

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 1 of 81

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller](#)
- [9- 2022 State of the State](#)
- [23- SDDP Statement on Gov. Noem's State of the State Address](#)
- [24- Aberdeen Christian girls use a 3-2-1 approach to beat Groton Area](#)
- [25- Weather Pages](#)
- [30- Daily Devotional](#)
- [31- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [32- Subscription Form](#)
- [33- News from the Associated Press](#)

## UpComing Events

### 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

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 2 of 81

## #504 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

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

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

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 3 of 81

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 4 of 81

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

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

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 5 of 81

So what about herd immunity? With these kinds of numbers, we should be able to get enough people protected for herd immunity, right? Even Israel's health officials are talking that way. So is that where we're going?

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 6 of 81

percent of our population across all geographic regions, economic strata, ethnicities, genders, and ages to put a dent in this thing. If it's not fairly even through these groups, then we'll continue to have devastating outbreaks. Honestly, I have little, maybe no, hope of that happening. This might just mean what we have now is the way it's going to be, effectively forever.

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

"Among 1,228,664 persons who completed primary vaccination during December 2020-October 2021, severe COVID-19-associated outcomes (0.015%) or death (0.0033%) were rare. Risk factors for severe outcomes included age  $\geq 65$  years, were immunosuppressed, and or had at least one of six other underlying conditions. All persons with severe outcomes had at least one risk factor; 78% of persons who died had at least four."

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

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 7 of 81

Here's a sobering study: A research group at the CDC took a look at records for almost 1.7 million pediatric cases of Covid-10 diagnosed between March 1, 2020, and February 26, 2021, and constructed a matched-samples study, matching for age, sex, and prior Covid-19 or other acute respiratory infection diagnosis to compare those with and without Covid-19 or acute respiratory infection and new diabetes diagnoses. They found that "diabetes incidence was significantly higher among those with COVID-19 than among those 1) without COVID-19 . . . and 2) with non-COVID-19 ARI [acute respiratory infections] in the pre-pandemic period." What this means is that children who have had Covid-19 are at significantly higher risk to develop Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. We've already seen this in adults; this study extends that finding to children. There have been reports of increased diabetes incidence in Europe as well. What we don't know yet is whether this is a transient condition that resolves or something that becomes chronic and lifelong. (If you need brushing up, a matched-samples design is a particularly powerful research means for comparing two groups; we talked about this almost a year ago in my Update #368 posted February 25, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4472116936138011>.)

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

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

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

Today's news is about the use of Covid-sniffing dogs in a Massachusetts school. Two dogs trained to detect the virus in humans are roaming the halls of schools in the Freetown-Lakeville Regional School District, looking for kids who are infected. In a study available in preprint (so not yet peer-reviewed) from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the dogs were able to accurately identify cases 82 to 94 percent of the time, which is as good as or better than many of our lab tests. This development

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 8 of 81**

could put an entirely new complexion on things. We do not yet have definitive data on the dogs' detection abilities in various contexts, for example, we're not sure how they'll do in a densely-crowded setting or outdoors; but this is a start.

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

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



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 9 of 81

## **2022 State of the State By: Governor Kristi Noem Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022**

### **Introduction**

Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, Chief Justice Jensen, Supreme Court justices, constitutional officers, and my fellow South Dakotans:

I am honored to stand before you today as the Governor of a state that is proudly leading the nation. We are leading with a talented workforce. We are leading by growing our businesses. We are leading with strong schools. We are leading with freedom, limited government, fiscal responsibility, and a commitment to defending the values that have made our country great.

I am proud to report that the state of our state is stronger than it has ever been in our 133-year history.

This did not happen because of what government did. It happened because of what government did NOT do.

And it is because of our people.

Two years ago, we made a decision in the face of a global threat. We chose not to compromise our values. We kept businesses, schools, and churches open. We did not decide who is essential and who is not. We chose freedom and personal responsibility over mandates and lockdowns. We took steps to be safe, to guard public health. But we also trusted people to make decisions that were best for them and their families.

We did what was right — and we were attacked for our decision.

Today we are thriving because we upheld our principles. Our economy is strong. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the United States.

South Dakota saw new families and new businesses move here from other states. From July 2020 to July 2021, South Dakota's population grew nine times faster than the national average. While places like California, New York, and Washington, D.C., are LOSING population.

The reason why is no secret. People want to live somewhere that respects them – that respects their freedoms. They want to share in our quality of life. They're coming here because they want to be like us.

Last year, we were ranked the Number 1 state for helping our workforce and small businesses get through the pandemic. We've had record tourism numbers and created opportunities for success for everyone.

No group is succeeding in higher numbers than women in South Dakota. During the pandemic, South Dakota was Top 3 for smallest negative impact on female workers. We also are one of the Top 10 Best States for Women to live and work. I am very proud that South Dakota is one of the Top 5 states for providing career opportunities for working moms.

We are seeing inspirational testimonies from women like our very own State Senator Jessica Castleberry. I am so grateful she is allowing me to share her story with all of you today.

Fifteen years ago, Jessica suddenly found herself a single mother with three very young mouths to

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 10 of 81

feed and only \$3 in her checking account. She went to visit with a credit counselor to get some advice on what she might do to improve her situation. Jessica shared her dreams of getting a business degree and becoming a business owner someday. The woman responded to Jessica by saying that there was no magic wand that could make her dream come true.

Well, that didn't sit well with Jessica. She went and bought herself a magic wand and kept it close to remind herself that she could make her dreams come true, regardless of what others thought was possible. Through hard work, Senator Castleberry advanced her education and launched her career. This year, she celebrated the 11th anniversary of her business in Rapid City, which has three commercial locations. To this day, that magic wand sits in her office as a reminder of all that is possible.

Sen. Castleberry's story has good company here in the Capitol. In fact, all of the legislators have inspirational stories that led them to where they are today. That is what is so special about South Dakota. The Representatives and Senators in the SD Legislature truly do reflect the people of South Dakota. They understand challenges, hardships, and loss. Today, you will hear more stories about the amazing people in our state who have faced and overcome adversity. I believe you will find inspiration in their stories and gain hope and excitement for the year ahead.

The South Dakota people worked together to navigate the pandemic. Over and over again, we are recognized as one of the best states in the country because of our willingness to trust each other.

Other states took a different course. They locked down. Closed up businesses. Shut schools. Mandated masks. Their economies — their people — are paying the price. They have suffered. And it didn't have to happen. Unfortunately, we're starting to see it happen all over again in some states.

But even here in South Dakota, we have new challenges — new barriers to the American Dream. Inflation is rising. Washington is threatening to raise taxes as it piles on more debt and spending. It's getting harder for families to put food on the table, gas in their car, or keep the lights on.

The world economy is changing, too. We're seeing new technologies, emerging industries, and international competition. We must be ready.

On top of all that, our children, our history, and our values are under attack.

These threats are already here. We're seeing it in our schools and communities. It's happening in the news, on TV, in social media, and with what is taught to our children. It is up to us to defend our values and prepare for the future.

So today, I will talk to you about the state of our great state — how we are succeeding — and the steps we can take together to preserve what we have and grow even stronger.

## **Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness**

We can make that happen by remaining true to the principles that made America so great in the first place — and that make South Dakota the greatest state in the union.

Thomas Jefferson famously outlined our founding ideal in the Declaration of Independence: "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Jefferson continued by reminding us why government is here in the first place — to secure those rights,

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 11 of 81**

not to grant them. Our rights come from God, NOT from government. And GOVERNMENT must remain LIMITED to serve its proper role of securing those rights.

## **Life**

It's no mistake that when Thomas Jefferson wrote those famous words, that LIFE came first. Government's most fundamental role is to defend the lives and safety of the people. That includes the rights and the lives of unborn children.

Over the last decade, abortions have dropped sharply in South Dakota. In 2020, the total number of abortions was down approximately 80% from a decade before.

That's something to celebrate, and it's thanks in part to the policies passed by some of the legislators in this room. You have proven that abortion does not need to be a divisive issue. Last year, every single legislator supported my bill to guarantee protections for unborn children with Down syndrome.

I look forward to the day when all unborn lives are protected. The Supreme Court has a historic opportunity to make that a reality. As soon as Roe v. Wade is overturned, our state laws are ready to protect every unborn South Dakota child. But until then, we can take steps to protect South Dakota children, today.

There is more we can do. Every human life is unique in a truly beautiful way from the moment that they are conceived. It isn't long before they have their own unique heartbeat, too. Science tells us that an unborn child's heartbeat starts 6 weeks after conception. And any abortion after that point stops that heartbeat — stops that life — stops that gift from God.

Today, I am asking all of you to protect the heartbeats of these unborn children. I am bringing legislation to ban all abortions once a heartbeat can be detected.

Last year, I signed an executive order banning telemedicine abortions in South Dakota. Today, I am asking all of you to ban telemedicine abortions in state law.

Chemical abortions happen when a woman ends an unborn life with a pill. These procedures are four times as likely to cause the woman getting the abortion to end up in the Emergency Room. Chemical abortions are dangerous. I am asking all of you to take action to protect South Dakota women from this dangerous procedure.

## **Adoption and Foster Care**

We can also protect lives by expanding access to adoption and foster care. This past year, 262 South Dakota children found their forever families, and 135 children were placed into a legal guardianship.

All children deserve to grow up in a family where they are loved and protected. When I stood at this podium for my first State of the State in 2019, I promised to talk about foster care at every opportunity. Since then, we have made tremendous progress.

We have launched our Stronger Families Together initiative with the Department of Social Services alongside America's Kids Belong and South Dakota Kids Belong. I need faith-based organizations, church

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 12 of 81

leaders, business leaders, and other community organizations to come alongside me in your hometowns and support those who choose to adopt or foster children.

In South Dakota, we support and serve others. My parents instilled that in me from a very young age. We helped struggling families put food on the table or keep the lights on. I also had the opportunity to grow up with a foster brother. I remember my parents telling me years later that they wished they would have had more tools, more information, or more training so that they could have helped him adjust better to becoming a part of our family.

Today, we have people in the room who can provide that kind of help. We have the leadership of South Dakota Kids Belong here with us. Would you please stand, and everyone please join me in thanking them for their efforts to help families going through crisis?

While we're on the subject of Foster Care, today, I want to highlight a family that has been providing foster care for twenty-two years. Rodney and Peggy Anderson have adopted nine children out of the foster care system and have fostered many more. They've dealt with childhood trauma and connected their foster kids with professionals to help them. Rod and Peggy give kids a place to live, but more than that, they give them a home where they are loved and cared for.

One of our Family Services Specialists had this to say about the Andersons: "This family is by far the most resilient, knowledgeable, fantastic, flexible, amazing family I have ever worked with. They go above and beyond – always putting the children in their home first. They have some of the toughest kids I've ever had on my caseload. And they handle them with patience and grace! We are so incredibly lucky to have them as foster parents!"

I would like to have Rod and Peggy please stand. Three years ago, I created the Governor's Heroism Award to honor South Dakotans who went above and beyond. Rod and Peggy Anderson are heroes. They're heroes for how they've changed these kids' lives. And this year, I'd like to recognize Rodney and Peggy Anderson with the 2022 Governor's Heroism Award. Let's thank them and every foster parent in this state for their tremendous, heroic efforts!

With more foster families like Rod and Peggy, we will be able to help even more children and families in the years to come.

## Expanding Healthcare Access

Another way that we can advance life in South Dakota is by giving our people healthcare options close to home.

Many South Dakotans live on farms, ranches, and in small towns. No matter where you live in our state, you should have access to the highest quality care available. You should be able to get the medical help you need.

We've increased flexibilities to bring healthcare directly to our patients. I signed legislation to address this, and my budget this year expands telehealth to our emergency responders so that they are available to help in a time of crisis, no matter where you live.

For years, emergency services in small towns across South Dakota have been largely run by volunteers. Today, we have a volunteer ambulance crew with us from Onida. Would you all please stand? The Onida Ambulance Service has been in operation since 1956. In 2000, they were named the South Dakota Emer-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 13 of 81

gency Medical Service of the Year. They won that award again in 2020. To win such an honor twice is a testament to their hard work and training.

They complete the hours and hours of training to become Emergency Medical Technicians and ongoing training as well. They answer calls across Sully County. And they do it all as volunteers. Their dedication to saving the lives of their fellow South Dakotans is inspirational. Will you help me thank them for their service to the people here in South Dakota?

Unfortunately, our emergency responders are getting fewer and fewer. Many have gotten older, and less people are stepping up to volunteer. We must reverse this trend. We need to recruit more volunteer firefighters and emergency responders. And we need to support them with modern tools – my budget does that. I look forward to working with all of you to get these wonderful folks the equipment and training that they need.

For over a year, we have offered free at-home COVID tests to the people of South Dakota. Last week, I announced that I had ordered 1 million new tests to be delivered to even more locations in our state. Every citizen in South Dakota will have the access to get a free COVID test in their home community. President Biden had promised this action but has failed to do so. The state will continue to work together to take care of our people.

Our healthcare workers worked hard to keep us within our hospital capacity. Our systems monitored people from home to ensure their safety while keeping beds available.

To our nurses, doctors, and healthcare professionals: we are getting you more help. We've invited more healthcare professionals to come and live in South Dakota. We've made it possible for out-of-state licenses to be recognized so that they can get right to work. And when they come here, they will have the opportunity to work for some of the greatest systems in the country.

Healthcare workers in South Dakota have faced perhaps the greatest challenges of their career over these past two years. I am amazed by their efforts, and I am so grateful for how they have sacrificed to serve others.

## **Mental Health/Addiction**

Another problem we need to address is addiction and mental illness, and we are doing that through our targeted treatment and prevention initiatives. While overdoses have been skyrocketing across the country, in South Dakota, overdose deaths dropped by 19 percent.

There's more work to do. In 2022, we will launch a statewide behavioral health campaign, continue to focus on fighting meth, and raise awareness about available resources. These efforts are saving lives.

Unfortunately, we are seeing that increased drug activity from the border is making its way into our communities. Counterfeit fentanyl is a serious problem. We can thank our law enforcement agencies who are working to keep this poison off our streets.

As for mental health, my budget creates regional behavioral crisis centers. These centers will help us get people appropriate care more quickly and close to home. This will help relieve the pressure on law enforcement and emergency rooms.

I take our citizens' health seriously. I don't make these decisions lightly. And when we create new policy, we're going to do everything we can to get it right from day one. Our state's medical cannabis program

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 14 of 81

is one example. It was launched on schedule according to the timeline passed by South Dakota voters. I know there will be some debate about that program this session. My focus is on making sure South Dakota has the safest, most responsible, and well-run medical cannabis program in the country.

## Liberty

Together, we can make protecting lives our priority so that all South Dakotans can enjoy our God-given gift of liberty – the second unalienable right the Declaration upholds.

## Prayer in Schools

There is one freedom that is fundamental to our nation's founding. It is the freedom to worship.

In the Preamble to our state's Constitution, we express gratitude "to Almighty God for our civil and religious liberties." Our state's motto is, "Under God the people rule." And we began here today — in this chamber — with a prayer asking for God's grace and guidance. Yet in our public schools, prayer is absent – forbidden.

I am introducing legislation that would allow for a moment of silence at the beginning of each school day. Students can choose to reflect on the upcoming day or have a quiet moment – they can also exercise their First Amendment right to pray. We will protect the freedom to worship and re-instill a right that has been absent for far too long in our schools.

## Economic Freedom

Another fundamental liberty is the right of individuals to provide for themselves and their families. Government, at times, abuses its power and interferes with that liberty. But never in our history have we seen government shut down liberty as we saw during the pandemic.

State after state imposed mandates and lockdowns. Closed businesses and churches. America is still suffering the consequences.

Other states told people that they weren't essential -- picked winners and losers. We kept the doors to businesses open.

Ace Hardware in Sioux Falls is a great example of a thriving business in South Dakota. They weathered the worst days of the pandemic without laying off a single employee. They innovated quickly, protected the health of their staff and customers, and continued their passion for quality service and customer care. Similar success stories can be found time and time again around our great state.

Here with us today is a young woman named Alyssa Nix, a small business owner in Sioux Falls. Alyssa was born and raised in Sioux Falls and started working in retail and fashion when she was 16 years old. In February 2018, she took out a loan to purchase a women's clothing boutique, which fulfilled a life-long dream for her. She is proud to sell clothing and accessories that make women feel confident about themselves at all budget levels and for all occasions.

Alyssa was nervous when the pandemic hit. She didn't know what the future had in store, and she didn't think she could keep her business going if she had been forced to close.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 15 of 81

I heard about Alyssa's store from my daughters, so I decided to stop in one day when Bryon and I were in Sioux Falls running errands. While I was there, Alyssa and I chatted about the weather, horses (which we both love) and 4-H -- we have both been 4-H leaders for years. During our visit, Alyssa told me with tears in her eyes that if our state made different decisions during the pandemic the past 2 years and not trusted her, she didn't know if her store would still be open. Her life-long dream would have come to an end. She was so grateful she was respected by her government and thankful to still be able to serve her customers.

Alyssa's American Dream is alive and well in South Dakota. Because we trusted small business owners, like Alyssa and Ace Hardware, to find ways to adapt, we gave them an opportunity to survive. Every other state in this country ordered some businesses to close. That didn't happen here.

Alyssa, I'd like to ask you to please stand and also thank you -- thank you for your love for people and willingness to share your story. So many little girls dream of growing up and striking out on their own, owning their own business, and they can look up to you. Thank you for your strength and for not giving up on your dream. Would you all join me in giving Alyssa a round of applause?

## Cutting Regulations

One way that we can continue to expand liberty is by remembering that government should not make it harder to have a career.

My Department of Labor is eliminating barriers to employment. And they're partnering with others to promote job training and match students with the best career for them. Here are a few examples:

In 2021, the Department of Labor worked with the Department of Education and schools across the state to promote "South Dakota Week of Work." The week included job fairs, job shadowing opportunities, and visits by professionals to classrooms to share their experiences in communities across the state. For example, Hanson High School hosted 40 guest speakers representing 16 different career areas.

We have partnered with Dakota State University to create a Future Workforce Finder tool. We are expanding the Upskill program to the South Dakota Women's Prison and other career fields to get workers trained for in-demand jobs. We are partnering with adult education providers across the state to offer more options for adults to achieve their GED, to help them in their career.

We are focused on EXPANDING opportunities and liberty, not regulating it away. And South Dakota's jobs market continues to be a national leader as a result.

## Revenue Update and Tax Cuts

In order for us to defend liberty, government must remain limited. And part of how we do that is through our budget process -- through our commitment to fiscal responsibility. I want to assure every South Dakotan of this: we will not use one-time money -- whether federal or state dollars -- for ongoing expenses or new programs. It would be irresponsible to create or expand any ongoing programs with one-time dollars.

A month ago, I reported to you the exceptional revenue growth that South Dakota has enjoyed because of the steps that we took in South Dakota. Since that time, we've received even more great news, which

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 16 of 81

I'm prepared to share with you today.

In addition to the estimates I gave you back in December, our economy is even stronger than expected. Ongoing general fund revenues were \$20.8 million higher than the revised estimates from December. So far this fiscal year, we're \$116 million above ongoing legislative adopted estimates. That's fantastic news, and we should return a portion of these strong revenues to the people of South Dakota.

I am announcing three proposals today to cut taxes and fees for the hard-working men and women in South Dakota.

First of all, let's eliminate fees associated with starting or renewing a business with the Secretary of State in South Dakota. In 2020, the theme of my State of the State was "Open for Business," and we are continuing that commitment today. We are already among the most business-friendly states in America, and with this step, we will make it even easier to do business here.

Let's also eliminate all fees for concealed carry permits in the state. We will pay the costs for federal background checks, as well. It will not cost you a penny to exercise your Second Amendment rights in South Dakota.

Three years ago, Constitutional Carry was the very first bill that I signed as Governor. We guaranteed the right of our people to keep and bear arms. Together, we will continue to defend this key constitutional liberty.

Finally, although we don't have many taxes in South Dakota, I am proposing that we eliminate a ridiculous tax. Did you know that we have a bingo tax? This is largely a tax on our elderly populations and veterans. I'm proposing that we get rid of it, and this is just the beginning.

## Vaccine Legislation

Financially, we see the impact of protecting liberty in South Dakota, but unfortunately, personal liberties are under attack. But that attack IS NOT coming from state government. It's coming from the Biden Administration in Washington, D.C.

I always promised you I would protect our state from overbearing federal intrusion into our daily lives. So we took action. South Dakota has joined four lawsuits against the Biden Administration's unconstitutional vaccine mandates, and we are winning in court. The issue has advanced to the United States Supreme Court and oral arguments were heard last week.

The COVID vaccination should be a choice. And we should reject the efforts that we're seeing in other parts of the country to divide us into two classes: vaccinated and unvaccinated. Unvaccinated Americans are still Americans. We live in a free country – free to make our own decisions. The government does not get to make them for us.

I am bringing legislation this session to protect the people's right to a medical or religious exemption from COVID vaccines, just as my executive order did for state employees. We will also recognize natural immunity. I hope you will support the bill.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 17 of 81

## Game, Fish, and Parks

From day one, it has been my priority to focus on the next generation of South Dakotans. Our way of life here is special, but so are our natural resources.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, "Of all the questions which can come before this great nation, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us."

We take that message to heart here in South Dakota. We take care of our natural resources because we want them to be available for our kids and grandkids.

U.S. News & World Report ranks South Dakota in the Top 3 for Natural Environment and top 3 for the least pollution. We are nearly four-times higher than the national average for using renewable energy.

One of the first priorities I outlined as Governor was the Second Century Initiative. This Initiative raises money to support pheasant habitat, trap predators who threaten our pheasant populations, and educate South Dakotans about our wildlife and land. It helps preserve our state's status as a top destination for pheasant hunting.

The Second Century Initiative has benefitted hunters, while also supporting our farmers and ranchers. They're improving water and soil quality and enhancing opportunities for all who enjoy the outdoors.

Last year, we raised \$1.4 million for the Second Century Habitat Fund. These dollars go directly toward expanding habitat acres across South Dakota. We also raised almost five and a half million dollars with the Habitat Stamp. Between these efforts, we have added more than 10,000 acres of habitat for our wildlife, created additional public access for fishing and hunting, and completed hundreds of habitat improvement projects on existing public lands.

Habitat helps our economy, too. Hunting and fishing adds \$1.3 billion to the state economy. As a result, South Dakota is the number one state for licensed hunters per capita. We've seen an 8% increase in sales for resident combo hunting and fishing licenses and a 16% increase in out-of-state small game licenses over the 3-year average. We've also had big increases in youth hunting, including a record increase in youth participation for the Nest Predator Bounty program. Youth fishing licenses and small game hunting licenses grew by 23% for residents and 83% for nonresidents. More of our kids are becoming interested in the outdoors.

Meanwhile, our state parks saw a 10% increase for park entrance licenses over last year's record, with an estimated 8.5 million visitors. We plan to add more campsites at Custer State Park to expand our ability to host people from in and out of state. Since 2015, we have seen an increase of nearly 100,000 camping nights reserved throughout the state park system. I am hopeful you will support these projects.

We have a fantastic army of volunteers who work at our parks each year. This past year, we had 443 volunteers log a total of 103,000 hours of service. I am so grateful for all those folks who volunteer to welcome people who visit our state parks.

