer any prospect of easing the increasingly worrisome standoff over Russia's military buildup on its border with Ukraine that the West sees as a fundamental threat to European security. Nor was there any indication of movement on other, perhaps less-explosive matters that have vexed the U.S.-Russia relationship.

Moscow insists on guarantees to halt NATO's eastward expansion and even roll back the military alliance's deployments in Eastern Europe, while Washington firmly rejects the demands as a nonstarter.

With both sides dug in on their positions and Ukraine's future hanging in the balance, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said "no progress" was made on the central demand on NATO expansion, although he insisted: "We have no intention to invade Ukraine." U.S. officials openly questioned that comment.

Ryabkov spoke following talks with his U.S. counterpart, Wendy Sherman — part of a flurry of diplomatic activity in Europe this week aimed at defusing the tensions.

Sherman called the talks a "frank and forthright discussion" but would not, or could not, point to any progress.

"It was not what you would call a negotiation," she told reporters. "We're not to a point where we're ready to set down texts and begin to go back and forth."

"We were firm, however, on pushing back on security proposals that are simply nonstarters for the United States," Sherman said, adding "we will not allow anyone" to shut NATO's "open-door policy" that extends to countries seeking to join the alliance.

She said Washington "will not forgo bilateral cooperation with sovereign states that wish to work with the United States. And, we will not make decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine, about Europe without Europe or about NATO without NATO."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has described NATO expansion to Ukraine and other former Soviet states as a "red line" for Moscow, demanding binding guarantees from the West that they wouldn't become members of the alliance.

Moscow has sought to wrest a string of concessions from the U.S. and its Western allies, and has massed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine in steps that have raised concerns about a possible military intervention there.

"The situation now is so dangerous, and so -- I would say -- precarious that we cannot afford any further delays in resolution of this very fundamental question," Ryabkov said at a separate news conference at the Russian mission. "As President Putin said, on many occasions, 'we cannot backpedal. We cannot go backwards. There is no further space for us to do so.'"

Ryabkov rattled off Russian concerns and demands issued last month on subjects like NATO expansion and wanting Western commitments not to deploy offensive weapons near Russian borders.

"The American side has treated the Russian proposals seriously and deeply studied them," he said, adding that he characterized Moscow's demand for legally binding guarantees that NATO would not move eastward as "an absolute imperative for us."

Ryabkov emphasized that it would be hard to work on other issues if the U.S. stonewalled on Russia's key demands.

"If now NATO proceeds towards deployment of capabilities that are being developed very rapidly in the U.S., and will possibly be introduced somewhere in Europe, it would require a military response on the

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 54 of 69

Russian part, that is a decision to counter this threat through means at our discretion," said Ryabkov, speaking in English. "That will inevitably, unavoidably damage security of the U.S. and its European allies." He did not elaborate.

After Ryabkov stated that Russia had no intention to invade Ukraine, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, was publicly skeptical.

"I wish to believe him, I wish that it is true that they have no plans, but everything we've seen so far indicate that they are making motions in that direction," she told reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York.

Echoing comments from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Sherman said progress could only happen if Russia "stays at the table and takes concrete steps to de-escalate tensions."

De-escalation, she said, would include returning the Russian troops now deployed on Ukraine's borders to their barracks.

"We've made it clear that if Russia further invades Ukraine there will be significant costs and consequences well beyond what they faced in 2014," she said. "Russia has a stark choice to make."

However, neither Sherman nor State Department spokesman Ned Price would say if the U.S. would move ahead with sanctions if Russia opts not to invade but also refuses to withdraw its troops from the border.

Monday's meeting was part of "Strategic Security Dialogue" talks on arms control and other broad issues launched by Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden at a June summit in the Swiss city. Talks between Russia and NATO are planned Wednesday in Brussels followed by a meeting in Vienna of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on Thursday.

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

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.

Blinken said Sunday he didn't expect any breakthroughs, with a more likely positive outcome being an agreement to de-escalate tensions in the short term and return to talks at an appropriate time.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg similarly played down expectations ahead of the talks.

"I don't think that we can expect that these meetings will solve all the issues," he told reporters in Brussels after talks with Olga Stefanishyna, Ukraine's deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. "What we are hoping for is that we can agree on a way forward, that we can agree on a series of meetings, that we can agree on a process."

During a visit to Rome, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said dialogue offered the only way out of the crisis.

"At the same time, it's equally clear that a renewed breach of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia would have grave consequences," she said.

Russia has said it wants the issue resolved this month, but NATO is wary that Putin might be looking for a pretext, such as a failure in the negotiations, to launch an invasion.

Ukraine was not present at the table Monday and won't be involved in discussions with Russia until Thursday's OSCE meeting.

Eager to keep Kyiv in the loop, the Pentagon said Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Gen. Mark Milley spoke with Ukraine's military chief Monday.

They exchanged "perspectives and assessments of the evolving security environment in Eastern Europe," spokesman Col. Dave Butler said. "Ukraine is a key partner to NATO and plays a critical role in maintaining peace and stability in Europe."

