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UpComing Events

Monday, Jan. 17

Junior High Wrestling Invitational at Redfield
Girls basketball hosting Langford Area (JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)

Tuesday, Jan. 18

Wrestling Tournament at Hamlin
Junior High Boys Basketball at Mobridge. 7th at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

Junior High Wrestling Invitational at the Aberdeen Civic Arena, 4 p.m.

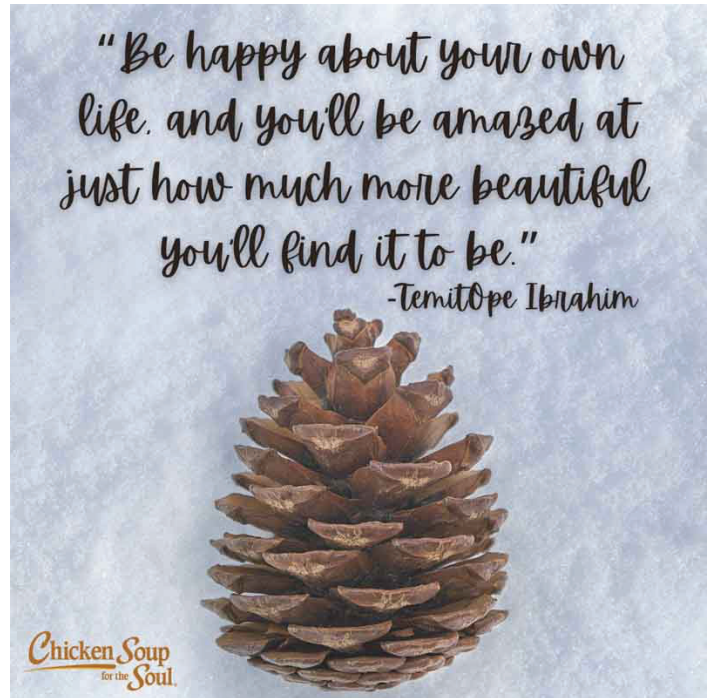
The Junior High boys basketball game in Groton scheduled for Jan. 18th is cancelled.

City Council Meeting at 7 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 20

Girls Basketball at Clark/Willow Lake. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

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



Friday, Jan. 21

Debate Speech Fiesta at Watertown High School
Boys Basketball hosting Clark/Willow Lake. 7th grade at 4 p.m., 8th grade at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game.

Wrestling Dual at Deuel High School, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 22

Debate Speech Fiesta at Watertown High School
Wrestling Tournament at Arlington, 10 a.m.

Surplus Van for Sale

The Groton Area School District is accepting sealed bids for the sale of a 1994 Chevy Beauville Van with liftgate. For more information or to see the vehicle, contact Transportation Director, Damian Bahr, at 605-397-8117 or Damian.Bahr@k12.sd.us. Bids can be dropped off at the high school office (502 N 2nd Street, Groton, SD) or mailed to Groton Area School District PO Box 410, Groton, SD 57445. Envelopes should be marked "Van Bid." Bids will be opened on Friday, January 28 at 2:00 PM. (0112.0119)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

Sunday, January 16, 2022

Human Relations Day

Conde Worship 9:00 AM

Sunday School 10:00 AM

Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Bible Study - Really Bad Girls Entire Video 10:00AM

Conde Ad Council 6:00 PM

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Community Coffee Hour 9:30 AM

Confirmation Snack Time 3:30 PM

Confirmation 4:00 PM

Groton Ad Council 7:00 PM

Sunday, January 23, 2022

Conde Worship 9:00 AM

Sunday School 10:00 AM

Groton Worship 11:00 AM

Hospitality Committee Meeting Noon

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, Jan. 16

9am Worship / Communion

NO Sunday School

10:15 Grace Alone

3pm Avantara

Annual reports ready for p/u

7pm Choir practice

Monday, Jan. 17

6:30am Bible Study

Tuesday, Jan. 11

6:00 Council potluck for new & outgoing members
w/ meeting to follow.

Wednesday, Jan. 19

6pm Confirmation

Thursday, Jan. 20

6:30pm Grace Alone

Newsletter Deadline

Sunday, Jan. 23

9am Sunday School

10:15am Worship/ Milestones 6th gr.

Annual Meeting

Spaghetti Dinner to follow meeting

7pm Choir practice

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

Weekend Mass Schedule

Saturday 4:30pm Groton

Sunday 8:30am Groton & 11:00am Turton

Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton

Sat 10am Newman Center

Confessions:

Sat. 3:45-4:15pm & Sun. 7:45am to 8:15am (G)

Sun. 10:30-10:45am (T)

Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton

St. John's Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, Jan. 16

8 a.m.: Bible Study

9 a.m.: St. John's Worship with communion

10 a.m.: Sunday School

11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship with communion

Monday, Jan. 17

Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 18

Quilting, 9 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 19

3:45 p.m.: Confirmation

Sunday, Jan. 23

8 a.m.: Bible Study

9 a.m.: St. John's Worship

10 a.m.: Sunday School

11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship

To submit your monthly or
weekly church calendar, email
to
news@grotonsd.net

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Zoellner, Krueger place first at Gettysburg JV Tournament

Groton Area's junior varsity wrestling team went to Gettysburg on Saturday where all seven wrestlers placed. Walker Zoellner and Liza Krueger both placed first, Nick Morris was second, John Bisbee, Isaiah Scepaniak and Cameron Johnson all placed third and Noah Scepaniak placed fourth.

JV 72-78: Noah Scepaniak's place is 4th and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Clayton Horst (Ipswich/Bowdle) won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) (Fall 0:25)

Round 2 - Landon Houska (Chamberlain) won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) (Fall 2:55)

Round 3 - Maverick Classen (Clark/Willow Lake) won by fall over Noah Scepaniak (Groton) (Fall 0:29)

JV 95-95: John Bisbee's place is 3rd

Round 1 - Blake Butler (Lemmon/McIntosh) won by fall over John Bisbee (Groton) (Fall 0:53)

Round 3 - Isaac Johnson (Clark/Willow Lake) won by fall over John Bisbee (Groton) (Fall 1:58)

JV 106-106: Walker Zoellner's place is 1st and has scored 18.0 team points.

Round 1 - Walker Zoellner (Groton) won by fall over Dominic Kluckman (Deuel) (Fall 4:19)

Round 2 - Walker Zoellner (Groton) won by decision over Garrett Huizenga (Linton) (Dec 3-0)

Round 3 - Walker Zoellner (Groton) won by fall over Xadyn LaPlante (CEB/Dupree) (Fall 2:50)

JV 126-129: Isaiah Scepaniak's place is 3rd

Round 1 - Roy Antrim (Faith) won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton) (Fall 0:11)

Round 2 - Chisum Blum (Chamberlain) won by fall over Isaiah Scepaniak (Groton) (Fall 0:26)

JV 126-132: Cameron Johnson's place is 3rd

Round 1 - Jerrod Larsen (Chamberlain) won by decision over Cameron Johnson (Groton) (Dec 5-4)

Round 3 - Cole Nitschke (South Border) won by fall over Cameron Johnson (Groton) (Fall 0:58)

JV 132-138: Nick Morris's place is 2nd and has scored 4.0 team points.

Round 1 - Nick Morris (Groton) won by fall over Gus Buchanan (Harding County) (Fall 3:23)

Round 3 - Cutler Schaunaman (South Border) won by fall over Nick Morris (Groton) (Fall 4:17)

Girls 85-94: Liza Krueger's place is 1st and has scored 9.0 team points.

Round 1 - Liza Krueger (Groton) won by fall over Macee McGregor (Webster) (Fall 1:02)

Round 2 - Liza Krueger (Groton) won by fall over Zoey Donovan (Chamberlain) (Fall 0:58)

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#506 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're still on fire, and we've passed 64 and 65 million cases in the two days since we last talked. Please note below that the last five consecutive days have each seen us notch another million on our belt and that in the two short weeks of this new year we've added 10 million cases. Our seven-day new-case average is up to a horrifying 806,157, a number which has risen steadily since December 15 when it was 119,215, which seems almost quaint today. Our raw number increase in 24 hours was 928,704, putting us at 65,049,258 at midday today. Way back on March 7 when it looked like we were going to get out of this thing (something else that seems quaint now) and we were passing 29 million, I wrote this: "Here's the history, offered in the sincere hope that I never have to report this again." That's one good way to be wrong about something important more than 30 times in less than a year. I'm done with those kinds of wishful hopes. So I'll offer another abbreviated history, knowing by now that we have a long way to go.

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
January 9 – 60 million – 2 days
January 10 – 61 million – 1 day
January 11 – 62 million – 1 day
January 12 – 63 million – 1 day
January 13 – 64 million – 1 day
January 14 – 65 million – 1 day

We have some evidence to show that this latest surge may be flattening in the earliest-hit places. The number of new cases in New York City has leveled off somewhat after a 20-fold increase in December. Other major cities in the Northeast and East have shown a slight drop this week. Dr. Shira Doron, epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center, told GBH news that the wastewater is suggesting a decline, "and so we hope that means cases will decline steeply as well." As we've discussed before, we don't want to declare our troubles behind us before we have pretty strong evidence (been there; done that), but at least things appear to be going our way. This estimate, however, is given strength by the fact that our trajectory echoes those seen in South Africa and the UK. The Omicron variant seems to have a shorter cycle time than earlier variants, and if so, that may bode well for us; but we want to remember that we have pockets—large ones—across the country with low vaccination rates, high transmission rates, and no desire at all to mitigate spread. That could prolong the cycle here by quite a lot. Meanwhile, we have swamped hospitals, people dying for lack of care, and worse to come. Before Omicron, we were looking at one last smallish surge in the winter; you can see how well that worked out. The virus made a fool of us again: This is not smallish, and there's no guarantee it's the last. That leaves me reluctant to get too certain about the future.

There was a lag between the surge of new cases and the surge in hospitalizations, but we're really in the thick of that now. Hospitalizations are up about 79 percent over two weeks to 150,237, well above previous records from a year ago. HHS data show 24 states have 20 percent or less of their capacity available; that number is 15 percent in 18 states plus the District of Columbia. States in the most trouble are New Mexico, Texas, Missouri, Alabama, and Rhode Island; but there's plenty of pain to go around.

Emergency rooms are jammed because they're short-staffed, because so many of their regular staff are

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out with Covid-19 or due to a contact, because so many patients are coming in through them, and also because they can't move admitted patients into regular beds—because there are no regular beds available. It's a matter of sitting around waiting for someone to either be discharged or to die and open one up. When patients are ready to be discharged, those who can't go directly home often can't be moved out because the rehab and long-term care facilities which would normally be their next destination aren't taking new patients due to short staffing. So the whole system is plugged up.

Typically, a certain percentage of folks who come into emergency rooms don't actually have emergent needs. Some of them don't have regular care providers, so the emergency room is their only place to go for care. Others have no money to pay for care and must rely on emergency rooms who are required to see patients irrespective of their ability to pay. In addition to these long-standing situations, these days lots of people come in looking for testing. But now, ERs are just full. Packed. One patient in one room is a fantasy. Waiting areas are crowded, and patients are lined up in rows in hallways and anywhere they'll fit. This whole issue of crowding is complicated by the need for stringent infection control: Patients with Covid-19 must be separated from those who are not infected, which requires more space and more staff and more resources. If you come in, wait times to be seen are double and triple the norm. You might sit in a waiting room—or wait in your car—for hours. Some folks give up, go home, and come back when they're even sicker. Some of them skip right over that to the morgue.

Meanwhile, the glut of patients all over a hospital is having all kinds of ripples. For example, surgeries cannot proceed until there's a bed to put the patient in after surgery. With ERs at 100+ percent capacity and holding patients for days before funneling them into beds as fast as the beds become available, it's tough to reserve a bed and schedule a procedure. I heard from one person who works in surgery they can't start a procedure until they receive word a bed will be available when the procedure is finished. Something goes wrong in surgery so the patient ends up needing an ICU bed instead of a regular one, and you have a whole other set of problems because those are full too. As a result, you have patients clogging post-anesthesia care (recovery) units waiting for those ICU beds. Can't send them more patients fresh from surgery until they have beds for them.

Meanwhile, larger hospitals which offer specialized care and are accustomed to receiving transfers from more rural and smaller institutions don't have anywhere to put those transfers either. Their ERs are full, their surgeries are backed up, their post-anesthesia unit is swamped, they have no beds available; so they have to refuse transfers. There is quite simply nowhere to put them. Have a stroke or a coronary artery problem or a serious accident in a small town, and you could die or suffer long-term disability because you had to wait days or longer—maybe even the rest of your life—to receive the specialized care you need. Even if you think Covid-19 is fake, I can assure you those folks dying of other diseases for lack of capacity to care for them are very, very real.

So we're seriously short of hospital capacity. Know what else we're short of? Blood. Desperately short in places. The Red Cross, which provides almost 40 percent of the US blood supply, has had to limit distributions to hospitals. And that means hospital medical staff are having to decide who gets blood. The Red Cross says as much as one fourth of blood needs are not being met. This is because need is up and donations are down. With this surge in infections, it's been difficult to hold the regular blood drives on campuses and in towns, and winter weather has complicated the picture by interfering with traffic at times. Donors are hunkering down at home instead of coming in to donate. Where surgeries aren't being canceled due to hospital capacity issues, they could be canceled because of blood availability issues. Merle Eldridge, the director of donor recruitment for Mississippi Blood Services, told a local TV station, WJTV, "We need to see anywhere from 200 to 250 donors every day to meet those needs. Right now, we're seeing about 100 to 150 donors." If you're able to donate, this might be a great time to get that done.

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The WHO updated its treatment guidelines for Covid-19. They've added a "strong" recommendation for using an immunosuppressive drug, baricitinib (Olmiant). You may recall from a long-ago conversation (Update #114 posted June 16, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3687706237912422>) that this is a Janus kinase inhibitor (JAK) that is used along with corticosteroids to treat severe disease and seems to improve survival and reduce the need for ventilation. It appears to down-regulate cytokine-mediated signals between cells, so it may inhibit the overwhelming cytokine response that recruits immune cells to produce a damaging reaction to infection. It may inhibit viral replication as well. Baricitinib is a monoclonal antibody that received emergency use authorization (EUA) in November, 2020, one of those lab-made antibodies that all arise from a single clone of B cells. This one has anti-inflammatory properties, and now the WHO is endorsing its use.

We've been hearing anecdotal reports (meaning just that—individual reports here and there with no systematic effort to gather or characterize them) for some months from women who found their menstrual cycles changed slightly after being vaccinated for Covid-19. We finally have a piece of research, that is, an attempt to turn those anecdotes into evidence, on the topic from researchers at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Oregon Health and Science University and the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and published in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* last week. The bottom line is that this is to be expected for some people and has been transient with no long-lasting effects, no short-term effects either, for that matter, other than the actual alteration in cycle.

The work was done using data from an app that tracks fertility from a company, Natural Cycles. Women use the app to track their cycles, often in order to prevent and/or to promote pregnancy and was there for the taking. This was, of course, after permission to use de-identified data was given by the 4000 participants. They were ages 18 to 45 and had logged their periods over a six-month time span. Twenty-four hundred of them were vaccinated, and 1550 of them were not. For vaccinated individuals, three cycles before and three cycles after vaccination were tracked while unvaccinated people were tracked for a similar six-month duration. Some reported periods were late while postmenopausal women reported experiencing periods after years without one. When data from all of the women were aggregated, the average delay on a period was about one day and was transient with cycles returning to normal with a month or two. Women who received both doses within the same cycle reported more pronounced delays, up to two days' delay. To be clear, there were no effects observed on fertility, just on cycle length. We should note that any vaginal bleeding in postmenopausal women should be followed up by a physician because some cases of this can signal more serious conditions. No one thinks these more serious conditions are associated with the vaccines, but because they can occur in someone at any time, they require follow-up.

Vaccination, on average, was associated with less than one day's change in cycle while unvaccinated people saw no significant changes. It is important to note that a small group of just 380 vaccinated women experienced a change of at least two (and up to eight) days while many others experienced no change at all. This means a few people with larger changes skewed the average toward the long end of these effects; most participants had very small, if any, change. It's not unusual for women to experience shifts in menstrual cycle; these are influenced by environmental factors, stressors, and life changes, of which we've seen plenty during this pandemic. Even in normal times, it is relatively common to see the occasional missed period or unusual cycle. These just all happened in close enough proximity to vaccination to implicate the vaccine as a potential cause.

Here's what we don't know: whether other vaccines are associated with similar changes. Maybe this happens all the time—maybe not. It's just never come up before, and so we have no data on the point. We don't often have millions of women receiving the same vaccine within a few months so that such a

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pattern might show up. Clinical trials don't typically track menstrual cycles unless the drug being tested is related to contraception or fertility. It's probably a good idea to start including this in trials, but in the meanwhile, we have established that the menstrual changes which follow Covid-19 vaccination look like they're transient and nonsignificant.

On the subject of births, we're missing some. No, it's not because people couldn't get pregnant because of the vaccines; it's because people assessed the situation and decided a pandemic wasn't the ideal time to be giving birth. Can't say that I blame them. According to a Brookings Institution study, there are about 60,000 fewer births than would be expected between October, 2020, and February, 2021. The largest number missing so far are from last January, which corresponds to a conception date the prior April when we were just starting to realize the mess we were in. A co-author, Phillip Levine, professor of economics at Wellesley College, said, "Uncertainty is not good for fertility." If there's anything we had plenty of in the spring of 2020, it would be uncertainty. Studies of the 1918-1919 "Spanish" flu pandemic indicate there was a significant dip in births about nine months after every significant spike in death rates. That makes sense to me. By last spring, births rose to expected levels consistent with the downturn in virus cases in the previous summer, but this increase did not completely compensate for the earlier declines. The largest declines corresponded to states with larger spikes in cases and large spikes in unemployment rates. While birth rates in the US have been declining for decades, 2020 showed the lowest number of births in over 40 years and the largest one-year drop by percentage since 1965, the year the post-war baby boom ended. When this whole thing is over, there's an interesting study there waiting for some intrepid researcher to dive in. It would be nice if we didn't have so many months of data for that study.

We're getting a lot of reports of children with croup when they're infected by the Omicron variant. Croup happens in an upper airway infection when swelling narrows the airway, resulting in a characteristic cough often described as a "bark." The airway can become obstructed if the swelling is severe enough. Because children's airways are narrow in the first place, it is easier for them to become obstructed than in adults. There have also been reports of bronchiolitis, the same sort of situation farther into the chest where the tubes that carry air narrow as they branch. While this variant isn't as successful as earlier variants at infecting lung tissue, it is very good at establishing itself in the upper respiratory tract where this sort of effect is more likely. Parents of children with Covid-19 should be alert to signals the child is struggling for breath; that is an emergency requiring the child be seen.

If you're like most folks, you probably know people who've had positive Covid-19 tests; maybe those people are you and the people who live in your household. So what do you do when that happens? First thing is the infected person should isolate from the rest of the household if at all possible. I am aware many families live in tight quarters or have very young children, and so this guidance can be difficult to follow; but if you can make it work, the infected person should isolate. If there are two parents and the child is young, it would be best if only one parent had contact with an infected child or the infected parent avoided contact with the healthy children. If possible, the infected and uninfected members of the family should sleep in different rooms and use different bathrooms. If the caretaker parent and the child, one infected and the other not, must be together, the parent should wear a mask when with the child. If there is only one parent present and there are both infected and uninfected children, wearing masks if possible will help to limit transmission. Masking, in general, is going to be important if you have a household that is only partially infected, but I am aware children under 2 cannot safely mask and it may be difficult to induce very young children to mask reliably at home. Infected and uninfected persons should not eat together since it is not possible to eat while masked. If everyone in the family is infected, then there is no need to isolate from one another.

There's a whole lot of "if possible" in there because the realities of family life may mean most of this is

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not, indeed, possible. Just keep in mind how helpful masks are in situations where other measures aren't going to work. And the more of those people who are vaccinated, the better things are for all involved.

If you can get outside without passing through shared spaces (apartment lobbies, for example), then it's fine to go outside as long as you stay distanced from others. The first 5 days, the infected person should isolate; for 5 more days after that, you can be indoors with others, but only while wearing a high-quality mask and avoiding settings where you cannot mask. That means using masks the entire 10 days at home with family. We start counting days when the symptoms begin (Day 0) or if there are no symptoms, then when the test specimen is taken. Day 1 is the first full day after the symptoms or positive test; Day 6 is when isolation can stop and Day 11 is when the mask can come off.