Because we trusted in liberty, people chose to visit our state by the millions. We didn't just keep the "open" sign on. We rolled out the welcome mat for tourists. We broke records for visitor spending, visits to our state parks, and so much more. More people came to Mount Rushmore last year than ever in our history.

Countless families made South Dakota their travel destination. And because of our world-class hospital-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 18 of 81

ity, we can be sure that many of them will be back.

## Fairness in Sports

Freedom and Liberty are about self-determination and the right to achieve — to reach our fullest potential. But there is a troubling movement in our society. Our young girls are having their freedom to achieve taken away by schools and organizations that are changing the rules of the game in competition.

When our kids participate in sports and activities, they learn valuable lessons like teamwork, perseverance, and hustle. For many activities, it may not matter whether kids are male or female — they are on an equal playing field: debate, theater, and academic competitions, to name a few. But for other activities, the playing field is not equal.

Allyson Felix is an American track and field star. She's won 25 Olympic and World Championship medals, including 17 gold medals, the most of any track and field athlete ever — male or female. She specialized in the 400-meter race, with a lifetime best of forty-nine-point-two-six seconds. Yet HUNDREDS of high school aged boys have run faster times than that. Common sense tells us why. Boys' and girls' bodies are biologically different.

In South Dakota, only girls can play in girls' sports according to the executive orders I signed almost a year ago. But I am introducing -- and hope you will support -- a bill that will be the strongest law in the nation. Congress passed Title IX years ago to guarantee that girls have a level playing field on which they can succeed — to ensure their liberty to achieve.

They can win high school championships, maybe earn scholarships, maybe even go on to play professional sports. We need to protect the freedom of our young girls to go out there and do it.

## Pursuit of Happiness

Success in America is by no means a given. But if you work hard and put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything. That's the American Dream. That's what the pursuit of happiness is all about.

But there's a new ideology taking hold in our country. It redefines our culture. It rejects the American Dream. It tells children that our country is racist. It divides us based on the color of our skin. It teaches a distorted view of our history — and it undermines the foundation of our society.

We must act now to protect the American Dream — to preserve the pursuit of happiness for future generations.

## True, Honest History

Over 30 years ago in his farewell address, President Ronald Reagan asked the nation an important question: "Are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world?" He reminded us that we need to educate our kids and our grandkids that, quote, "America is freedom — freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 19 of 81

is special and rare. It's fragile. It needs protection."

President Reagan was right. We have to make sure our children know America's promise. We have to teach them the true, honest history of our country.

In state after state, school after school, children are being exposed to radical political ideologies like Critical Race Theory. We are not going to let that happen in South Dakota.

Our state supports opportunity for all. We don't teach our children to be divisive and organize them into separate groups based on skin color. I am bringing legislation this year to enshrine these values and protect our students from hatred and division.

Schools are where our children learn the consequences of making mistakes and the hard work of success. By the same token, they should learn from both America's triumphs and our mistakes. And then they learn the overwhelming benefits of working together to fix those mistakes so that we all share a brighter future.

As we update our social studies standards, they must reflect America's true and honest history. Native American history will be a part of that. Our tribal culture and heritage are essential to who we are as a state – and it must be balanced and woven into the full context of American history and civics.

Today, I'm proud to be joined by a friend of mine, and a hero in his own right, Dr. Ben Carson and his wife Candy. Despite the challenges of his childhood, Dr. Carson grew up to become one of the most accomplished surgeons in American history. His story is the American Dream, and he followed it up with a career in public service.

Today, Dr. Carson continues to advance the values that make America so special through his work at the American Cornerstone Institute, which just launched an online learning platform called Little Patriots to teach children about our country's founding principles.

Additionally, he has been instrumental in the work of 1776 Action. Last year, they released the "1776 Pledge" as part of a nationwide effort to restore "honest, patriotic education" in our K-12 schools. I was proud to be the first candidate for public office in the nation to sign that Pledge, and Dr. Carson joined me in co-authoring an op-ed outlining that decision. I applaud his efforts to ensure that all of our kids and grandkids understand and love our nation's history and values. Please join me in thanking Dr. Carson for being here today.

## Education

The pandemic was very hard on schoolchildren across this country. South Dakota was recently ranked first in the nation for the least amount of learning loss among students during the pandemic.

Because our students were in the classroom for all of last school year, our kids saw positive outcomes in their learning. In 2021, six of our schools were nationally recognized for excelling in the classroom. Arlington and Pinedale Elementary Schools, Gettysburg Middle School, and O'Gorman High School, Bishop O'Gorman Catholic Schools were all named National Blue Ribbon Schools. Explorer and Platte-Geddes Elementary were both named National Distinguished Schools and will be honored next month at the National Elementary and Secondary Education Act Conference.

It is wonderful to see our elementary schools leading the nation in education, but we are also seeing

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 20 of 81

success at middle schools and high schools through our Jobs for America's Graduates programs, more commonly known as JAG. We brought this program to our state with legislation in 2019. This program focuses on helping students who are at high risk not to graduate. It has been tremendously successful at putting students on a path to graduation and future success.

In the last two years, JAG program enrollment has grown by 50 percent, and three new schools have been added. Today, South Dakota's JAG programs have seen a nearly 100 percent graduation rate for program participants.

This year, the Lyman school board added its first JAG program. Students took advantage of opportunities to work with local and statewide volunteer organizations. Others explored cutting-edge careers in health care and cybersecurity. We have seen students not only make a change in their attitude toward school but also think about their future beyond high school and their place in their communities. JAG is helping these students at risk of dropping out to achieve graduation and be ready for their futures. And more school districts should look at bringing JAG into their communities.

## **Investing in Skilled Training**

As the world economy changes, South Dakotans need new skills and new training to be prepared for the careers of the future. South Dakota is Number 1 in the nation for our graduation rate in 2-year college programs, and we are in the Top 10 for higher education. We are expanding the cybersecurity program at Dakota State University with a \$30 million dollar investment. And the Freedom Scholarship that you supported last year is starting to change the lives of South Dakota students that didn't have an opportunity to further their education before because of economic challenges.

Together, we'll continue setting our students up for a brighter and happier future.

## **Law Enforcement**

But we cannot enjoy life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness if we are not safe on our streets, in our schools, at our businesses, or in our homes. Our way of life — our civil society — depends on the brave men and women of law enforcement. We respect law and order in South Dakota, and we will continue to support those who uphold the law and keep our streets safe.

Today, we have with us some law enforcement officers who have recently moved to South Dakota. Would you please stand?

When the riots and violence started across the country months and months ago, we launched a nationwide campaign to recruit law enforcement officers to move to our state. We wanted every police officer in America to know that if they wanted to live somewhere they were appreciated and respected, then come to South Dakota.

Hundreds of law enforcement officers responded to our invitation. And we are so proud to be known as a state that stands and defends the people who put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 21 of 81

## National Guard and Veterans

We are also free to pursue our American Dream because of the women and men in our armed forces who defend our country at home and abroad. Could we have any members of the South Dakota National Guard please stand and join the officers that are currently standing?

Our South Dakota National Guard continues to demonstrate excellence. The 114th Fighter Wing in Sioux Falls earned the prestigious Spaatz Trophy for Most Outstanding Air Guard unit yet again in 2021, for the fifth time in fifteen years. And the Brookings-based 152nd won the Walter T. Kerwin, Jr. Readiness Award, the fourth straight year that a South Dakota Guard unit has been named the best National Guard unit in the country.

Our Guard has stepped in to help with everything asked of them: storm recovery, firefighting, drug stops, COVID medical support, and of course helping to secure our nation's borders and ensuring our shared defense.

We are also the proud home of many veterans. Could I ask our veterans to stand and join the others?

Our Department of Veterans Affairs has earned a five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid -- the highest level possible. The Yankton School District won the 2021 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, one of just 15 nationally given out. The opening of the State Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls has given us a dignified final resting spot for eligible veterans and their spouses. Our efforts to pass laws to honor our veterans are being noticed. South Dakota has been named the number one state in the nation for veterans to live and work.

South Dakota honors those who honor the call to serve -- the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Would you all join me in thanking these veterans, national guard members, and law enforcement for their bravery and sacrifice.

## Moving to South Dakota

It wasn't just law enforcement that moved to South Dakota. Thousands of new residents made the move. Our state is top-3 in the nation for inbound migration, according to United Van Lines.

Georgi Boorman is a native of Washington State who was fed up with lockdowns. Fed up with not being able to go to church. Fed up with the "ever-changing rules," as she describes it. In Washington, her family had to restrict capacity at their cafe. She had to wear a mask everywhere she went, even when other people weren't around. Georgi had enough. And she was ready to make a change.

She took a road trip to the Black Hills. And as she was driving home to Washington, she said "I don't want to go back." She wanted to move to South Dakota, but she wanted to stay close to her family.

So the family came, too -- her kids' grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Then more family followed. Eventually, South Dakota gained dozens of new residents from a family that loved freedom and was tired of tyranny. More are still planning to come! The only home they had ever known was Washington -- but it didn't feel like home anymore. They fell in love with South Dakota.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 22 of 81

## Business Success

Many people who moved here brought their businesses with them – big and small. Aesir Technologies chose Rapid City as the location for their new Gigafactory after a nationwide search. They considered what every other state in this country had to offer, and then they chose South Dakota as the best place for them to expand. They'll create 400 new good-paying high-tech jobs in the process.

Albany Farms moved the headquarters of its food manufacturing operations from Los Angeles to Belle Fourche. This new facility will give wheat farmers a new place to sell their product and bring in more than 500 jobs.

Businesses that have always called South Dakota home also expanded. Ten South Dakota businesses were named among the fastest growing in the nation earlier this year. Furniture Mart USA is doubling its campus in Sioux Falls, creating a 650,000 square foot facility. North Sioux City is adding over 300 acres to their industrial park to host many businesses. And they're preparing to build 300 new career homes to support that growth.

Black Hills Harley Davidson led the WORLD in Harley sales. In fact, no Harley Davidson dealership ANYWHERE has ever seen the revenue that Black Hills Harley achieved in 2021. That was driven by our strong economy -- by tourism, particularly visitors to the Sturgis Rally – and it was driven by the work ethic of the men and women who run this dealership.

Black Hills Harley is not just a record-setting motorcycle dealership. In the middle of a dangerous wildfire near Rapid City earlier this year, Black Hills Harley allowed their store to be used as the headquarters for the fire response. They gave our firefighters and first responders free use of their facilities and didn't ask for anything in return.

No matter how these businesses got here or got started, they are thriving because here in South Dakota, the government gets out of the way, allows them to grow and innovate, and helps out where we can.

## CLOSING

We are free here in South Dakota, but we cannot take that freedom for-granted. President Reagan reminded us, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children's children what it was once like in the United States when men were free."

In South Dakota, we will protect freedom. We will pass it on to our children. We will not allow freedom to go extinct.

That's what it means to be South Dakotans. We work together to help our communities grow, thrive, and remain safe, strong, and healthy. We support our local businesses, and they support us in return. We set an example for the nation in how we do business, how we approach public policy, and how we interact with each other every single day.

We are blessed to be living in South Dakota. The state of our state is the strongest it has ever been — even with so many challenges in the world around us.

But our state isn't measured by one snapshot in time.

It is our duty to ensure that it is strong for generations to come.

Let's work together this session to keep the doors of opportunity open for our people – and to guarantee the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

May God bless you all. And God bless the great state of South Dakota.

## **SDDP Statement on Gov. Noem's State of the State Address**

South Dakota Democratic Leaders issued the following statements in response to Governor Noem's State of the State Address.

### **SDDP Vice-Chair Nikki Gronli:**

"It comes as no surprise that Governor Noem used this speech to further divide South Dakotans. Clearly, she'd rather continue to build a national profile as a culture warrior than address the real concerns of hardworking South Dakotans. Democrats are focused on delivering for South Dakotans on healthcare, education, and an economy that works for everyone."

### **House Democratic Leader Jamie Smith:**

"Governor Noem's speech was an opportunity to bring South Dakotans together, but today we heard a partisan speech that divides. We need a government that works for all South Dakotans. There are opportunities for us to work together. Areas of agreement include workforce housing, job training, and childcare just to name a few.

Instead of paying attention to the science and encouraging South Dakotans to get vaccinated and boosted, Kristi Noem refuses to lead. I encourage people to get vaccinated and wear a mask when appropriate. Together we can end this pandemic."

### **Senate Democratic Leader Troy Heinert:**

"Governor Noem squandered the opportunity to make meaningful change in many South Dakotans' lives by focusing on social issues that have been debated and settled in this state over twenty years ago."

### **Senate Democratic Whip Reynold Nesiba:**

"Kristi Noem is quick to say we're first in lack of education loss but South Dakota is still 50th in teacher pay. Teachers have worked to ensure our children's education but Kristi Noem is offering them a raise that doesn't even keep up with inflation. They deserve 8%. Teachers and state employees deserve better"

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 24 of 81

## Aberdeen Christian girls use a 3-2-1 approach to beat Groton Area

Three-pointers, two-pointers and free throws all made for lethal weapons for Aberdeen Christian as the Knights defeated Groton Area in girls basketball action Tuesday in Groton, 55-38.

Free throws propelled the Knights in the first quarter as they made nine of 10 free shots to take a 16-7 lead at the end of the first quarter. Aberdeen Christian then upped its lead to 36-15 by half time and 43-23 by the end of the third quarter. The Knights made six three-pointers. The Tigers actually made more three-pointers than two-pointers.

Allyssa Locke led the Tigers, making four of seven three-pointers and having 12 points, three rebounds, one assist and three steals. Kennedy Hansen had eight points, one rebound and one assist. Gracie Traphagen had five points, nine rebounds and two assists. Alyssa Thaler had four points, four rebounds and one steal. Jaedyn Penning had four points and three rebounds. Brooklyn Hansen had three points. Jerica Locke had two points, one assist and one steal. Brooke Gengerke had two rebounds, two assist and one steal. Sydney Leicht had four rebounds and one assist. Aspen Johnson had three rebounds. Faith Traphagen had one rebound and one assist.

Groton Area made six of 22 field goals for 27 percent, seven of 26 three-pointers for 27 percent, made five of six free throws for 83 percent, had 30 rebounds, 13 turnovers, nine assists, six steals and 12 team fouls.

Aberdeen Christian was led by Mallory Miller with 18 points (scoring 16 of them in the first half), Kaylee Block had 11 points while Joy Rohrbach had seven, and Hanna Miller, Chloe Holt and Grace Kaiser each had six points.

The Knights made 18 of 42 field goals for 43 percent, 11 of 16 free throws for 68 percent, had 11 team fouls and nine turnovers.

Aberdeen Christian is now 7-0 on the season while the Tigers go to 4-5.

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

Groton Area's junior varsity team kept Aberdeen Christian scoreless in the second half as the Tigers won, 48-13. Groton Area held a 10-5 lead at the end of the first quarter, a 21-13 lead at half time and a 35-13 lead at the end of the third quarter.

Brooklyn Hansen led the Tigers with 13 points followed by Jerica Locke with seven, Faith Traphagen had six, Elizabeth Flihs and Mia Crank each had five, Kennedy Hansen and Riley Dunker each had four and Jaedyn Penning and Talli Wright each had two points.

Chloe Bosma led the Knights with six points while Sophia Fogarty had four, Bailey Englund two and Chloe Holt added one.

The junior varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Ken & Teresa Roberts of Tonganoxie, KS.

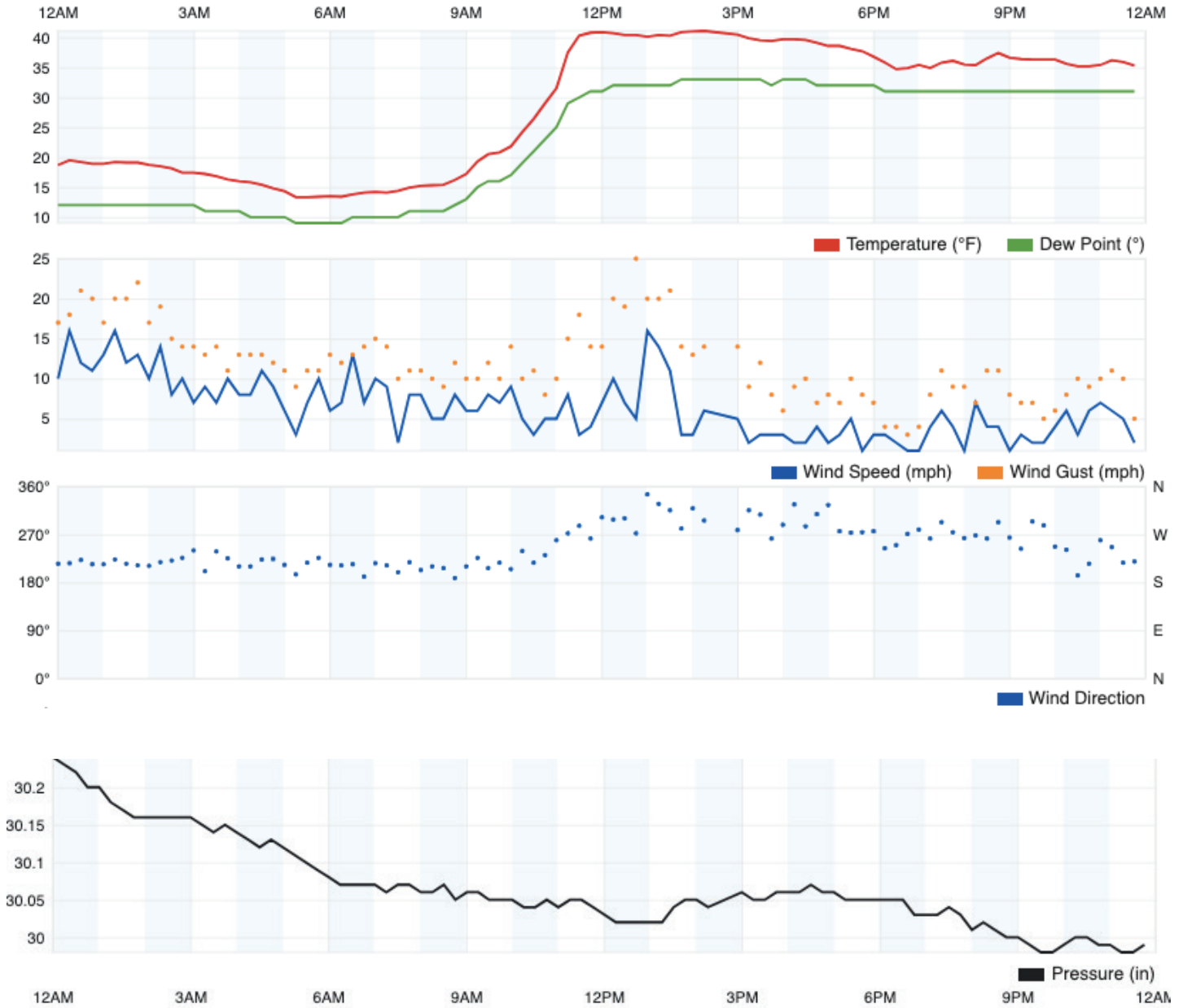
- Paul Kosel



# Groton Daily Independent




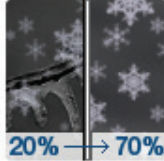

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 25 of 81

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 26 of 81**


<b>Today</b>	<b>Tonight</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Thursday Night</b>	<b>Friday</b>
				
Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Slight Chance Wintry Mix then Snow Likely	Snow
<b>High: 33 °F</b>	<b>Low: 24 °F</b>	<b>High: 28 °F</b>	<b>Low: 17 °F</b>	<b>High: 24 °F</b>

## Timing Snow & Wind

Probability of Precipitation Forecast Wind Gust

	Thu	Fri								Sat				Thu	Fri								Sat		
	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am		9pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am
<b>Aberdeen</b>	16	65	65	81	81	65	65	11	11	0	0	0	<b>Aberdeen</b>	18	21	22	22	24	28	28	25	25	23	20	15
Britton	21	75	75	86	86	71	71	15	15	0	0	0	Britton	17	20	21	23	26	28	28	24	22	20	16	12
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	7	23	23	47	47	43	43	3	3	0	0	0	<b>Eagle Butte</b>	23	23	20	22	36	39	37	35	30	24	20	16
Eureka	23	62	62	75	75	54	54	6	6	0	0	0	Eureka	20	22	22	21	24	31	32	29	22	18	15	12
<b>Gettysburg</b>	11	42	42	67	67	60	60	9	9	0	0	0	<b>Gettysburg</b>	23	23	23	22	20	30	36	35	28	24	22	15
Kennebec	3	18	18	52	52	61	61	20	20	1	1	0	Kennebec	22	23	22	20	26	33	33	31	29	28	23	20
<b>McIntosh</b>	19	38	38	58	58	34	34	1	1	0	0	0	<b>McIntosh</b>	23	23	18	22	35	41	41	36	25	21	15	16
Milbank	10	65	65	87	87	79	79	27	27	1	1	0	Milbank	13	14	17	20	21	22	22	18	17	17	14	9
<b>Miller</b>	10	47	47	76	76	74	74	23	23	1	1	0	<b>Miller</b>	18	21	21	20	20	21	25	26	25	24	20	17
Mobridge	17	47	47	64	64	49	49	4	4	0	0	0	Mobridge	20	20	18	18	24	32	35	32	23	18	16	13
<b>Murdo</b>	4	15	15	48	48	61	61	20	20	1	1	0	<b>Murdo</b>	22	22	21	23	33	40	40	38	32	28	23	20
<b>Pierre</b>	6	26	26	55	55	62	62	16	16	1	1	0	<b>Pierre</b>	21	21	18	16	23	31	33	33	29	24	20	15
<b>Redfield</b>	12	57	57	81	81	72	72	19	19	1	1	0	<b>Redfield</b>	18	20	20	23	23	22	25	25	24	23	20	16
Sisseton	16	71	71	86	86	75	75	20	20	1	1	0	Sisseton	14	17	21	23	24	24	23	21	20	20	16	13
<b>Watertown</b>	9	63	63	88	88	79	79	28	28	1	1	0	<b>Watertown</b>	17	18	20	22	23	24	25	25	22	20	17	15
Wheaton	12	64	64	81	81	71	71	17	17	1	1	0	Wheaton	14	16	21	23	23	23	23	18	16	15	13	8

\*Table values in %  
 \*\*Created: 2 am CST Wed 1/12/2022  
 \*\*\*Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

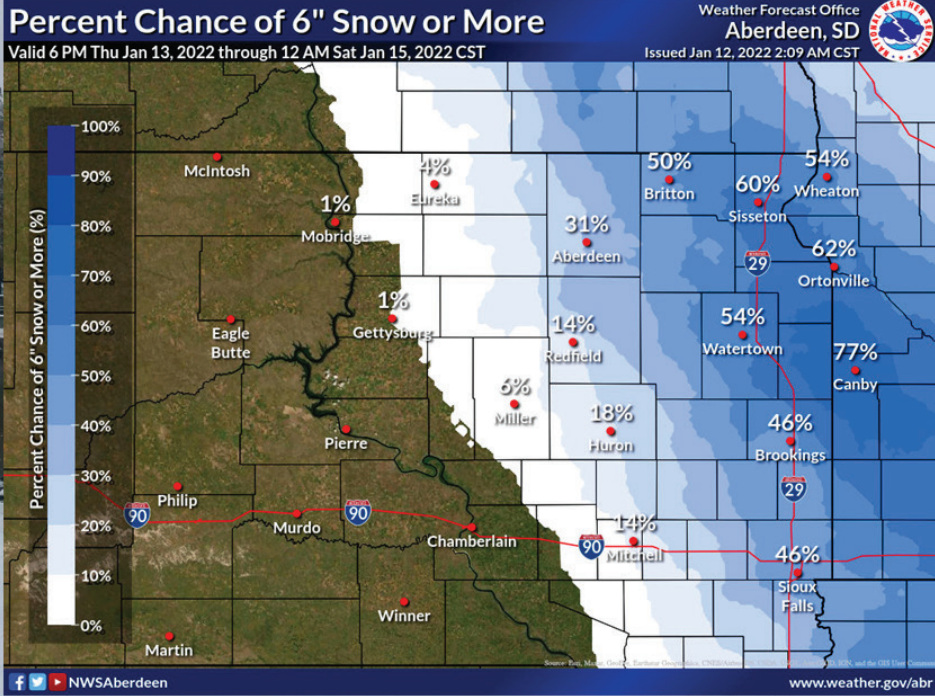
 NWS Aberdeen, SD  
 Updated: 1/12/2022 2:57 AM CST

A system moves into the region late Thursday with the potential for snow and wind across the Dakotas. This is the approximate timing for each. Heaviest snow looks to be focused in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota while the strongest winds will be across the Missouri valley and west.

# Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 27 of 81

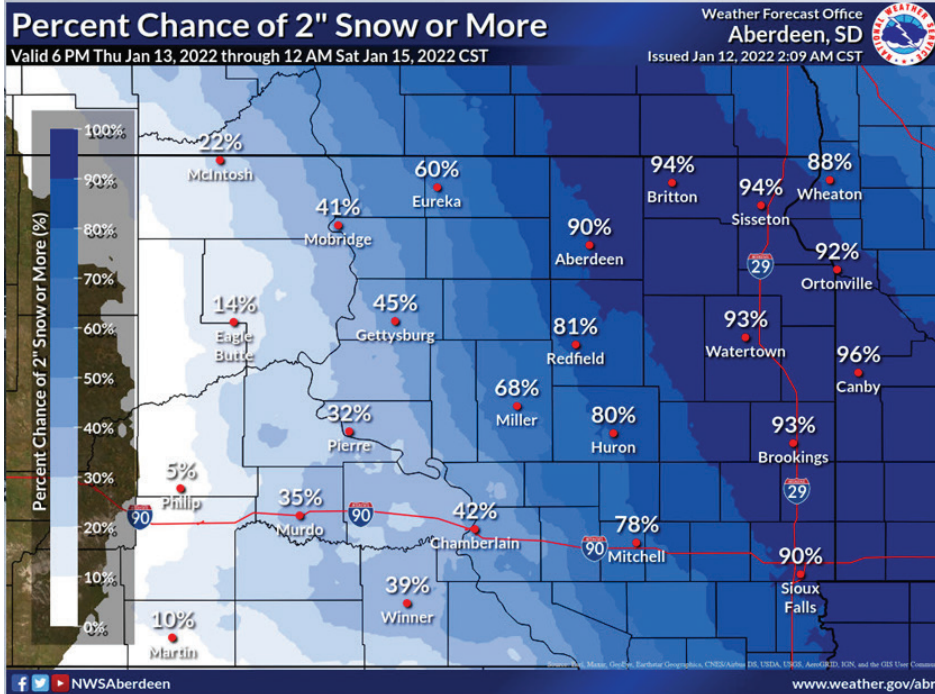
## Snowfall Probabilities - 6" Accumulations



- **Storm System Comes In Thurs Night**
- **A Mix of Freezing Rain Sleet & Snow Initially**
- **Little If Any Ice Accum**
- **Most Precip Will Fall As Snow**
- **Band of Snow Sets Up Over Eastern SD & Western MN**
- **Snow Diminishes Friday Afternoon & Winds Pick Up West**

www.weather.gov/abr  
National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

## Snowfall Probabilities - 2" Accumulations



- **Storm System Comes In Thurs Night**
- **A Mix of Freezing Rain Sleet & Snow Initially**
- **Little If Any Ice Accum**
- **Most Precip Will Fall As Snow**
- **Band of Snow Sets Up Over Eastern SD & Western MN**
- **Snow Diminishes Friday Afternoon & Winds Pick Up West**

www.weather.gov/abr  
National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 28 of 81

## Today in Weather History

January 12, 1912: The all-time coldest temperature ever recorded at Aberdeen and Timber Lake, South Dakota, was 46 degrees below zero on this date in 1912. On February 8th, 1895, 46 degrees below zero was also recorded in Aberdeen. The record low for this date was also set at Watertown, with 38 degrees below zero.

January 12, 1997: On January 12th, 1997, some of the greatest snow depths were recorded across central and northeast South Dakota. Ipswich had 29 inches on the ground, Aberdeen had 30 inches, Timber Lake had 31 inches, Mobridge had 34 inches, and Waubay had 38 inches. Some of the highest snow depths were recorded at Summit, Sand Lake, and Eureka. Summit had 42 inches of snow on the ground on January 12th, Sand Lake had 47 inches, and Eureka had a snow depth of 50 inches. The snow depth at Aberdeen was the all-time record, and Mobridge was just an inch shy of their 35-inch record snow depth.

1886: With a reading of 26 degrees below zero, Bowling Green, Kentucky, recorded its coldest temperature on record.

1888: Children's or Schoolhouse Blizzard occurred on this day. The blizzard killed 235 people, many of whom were children on their way home from school, across the Northern Plains.

1890: A tornado touched down at St. Louis, Missouri, and crossed the Mississippi River, ending just south of Venice. The worst damage from this tornado occurred in St. Louis. Further east and northeast, one tornado in McLean County passed through downtown Cooksville, destroying at least a dozen buildings, while a tornado in Richland County destroyed four homes northeast of Olney. In all, over 100 homes and other buildings were unroofed or damaged. The storm caused four deaths and 15 injuries.

1985: A record snowstorm struck portions of western and south-central Texas. All snowfall records dating back to 1885 were easily broken. Austin measured 3.6 inches, and Del Rio received 8.6 inches. San Antonio saw a record-setting 13.5 inches from this event.

2010: A magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti, leaving over 200,000 people dead.

1888 - A sharp cold front swept southward from the Dakotas to Texas in just 24 hours spawning a severe blizzard over the Great Plains. More than 200 pioneers perished in the storm. Subzero temperatures and mountainous snow drifts killed tens of thousands of cattle. (David Ludlum)

1912 - The morning low of 47 degrees below zero at Washta IA established a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A record snowstorm struck portions of western and south central Texas. The palm trees of San Antonio were blanketed with up to thirteen and a half inches of snow, more snow than was ever previously received in an entire winter season. (Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1987 - Twenty-seven cities in the Upper Midwest reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 72 degrees at Valentine NE and 76 degrees at Rapid City SD set records for the month of January. (National Weather Summary)

1988 - Parts of North Dakota finally got their first snow of the winter season, and it came with a fury as a blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Snowfall totals ranged up to 14 inches at Fargo ND, winds gusted to 65 mph at Windom MN, and wind chill readings in North Dakota reached 60 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A dozen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s. Fort Myers FL reported a record high of 86 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Gale force winds produce squalls with heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Totals in northwest Pennsylvania ranged up to eleven inches at Conneautville and Meadville. Barnes Corners, in western New York State, was buried under 27 inches of snow in two days. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

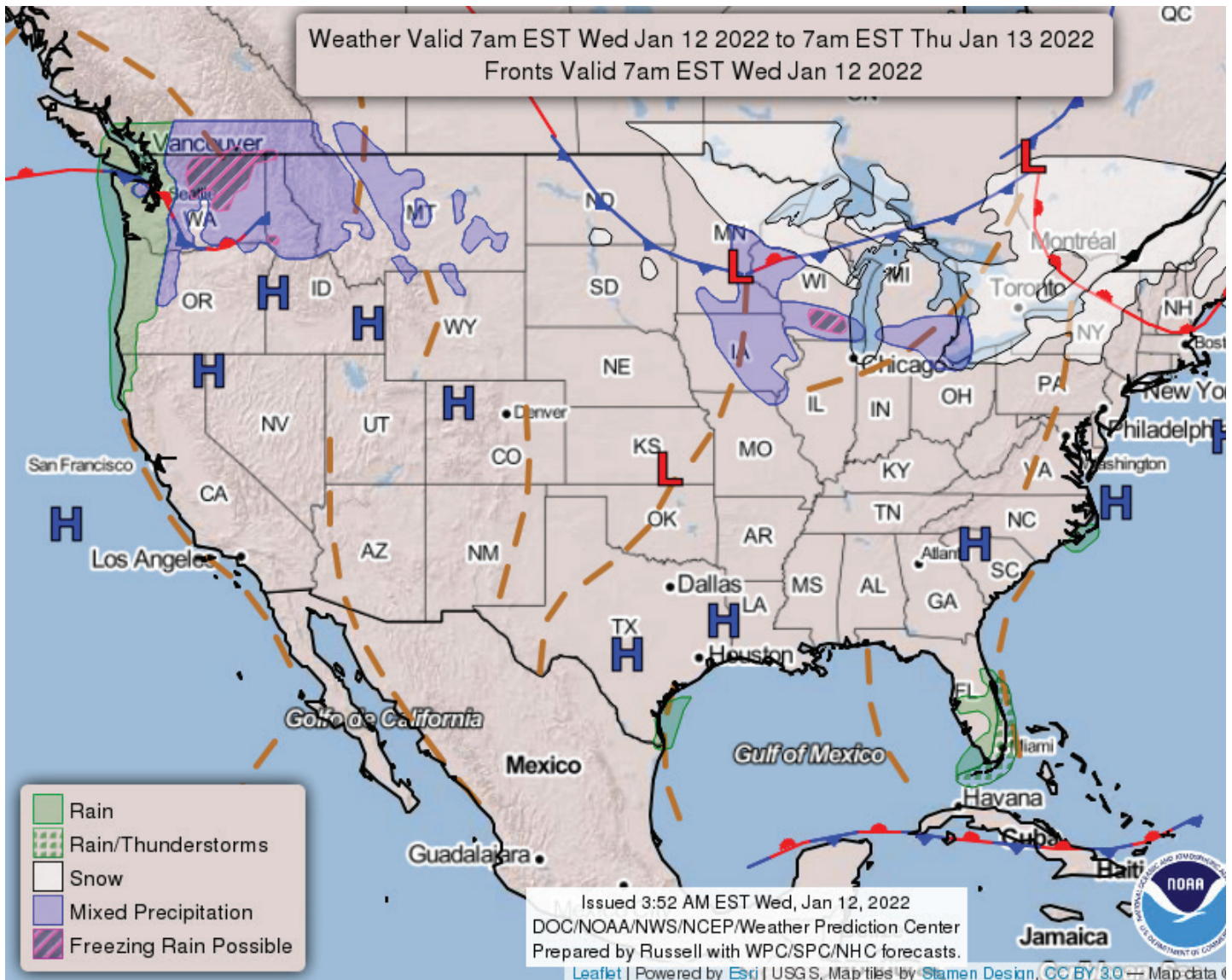
# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 29 of 81

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 42 °F at 2:28 PM**  
**Low Temp: 13 °F at 5:24 AM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 12:37 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 58 in 1987**  
**Record Low: -46 in 1912**  
**Average High: 23°F**  
**Average Low: 2°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.25**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.25**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:13:32 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07:35 AM**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 30 of 81



## WILLING

One morning Michael Faraday was walking past a high fence with a large iron gate. Puzzled, he looked through the gate wondering what the fence was hiding. Not being able to see very much he struggled hard and was able to get his head, shoulders, and arms through the gate. When he tried to extract himself, he realized that he was stuck! Laughing at himself he said, "My head and arms are on one side, and my body is on the other."

He tried desperately to free himself but had no success. Finally, a stranger came to his rescue and was able to pull him from the gate and set him free.

Later in life, after becoming one of the world's most respected scientists in the field of electromagnetism, he said, "That experience taught me a precious lesson. My head and heart and hands should always be together."

Another famous person, King David, said the same thing in different words: "Your troops should be willing on your day of battle." The word "willing" literally means "willing offerings" or "a freewill offering." So, we can interpret the verse to read, "Your troops are to be a free-will offering." Could there be a more descriptive way to explain the true meaning of consecration?

Consecration is the voluntary surrender of our heads, hearts, and hands to the Lord. It is to say, "Lord, let your Word make its way from my head to my heart and from my heart to my hands as I willingly use them to do your work!"

Imagine what God could do with us if we are willing!

Prayer: Lord, in Your infinite love, infinite wisdom and infinite power do what You will with my life. I am willing, and I am Yours! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: -But You, O Sovereign Lord, deal well with me for Your name's sake; out of the goodness of Your love, deliver me. Psalm 109:21

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 31 of 81

## 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

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 32 of 81

## 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

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 33 of 81

News from the  Associated Press

## Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 55, Groton Area 38

Aberdeen Roncalli 45, Faulkton 34

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 57, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 23

Arlington 55, Deuel 13

Belle Fourche 57, Lead-Deadwood 19

Bennett County 59, Little Wound 37

Bison 69, Tiospaye Topa 22

Bowman County, N.D. 46, Harding County 43

Bridgewater-Emery 69, Ethan 42

Britton-Hecla 41, Wilmot 27

Castlewood 56, Clark/Willow Lake 34

Centerville 38, Scotland 35

Colman-Egan 72, Chester 53

DeSmet 62, Howard 47

Dell Rapids St. Mary 55, Elkton-Lake Benton 51

Flandreau 55, Garretson 29

Freeman 52, Parker 43

Great Plains Lutheran 41, Estelline/Hendricks 32

Hamlin 56, Sioux Valley 30

Hanson 72, McCook Central/Montrose 22

Hill City 54, Philip 29

Huron 69, Mitchell 46

Lakota Tech 65, Pierre 60

Leola/Frederick 35, North Central Co-Op 29

Menno 36, Canistota 23

Potter County 48, Stanley County 38

Rapid City Christian 53, Sturgis Brown 40

Redfield 59, Miller 32

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 48, Kimball/White Lake 32

Sisseton 70, Tiospa Zina Tribal 18

Tea Area 59, Tri-Valley 32

Vermillion 54, Madison 31

Viborg-Hurley 66, Alcester-Hudson 30

Wagner 53, Gregory 32

Warner 50, Hitchcock-Tulare 43

West Central 64, Dakota Valley 53

Yankton 44, Harrisburg 40

West River Tournament=

Edgemont 60, Oelrichs 33

Faith 60, Moorcroft, Wyo. 44

Upton, Wyo. 49, Newell 28

Wall def. Hot Springs, forfeit

---

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 34 of 81

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=  
Belle Fourche 68, Lead-Deadwood 32  
Beresford 61, McCook Central/Montrose 54  
Bison 57, Tiospaye Topa 52  
Bowman County, N.D. 72, Lemmon 61  
Britton-Hecla 45, Wilmot 36  
Centerville 57, Scotland 42  
Clark/Willow Lake 55, Castlewood 48  
Dakota Valley 73, West Central 60  
DeSmet 59, Howard 38  
Dell Rapids 66, Sioux Falls Christian 57  
Deuel 79, Arlington 44  
Estelline/Hendricks 53, Great Plains Lutheran 48, OT  
Ethan 56, Bridgewater-Emery 41  
Gayville-Volin 61, Sioux Falls Lutheran 26  
Gregory 56, Wagner 55  
Hamlin 56, Sioux Valley 30  
Highmore-Harrold 59, Faulkton 58  
Hitchcock-Tulare 54, Warner 49  
Kimball/White Lake 61, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 50  
Leola/Frederick 55, North Central Co-Op 35  
Mitchell 64, Huron 51  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 62, Wessington Springs 46  
Northwestern 32, Florence/Henry 31  
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 78, James Valley Christian 63  
Redfield 59, Miller 32  
Sully Buttes 35, Ipswich 33  
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 69, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 38  
Viborg-Hurley 53, Alcester-Hudson 23  
Winner 46, Pierre 43  
Yankton 46, Harrisburg 45  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Mobridge-Pollock vs. McLaughlin, ppd.  
Waverly-South Shore vs. Tri-State, N.D., ppd. to Feb 4th.

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

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined  
PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:  
Mega Millions  
02-03-19-52-58, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 2  
(two, three, nineteen, fifty-two, fifty-eight; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: two)  
Estimated jackpot: \$300 million  
Powerball  
Estimated jackpot: \$38 million

## Court filings: Probe of billionaire Sanford remains open

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota attorney general's office and the lawyer for billionaire

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 35 of 81

banker and philanthropist T. Denny Sanford have confirmed in recent court filings that an investigation into Sanford for possible possession of child pornography is still ongoing.

The two sides filed documents last week fighting a South Dakota Supreme Court ruling that would allow some information related to search warrants in the case to become public. As part of his argument, Sanford lawyer Marty Jackley said the probe revealed that his client's email accounts were hacked.

Assistant Attorney General Paul Swedlund wrote that the existence of an investigation into Sanford should be reason to stop the release of the affidavits that were filed by an agent with the Department of Criminal Investigation in December 2019, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

It was not clear whether the investigation had concluded. Under state law, affidavits used to obtain search warrants don't have to be made public until a person has been indicted by a grand jury or the investigation has concluded. Sanford has not been charged with a crime.

The Argus Leader and ProPublica went to court for access to the search warrants.

The 86-year-old Sanford is the state's richest man, worth an estimated \$3.4 billion. He made a fortune as the founder of First Premier Bank in South Dakota, which is known for issuing high-interest credit cards to those with poor credit.

## Noem to push abortion ban after 6 weeks, conservative vision

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Tuesday said she would push legislation to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, as she laid out a sharply conservative list of priorities to start the state's legislative session.

During the final State of the State address of her first term, the Republican governor proposed what amounted to a wishlist for conservative voters, promising to make it easier for state residents to get a permit to carry concealed firearms and nearly impossible for them to get an abortion. She is also proposing a requirement that schools allot time for prayer, a ban on the teaching of controversial material on race in public schools and ensured exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines for medical or religious reasons.

"In South Dakota, we protect freedom, and we will pass it on to our children, and we will not allow freedom to go extinct," the governor said, as she derided other states for enacting restrictions to prevent and slow COVID-19 infections.

Noem has used her hands-off approach to the pandemic to generate nationwide attention among Republicans. She has positioned herself for a 2024 White House bid, and her speech Tuesday showed a willingness to tap into the country's most incendiary social issues to stay in the spotlight.

"It was a campaign speech," said Rep. Jamie Smith, the House Democratic leader, adding that it was a "blueprint of how conservative can I be?"

The governor's office did not immediately release details on the bill to ban abortions after the sixth week of pregnancy — often known as "heartbeat law." The Supreme Court's willingness to consider striking down *Roe v. Wade* — the 1973 decision that established the right to an abortion nationwide — has prompted a flurry of bill-writing in Statehouses.

But medical experts say the heart doesn't begin to form until the fetus is at least nine weeks old, and they decry efforts to promote abortion bans by relying on medical inaccuracies.

"Today, I am asking all of you to protect the heartbeats of these unborn children," Noem told the lawmakers assembled in the House chamber. "I am bringing legislation to ban all abortions once a heartbeat can be detected."

The proposal received a standing ovation from the Republican-dominated Legislature.

Noem also touted a \$116 million tax surplus and proposed using that to slash fees for applications for concealed weapon permits, including covering the cost of federal background checks. She also proposed cutting fees to register businesses with the Secretary of State and cutting a tax on bingo operations.

Noem's list of proposals will put Democrats, who just hold 11 seats in the Legislature, on the defensive. But Noem also faces several political foes within her own party, including one House member who is

mounting a primary campaign against her.

Rep. Steve Haugaard, who has criticized the governor for not being conservative enough, agreed that Noem's State of the State address was more of a campaign speech and said that if the governor was serious about such proposals, she would not have waited until the final year of her term to bring them up.

The governor's tenure has been marked by the coronavirus pandemic and her decision to mostly forego lockdowns or other restrictions. Noem on Tuesday defended those who don't get vaccinated against COVID-19, saying, "We live in a free country and we are free to make our own decisions."

Smith criticized the governor's failure to encourage people to get vaccinated, pointing out that the overwhelming majority of people hospitalized for COVID-19 are unvaccinated. The state's hospitals have been strained in recent weeks as they handle the most people hospitalized with COVID-19 in over a year.

But Republican Rep. Chris Johnson, the assistant leader of House Republicans, praised the governor's speech and approach to the pandemic, saying it has positioned the state to grow into the future.

"The governor deserves to take a victory lap at this time," he said.

## American Indian Movement leader Clyde Bellecourt dies at 85

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Clyde Bellecourt, a leader in the Native American struggle for civil rights and a founder of the American Indian Movement, has died. He was 85.

Bellecourt died Tuesday morning from cancer at his home in Minneapolis, Peggy Bellecourt, his wife, told the Star Tribune. Lisa Bellanger, the current co-director of AIM, also confirmed his death to The Associated Press.

"Clyde was a really good man and influenced a lot of people," said Winona LaDuke, an American Indian activist and the executive director of Honor the Earth, a group dedicated to raising awareness for Indigenous environmental issues. "He was very influential in my life."

Bellecourt was a co-founder in 1968 of the American Indian Movement, which began as a local organization in Minneapolis that sought to grapple with issues of police brutality and discrimination against Native Americans.

One of the group's first acts was to organize a patrol to monitor allegations of police harassment and brutality against Native Americans who had settled in Minneapolis where AIM is based. Members had cameras, asked police for badge numbers and monitored radio scanner traffic for mention of anyone they might recognize as Indigenous to ensure their rights weren't being violated.

The group quickly became a national force. It would lead a string of major national protests in the 1970s, including a march to Washington, D.C., in 1972 called the Trail of Broken Treaties.

At times, the American Indian Movement's tactics were militant, which led to splintering in the group. In one of its most well-known actions, the group took over Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1973 to protest U.S. and tribal governments. The 71-day occupation turned violent, and two people died in a shootout.

The group called out instances of cultural appropriation, provided job training, sought to improve housing and education for Indigenous people, provided legal assistance, spotlighted environmental injustice and questioned government policies that were seen as anti-Indigenous.

Bellecourt was born and raised on the White Earth Indian Reservation. His Ojibwe name is Nee-gon-we-way-we-dun, which means "Thunder Before the Storm." He was the only remaining living founder of the AIM movement, Bellanger said.

Bellecourt was among those who protested the 1992 Super Bowl in Minneapolis, when the Washington Football Team beat the Buffalo Bills. The Washington team dropped its old name in 2020 after decades of criticism it was offensive to Native Americans and after pressure from sponsors amid a national reckoning on race in the U.S. Bellecourt long called for the team's name to be changed.

Bellanger said condolences have been coming in from around the globe.