## Man who bought gun for Kyle Rittenhouse pleads no contest

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 55 of 69

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The man who bought an AR-15-style rifle for Kyle Rittenhouse pleaded no contest Monday to a reduced charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor in a deal with prosecutors that allows him to avoid prison.

Kenosha County Circuit Judge Bruce Schroeder accepted Dominick Black's plea during a six-minute hearing. Assistant District Attorney Thomas Binger dropped two felony counts of intent to deliver a dangerous weapon to a minor as part of the deal.

Contributing to the delinquency of a minor is a misdemeanor punishable by up to nine months in jail, but Binger reduced the charge to a non-criminal county ordinance violation. Under the deal, Black will pay a \$2,000 fine. Each felony count would have been punishable by up to six years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Rittenhouse used the rifle to shoot three people, killing two, during a tumultuous night of protests in Kenosha in 2020 over the shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake, by a white police officer. A jury acquitted Rittenhouse of homicide and other charges in November.

Binger told Schroeder that he didn't believe he could move forward with the felony counts against Black, who testified against Rittenhouse. Binger noted, among other things, that during Rittenhouse's trial, Schroeder sided with defense attorneys who argued that Wisconsin law prohibits minors from possessing short-barreled rifles and short-barreled shotguns but allows them to possess long guns.

"In these circumstances, to go forward with these felony charges against Mr. Black, given the court's legal ruling as well as Mr. Black's cooperation and the jury's decision in the Rittenhouse case, does not seem appropriate," Binger said.

Black's attorney, Tony Cotton, said nothing except to confirm the deal. He said in an email to The Associated Press after the hearing that "justice was done."

"The District Attorney's Office did the right thing by agreeing to dismiss the felony charges against our client especially considering that a jury found Rittenhouse not guilty," Cotton said.

Black was 18 and dating Rittenhouse's sister when he purchased an AR-15-style rifle for Rittenhouse in May 2020. Rittenhouse, of Antioch, Illinois, was 17. Black testified during Rittenhouse's trial that he bought the rifle so he and Rittenhouse could target shoot and hunt on a friend's property in northern Wisconsin.

Three months later, in August 2020, Rittenhouse used the rifle to shoot Joseph Rosenbaum, Anthony Huber and Gaige Grosskreutz. Rosenbaum and Huber died of their wounds. Rittenhouse is white, as were all of the people he shot.

Rittenhouse argued that he fired in self-defense after the men attacked him. On the last day of his trial, Schroeder dismissed a charge of being a minor in possession of a firearm.

Binger told Schroeder on Monday that he anticipated the judge would have dismissed the felony counts against Black based on that decision. He also told Schroeder that he didn't agree with his interpretation of state law and suggested the district attorney's office might appeal that ruling.

District Attorney Michael Graveley didn't immediately respond to a message about that.

The rifle was tagged as evidence in Rittenhouse's trial, but it's unclear what will become of it. Rittenhouse's attorney, Mark Richards, said Rittenhouse wants it to be destroyed. Graveley also didn't respond to a message inquiring about what will be done with it.

## Question for Fed: Has it waited too long to fight inflation?

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With inflation surging, unemployment falling and wages rising, some economists are warning that the Federal Reserve may have waited too long to reverse its ultra-low-rate policies — a delay that could put the economy at heightened risk.

On Wednesday, the government is expected to report that consumer prices jumped 7.1% over the past 12 months, which would be the steepest such increase in decades. Fed Chair Jerome Powell is sure to be grilled on the issue during a Senate hearing Tuesday on his nomination for a second four-year term. Inflation has become the most serious threat to the economy, a growing worry for the financial markets and a major political problem for the Biden administration and Democrats in Congress.

While Powell has many defenders who applaud the Fed's willingness to keep interest rates low to help

# Groton Daily Independent

**Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 56 of 69**

reduce unemployment after the pandemic recession, Friday's U.S. jobs report for December raised alarms. It showed another sharp drop in the unemployment rate, an unexpectedly large increase in hourly pay and chronic labor shortages.

Though lower joblessness and higher pay benefit workers, they can also fuel rising prices. The jobs report led many economists to forecast more interest rate hikes this year than they had previously predicted as the Fed scrambles to manage a rapidly shifting economy. The Fed is now widely expected to begin raising rates in March — action that would, in turn, raise borrowing costs for many consumers and businesses.

By waiting as long as it has, the Fed might eventually be forced to accelerate its rate increases, effectively pressing harder on the economic brakes. Yet that could slow growth, disrupt financial markets and potentially cause a recession. Many past recessions have been caused by aggressive Fed rate hikes that were intended to combat or prevent inflation.

Last month, in a sharp pivot toward fighting inflation, the Fed signaled that it expects to raise its short-term benchmark rate, currently near zero, three times this year. As recently as September, policymakers had been divided over whether to raise rates even once in 2022.

"There is a substantial risk that the Fed is sufficiently behind the curve that it will need to face the challenge of letting inflation remain persistently high or risk a recession," said Tim Duy, chief U.S. economist at SGH Macro Advisors.

Stocks have tumbled and bond yields have surged since the minutes of the Fed's December meeting, released last week, showed officials likely to move more faster to tighten credit.