For previous variants, it was not unusual for only some household members to test positive while others remained negative. I'm not sure how Omicron is affecting this picture, but it seems reasonable to me to expect far more transmission within a household now, given how very transmissible it is. I would expect more members of a household are likely to become infected if they're sharing space while someone is infected unless you take careful precautions.

I've read a study in Nature Communications from Imperial College London that assesses the role of T cells in protection against SARS-CoV-2. The interesting point here is that the T cells studied are induced by coronaviruses other than SARS-CoV-2 which appear to be cross-reactive across different coronaviruses. They counted frequency of T cells specific for spike (usual in vaccines), nucleocapsid, membrane, and envelope proteins that cross-react with endemic (cold-causing) coronaviruses, finding that T cells produced against these internal proteins were stable even after antibodies had waned. What's more, these internal proteins tend to be conserved when mutation occurs, so the T cells remain effective even against new variants.

This work began in September, 2020, assessing contacts of Covid-19 cases for T cells specific for SARS-CoV-2. They found individuals with pre-existing stocks of T cells specific for other human coronaviruses seemed to be protected from infection with SARS-CoV-2 as well. Since they found these T cells in the contacts testing negative and saw they were "completely absent" in people who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, they are inferring a strong protective association with the cells. These researchers are reading these results to mean that we should be targeting core proteins in future vaccines for broader and more mutation-resistant protection. I'll be curious to see what follow-up work gets done.

I read a study from the University of Edinburgh, the University of St. Andrews, and Public Health Scotland that looked at pregnancy outcomes and vaccination status in pregnant women. It was published in Nature Medicine just a few days ago. They used data from a national cohort between December 8, 2020, and October 31, 2021. Vaccination rates in pregnant women were less than half those in the general population, 32.8 percent to 77.4 percent. There were 4950 confirmed cases in their cohort of infection in pregnancy over the study period spread fairly evenly throughout pregnancy.

Of these infections, 823 were associated with a hospital admission, and 104 of those were associated with a critical care admission. Hospital admissions were not spread evenly throughout pregnancy, with admission much more likely when infection occurred later in pregnancy. Of the infections occurring during pregnancy, 88.9 percent were seen in those who were not fully vaccinated while only 11.1 percent were fully vaccinated. When unvaccinated, 19.5 percent of cases resulted in hospitalization and 2.7 percent of cases resulted in critical care admissions; when fully vaccinated, 5.1 percent were hospitalized and 0.2 percent were admitted to critical care. Overall, 77.4 percent of infections in pregnancy occurred in the unvaccinated, as did 90.9 percent of those resulting in hospitalization and 98.1 percent of those associated with critical care admission.

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The risk of fetal loss or neonatal death was higher in Covid-19-infected mothers. The group found that the extended perinatal mortality rate for SARS-CoV-2 infection at any point in pregnancy was 8.0 per 1000 births and 22.6 for births occurring within 28 days of a diagnosis, whereas the background rate where there was no infection was 5.6 deaths per 1000 births. There were no deaths in fetuses or neonates when the infected mother had been vaccinated, so all of these losses were to unvaccinated mothers. Preterm births were also higher among women who had Covid-19 during pregnancy and were especially high if the baby was born within a month of the mother becoming ill; infected women were more than twice as likely to give birth preterm than uninfected women. This makes it clear there is significant risk associated with infection during pregnancy and significantly greater risk both for infection and for bad outcomes when the mother is unvaccinated.

We've talked about transportation woes in this surge; one of the transportation services we've mentioned previously is Amtrak. They're back in the news as they are forced to suspend eight percent of their departures for a couple of months. This adds to the suspensions announced earlier this month. With hundreds of employees quarantining and isolating, they simply don't have the personnel to run all of their routes. The affected part of the country is primarily the Northeast, but some long-distance routes will be suspended too.

Now that we've all been advised to upgrade our mask game, I've received some questions about reusing N95s. Here's the word on that: The N95 respirators or equivalent were designed for single use for a maximum of two to three hours, but that's in medical use. We learned in the early days of the pandemic when these items were in short supply that they can actually be used for longer and for multiple uses. If you're concerned about cost or filling up landfills with barely-used masks, you should know you can extend this use quite a bit in your personal (non-health-care) life. The thing is, after you've used one, there's the potential that the outside of it is contaminated with viruses that were floating around in the air wherever you went with it. This coronavirus dies with time on a dry surface, most of it within a day; so if you can set a mask aside for 48 to 72 hours, you can be assured it's safe to handle again. If you need to go out on consecutive days, the best practice is to have at least three or four masks and then mark them so that you can rotate them in order. It is generally recommended to store them in simple paper bags, each in its own, in the interim between uses. There is no need to apply disinfectant or to wash masks; in fact, that's likely to damage them. Let time be your disinfectant.

You can use the same mask for multiple wearings as long as it retains its integrity. That means the elastic is sound so that the mask still sits tightly against your face. The nose piece should still conform to your face so that air doesn't escape around it. If the mask becomes visibly soiled or gets wet, it should be retired. If it becomes more difficult to breathe through, then it's probably loaded up with secretions and such and should be discarded and replaced.

I have one last topic for today. For members of the What-the-hell-I'll-just-get-one-of-those-fancy-new-treatments-if-I-get sick Club, I have some bad news: We're a little short on choices at the moment. Here's the situation.

I've been hearing a great deal of angst from people who are diagnosed and have risk factors, but cannot get monoclonal antibody therapy. This was exacerbated in recent days when it was reported some governor was receiving the Regeneron treatment even though he wasn't having symptoms at all. Here's the thing you want to know: with upwards of 95 percent of our cases involving the Omicron variant, no one should be receiving the Regeneron therapy unless their specific specimen was sequenced and identified as Delta. That's because this therapy is ineffective against Omicron—not just reduced effectiveness,

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but no effectiveness. Same story for the Eli Lilly monoclonal. The only part that should outrage you about people receiving Regeneron's drug is that we taxpayers are footing the bill for this very expensive drug that offers no benefit at this time. Might as well set that money on fire; at least we could warm up that way.

The only monoclonal antibody therapy that is effective against this variant, and therefore the only one which should be administered now, is sotrovimab, the one produced by GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology. We talked about this issue just about a month ago (Update #496 posted December 16 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5431513513531677>). This stuff is in critically short supply; the company only received its emergency use authorization (EUA) for the drug in late May, and it takes months to produce a batch. We're expected to have some 400,000 doses available by the end of the month; but when you're reporting twice that many new cases daily, this is at best a drop in the bucket and it's a while off yet. That likely means the only folks getting it will be those with some serious and multiple risk factors. Another point we should mention is that staffing shortages in many hospitals are going to interfere with administration of monoclonal antibodies. Monitoring infusions is staff-intensive, and it may be there just isn't anyone available to give these in some places. That's just the place we're in right now.

So what's left for you if you test positive and have some risk? Not a lot. There's Paxlovid, the Pfizer protease inhibitor taken orally in pill-form. If you're curious about how this one works, check out my Update #484 posted November 6, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5276107965738900>. The supply here is also limited, and this one takes some time to produce too. The company is working to scale up production; but again, the case numbers we're seeing dwarf the supply at the moment.

There is one more thing to remember—and we've talked recently about this too (Update #499 posted December 27 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5473849672631394>), so this is just a reminder. Our old standby remdesivir (Veklury) has recently been shown to be very effective in cases of mild to moderate disease, and I do not believe this one has the kinds of supply problems as these other therapies we've just discussed. That means it may be worth inquiring about it as a potential therapy if you have risk factors and are diagnosed. Better idea yet is to stay uninfected, at least until case numbers fall, these supply problems ease, and you can have your physician's choice of excellent therapies.

That wraps things up for today. Stay well, and we'll talk again in a few days.

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Wolves Capture Weekend Sweep With 60-59 Win Over Sioux Falls

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State women’s basketball team earned the weekend sweep with a closely contested 60-59 win over Sioux Falls. The Wolves weekend sweep extended their win streak to three games, as well as maintained a perfect 3-0 record against NSIC South opponents on the season.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 60, USF 59

Records: NSU 9-7 (6-5 NSIC), USF 11-6 (6-4 NSIC)

Attendance: 2815

HOW IT HAPPENED

- In a back and forth first quarter, Northern State saw Lexi Roe and Rianna Fillip knock down three 3-point baskets enroute to a tie at 17 after one period of play
- Sioux Falls pulled ahead by as many as eight points in the second period, leading 31-23 with 4:05 remaining in the half, however the Wolves responded with a quick 3-pointer by Fillipi to help cut into the lead and get within four at the break
- After exchanging the lead three different times in the third quarter, Northern used a four point advantage in the period to tie the game back up at 47 entering the final ten minutes
- NSU jumped out to a quick four point lead in the fourth quarter, with jumpers by Haley Johnson and Laurie Rogers
- Trailing by one with under a minute to play, Northern looked inside to Rogers who had been a scoring threat all night in the paint, she would hit the game winning basket with 47 seconds remaining
- The closely contested game saw 11 lead changes and eight ties
- Rogers recorded a career high 20 points in the win, to go along with her second consecutive double-double and fourth consecutive game with five or more blocks
- Northern State shot 42.6 percent from the field, 45.5 percent from 3-point range, and 75.0 percent from the free throw line
- The Wolves held a 36-33 advantage in rebounding, and a 22-20 advantage in points in the paint

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Laurie Rogers: 20 points, 10 rebounds, 6 blocks

Rianna Fillipi: 17 points, 7 rebounds, 8 assists

Lexi Roe: 10 points, 3 rebounds, 1 assist

UP NEXT

The Northern State women’s basketball will host Upper Iowa and Winona State next weekend for I Hate Winter. The Wolves and Peacocks will tip-off at 5:30 p.m. on Friday night, and the Wolves and Warriors are scheduled for a 4 p.m. start on Saturday afternoon.

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Wolves Run Past Mustangs in 74-64 Victory

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State women’s basketball picked up a crucial win to get back to .500 in conference play with a 74-64 victory over Southwest Minnesota State. In a game highlighted by Lexi Roe becoming the 35th member of the 1000 point club, all five starters chipped in and scored in double figures tonight.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 74, SMSU 64

Records: NSU 8-7 (5-5 NSIC), SMSU 8-6 (5-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 1437

HOW IT HAPPENED

- After ending the first quarter tied at 18 apiece, the Wolves used a 9-1 run late in the second quarter gain a 38-33 halftime lead
- A 3-pointer by Lexi Roe capped a 16-3 run in the third quarter as Northern pulled ahead by as many as 16 in the period
- Northern State led by as many as 21 points late in the fourth quarter, however an 11-0 Mustang run brought the final margin to ten points
- Lexi Roe became the 35th player in program history to reach 1000 career points tonight, as well as the 25th player in program history to record 1000 career points and 500 career rebounds
- Southwest Minnesota State came into the contest as one of the leagues top 3-point shooting teams, the Wolves defense held them to 3-25 (12%) shooting from behind the arc
- NSU made a season best six 3-pointers in the win, led by Rianna Fillipi who shot 3-4 from behind the arc
- With five blocks tonight, Laurie Rogers recorded her third consecutive five block game and fifth of the season
- With Rogers and Roe both recording double-doubles, with 11 and ten rebounds respectively, the Wolves once again out-rebounded their opponent with a 41-31 advantage on the boards

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 18 points, 3 rebounds, 5 assists

Laurie Rogers: 17 points, 11 rebounds, 5 blocks

Kailee Oliverson: 15 points, 6 rebounds, 2 assists

Lexi Roe: 11 points, 10 rebounds, 4 assists

Haley Johnson: 10 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists

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Northern State Defeats Sioux Falls from Wachs Arena

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team continued their success at home, defeating the University of Sioux Falls on Saturday afternoon. The win completed a weekend sweep for the Wolves versus the South Division.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 79, USF 72

Records: NSU 12-8 (6-6 NSIC), USF 8-7 (4-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 3117

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern trailed at the half, however rallied with 56 points in the final 20 minutes to secure the victory
- The Wolves shot a game high 42.9% from the floor and 82.9% from the foul line
- They tallied 36 points in the paint, 16 fast break points, ten points off turnovers, seven second chance points, and seven points off the bench
- USF edged out NSU in rebounds 35-30, and the Wolves added three assists, one steal, and one block
- Four Wolves scored in double figures, led by Sam Masten for the second straight evening

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sam Masten: 29 points, 50.0 FG%, 5 rebounds, 1 steal
- Jacksen Moni: 16 points, 50.0 FG%, 5 rebounds
- Augustin Reede: 13 points, 3 rebounds
- Jordan Belka: 12 points, 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 block
- Kobe Busch: 7 points, 8 rebounds, 1 assist

UP NEXT

Northern continues their home stand next Friday and Saturday versus Upper Iowa and Winona State for the annual I Hate Winter weekend. The Wolves will tip-off in the second game each day, facing the Peacocks at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and the Warriors at 6 p.m. on Saturday.

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Masten Leads Wolves Rally in Comeback Victory over SMSU

Aberdeen, S.D. – In their second straight comeback victory from Wachs Arena, the Northern State University men's basketball team took down Southwest Minnesota State. The Wolves out-scored the Mustangs 44-35 in the second half, sealing their fifth NSIC victory of the year.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 69, SMSU 68

Records: NSU 11-8 (5-6 NSIC), SMSU 9-6 (5-5 NSIC)

Attendance: 2704

HOW IT HAPPENED

- The Wolves got off to a slow start, trailing by as much as 17 in the first 20 minutes of action
- Northern trailed 33-25 at the half, shooting just 26.5% from the floor and 25.0% from beyond the arc
- Midway through the second half, Cliff McCray of SMSU hit a layup, giving the Mustangs an 18-point lead
- Following the McCray bucket, Northern went on a 27-8 run to close out regulation and the game
- NSU shot 53.1% from the floor and 42.9% from the 3-point line in the second en route to the victory
- The Mustangs out-shot and out-rebounded the Wolves in the contest, however Northern notched a game high 17 points off turnovers and seven steals
- In total, NSU recorded 30 rebounds, 30 points in the paint, 12 assists, 11 made 3-pointers, and two blocks
- Sam Masten and Jordan Belka led the team in double figures, each hitting four from beyond the arc
- Masten knocked down 12-of-19 from the floor, including 4-of-8 from the 3-point line, while Belka hit 6-of-14 from the field and 4-of-7 from beyond the arc
- Carter Lancaster led the team off the bench with seven points, while Belka and Trey Longstreet each recorded a team high seven boards

Groton Area boys dominate all aspects of game with win over Deubrook

Groton's defense and offensive weapons proved to be much more than what Deubrook could handle as the Tigers posted a 68-42 win over the Dolphins. The game was played Saturday at the Redfield Holiday Classic. It was the lowest scoring game for Deubrook this year.

With Kaden Kurtz not feeling well, Wyatt Hearnen was the next player up and started for the Tigers and he made his presence known right off the bat. The Dolphins, with starters ranging from 6-6 to 6-0, were no match for the quickness of the Tigers. Hearnen was quick to score eight points in the first quarter on quick passes under the basket where he was left unguarded. Groton Area took a 15-12 lead after the first quarter.

Jayden Zak and Lane Tietz lit the nets on fire in the second quarter and Groton Area took a commanding 42-20 lead at half time. The Tigers made 10 of 15 field goals in the second quarter and the Dolphins had 12 turnovers in the first half. Zak made nine points in the second quarter including a three-pointer and Tietz made 13 points in the second quarter which included triple three-point shots.



Tate Larson and Wyatt Hearnen.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Jayden Zak shooting
Jacob Zak in the background.**
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

The momentum geared down in the second half, but Deubrook posed no threat at all as the Tigers led, 52-31 after the third quarter.

Lane Tietz made four of eight two-pointers and four of six three-pointers and led all scorers with 22 points. He had two rebounds, four assists and four steals. Jayden Zak made four of seven two-pointers and three of seven three-pointers to add 18 points to the tally and had six rebounds, three assists and one steal. Wyatt Hearnen made seven of eight field goals and finished with 14 points, seven rebounds, one assist, three steals and one blocked shot. Jacob Zak had seven points, five rebounds, two steals and two blocked shots. Tate Larson had six points which



Lane Tietz
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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included four of four free throws, had six rebounds, four assists and one blocked shot. Cole Simon had one point and one steal. Colby Dunker had one rebound and one steal. Logan Ringgenberg and Holden Sippel each had one rebound. Cade Larson had two assists and one steal.

Groton Area made 18 of 38 field goals for 47 percent, seven of 19 three-pointers for 37 percent, 11 of 15 free throws for 75 percent, had 30 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 14 assists, 13 steals, 13 team fouls and a season high four blocks.

Deubrook was led by Nicholas Bowne with 12 points while Jacob Jorenby had nine, Andrew Trooien seven, Mason Shaw four, Sutton Fritz three and Gavin Landmark, Landen Johnson and Parker Crooks each had two points and Dominic Lacek added a free throw. Deubrook made 16 of 45 field goals for 36 percent, six of nine free throws for 67 percent, had 19 turnovers and 17 team fouls.

Groton Area is now 8-0 on the season while Deubrook goes to 4-4.

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

- Paul Kosel

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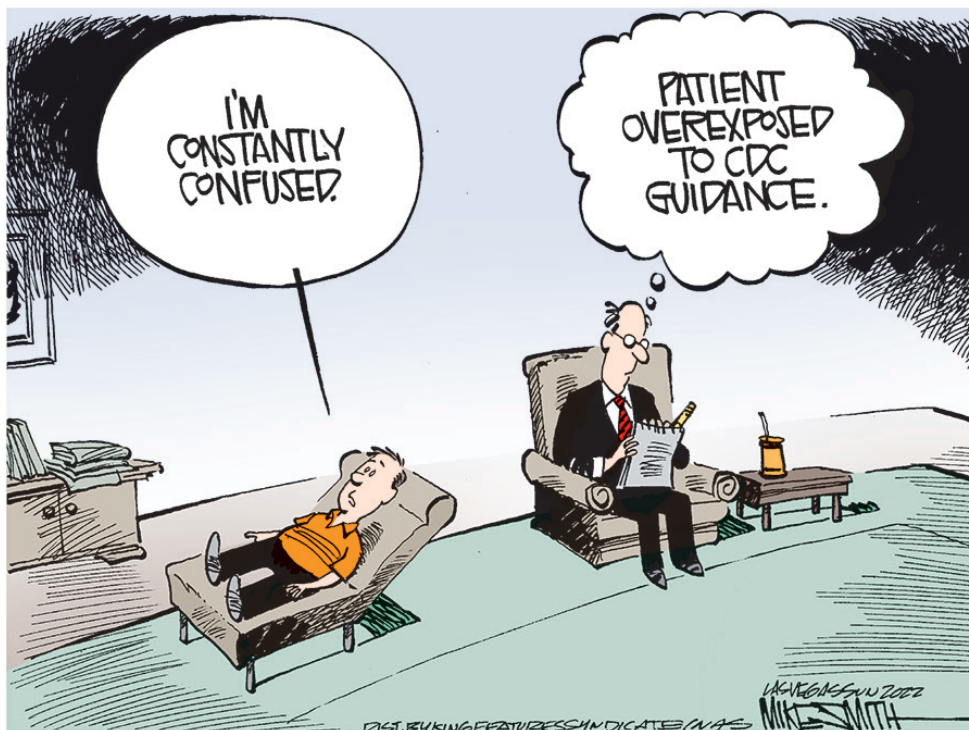
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



*In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men,
fear came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.*

🌀 JOB 4: 13,14 🌀

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BIBLE TRIVIA by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Titus in the Old or New Testament or neither?
2. From Isaiah 45, whom did God ask, "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it"? *Gideon, Peter, Cyrus, Elijah*
3. Where do you find the phrase "God is love"? *Genesis, Nehemiah, Hebrews, 1 John*
4. Who sold his birthright for a pottage of lentils? *Cain, Jacob, Esau, Abel*
5. What Jewish ruler visited Jesus by night? *Hezekiah, Barabbas, Nicodemus, Darius*
6. Which of these in scripture was Moses' assistant? *Joshua, Gad, Nun, Jethro*

ANSWERS: 1) New; 2) Cyrus; 3) 1 John 4:8; 4) Esau; 5) Nicodemus; 6) Joshua (Exodus 24:13)

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

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Comfort foods Made fast and healthy by Healthy Exchanges Grandma Jo's Stew

Your kids or grandkids will love all the vegetables and meat chopped into tiny pieces.