"He was known worldwide," she said.

## Person of interest held in triple homicide on reservation

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Oglala Sioux tribal police and the FBI say they are investigating a triple homicide near Manderson.

According to the FBI, two men and a woman were fatally shot in the early morning hours last Wednesday at a home in Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Officials say a person of interest is in custody and is being held on unrelated charges.

The victims have been identified as 39-year-old Michael White Plume Sr., James Graham and Alma Garneau, both 38, KOTA-TV reported. A obituary says Garneau was the mother of seven children.

According to a tribal police social media post, the man in custody was arrested at a Manderson home following a search. Police say they are also questioning him about two other shootings last month as well as an assault on an officer.

Formal charges are pending.

## Djokovic: Not isolating after COVID infection was 'error'

By JOHN PYE and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic knew he'd tested positive for COVID-19 when he attended a newspaper interview and photo shoot in Serbia last month, saying Wednesday he made an "error of judgment" and should have immediately gone into isolation.

In a statement posted to his social media accounts, the tennis star also blamed "human error" by his support team for failing to declare that he had traveled in the two-week period before entering Australia.

Upon arrival, his visa was revoked and then later reinstated in an ongoing saga over whether he should be allowed into the country despite not being vaccinated against COVID-19. The back and forth has provoked outrage in Australia and overshadowed the lead-up to the Australian Open.

Djokovic acknowledged the lapses when he sought to clarify what he called "continuing misinformation" about his movements after he became infected last month — though he did not say spell out what inaccuracies he was referring to.

The statement was posted while the men's tennis No. 1 was in Rod Laver Arena holding a practice session, his third on the tournament's main court since being released from four nights in immigration detention.

The nine-time and defending Australian Open champion remains in limbo before the year's first tennis major starts next Monday. The stakes are particularly high since he is seeking a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He won a legal battle on procedural grounds Monday that allowed him to stay in the country, but he still faces the prospect of deportation because his exemption from COVID-19 vaccination rules has been questioned. That decision is entirely at the discretion of Australia's immigration minister if deemed to be in the public interest for health and safety reasons.

Deportation could result in sanctions ranging up to a three-year ban from entering Australia, a daunting prospect for a player who has won almost half of his 20 Grand Slam singles titles here.

Court documents detailing Djokovic's positive test sparked speculation over the star player's attendance at events in his native Serbia last month. Further questions also were raised about errors on his immigration form that could potentially result in the cancellation of his visa.

On the form, Djokovic said he had not traveled in the 14 days before his flight to Australia, despite being seen in Spain and Serbia in that period.

In his statement, Djokovic described recent commentary as "hurtful" and said he wanted to address it in the interest of "alleviating broader concern in the community about my presence in Australia."

The 34-year-old Serb said he'd taken rapid tests that were negative and he was asymptomatic before he received his positive result from a PCR test he undertook out of an "abundance of caution" after attending a basketball game in Belgrade on Dec. 14.

He received the result late Dec. 17, he said, and scrapped all his commitments except a long-standing interview with L'Equipe newspaper.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 38 of 81

"I felt obliged to go ahead ... but did ensure I socially distanced and wore a mask except when my photograph was being taken," Djokovic said. "While I went home after the interview to isolate for the required period, on reflection, this was an error of judgment."

Serbia requires those who are infected with COVID-19 to isolate for eight days, but they can get out early if they test negative during that period.

Djokovic addressed the Australian travel declaration by saying it was submitted by his support team and "my agent sincerely apologizes for the administrative mistake in ticking the incorrect box."

"This was a human error and certainly not deliberate," he wrote. "My team has provided additional information to the Australian Government to clarify this matter."

The decision could take a while — but there is time pressure since the draw to determine brackets for the Australian Open is set to take place Thursday.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's office issued a statement saying Djokovic's legal team had filed further documents against the potential cancellation of his visa and added: "Naturally, this will affect the timeframe for a decision."

At issue is whether he has a valid exemption to strict rules requiring vaccination to enter Australia since he recently recovered from COVID-19.

His exemption to compete, based on the infection, was approved by the Victoria state government and Tennis Australia, the tournament organizer. That apparently allowed him to receive a visa to travel.

But the Australian Border Force rejected that exemption and canceled his visa upon arrival before a federal judge overturned that decision.

The initial decision to let him compete sparked outrage that Djokovic was being given special treatment — and the subsequent cancellation of his visa raised allegations that he was being targeted once the issue became political. The saga is playing out against the backdrop of growing concern in Australia over surging COVID-19 cases — and the government's strategy to contain them.

Victoria state, whose capital Melbourne is hosting the Australian Open, reported 21 deaths Wednesday along with 40,127 new cases.

Australia-based lawyer Greg Barns, who is experienced in visa cases, told The Associated Press that the immigration minister has the "personal power" to cancel the visa without having to give written notice or a reasonable time for Djokovic to respond.

If Djokovic's visa is canceled, his lawyers could go back to court to apply for an injunction that would prevent him from being forced to leave the country.

If the government decides instead to first give notice, Barns said it could give Djokovic up to nine days to respond.

"That might be a way of giving Djokovic a chance in the tournament and then kicking him out at the end of that," Barns said.

Sydney-based immigration lawyer Simon Jeans said there's "a lot of fudges" in the law and the immigration department would be taking its time to make sure any visa cancellation was "appeal-proof."

"It's not an easy task because if they cancel his visa and then Djokovic wins (an appeal) and he misses the opportunity to compete, he could make a claim against the department for the prize money and all his legal fees," Jeans said.

## UK's Johnson faces Parliament test over lockdown party claim

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a high-stakes showdown Wednesday in Parliament that could help defuse a crisis over claims that he and his staff broke coronavirus lockdown rules by holding illicit parties — or fan the flames even further.

Opponents and allies alike want Johnson to come clean about whether he attended a gathering in May 2020, when Britain was under a strict lockdown imposed by Johnson to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Johnson has so far declined to comment on reports he was at the "bring your own booze" get-together

in the garden of his Downing Street residence.

An invitation to the "socially distanced drinks" gathering was emailed to about 100 people by a senior prime ministerial aide. At the time, people in Britain were barred by law from meeting more than one person outside their household.

Johnson's lunchtime appearance at the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session in the House of Commons will be his first public appearance since details of the party emerged. On Tuesday, a spokesman declined to comment on the allegations, citing an ongoing investigation by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, into several alleged parties by government staff.

Johnson has previously said that he personally broke no lockdown rules, but his troubles are mounting.

Angela Rayner, deputy leader of the opposition Labour Party, said Johnson's refusal to say whether he was at the May 2020 party was "astonishing."

"People have been reflecting about what was happening to them at the time in May and many people are still grieving their loved ones who they weren't able to say goodbye to at the time, and to think the prime minister was laughing and partying is just unforgivable," she told the BBC.

Rayner said that if Johnson had "lied to the British public, lied to Parliament and he has attended parties during lockdown, then his position is untenable."

The scandal dubbed "partygate" has become the biggest crisis of Johnson's two-and-a-half years in power. During the U.K.'s first lockdown, which began in March 2020 and lasted for more than two months, almost all gatherings were banned. Millions of people were cut off from friends and family, and even barred from visiting dying relatives in hospitals. Thousands were fined by police for breaking the ban on gatherings.

So there has been widespread anger at claims Johnson's Conservative government flouted the rules it had imposed on the rest of the country by holding garden parties, Christmas get-togethers and office quiz nights in Downing Street, which is both the prime minister's home and his office.

Opposition politicians are calling for Johnson's resignation. More worryingly for the prime minister, many members of his own party are increasingly concerned about Johnson's judgment and leadership.

The Conservatives picked Johnson as leader in 2019 for his upbeat manner and popular touch, and despite the serial allegations of rule-bending and dishonesty that have followed him through his twin careers as journalist and politician. The choice appeared vindicated when he led the party to a big election win in December that year.

But support inside the party is being eroded by discontent over continuing pandemic restrictions, which some Conservatives view as draconian. He is also facing disquiet about his judgment after a slew of financial and ethical misconduct allegations against him and his government.

The Conservatives have a history of ousting leaders if they become a liability — and a recent surprising loss in a by-election for a district the party held for more than a century has increased their jitters.

Conservative legislator Christian Wakeford urged Johnson not to "defend the indefensible."

"It's embarrassing and what's worse is it further erodes trust in politics when it's already low," Wakeford wrote on Twitter. "We need openness, trust and honesty in our politics now more than ever and that starts from the top!"

Another Conservative lawmaker, Tobias Ellwood, said Johnson needed to apologize and "show some contrition" if he wanted to ride out the storm.

"We can't allow things to drift, that is not an option," he told Sky News.

## Large explosion outside Mogadishu airport, deaths reported

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — A large explosion was reported outside the international airport in Somalia's capital on Wednesday and an emergency responder said there were deaths and injuries.

The founder of the Amin ambulance service, Abdulkadir Adan, tweeted that he was "deeply saddened by the loss of life and injuries" in Mogadishu. He posted a photo from the scene of a mangled vehicle.

It wasn't immediately clear how many people were dead or who was targeted. The Somali National News Agency reports "unspecified casualties."

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab extremist group that controls parts of Somalia often carries out bombings at high-profile locations in the capital.

## Omicron may be headed for a rapid drop in Britain, US

By MARIA CHENG and CARLA K. JOHNSON Associated Press

Scientists are seeing signals that COVID-19's alarming omicron wave may have peaked in Britain and is about to do the same in the U.S., at which point cases may start dropping off dramatically.

The reason: The variant has proved so wildly contagious that it may already be running out of people to infect, just a month and a half after it was first detected in South Africa.

"It's going to come down as fast as it went up," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

At the same time, experts warn that much is still uncertain about how the next phase of the pandemic might unfold. The plateauing or ebbing in the two countries is not happening everywhere at the same time or at the same pace. And weeks or months of misery still lie ahead for patients and overwhelmed hospitals even if the drop-off comes to pass.

"There are still a lot of people who will get infected as we descend the slope on the backside," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium, which predicts that reported cases will peak within the week.

The University of Washington's own highly influential model projects that the number of daily reported cases in the U.S. will crest at 1.2 million by Jan. 19 and will then fall sharply "simply because everybody who could be infected will be infected," according to Mokdad.

In fact, he said, by the university's complex calculations, the true number of new daily infections in the U.S. — an estimate that includes people who were never tested — has already peaked, hitting 6 million on Jan. 6.

In Britain, meanwhile, new COVID-19 cases dropped to about 140,000 a day in the last week, after skyrocketing to more than 200,000 a day earlier this month, according to government data.

Numbers from the U.K.'s National Health Service this week show coronavirus hospital admissions for adults have begun to fall, with infections dropping in all age groups.

Kevin McConway, a retired professor of applied statistics at Britain's Open University, said that while COVID-19 cases are still rising in places such as southwest England and the West Midlands, the outbreak may have peaked in London.

The figures have raised hopes that the two countries are about to undergo something similar to what happened in South Africa, where in the span of about a month the wave crested at record highs and then fell significantly.

"We are seeing a definite falling-off of cases in the U.K., but I'd like to see them fall much further before we know if what happened in South Africa will happen here," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia.

Dr. David Heymann, who previously led the World Health Organization's infectious diseases department, said Britain was "the closest to any country of being out of the pandemic," adding that COVID-19 was inching towards becoming endemic.

Differences between Britain and South Africa, including Britain's older population and the tendency of its people to spend more time indoors in the winter, could mean a bumpier outbreak for the country and other nations like it.

On the other hand, British authorities' decision to adopt minimal restrictions against omicron could enable the virus to rip through the population and run its course much faster than it might in Western European countries that have imposed tougher COVID-19 controls, such as France, Spain and Italy.

Shabir Mahdi, dean of health sciences at South Africa's University of Witwatersrand, said European countries that impose lockdowns won't necessarily come through the omicron wave with fewer infections; the cases may just be spread out over a longer period of time.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 41 of 81

On Tuesday, the World Health Organization said there have been 7 million new COVID-19 cases across Europe in the past week, calling it a "tidal wave sweeping across the region." WHO cited modeling from Mokdad's group that predicts half of Europe's population will be infected with omicron within about eight weeks.

By that time, however, Hunter and others expect the world to be past the omicron surge.

"There will probably be some ups and downs along the way, but I would hope that by Easter, we will be out of this," Hunter said.

Still, the sheer numbers of people infected could prove overwhelming to fragile health systems, said Dr. Prabhat Jha of the Centre for Global Health Research at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

"The next few weeks are going to be brutal because in absolute numbers, there are so many people being infected that it will spill over into ICUs," Jha said.

Mokdad likewise warned in the U.S.: "It's going to be a tough two or three weeks. We have to make hard decisions to let certain essential workers continue working, knowing they could be infectious."

Omicron could one day be seen as a turning point in the pandemic, said Meyers, at the University of Texas. Immunity gained from all the new infections, along with new drugs and continued vaccination, could render the coronavirus something with which we can more easily coexist.

"At the end of this wave, far more people will have been infected by some variant of COVID," Meyers said. "At some point, we'll be able to draw a line — and omicron may be that point — where we transition from what is a catastrophic global threat to something that's a much more manageable disease."

That's one plausible future, she said, but there is also the possibility of a new variant — one that is far worse than omicron — arising.

## **Biden sending more COVID tests to schools to keep them open**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is increasing federal support for COVID-19 testing for schools in a bid to keep them open amid the omicron surge.

The White House announced Wednesday that the administration is making a dedicated stream of 5 million rapid tests and 5 million lab-based PCR tests available to schools starting this month to ease supply shortages and promote the safe reopening of schools. That's on top of more than \$10 billion devoted to school-based tests authorized in the COVID-19 relief law and about \$130 billion earmarked in that law to keep kids in school.

The new initiative comes as the White House faces mounting criticism over long lines and supply shortages for testing and after the nation's third-largest public school system, in Chicago, closed for days after an impasse between teachers and officials over reopening policies. The closure was a black eye for Biden, who made reopening schools — and keeping them open — a priority.

"We have been very clear, publicly and privately, that we want to see schools open," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday. She cited the massive amount of funding for schools as evidence of the administration ensuring "we were prepared and had resources needed to address whatever may come up in the pandemic."

The new crop of tests is enough to cover only a small fraction of the more than 50 million students and educators in the nation's schools. The administration hopes the tests will fill critical shortfalls in schools that are having difficulty securing tests through existing federal funding or are facing outbreaks of the more transmissible COVID-19 variant.

The White House says states will be able to request the tests immediately and the tests will be available for use by the end of the month.

The administration is also working to target other federally backed testing sites to support school testing programs, including locating Federal Emergency Management Agency sites at schools.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is set to release new guidance later this week

to help schools implement "test-to-stay" policies, in which schools use rapid tests to keep close contacts of those who test positive in the classroom.

## China's Tianjin orders more testing of 14 million residents

BEIJING (AP) — The northern Chinese city of Tianjin ordered a second round of COVID-19 testing of all 14 million residents Wednesday following the discovery of 97 cases of the omicron variant during initial screenings that began Sunday.

Residents were asked to remain where they are until the results of all the nucleic acid tests are received, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Xinhua said authorities have carried out almost 12 million tests so far, with 7.8 million samples returned. Infections were first reported on Saturday in the city that is only about an hour from Beijing, which is to host the Winter Olympics from Feb. 4.

High-speed rail service and other forms of transportation between the cities have been suspended, leading to some disruptions in supply chains, including for packaged food items sold in convenience stores.

Tianjin's COVID-19 prevention and control office said all who have tested positive in the initial testing round were found to have the omicron variant, of which China has so far only reported a small number of cases. The source of the outbreak is still unknown and many who are spreading the variant may be doing so unwittingly because they show no symptoms.

Also in the north, two college students who traveled earlier this month by train from Tianjin tested positive for the virus Wednesday in the city of Dalian, city officials said. There was no word on what variant they had contracted.

The omicron variant spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who are vaccinated or were previously infected by other versions of the virus. However, early studies show omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the delta variant, and vaccination and a booster still offer strong protection from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

Millions more Chinese are under lockdown in cities under the strict "dynamic zero-case policy" that has allowed China to largely contain major outbreaks, although at considerable cost to local economies.

Hong Kong has closed kindergartens and primary schools after infections were discovered among students, banned flights from the United States and seven other countries and held 2,500 passengers on a cruise ship for coronavirus testing Wednesday as the city attempts to stem the emerging omicron outbreak.

Hong Kong has tightened pandemic-related restrictions in recent days after discovering the omicron variant had spread beyond people arriving from overseas.

In total, China announced 166 new cases of COVID-19 in the 24 hours before Wednesday, including 33 in Tianjin and 118 in Henan province but just eight in the city of Xi'an, home to the famed Terracotta Warrior statues and major industries, where a lockdown was imposed Dec. 23.

Authorities also released news of an inspection to Henan last week by Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, who called for stepped-up measures to prevent the spread of both the delta and omicron variants. COVID-19 has spread to three cities in the province, including Yuzhou, Anyang and the provincial capital Zhengzhou, prompting travel bans and various levels of lockdown.

"It is necessary to do a good job in guaranteeing the living needs of the people in the closed and controlled communities, ensure the basic medical needs of the people during the epidemic period, and ensure that the people's demands can be responded to and resolved in a timely manner," Sun was quoted as saying.

Some Xi'an residents have complained about their inability to obtain food and other daily necessities.

China has sacked or otherwise punished a number of officials for dereliction of duty related to the pandemic response, including failing to prevent new infections. On Wednesday, Anyang authorities cited 61 government departments and 11 officials in violation. Punishments ranged from verbal warnings to dismissal, according to a city government notice.

Ensuring the Olympics are free of any outbreaks is a key concern of the ruling Communist Party. Athletes,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 43 of 81

officials and journalists are operating in a closed-loop bubble to prevent them from coming into contact with the general public from the time they arrive in Beijing until their departure. If fully vaccinated, they will not have to undergo the standard 21-day quarantine.

In addition, the International Olympic Committee has issued a document advising attendees to avoid crowded places such as bars and restaurants and avoid physical contact with others five days before departing.

Attendees are required to provide two negative PCR tests before they travel and will be tested twice daily while in China.

Participants should "absolutely not let your guard down" even after testing negative, the IOC said.

China has banned fans from outside the country from attending and it appears Beijing plans to distribute only a small number of tickets to carefully selected spectators.

Along with lockdowns, China has used mask mandates and detailed case tracing to restrain major outbreaks.

It has vaccinated nearly 85% of its population, according to Our World in Data. The shots have helped reduce the severity of disease, although Chinese vaccines are considered less effective than those used elsewhere.

China says it currently has 3,476 active COVID-19 cases. The country has reported 4,636 deaths among 104,189 total cases since the virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.

## **NATO, Russia in high-level talks as Ukraine tensions simmer**

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Senior NATO and Russian officials were meeting Wednesday to try to bridge seemingly irreconcilable differences over the future of Ukraine, amid deep skepticism that Russian President Vladimir Putin's security proposals for easing tensions are genuine.

The talks comes during a week of high-stakes diplomacy and a U.S.-led effort to prevent preparations for what Washington believes could be a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moscow denies it is planning an attack. Still, its history of military action in Ukraine and Georgia worries NATO.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko and Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin were stern-faced as they posed for the media before the NATO-Russia Council. There was no public handshake, although the Russian delegation fist-bumped officials from the 30 NATO member countries inside the meeting venue.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman led the U.S. team at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Stoltenberg tweeted that "it is a timely opportunity for dialogue at a critical moment for European security. When tensions are high, it is even more important that we sit down around the same table and address our concerns."

The meeting, the first of its kind in over two years, was due to run for about three hours. The NATO-Russia Council, their chief forum for talks, was set up two decades ago but full meetings paused when Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. It has met only sporadically since, the last time in July 2019.

With around 100,000 combat-ready Russian troops backed by tanks, artillery and heavy equipment massed just across Ukraine's eastern border, Wednesday's gathering has taken on great significance, yet it still seems destined to fail.

"These are completely unacceptable proposals," Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet told public broadcaster ERR on the eve of the talks. Estonia, like its Baltic neighbors Latvia and Lithuania, relies on U.S. security guarantees provided by its membership in NATO.

Putin says Russia's demands are simple, but key parts of the proposals contained in the documents that Moscow has made public — a draft agreement with NATO countries and the offer of a treaty between Russia and the United States — won't pass muster at the 30-country military organization.

NATO would have to agree to halt all membership plans, not just with Ukraine, and scale down its pres-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 44 of 81

ence in countries like Estonia close to Russia's borders. In exchange, Russia would pledge to limit its war games, as well as end aircraft buzzing incidents and other low-level hostilities.

Endorsing such an agreement would require NATO to reject a key part of its founding treaty. Under Article 10 of the 1949 Washington Treaty, the organization can invite in any willing European country that can contribute to security in the North Atlantic area and fulfill the obligations of membership.

"It has become crystal clear that not a single ally inside the NATO alliance is willing to budge or negotiate anything as it relates to NATO's open door policy," Julianne Smith, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, said Tuesday. "I cannot imagine any scenario where that is up for discussion."

Maksim Samorukov, a fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank, says the lack of any real Russian concessions in Putin's draft agreement probably means that "Russia is ready to tolerate a failure of these negotiations."

The idea, Samorukov said, is to "demonstrate to the West that we are serious, we mean business. That Russia is really ready to take drastic steps to impose these concessions" on the U.S.-led military organization.

Still, NATO can't afford to ignore Russia's offer. Some members fear that Putin may be seeking a pretext to launch an invasion — like the failure of the West to engage — and any talks that would ease tensions over border forces, missile deployments or war games would be welcome.

For the Kremlin, though, time is of the essence.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that this week's talks have, so far, provided little reason for optimism. He said the outcome of Wednesday's meeting, and one at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on Thursday, could determine whether it makes sense to continue talking.

## Amid Djokovic backlash, Australia grapples with omicron wave

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Like millions of others in the most locked-down place on the planet, Melbourne resident Rav Thomas dutifully spent 262 days confined to his home as the COVID-19 pandemic raged. He got vaccinated. And the single father of two found ways to pay the bills as Melbourne's lockdowns — the longest imposed by any city in the world — battered his entertainment and events company.

Then in October, the city's restrictions began to lift, along with Thomas' spirits. His company once again began booking events as Melbourne's nightclubs and bars reopened.

And then, omicron arrived.

The coronavirus variant has swept across Australia despite its high vaccination rate and strict border policies that kept the country largely sealed off from the world for almost two years. Those measures, which turned Australia into a virtually COVID-19-free utopia early in the pandemic, have garnered fresh scrutiny as the government has battled to deport unvaccinated tennis star Novak Djokovic ahead of the Australian Open. And they have prompted questions from frustrated and fatigued Australians about why their country — which seemingly did everything to stop the spread of the virus — now finds itself infested with it.

"Tell your population, 'Stay in your houses, you can't go past your letterbox after 8 p.m. for days and months on end.' And then you're told, 'OK, we've put in the hard yards,'" says Thomas, whose company, Anthem Entertainment, is now facing its 23rd consecutive month of financial loss as bookings once again dry up. "But then here we go again. Again. Again!"