Many economists now expect the Fed to raise its key rate at least four times this year. And according to the minutes of its December meeting, Fed officials are also considering moving faster to shed the nearly \$8.8 trillion in Treasury and mortgage bonds they hold, a move that would also tighten credit. The minutes indicated that the policymakers could start letting those holdings decline, as the securities mature, as soon as after the Fed's first rate hike.

For now, the Fed's policies reflect mostly the emergency settings that have been in place since the pandemic struck in March 2020. Besides pegging rates at essentially zero, the Fed is still buying bonds to try to hold down longer-term rates. Those bond purchases are set to end in March.

Yet on Friday the government reported that the unemployment rate sank in December to 4.2% from 3.9% in November and is down from 6.7% a year earlier — the fastest 12-month drop in the jobless rate since records began in 1948. (It followed the largest increase in unemployment on record in 2020.)

With the number of unemployed dwindling, businesses have been forced to raise hourly pay to keep and attract workers. In the final three months of 2021, wages jumped at a 6.2% annual rate. And for workers in restaurants, hotels and casinos, pay soared 14.1% in December compared with a year ago.

"Normally, the Fed would have raised rates long before," Duy said. "The fact that we've barely started suggests the Fed has misjudged how quickly the economy was going to come back online."

Some economists, though, defend the Fed's approach. They echo the central bank's view that inflation will likely decline this year as the pandemic wanes. The spike in spending on goods, from cars to Pelotons, will fade as Americans switch back to spending on travel and restaurant meals, according to this view. That will allow supply-chain bottlenecks to unravel, thereby reducing goods prices.

And, they argue, the Fed's willingness to keep rates low, even as the economy recovered, helped support a faster pace of growth and hiring, particularly compared with the grindingly slow recovery after the 2008-2009 recession.

"The Fed is closer to on schedule than they are to making a mistake," said Skanda Amarnath, executive director of Employ America. "It's easy to Monday morning quarterback to say that the Fed should have done more last year. But that would have risked leaving too many people without jobs." Even now, the economy has 3.6 million fewer jobs than before the pandemic.

Yet many economists argue that the Fed remains too optimistic about inflation and that the rate will stay well above the Fed's 2% inflation target this year.

"What is currently expected in terms of what the Fed is going to do in 2022 is just far too little," said Jon Steinsson, an economics professor at the University of California, Berkeley.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 57 of 69

Steinsson spoke Saturday on a panel discussion of inflation at the annual meeting of the American Economic Association. Steinsson noted that adjusted for inflation, interest rates are in negative territory despite the economy's rapid progress.

"I think that's just way too low," he said.

All three economists on Saturday's panel — Steinsson; Jason Furman, a Harvard economist and former top adviser to President Barack Obama; and Joseph Gagnon, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former Fed economist — said they thought inflation, under the Fed's preferred measure, would remain at least 3.5% by year's end. The Fed thinks it will fall to 2.6%.

Powell has frequently said that if the pandemic fades, inflation will decline because supply chains will untangle and more people will take jobs. But Furman argued that other trends will offset some of those benefits. Once COVID-19 cases decline, he said, people will likely drive more and send gas prices up. And as with previous re-openings of the economy, prices for hotel rooms, airline tickets and rental cars could climb.

The Fed had hoped that more people would resume searching for work once enhanced unemployment aid ended nationwide in September. Schools also reopened that month, potentially freeing up more women to return to work after caring for their children during online school. Yet that influx of workers didn't happen. There are still 2.2 million fewer people working or looking for work than before the pandemic.

Instead, businesses' desperate demand for workers — with job openings near a record high, in November, of 10.6 million — has sharply pushed up wages.

Higher pay should enable more spending, keeping upward pressure on prices, Furman said. And rents are now rising fast.

Gagnon said Saturday that the Fed has been too cautious in part because it is too concerned about preparing financial markets for policy changes, particularly after 2013. Back then, in an episode known as the "taper tantrum," Chairman Ben Bernanke unexpectedly said the Fed would soon taper the bond purchases it was engaged in, a remark that caused gyrations in stock and bond prices.

"They were scarred by the taper tantrum," Gagnon said. "I think they have veered too far to the other side to try to minimize surprising markets."

Gagnon also defended the Fed, though, noting the complexity of the economy during the pandemic.

"It seems incredibly slow what they're doing, but they're turning a supertanker, they're communicating to markets, they are moving in the right direction, it's clear that they're focused on the right things," he said.

The Fed can also accelerate its tightening of credit if necessary, Gagnon said.

"If we are right about our inflation worries, they'll be doing more than three rate hikes this year," he said.

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

By WILL WEISSERT and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

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 coronavirus 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 58 of 69

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."

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 59 of 69

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."

## Deadly extreme weather year for US as carbon emissions soar

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The United States staggered through a steady onslaught of deadly billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in an extra hot 2021, while the nation's greenhouse gas emissions last year jumped 6% because of surges in coal and long-haul trucking, putting America further behind its 2030 climate change cutting goal.

Three different reports released Monday, though not directly connected, paint a picture of a U.S. in 2021 struggling with global warming and its efforts to curb it.