- 16 ounces lean round steak, cut into 36 pieces
- 2 cups sliced carrots
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups chopped celery
- 2 cups diced raw potatoes
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 (10 3/4-ounce) can reduced-fat tomato soup
- 1 (8-ounce) can cream-style corn
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

1. Spray a slow cooker container with butter-flavored cooking spray. In prepared container, combine meat, carrots, onion, celery, potatoes and peas.

2. In a small bowl, combine tomato soup, corn, parsley flakes and black pepper. Stir soup mixture into meat mixture.


3. Cover and cook on LOW for 8 hours. Mix well just before serving. Makes 6 (1 1/2 cup) servings.

* Each serving equals: 237 calories, 5g fat, 20g protein, 28g carb., 336mg sodium, 4g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 2 Meat, 1 1/2 Starch, 1 Vegetable.


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Character Profile:
Dale Arden



AN AIRPLANE IS TORN ASUNDER BY A FREAK METEOR SHOWER!

THAT FATEFUL FLIGHT BRINGS RAVEN-HAIRED BEAUTY DALE ARDEN INTO THE ARMS OF WORLD-RENOWNED ATHLETE FLASH GORDON.

SINCE THEN THEIR LIVES HAVE BEEN BOUND TOGETHER... FACING ADVENTURES UNDREAMED OF IN THE HOPES OF SAVING A WORLD ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION!

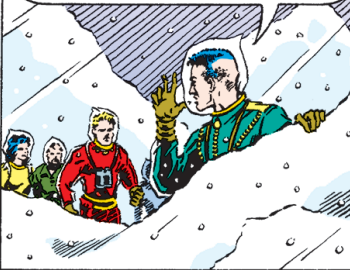
FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

1-9

HIS KINGDOM RECLAIMED, KING RONAL LEADS A RECONNAISSANCE MISSION IN SEARCH OF THE TREACHEROUS CAPTAIN LONAK.

CAREFUL...THE KRONTORS' VILLAGE IS JUST BEYOND THIS RIDGE.

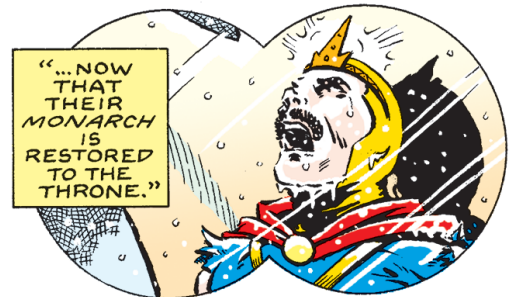


WEARING PROTECTIVE GEAR AGAINST THE SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES, THE SEARCH PARTY CAUTIOUSLY PEERS DOWN INTO THE CAMP.

I SEE HIM.
HE... STILL WEARS THE CROWN.

THEN IT APPEARS THE CREATURES ARE NO LONGER A THREAT...

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LONAK DESIRED TO BE KING. IT LOOKS LIKE HE GOT HIS WISH.

NEXT: NEW ADVENTURE!

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

FOR SOLID IMPROVEMENT AT GOLF, YOU NEED PLENTY OF PRACTICE AND LAY, PLUS ONE OTHER OFTEN-FORGOTTEN INGREDIENT... COMPETITION.

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GOLF IS REALLY TWO GAMES IN ONE: HITTING THE SHOTS AND PLAYING THE GAME - STRATEGY, TACTICS, COURSE MANAGEMENT, SELF-MANAGEMENT THE HARDER AND MORE OFTEN YOU COMPETE, THE FASTER AND BETTER YOU'LL MASTER THE SECOND PART.



Risk to Chemotherapy Patient From Healthy Cat is Small

DEAR DR. ROACH: My neighbor is battling cancer for the third time. The medical personnel she sees when she goes for her chemotherapy treatments are urging her to get rid of her two cats. They claim the cats are a danger to her health. Wearing gloves and a mask while cleaning litter boxes will not help. Why? What do the cats have that can hurt someone going through chemotherapy? -- S.C.

ANSWER: Cancer chemotherapy frequently causes damage to the body's immune system. Many types of chemotherapy work against fast-growing cells, and while cancer cells are fast-growing, your neighbor's healthy immune system cells, especially white blood cells, are also fast-growing and can be damaged by the chemotherapy. Avoiding potentially infectious agents is therefore wise advice for people going through chemo.

There are several potential infections that can be transmitted from cats to humans. The one we worry about most is probably toxoplasmosis, a protozoan infection. Toxoplasmosis is a big concern in people with HIV, but also can be an issue in people who have recurrent chemotherapy or have a more prolonged reduction in immune system function. However, toxoplasmosis can be effectively avoided by wearing gloves while changing the litter box, keeping the cats indoors and feeding them only high-quality cat food and never raw meat.

Cat bites or scratches can be very serious, especially to someone with an immune system that is less than perfect. If her cats occasionally bite or scratch, that would be a problem.

There are a few other uncommon zoonotic diseases (ones that can be transmitted from animals to humans) that might be of concern. Her cats' veterinarian would be a useful resource to find out more. The cats should, of course, be thoroughly evaluated.

Allergies, not infection, might be the issue, but allergies are usually less of a problem during chemotherapy.

The risks from a healthy indoor cat are very small. Risks must always be balanced against the very strong feelings people have for their pets, especially at a vulnerable time. I would not recommend separating a person from her cats without very good reason, and would want to know exactly why, since it's not clear to me in this case.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am an 80-year-old man with Type 2 diabetes. I have been told that I have a heart "prebeat" but that I should not worry unless it becomes random and misses beats. I do not have atrial fibrillation and have passed several stress tests. I can feel a rapid heart rate, especially at night. I can usually stop it by heaving my chest. Am I at risk for a serious event? -- R.G.B.

ANSWER: Premature heart contractions can come from either the top chambers of the heart (premature atrial contractions) or the bottom (premature ventricular contractions). Both are common, but neither is usually the sign of serious heart disease. The fact that you have found a way to stop them suggests to me that you are more likely having premature atrial contractions, which can come in runs of multiple beats (runs of premature ventricular contractions is called ventricular tachycardia and is very serious).

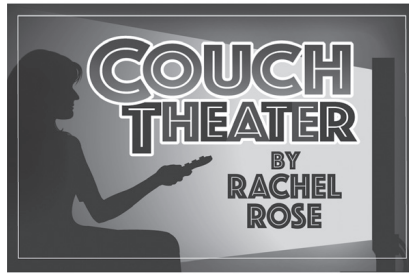
Evaluation of this common concern often includes a long-term electrical study of the heart, such as wearing a Holter monitor, a 24-hour recording of every heartbeat. If that has not been done, and you remain concerned, it might be reasonable to ask your doctor about obtaining one. If you have had one, and it showed nothing serious, then you are at no increased risk above the not-insignificant risk of an 80-year-old man with diabetes.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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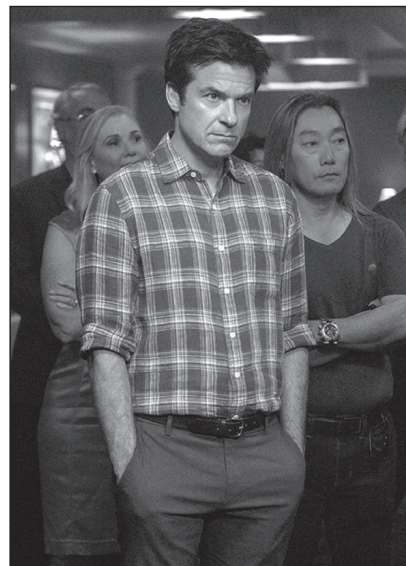
Ozark Season 4 (TV-MA) — The fourth and final season of this extremely dark Netflix original dramatic series arrives to close the story of Marty Byrde (Jason Bateman) and family. A financial adviser, Byrde is trapped in a five-year indentured servitude to launder \$500 million for the leader of a drug cartel. Season 3 ended with a literal bang, with Marty and wife Wendy (Laura Linney) seemingly poised to rise on the cartel's leadership ladder. Meanwhile, hillbilly helper Ruth Langmore continued to demand a bigger piece of the pie for doing much of Marty's dirty work. Season 4 will be split into two parts of seven episodes each, the second part to be released later in 2022. (Netflix)

As We See It (NR) — A dramedy that attempts to blend the humor of our differences with some realistic enlightenment about our differences, this Amazon original series follows the life of three young adults on the autism spectrum attempting to lead independent lives. While living in a transitional group home, they gain support from counselor Mandy (Sosie Bacon) while striving to maintain jobs and form relationships. All three main actors personally identify as being on the spectrum, lending credibility to the show. (Prime Video)

The Murder of Fred Hampton (NR) - First released in 1971, this documentary began in 1969 as a project to profile the young leader of the Illinois Black Panther Party. When the film's subject and a fellow Panther were killed as they slept during a pre-dawn raid in his apartment by Chicago Police, the focus shifted. The producer and director instead worked to challenge both police and news reports of the tragedy by showing extensive footage they took in Hampton's apartment immediately following his death, as well as personal interviews and re-enactments. Both filmmakers

have since passed away, but the film was finally accepted just last year into the United States Film Registry for its cultural, historical and aesthetic significance. (HBO Max)

Single Drunk Female — Admittedly, when I saw the title of this series and Ally Sheedy's name, I assumed it was a followup on the life of Allison, her character from "The Breakfast Club." But alas, I was wrong. In actuality, Sheedy plays the mother of Samantha (Sofia Black D'Elia), a



MovieStillsDB+

Jason Bateman is Marty Byrde in Netflix's "Ozark."

young woman struggling with addiction and all the bad choices and fallout that result from it. As Samantha works to get her life back on track and accept all those things she cannot control, she also moves back in with her mom. Despite the heavy issues, the show maintains a humorous edge, and Sheedy is wonderfully cast as the overbearing mother, Carol. (Hulu)

Ghosted: Love Gone Missing — Because nothing makes being deserted by a lover more palatable and less sad than having it broadcast on national TV for all to see. If you enjoy "Catfish," you'll probably like "Ghosted." Hosts Rachel and Travis help confused, jilted partners who've been suddenly cut out of their companions' lives find answers and closure. (Paramount+)

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1. Name the first group that had a hit with "Dedicated to the One I Love."
2. Who released "Crystal Blue Persuasion"?
3. Name the two hits by The Cyrkle.
4. Which Neil Sedaka song was released twice, once as a slow ballad (1976) and once as a faster pop song (1962)?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "My love must be a kind of blind love, I can't see anyone but you."

Answers

1. The Shirelles in 1959. They were followed by the Mamas & the Papas who took the song to No. 2 in

1967.

2. Tommy James and the Shondells. The story was that the song was written as James was reading the Bible and a blue light was mentioned. However, many thought he was referring to the blue LSD tablets that were in vogue.

3. "Red Rubber Ball" and "Turn-Down Day," both in 1966.

4. "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do."

5. "I Only Have Eyes For You," by the Flamingos, in 1959. The song was written for a 1934 film ("Dames"), but it was the Flamingos' doo-wop version that brought the song attention. Rolling Stone ranked it No. 158 on their list of "500 Greatest Songs of All Time."

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Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by} Waipara

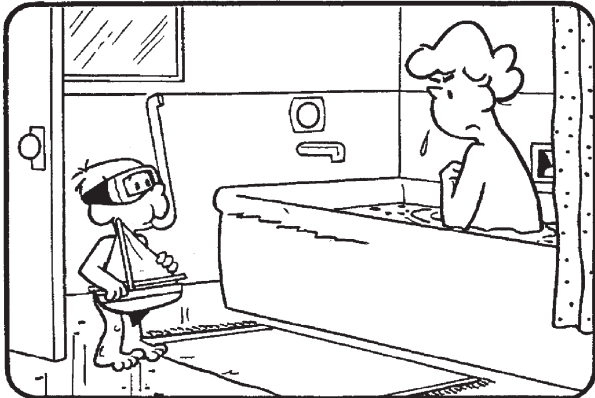


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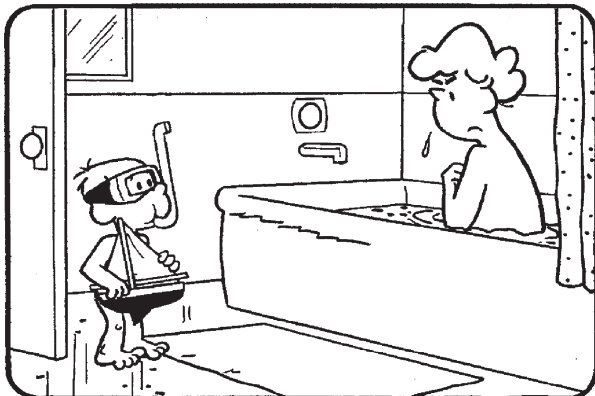
Waipara

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Mirror is smaller. 2. Tube is shorter. 3. Mat is different. 4. Boat is different. 5. Soap dish is missing. 6. Curtain is shorter.

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- To soften food that is stuck on a pan, try soaking it overnight with fabric softener. Just fill the pan with enough water to cover the burned-on food, then lay a dryer sheet of fabric softener in the pan (poke it down so it will stay under the water). The next morning, you should be able to wipe the food right off. You can even use the fabric softener sheet as a scrubber. —*A.S. in Maryland*

- I installed rivet rings in the corner of my bathroom towels. Now, when I hang a towel up, it stays hung up. —*I.S. via e-mail*

- Ways to avoid spam, that nuisance e-mail that comes to fill your e-mail box in droves: Use a name that has both words and numbers. Keep a separate “free” e-mail address for bill-paying and one for shopping. Be sure to report spam to your e-mail provider. Up your filter and add everyone you know to your address book or “safe” list. —*via e-mail*

- To keep thread straight when threading needles, I run the end across a cheap glue stick. It works very well, and the glue washes right out of the thread. Or, if you are afraid it will be sticky, you can just clip the end off before you start sewing. —*T.E. in Kentucky*

- To make butter easier to spread on bread or toast, we keep a stick in a plastic sandwich baggie. We just handle the butter a bit through the bag. It softens, but doesn't overmelt, like when you put it in the microwave. You can just reseal the baggie and put it back in the fridge. —*N.U. in Florida*

- To make your carpets look clean in a hurry, like if you are having company over, just sweep them with your broom. —*C.C. in Pennsylvania*

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman



SPINS AND NEEDLES WITH PEN PALS

PEN in hand, looking for answers? No holds are barred in correspondence below.

DEAR HAL: What would a chat with a butcher be like?
Dear Pal: Mostly chop talk.

DEAR HAL: I'm catering a dinner for nuclear scientists. What should I serve?
Dear Pal: How about fission chips.

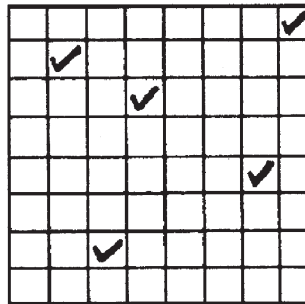
DEAR HAL: What will mounting a horse from the wrong side do?
Dear Pal: It'll stirrup trouble.

DEAR HAL: Pains from my hip to my big toe are killing me. What should I do?
Dear Pal: Draw up a will to set your legatees.

MODEL POSE! Which canvas bears the closest likeness to the model posed above? Check carefully before you decide.
Twin is at bottom right.

PRODUCT LINE! Fire up your calculator. Pick a number from 1 to 100. Multiply by 11. Multiply this result by 9091. Alakazam, selected number appears fore and aft in final product.

CHECK MATES! You are asked to supplement five checks in the diagram at right with three more so that there will be one and only one check in each row across, down and in assorted diagonals.



Remember there are to be eight checks in all; no two in any row, including diagonals.

How quickly can you comply?

Time limit: Two minutes.

Check first square fourth row down, fifth square sixth row down, sixth square on bottom row.

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Hula swivelers
- 5 Kvetch
- 9 Comedian Margaret
- 12 Inky stain
- 13 Stead
- 14 Bond rating
- 15 Sooner State native
- 17 "The A-Team" actor
- 18 Trails
- 19 Rose parts
- 21 Halloween disguises
- 24 Rating unit
- 25 iPhone downloads
- 26 Skunk relatives
- 30 "— was saying ..."
- 31 Passion
- 32 — tai
- 33 Olympic winner
- 35 Poet of yore
- 36 Dutch cheese
- 37 Arm bones
- 38 Peer in a box
- 40 The Emerald Isle
- 42 Branch
- 43 Intermediary
- 48 "Patience — virtue"
- 49 Thus
- 50 Corn recipe

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15				16						17		
			18					19	20			
21	22	23					24					
25					26	27					28	29
30				31						32		
33			34						35			
		36						37				
38	39					40	41					
42				43	44					45	46	47
48				49					50			
51				52						53		

- 51 PC linkup
- 52 Calendar squares
- 53 Fill up
- DOWN**
- 1 "Veep" ailer
- 2 Sort
- 3 D.C. figure
- 4 Celery servings
- 5 Drain blockage
- 6 Intends
- 7 Actor Stephen
- 8 Groan-inducing humorist
- 9 TV station employee
- 10 Injure
- 11 Feed-bag filler
- 16 Possesses
- 20 Tic- — -toe
- 21 Sir's counterpart
- 22 Church section
- 23 Peter Parker's alter ego
- 24 Coin aperture
- 26 Prudish
- 27 Takes too much, in med. lingo
- 28 Skater Lipinski
- 29 Faction
- 31 Fear-stricken
- 34 Big fuss
- 35 Censors
- 37 Internet address
- 38 Hoosgow
- 39 Celestial bear
- 40 Jittery
- 41 Altar vows
- 44 Roth svgs. plan
- 45 Extinct bird
- 46 Picnic crasher
- 47 Born

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— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

H	I	P	S		C	A	R	P		C	H	O	
B	L	O	T		L	I	E	U		A	A	A	
O	K	L	A	H	O	M	A	N		M	R	T	
			L	A	G	S		S	T	E	M	S	
M	A	S	K	S			S	T	A	R			
A	P	P	S		P	O	L	E	C	A	T	S	
A	S	I			A	R	D	O	R		M	A	I
M	E	D	A	L	I	S	T			B	A	R	D
		E	D	A	M				U	L	N	A	E
J	U	R	O	R		E	I	R	E				
A	R	M			M	I	D	D	L	E	M	A	N
I	S	A			E	R	G	O		P	O	N	E
L	A	N			D	A	Y	S		S	A	T	E

LAFF - A - DAY

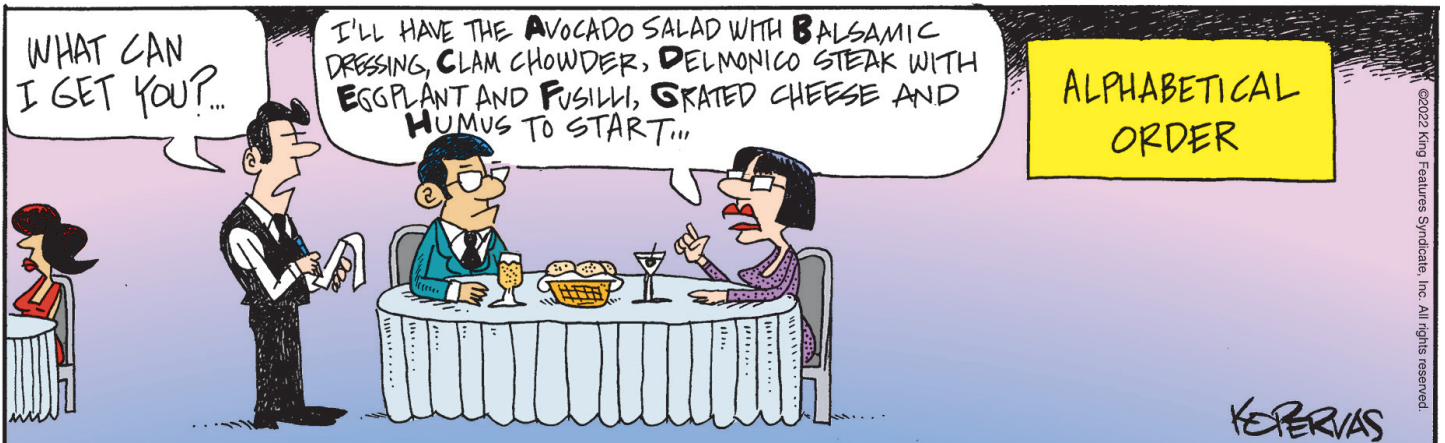


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"I'm glad YOU like it—the dog wouldn't even touch it!"