Officially, there are now more than 600,000 active cases across Australia's population of 26 million, though experts believe the actual number is far higher. The surge, health experts say, is partly due to the coinciding of two events: Politicians who were reluctant to renege on pre-omicron promises that they would relax restrictions such as mask-wearing, and the emergence of the incredibly contagious variant. Faced with the explosion of infections, the government of the most populous state, New South Wales, ultimately backtracked and reimposed mask mandates last month. But by then, epidemiologists say, it was too late.

While deaths and hospitalizations remain relatively low, the vaccines have not stopped the spread of the virus. Australia's vaccine program — which has resulted in around 80% of the total population having at

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 45 of 81

least one jab — also began later than many other Western countries, leaving much of its population yet to qualify for a booster.

“Vaccination alone isn’t good enough,” says epidemiologist Adrian Esterman, chair of biostatistics and epidemiology at the University of South Australia. “We were doing so well, until New South Wales decided it didn’t want to go into lockdown.”

Esterman has urged politicians to enforce mask-wearing and social distancing, and to improve ventilation in schools, particularly as students prepare to return after the southern hemisphere summer break. Children between the ages of 5 and 11 only became eligible for the vaccines this month.

“We haven’t got enough vaccines for youngsters,” says Esterman, who previously worked for the World Health Organization. “We know how to keep schools safe: First, get kids and teachers vaccinated, make sure ventilation is very good and you get the kids to wear masks. Do we do that in Australia? No.”

Though Australia’s high vaccine uptake has prevented an even worse crisis at stressed hospitals, Australian Medical Association President Dr. Omar Khorshid acknowledged it was difficult to watch Australia plummet from its position as a poster child for COVID-19 containment.

“It is certainly frustrating to see our case per head of population rate sort of getting toward the highest in the world in New South Wales, for instance, when we were at the lowest in the world not that long ago,” he said. “It’s a little unfortunate that the opening up of the country coincided almost perfectly with the omicron outbreak starting around the world.”

In recent months, the government has pivoted from its longstanding “COVID-zero” approach to a “live with it” approach, leaving many Australians confused.

“Omicron has changed everything,” Prime Minister Scott Morrison said this week. “My government is for keeping Australia open and pushing through.”

The policy whiplash also caught the health system off guard. Lines for PCR tests are often hours long, results take days, and a lack of rapid antigen tests has left sick Australians scurrying from store to store hunting for the kits.

Sydney resident Rodney Swan recently found himself among the hordes hunting for rapid tests. The 77-year-old’s granddaughter is ill, and her family has been isolating at home for days as they await the results of their PCR tests.

“If you do get a test that’s a PCR test, then you wait ages,” Swan says. “You can’t get a rapid antigen test. My daughter can’t get boosters for her children.”

Swan is frustrated by what he views as the government’s jumbled messaging, and is stunned by the skyrocketing case numbers.

“These are numbers that you get in England,” he says. “I’ve got friends in London, because I lived in London, and I sense the smirk that they have now looking at Australia.”

Australia’s slow start to its booster program has left the population vulnerable to omicron, and has also increased the chances that its omicron wave will not decline as rapidly as other countries, says epidemiologist Dr. Nancy Baxter, head of the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at Melbourne University.

Australia’s politicians appear worried that any new restrictions will anger the public, Baxter says. But they can still help slow the spread by providing Australians with a limited number of free N95 masks and rapid tests, she says.

“We could manage the wave, but there’s no political will to do so,” Baxter says.

Fury and fear prompted former Australian human rights commissioner Chris Sidoti to pen an opinion piece for the Sydney Morning Herald this week, detailing the terror he felt when his two immunocompromised grandchildren become ill with COVID-19 after Christmas, two weeks before they were eligible for the vaccine. Both children have been in and out of the hospital since then.

Sidoti blames his grandchildren’s plight on the government. Why, he asks, wasn’t the government prepared with adequate supplies of rapid tests before the PCR system became inevitably overwhelmed? And why did the New South Wales premier roll back restrictions such as mask-wearing in November, before young children were eligible for vaccines and before most adults were eligible for boosters?

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 46 of 81

"We have gone wrong from day one because our politicians are not prepared to learn and to prepare," Sidoti said in an interview. "People have stopped listening because there's no consistency, there's no credibility and there are no answers."

Though policymakers seem averse to further lockdowns, the omicron outbreak has prompted many Australians to stay home anyway, leaving small business owners worried about their companies' survival.

"People are quite broken," says Zara Madrusan, who owns several bars and restaurants in Melbourne. "We are basically in some kind of self-imposed lockdown. No one is going out, but there's no protection for us, there's no advice for us, there's no financial support available. So we're just supposed to muddle through."

For Thomas, whose company is facing a deluge of event cancellations, the state's decision this week to shut down indoor dance floors in hospitality and entertainment venues was another gut punch. He wonders what of his once-vibrant city will be left when this all ends.

"What is our objective now?" he says. "What is our finish line?"

## Kazakhstan detains nearly 1,700 more after violent unrest

MOSCOW (AP) — Kazakh authorities said Wednesday they detained 1,678 more people in the past 24 hours over their alleged participation in the violent unrest that rocked the former Soviet nation last week, the worst since Kazakhstan gained independence three decades ago.

The additional detentions, reported by authorities in Almaty, the country's largest city that was hit the hardest by the turmoil, brought the total number of arrests to about 12,000. More than 300 criminal investigations into mass unrest and assaults on law enforcement officers have been opened.

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 country's authoritarian government.

As the unrest mounted, the authorities attempted to mollify the protesters and announced a 180-day cap on fuel prices. The ministerial Cabinet resigned, and Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country's former longtime leader, was ousted from his influential post of head of the National Security Council.

Still, over the next few days, the demonstrations turned 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. The unrest was largely quelled by last weekend.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has blamed the unrest on foreign-backed "terrorists" and requested help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization, or CSTO, a Russia-led military alliance comprising of six ex-Soviet states. The bloc authorized sending 2,500 troops to Kazakhstan.

Tokayev said Tuesday that the CSTO will start withdrawing its troops this week, as they have completed their mission and the situation in the country has stabilized.

## With more girls pregnant, Zimbabwe pushes a return to school

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

MUREHWA, Zimbabwe (AP) — Inside a sparsely furnished two-room home in rural Zimbabwe, a 3-month-old baby cries. His mother, Virginia Mavhunga, spends her days making trips to the well with a bucket on her head, selling fruits and vegetables at the roadside, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes — she has too much on her hands to offer her child, Tawananyasha, much comfort.

"That's my life now, every day," the new mother said.

Between the chores of her strict routine, Virginia prepares her four younger siblings for school and helps them with homework when they return. It's these tasks that hit Virginia the hardest — because, at age 13, she, too, would rather be in school.

Virginia is part of a steep increase in pregnancies among girls and teenagers reported in Zimbabwe and other southern African countries during the pandemic. Zimbabwe has long struggled with such pregnan-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 47 of 81

cies and child marriages. Before COVID-19 hit, one of every three girls in the country was wed before age 18, many with unplanned pregnancies, because of lax enforcement of laws, widespread poverty, and cultural and religious practices.

This story is part of a yearlong series on how the pandemic is impacting women in Africa, most acutely in the least developed countries. The Associated Press series is funded by the European Journalism Centre's European Development Journalism Grants program, which is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The AP is responsible for all content.

The spread of coronavirus intensified the situation. The country of 15 million people imposed a strict lockdown in March 2020, closing schools for six months and reopening them only intermittently. Girls in particular were left idle and shut out from access to contraceptives and clinics; the troubles of impoverished families worsened.

Many girls became victims of sexual abuse or looked to marriage and pregnancy as a way out of poverty, advocates and officials said. Before the pandemic, many such girls were "relegated as a lost cause," said Taungana Ngoro, an education official in Zimbabwe.

But faced with the rising numbers, the government in August 2020 changed a law that had long banned pregnant students from schools. Activists and authorities hailed the move as a significant step in the developing nation, but so far the new policy has largely failed. Most girls haven't returned to school, with authorities and families citing economic hardship, deep-seated cultural norms, and stigma and bullying in class.

The AP generally doesn't name victims of sexual abuse without consent. For this story, the girls and their families have agreed to be identified and have their names published, in keeping with their wishes to have their stories told.

Virginia tried to return to school while pregnant under the policy change. Officials encouraged her and her parents. But she was the butt of jokes and the subject of gossip in a community not accustomed to seeing a pregnant girl in a school uniform.

"People would laugh at me. Some would point and ask in ridicule; 'What's up with that belly?'" she said, looking at a photo of herself in the purple uniform. She has since sold it for \$2 to pay for the baby's clothing and other needs.

Virginia said she had hoped the older man who impregnated her would marry her. Despite initial promises, he ultimately denied paternity, she said. She and her family didn't follow through on a statutory rape case with police, despite Zimbabwean law putting the age of consent at 16.

Under the law, people convicted of sexual intercourse or "an indecent act" with anyone younger than 16 can get a fine or up to 10 years in jail. But most incidents never get that far. Families and officials have long tried "to sweep the cases under the carpet or ... force marriages on the minor," police spokesman Paul Nyathi said.

Families often try to negotiate with the offender, pressuring him to marry the girl and give her family cattle or money, Nyathi said. Then they agree to not report the case to police — ultimately "assisting in the abuse of the girl," he said.

Police said they couldn't provide data related to prosecuted or reported cases. Nyathi said a tally would be ready by the end of January — but any figures are likely an undercount.

Zimbabwe does have figures on pregnancies in girls who drop out of school — and while they show an alarming increase, officials say they, too, likely reflect an undercount, as many girls simply leave without giving a reason.

In 2018, about 3,000 girls dropped out of school nationwide because of pregnancies. In 2019, that number remained relatively steady. In 2020, the number rose: 4,770 pregnant students left school.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 48 of 81

And in 2021, it skyrocketed: About 5,000 students got pregnant in just the first two months of the year, according to women's affairs minister Sithembiso Nyoni.

Across Africa, Zimbabwe isn't alone: During the pandemic, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, South Africa and Zambia "all recorded a steep rise in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which has contributed to a reported increase in pregnancies among young and adolescent girls," according to an Amnesty International report. The continent has one of the highest pregnancy rates among adolescents in the world, according to the United Nations, and Zimbabwe and a handful of other nations now have laws or policies to protect girls' education while pregnant.

Zimbabwe's change in law gave community workers an opportunity to encourage girls to return to school. Through a group that promotes girls' rights, Tsitsi Chitongo held community meetings and knocked on doors to speak with families in remote, rural areas.

But the lack of enthusiasm from families jolted her. By November, her group had persuaded only one child to return to school in Murehwa — a poor rural township of mostly small farmers dealing with the fallout of drought, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the capital, Harare.

That girl lasted only a week in school, Chitongo said. She sees resistance from parents, community leaders and teachers — in addition to the girls themselves.

"Most parents are still steeped in the old way of doing things," she said. "They prefer to have the child married, even if she is under the age of 18. They tell us, 'I am already struggling to take care of my family; I can't afford an extra mouth when the girl gives birth.' So children are being chased away from home."

Some schools also discourage girls from returning, despite the recent change, Chitongo said.

"Sometimes headmasters tell us that they don't quite understand how the policy works and they refuse to admit the children," she said. "They complain that pregnant girls are not focused. Some simply tell us that the school is full."

Often girls are unaware they have a right to remain in school. They're then forced to find work, frequently as housemaids, to support their children, Chitongo said. Or they go to the men who impregnated them.

For 16-year-old Tanaka Rwizi, the backyard of a clinic run by Doctors Without Borders in the poverty-stricken Mbare township has taken the place of school. There, a club for teenage mothers provides crash courses on life skills and ways they can make a living, such as giving manicures and making soap for sale.

Tanaka dropped out of her school after becoming pregnant early last year. She lives with her unemployed uncle in a single room divided by a curtain. Every Thursday, she gathers with other girls for the clinic's program. It began in 2019 for a handful of participants, but demand grew during the pandemic, said Grace Mavhezha, of Doctors Without Borders. More than 300 girls have come to the program since COVID-19 hit.

Most of the girls opt for the program over formal school because they need a skill that can help them "quickly make some money," Mavhezha said. "There is a lot of poverty; they need to fend for their children."

Many also set their sights on marriage to survive. Tanaka said the 20-year old man who impregnated her promised to marry her as soon as she turns 18 — the youngest allowed in Zimbabwean law.

"I can't wait that long," Tanaka said. She planned to go to him immediately after giving birth.

The clinic also offers contraceptives. But travel restrictions shut out many young people from such facilities, cutting off access to not only contraceptives but to counseling. Clinic workers say many young people need such services because of conservative parents who equate contraceptives with prostitution. Proposals to supply contraceptives in school have been met with outrage in this conservative and deeply religious country.

"Girls are banned from taking contraceptives due to traditional myths that our parents have, that girls cannot have sex until they are in their 20s or married," said Yvette Kanenungo, a 20-year old clinic volunteer. "The truth is that the girls are already having sex, but cannot freely take contraceptives because of the no-sex-before-marriage decree at home."

For Virginia, the travel restrictions meant she was stuck at home in Murehwa after visiting her parents from her city school last year. She enrolled instead at a local school, but spent little time there because of intermittent closures.



At first, Virginia's parents — who try to support the family by sorting market items for sale and getting their drought-damaged land ready for growing again — wanted to pursue a statutory rape case against the older man who impregnated her. But they gave up when he was released on bail and said they now hope he'll take care of the baby.

Virginia's father ignored advice from neighbors to make his daughter leave home. Her mother wanted to protect her, and that included keeping her out of school and away from harassment.

Virginia vows to return to school someday, though. She misses her classes, her peers. She wants to graduate and be accepted to a university, so she can get a degree and repay her parents' faith in her by building them a bigger home.

"I would rather return to school than get married," she said. "I am not afraid of going back to school once my child is older. They may laugh at me now, but I am dedicating all my spare time and weekends to reading and catching up.

"This is not the end of the road, just a forced break."

## Twin panda cubs debut at Tokyo zoo, woo devoted fans

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Twin panda cubs made their first public appearance Wednesday before devoted fans in Tokyo, but they will be on display only briefly for now — over three days — due to a spike in COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant.

The twins, male cub Xiao Xiao and its sister Lei Lei, which were born at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo in June, took their first steps as beaming fans held up their smartphones to film the cuddly pair as they played together.

In a video released by the zoo Wednesday, the twin cubs sit back to back on a tree playing with bamboo while visitors can be heard saying "kawaii (cute)!" in the background. Then the male cub steps on its sister to move up the tree.

"My heart thumped with excitement when I first saw them," said Kirie Tanaka, an avid panda fan who came from the western Japanese city of Osaka for the day.

During her turn, the cubs were pretending to eat bamboo and "that was just adorable," said Tanaka, whose hat and bag were decorated with panda-motif ornaments. "It's so comforting to see them."

The twins, which were palm-sized pink creatures when they were born, now weigh as much as a toddler each and have developed black-and-white fur. They enjoy climbing trees and playing together on the wood chips on the ground, according to the zoo.

In preparation for their debut, the twins and their mother were placed in a shared living quarter where they were exposed to sounds from a radio to get used to noise and voices from visitors.

The zoo has been closed since Tuesday as the highly transmissible omicron variant spreads rapidly across Japan. The zoo is open only for the twin panda exhibit until Friday, with 1,080 visitors who won slots in a competitive lottery granted access each day.

Zoo staff Naoya Ohashi lamented the scaled-down debut and said he hopes many more people can see the panda cubs after coronavirus infections slow.

Groups of six people at a time were allowed to enter the panda quarters, where they could remain for one minute. The public viewing period is limited to two hours in the morning.

The rare animals live mainly in the bamboo-covered mountains in China's Sichuan area.

China has for decades loaned its unofficial national mascot in what is known as "panda diplomacy." All pandas, including those born abroad, must eventually be returned to China.

The twin cubs' elder sister, Xiang Xiang, born in the Ueno Zoo in 2017, is set to be sent back to China in June.

There are about 1,800 pandas living in the wild in China and about 500 others in captivity in zoos and reserves, the majority within the country.

## Former Senate leader Harry Reid to lie in state at Capitol

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 50 of 81

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Sen. Harry Reid will lie in state at the U.S. Capitol as colleagues and friends pay tribute to a hardscrabble Democrat who rose from poverty in a dusty Nevada mining town to the most powerful position in the U.S. Senate.

Reid will be honored Wednesday in the Capitol Rotunda during a ceremony closed to the public under COVID-19 protocols. He died last month at 82 after a four-year battle with pancreatic cancer.

The longest-serving Nevadan in Congress and the Senate majority leader alongside two presidents, Reid helmed the chamber during one of its more consequential legislative sessions — securing the economic recovery bill during the Great Recession and President Barack Obama's landmark health care law.

President Joe Biden called Reid a "great American," one who "looked at the challenges of the world and believed it was within our capacity to do good, to do right."

During a funeral service last weekend in Las Vegas, Biden, Obama and others recalled one of Reid's best-known traits — abruptly hanging up on people, even presidents, rather than close with lengthy goodbyes.

The few words Reid did say were often flinty and fiery, the senator unafraid to take on presidents (he called George W. Bush a "loser"), criticize the fossil fuel industry ("coal makes us sick") or declare the war in Iraq "lost." He titled his 2008 autobiography "The Good Fight."

Influential in retirement, Reid said Biden should give his new presidency just three weeks to try to work with Republicans. If not, Biden should force changes in the Senate's filibuster rules to allow simple majority passage of elections and voting rights legislation and other priorities, Reid said.

"The time's going to come when he's going to have to move in and get rid of the filibuster," Reid told The Associated Press.

Reid was born in the desolate mining town of Searchlight, Nevada, his father a hard-rock miner who later committed suicide, his mother doing laundry at home for bordellos. (He and other kids would swim in a brothel's pool.) Searchlight was a place, he said, that "had seen its better days."

The town had no churches, his family no religion. But a picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt hanging in the Reid home would influence his political career.

Reid hitchhiked some 40 miles to attend high school and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as he made his way through college and law school. An amateur boxer, he once leveled a punch at his future father-in-law after being denied a date with Landra Gould, who would become his wife. They were married for 62 years.

First elected to the House in 1982 and reelected in 1984, Reid then served 30 years in the Senate, including a decade as the Senate Democratic leader.

Along the way, Reid rewrote the map of Nevada by expanding public lands, halting the planned Yucca Mountain nuclear waste outside of Las Vegas; and securing national monument status around artist Michael Heizer's "City" installation in the desert. He quietly ensured federal funding to research UFOs.

A man of few words, Reid often wrote notes instead — to family, colleagues and a Nevada student advocate who had reached out on immigration law changes. He championed the Dream Act and Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals to protect young immigrants in the U.S. without legal status from deportation.

As his power rose, Reid engineered a Democratic legacy for his state with Nevada's early presidential caucus. He left behind a state party apparatus that was sometimes referred to as the "Reid Machine" for its enduring political power seeking to elect the next generation of Democratic leaders.

After suffering an exercise accident at home, and with Democrats back in the Senate minority, Reid announced he would not seek reelection in 2016.

In his farewell address to the Senate, he acknowledged he had done things that "probably a lot of people wouldn't do." But he passed on his advice to those wondering how he made it from Searchlight to Washington.

"I didn't make it because of my good looks. I didn't make it because I am a genius. I made it because I worked hard," Reid said. "Whatever you want to try to do, make sure you work as hard as you can to try to do what you want to do."

## Omicron wave prompts media to rethink which data to report

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For two years, coronavirus case counts and hospitalizations have been widely used barometers of the pandemic's march across the world.

But the omicron wave is making a mess of the usual statistics, forcing news organizations to rethink the way they report such figures.

"It's just a data disaster," said Katherine Wu, staff writer who covers COVID-19 for The Atlantic magazine.

The number of case counts soared over the holidays, an expected development given the emergence of a variant more transmissible than its predecessors.

Yet these counts only reflect what is reported by health authorities. They do not include most people who test themselves at home, or are infected without even knowing about it. Holidays and weekends also lead to lags in reported cases.

If you could add all those numbers up — and you can't — case counts would likely be substantially higher.

For that reason, The Associated Press has recently told its editors and reporters to avoid emphasizing case counts in stories about the disease. That means, for example, no more stories focused solely on a particular country or state setting a one-day record for number of cases, because that claim has become unreliable.

Throughout the media, there has been more caution in use of official case counts.

An NBC News story on Monday about the skyrocketing number of COVID cases relied on a one-week average of case counts. A Tuesday story simply referred to a "tidal wave" of cases.

During its coverage of a Senate hearing with health experts on Tuesday, the case counts CNN flashed onscreen were two-week averages. MSNBC used a variety of measurements, including a listing of the five states with highest reported numbers over the past three days.

On its website's "Guide to the Pandemic," The Washington Post used a seven-day average of cases and compared that number to last Tuesday's, showing a 56% increase. The New York Times used a daily count in an online chart, yet also included a two-week trend in both cases and deaths.

An AP story Saturday by Jennifer Sinco Kelleher and Terry Tang headlined, "Omicron explosion spurs nationwide breakdown of services" was full of statistics from across the United States on hospitalization rates or employees calling out sick from work. The case count metric was not used.

"We definitely wanted people to go a little deeper and be more specific in reporting," said Josh Hoffner, the news editor who helps oversee AP's virus coverage.

Many news organizations are debating how best to use statistics now during the omicron surge, Wu said. But there are no easy answers.

"It's how journalism works," Wu said. "We need the data. We need to show receipts to readers. But I try to do it carefully."

Hospitalization and death rates are considered by some to be a more reliable picture of COVID-19's current impact on society. Yet even the usefulness of those numbers has been called into question in recent days. In many cases, hospitalizations are incidental: there are people being admitted for other reasons and are surprised to find they test positive for COVID, said Tanya Lewis, senior editor for health and medicine at Scientific American.

Despite the imperfections, case counts should not be ignored, said Gary Schwitzer, a University of Minnesota School of Public Health instructor and publisher of HealthNewsReview.org, which monitors health coverage in the media.

The numbers illustrate trends, giving a picture of which areas of the country are being hit particularly hard or where the surge may have peaked, he said. They can predict broader societal impacts, like where hospitals are about to be slammed or where there will be worker shortages.

"These are stories that may not be told adequately if only hospitalizations and deaths are emphasized," Schwitzer said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 52 of 81

That's a point emphasized in AP's internal guidance, as well.

"They do have value," Hoffner said. "We don't want people to eliminate mention of case counts."

There are some in public health and journalism who believe the current surge — painful as it is — may augur good news. It could be a sign that COVID-19 is headed toward becoming an endemic disease that people learn to live with, rather than being a disruptive pandemic, wrote David Leonhardt and Ashley Wu in *The New York Times*.

But if the past two years have taught anything, it's about the danger in predictions, Lewis said.

"We've been surprised time and again," she said. "We don't know everything about the course of the pandemic. We still need to be humble and keep an open mind in terms of where things are going."

## US shoppers find some groceries scarce due to virus, weather

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and PARKER PURIFOY AP Business Writer

Benjamin Whitely headed to a Safeway supermarket in Washington D.C. on Tuesday to grab some items for dinner. But he was disappointed to find the vegetable bins barren and a sparse selection of turkey, chicken and milk.

"Seems like I missed out on everything," Whitely, 67, said. "I'm going to have to hunt around for stuff now."