A report from the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm, on Monday said that in 2021 America's emissions of heat-trapping gas rebounded from the first year of the pandemic at a faster rate than the economy as a whole, making it harder to reach the country's pledge to the world to cut emissions in half compared to 2005 by 2030. And last year was the deadliest weather year for the contiguous United States since 2011 with 688 people dying in 20 different billion-dollar weather and climate disasters that combined cost at least \$145 billion, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Monday.

That was the second highest number of billion-dollar weather disasters — which are adjusted for inflation with records going back to 1980— and third costliest.

"It was a tough year. Climate change has taken a shotgun approach to hazards across the country," said NOAA climatologist and economist Adam Smith, who compiles billion-dollar weather disasters for NOAA.

Scientists have long said human-caused climate change makes extreme weather nastier and more frequent, documenting numerous links to wild and deadly weather events. They say hotter air and oceans and melting sea ice alter the jet stream which brings and stalls storm fronts, makes hurricanes wetter and stronger, while worsening western droughts and wildfires.

Last year's weather disasters included a record shattering heat wave in the Pacific Northwest where temperatures hit 116 degrees in Portland, a devastating and deadly cold icy storm in Texas, a widespread windstorm called a derecho, four hurricanes that caused intense damage, deadly tornado outbreaks, mudslides and a persistent drought and lots of wildfires.

While 2020 set the record for the most billion-dollar disasters, in 2021 "the extremes seemed a bit more profound than in 2020," Smith said.

Last year, billion dollar weather disasters were more than twice as deadly as in 2020, when those extremes killed 262 people. The last deadlier year was 2011. Hurricane Maria in 2017 killed nearly 3,000 people in Puerto Rico, which isn't part of the contiguous United States.

Changes in where people live and housing vulnerability were factors, Smith said, "but the 800-pound gorilla in the room is, of course, climate change, because that's accelerating all of these trends in regards to disaster potential for damage."

"We're having these compound cascading events one after another, after another," Smith said. "A lot of trends are going in the wrong direction."

The last five years have cost \$742 billion in 86 separate billion-dollar weather disasters, an average of more than 17 a year, a new record. That's nearly \$100 billion more than the combined total of all the billion-dollar disasters from 1980 to 2004, adjusted for inflation and far more the three billion-dollar disasters a year that the nation averaged in the 1980s.

"That's exactly what I'd expect with climate change because climate change is essentially supercharging many types of extreme weather, making heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, intense rainfall, flooding, and storms more severe, destructive and deadly," said Jonathan Overpeck, dean of environmental studies at the University of Michigan, who wasn't part of the reports.

Last year was also the fourth warmest year on record in the United States, with an average temperature of 54.5 degrees ( 12.5 Celsius), according to another NOAA report. Several cities had their hottest years

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 60 of 69

on record, including Akron, Ohio; Baltimore; Bismarck, North Dakota; Boston; Buffalo, New York; Erie, Pennsylvania; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Montpelier, Vermont; Sault Saint Marie, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio.

Last month was the hottest December on record for the contiguous United States, averaging 39.3 degrees (4.1 degrees Celsius), which is 6.7 degrees (12 degrees Celsius) above the 20th century average.

National temperature records go back 127 years and the 20th century average is 52 degrees (11.1 degrees Celsius).

Experts expected U.S. greenhouse emissions to increase from the steep 2020 pandemic dive, but how big it jumped worried them.

"What was dismaying was that emissions bounced back even faster than the economy as a whole," said Rhodium Group partner Kate Larsen, a co-author of the emissions report, which was based on daily and weekly government data."

Coal use increased for the first time since 2014, 17% from 2020, mostly because of spikes in natural gas prices, Larsen said.

"This is an example of how we've been riding on cheap natural gas to drive coal's decline over the last 15 years," Larsen said.

The other major factor was transportation emissions, mostly from long-haul diesel trucking, rising 10%, as freight nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels and are likely to continue to rise, Larsen said.

Over the long-run, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions have been decreasing — even with 2021's jump from the sudden 2020 plunge. However, last year's emissions increases the difficulty in reaching the goal President Joe Biden set as part of the Paris and Glasgow climate agreements, Larsen said. She said to get to the 50% cut Biden pledged, the country needs to be reducing emissions 5% a year, not increasing.

"We are running out of time," she said.

Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who wasn't part of the reports, agreed.

"The radical changes in our economy that are required for reaching low climate goals have not been achieved," Mahowald said. "Unfortunately, what we are seeing today is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we will see unless substantial reductions in emissions are made and quickly."

## Judge says Djokovic can stay in Australia but saga not over

By ROD MCGUIRK and MARK D. BAKER Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic returned to the tennis court Monday for training, having won a legal battle to stay in Australia to play in the Australian Open after his exemption from strict coronavirus vaccine rules was questioned. But the government is still threatening to cancel his visa and deport him.

The unvaccinated tennis star was released after being confined to an immigration hotel for four nights — a drama that has gripped many in Australia and beyond.

Federal Circuit Court Judge Anthony Kelly reinstated Djokovic's visa, which was pulled after his arrival last week because officials said he didn't qualify for an exemption to a rule that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated. Djokovic's lawyers say that since he recently recovered from COVID-19, he didn't need to be inoculated.