Out on a Limb

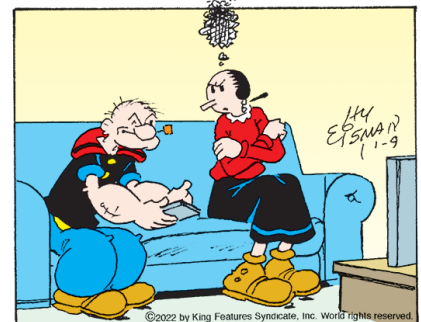
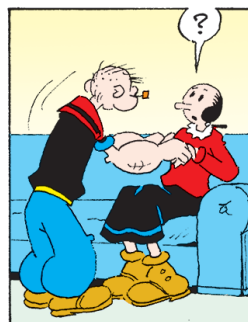
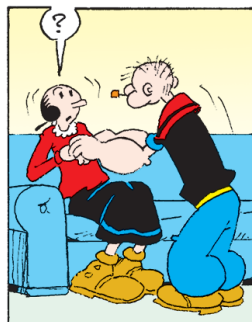
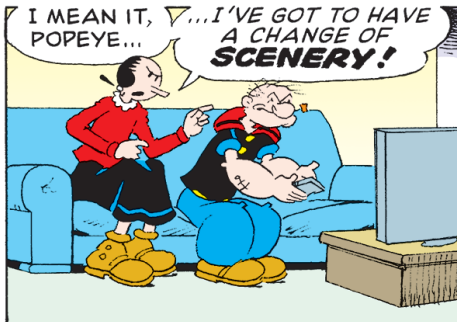
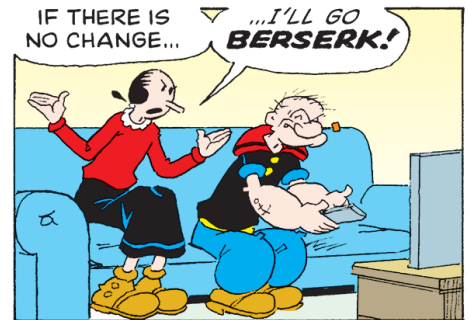
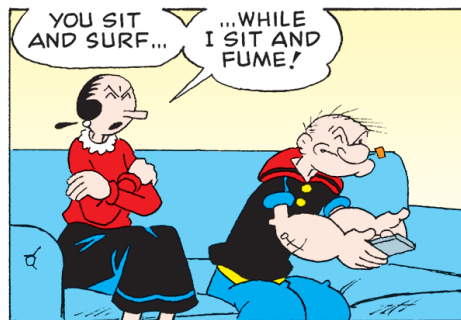
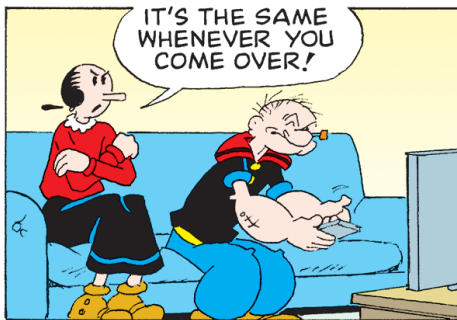
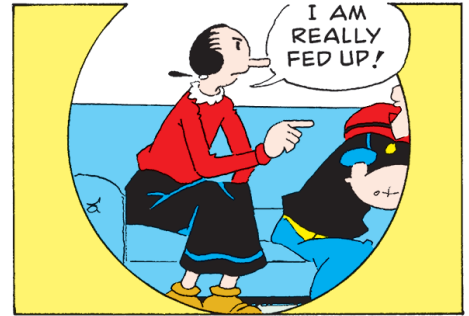
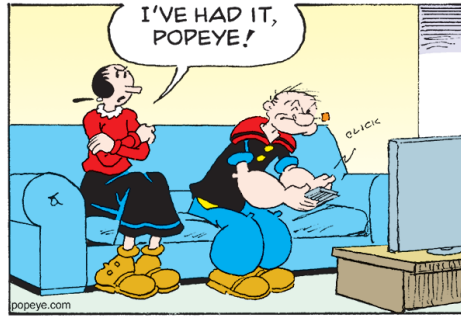
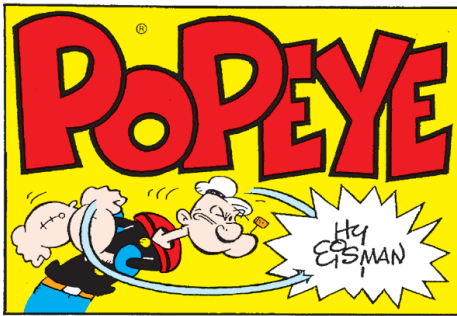
by Gary Kopervas



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R.F.D.



by Mike Marland



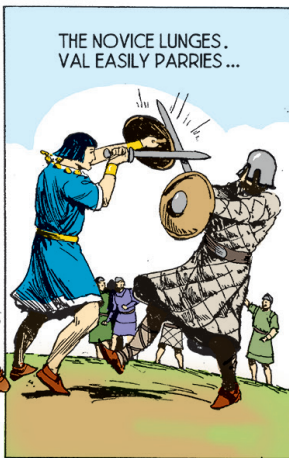
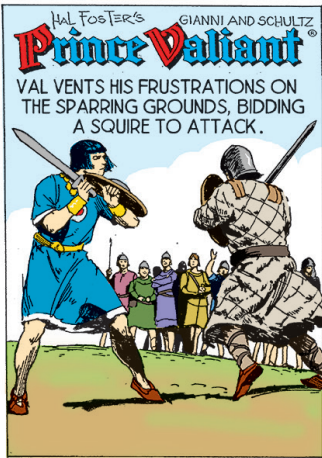
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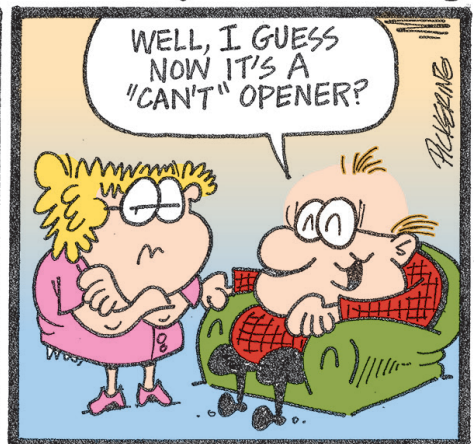
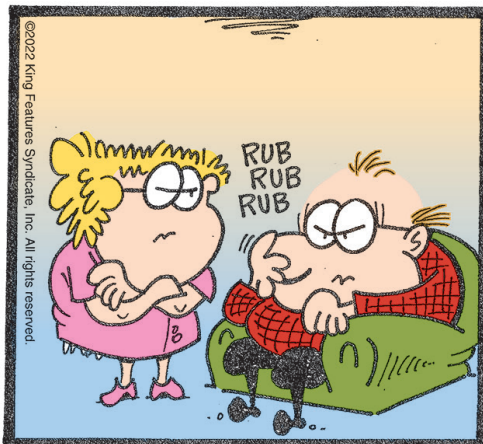
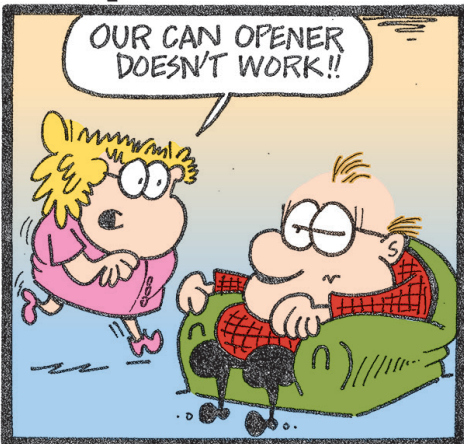
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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Travel Is Complicated Right Now

My neighbor still thinks she'll be going on a cruise to a foreign country in the spring. She calls her travel agent every few weeks to ask if the cruise is still on. Of course the travel agent doesn't want to say no and have to give back the money just yet, so the answer is yes. My neighbor has been busily sewing new outfits for her cruise dinners. Me, I've been keeping silent about it, but I fear that cruise might not come to pass.

There is always debate about requirements for masks on cruise ships, but that might be the least of the concerns. The latest updates have several countries in Level 4 Do Not Travel categories. My neighbor's destination is currently at a Level 3, which is Reconsider Travel. New ones are being added all the time.

If you'll be traveling in the next few

months, especially if it's international, look at AARP's travel page for helpful information: www.aarp.org/travel.

Watch the Department of State's website as well: travel.state.gov/content/travel.html. Look for the information on your specific destination, and keep an eye on it, as it's all subject to change.

Invest in trip cancellation and interruption insurance. Make sure you understand the details of what it will and won't cover. Be sure what the cruise company's policies are as well.

Be certain you know exactly when you'll need a COVID-19 test before you go — and that you can get one. At this point, many areas have backlogs on testing appointments, and walk-in places are often backed up for many hours. If you're traveling internationally, you'll also need a test before you return. The logistics and timing can be complicated right now.

Your best bet: Stay in close touch with your travel agent about changes, warnings and timing.

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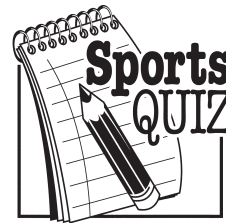
1. What sports apparel manufacturer debuted the 1992 “Dan & Dave” marketing campaign centered around U.S. decathletes Dan O’Brien and Dave Johnson?

2. Name the pop star who was in a relationship with former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo from 2007-09.

3. What stadium, demolished in 1960, was home to the Brooklyn Dodgers from 1913-57?

4. Name the U.S. figure skater who won men’s singles gold medals at the 1948 St. Moritz and 1952 Oslo Winter Olympics and five straight ISU World Championship titles from 1948-52.

5. What businessman and former race-car driver started his own CART team in 1990 with Eddie Cheever as driver and Target as the primary sponsor?



by Ryan A. Berenz

6. According to sportscaster and author Brian McFarlane, what Hockey Hall of Fame defenseman from the 1920s and ‘30s “started a thousand fights and never won one”?

7. What football trick play was famously used by the Nebraska Cornhuskers against the Miami Hurricanes in the 1984 Orange Bowl and resulted in Huskers offensive lineman Dean Steinkuhler running for a touchdown?

Answers

1. Reebok.
2. Jessica Simpson.
3. Ebbets Field.
4. Dick Button.
5. Chip Ganassi.
6. King Clancy.
7. The fumblerooski.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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Keep Pets Prepared for Emergencies in Winter, Too

Dear Paws: Please remind your readers to include their pets in winter emergency preparedness planning. Last year, when the Texas power grid failed in extreme cold weather conditions, shelters saw many pets with cold-related injuries. When the power goes out on a cold night — or for several days — dogs and cats can't just “tough it out.” — *Tyler in Southeast Texas*

Dear Tyler: You're absolutely right. Readers, emergency preparedness should always include your pets. I warn my East Coast readers each summer at the start of hurricane season to put together a grab-and-go emergency kit for their pet. But every region experiences natural disasters, and sometimes they occur in the depths of winter.

A winter-ready pet emergency kit should include:

- A warm blanket for each pet.
- A soft pad for pets to sleep on if you're in an evacuation center.
- Booties and sweaters to wear when pets go outside in freezing conditions.
- Pee pads and pet waste bags.
- Three days of canned or dry pet food, and bottled water.
- A copy of each pet's vaccination and medical records.
- A three-day supply of each pet's medication.
- A list of important phone numbers, including their veterinarian.
- Extra leash and collar for each pet, and extra ID tags.

If your pet isn't microchipped, I strongly recommend it. Pets have escaped from even the most responsible, organized owners. Keep them up to date on vaccinations as well — it's hard to predict whether your pet will be exposed to a disease by another cat or dog during an evacuation.

You can find more tips and recommendations for emergency preparedness at <https://www.ready.gov/pets>.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

STRANGE BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* In 2016, KFC released edible nail polishes in Hong Kong. They came in Hot & Spicy and Original flavor.

* The main reason why Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pinocchio and other early Disney characters

wore gloves is because it was easier to animate them and helped the characters appear to be more humanlike.

* It is illegal to name your pig Napoleon in France.

* Eighty-year-old Tatsuo Horiuchi has created paintings in Microsoft Excel for over 15 years, using vector drawing tools developed primarily for graphs and simple shapes to make panoramic scenes of life in rural Japan.

* More salt is used to remove ice from roads than for eating.

* A Tennessee judge ordered a name change for a baby named "Messiah." She was later fired after the decision was found unconstitutional on appeal.

* Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia is the fear of the number 666.

* There was a tree in Glastonbury, England, that was known to flower on Christmas Day. Locals were disappointed that it did not obey the switch to the Gregorian calendar in 1752.

* George H.W. Bush's hatred of broccoli was so intense that he mentioned it 70 times during his presidency, banned it from the White House, and blamed the extinction of the dinosaurs on it.

* Speaking of those famous reptiles, in 1992 after paying for entry to the "Dinosaurs Live!" exhibition at the Memphis Zoo, six visitors demanded a refund. Their grounds? It didn't contain live dinosaurs.

Thought for the Day: "For pilgrims walking ... every footfall is doubled, landing at once on the actual road and also on the path of faith." -- Robert Macfarlane

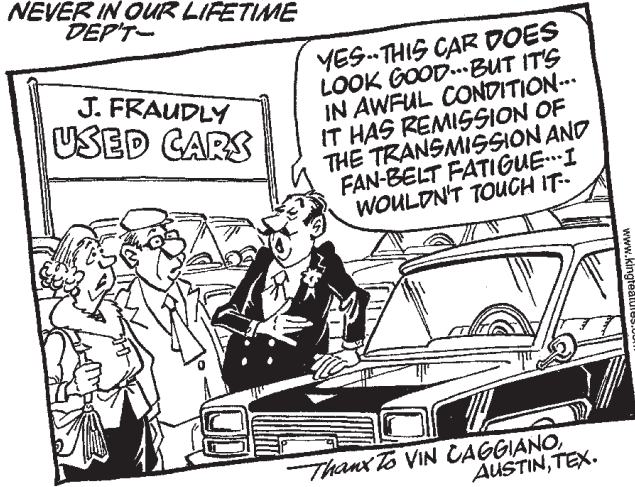
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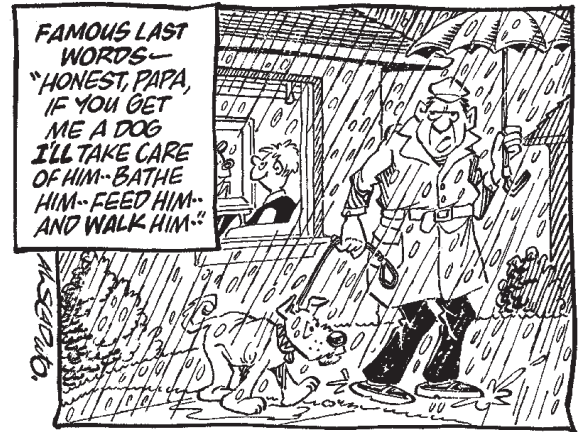
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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

NEVER IN OUR LIFETIME
DEPT-



BY AL SCADUTO



THANK TO MARSHA DUREN, SARASOTA, FL.

HOSPITAL HI-JINX-



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Called "ladybug" or "ladybeetle" in the United States, this garden favorite is called glückskäfer in Austria, slunéčko in

Ladybug lingo

Czechoslovakia, leppäkerttu in Finland, paskalitsa in Greece, lieveheersbeestje in Holland, coccinella in Italy, tentou mushi in Japan, kumbang in Malaysia, biedronka in Poland, pikapolonica in Slovenia, mariquita in Spain and ilsikazana esincane in Zulu.

- Brenda Weaver

Source: www.celticbug.com

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Full Education Housing Benefits Extended

If you're in school and were about to lose half of your VA education housing benefits at the end of last month due to remote classes, you're safe. Congress pushed through the REMOTE (Responsible Education Mitigating Option and Technical Extensions) Act, and it's going to cover you for the next six months.

The problem has been attending classes in person versus taking classes remotely. If you typically attend via remote classes, your housing allowance was always half that of in-person students. The pandemic landed, and with that colleges and schools went remote last year, which threatened to halve the benefit money of in-person students forced into remote classes. Congress saw that and extended the full coverage until December.

They recently stepped in again. Now

you'll be covered until summer — while schools sort out whether they're bringing students back into the classroom for the January-May semester, keeping everyone at home again or a combination of the two. As is typical of the pandemic era, even if you're currently attending in-person classes, your school might shift to remote at any time.

You and the 55,000 other student veterans potentially impacted by those reduced housing benefits can thank Nevada Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto and others for introducing the bill and pushing it to become law.

Not a student? Have you decided to sit out the shaky job market and go back to school or aim for a new trade? Start with an intro to your veterans education benefits: www.va.gov/education. Scroll down and click on the Eligibility link. Then click on the GI Bill Comparison Tool on the right and learn what programs and education benefits are available for you. Different programs have different benefits, so study those first to see which might be the best fit. If you need help sorting it all out, call the GI Bill Hotline at 888-GIBILL-1 (888-442-4551).

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Voting is a Sacred Right

Sunday night, New York City passed a law that will allow noncitizens (green card holders and DACA recipients) the right to vote in municipal elections. More than 800,000 noncitizens will now be eligible to vote. This is a serious mistake.

Nor is this an isolated incident. San Francisco passed a similar measure back in 2018 to allow noncitizens, including those without legal status, to vote in school board elections. Additionally, College Park, Maryland; Montpelier and Winooski, both in Vermont, have allowed noncitizens to vote in municipal elections as well.

Voting is a sacred honor, and we should vehemently protect the voting rights of legal citizens. But allowing non-citizens to vote waters down the value of citizenship. If we allow everyone to vote, we diminish the hard work of those who spent years becoming a naturalized citizen. Why should we give citizens of other countries power in setting the policies of American governments?

Free, fair, and accountable elections are vital to the survival of our democracy, and lawful American citizens should never be denied the right to vote. I believe in protecting election integrity, and laws and policies like that of New York City, threaten that objective. Simply put, only Americans should vote in American elections.

###

South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Fairness in Girls' Sports Matters

This week, the 2022 legislative session kicked off, and I presented my State of the State address to the people of South Dakota. I described how South Dakota is stronger than it has ever been in its 133-year history. This did not happen because of what government did. It happened because of what government did NOT do. To preserve what we have and grow even stronger, we need to remember why government exists in the first place – to protect the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

One way a young girl exercises her liberty is on the fields and in the gyms of South Dakota: playing basketball, swimming competitively, and running track, just to name a few popular sports here in the Mount Rushmore state. It is in playing sports that a young girl can learn how to achieve and how to succeed. But some in our society want to take those opportunities to succeed away from our young women. Some schools and organizations across the country have sought to take away their freedom to achieve by changing the rules of the games.

When our children participate in sports and activities, they learn valuable lessons like teamwork, perseverance, and hustle. For many activities, the playing field is level for boys and girls: debate, theater, and academic competitions, to name a few. But for other activities, the playing field is not equal between boys and girls because of basic, common-sense biology.

Allyson Felix is an American track and field star. She has 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. To advance that action even further, earlier this month I asked the Legislature to introduce my bill ensuring fairness in girls' sports.

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.

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How do we achieve this through the legislature?

We will establish a framework that will allow parents to challenge schools that allow students who are born male at birth to compete in girls' sports. The legislation I am proposing includes the ability for a parent to hold schools accountable in court. Parents will be able to sue to play, not to pay. This is not about creating financial windfalls — it is about ensuring parents have the tools to fight for their daughter's ability to compete on a level playing field.

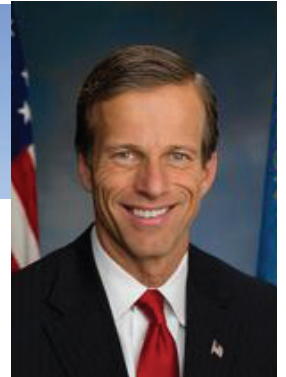
This issue matters to me for many reasons. I participated in high school sports. I wasn't as good as my two daughters, Cassidy and Kennedy, who both played college sports. If my girls had competed against men, their ability to compete would have been dramatically limited. Participating in college sports teaches teamwork, leadership, work ethic, and grit. It develops talent and skills. I would not have wanted my daughters to miss out on such an opportunity.