Shortages at U.S. grocery stores have grown more acute in recent weeks as new problems — like the fast-spreading omicron variant and severe weather — have piled on to the supply chain struggles and labor shortages that have plagued retailers since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The shortages are widespread, impacting produce and meat as well as packaged goods such as cereal. And they're being reported nationwide. U.S. groceries typically have 5% to 10% of their items out of stock at any given time; right now, that unavailability rate is hovering around 15%, according to Consumer Brands Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman.

Part of the scarcity consumers are seeing on store shelves is due to pandemic trends that never abated — and are exacerbated by omicron. Americans are eating at home more than they used to, especially since offices and some schools remain closed.

The average U.S. household spent \$144 per week at the grocery last year, according to FMI, a trade organization for groceries and food producers. That was down from the peak of \$161 in 2020, but still far above the \$113.50 that households spent in 2019.

A deficit of truck drivers that started building before the pandemic also remains a problem. The American Trucking Associations said in October that the U.S. was short an estimated 80,000 drivers, a historic high.

And shipping remains delayed, impacting everything from imported foods to packaging that is printed overseas.

Retailers and food producers have been adjusting to those realities since early 2020, when panic buying at the start of the pandemic sent the industry into a tailspin. Many retailers are keeping more supplies of things like toilet paper on hand, for example, to avoid acute shortages.

"All of the players in the supply chain ecosystem have gotten to a point where they have that playbook and they're able to navigate that baseline level of challenges," said Jessica Dankert, vice president of supply chain at the Retail Industry Leaders Association, a trade group.

Generally, the system works; Dankert notes that bare shelves have been a rare phenomenon over the last 20 months. It's just that additional complications have stacked up on that baseline at the moment, she said.

As it has with staffing at hospitals, schools and offices, the omicron variant has taken a toll on food production lines. Sean Connolly, the president and CEO of Conagra Brands, which makes Birds Eye frozen vegetables, Slim Jim meat snacks and other products, told investors last week that supplies from the company's U.S. plants will be constrained for at least the next month due to omicron-related absences.

Worker illness is also impacting grocery stores. Stew Leonard Jr. is president and CEO of Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain that operates stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Last week, 8% of

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 53 of 81

his workers - around 200 people - were either out sick or in quarantine. Usually, the level of absenteeism is more like 2%.

One store bakery had so many people out sick that it dropped some of its usual items, like apple crumb cake. Leonard says meat and produce suppliers have told him they are also dealing with omicron-related worker shortages.

Still, Leonard says he is generally getting shipments on time, and thinks the worst of the pandemic may already be over.

Weather-related events, from snowstorms in the Northeast to wildfires in Colorado, also have impacted product availability and caused some shoppers to stock up more than usual, exacerbating supply problems caused by the pandemic.

Lisa DeLima, a spokesperson for Mom's Organic Market, an independent grocer with locations in the mid-Atlantic region, said the company's stores did not have produce to stock last weekend because winter weather halted trucks trying to get from Pennsylvania to Washington.

That bottleneck has since been resolved, DeLima said. In her view, the intermittent dearth of certain items shoppers see now are nothing compared to the more chronic shortages at the beginning of the pandemic.

"People don't need to panic buy," she said. "There's plenty of product to be had. It's just taking a little longer to get from point A to point B."

Experts are divided on how long grocery shopping will sometimes feel like a scavenger hunt.

Dankert thinks this is a hiccup, and the country will soon settle back to more normal patterns, albeit with continuing supply chain headaches and labor shortages.

"You're not going to see long-term outages of products, just sporadic, isolated incidents \_\_\_ that window where it takes a minute for the supply chain to catch up," she said.

But others aren't so optimistic.

Freeman, of the Consumer Brands Association, says omicron-related disruptions could expand as the variant grips the Midwest, where many big packaged food companies like Kellogg Co. and General Mills Inc. have operations.

Freeman thinks the federal government should do a better job of ensuring that essential food workers get access to tests. He also wishes there were uniform rules for things like quarantining procedures for vaccinated workers; right now, he said, companies are dealing with a patchwork of local regulations.

"I think, as we've seen before, this eases as each wave eases. But the question is, do we have to be at the whims of the virus, or can we produce the amount of tests we need?" Freeman said.

In the longer term, it could take groceries and food companies a while to figure out the customer buying patterns that emerge as the pandemic ebbs, said Doug Baker, vice president of industry relations for food industry association FMI.

"We went from a just-in-time inventory system to unprecedented demand on top of unprecedented demand," he said. "We're going to be playing with that whole inventory system for several years to come."

In the meantime, Whitely, the Safeway customer in Washington, said he's lucky he's retired because he can spend the day looking for produce if the first stores he tries are out. People who have to work or take care of sick loved ones don't have that luxury, he said.

"Some are trying to get food to survive. I'm just trying to cook a casserole," he said.

## No. 19 Texas Tech ends No. 1 Baylor's 21-game streak, 65-62

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

WACO, Texas (AP) — Texas Tech ended No. 1 Baylor's nation-best winning streak at 21 games, with the 19th-ranked Red Raiders getting a second consecutive victory over a Top 10 team while still not at full strength.

Kevin McCullar, not even close to fully healthy after missing the previous two games with an ankle injury, had 12 points with a key 3-pointer late as Texas Tech won 65-62 on Tuesday night to hand Baylor its first loss since before last season's NCAA Tournament. The 19th-ranked Red Raiders are still without injured

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 54 of 81

leading scorer Terrence Shannon.

"Just a lot of determination and grit and character," said Mark Adams, who was promoted to head coach when Chris Beard left last offseason to become coach at Texas. "Very proud of them and blessed to be their coach."

Baylor (15-1, 3-1 Big 12) had lost only once at home over the past three seasons. The last loss anywhere had been in the Big 12 tournament last March. The Bears then won all six NCAA tourney games on the way to their first national title.

The Red Raiders (12-3, 2-1) had their biggest lead at 59-52 when McCullar hit his 3 from the left corner in front of their bench with 2:39 left, and they held on to follow up their home win Saturday over then-No. 6 Kansas.

"Everybody was just yelling," McCullar said of the reaction from his teammates behind him when the shot went in.

McCullar played 31 minutes off the bench. He was 5-of-8 shooting with six rebounds, five assists and three steals.

"He played with a lot of courage," Adams said. "He played with a lot of heart tonight, and we couldn't have won without Kevin's performance."

Adam Flagler and James Akinjo each had 17 points with their own late 3s for Baylor (15-1, 3-1), but the Bears fell two short of matching their own Big 12 record of 23 consecutive wins set two seasons ago.

Davion Warren made two free throws for the Red Raiders with 22 seconds left before a timeout. Akinjo had the last shot, bobbling the ball at the top of the key before gathering it and taking a 3-pointer that hit off the front of the rim as time expired.

Baylor was the last Division I team to lose this season. Fifth-ranked Southern California (13-1) was also undefeated before a 75-69 loss at Stanford earlier Tuesday.

"You've got to give Texas Tech a lot of credit. I think the first 15 minutes we did a great job, and then the last five minutes of the first half they finished on a great run and had momentum," Bears coach Scott Drew said. "And then the second half they carried that momentum."

The Bears quickly scored the game's first nine points and had a 15-point lead late in the first half before things started to turn for Texas Tech, which beat Kansas without Shannon or McCullar. Shannon has missed six games in a row because of lingering back spasms.

Adonis Arms had 14 points for the Red Raiders, while Kevin Obanor and Bryson Williams had 13 each. Clarence Nadolny had 11 points.

Flagler had two 3-pointers in Baylor's opening stretch, and made another one with 6:13 left in the first half for a 31-16 lead.

"We could have just quit in about that first 10 minutes," Adams said. "But the guys just hung around and kind of got back in it at halftime, and then were able to gain some momentum as the game went on."

Baylor didn't score again before the break after Flagler's fourth 3. The Bears had six missed shots and four turnovers while Tech scored 10 points to cut its halftime deficit to 31-26.

"It was very frustrating. Not only we didn't score but we gave up eases in transition," Akinjo said of that final stretch. "So that was more frustrating than us not scoring."

Obanor had a dunk for Texas Tech only 10 seconds into the second half that started a quick 7-1 run. The Red Raiders tied it for the first time at 33-33 when Williams converted a three-point play with 18:28 left, though they didn't lead for the first time until Nadolny hit a free throw with 9:52 left that made it 47-46.

## BIG PICTURE

Texas Tech: The Red Raiders wrapped up a three-game stretch of games against top-11 teams, falling 51-47 at No. 11 Iowa State without McCullar and Shannon before the consecutive wins. It was the third of five games in a 10-day stretch. ... It was the second time in three seasons the Red Raiders beat a No. 1 team. They beat then top-ranked Louisville 70-57 in a game at Madison Square Garden on Dec. 10, 2019.

Baylor: The Bears had also won 22 consecutive home games, winning those by an average margin of more than 26 points. They had had won 34 of 35, the only loss in that span by three points to Kansas on Feb. 22, 2020.

## UP NEXT

Texas Tech: The Red Raiders host Oklahoma State on Thursday in the makeup of a scheduled Big 12 opener postponed from Jan. 1 because of COVID-19 protocols.

Baylor: The Bears host Oklahoma State on Saturday.

## **FACT FOCUS: Federal agents didn't orchestrate Jan. 6**

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection poked another hole in the pro-Trump conspiracy theory that federal agents orchestrated the attack, confirming on Tuesday that a man at the center of the claims said he'd never been an FBI informant.

Ray Epps, an Arizona man who was filmed encouraging others to enter the U.S. Capitol, testified that he wasn't "employed by, working with, or acting at the direction of any law enforcement agency on Jan. 5th or 6th or at any other time," the committee tweeted on Tuesday.

The committee issued its statement after numerous Republican lawmakers highlighted the fringe theory in recent weeks, including Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Tuesday. Pressed by Cruz, a Justice Department official said she couldn't say whether FBI agents participated in the insurrection because she couldn't discuss "the specifics of sources and methods" of the FBI.

Meanwhile, the evidence indicates the mob that invaded the Capitol on Jan. 6 was overwhelmingly made up of Trump supporters who wanted to help the then-president.

Here's a closer look at the facts:

**CLAIM:** Ray Epps, who was filmed on Jan. 5 and 6 urging rioters toward the U.S. Capitol, is a federal agent who helped to orchestrate the insurrection.

**THE FACTS:** There's no evidence to support that Epps — who has not been arrested or charged in connection with the Jan. 6 riot — was anything but a disgruntled supporter of former President Donald Trump, like thousands of others who descended on the Capitol that day.

The Jan. 6 committee says Epps testified that he wasn't working for law enforcement, and at this point, no convincing evidence has been provided linking him to federal agents.

Public records show Epps appears to be a 60-year-old Queen Creek, Arizona, business owner. He also appears to have been affiliated in the past with the Oath Keepers, a national militia group, in Arizona. A YouTube video posted by the group in 2011 lists Epps as the "Oath Keepers Arizona Chapter President," while a man resembling Epps appears in the footage.

The FBI at one point included an image of Epps on a "wanted" list seeking information about those involved in Capitol violence, then deleted the reference in July. But there are plenty of reasons the FBI might remove individuals from the site, including if it no longer needed help locating them or had already interviewed them.

The theory that Epps was an undercover FBI agent grew from a video that circulated on far-right message boards days after the insurrection. It showed Epps on the evening of Jan. 5, urging Trump supporters around him to "peacefully" enter the Capitol the next day.

That video and others of Epps talking to rioters outside the Capitol building ricocheted across social media for months until Rep. Thomas Massie, a Republican from Kentucky, shared the footage in a congressional hearing in October.

Massie asked Attorney General Merrick Garland why the man in the videos hadn't been charged, and whether federal agents were involved in the riots. Garland said he couldn't comment on an ongoing federal investigation, per FBI policy, causing claims about Epps to snowball.

The theory was amplified by Revolver News, a fringe news site founded by a former Trump administration speechwriter who lost his job after speaking at a 2016 conference attended by white nationalists. The site claimed that the FBI posting, then removing, an image of Epps from a "Capitol Violence Most Wanted List" showed he was a "Fed-Protected Provocateur" who "Appears To Have Led" the Jan. 6 attack.

That's not proof the man was a federal agent — and there's no reason right now to believe that any

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 56 of 81

undercover agent galvanized a mob of Trump supporters, many of whom were vocal about their intentions, to attempt to delay the congressional certification of Joe Biden's presidential win.

In fact, an AP review of social media posts, voter registrations, court files and other public records for more than 120 people either facing criminal charges or identified in footage from Jan. 6 showed that the mob was overwhelmingly made up of longtime Trump supporters, including GOP officials and donors, far-right militants, white supremacists, off-duty police, members of the military and conspiracy theory adherents.

Revolver News didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Conservative blogs and lawmakers have insisted that Epps not being charged with a crime reveals he must be associated with the FBI. But Epps was among thousands of revelers trespassing on the Capitol grounds, many of whom have not been charged.

Republicans who have promoted the theory, including Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, say they've asked the FBI and Justice Department for more information about Epps and his involvement in Jan. 6 to no avail. That's not surprising. Federal law enforcement officials rarely share details about ongoing investigations. Gaetz gave no indication what led him to believe that Epps was working for the FBI but said he finds the agency's silence to be concerning.

Asked during testimony before Congress whether there was any reason to believe the insurrection was organized by "fake Trump protesters," FBI Director Christopher Wray, who was appointed by Trump, said the agency had "not seen evidence of that."

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection tweeted on Tuesday that it was aware of claims Epps was an FBI informant, and had interviewed Epps directly.

"Epps informed us that he was not employed by, working with, or acting at the direction of any law enforcement agency on Jan 5th or 6th or at any other time, & that he has never been an informant for the FBI or any other law enforcement agency," the committee wrote.

Epps told an Associated Press reporter that he'd been advised not to comment and referred questions to his lawyer, who said Tuesday evening that he was not available for comment.

## **Biden challenges Senate on voting: 'Tired of being quiet!'**

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, COLLEEN LONG and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Pounding his hand for emphasis, President Joe Biden challenged senators Tuesday to "stand against voter suppression" by changing Senate rules to pass voting rights legislation that Republicans are blocking from debate and votes.

Biden told a crowd in Atlanta gathered on the grounds of Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta University that he'd been having quiet conversations with senators for months over the two bills — a lack of progress that has brought him criticism from activists in his own party.

"I'm tired of being quiet!" he shouted to cheers from the crowd.

In his remarks, Biden invoked the civil rights battles of the 1960s. He likened the wrongs of the past to modern-day efforts to subvert elections through the Capitol riot a year ago and a series of GOP-backed laws passed after former President Donald Trump lost in 2020 and then falsely claimed widespread voter fraud. Biden chastised Republicans for falling in line behind Trump's election lies.

"Today, we call on Congress to get done what history will judge," Biden said. "Pass the freedom to vote act."

Biden's speech was forceful, blunt and explicit, referring to new efforts to limit voting access as "Jim Crow 2.0." For the first time, he directly advocated eliminating the Senate's vote-blocking device called the filibuster in order to debate and vote on election and voting rights legislation. Though his focus brings more national attention to the debate ahead, it's not clear what impact his newfound fire will have.

Current rules require 60 votes to advance most legislation — a threshold that Senate Democrats can't meet alone because they have just a 50-50 majority with Vice President Kamala Harris to break ties. Republicans unanimously oppose the voting rights measures.

There also aren't enough Democratic votes to change the Senate rule. West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin threw more cold water on the idea Tuesday, saying he believes any changes should be made with sub-



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 57 of 81

stantial Republican buy-in. And there aren't any Republican senators willing to sign on.

"Not a single Republican has displayed the courage to stand up to a defeated president to protect Americans' right to vote," Biden said. "Not one. Not one."

Congressional Democrats 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. The legislation also would reduce the influence of big money in politics and limit 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.

Republicans say the changes are not aimed at fairness but at giving Democrats an advantage in elections. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky accused Biden of invoking "the brutal racial hatred of Jim Crow Segregation to smear states'" new voting laws.

And it is coming from "a sitting president of the United States who pledged to lower the temperature and unite America," McConnell said.

Even if Democrats clear the obstacles to passing the legislation, it could be too late to counter voting restrictions passed in 19 states following Trump's 2020 loss and his lies — embraced by many in the GOP -- that the election was stolen through voter fraud.

Voting rights advocates in Georgia and nationwide are increasingly anxious about what may happen in 2022 and beyond. They view the changes in many states as a subtler form of ballot restrictions like literacy tests and poll taxes once used to disenfranchise Black voters, a key Democratic constituency.

"This matters to all of us," Biden insisted. "The goal of the former president and his allies is to disenfranchise anyone who votes against him, simple as that."

The president spent decades in the Senate, and he spoke with regret of how much it's changed for the worse, calling it "a shell of its former self." He spoke of an era not long ago when an issue like voting rights would never have been so rancorously partisan.

He recalled working with segregationist lawmakers in the Senate to get legislation passed and for it then to be signed into law by Republican presidents. But now, the filibuster has been used frequently to block even the debating of some legislation.

"How do you want to be remembered?" he asked his former congressional colleagues.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has set next Monday's Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a deadline to either pass voting legislation or consider revising the rules. Biden told his audience, "The next few days, when these bills come to a vote, will mark a turning point in this nation's history."

"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 declared. "I will defend the right to vote, our democracy, against all enemies foreign, yes and domestic. The question is where will the institution of the United States Senate stand?"

Biden also visited Atlanta's historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once held forth from the pulpit. He stood quietly as Martin Luther King III placed a wreath outside at the crypt of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King.

Some voting rights advocates boycotted Biden's speech out of frustration over Washington's inaction. Georgia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, known for her untiring voting rights work, said she skipped the event because of a scheduling conflict, which she did not explain further.

King said in a statement that he was happy to host Biden, but that he also supported those who chose to skip the speech.

"We've seen what's possible when President Biden uses the full weight of his office to deliver for bridges," he said, referencing Biden's successful push for a \$1 trillion infrastructure spending deal. "And now we need to see him do the same for voting rights."

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 by backing

for elective office some of those who participated in the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Vice President Kamala Harris spoke before Biden on Tuesday, warning that the barrage of new state laws means there is "a danger of becoming accustomed to these laws, a danger of adjusting to these laws as though they are normal."

"There is nothing normal about a law that makes it illegal to pass out water or food to people standing in long voting lines," she said, to cheers.

Georgia is at the center of it all, one of the key battleground states in the 2020 elections. After the votes were counted and recounted, Trump told the 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.

Last year, the state's 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.

## Democrat Cherfilus-McCormick to fill Florida US House seat

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Health care CEO Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick was elected to fill the seat of late Democratic Florida U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings on Tuesday, boosting the Democrats' slim majority in the House.

Cherfilus-McCormick defeated Republican Jason Mariner in the 20th Congressional District, which is firmly Democratic. Hastings was the longest-serving member of the Florida delegation before he died in April of pancreatic cancer.

Democrats outnumber Republicans by a nearly 5-1 ratio in the district, which includes parts of Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Cherfilus-McCormick received 43,663 votes, or about 79%, while Mariner got 10,883 votes, or about 20%. About 55,000 people voted in the race — a turnout of just over 11%. Less than 9% of registered voters cast mail-in and in-person early voting ballots, with Democrats casting six times as many votes as Republicans.

Flanked by her husband and two children, Cherfilus-McCormick fought back tears as she celebrated her win with a small gathering of supporters at Smitty's Wings in Fort Lauderdale.

"I am so excited and humbled," the Sun Sentinel quoted Cherfilus-McCormick as saying about an hour after the polls closed. "The people have spoken and the people have spoken very loudly."

Cherfilus-McCormick said she is flying to Washington, D.C., on Wednesday with plans to be sworn in Thursday morning, depending on how quickly the Florida secretary of state validates the results.

Reclaiming Hastings' seat will increase the Democrats' slender House majority to 222-212, leaving room for no more than four Democratic defections as Speaker Nancy Pelosi tries moving her party's bills through the House. For much of 2021, that margin was three.

The win will make little difference, however, for the Democrats' \$2 trillion social and environment bill, now stalled in the evenly divided Senate because of objections by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia. The package is opposed unanimously by Republicans.

There is one other House vacancy: Republican U.S. Rep. Devin Nunes of California left office last week to join a media company run by former President Donald Trump.

Cherfilus-McCormick's victory marked a stark contrast to the November primary, when she defeated a field of 10 other Democrats by only five votes, or less than 24%.

She will have to immediately defend the seat in an August primary and, if she wins, the November general election. The runner-up to Cherfilus-McCormick in November's primary, Broward County Commissioner Dale Holness, has sued to try to overturn the election results. He also plans to run in the August primary.

Demographics worked in Cherfilus-McCormick's favor on Tuesday. She is the black daughter of Haitian

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 59 of 81

immigrants. About half the voters in the district are Black, compared to about 21% who are white. Mariner is white.

Cherfilus-McCormick also had a huge money advantage. She loaned her campaign nearly \$6 million, though has repaid herself \$2 million. Still, by late December, she had \$1.3 million in her campaign account, compared to less than \$24,000 for Mariner.

Mariner is the owner of an advertising company that pays drivers to place ads on their cars. He has served two prison sentences totaling nearly two years. He was last released in 2013 after drug and theft convictions, according to the Department of Corrections.

Mariner's campaign website said he beat drug addiction and co-founded a drug and alcohol detox facility.

While some people have questioned whether Mariner can run for office because of the felony convictions, Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment giving felons the right to vote. The law implementing the amendment said that all court fees, fines and restitution must be paid before voting rights are restored.

When Mariner registered to vote, he checked a box that said he was previously convicted of a felony, but his voting rights had been restored, said Palm Beach County Elections Supervisor Wendy Sartory Link.

## Jan. 6 committee subpoenas Trump aide, 2 GOP strategists

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House panel investigating the U.S. Capitol insurrection is demanding records and testimony from a former White House aide they say helped draft former President Donald Trump's Jan. 6 speech, along with two others it says were in communication with people close to Trump.

Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, Democratic chairman of the panel, issued subpoenas on Tuesday to Andy Surabian and Arthur Schwartz, strategists who advised Donald Trump Jr., and Ross Worthington, a former White House official who the committee says helped draft the speech Trump gave at the rally directly preceding last year's attack.

"We have reason to believe the individuals we've subpoenaed today have relevant information and we expect them to join the more than 340 individuals who have spoken with the Select Committee as we push ahead to investigate this attack on our democracy and ensure nothing like this ever happens again," Thompson said in a letter Tuesday.

Worthington is a former Trump White House and campaign aide who served as a speechwriter and policy adviser. He had previously worked for former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a Trump ally.

Surabian is a GOP strategist who has worked with Trump's eldest son, Trump Jr., former Trump strategist Steve Bannon and others within the Trump orbit. The committee alleges he and Schwartz, another strategist who has worked with Trump Jr. and Bannon, communicated with people including Trump Jr. and his fiancée and Trump fundraiser Kimberly Guilfoyle regarding the Jan. 6 rally on the Ellipse.

An attorney representing Surabian said his client will cooperate with the committee "within reason," but does not understand why the subpoena was issued in the first place.

"He had nothing at all to do with the events that took place at the Capital that day, zero involvement in organizing the rally that preceded it and was off the payroll of the Trump campaign as of November 15, 2020," Daniel Bean, an attorney representing Surabian, said in a statement.