The judge ruled the No. 1 player had not been given enough time to speak to his lawyers before the decision was made and ordered the government to release him from the Melbourne quarantine hotel where he was held.

But government lawyer Christopher Tran told the judge that the immigration minister "will consider whether to exercise a personal power of cancellation."

That would mean that the nine-time Australian Open winner and defending champion could again face deportation and could miss the tournament, which starts on Jan. 17. It could also bar him from the country for three years.

Late Monday night, Djokovic tweeted out a photo that showed him and his team standing on one of the main show courts of the tournament. He was already back to training, his brother told reporters in Serbia.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 61 of 69

"I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation. Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen," Djokovic said in the post.

The back and forth has caused a furor in Australia, where many initially decried the news that Djokovic, who has been a vocal skeptic of vaccines, had received an exemption to strict rules to compete in Melbourne. Many felt the star, who court documents say is not inoculated, was being given special treatment since Australians who aren't vaccinated face tough travel and quarantine restrictions.

But when border police then blocked the 34-year-old on arrival, others cried foul, saying he was being scapegoated by an Australian government facing criticism for its recent handling of the pandemic.

The tennis star's brother, Djordje Djokovic, told television network Prva in Belgrade, Serbia: "This is definitely politics, all this was politics."

Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal called the controversy "a circus" and said he supported the decision allowing his rival to play in Melbourne.

"Beyond me agreeing or not with Djokovic on certain things, there's no question that justice has spoken and has said that he has the right to take part in the Australian Open," Nadal said Monday during an interview with Spain's Onda Cero radio.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government is seeking re-election for a fourth term in 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, he has recently loosened some rules, just as omicron cases have been rapidly surging. He has been criticized for that strategy as well as for shortages of rapid antigen tests and for refusing to make the tests available to all for free.

At Monday's court hearing, Djokovic's lawyers argued their client 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 people who have been infected with COVID-19 within six months can receive a temporary exemption to the vaccination rule.

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 that his client could not have done more, noting that transcripts of Djokovic's interview with Border Force officials and his own affidavit revealed that he repeatedly told officers he had done everything he thought was required of him.

Djokovic's lawyers described the cancellation as "seriously illogical."

But lawyers for Home Affairs Minister Andrews said in their submission that the vaccination exemption could only be granted for travelers who had recovered from a serious bout of COVID-19.

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

But in the end, the government lawyers conceded that the 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.

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.

Minister Andrews did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But a spokesperson for Alex Hawke, minister for immigration, citizenship, migrant services and multicultural affairs, acknowledged the court's decision, adding the minister's personal discretion remains in play.

"The minister is currently considering the matter and the process remains ongoing," the spokesman said.

Still, at a news conference in Belgrade, Serbia, Djokovic's family declared victory.

"This is his greatest victory, greater than all the Grand Slams that he has won," his mother, Dijana

Djokovic, said.

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

## Nearly 8,000 detained in Kazakhstan over violent protests

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Nearly 8,000 people in Kazakhstan 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, authorities said Monday.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Monday described the unrest that followed initially peaceful protests against rising energy prices as a "terrorist aggression" against the mineral-rich Central Asian nation of 19 million and dismissed reports that authorities targeted peaceful demonstrators as "disinformation."

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

Monday was declared a day of mourning for the victims of the violent unrest, which the health ministry says killed 164 people, including three children.

The demonstrations began on Jan. 2 over a near-doubling of prices for vehicle fuel and quickly spread across the country, with political slogans reflecting wider discontent with Kazakhstan's 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 the president 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. In Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, the protesters set the city hall on fire and 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 Monday, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said the peaceful protests "were hijacked by terrorist, extremist and criminal groups," including radical Islamist fighters with combat experience.

Speaking Monday at an extraordinary virtual summit of CSTO, 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 that sentiment, calling the unrest "an act of aggression" masterminded from abroad.

"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" has been restored and the "large-scale anti-

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 63 of 69

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

The foreign militants involved, Tokayev charged later Monday, came from "mostly Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan," and some from Mideast nations.

Kazakhstan's National Security Committee said Monday that "hot spots of terrorist threats" in the country have been "neutralized." The committee also told Russia's Interfax news agency that 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 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 had demanded Ruzakhunov's release, and the country's authorities on Monday sought to open a probe on charges of torture.

On Monday evening, Ruzakhunov returned to Kyrgyzstan. He told a local TV channel that he came to Almaty on Jan. 2 to visit a friend, but several days later, as the protests turned violent, decided to travel back to Kyrgyzstan and was detained.

In jail, Ruzakhunov heard from cellmates that confessing to going to Almaty with the purpose of taking part in the protests and being offered money for it was the quickest way to get deported home, so that's what he decided to do.

"It was a path (home), so I decided to implicate myself, even though I didn't do it," Ruzakhunov said.

## Medicare told to reassess premium hike for Alzheimer's drug

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health secretary Xavier Becerra on Monday ordered Medicare to reassess a big premium increase facing millions of enrollees this year, attributed in large part to a pricey new Alzheimer's drug with questionable benefits.

Becerra's directive came days after drugmaker Biogen slashed the price of its \$56,000-a-year medication, Aduhelm, to \$28,200 a year — a cut of about half.