I have led the charge on this issue for years. When the USDA tried to force boys and girls to compete against each other in 4-H Rodeo, I led the fight to protect fairness for girls. And we won in 2018 because we approached the fight in a smart way.

Now we will make sure we have the strongest law in the country.

###

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Pain in the Pocketbook

Year-over-year inflation reached 7 percent in December – its highest level in 40 years. That’s seven straight months in which inflation has been higher than 5 percent. As South Dakotans struggle to keep up with steep increases in grocery prices, fuel prices, and heating bills, this record-high inflation is taking a major toll on the pocketbooks of families and those living on a fixed income. Despite growing wages throughout 2021, Americans have now experienced a de facto pay cut as they watch their wage growth get eroded by rising costs.

Families aren’t the only ones on the receiving end of the inflation pain. According to the National Federation of Independent Business, high inflation is a top concern of small business owners across the nation, likely due to the fact that annualized inflation for wholesale goods increased by a staggering 9.7 percent, which affects business owners and families alike.

At its most basic level, inflation is created when there are too many dollars chasing too few goods in the economy. What we’re seeing today is a textbook example of it. When Democrats took office last January, inflation was at 1.4 percent. That was well within what most economists would consider to be an acceptable range – what’s commonly called the target inflation rate. And it could have stayed there had Democrats not decided to pass a massive multi-trillion-dollar government spending spree under the guise of COVID relief – passing it mere weeks after Congress had just approved a major COVID relief bill targeted toward actual COVID needs. That unnecessary government spending, of course, had serious economic consequences: a soaring inflation crisis with no clear end in sight.

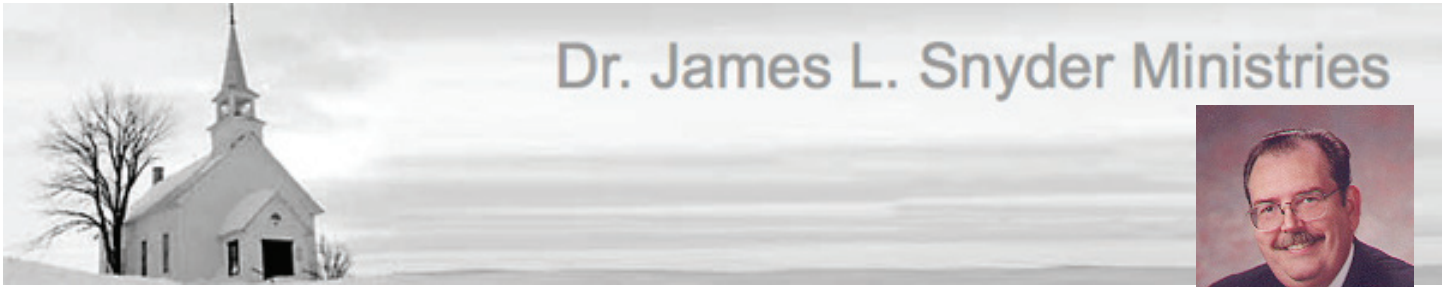
Any level-headed person would think that the economic pain Americans continue to experience after months of rising prices would give Democrats pause. They would be wrong, though, because Democrats actually spent most of last year trying to double down on their reckless tax-and-spending strategy that helped lead to the inflation crisis we’re seeing today.

President Biden and congressional Democrats seem to believe that they can’t be bothered to pay attention to a real crisis – one that has real economic consequences for South Dakota families. Instead, Democrats in Washington are focused on passing their radical agenda that is full of heavy-handed and government-knows-best policies. I am hopeful that the shocking inflation numbers that were just released will resonate with Democrats and help redirect their attention to issues that are draining Americans’ pocketbooks.

It’s time for Democrats to recognize that families, small businesses, and our broader economy cannot afford any more reckless government spending.

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I Just Kissed Yesterday Goodbye

Focus is an essential part of getting something done. Sometimes my focus is more on yesterday than it is today. I waste a lot of time looking backward.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage often rebukes me because I look in the past. I talk more about yesterday than I do today. On the other hand, she is always focused on today and what can be done today.

I look back and see yesterday and what I didn't accomplish. I try to relive yesterday, and it never works.

My father used to tell me, "If you were supposed to look behind you, God would've put eyes in the back of your head. God knows what He's doing."

The older I get, the more sense that makes to me. I can waste all my time looking back or investing my time in today and looking forward. I can't look both ways.

Of course, it is pretty hard to transition as a husband. My wife will ask me many times, "Did you remember to do..." Then she fills in the blank with many things that she wanted me to do yesterday.

I once, and only once, tried to make a joke out of it and said to her, "Yesterday is over, and I have nothing more to do with it."

The lecture I got on that subject from her entitles me to some Ph.D. degree in something or other. (PhD is simply Pretty Hard to Disagree.)

Amazingly, the one in our house who is always focused on today is concerned about my yesterday. I'm not going to approach her on that subject; I like my life as it is right now.

One of the hardest things that I have in life is saying goodbye to somebody. When I went off to Bible school, I remember saying goodbye to my parents, which was a tough thing to do. The Bible school was maybe 10 hours away from where we lived. So when I said goodbye, I knew I was leaving and I wouldn't have access to them as I have had.

This was before cell phones, texting and the Internet. My only contact was the landline house phone. I could not call them when I wanted to, as we can do today.

Today, all I have to do is send a text message no matter the time of day, and they will respond to me when they get the text.

Saying goodbye to my parents and moving out of the house was a chore for me in many regards. I had

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no idea what I was going to be doing. I did not have any idea how I would take care of myself. At that time I was focused on looking forward and was excited about what I would experience.

It was then that I first discovered what it means to kiss yesterday goodbye.

When I said goodbye to my parents at that point, I put everything behind me, and I was going to experience a new adventure that I didn't know much about. For me, it was exciting. It was a time to try new things and new experiences.

I was soon to learn the key ingredient in kissing yesterday goodbye.

I had no idea what was before me when I closed yesterday, but I was anxious to navigate new waters in my life.

At this Bible school, I met a young lady. Since we were going to school together, she was a year ahead of me, we ran across each other every day. So it wasn't long before we became what is called "an item." That was something brand-new for me. I never was part of an "item."

It was then I began to understand that today's "item" can take your focus off of yesterday. I never knew it quite like that before. To kiss yesterday goodbye is to welcome today into your life sometimes you don't know what's associated with today.

Letting yesterday go enables me to enjoy today and get ready for tomorrow. I need to remember; today is tomorrow's yesterday.

No matter how good yesterday was, today can be that much better. So when I let go of yesterday, I have an opportunity now to enjoy today in its fullness.

Every once in a while, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage will say with a smile, "Remember when...?" then she goes into a long tirade of something that happened years ago. But, of course, I enjoy the reflection, and sometimes it encourages me for today.

According to her, there's nothing wrong with reflecting on past experiences as long as you're not going back to that situation. So I'm still trying to learn that side of it.

Usually, we reflect on past anniversaries on our wedding anniversary and enjoy that reflection. She remembers things yesterday that I don't remember at all.

The purpose of memories is to enhance today, make it better, and give me the energy to move forward.

I have learned to turn my yesterday into a blessing that enables me to enjoy today and tomorrow at its best.

One of my favorite Bible verses says, "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

When I kiss yesterday goodbye I can focus on the day, today, that God has made to be a blessing in my life.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: How will the homes of the future look and feel different as a result of global warming?

—A.G., Silver Spring, MD

No doubt, homes are changing dramatically as the planet warms. Recent data from the United Nations Environment Programme shows that construction and use of residential buildings accounts for 17 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. As architects and engineers look to reduce their environmental footprint, homes are starting to change in several key ways.

In general, new construction homes are the most likely to be the most resilient to climate change. New forms of concrete that are made from recycled or waste-based material save a large share of carbon emissions associated with the production of virgin concrete. Painting the roof white or another light color can reduce air conditioning use extensively by reflecting the sun's rays and their heat back toward the sky instead of absorbing them into the building structure. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that painting your roof white or another light color enables it to reflect solar radiation and keep up to 50 degrees colder than a typical roof on a hot day.

As for winter, making sure a house's shell is tight and free of drafts is one key to efficiency, as well as the use of eco-friendly insulation in walls and roofs. Strategically placed windows can help reduce winter heating bills through so-called "passive solar" heating.

The use of integrated systems and smart home technology to link up appliances and lights and run them only when needed is another hallmark of the home of the future. Likewise, design and materials considerations will play a large role in making these new homes as energy and water efficient as possible.

The geographic distribution of housing is also changing due to global warming. Cities across the U.S. are debating proposals to build high-density housing along bus and rail lines, with the hope that easier access to public transportation will reduce vehicle emissions. Inside, the homes of the future are likely to be chock full of eco-friendly innovations to reduce energy usage, from space age insulation materials to hyper-efficient electric appliances and lights that turn on and off as needed.

Finally, some places are taking an entirely new approach to housing. The Netherlands, a nation at extremely high risk of flooding, is pioneering floating homes, which are anchored tightly to the shore but can rise and fall with the tide. Unlike houseboats, the Dutch floating homes are connected to their local electricity and sewage systems and are stabilized in the water with a concrete hull, according to YaleEnvironment360. Though they function essentially the same as any other house, their ability to ride out a flood will protect them from damage long into the future. As seas rise and coastal communities around the world lose their land to the water, the Netherlands' floating houses could be harbingers of what the homes of the future will look like.



The homes of the future will be built to use a lot less energy and withstand harsher, more extreme weather events thanks to global warming. Credit: Karin S, Pexels.

com.

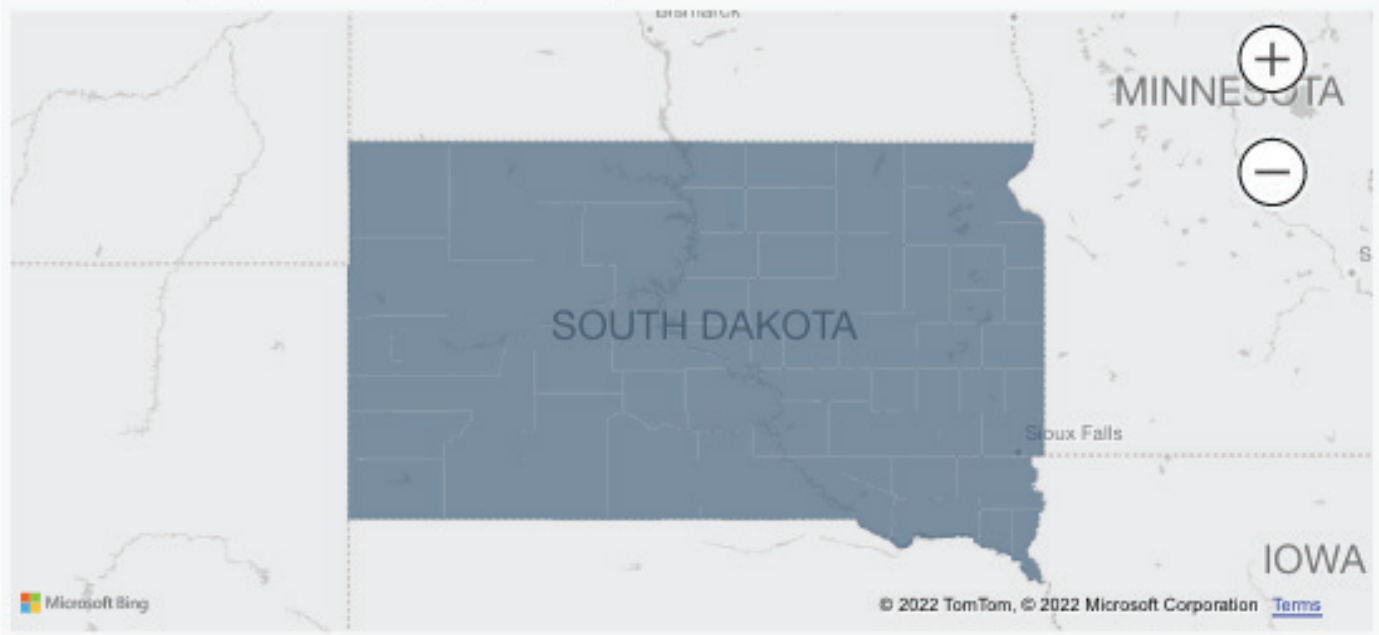
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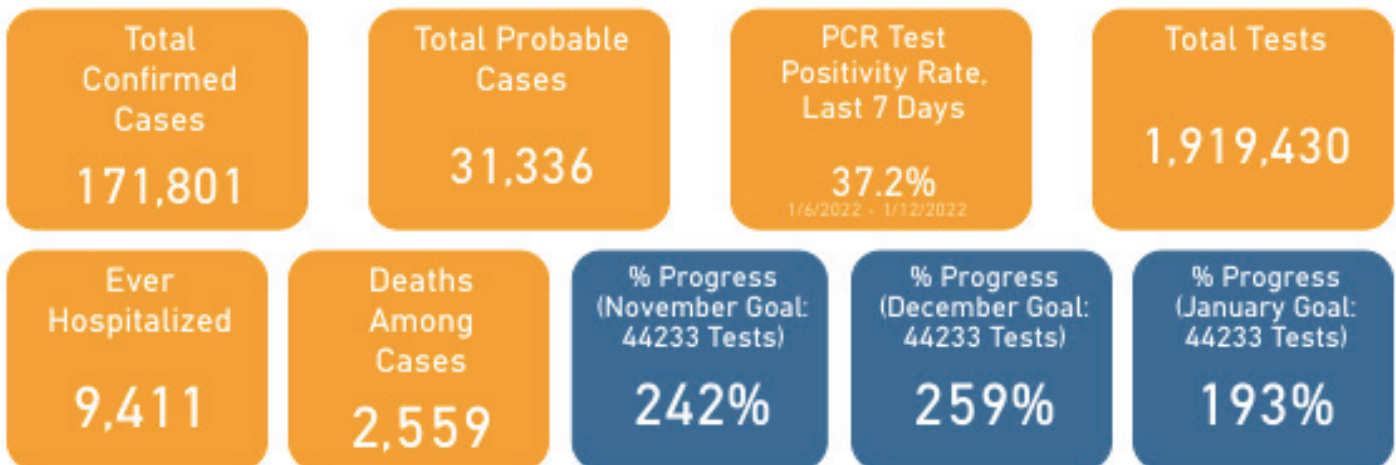
South Dakota COVID-19 Report



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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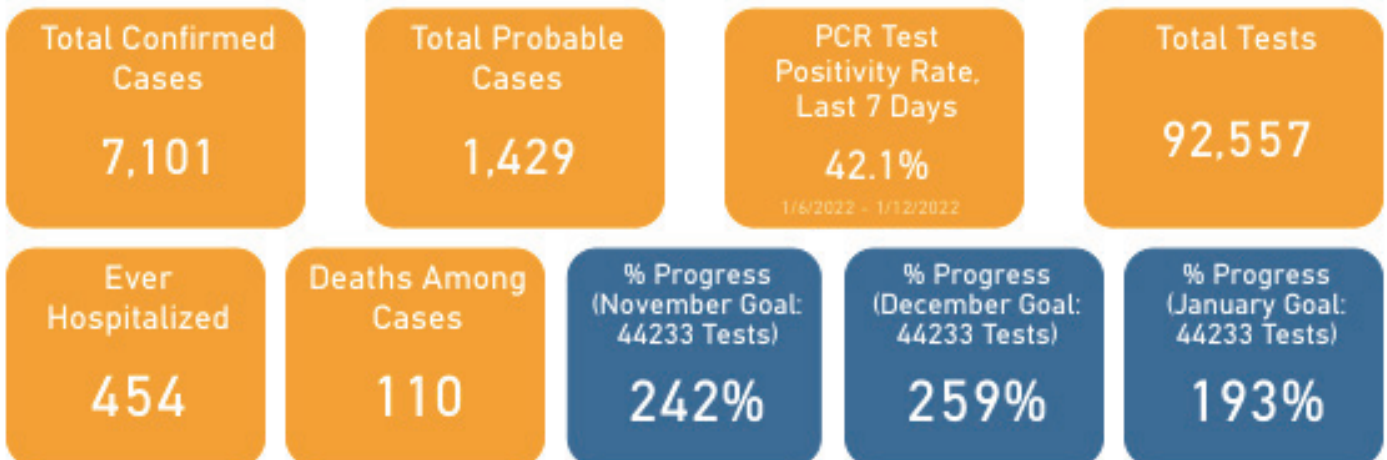
Brown County COVID-19 Report



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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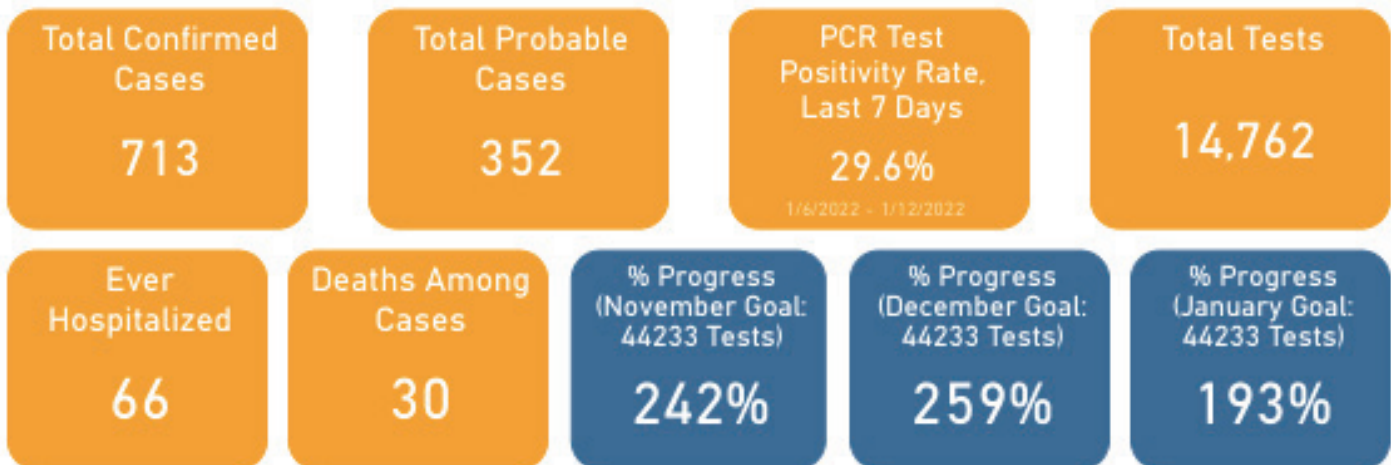
Day County COVID-19 Report



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Currently Hospitalized	+48	349
Deaths Among Cases	+37	2559
Ever Hospitalized		9411
Active Cases		26835
Recovered Cases		173743
Total Cases		203137

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	106753	1171
Male	96384	1388

VARIANT CASES OF COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Variant	# of Cases
Delta (B.1.617.2 & AY lineages)	1294
Alpha (B.1.1.7)	176
Omicron (B.1.1.529 & BA lineages)	27
Gamma (P.1)	4
Beta (B.1.351)	2

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	12711	1
10-19 years	24651	0
20-29 years	35876	11
30-39 years	34577	43
40-49 years	28618	69
50-59 years	26425	191
60-69 years	21782	399
70-79 years	11210	591
80+ years	7287	1254

RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
Asian / Pacific Islander	2733	1%
Black	5060	2%
Hispanic	8537	4%
Native American	24347	12%
Other	2028	1%
Unknown	5035	2%
White	155397	76%

Groton Area School District
 Active COVID-19 Cases
 Updated January 14, 2022; 4:26 PM