Schwartz had no comment when reached by The Associated Press on Tuesday, and Worthington did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Trump at the time was pushing false claims of widespread voter fraud and lobbying Vice President Mike Pence and Republican members of Congress to try to overturn the count at the Jan. 6 congressional certification. Election officials across the country, along with the courts, had repeatedly dismissed Trump's claims.

## Judge says FTC's antitrust case against Facebook can proceed

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

A federal judge has ruled that the Federal Trade Commission's revised antitrust suit against Meta, formerly known as Facebook, can proceed, shutting down the social media company's request for a dismissal.

In a revised complaint filed last August, the FTC argues that the company pursued a "buy or bury"

strategy against rivals to suppress competition.

This is the FTC's second antitrust run at the company. A federal judge in June dismissed antitrust lawsuits brought against Facebook by the agency and a broad coalition of state attorneys general that were among multiplying efforts by federal and state regulators to rein in tech titans' market power.

The FTC is seeking remedies that could include a forced spinoff of Facebook's popular Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services, or a restructuring of the company.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg, who in June ruled that the FTC's original lawsuit was "legally insufficient" and didn't provide enough evidence to prove that Facebook was a monopoly, said in Tuesday's ruling that the first complaint "stumbled out of the starting blocks."

But he added that, though the "core theory" of the lawsuit — that Facebook is a monopoly engaging in anticompetitive behavior — remains unchanged, the facts alleged this time around are "far more robust and detailed than before."

Meta said in an emailed statement it is "confident the evidence will reveal the fundamental weakness of the claims."

"Our investments in Instagram and WhatsApp transformed them into what they are today," the company said. "They have been good for competition, and good for the people and businesses that choose to use our products."

Holly Vedova, director of the FTC's bureau of competition, said the agency presented a "strong amended complaint a strong amended complaint, and we look forward to trial."

## Justice Dept. creating unit focused on domestic terrorism

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is establishing a specialized unit focused on domestic terrorism, the department's top national security official told lawmakers Tuesday as he described an "elevated" threat from violent extremists in the United States.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen, testifying just days after the nation observed the one-year anniversary of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, said the number of FBI investigations into suspected domestic violent extremists has more than doubled since the spring of 2020.

"We have seen a growing threat from those who are motivated by racial animus, as well as those who ascribe to extremist anti-government and anti-authority ideologies," Olsen said.

The formulation of a new unit underscores the extent to which domestic violent extremism, which for years after the Sept. 11 attacks was overshadowed by the threat of international terrorism, has attracted urgent attention inside the federal government and at the White House.

But the issue remains politically freighted and divisive, in part because the absence of a federal domestic terrorism statute has created ambiguities as to precisely what sort of violence meets that definition. The U.S. criminal code defines domestic terrorism as violence intended to coerce or intimidate a civilian population and to influence government policy, but there is no standalone domestic terrorism charge, meaning prosecutors have to rely on other statutes.

Olsen's assessment about growing domestic threats tracked with a warning last March from FBI Director Christopher Wray, who testified that the threat was "metastasizing." Jill Sanborn, the executive assistant director in charge of the FBI's national security branch who testified alongside Olsen, said Tuesday the greatest threat comes from lone extremists or small cells who radicalize online and look to carry out violence at so-called "soft targets."

"This includes both homegrown violent extremists inspired primarily by foreign terrorist organizations as well as domestic violent extremism," Sanborn said.

The department's National Security Division, which Olsen leads, has a counterterrorism section. But Olsen told the Senate Judiciary Committee that he has decided to create a specialized domestic terrorism unit "to augment our existing approach" and to "ensure that these cases are properly handled and effectively coordinated" across the country.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 61 of 81

The partisan divisions around the domestic terrorism terminology were evident during Tuesday's hearing. Sen. Richard Durbin of Illinois, the Democratic chairman of the committee, played video of the Jan. 6 riot at the outset of the hearing and urged everyone on the committee to "use this hearing to explicitly condemn the use or threat of violence to advance political goals."

"It's a simple request, but sadly a necessary one," Durbin added. "This committee should speak with a unified voice in saying violence is unacceptable."

Several Republican senators sought to shift focus away from Jan. 6 and asserted that the insurrection had taken away attention from the 2020 rioting that erupted in American cities and grew out of racial justice protests. Sen. Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican, castigated the law enforcement witnesses for what he said were "wildly disparate standards" in the department's pursuit of suspects in the 2020 rioting and in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the panel's top Republican, showed video of the 2020 violence as a counter to the Jan. 6 footage that Durbin showed.

"Those anti-police riots rocked our nation for seven full months," Grassley said.

The FBI and Justice Department say they treat domestic extremist violence the same regardless of ideology. Sanborn said the FBI has opened more than 800 investigations tied to the 2020 rioting and arrested more than 250 people. Attorney General Merrick Garland said last week that the Justice Department had arrested and charged more than 725 people for their alleged roles in the Jan. 6 attack.

## Russia, US take tough stands ahead of more talks on Ukraine

By DASHA LITVINOVA and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Moscow and Washington both took uncompromising stands Tuesday ahead of more talks amid a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine, with the U.S. rebuffing a demand to halt NATO expansion and the Kremlin saying it will quickly see if it's worthwhile to even keep negotiating.

At Monday's talks in Geneva, Russia insisted on guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations and demanded to roll back the military alliance's deployments in Eastern Europe. The U.S. firmly rejected the demands as a nonstarter.

The U.S. envoy to NATO set a tough tone for the next talks with Moscow, ruling out any concessions on the alliance's eastward expansion. "We will not allow anyone to slam NATO's open-door policy shut," said U.S. Ambassador Julianne Smith.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the Geneva talks as "open, comprehensive and direct," but emphasized that Moscow wants quick results. "We see no significant reason for optimism," he told reporters.

Peskov said Russia-NATO talks in Brussels on Wednesday and a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Thursday would show whether further negotiations are worthwhile.

"It will become clear in what direction and how to proceed and if it makes sense," he said. "We absolutely wouldn't accept dragging this process out endlessly."

Smith said "not a single ally inside the NATO alliance is willing to budge or negotiate anything as it relates to NATO's open-door policy."

"We stand firm in pushing back on security proposals that are simply nonstarters," she told reporters. "There's widespread unity and consensus across the alliance on the challenge that sits before us."

The U.S. estimates Russia has massed about 100,000 troops near Ukraine, a buildup that has stoked fears of an invasion. Moscow says it has no plans to attack and rejects Washington's demand to pull back its forces, saying it has the right to deploy them wherever necessary.

President Vladimir Putin has warned Moscow would take unspecified "military-technical measures" if the U.S. and its allies don't meet its demands. He spoke with members of his Security Council, saying he wanted to discuss unspecified issues related to security and infrastructure in border areas.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said it was "too early to tell whether the Russians are serious about the path to diplomacy or not," or whether they will use the talks as a "pretext to claim that diplo-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 62 of 81

macy couldn't possibly work" and move forward with an invasion.

Psaki sidestepped questions about whether the U.S. agreed the Geneva talks did not provide reason for greater optimism. She noted, however, that they had included discussions about the placement of missiles in Europe and reciprocal limits on military exercises.

"There are a range of discussions that can be a part of a diplomatic path, but ultimately it's up to the Russians to determine about whether they're going to take a serious approach," she said.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation in Geneva, said afterward that it would be hard to make any progress on other issues if the U.S. and its allies stonewall Moscow's demand for guarantees precluding NATO's expansion.

The U.S. and its allies reject the demand for NATO not to admit new members, emphasizing that a key alliance principle is that membership is open to any qualifying country and no outsiders have veto power. But Washington and NATO also say they are ready to discuss arms control, confidence-building measures, greater transparency and risk reduction if Russia takes a constructive stance.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said she briefed the North Atlantic Council on her talks in Geneva. "The United States is committed to working in lockstep with our Allies and partners to urge de-escalation and respond to the security crisis caused by Russia," she tweeted.

The U.S. warned that Russia will face unprecedented sanctions if it attacks Ukraine.

Amid the tensions, the Russian military said 3,000 troops were taking part in drills at firing ranges in the Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk and Smolensk regions near Ukraine.

In 2014, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula after the ouster of its Moscow-friendly leader and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in the country's east, where more than seven years of fighting has killed over 14,000 people.

A 2015 peace deal brokered by France and Germany has helped end large-scale battles, but frequent skirmishes have continued and efforts to negotiate a political settlement have failed.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met Tuesday in Kyiv with French and German officials on prospects for another meeting of the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, saying he wanted "substantive talks on ending the conflict."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday, saying Kyiv and Washington "remain united in seeking de-escalation through diplomacy and strength."

## **Fed's Powell: High inflation poses a threat to job market**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Warning that high inflation could make it harder to restore the job market to full health, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Tuesday that the Fed will raise interest rates faster than it now plans if needed to stem surging prices.

With America's households squeezed by higher costs for food, gas, rent, autos and many other items, the Fed is under pressure to rein in inflation by raising rates to slow borrowing and spending. At the same time, the economy has recovered enough that the Fed's ultra-low-interest rate policies are no longer needed.

"If we have to raise interest rates more over time, we will," Powell said during a hearing of the Senate Banking Committee, which is considering his nomination for a second four-year term.

The stark challenge for Powell if he is confirmed for a new term, as expected, was underscored by the questions he faced Tuesday from both Democratic and Republican senators. They pressed him to raise rates to reduce inflation, though without ramping up borrowing costs so much that the economy tumbles into a recession.

Fed officials have forecast three increases in their benchmark short-term rate this year, though some economists say they envision as many as four hikes in 2022.

Powell's nomination is expected to be approved by the committee sometime in the coming weeks and then confirmed by the full Senate with bipartisan support. At Tuesday's hearing, he drew mostly sup-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 63 of 81

portive comments from senators from both parties. A Republican first elevated to the chair by President Donald Trump, Powell has also been credited by many Democrats for sticking with ultra-low-rate policies to support rapid hiring for the past 18 months.

In his testimony, Powell rebuffed suggestions from some Democratic senators that rate increases would weaken hiring and potentially leave many people, particularly lower-income and Black Americans, without jobs. Fed rate increases usually boost borrowing costs on many consumer and business loans and have the effect of slowing the economy.

But Powell argued that rising inflation, if it persists, also poses a threat the Fed's goal of getting nearly everyone wants a job back to work. Low-income families have been particularly hurt by the surge in inflation, which has wiped out the pay increases that many have received.

"High inflation is a severe threat to the achievement of maximum employment," he said.

The economy, the Fed chair added, must grow for an extended period to put as many Americans back to work as possible. Controlling inflation before it becomes entrenched is necessary to keep the economy expanding, he said. If prices keep rising, the Fed could be forced to slam on the brakes much harder by sharply raising interest rates, threatening hiring and growth.

Powell won praise from Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, the chairman of the committee, and Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, the senior Republican on the panel.

"The president is putting results over partisanship, re-nominating a Federal Reserve chair of the other political party," Brown said. "As chair, together with President Biden, he has helped us deliver historic economic progress."

"There is broad bipartisan backing for Chairman Powell's re-nomination," Toomey added.

Still, Toomey also criticized some of the Fed's 12 regional banks for holding events that addressed climate change and "so-called racial justice," which, Toomey argued, went far beyond the Fed's mandate. He cited one event, organized by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, in which he said participants called for defunding police.

"The troubling politicization of the Fed puts its independence and effectiveness at risk," Toomey said.

And Sen. Richard Shelby, an Alabama Republican, criticized Powell for the central bank's initial characterization of the price spikes that began this spring as "transitory."

"I'm concerned if the Fed missed the boat on addressing inflation sooner, a lot of us are," Shelby said. "As a result of that, the Fed under your leadership has lost a lot of credibility."

Inflation has soared to the highest levels in four decades, and on Wednesday the government is expected to report that consumer prices jumped 7.1% over the past 12 months, which would be the largest such jump since 1982.

Powell said the Fed mistakenly expected that supply chain bottlenecks driving up prices for goods such as cars, appliances, and furniture would not last nearly as long as they have. Once unsnarled, prices for things like used cars, which have spiked in the past year, would come back down, he said.

But for now, those supply chain problems have persisted, and while there are signs they are loosening, Powell said that progress is limited. He noted that many cargo ships remain docked outside the port of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the nation's largest, waiting to unload.

The number of people working or looking for work also remains far below pre-pandemic levels, Powell noted. Millions of Americans have retired early, or are avoiding jobs because of fear of the coronavirus. The Fed had anticipated that more of those people would return to the workforce than have done so.

The smaller workforce has forced businesses to offer much higher pay to attract and keep employees. Powell said that isn't mainly why prices are high right now, but it "can be an issue going forward for inflation."

Economists and former Fed officials are raising concerns that the Fed is behind the curve on inflation. Last Friday's jobs report for December, which showed a sharp drop in the unemployment rate to a healthy 3.9%, and an unexpected wage increase, has helped fan those concerns. While lower unemployment and higher pay benefit workers, those trends can potentially fuel rising prices by encouraging more spending.

At the Fed's most recent meeting in December, Powell said the central bank was rapidly accelerating its

efforts to tighten credit with the goal of reining in inflation. The Fed will stop buying billions of dollars of bonds in March, ahead of its previously announced goal of doing so in June. Those bond purchases have been intended to encourage more borrowing and spending by lowering longer-term rates.

And Fed officials' expectation that they will raise short-term rates three times this year marks a sharp shift from September, when they were divided over doing it even once.

The flood of new omicron infections won't slow the Fed's shift toward policies more appropriate for an economy getting back to normal, Powell said at the hearing, because so far it doesn't appear to be weighing on the economy.

"It is really time for us to move away from those emergency pandemic settings to a more normal level," he added. "It's a long road to normal from where we are."

## **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 Central Asian nation 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 country's authoritarian government. Over the next few days, the demonstrations turned 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. The unrest was largely quelled by the weekend.

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 the CSTO has largely completed its mission 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 and a new cabinet on Tuesday, with some deputy prime ministers and ministers from the previous government keeping their posts.

Kazakhstan's government resigned last week in 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.

The new prime minister, 49-year-old Alikhan Smailov, previously served as Kazakhstan's minister of finance and its first deputy prime minister.

Life in Almaty, which was hit by the harshest violence, started returning to normal this week, with public transport resuming operations and malls reopening. The owners of shops 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," she said. "I'm so distressed, God is my witness, I don't know how to feed my kids."



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 65 of 81

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

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

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

A mass of arctic air swept into the Northeast on Tuesday, bringing bone-chilling sub-zero temperatures and closing schools across the region for the second time in less than a week.

High temperatures were not expected to make it out of the teens and 20s in most spots, with single digits in many areas, especially northern New England, according to the National Weather Service. But things felt even worse because of the wind, which made it feel below zero for many.

Schools in Massachusetts' three largest cities — Boston, Worcester and Springfield — canceled classes, saying they did not want children standing outside for extended periods of time waiting for buses.

"There has been an increase of covid with transportation personnel, which would result in buses running up to 30 minutes late," according to a tweet from the Worcester public schools. "The safety of our students and staff are always the focus of our decisions."

Low temperatures can result in frostbite to exposed skin in as little as 30 minutes, according to the National Weather Service.

For parents who had to work, the YMCA of Central Massachusetts provided a safe, warm place for their children.

"Anytime there's school closures we open up our all-day programming so that parents can still continue to work and have the children at our location," President and CEO David Connell said.

Syracuse, New York, Manchester, New Hampshire, and Burlington, Vermont, were among communities that also closed public schools. The closures came just a few days after many school closed because of snow Friday.

Some COVID-19 testing sites in New Hampshire and Massachusetts closed in response to the cold, and warming centers opened across the region for people who needed temporary shelter from the bitter temperatures. Rhode Island opened warming centers across the state and in Boston, Mayor Michelle Wu reminded residents that the city's network of public libraries were open for people looking for a place to warm up.

Some people took the cold in stride.

"We live in the Northeast in winter — it goes with the territory," said Michael Davis as he walked his dog in Brooklyn on Tuesday morning.

Others struggled, despite new winter gear.

"I bought this really expensive coat on Amazon, and it's the best purchase I've ever made, but it's not enough," said Katie Cronin, who was also in Brooklyn.

The frigid cold was the likely cause of a water main break in downtown Boston that forced street closures and turned the area into an icy mess, a spokesperson for the Boston Water and Sewer Commission said.

The freezing temperatures were caused by a pocket of cold air descending from Canada, but the good news is that it is expected to be a short-lived cold spell, said Bill Simpson, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Norton, Massachusetts, office.

"We're getting an arctic cold front with northwest flow, quickly switching to a southwest flow," he said, adding temperatures are expected to rise to around 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4.5 C) in the Boston area later in the week.

Wind chill temperatures in areas near lakes Erie and Ontario in New York state were expected to drop as low as minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 34 Celsius). To make matters worse, parts of the state were expected to be hit with up to 2 feet (0.6 meters) of lake-effect snow and winds gusting up to 40 mph (64 kph).

The high temperature in Vermont on Tuesday was expected to be several degrees below zero in some

areas with wind chills of up to minus 35 (minus 37 C).

In New Hampshire, it was minus 26 degrees (minus 32 C) atop Mount Washington — known for its weather extremes — with a wind chill of nearly minus 72 (minus 58 C) as of 8 a.m. That was actually warmer than earlier in the morning.

The Mount Washington Observatory posted a photo on Facebook of a frozen plate of spaghetti supporting a fork.

Temperatures dropped into the single digits Fahrenheit in many areas of Massachusetts, with the wind chill making it feel well below zero.

The Bureau of Motor Vehicles branch in Bangor, Maine, where the wind made it feel minus 17 degrees (minus 27 C), was temporarily closed due to lack of heat but reopened later in the day.

Central Maine Power encouraged customers to weather strip windows and open drapes to let in heat from the sun and allow sunlight to reduce reliance on electricity, and warned people to be careful when using space heaters. A malfunctioning electric space heater was blamed for a fire Sunday in New York that killed 17 people.

## Special rescues help ailing owners find pets' next home

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Who will take your pet when you die?

The question often doesn't have an easy answer, especially for ill or older people headed to residential nursing care or assisted living. During the pandemic, specialized rescue, advocacy and adoption services run by volunteers are trying to fill the void, one pet at a time.

Leaders in the small movement said the past couple of years have opened the eyes of many.

"The thing about COVID is a lot of people are thinking, I can't be guaranteed to be around forever. A lot more people are trying to make plans in advance, which is the best thing to do because unfortunately, a lot of people wait until they're in hospice or there's a desperate situation," said Amy Shever, founder and director of 2nd Chance 4 Pets in suburban Sacramento, California.

The number of pets surrendered to shelters due to caretaker health or death is up from 7.3% in 2009 to 10.2% during the pandemic, according to the Best Friends Network of thousands of public and private shelters, rescue groups and other animal welfare organizations in all 50 states.

The pets of seniors are often seniors themselves, languishing in shelters or the first to be euthanized after they're declared unadoptable, Shever said. They're routinely given up by relatives who can't take in a dog or cat. The life spans of other pets, such as parrots, are far longer, which sometimes scares off loved ones.

Shever's focus is educating veterinarians and shelters on how they can get involved. Her organization also tries to help pet owners in need of direction. She urges owners to identify a committed caregiver, provide written instructions for a pet's routine and put a financial plan in place. Her group has distributed thousands of emergency-card door hangers, for instance, to pet food banks and animal welfare organizations so owners can make their wishes known.

Another organization, Pet Peace of Mind, works directly with about 250 hospices around the country to provide and train volunteers who care for pets of the seriously and terminally ill, said Dianne McGill, the president and founder in Salem, Oregon. Most of the hospices are providing home services, where pets are often giving comfort and support.

"These specialty volunteers bring pet care knowledge with them so they can do whatever is needed to help," she said. "So they're walking, feeding, playing, cleaning up or helping to arrange a plan for rehoming."

While providing pet care or adoption services often isn't top of mind for social workers or nurses, it's a huge emotional driving force for patients and loved ones living far away, McGill said.

"Care workers hear about the issues from family members," she said. "They say, my mom is really, really upset about what's going to happen to her pet. I live out of state. I can't help her. How do we get some pet care in place while she's navigating her end-of-life journey or when she passes?"

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 67 of 81

"I've got a million stories about patients who literally hung on until they heard that their pet had received a new home," McGill said.

Enter angels-on-earth like 79-year-old Kathy Reister.

She adopted a 12-year-old Chihuahua named Jackson with the help of Tyson's Place Animal Rescue in Holland, Michigan. The nonprofit helps people with terminal illnesses find new homes for their pets. Reister, who has been diagnosed with congestive heart failure, had recently lost her own dog and was having a hard time at home alone when she took in Jackson last August.

"I've never been without a dog since about 1965," said the widow. "His previous owner had passed away."

Soon after, Jackson was also diagnosed with congestive heart failure, and Tyson's Place stepped in with a grant to help Reister cover his medical bills. She promised to return him to the agency for rehoming should her health take a turn for the worse.

"Having him has really helped me want to continue to live and keep fighting," said Reister, of Grandville, Michigan. "I started walking one block down and one block back home with him. Now we walk at least 20, 25 minutes a day. He needs to walk and I need to walk. He's made such a big difference in my life."

Caitlin Koska, 31, and Michael White, 34, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, included 14-year-old Luna in their May 1 wedding after Koska adopted her through Tyson's Place around Thanksgiving 2020. Luna, also a Chihuahua, was their ring bearer.

"Her owner had gone into a nursing home and could no longer take care of her," Koska said. "She has a lot of dental issues, cataracts and very poor hearing. She's just the sweetest dog. Everybody who knows her loves her."

Jill Bannink-Albrecht founded Tyson's Place about six years ago. It services the entire state of Michigan, working directly with a pet owner before rehoming becomes an urgent matter, or with family members after a death, using a small network of foster homes.

For Koska, Tyson's Place took care of extensive dental work for Luna before she was adopted.

"I used to work for a high-kill animal shelter, and I knew what happened to the old dogs when they came in. I remember one dog who animal control literally picked up from the side of his dead owner's body, and he didn't even have an opportunity to be adopted. He was put to sleep because we didn't have space," Bannink-Albrecht said.

Now, hospices and social workers refer patients to Tyson's Place. Bannink-Albrecht is struggling to expand her foster reach.

"I just can't meet the demand for this kind of service, especially when it comes to cats," she said. "In the last two months, I've turned away 40 cats that meet our mission just because we don't have a place to put them."

Bannink-Albrecht knows of just a few other rescues like hers. One, in Canada, also needs help.

Angela Rafuse, 27, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, founded My Grandfather's Cat on May 18, her grandfather's birthday. He died in 2019 and left behind his grumpy 14-year-old cat, Mackenzie.

"She was my grandmother's best friend and when she passed away, my grandfather took care of her for the next year before he passed away," Rafuse said. "He wouldn't put his name on the list for a nursing home knowing nobody would take the cat, who has the grumpiest meow I've ever heard."

Rafuse promised her grandfather she would take Mackenzie. She began posting TikTok videos of their adventures. One video, of Mackenzie scratching Rafuse's face as she held her up to the camera, has been viewed nearly a million times.