"With the 50% price drop of Aduhelm on Jan. 1, there is a compelling basis ... to reexamine the previous recommendation," Becerra said in a statement about his directive to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

More than 50 million Medicare recipients who pay the \$170.10 monthly "Part B" premium for outpatient care will see no immediate change to their costs, but Monday's move could open the way for a reduction later in the year. The Department of Health and Human Services says it is reaching out to the Social Security Administration, which collects the premium, to examine options.

Medicare's standard premium is rising by about \$22 this year, up from \$148.50 in 2021 and one of the biggest annual increases ever. About half of that, \$11, was attributed to the potential costs of having to cover Aduhelm at its original \$56,000 price. Since Aduhelm is administered by infusion in a doctor's office the cost is factored into Medicare's outpatient coverage, not the separate prescription plan that pays for pharmacy medicines.

Becerra's move came after prominent Democratic senators urged the Biden administration to take immediate steps to cut rising drug costs for seniors. Much bigger curbs on drug prices promised by Democrats are hung up in Congress along with the rest of President Joe Biden's massive social agenda legislation. That bill would cap at \$2,000 a year the amount Medicare recipients have to pay out-of-pocket for medicines, require drugmakers to pay the government rebates if they hike prices faster than inflation, and authorize Medicare to negotiate prices for certain medications.

In announcing the price cut just days before the Christmas holidays, Biogen acknowledged the high cost had become a stumbling block to uptake for its medication.

"Too many patients are not being offered the choice of Aduhelm due to financial considerations and are thus progressing beyond the point of benefitting from the first treatment to address an underlying

pathology of Alzheimer's disease," CEO Michel Vounatsos said at the time. "We recognize that this challenge must be addressed in a way that is perceived to be sustainable for the U.S. healthcare system."

Medicare is currently covering Aduhelm on a case-by-case basis. Later this week, the agency is expected to issue an initial coverage decision, but the process of finalizing it can take months. Medicare said Monday it is reviewing Becerra's request to determine next steps.

Usually the financial impact of high-cost drugs falls most directly on patients with serious diseases such as cancer, rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis. But with Aduhelm, the pain would be spread among Medicare recipients generally, not just Alzheimer's patients needing the drug.

That's turned the drug into a case study of how one pricey treatment can swing the needle on government spending and impact household budgets. People who don't have Alzheimer's would still be on the hook for the cost of Aduhelm, since it's big enough to affect their premiums.

Alzheimer's is a progressive neurological disease with no known cure, affecting about 6 million Americans. The vast majority are old enough to qualify for Medicare, which covers more than 60 million people, including those 65 and older, and disabled people under 65.

Aduhelm is the first Alzheimer's medication in nearly 20 years. It doesn't cure the life-sapping condition, but the Food and Drug Administration determined that its ability to reduce clumps of plaque in the brain is likely to slow dementia in its earlier stages. However, many experts say that benefit has not been clearly demonstrated.

## Greece hopes marble foot will get UK to return sculptures

By NICHOLAS PAPHITIS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — It's only the size of a shoebox, carved with the broken-off foot of an ancient Greek goddess.

But Greece hopes the 2,500-year-old marble fragment, which arrived Monday on loan from an Italian museum, may help resolve one of the world's thorniest cultural heritage disputes and lead to the reunification in Athens of all surviving Parthenon Sculptures — many of which are in the British Museum.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the Sicilian museum's gesture "opens the way, I believe, for other museums to be able to move in a similar direction."

"Most importantly, of course, the British Museum, which must now realize that it's time for the Parthenon marbles ... to finally return here, to their natural home," he added, voicing gratitude to Italy for the loan.

The fragment was part of a 160-meter-long (520-foot) frieze that ran around the outer walls of the Parthenon Temple on the Acropolis, dedicated to Athena, goddess of wisdom. Much was lost in a 17th-century bombardment, and about half the remaining works were removed in the early 19th century by a British diplomat, Lord Elgin. They ended up in the British Museum, which has repeatedly rebuffed Greek demands for their return.

Officially, Sicily's A. Salinas Archaeological Museum is only lending the foot of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, to Greece for a maximum of eight years. But the ultimate aim, Italian and Greek officials say, is its "indefinite return" to Athens. In exchange, Greece will loan significant antiquities to Italy.

"The solution we found proves that, where there is will among museums and the cultural authorities of two countries, there can be a mutually acceptable solution," Mitsotakis said during a ceremony at the Acropolis Museum, where Greece's surviving sections of the frieze are inset among casts of those in London.

Artemis' foot will snuggle in like a missing jigsaw piece between two original fragments and a copy of a larger section now in London.

Successive Greek governments have lobbied for the return of the British Museum's share of the works, which include statues from the Parthenon's pediments — the all-marble building's gables. They argue that Elgin illegally sawed off the sculptures, exceeding the terms of a questionable permit granted by Turkish authorities while Greece was an unwilling part of the Ottoman Empire.

The British Museum rejects that stance and — despite indications that public opinion in the U.K. favors the Greek demand — has shown no intention of permanently returning the works.



# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 65 of 69

Mitsotakis raised the matter again in a meeting with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in London in November. He said Monday he was "encouraged" by Johnson saying the British government wouldn't oppose a potential deal on the sculptures' return — should the British Museum and Greece reach one.