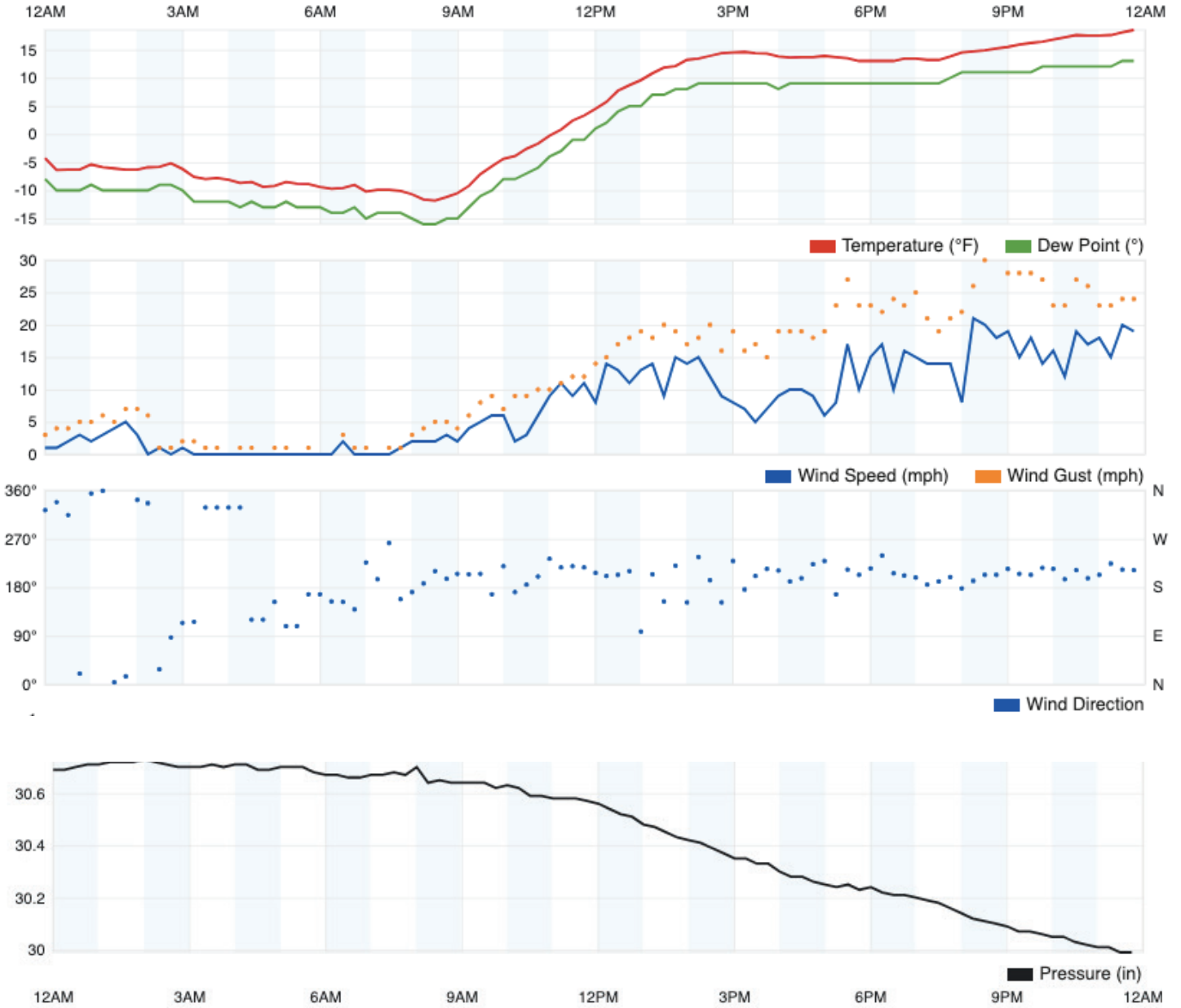
Increase of 8 from last week

J	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	1	1	S	T
K	G										0	1	2	t	o
														a	t
														f	a
														f	i
0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	4	1	13

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today



Slight Chance Snow then Partly Sunny and Breezy

High: 36 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 19 °F

M.L.King Day



Mostly Cloudy

High: 31 °F

Monday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 18 °F

Tuesday

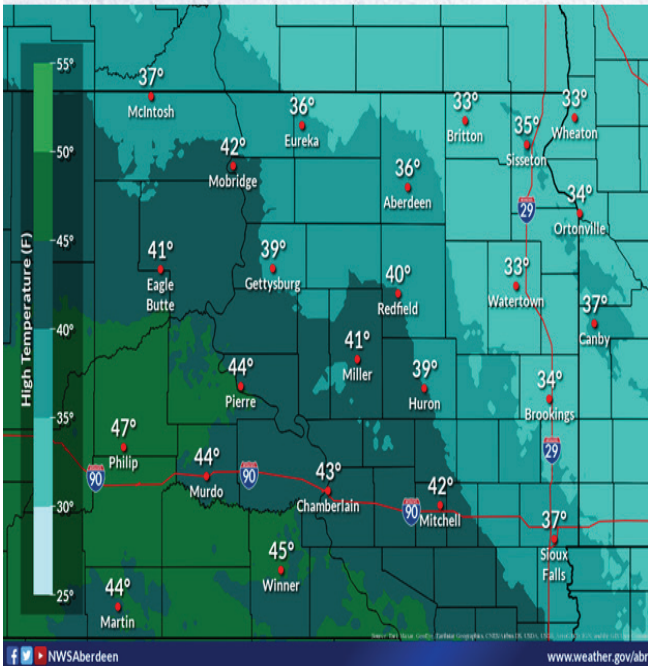


Partly Sunny then Partly Sunny and Breezy

High: 38 °F

Mild, but Breezy Today

Today's High Temperature



Max Wind Gusts Today - Tonight

	1/16 Sun						1/17 Mon	
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	Maximum
Aberdeen	20	26	29	29	22	16	14	29
Britton	16	23	30	28	20	16	14	30
Eagle Butte	25	36	40	39	25	20	17	40
Eureka	23	33	38	35	28	24	14	38
Gettysburg	20	26	32	29	22	17	13	32
Kennebec	20	28	35	35	22	14	14	35
McIntosh	31	40	41	40	25	23	20	41
Milbank	20	23	28	24	22	14	10	28
Miller	20	25	28	29	23	18	16	29
Mobridge	20	28	32	31	20	15	9	32
Murdo	25	30	40	40	22	18	16	40
Pierre	16	25	32	32	18	12	8	32
Redfield	16	21	26	28	23	18	15	28
Sisseton	30	31	32	29	23	23	17	32
Watertown	14	21	26	25	21	21	14	26
Wheaton	17	26	29	29	23	16	10	29

*Table values in mph
 **Created: 3 am CST Sun 1/16/2022
 ***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Jan. 16, 2022 | 5AM

Breezy west to northwesterly winds can be expected today. The winds will bring milder air into the area with highs reaching the 30s for most locations. Central South Dakota could see highs in the mid-40s.

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Today in Weather History

January 16, 1967: In Minnesota, a fast-moving blizzard brought winds over 75 mph. The snowfall was light to moderate, with extensive blowing and drifting snow. Visibility was near zero for an extended time. Temperatures fell rapidly during the storm, and by the morning of the 18th, many record lows temperatures were set. Many vehicles went into the ditch. Thousands of motorists and schoolchildren found shelter wherever they could as travel was halted. A Wheaton man froze to death. In South Dakota, rain followed by a sudden drop in temperatures of nearly 30 degrees in 2 hours resulted in widespread freezing rain and significant icing on roads and trees. Strong winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to 75 mph along with the ice halted most travel. The wind and icing also caused the toppling of a 270-foot radio tower near Aberdeen.

January 16, 1997: An intense Arctic High brought widespread blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 70 below to central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. One to 3 inches of snow fell on top of the already deep snowpack of 2 to 5 feet. The blizzard winds brought another round of widespread heavy drifting, blocking area roads and highways. Many area schools were closed once again to add to their large number of days missed for the winter season. Fortunately, this blizzard was short-lived compared to previous blizzards, and the people were better prepared.

January 16, 2014: A strong area of high-pressure building into the region behind an Arctic cold front brought high winds to central and north-central South Dakota during the early morning hours of the 16th. Some of the strongest wind gusts include; 69 mph near Whitlocks Bay; 68 mph near Bullhead; 67 mph near Trail City; 66 mph in Foster Bay; 65 mph near Mellette and in Presho; 64 mph near Harrold and in Murdo; and 63 mph in Pierre, Reliance, and Miranda. The strong winds diminished during the late afternoon hours of the 16th. A clipper system passing across the region brought light snowfall and powerful northwest winds gusting more than 70 mph at times resulting in blizzard conditions. The highest wind gusts include; 76 mph at the Brown County Landfill, 69 mph in Aberdeen and Cravens Corner, 52 mph near Webster, and 52 mph in Sisseton. Blizzard conditions ended during the late afternoon hours. A no travel advisory was issued in Grant, Codington, Hamlin, and Spink Counties due to low visibilities. The blizzard led to the cancellation of several area activities and schools and nearly impossible travel conditions.

1831 - A great snowstorm raged from Georgia to Maine. Snowfall totals greater than 30 inches were reported from Pennsylvania across southern New England. (David Ludlum)

1964 - Fort Worth, TX, received 7.5 inches of snow, and Dallas reported a foot of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A winter storm produced a total of 61 inches of snow at Rye CO, and wind gusts to 100 mph in Utah. The storm then spread heavy snow from the Texas panhandle to Indiana. Tulia TX received 16 inches of snow, and up to 14 inches was reported in western Oklahoma. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A small storm in the western U.S. produced a foot of snow and wind gusts to 70 mph in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada. Showers and thunderstorms produced 2.28 inches of rain at Brownsville TX, their third highest total for any day in January. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong chinook winds plagued much of the state of Wyoming. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Cody, and wind gusts to 100 mph were reported in eastern and northwestern Wyoming. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: Heavy snow fell across Prince Williams Sound and the Susitna Valley of southern Alaska. Valdez was buried under 64.9 inches of snow in less than two days, including a record of 47.5 inches in 24 hours. The heavy snow blocked roads, closed schools, and sunk six vessels in the Valdez harbor under the heavy snow's weight.

2008: An area of low pressure brought snow, sleet, and freezing rain across northern Georgia. Three to four inches was a typical amount reported from many of the northeast Georgia counties. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the NWS Office in Atlanta, Georgia.

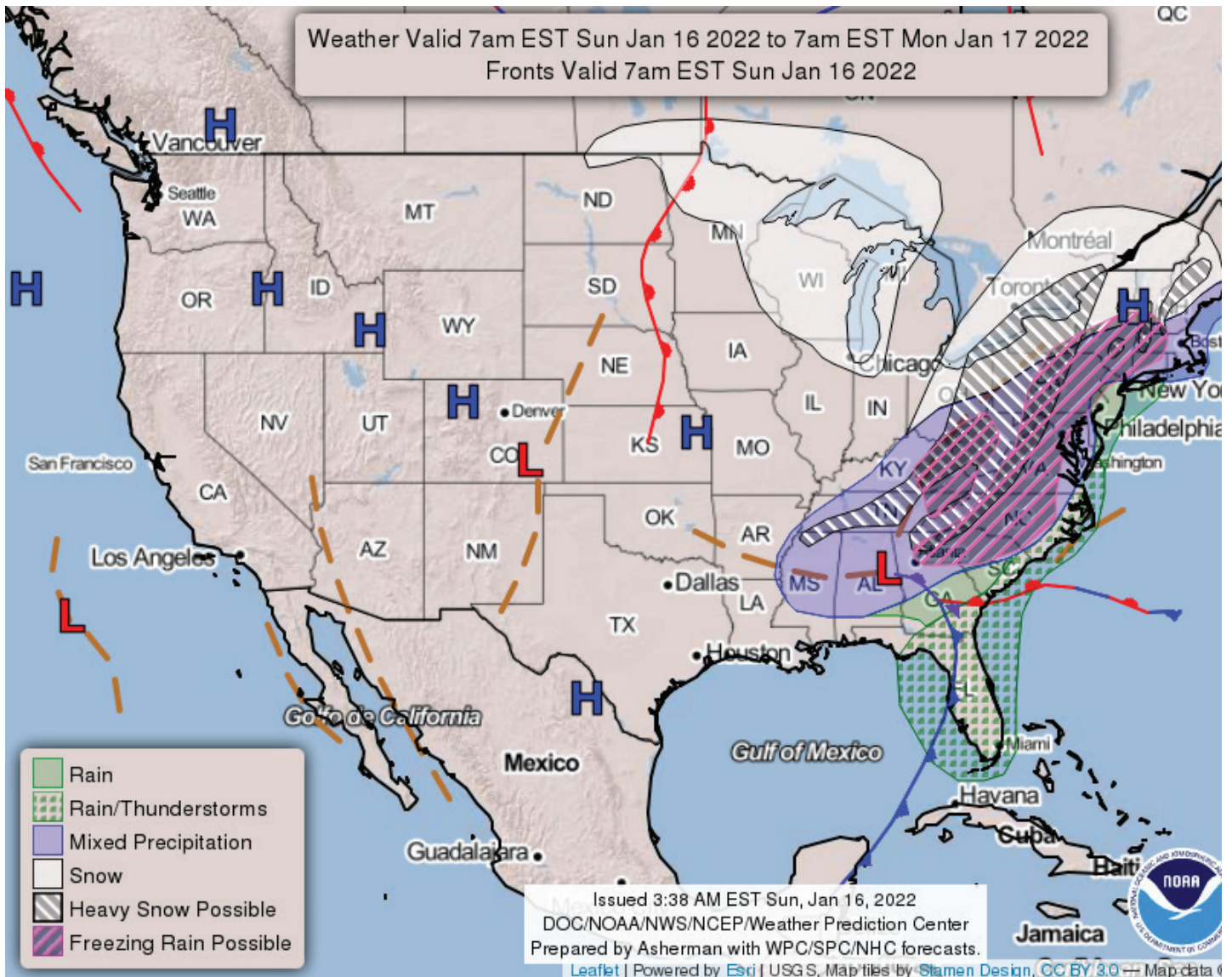
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 19 °F at 11:53 PM
Low Temp: -12 °F at 8:31 AM
Wind: 30 mph at 8:24 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 49 in 1942
Record Low: -30 in 2005
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.31
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.43
Average Precip to date: 0.31
Precip Year to Date: 0.43
Sunset Tonight: 5:18:33 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05:16 AM



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INCOMPARABLE!

The agnostics wonder if there is a God. The materialists boast that they do not need a god. There are even some who do not want to know if there is a God because they do not want to face Him. Christians, however, are thankful for God because they could not live without Him.

In wonderment, the Psalmist and the Christian ask a reasonable question: "Who is like the Lord our God?" And the answer is: "No one!"

Who is like Him in power? He is the "All-Powerful One." The word "impossible" is not in His vocabulary. Whatever needs to be done, He can do. He cannot fail, or He would not be God. He is a God who is loving, faithful, merciful, filled with grace and willing to forgive and restore the fallen. While He cannot lie, sin or act contrary to His nature, He can do anything. And one day He will "make all things new."

Who is like Him in knowledge? He is the "All Knowing One." God is intuitive and infallible and knows Himself and all other beings and events. Past, present, and future are an open book to Him. He sees, knows and understands everything from beginning through eternity.

Our God is incomparable because God is God. No one will ever judge Him because He is above all and in all. At the same time "He stoops down" - or, actually humbles himself - "to look down on the heavens and the earth."

From the moment we are born, and He looks into our crib until the moment we die and enter His presence, our gracious God is forever with us. Who, indeed, is like Him?

Prayer: We thank You, Heavenly Father, that You are Who You are, yet love us in spite of our sins and failures. We are grateful that You "stoop down" to see us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: - Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? Psalm 113:5-6

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 67, Douglas 38

Burke 63, Gayville-Volin 42

Chamberlain 69, Bon Homme 33

Freeman Academy/Marion 66, Scotland 42

Great Plains Lutheran 61, North Central Co-Op 25

Herreid/Selby Area 71, Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 26

Hill City 59, Sundance, Wyo. 56

Kimball/White Lake 48, Avon 35

Lower Brule 89, Crow Creek 33

Mitchell 69, Pierre 54

Parkston 42, St. Thomas More 38

Sioux Falls Christian 64, Watertown 52

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 50, Yankton 45

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 61, Sioux Falls Lincoln 53

Tea Area 54, Aberdeen Central 51

Warner 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 44

281 Conference Tournament=

First Round=

Hitchcock-Tulare 64, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 54

James Valley Christian 63, Highmore-Harold 40

Wessington Springs 73, Iroquois/Doland 52

Wolsey-Wessington 68, Sunshine Bible Academy 14

Jones County Invite=

Championship=

White River 58, Lyman 36

Fifth Place=

Kadoka Area 41, Colome 34

Third Place=

Stanley County 46, Philip 37

Redfield Pheasant Shoot Out=

Belle Fourche 53, Northwestern 42

Groton Area 68, Deubrook 42

Little Wound 59, Florence/Henry 55

Redfield 54, Waverly-South Shore 47

Timber Lake 65, Faulkton 61

Sacred Heart Hoops Classic=

Rapid City Central 72, Campbell County, Wyo. 64

Rapid City Christian 66, Newcastle, Wyo. 36

Thunder Basin, Wyo. 55, Lakota Tech 41

West River Tournament=

Championship=

Hot Springs 54, Faith 47, OT

Fifth Place=

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Wall 56, Moorcroft, Wyo. 26
Seventh Place=
Newell 50, Edgemont 23
Third Place=
Upton, Wyo. 52, New Underwood 36
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Brookings vs. Fairmont, Minn., ccd.
Santee, Neb. vs. Takini, ccd.
Tiospa Zina Tribal vs. Flandreau Indian, ppd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
Bon Homme 58, Chamberlain 47
Brandon Valley 54, Douglas 22
Burke 49, Gayville-Volin 39
Dupree 47, Lemmon 38
Hill City 49, Sundance, Wyo. 14
Scotland 38, Freeman Academy/Marion 19
Sioux Falls Christian 44, Watertown 40
Sioux Falls Lincoln 47, Huron 45
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 68, Yankton 33
Tea Area 53, Aberdeen Central 46
Dakota Valley Conference Classic=
Arlington 46, Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. 34
Castlewood 46, Westbrook-Walnut Grove, Minn. 32
Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley, Minn. 55, Elkton-Lake Benton 42
Colman-Egan 63, Pipestone, Minn. 54
Dell Rapids St. Mary 55, Adrian/Ellsworth, Minn. 25
Estelline/Hendricks 53, Ortonville, Minn. 32
Lake Preston 54, Dawson-Boyd, Minn. 48
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 49, Benson, Minn. 20
Hanson Corn Palace Classic=
Bridgewater-Emery 60, Highmore-Harrold 45
Corsica/Stickney 58, Flandreau 47
Hanson 64, Wolsey-Wessington 47
Lakota Tech 43, Florence/Henry 41
Lennox 44, Deubrook 43
Parkston 42, St. Thomas More 38
Viborg-Hurley 49, Ethan 38
Wagner 75, West Central 47
Winner 55, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 40
Sacred Heart Hoops Classic=
Newcastle, Wyo. 58, Rapid City Christian 45
Rapid City Central 53, Campbell County, Wyo. 39
Thunder Basin, Wyo. 66, Pine Ridge 8
West River Tournament=
Championship=
Wall 33, Faith 31
Fifth Place=
Hot Springs 47, Moorcroft, Wyo. 40
Seventh Place=

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Newell 54, Oelrichs 36
Third Place=
Upton, Wyo. 43, Edgemont 39
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Santee, Neb. vs. Takini, ccd.

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 Saturday:
Dakota Cash
03-12-13-16-32
(three, twelve, thirteen, sixteen, thirty-two)
Estimated jackpot: \$55,000
Lotto America
16-22-35-49-52, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 3
(sixteen, twenty-two, thirty-five, forty-nine, fifty-two; Star Ball: nine; ASB: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$6.38 million
Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$347 million
Powerball
03-18-37-51-59, Powerball: 13, Power Play: 2
(three, eighteen, thirty-seven, fifty-one, fifty-nine; Powerball: thirteen; Power Play: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$48 million

Some in GOP begin testing party's lockstep loyalty to Trump

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump stepped up his election-year effort to dominate the Republican Party, holding a rally in Arizona on Saturday in which he castigated anyone who dares to question his lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, including the state's GOP governor, Doug Ducey.

But 2,000 miles to the east in Washington, there are small signs that some Republicans are tiring of the charade. Mike Rounds, the generally unassuming senator from South Dakota, was perhaps the boldest in acknowledging the reality that the election was in fact fair. Instead of being shunned, he was supported by his GOP colleagues, including Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. Rounds later said the party needed to get "louder" in telling voters the truth about the 2020 campaign.

Meanwhile, top Republicans in Washington have engaged in a behind-the-scenes effort to encourage Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, one of Trump's most vocal antagonists in the party, to run for a Senate seat. And on Saturday, Glenn Youngkin became the first Republican since 2010 to be sworn in as Virginia's governor after running a campaign that kept Trump at arm's length.