"Then so many people started sharing stories with us about how their grandparents' cats ended up in shelters and how their grandparents worry about what will happen to their cats or their dogs because there's nowhere to take them," Rafuse said. "I've worked at a nonprofit for the past four years so I thought, it should be pretty easy to find resources to help these people. Nothing existed that empowered a senior and helped them arrange this and empowered their family. Everything was just shelters."

After she launched, emails asking for help and offering donations rolled in, but she didn't have enough foster homes to meet demand. She's working to expand. One of Rafuse's goals is to help keep a pet at

home until the final moment.

As for Mackenzie, she's living her best life, hiking and kayaking with Rafuse.

"She's still grumpy," Rafuse said. "She's developed a really special connection with my dad, and I know my dad loves that because she's the last thing he has of his parents."

## Grand Ole Opry under fire for Morgan Wallen performance

By KRISTIN M. HALL AP Entertainment Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Morgan Wallen stepped on country music's most historic and storied stage over the weekend, a sign that many interpreted as the Grand Ole Opry giving the troubled star its blessing and a path to reconciliation after he used a racial slur on camera.

While the country star's return to the public eye seemed inevitable, a tweet from the Opry about Wallen surprising fans at its regular Saturday broadcast show led to heavy criticism of the mostly white institution and its history as a gatekeeper.

Performers ranging from Yola, Allison Russell, Rissi Palmer, Noelle Scaggs of Fitz and the Tantrums, Joy Oladokun, Chely Wright, as well as Grammy winners Brandi Carlile and Jason Isbell, weighed in on how the Opry's decision could have troubling consequences for artists of color in country music.

"Morgan Wallen's thoughtless redemption tour is the nail in the coffin of me realizing these systems and this town is not really for us," wrote Oladokun on Sunday.

Wallen was caught on camera last year using a racial slur and while some organizations banned him temporarily, he has returned to the airwaves and remained the most popular artist of 2021 across all genres. He resumed touring arenas last year and has been releasing new music, including collaborations with rapper Lil Durk, who is Black, and country artist ERNEST. Wallen made an unannounced appearance on the Opry, which has been broadcasting for nearly 100 years, to sing with ERNEST.

This time the criticism centered more on the silent signaling by the Opry than Wallen himself.

"It's the idea of a young Black artist walking into that venue and wondering if ANYBODY is on their side," wrote Isbell. "What a lot of us consider to be a grand ole honor can be terrifying for some."

For many Black artists, the promises for change and racial equity inside country music's institutions continue to ring empty.

In 2021, writer Holly G started a blog called the Black Opry to create a home for Black artists and fans. It has since grown in less than a year to a fully-fledged community and performances at venues around the country. Enthusiasm for what she created has grown so much that venues have been reaching out to book shows.

She met with the Opry's talent director with a proposal to host a show next month for Black History Month in conjunction with the Black Opry. She said the Opry's rep stressed that they were carefully selecting who appeared on their stage.

Following Wallen's appearance, Holly G wrote a letter asking for an explanation of how the Opry felt that Wallen met their standards.

"They have figured out they can invite a few Black performers to the stage and give them debuts and that will quiet or calm people down for a little bit," she told The Associated Press on Monday. "But if you look at the structural set up for the institution, nothing has changed. They have two Black members over the entire history of the institution."

A publicist for the Opry did not return a request for comment from the AP, and Holly G said she also had not received a response to her letter as of Tuesday morning.

Soon after the video of Wallen was published on TMZ, the country singer apologized and told fans not to defend his racist language. But his fans have galvanized their support for him, boosting his streaming numbers when radio stations were pulling him off playlists. Wallen himself acknowledged a lack of awareness when asked on "Good Morning America" in July of last year about whether country music had a problem with race. "It would seem that way, yeah. I haven't really sat and thought about that," he replied.

A publicist for Wallen did not return a request for comment from the AP.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 69 of 81

Charles Hughes, a professor at Rhodes College in Memphis and author of "Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South," said playing the Opry — one of the most important institutions in the genre's history — legitimizes artists.

Hughes said Wallen's path, via the Opry and other stages he is performing on, appears like the "wayward white artist" being welcomed back into the family.

"The narrative of reconciliation is a really powerful one... and reconciliation without any reckoning, real reckoning, can actually end up worse," said Hughes. "Cause if you don't address the problem, you just sort of act like it didn't happen."

Musician Adia Victoria noted that minstrels wearing blackface performed comedy acts on the Opry for years. The Opry's very first performer for the first show in 1927, harmonica player DeFord Bailey, was fired and he left the music business. Only Charley Pride, who died in 2020, and Darius Rucker have been officially invited to be regular members. The Opry's management team selects artists to be members based on career success, like sales and industry recognition, and their commitment to their audience. Wallen is not a member, but was a guest performer.

The timing of Wallen's Opry appearance came the same weekend as Grammy-nominated country star Mickey Guyton tweeted about a racist commenter, while a white country star RaeLynn said in an interview with a conservative podcaster that the genre was not racist because she had never experienced racism herself. Guyton is Black.

The confluence of all these incidents in a few short days has been exhausting for artists from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, said Holly G. That's why she sees a need to create new spaces and organizations apart from the genre's long-standing institutions that haven't made everyone feel welcome.

"We'll create our own audiences and our own stages and our own traditions," she said. "It doesn't feel very worth fighting to share space with people who unequivocally do not want you there."

## Djokovic back into swing in Australia, visa questions linger

By JOHN PYE and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic held a practice session on Tuesday, a day after he left immigration detention, focusing on defending his Australian Open title even while he still faces the prospect of deportation because he's not vaccinated against COVID-19.

The top-ranked tennis star hit the show courts of Melbourne Park, where the tournament is held, within hours of winning a legal battle that allowed him to stay in the country.

At issue is whether he has a valid exemption to rules requiring vaccination to enter Australia since he recently recovered from COVID-19. A judge ruled Monday he could stay, but the immigration minister could still send him home.

There were also new questions raised Tuesday over an immigration form, on which he said he had not traveled in the 14 days before his flight to Australia. The Monte Carlo-based athlete was seen in Spain and Serbia in that two-week period.

The back and forth over whether Djokovic complied with Australia's rules has caused a furor in the country and beyond. When the vocal skeptic of vaccines was first granted a visa to travel to Melbourne, many complained he was being given special treatment from a country known for its strict travel restrictions during the pandemic.

But amid a flood of confusing information about what the rules are, others have charged Djokovic has become a convenient scapegoat for an Australian government facing criticism for its recent handling of the pandemic.

The nine-time Australian Open winner held a practice Tuesday afternoon at Rod Laver Arena. Soon after, tournament organizers made him the top-seeded player in the men's singles draw.

The athlete was seen hitting shots from behind the baseline, taking feedback from his coach, and stretching beside the court with a trainer. He spent four nights confined to an immigration hotel and now is getting back into the swing less than a week before the Grand Slam tournament starts.

"Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen. I remain focused

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 70 of 81

on that," Djokovic tweeted in the early hours of Tuesday. "I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans."

But he still faces the prospect of deportation before the first match.

Djokovic was given an 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. That apparently allowed him to receive a visa to travel.

But federal border authorities stopped him on arrival last week and canceled his visa. Lawyers for the government have said an infection in the previous six months was only grounds for an exemption in cases in which the coronavirus caused severe illness.

It's not clear why Djokovic was ever granted a visa if that's the case.

A federal judge reinstated Djokovic's visa Monday on procedural grounds, saying he hadn't been allowed enough time to speak to his lawyers to contest the decision. But Immigration Minister Alex Hawke is still considering using his power to deport the 34-year-old Serbian under separate legislation.

Hawke's office issued a statement saying the matter was still under consideration.

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

A new potential stumbling block also emerged Tuesday after documents released by the Federal Circuit Court revealed Djokovic told authorities he had not traveled in the 14 days before his flight to Australia.

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

But he was filmed playing tennis in the streets of the Serbian capital, Belgrade, on Dec. 25, and later training in Spain — all within the 14-day window. He traveled to Australia from Marbella, Spain.

Djokovic told border officers that Tennis Australia completed the declaration for him, but the officer who canceled his visa said that the body would have done that based on information from Djokovic himself.

It was not clear if the document came up during Monday's hearing.

The form notes that giving false or misleading information is a serious offense — and it could be grounds for deportation.

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

Morrison spoke about the issue with Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić on Tuesday, and they agreed to keep in touch.

"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 prime minister especially emphasized the importance of the conditions for training and physical preparation for the upcoming competition," RTS reported.

The drama has put Morrison's government in a tight spot ahead of elections 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 been criticized for loosening some rules, just as omicron cases have been rapidly surging.

The opposition home affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, blamed the visa confusion on a lack of planning by Morrison's 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."

Andy Murray, who lost four Australian Open finals to Djokovic, said the court win was a "positive" for his

fellow major winner but there were still details to clarify.

"I'm sure we'll hear from him in the next few days," Murray said. "I'm hoping we can move on from it now. It looks like he's going to be able to play and compete in the Australian Open."

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

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States on Tuesday 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 national security council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a statement 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 International Rescue Committee, a global humanitarian aid organization, said community health workers it supports have reported seeing a sharp increase in the number of children with severe acute malnutrition in Khost and Herat provinces. The group also reported that food prices in Afghanistan have risen by an estimated 10% to 20% compared with the previous five years.

The IRC's president and CEO, David Milliband, said the "cause of today's humanitarian disaster is clear: the economic tourniquet applied to Afghanistan."

"It is way past time for a change of approach," he said.

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.

Separately, the United Nations 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan, unveiled Tuesday, found the country requires \$4.4 billion in funding, the largest humanitarian appeal ever launched for a country.

"Events in Afghanistan over the past year have unfolded with dizzying speed and with profound consequences for the Afghan people," said Martin Griffiths, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator. "The world is perplexed and looking for the right way to react. Meanwhile, a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe looms."

The new Biden administration commitment 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. They hope that by giving money directly to independent aid organizations they'll be able to keep it out of

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 72 of 81

the hands of the Taliban.

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.

Sen. Chris Murphy, chairman of the U.S. Senate foreign relations subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia and counterterrorism, said that it was in U.S. and allies' interest to ease Afghans' suffering.

"The United States of America has a moral obligation to prevent avoidable suffering and a national security imperative to do what we can to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe," said Murphy, D-Conn.

## UK's Johnson accused of breaking lockdown with 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 meeting up with more than one person outside their households.

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. 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 held a televised news conference to remind people that group gatherings were banned indoors and out. London's Metropolitan Police force also published a reminder 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. A senior civil servant who was looking into those accusations will also investigate the latest ones.

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

But outrage is mounting since this is not the first time Johnson's Conservative government has been accused of flouting pandemic rules that imposed the most severe restrictions on Britons' individual freedoms since World War II.

During the first lockdown, which began in March 2020 and lasted for more than two months, gatherings were banned with a few exceptions. Millions of people were cut off from friends and family, and even barred from visiting dying relatives in hospitals.

While Johnson has weathered the criticism thus far, his problems are piling up. Support for him in his own party is being eroded by discontent over continuing pandemic restrictions, which some Conservatives view as draconian. He is also facing disquiet about his judgment after a slew of financial and ethical misconduct allegations against him and his government.

Britain is not scheduled to hold a national election until 2024, so Johnson does not face an imminent verdict from voters. His party is another matter. The Conservatives have a history of ousting leaders if they become a liability — and a recent surprising loss in a by-election for a district the party held for more than a century has increased their jitters.

On the day of the garden party in May 2020, 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 in Europe after Russia.

Lyndsay Jackson, whose mother died of COVID-19 that month, 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



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 73 of 81

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."

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 held lockdown-breaching Christmas parties in 2020.

The opposition Labour Party demanded that Johnson answer questions about the allegations in Parliament — but the government sent a junior minister, Michael Ellis, to face lawmakers instead. Ellis apologized "for the upset that these allegations have caused" but said he could not comment further because an investigation was underway.

Labour Deputy Leader Angela Rayner said Johnson's "absence speaks volumes."

"He can run but he can't hide," she said.

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 lawmaker Ed Miliband said the allegations were "incredibly damning."

"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, as the party is known, to a big election win in December 2019.

But the pandemic has shaken his authority. He has faced criticism for not reacting quickly enough to lock the country down, for frequent policy U-turns and, most recently, for the allegations he and his staff did not follow their own rules.

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.

## 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.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 74 of 81

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 Brian Branch 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.

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."

## 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.

## How fleeting choices, circumstances doomed 17 in Bronx fire

By ADAM GELLER AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It started as just another January morning, the damp chill prompting a family on the third floor of a drafty Bronx apartment tower to run a space heater for extra warmth, as residents had done countless times before.

In the moment, that decision hardly deserved a second thought.

Soon, though, it would prove the first in a series of fleeting choices and troubling circumstances that combined to fuel a staggering tragedy.

If only the heat inside apartment 3N had been sufficient. If only the family, fleeing a fire sparked by the malfunctioning space heater, had pulled the door closed behind them. If only their neighbors, conditioned to ignore frequent alarms that nearly always proved false, had not disregarded them this time. If only the blaze hadn't started near the bottom of the building, quickly turning the structure into a chimney that funneled impenetrable black smoke up stairwells and down hallways as scores struggled to escape.

If only so many seemingly minor factors had not aligned, then 17 people, including eight children, might now be alive.

"I dropped on my knees and started to pray to God and said, 'Please help me. Please help us,'" said Tysena Jacobs, 68, who was making breakfast in her 15th-floor apartment when acrid smoke started billowing under the front door. "It was like a nightmare."

Most nightmares, though, are solitary.

This one, all too real, was endured by hundreds spread over 19 floors -- taxi drivers and teachers, the elderly and newborns, many of them west African immigrants. From the outside, their brown block building set on a cement corner appeared anonymous. But inside it was a community, only vertical. That amplified both the damage and the grief.

If only, after an almost eerily mild December, the weekend's weather in New York had not turned cold. Each winter, some apartments in the Twin Parks tower stayed comfortable while others did not, forcing residents to improvise, said Stefan Beauvogui, a 67-year-old immigrant from Guinea who lives on the fourth floor.

On Sunday, he and his wife had space heaters running in both bedrooms and their sitting room because the building's heat "don't work for nothing." He said he had complained, but it hadn't been fixed.

Fathia Touray's family was the first to arrive at Twin Parks from the west African country of Gambia in the mid-1980s. They and other new arrivals bought space heaters. But sometimes her family had to turn on the oven or boil pots of water to keep the chill at bay, said Touray. She moved out in 2005 but her family remained, forced to flee Sunday's blaze.

Investigators say an electric space heater set up in one of the bedrooms of a duplex on the third floor of the building had been on for a "prolonged period" when an unspecified malfunction set off a fire around 11 a.m. Soon, flames began billowing from the unit's windows.

Down the hall, resident Karen Dejesus heard one of the building's hard-wired smoke alarms going off on the other side of her apartment door. At first, she ignored it.

"So many of us were used to hearing that fire alarm go off, it was like second nature to us," said Dejesus, 56, who was in the apartment with her son and 3-year-old granddaughter. "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.'"

Up on the 10th floor, Jose Henriquez had the same reaction.

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

By that point, smoke was spreading fast. When residents of 3N fled, the door to the unit was left open and stayed that way, investigators say, despite New York City law that requires entrances to apartments and stairwells be spring-loaded so they close automatically. The company that owns the building said in a statement Monday that maintenance workers repairing a lock on that door recently had inspected the self-closing mechanism and found it working.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 77 of 81

Within minutes, air rushing through the open doorway had sucked flames, soot and thick black smoke into the hall, and then under Dejesus' door. Before she could stuff towels into the opening, it filled the room, forcing the family to flee down the stairs to the lower floor of their duplex.

When firefighters arrived a few minutes after the blaze was reported, they broke down her door and rushed all three family members out a window onto a waiting ladder.

But while the flames never escaped the third floor, smoke poured into the building's stairwells and, with a second door left open on a 15th-floor landing, rapidly swept throughout the building. There was little to hold back the blaze in a structure that has sprinklers in its compactor and laundry rooms but none elsewhere.

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 without systems to douse a blaze.

"In a building that doesn't have sprinklers in it, that has very little fire safety in it, this door became literally life and death for hundreds of people," he said.

On the ninth floor, Kweesam Wood, a train station cleaner for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, was in the shower when his 6-year-old daughter Dasanii ran to tell his wife that she smelled smoke. The family grabbed clothes and started down the building's fire stairs.

But "there were people, glass, bodies," Fatima Wood says. They only made it down a few flights when heavy smoke forced them to turn around.

The smoke, though, kept rising.

On the 15th floor, Jacobs and her brother rushed toward the door as the air in their apartment took on the odor of soot. But they decided not to open it when they saw plumes of smoke billowing from beneath it.

Four floors up, Renee Howard was startled by a banging at her door. She opened it to find a firefighter, his face covered in soot, standing in a hallway filled with black smoke, asking her if everyone inside was OK. Assured she was safe, he ordered her to keep away from the door and stay near the window and wait for further instructions.

"I didn't move from there for at least seven hours because I didn't know where the fire was," she said.

Staying put kept her safe. But in a building without fire escapes, many residents flooded into the stairways, leaving what refuge they had in their units. Members of another family who lives on the same floor as Howard died trying to escape the building.

In the chaos, though, others made it to safety.

"I just ran down the steps as much as I could but people was falling all over me, screaming," said Sandra Clayton, 61, who was able to grope her way through the smoke. Gasping for air outside, she could think only of the wails of those who would not make it.

As residents returned to the building Monday hoping to gather personal items, they despaired pondering all the ways in which the tragedy and its terrible toll might have been averted.

"I saw the firefighters taking the children out. Their lives have been snatched away in a second," Howard said, breaking into tears. "I don't want to go back there. It's such a heartache."

## 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 oppressed to become president of the European Union's parliament, died in an Italian hospital on Tuesday at 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."

Sassoli, a socialist, had been hospitalized since Dec. 26 because of abnormal functioning of his immune system, his spokesman Roberto Cuillo said. Sassoli will be buried Friday at Rome's Santa Maria degli Angeli, the church where state funerals are held.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 78 of 81

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 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.

"Our union has lost at the same time an Italian patriot, a great European and a tireless humanist," French President Emmanuel Macron said.

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 showed him 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.

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.

Pope Francis, who received Sassoli in an audience last year, sent an unusually heartfelt telegram of condolences to Sassoli's wife, paying tribute to him as an "animated believer of hope and charity ... who, in a peaceful and respectful way, worked for the common good with a generous commitment."

A lifelong fan of the Fiorentina football club, he emulated the refined style of the team where Gabriel Batistuta and Roberto Baggio thrived. But in the end, like the Florence club, he also never got to reach the very highest level. Being head of the European Parliament doesn't compare to being a 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 the German Christian Democrat von der Leyen become European Commission president and the 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.

His pinnacle came on the European scene but he was just as respected in his native 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."

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 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."

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

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Cyberthreats and the growing space race 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 80 of 81

## 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."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 12, the 12th day of 2022. There are 353 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 12, 1959, Berry Gordy Jr. founded Motown Records (originally Tamla Records) in Detroit.

On this date:

In 1828, the United States and Mexico signed a Treaty of Limits defining the boundary between the two countries to be the same as the one established by an 1819 treaty between the U.S. and Spain.

In 1910, at a White House dinner hosted by President William Howard Taft, Baroness Rosen, wife of the Russian ambassador, caused a stir by requesting and smoking a cigarette — it was, apparently, the first time a woman had smoked openly during a public function in the executive mansion. (Some of the other women present who had brought their own cigarettes began lighting up in turn.)

In 1915, the U.S. House of Representatives rejected, 204-174, a proposed constitutional amendment to give women nationwide the right to vote.

In 1932, Hattie W. Caraway became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate after initially being appointed to serve out the remainder of the term of her late husband, Thaddeus.

In 1945, during World War II, Soviet forces began a major, successful offensive against the Germans in Eastern Europe. Aircraft from U.S. Task Force 38 sank about 40 Japanese ships off Indochina.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, unanimously ruled that state law schools could not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race.

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson said in his State of the Union address that the U.S. military should stay in Vietnam until Communist aggression there was stopped. The TV series "Batman," starring Adam West and Burt Ward as the Dynamic Duo, premiered on ABC.

In 1969, the New York Jets of the American Football League upset the Baltimore Colts of the National Football League 16-7 in Super Bowl III, played at the Orange Bowl in Miami.

In 1971, the groundbreaking situation comedy "All in the Family" premiered on CBS television.

In 2000, in a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Illinois v. Wardlow*, gave police broad authority to stop and question people who run at the sight of an officer.

In 2010, Haiti was struck by a magnitude-7 earthquake; the Haitian government said 316,000 people were killed, while a report prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development suggested the death toll may have been between 46,000 and 85,000.

In 2016, Iran detained 10 American sailors and their two small Navy boats after the boats drifted into Iranian waters; the sailors and their vessels were released the following day.

Ten years ago: Pentagon leaders scrambled to contain damage from an Internet video purporting to show four Marines urinating on Taliban corpses. (The Marine Corps announced in August 2012 that three Marines had received administrative punishments in connection with this incident.)



# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 189 ~ 81 of 81**

Five years ago: In yet another aftershock from the chaotic presidential campaign, the Justice Department inspector general opened an investigation into department and FBI actions before the election, including whether FBI Director James Comey followed established policies in the email investigation of Hillary Clinton. President Barack Obama ended the longstanding "wet foot, dry foot" immigration policy that allowed any Cuban who made it to U.S. soil to stay and become a legal resident.

One year ago: The House voted to urge Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution and hold a Cabinet vote to remove President Donald Trump from office; it was a symbolic action after Pence had already said he would not do so. Amid worry about renewed violence on Inauguration Day, the military's top leaders issued a written reminder to service members that the deadly insurrection at the Capitol was an anti-democratic, criminal act, and that the right to free speech gives no one the right to commit violence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said anyone flying to the United States would soon need to show proof of a negative test for COVID-19.

Today's Birthdays: The Amazing Kreskin is 87. Country singer William Lee Golden (The Oak Ridge Boys) is 83. Actor Anthony Andrews is 74. Movie director Wayne Wang is 73. Actor Kirstie Alley is 71. Legal affairs blogger Ann Althouse is 71. Writer Walter Mosley is 70. Country singer Ricky Van Shelton is 70. Radio-TV personality Howard Stern is 68. Writer-producer-director John Lasseter is 65. Broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour is 64. Actor Oliver Platt is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Dominique Wilkins is 62. Entrepreneur Jeff Bezos is 58. Rock singer Rob Zombie is 57. Actor Olivier Martinez is 56. Model Vendela is 55. Actor Farrah Focuse is 54. Actor Rachael Harris is 54. Rock singer Zack de la Rocha is 52. Rapper Raekwon (Wu Tang Clan) is 52. Actor Zabryna Guevara is 50. Singer Dan Haseltine (Jars of Clay) is 49. Singer Melanie Chisholm (Spice Girls) is 48. Contemporary Christian singer Jeremy Camp is 44. Actor Cynthia Addai-Robinson is 42. R&B singer Amerie is 42. Actor Issa Rae is 37. Actor Will Rothhaar is 35. Actor Andrew Lawrence is 34. Rock singer ZAYN is 29. Pop/soul singer Ella Henderson (TV: "The X Factor") is 26.