The Italian fragment, which measures 31 by 35 centimeters (12 by 14 inches), was acquired under unknown circumstances by 19th-century British consul in Sicily Robert Fagan, and his widow sold it to the Sicilian museum's precursor.

Acropolis Museum director Dimitris Pantermalis said the marble foot may have been dislodged from its place in 1687, when a mortar fired by besieging Venetian forces hit the Parthenon, which the Acropolis' Turkish garrison was using as a gunpowder store. But, he said, it was in better condition than other surviving frieze fragments.

"In all other cases, the surface is slightly scratched," he said. "Here it has the freshness of the original, and that makes us proud."

The Parthenon was built between 447-432 B.C. and is considered the crowning work of classical architecture. Despite being successively used as a church and a mosque, it survived virtually intact until the Venetian siege.

The frieze depicted a procession in honor of Athena. Some small bits of it — and other Parthenon sculptures — are in other European museums.

## **Pope on COVID vaccines says health care a 'moral obligation'**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis suggested Monday that getting vaccinated against the coronavirus was a "moral obligation" and denounced how people had been swayed by "baseless information" to refuse one of the most effective measures to save lives during the pandemic.

Francis used some of his strongest words yet calling for people to get vaccinated in a speech to ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, an annual event in which he sets out the Vatican's foreign policy goals for the year.

Francis, 85, has generally shied away from speaking about vaccination as a "moral obligation," though his COVID-19 advisors have referred to it as a "moral responsibility." Rather, Francis has termed vaccination as "an act of love" and that refusing to get inoculated was "suicidal."

On Monday he went a step further, saying that individuals had a responsibility to care for themselves "and this translates into respect for the health of those around us. Health care is a moral obligation," he asserted.

He lamented that, increasingly, ideological divides were discouraging people from getting vaccinated.

"Frequently people let themselves be influenced by the ideology of the moment, often bolstered by baseless information or poorly documented facts," he said, calling for the adoption of a "reality therapy" to correct this distortion.

"Vaccines are not a magical means of healing, yet surely they represent, in addition to other treatments that need to be developed, the most reasonable solution for the prevention of the disease," he added.

Some Catholics, including some conservative U.S. bishops and cardinals, have claimed that vaccines based on research that used cells derived from aborted fetuses were immoral, and have refused to get the jabs.

The Vatican's doctrine office, however, has said it is "morally acceptable" for Catholics to receive COVID-19 vaccines based on research that used cells derived from aborted fetuses. Francis and Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI have been fully vaccinated with Pfizer-BioNTech shots.

Francis repeated his call for universal access to the shots, particularly in the parts of the world with low vaccination rates, and called for revisions to patent rules so that poorer countries can develop their own vaccines.

"It is appropriate that institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization adapt their legal instruments lest monopolistic rules constitute further obstacles to production and to an organized and consistent access to health care on a global level," he said.

Francis delivered the speech to a much smaller group of diplomats than usual, and skipped the part of the audience that ambassadors relish: a chance to greet him personally and exchange a few words. The restrictions were clearly a response to the exponential rise in coronavirus cases in Italy.

On other topics, Francis lamented Syria's devastation, calling for "political and constitutional reforms" so the country can be "reborn," and urged that any sanctions avoid targeting civilians. He didn't single Russia out by name but called for "acceptable and lasting solutions" for Ukraine and the southern Caucasus inspired by "reciprocal trust and readiness to engage in calm discussion."

And he also urged more open communications to avoid culture wars, without mentioning gender ideology or other hot-button topics by name.

"(Some attitudes) leave no room for freedom of expression and are now taking the form of the 'cancel culture' invading many circles and public institutions. Under the guise of defending diversity, it ends up cancelling all sense of identity, with the risk of silencing positions," he warned.

## Grand Theft Auto maker buys FarmVille company in \$12.7B deal

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Take-Two Interactive, maker of "Grand Theft Auto" and "Red Dead Redemption," is buying Zynga, maker of "FarmVille" and "Words With Friends," in a cash-and-stock deal valued at about \$12.7 billion.

The acquisition announced Monday would wed a powerhouse in console gaming, Take-Two, with a mobile gaming company with an almost cult-like following.

Zynga shareholders will receive \$3.50 in cash and \$6.36 in shares of Take-Two common stock for each share of Zynga outstanding stock at closing. The transaction is valued at \$9.86 per share of Zynga common stock.

"This strategic combination brings together our best-in-class console and PC franchises, with a market-leading, diversified mobile publishing platform that has a rich history of innovation and creativity," Take-Two Chairman and CEO Strauss Zelnick said in a prepared statement. He will retain those roles when the companies become one.

Take-Two anticipates the deal will help bring about mobile versions of some of its console and personal computer based games.

Take-Two said Monday it anticipates approximately \$100 million in annual cost savings within the first two years after the transaction is complete.

Zynga CEO Frank Gibeau and its president of publishing, Bernard Kim, will oversee the integration and day-to-day operations of the combined Zynga and T2 Mobile Games business, which will operate under the Zynga brand as its own label within the Take-Two.