Less than two months before the 2022 primary season begins, Trump remains the most popular figure among the voters who will decide which Republicans advance to the fall general election. But the recent dynamics bring new clarity to the debate that will likely animate the GOP all year: how closely candidates should align themselves with Trump and his election lie.

"I was very encouraged by the response from a number of different senators supportive of Sen. Rounds," said former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who has been a rare Republican urging the party to move on from Trump and his election obsession.

There is no evidence to support Trump's claims that the election was stolen. Elections officials and his

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own attorney general rejected the notion. Trump's arguments have also been roundly dismissed by the courts, including judges appointed by the former president.

Still, dissent from Trump's election lie within the GOP remains rare. From Ohio to Georgia and Arizona, candidates running for Senate, governor and attorney general have fully embraced Trump's falsehoods as they have tried to win over his endorsement, deflect his fury or win over his base. Those efforts were on full display in Arizona Saturday night as Trump-endorsed candidates falsely declared the election had been stolen and Trump the duly elected president.

In the short term, such positioning may help Republican candidates come out on top in primary fields that are often crowded. But there are concerns that it could hurt the party in the fall, especially among suburban voters who have become increasingly decisive in recent campaigns. The further to the right that Republicans go now, the easier it could become for their Democratic rivals to portray them as extreme in a general election.

And any time candidates spend looking backward is time not spent attacking President Joe Biden, who is seen as particularly vulnerable due to rising inflation and coronavirus cases.

"It's one of those issues that's quintessentially popular in a primary and unpopular in a general," said Chris DeRose, a Republican attorney and former clerk of the superior court in Arizona's Maricopa County.

He said candidates, who often privately acknowledge the election was fair, were clearly courting the former president by expressing skepticism about the 2020 election.

"Donald Trump's obviously the most sought-after endorsement among Republican candidates," he said. "That can make all the difference in a Republican primary."

John Shimkus, a Republican and former Illinois congressman, said it was easy for "armchair quarterbacks" who aren't on the ballot to judge candidates doing what they can to win their primaries.

"All the races are going to be fought by Trump and highlighted on Fox. So these candidates have to be very, very careful. They have to win the primary to win the general," he said.

The risk, however, is clear in Arizona's Senate race. In a year favoring Republicans, the state should be a relatively attainable pickup and some in the party are eager for Ducey to enter the race against Democratic incumbent Mark Kelly. But Trump's repeated attacks on Ducey, who has refused to back election conspiracies, could make it hard for him to succeed in a GOP primary.

Before his trip, Trump, who continues to tease another run for president in 2024, issued a statement that he would never endorse Ducey. And he continued to rail against him at the rally, which was dominated by his grievances over the election that was held more than 14 months ago.

"He's a disaster," said Trump. "Ducey has been a terrible, terrible representative of your state."

Whichever Republicans emerge on top in Arizona and other critical races will have to convince voters that they should participate in an election system Trump has spent years deriding as rigged.

Many Republicans still blame Trump for the party's loss of Georgia's two Senate runoff elections in 2021, arguing he depressed turnout by undermining confidence in the voting system, denying them control of the Senate. (Trump has argued that further investigation is the only way to instill confidence in future elections.)

"Trump still has this outsized voice and influence and too many candidates fear his wrath," said Charlie Dent, a former Republican congressman from Pennsylvania and Trump critic. "We know Donald Trump will use his megaphone to condemn those who don't buy his lies and his false narrative on the 2020 election. So these candidates are put in a bind: If they tell the truth, they run the risk of losing their primaries and incurring the wrath of Trump, and if they acquiesce and go along with this nonsense, they run the risk of alienating a lot of voters."

Still, DeRose said he has no concern that the issue will depress turnout, despite what happened in Georgia.

"The Republican base is quite enthusiastic," he said, predicting turnout on par with 2010, when Republicans made historic gains in the House. With soaring inflation, ongoing criticism over Biden's pullout from Afghanistan, he said, "Things aren't going well in this country and I think you're going to see this enormous blowback."

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Others disagreed. Barbara Comstock, a Trump critic and former GOP congresswoman from Virginia, warned Republicans risked nominating fringe candidates who would go on to lose in the general.

"Republicans feel like they're going to win no matter who's on the ticket. And I don't agree with that thesis," she said, pointing to Ohio, where Senate candidates have been trying to desperately out-Trump one another. "I think you really are taking a chance in blowing reliable races."

Nonetheless, Trump remained fixated on the issue on Saturday in Florence, Arizona, a Republican stronghold about 70 miles southeast of Phoenix. It's the first of what aides say will be a brisker pace of Trump events in the coming months. Trump on Friday announced another rally later in January in Texas, where the March 1 primary formally ushers in the midterm campaign.

Archambault scores 25 in South Dakota's rout of Omaha

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Mason Archambault scored 25 points to lead six in double figures and South Dakota defeated Omaha 105-70 on Saturday,

Hunter Goodrick had 10 points and a game-high 13 rebounds for the Coyotes (10-7, 3-3 Summit).

Frankie Fidler and Felix Lemetti had 11 points each for the Mavericks (3-16, 2-6).

Arians leads South Dakota State in romp past Denver, 80-62

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Alex Arians scored 19 points and led five players in double-digit scoring as South Dakota State rolled over Denver, 80-62 on Saturday to stay unbeaten through six Summit League games.

The Jackrabbits raced to a 21-point lead at intermission, 44-23, and cruised to the win.

Luke Appel scored 12 points and grabbed seven rebounds off the bench, D Wilson and B Scheierman each added 11 points and M Mims contributed 10 points for South Dakota State (15-4, 6-0 Summit League).

K.J. Hunt scored 18 points to lead Denver (6-14, 2-5). Coban Porter added 16 point off the bench and Touko Tainamo added 13 points and six rebounds.

Man sentenced to life in prison in fatal 2019 shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A man accused of opening fire on a group of people, killing one, has been sentenced to life in prison.

The Argus Leader reports Ramon Deron Smith was sentenced Thursday in connection to the 2019 killing of Larry Carr Jr.

Smith was convicted of second-degree murder, first-degree manslaughter and aggravated assault charges in August.

Smith also was sentenced to 25 years on the aggravated assault charges to be served consecutively with his life sentence.

According to court documents, the shootings took place on June 8, 2019, when several men came to an apartment in Sioux Falls to settle a dispute. Smith opened fire on the group. He hit three people, including 44-year-old Carr, killing him. Smith fled the state and was arrested about two weeks later in Minneapolis.

Judge orders new trial in fatal Rapid City stabbing case

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Box Elder man faces a second trial in a fatal stabbing in Rapid City.

A Pennington County judge last month declared a mistrial in a murder case of Barry Allman after discovering that prosecutors failed to inform the defense in a timely manner that immunity had been granted to several key witnesses.

KOTA-TV reports Judge Matt Brown announced a new trial Friday. Brown called the errors made by the state in the case "grossly negligent, egregious and caused serious inconvenience, burden and cost to the county, the court, court staff, jurors and to Mr. Allman."

Allman is accused of stabbing Lance Baumgarten in the chest at a Rapid City apartment in August 2020. Allman was arrested a day following the stabbing near Wanblee by Oglala Sioux tribal officers.

Indigenous group to turn ex-booze hotbed into healing center

By RICHARD TWO BULLS South Dakota Public Broadcasting

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation wants to change the narrative of the small unincorporated border town of Whiteclay, Nebraska.

The small town's four liquor stores left a decades-long scar on the people of the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the land that once belonged to them.

The liquor stores sold 4 million cans of beer annually, mostly taking advantage of the Tribal citizens just two miles to the north. In 2017, the Nebraska Liquor Commission declined to renew the stores' liquor licenses.

It took years of work by a variety of people to make that happen. Whiteclay's booming alcohol industry, which took advantage of existing social issues faced by the people of Pine Ridge, was effectively shut down. Thunder Valley hopes the healing can now begin, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

Thunder Valley CDC started on the Pine Ridge Reservation as a way to connect youth with the Lakota way of life. It continues its efforts to enhance the Oglala Lakota Oyate by offering a variety of initiatives such as food sovereignty, Lakota language education, housing and home ownership, a regenerative community development and more. The corporation recently acquired 48 acres of land in Whiteclay with the intent of building a holistic healing community.

Former Oglala Sioux Tribe attorney general and current Thunder Valley Executive Director Tatewin Means wants to write a new chapter focusing on healing, and changing the narrative around Whiteclay and the connection it had to her people.

"It's tremendous because we're able to be really intentional about building a healing community that is focused on really our relatives that are on the periphery, those that are forgotten or invisible or having a harder time accessing resources," said Means, who is the daughter of the late Russell Means, a prominent member of the American Indian Movement.

The idea of the community is transitional housing or permanent supportive housing with access to resources in one centralized place.

"Right now, we're focused on designing this community, what will it look like? What will be included?" said Means. "And that's going to take a lot of engagement with our community members, with justice-system stakeholders."

This project is one of many initiatives that Thunder Valley is doing to help tribal citizens reclaim their identity.

"Reclaiming our identity as Lakota people, that's a part of liberation, right? That's a part of freedom," said Means. "And so eliminating those messages of colonialism that have bound us for so many generations, and so how do you do that? How do you begin that process of decolonizing?"

Healing is a first step in that liberation process, according to Means.

"We can't hope and dream and think and act like Lakota again if we are still holding on to traumas, if we're still holding on to colonial mindsets," said Means. "We're finding our way through it just as everyone else is, but being open to that and making ourselves vulnerable to that, because it's scary to truly think about healing for ourselves. That takes a lot of courage."

Means hopes that someday there can be a holistic healing community in each of Pine Ridge's nine districts that's intentional and specific to providing pathways for each district's members.

COVID deaths and cases are rising again at US nursing homes

By MEG KINNARD and BRYAN GALLION Associated Press

COVID-19 infections are soaring again at U.S. nursing homes because of the omicron wave, and deaths are climbing too, leading to new restrictions on family visits and a renewed push to get more residents and staff members vaccinated and boosted.

Nursing homes were the lethal epicenter of the pandemic early on, before the vaccine allowed many of them to reopen to visitors last year. But the wildly contagious variant has dealt them a setback.

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Nursing homes reported a near-record of about 32,000 COVID-19 cases among residents in the week ending Jan. 9, an almost sevenfold increase from a month earlier, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A total of 645 COVID-19-related deaths among residents were recorded during the same week, a 47% increase from the earlier period. And there are fears that deaths could go much higher before omicron is through.

Despite the rising numbers, the situation is not as dire as it was in December 2020, when nursing home deaths per week topped out at about 6,200. Experts credit the high vaccination rates now among nursing home residents: About 87% are fully vaccinated, according to CDC data.

COVID-19 shots and boosters provide strong protection against severe illness, hospitalization and death, but the sick and elderly are uniquely vulnerable to the virus.

Nursing home officials say they are responding to the outbreak by limiting visitors to common areas instead of allowing them into residents' rooms, and by reinstating social distancing.

Some states, like New York, have put their own measures in place, like requiring proof of a negative test for visitors and providing all with surgical masks.

Nursing homes are also working to drive up vaccination numbers, especially for boosters. Sixty-three percent of nursing home residents nationally have received an extra dose.

Booster numbers are much worse for staff members. About 83% are fully vaccinated, but only 29% have gotten an extra dose.

Nursing homes have been holding vaccine clinics and town hall meetings to stress the importance of the shots.

They also got another tool to increase vaccinations Thursday when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Biden administration vaccine mandate for most health care workers in the U.S.

About 57,200 nursing home workers — by far the highest number on record during the pandemic — had the virus in the week ending Jan. 9, a more than tenfold increase from a month earlier, according to the CDC.

Sharon Wheeler was shocked to learn that her 88-year-old, dementia-stricken father recently contracted COVID-19 at a Naperville, Illinois, nursing home. She said she hopes the fact that he is fully vaccinated and boosted will help him pull through.

She said she suspects visitors and residents coming and going around the holidays brought COVID-19 inside. Wheeler hasn't been allowed to see her father, but the staff told her he had mild symptoms.

"I worked so hard to make sure he never got (COVID-19), because I was so terrified," she said. "He's such an older man, and I don't want to lose him this way."

Vaccines are just one of the many tools that should be used to defend the elderly against omicron, said Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists. He also recommended testing of visitors, mandatory boosters and the use of medical-grade masks like N95s and high-efficiency air filters.

"We need to build a Fort Knox around protecting nursing homes, but we're not doing that right now, and that's why cases are surging," Feigl-Ding said Thursday. "We're going to have exponential numbers of hospitalizations and deaths."

The virus dealt a devastating blow in late November to the New Hampshire nursing home Todd Fernald runs, called Webster at Rye, where 100% of residents and staff were vaccinated — but not boosted.

"COVID ripped through this building in 10 seconds," Fernald said, recalling how, on the day that extra shots were scheduled to be administered, an outbreak occurred that would ultimately kill six residents, infect dozens of others and sicken 20 employees.

Since then, nearly all residents have been boosted, and employees are getting their third shots.

"I only lost one employee who didn't want to be vaccinated and chose to resign their job," Fernald said. "I'm having more and more people each and every week that I see are getting boosted and bringing me their booster cards."

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Making sure that facilities have supplies like tests is crucial too, said Lisa Sanders of LeadingAge, an association of nonprofit providers of aging services, including nursing homes.

"Older adults and the people they care for should be prioritized for support and supplies as they become available," Sanders said.

After Biden's first year, the virus and disunity rage on

By ZEKE MILLER and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From the inaugural platform, President Joe Biden saw American sickness on two fronts — a disease of the national spirit and the one from the rampaging coronavirus — and he saw hope, because leaders always must see that.

"End this uncivil war," he implored Americans on Jan. 20, 2021. Of the pathogen, he said: "We can overcome this deadly virus."

Neither malady has abated.

For Biden, it's been a year of lofty ambitions grounded by the unrelenting pandemic, a tough hand in Congress, a harrowing end to an overseas war and rising fears for the future of democracy itself. Biden did score a public-works achievement for the ages. But America's cracks go deeper than pavement.

In this midterm election year, Biden confronts seething divisions and a Republican Party that propagates the delusion that the 2020 election — exhaustively vetted, validated many times over, fair by all measures — was stolen from Donald Trump. That central, mass lie of a rigged vote has become a pretext in state after state for changing election rules and fueling even further disunity and grievance.

In the dispiriting close of Biden's first year, roadblocks stood in the way of all big things pending.

The Supreme Court blocked his vaccinate-or-test mandate for most large employers. Monthly payments to families that had slashed child poverty ran out Friday, with no assurance they will be renewed. Biden's historic initiative to shore up the social safety net wallowed in Congress. And people under 40 have never seen inflation like this.

Only two days after Biden's lacerating speech in Atlanta invoking the darkest days of segregation, he saw his voting rights legislation run aground when Democratic Sen. Krysten Sinema of Arizona announced her opposition to changing Senate rules to allow the bill to pass by a simple majority.

Her rationale: Altering the rules would only "worsen the underlying disease of division infecting our country."

For all of that, Barack Obama was on to something when he paid his old vice president an odd compliment late in the 2020 campaign. Elect Joe Biden, he said, and after four years of flamboyant Trump dramas and crazy tweets, folks could feel safe ignoring their president and vice president for a spell.

"You're not going to have to think about them every single day," Obama said. "It just won't be so exhausting. You'll be able to go about your lives."

Indeed America saw normalcy, some say dignity, return to the White House. Pets came back and so did daily press briefings for the public.

The Trump-era political muzzle came off public health authorities, freeing them to confuse the public all on their own.

First lady Jill Biden's studded "Love" jacket at a global summit not-so-subtly countered the "I Really Don't Care, Do U?" jacket her predecessor wore in a visit to a migrant child detention center.

Instead of promising the world and delivering a Potemkin village (as when Trump declared the virus "very much under control" in February 2020), the Biden White House set pandemic and other goals that were modest to a fault, then exceeded them. The old game of lowering expectations and then taking credit for beating them was back, though such boasting was gone when the dual punch of the delta and omicron variants landed.

Even so, the discipline, drive and baseline competence from the new White House produced notable results. Biden won a bipartisan infrastructure package that had eluded his two predecessors, coming away with a legacy-shaping fix for the rickety pillars of industry and society.

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The first signs of that law in action came this month when Washington approved New York City's Second Avenue subway project to a final engineering phase before shovels hit the ground. The project, which would add three train stops in East Harlem, stalled under Trump.

Americans everywhere will be seeing plenty more orange construction cones for years to come. In just one initiative under the program, 15,000 highway bridges are in line for repairs.

Biden steered more judges through Congress to the federal bench than any recent predecessor. He won approval of a Cabinet that was half women and a minority of white people for the first time.

"I think it's a lot of achievements, a lot of accomplishment, in the face of some very serious obstacles," Biden's chief of staff, Ron Klain, told The Associated Press on the cusp of Biden's second year in office. "The Biden presidency remains a work in progress."

Matthew Delmont, a civil rights historian at Dartmouth, expected more from Biden by virtue of Biden's decades of experience as a savvy operator in the capital.

He had anticipated a far more effective COVID-19 response and more urgency, sooner, in countering the rollback of voting rights and tilting of election rules that Republicans are attempting across the country.

"There's something to be said for the professionalism of the White House and not going from one fire to the next," Delmont said. "What I worry is that the Washington he understands isn't the Washington we have anymore."

Political science professor Cal Jillson at Southern Methodist University in Dallas said Biden has displayed "warning track power" — the ability in baseball to hit long but not, as yet, over the fence.

"There are not so much wins and losses as partial progress on many fronts," he said.

In Biden, Jillson sees a leader who brought the even keel that Obama had talked about from the campaign stage but also one who only rarely delivers a speech worth remembering.

"While there are vast partisan differences in how Biden is seen, in general he is seen as stable but not forceful," he said.

That's how Biden has come across to John Ferguson, a retired diplomatic officer in Lovettsville, Virginia, who considers Biden "infinitely better than Trump" but adds: "He seems to give a speech every four hours and he's not very good at it."

In large measure, Biden's innate civility and predictability brought the sort of climate change that the world could get behind.

Here once more was a president who believed deeply in alliances and vowed to repair an American reputation frayed by the provocateur in office before him.

There would be no more puzzling feelers about buying Greenland. No more doting looks at Russian President Vladimir Putin; instead, Biden stepped up diplomatic confrontation over Putin's designs on Ukraine. There would be no eerie uplit gatherings around glowing orbs with rulers of dissent-crushing Arab countries like Trump's photo op with the Saudis.

But the world also witnessed Biden's debacle in Afghanistan, a chaotic withdrawal that brought more than 124,000 to safety but stranded thousands of desperate Afghans who had been loyal to the United States and hundreds of U.S. citizens and green card holders.

Discounting warnings from military and diplomatic advisers, Biden misjudged the Taliban's tenacity and the staying power of Afghan security forces that had seen crucial U.S. military support vanish. He then blamed Afghans for all that went wrong. Millions of Afghans face the threat of famine in the first winter following the Taliban takeover.

"He needs to be honest about the mistakes that were made," said Republican Rep. Peter Meijer of Michigan, who served with aid workers in Afghanistan after a military career and voted in Congress to impeach Trump. "He will say, 'The buck stops with me,' after he's blamed everybody else for how something turned out."

All presidents enter the world's most powerful office buoyed by their victory only to confront its limitations in time. For Biden, that happened sooner than for most. A polarized public, Trump's impeachment trial and an evenly divided Senate saw to that.

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Biden entered office with a list of to-dos amassed by his party. His quest for a sweeping "Build Back Better" program of social spending turned into a months-long slog, hostage to disagreement between Democrats of the left and center and sometimes to just one man, West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, or Manchin and Sinema together.

"There is a fine political line between forcing Congress' hand with detailed guidance and short timelines and allowing Congress to spin its wheels endlessly," Jillson said. "Biden has not found the sweet spot, but in such a narrowly divided Congress there may be no sweet spot."

Biden came late, by some reckonings, to the Trump-inspired Republican efforts in state capitals to revise how people can vote, how those votes are counted and who oversees elections. Defending democratic processes is a universal concern but also, in Delmont's view, the overarching civil rights issue of this time.

"Right now it feels like there's a lot more passion and energy from folks who would like to restrict or roll back voting rights," Delmont said. Absent an effective defense of those rights by Biden, "I can't say that he's doing enough to repay the Black Americans who put him in the White House."

Meantime, day after day, event after event, it was the virus that commanded Biden's attention. "That challenge casts a shadow over everything we do," Klain said. "I think we've made historic progress there but it's still a challenge."