Take-Two will also expand its board to 10 members upon closing, adding two members from Zynga's board.

The transaction includes a go-shop provision, giving Zynga 45 days to hear alternative proposals.

The deal is expected to close during the first quarter of Take-Two's fiscal 2023, ending June 30. It still needs approval of both Take-Two and Zynga stockholders. It has received approval from both companies' boards.

Shares of Zynga Inc., based in San Francisco, jumped 52.5% to \$9.15. Shares of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., based in New York City, fell 8.7% to \$150.25.

## 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 con-

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 67 of 69

firmed 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 Christian 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

# Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 68 of 69

to 31% in eastern Jharkhand state, among India's poorest.

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

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Jan. 11, the 11th day of 2022. There are 354 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 11, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the Grand Canyon National Monument (it became a national park in 1919).

On this date:

In 1861, Alabama became the fourth state to withdraw from the Union.

In 1913, the first enclosed sedan-type automobile, a Hudson, went on display at the 13th National Automobile Show in New York.

In 1927, the creation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was proposed during a dinner of Hollywood luminaries at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

In 1935, aviator Amelia Earhart began an 18-hour trip from Honolulu to Oakland, California, that made her the first person to fly solo across any part of the Pacific Ocean.

In 1943, the United States and Britain signed treaties relinquishing extraterritorial rights in China.

In 1963, the Beatles' single "Please Please Me" (B side "Ask Me Why") was released in Britain by Parlophone.

In 1964, U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry issued "Smoking and Health," a report that concluded that "cigarette smoking contributes substantially to mortality from certain specific diseases and to the overall death rate."

In 1978, two Soviet cosmonauts aboard the Soyuz 27 capsule linked up with the Salyut 6 orbiting space station, where the Soyuz 26 capsule was already docked.

In 1989, nine days before leaving the White House, President Ronald Reagan bade the nation farewell in a prime-time address, saying of his eight years in office: "We meant to change a nation and instead we changed a world."

In 2003, calling the death penalty process "arbitrary and capricious, and therefore immoral," Illinois Gov. George Ryan commuted the sentences of 167 condemned inmates, clearing his state's death row two days before leaving office.

In 2010, Mark McGwire admitted to The Associated Press that he'd used steroids and human growth hormone when he broke baseball's home run record in 1998.

In 2020, health authorities in the central Chinese city of Wuhan reported the first death from what had been identified as a new type of coronavirus; the patient was a 61-year-old man who'd been a frequent customer at a food market linked to the majority of cases there.

Ten years ago: Joran van der Sloot (YOHR'-uhn VAN'-dur-sloht), the longtime suspect in the still unsolved disappearance of American Natalee Holloway in Aruba, pleaded guilty in Lima to the 2010 murder of a Peruvian woman, Stephany Flores; he was sentenced to 28 years in prison.

Five years ago: In a combative and freewheeling news conference at Trump Tower in New York, President-elect Donald Trump said for the first time that he accepted that Russia was behind the election year hacking of Democrats that roiled the White House race; looking ahead, he urged Congress to move quickly to replace President Barack Obama's signature health care law and insisted anew that Mexico would pay the cost of a border wall. Six high-level Volkswagen employees from Germany were indicted in the U.S. in the VW emissions-cheating scandal, while the company agreed to plead guilty to criminal charges and pay \$4.3 billion — by far the biggest fine ever levied by the government against an automaker.

One year ago: The conservative-friendly social network Parler was booted off the internet over ties to the siege on the U.S. Capitol, but not before digital activists made off with an archive of its posts, includ-



# Groton Daily Independent

**Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 188 ~ 69 of 69**

ing any that might have helped organize or document the riot. The San Diego Zoo Safari Park said several gorillas there had tested positive for the coronavirus in what were believed to be the first cases among such primates in captivity. Pope Francis changed church law to explicitly allow women to do more things during Mass, while reaffirming they cannot be priests. Billionaire casino mogul and Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson died at 87. No. 1 Alabama won college football's national championship game, 52-24 against No. 3 Ohio State, capping a season that was played in a pandemic; thousands of excited football fans ignored pandemic precautions and partied in streets around the University of Alabama after the game.

Today's Birthdays: Former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (zhahn kray-tee-EHN') is 88. Actor Mitchell Ryan is 88. Movie director Joel Zwick is 80. Country singer Naomi Judd is 76. World Golf Hall of Famer Ben Crenshaw is 70. Singer Robert Earl Keen is 66. Actor Phyllis Logan is 66. Musician Vicki Peterson (The Bangles) is 64. Actor Kim Coles is 60. Actor Jason Connery is 59. Former child actor Dawn Lyn (TV: "My Three Sons") is 59. Rock musician Tom Dumont (No Doubt) is 54. Movie director Malcolm D. Lee is 52. Singer Mary J. Blige is 51. Musician Tom Rowlands (The Chemical Brothers) is 51. Actor Marc Blucas is 50. Actor Amanda Peet is 50. Actor Rockmond Dunbar is 49. Actor Aja Naomi King is 37. Actor Kristolyn Lloyd is 37. Reality TV star Jason Wahler is 35. Pop singer Cody Simpson is 25.