PANDEMIC POLITICS

Biden is the second U.S. president to be humbled by the coronavirus, which has killed some 846,000 people in this country.

The U.S. is now much better equipped against COVID-19. America's medical arsenal is stronger by orders of magnitude than in the pandemic's first year and the relief money pumped to households, communities and states also made a big difference, though at a cost of stirring inflation.

The Biden administration has been strikingly successful in procuring vaccines and clearing the way for new antiviral medicines that can be taken at home, which should relieve the strain on hospitals once those pills become widely available.

But testing continues to be a core failure, and millions of Americans still refuse to get vaccinated.

Rapid tests are frustratingly difficult to find, and expensive. PCR tests still take three to five days in many cases to get results. That means Americans will continue to be several steps behind the virus, especially with omicron. It remains to be seen if the administration's new testing push leads to a meaningful change.

Trump was undone by his bluster, his inability to own up to the seriousness of the situation and his failure to communicate the stakes truthfully to Americans. But Biden has not been entirely free of hubris.

His mask-less springtime stroll with Vice President Kamala Harris in the Rose Garden may be remembered as an ill-conceived example to the country. Biden's July Fourth celebration of American "independence" from the virus was premature, to put it charitably, despite hedging his remarks in recognition of the dangerous delta variant then stirring.

His portrayal of a "pandemic of the unvaccinated," meant to nudge those who won't get the needle, further illustrated the country's us-and-them divide and wasn't exactly true. Fully vaccinated people account for a growing number of cases across the country, though they are far less likely to suffer from it as much as the unvaccinated do. Equally vexing for Biden is that those most protected against the virus remain most afraid of it.

On the other side of the political divide, prominent Republican governors have actively opposed vaccination and mask mandates.

Anti-government sentiment, nurtured by misinformation, has been aimed at public health advisers and their recommendations, long regarded as beyond the political scrum.

As the pandemic enters its third year, the notion that the U.S. may not be able to crush the coronavirus and may have to settle for living with it — a thought that sparked outrage when it briefly surfaced in Trump's time — may now be gaining currency.

Biden's campaign promise from October 2020 hangs in the balance: "I'm going to shut down the virus, not the country."

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IN THE WORLD'S EYES

Biden campaigned on a promise to restore U.S. leadership, with dignity, among the democracies. He's made good on the style of that while disappointing supporters at home and allies abroad on some of the substance.

Apart from his bungled Afghanistan withdrawal, his efforts to bring Iran back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear accord and reverse Trump's withdrawal of the U.S. from the deal have been met only by Iran moving closer than before to nuclear capabilities.

With some of the autocrats he had promised to confront on human rights, Saudi's crown prince among them, he has equivocated.

Steven A. Cook, a Middle East expert and senior fellow at the Council for Foreign Policy, branded Biden's foreign policy "ruthless pragmatism," especially when it comes to undemocratic Middle East governments. Domestic politics, including Biden's own concerns about voter abhorrence for high gas prices, have kept him from making America the out-front example of fighting climate change that he'd promised it would be.

While Biden convened global summits for democracies and climate change as promised, and rejoined the Paris climate accord, his biggest effort on climate funding belly-flopped.

That, along with mixed administration efforts at home to keep natural gas and gasoline cheap and flowing while cutting fossil fuel use over the long term, threatens Biden's aim of making the U.S. a leader by example on the climate.

The U.S. does look much more normal to the world again, though.

Biden and his diplomats are going all out on rebuilding the alliances that Trump trashed. He's dealing head-on both with Russia and China. People who care about human rights welcome U.S. leadership on tough sanctions for China and Myanmar over their vicious mistreatment of minorities.

Overlaying everything, domestic or foreign, is a constant foreboding in the White House over what Trump might do next.

A year ago Trump left Washington for Florida, breaking one last tradition as president by refusing to attend Biden's inauguration. He told a sparse crowd of supporters at Joint Base Andrews that they should expect a second act.

"We will be back in some form," he said. "Have a good life. We will see you soon."

No title defense for No. 1: Djokovic deported from Australia

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Instead of starting the defense of his Australian Open title on Monday, Novak Djokovic was on his way home, a stunning and unprecedented end to his run of success at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic has won nine of his 20 Grand Slam trophies at the Australian Open — including three in a row — and was scheduled to play in the main stadium to conclude Day 1 of the tournament.

But the No. 1-ranked player in men's tennis had to be deported from Australia after three Federal Court judges decided unanimously Sunday to affirm the immigration minister's right to cancel Djokovic's visa. The ruling was made less than 18 hours before the first Grand Slam matches of 2022 were scheduled to begin.

Djokovic said he was "extremely disappointed" by the legal outcome but respected the decision and would cooperate in his "departure from the country." He also said he planned "to rest and to recuperate."

The 34-year-old from Serbia was trying to use a medical exemption approved by two independent medical panels and Tennis Australia to get around the requirements that everyone at the Australian Open — players, their support teams, spectators and others — be inoculated against COVID-19.

Djokovic is not vaccinated, and the government said his presence could stir up anti-vaccine sentiments.

The saga started on Jan. 5, when Djokovic's flight landed at a Melbourne airport.

"I am uncomfortable that the focus of the past weeks has been on me," he said Sunday, "and I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love."

Tennis Australia issued a statement saying it "respects the decision of the Federal Court" and added:

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"We look forward to a competitive and exciting Australian Open 2022 and wish all players the best of luck."

Djokovic's absence means just one past champion is in the men's bracket: 2009 winner Rafael Nadal. And that also means now it is only Nadal who will have a chance to claim a 21st Grand Slam title and break a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer (who is sidelined after a series of knee operations).

Djokovic's dominance in Grand Slam play of late has been particularly impressive, winning four of the last seven major tournaments and finishing as the runner-up at two others. The only time he did not get at least to the final in that span was at the 2020 U.S. Open, where he was disqualified in the fourth round for hitting a ball that inadvertently hit a line judge in the throat after a game.

Last season, Djokovic went 27-1 at majors, coming within a victory in the U.S. Open final of becoming the first man since 1969 to win a calendar-year Grand Slam.

On Monday night, Djokovic was supposed to play Miomir Kecmanovic, a Serbian ranked 78th, at Rod Laver Arena, the main stadium.

Instead, Kecmanovic will head to a smaller arena to face 150th-ranked Salvatore Caruso of Italy, a so-called "lucky loser" — someone who loses in qualifying rounds but gets access to the main draw because someone else withdraws after the first day's schedule was released.

Third-seeded Alexander Zverev's opener against Daniel Altmaier was moved to Rod Laver Arena.

The Federal Court's decision was as polarizing as Djokovic's vaccination status in a city where residents spent more than 250 days in lockdown and faced harsh travel restrictions at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Nadal was among those who said before Sunday's ruling that players knew the rules coming to Australia and no individual was bigger than the tournament.

After the ruling, Vasek Pospisil, a Canadian who won the 2014 Wimbledon men's doubles title and has worked with Djokovic to form an association to represent players, tweeted: "There was a political agenda at play here with the (Australian) elections coming up which couldn't be more obvious."

Pospisil also wrote: "This is not his fault. He did not force his way into the country and did not 'make his own rules.'"

Pospisil said Djokovic wouldn't have traveled to Australia and would have "been home with his family" had he not received the medical exemption that turned out to be so contentious.

The ATP Tour described Djokovic's absence from the Australian Open as "a loss for the game" and said the court ruling "marks the end of a deeply regrettable series of events."

The tour said it "continues to strongly recommend vaccination to all players."

More than 95% of the Top 100 in both the men's rankings and women's rankings have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

Patrick Mouratoglou, a coach who has worked with Serena Williams and other top players, said the "biggest loser of this mess is the tournament."

Djokovic's visa originally was canceled on Jan. 6 and he spent four nights in an immigration detention hotel before that decision was overturned by a judge on procedural grounds last Monday.

He spent another night confined to an immigration hotel on Saturday while awaiting the result of his last legal challenge.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has defended Australia's tough border policies since Djokovic was detained, tweeting that "rules are rules" on that day.

Morrison, who will face a vote by May, issued a statement Sunday saying he welcomed the decision "to keep our borders strong and keep Australians safe. ... Australians have made many sacrifices during this pandemic, and they rightly expect the result of those sacrifices to be protected."

Lebanon faces internet service interruption amid fuel crisis

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Internet services were disrupted in Lebanon on Sunday because of diesel shortages, according to the state provider, adding another essential service to the list of casualties of the country's

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snowballing economic crisis.

Imad Kreidieh, the head of state internet provider Ogero, tweeted that starting early Sunday a major station in west Beirut, al-Mazraa, would run out of diesel and go offline. The outage affected over 26,000 subscribers, including the country's Internal Security operation rooms, he told Al-Jadeed TV.

By midday Sunday, a resident donated diesel, allowing the station to get back online, he said. Meanwhile, another neighborhood in east Beirut, Achrafieh, was out of diesel and briefly operated on batteries.

"The situation is unbearable," Kreidieh told the TV station.

Lebanese live with only few hours of state electricity a day and rely on a network of private generators that also depend on diesel fuel. This often leaves neighborhoods in total darkness for hours. Meanwhile, residents have to pay for multiple services, including hefty bills to generator operators, which change regularly as the crisis worsens.

Internet and telecom services already were expensive in Lebanon. In 2019, a tax imposed on WhatsApp services sparked nationwide protests that turned into a denunciation of the entire political elite.

The import-dependent country is also suffering from shortage of medicines, leaving patients dependent on black market, smuggled medicines and donations from Lebanese expats and civil groups.

Lebanon is in the throes of the worst financial and economic crisis in its history that has sunk the once middle-class country into poverty.

The crisis is rooted in years of corruption and mismanagement by the same political class that has ruled for years. Lebanon is running out of foreign reserves and has gradually lifted subsidies on essential goods, including fuel and medicines.

But the government has yet to implement a social safety program or draft a recovery plan to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund.

The crisis caused the national currency to lose more than 90% of its value to the dollar while banks, fearing bankruptcy, have limited people's access to their deposits in local and foreign currency. Meanwhile inflation has soared and prices increased.

The state-owned and other telecommunication companies complain they can't keep up with rising operational costs, including fuel.

"I will not agree to continue in this post unless I have all the authorities and tools to do my job," Kreidieh told Al-Jadeed.

He blamed the service interruption in west Beirut on a civil servant who didn't sign a piece of paper on time to allow him to buy needed diesel. Amid the crisis, many public sector workers have gone on strike, demanding their salaries be adjusted to rising inflation and a collapsing currency.

Kreidieh said his company had to borrow to buy diesel at market rates to keep other stations operating, adding that internet service is also affected outside of Beirut.

Analysis: Novak Djokovic's legal loss is loss for Open, fans

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

Novak Djokovic's loss in a court of law is also a loss for the Australian Open, a loss for tennis fans and a loss for the sport as a whole.

Setting aside, for a moment, everything that led to his deportation from Australia on Sunday — a fundamentally hard-to-fathom reason for any athlete to be forced to sit out any event — who wouldn't want to see the player who dominated men's Grand Slam tennis in 2021 competing for what would be a historic title to begin 2022?

Unaccustomed to defeats on a big stage, especially lately, he could have pursued his 10th trophy at Melbourne Park, which would break his own record, and his 21st overall from all major championships, which would break the men's mark he shares with Rafael Nadal (who is in Australia) and Roger Federer (who is not, following knee surgery).

Instead, when play begins in Australia on Monday (Sunday in the U.S.), 2009 winner Nadal, as it turns out, will be the only past Australian Open champ in the 128-player men's field. And 150th-ranked Salvatore

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Caruso, a 29-year-old from Italy who is on a four-match losing streak in Grand Slam main-draw play and failed to get through qualifying in Melbourne, will be on the line in the bracket where No. 1 Djokovic stood until Sunday's Federal Court decision.

Less than 18 hours before the start of the tournament, a three-judge panel unanimously upheld a government minister's right to cancel Djokovic's visa, ending his last-ditch effort to be able to play and bringing a close to what the ATP Tour rightly called "a deeply regrettable series of events."

This was how Nadal put it on Saturday, when everyone still was awaiting a resolution: "Honestly, I'm a little bit tired of the situation."

At the heart of the 11-day saga was Djokovic's decision not to get vaccinated against COVID-19, which was a requirement for anyone at the Australian Open: players, their coaches and other entourage members, spectators, media members and everyone else on-site, too. More than 95% of all Top 100 men and women in their tours' respective rankings are vaccinated.

Djokovic sought, and initially was granted, a medical exemption, saying that he tested positive for COVID-19 in December. In the end, he was forced to leave Australia because he was seen as someone who could stir up anti-vaccine sentiments in a country, like many others, going through a surge of the omicron variant.

That's a big reason this drew so much attention.

Yes, it involved one of the most successful and famous athletes around, someone who came within one victory of the first calendar-year Grand Slam in men's tennis since 1969. And yes, it involved an intriguing "What will come next?" miniseries that included an eight-hour airport interrogation, a forced four-day stay in an immigration hotel, a handful of court hearings, two cancellations of a superstar's visa, one appeal that was successful and, ultimately, another that was denied.

But as polarizing a figure as Djokovic might be, rightly or wrongly, nothing is as polarizing among some folks these days as the coronavirus pandemic itself and the subject of those who won't get inoculated. It is something that the entire population of the world has a stake in.

What happens next with Djokovic will be fascinating to watch, because there are so many unknowns, at least in part because he hasn't taken questions or spoken to the media at all since his flight landed in Melbourne on Jan. 5.

After Sunday's verdict, he put out a statement saying he was "extremely disappointed" and that he "will now be taking some time to rest and recuperate, before making any further comments beyond this."

He added: "I am uncomfortable that the focus of the past weeks has been on me and I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love."

Nobody knows when he will return to action. Nobody knows which future tournaments might have vaccine requirements. Nobody knows whether Djokovic will ever get vaccinated. Nobody knows how this whole episode might figure into his attempts to form a players' association that could be the closest thing to a union tennis has seen.

And nobody can know for sure, of course, what Djokovic's future in the sport will look like.

Seems safe to count on this, though: Djokovic, the ultimate fighter, never daunted by difficult opponents or match points or antagonistic crowds, will get back to winning when he can get back on a court with a racket in his hands.

Chinese city Xi'an lifts some restrictions after lockdown

BEIJING (AP) — The Chinese city of Xi'an has gradually begun lifting restrictions after over three weeks of lockdown as authorities sought to stamp out a local outbreak before the Beijing Winter Olympic Games are due to start.

State-owned broadcaster CCTV reported Sunday that certain counties and development zones in Xi'an had begun restoring production.

Officials told a news conference that lockdown measures had been either partially or completely lifted in some communities that have been designated as lower risk, allowing people to leave their homes for a

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limited time to purchase daily necessities.

The city went into strict lockdown on Dec. 22, following a coronavirus outbreak that officials attributed to the delta variant. Xi'an, with a population of 13 million and a major tourist site for the famed Terracotta Warriors, has reported over 2,000 infections since December last year.

Xi'an is about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) southwest of Beijing.

China is seeking to stamp out local transmission of the omicron and delta variants with its "zero COVID" policy. Several municipalities and cities in the southern province of Guangdong as well as Beijing have in recent days reported local cases of the more contagious omicron variant.

Beijing reported its first local omicron infection on Saturday, according to state media, just before it hosts the Olympics starting on Feb. 4 and around two weeks before the start of Lunar New Year celebrations.

The infected person lives and works in the city's northwestern district of Haidian and had no travel history outside of Beijing for the past two weeks. The individual experienced symptoms on Thursday and was tested on Friday for COVID-19, officials said in a news conference Saturday.

The patient's residential compound and workplace have been sealed off and authorities are mass-testing people linked to either location. Some 2,430 people had been tested as of Saturday night, according to The Global Times, a state-owned newspaper.

Beijing Daily reported Sunday that the capital will require travelers to take nucleic acid tests within 72 hours of entry starting Jan. 22.

Officials across the country also urged residents to stay in their cities for the new year, instead of traveling back to their hometowns.

China reported 119 new cases on Saturday, of which 65 were domestic. The country has reported 104,864 infections since the beginning of the pandemic.

Djokovic leaving Australia after losing deportation appeal

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic left Australia on Sunday evening after losing his final bid to avoid deportation and play in the Australian Open despite being unvaccinated for COVID-19. A court earlier unanimously dismissed the No. 1-ranked tennis player's challenge to cancel his visa.

Djokovic, a 34-year-old from Serbia, said he was "extremely disappointed" by the ruling but respected it.

A masked Djokovic was photographed in an Melbourne airport lounge with two government officials in black uniforms. He left on an Emirates flight to Dubai, the same United Arab Emirates city he flew to Australia from.

He has won a record nine Australian Open titles, including three in a row, but this time won't even get the chance to try.

"I respect the Court's ruling and I will cooperate with the relevant authorities in relation to my departure from the country," he said in a statement.

Djokovic said he was "uncomfortable" that the focus had been on him since his visa was first canceled on arrival at Melbourne's airport on Jan. 6.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love," he said.

The national federation that runs the tournament, Tennis Australia, said it respects the decision of the Federal Court. "We look forward to a competitive and exciting Australian Open 2022 and wish all players the best of luck," it said in a statement.

A deportation order also usually includes a three-year ban on returning to Australia.

In Serbia, President Aleksandar Vucic said the hearing was "a farce with a lot of lies."

"They think that they humiliated Djokovic with this 10-day harassment, and they actually humiliated themselves. If you said that the one who was not vaccinated has no right to enter, Novak would not come or would be vaccinated," Vucic told reporters.

He said he told Djokovic after talking to him "that we can't wait to see him in Serbia, to return to his country, to come where he is always welcome."

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He did not say whether Djokovic said he would first go to Serbia after his deportation.

Chief Justice James Allsop said the ruling came down to whether the minister's decision was "irrational or legally unreasonable."

Hawke welcomed the decision. His office did not immediately provide detail of how or when Djokovic would leave.

"Australia's strong border protection policies have kept us safe during the pandemic, resulting in one of the lowest death rates, strongest economic recoveries, and highest vaccination rates in the world," Hawke said.

"Strong border protection policies are also fundamental to safe-guarding Australia's social cohesion which continues to strengthen despite the pandemic," he added.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison welcomed what he described as the "decision to keep our borders strong and keep Australians safe."

But opposition spokesperson on the home affairs portfolio, Kristina Keneally, said Djokovic was being deported for what he said and did publicly overseas before the government gave him a visa in November.

"This mess isn't a failure of our laws. It's a failure of Morrison's competence & leadership," Keneally tweeted.

The pandemic response has become politically charged with Morrison's conservative coalition seeking a fourth three-year term at elections due by May.

Infection rates have soared across much of Australia since December when Morrison's government relaxed what had been some of the democratic world's toughest restrictions on international travel.

"I will now be taking some time to rest and to recuperate, before making any further comments beyond this," he said.

The court process that Djokovic had hoped would keep his aspirations alive for a 21st Grand Slam title was extraordinarily fast by Australian standards.

Within three hours of Hawke's announcement on Friday afternoon that Djokovic's visa was canceled, his lawyers went before a Federal Circuit and Family Court judge to initiate their challenge to the decision. The case was elevated to the Federal Court on Saturday and submissions were filed by both sides that same day.

The three judges heard the case over five hours on Sunday and announced their verdict two hours later.

There was evidence that Djokovic was to be deported based on Hawke's assessment that he was considered a "talismán of a community of anti-vaccination sentiment."

Hawke's lawyer Stephen Lloyd took aim at Djokovic's anti-vaccination stance and his "history of ignoring COVID safety measures."

Lloyd raised the example of Djokovic giving a French newspaper journalist an interview last month while he was infected with COVID-19 and taking off his mask during a photo shoot. Djokovic has acknowledged the interview was an error of judgment.

The minister canceled the visa on the grounds that Djokovic's presence in Australia may be a risk to the health and "good order" of the Australian public and "may be counterproductive to efforts at vaccination by others in Australia."

Djokovic's visa was initially canceled on Jan. 6 by a border official who decided he didn't qualify for a medical exemption from Australia's rules for unvaccinated visitors. He was exempted from the tournament's vaccine rules because he had been infected with the virus within the previous six months.

Vasek Pospisil, a Canadian who won the 2014 Wimbledon men's doubles title and has worked with Djokovic to form an association to represent players, tweeted: "There was a political agenda at play here with the (Australian) elections coming up which couldn't be more obvious. This is not his fault. He did not force his way into the country and did not 'make his own rules'; he was ready to stay home."

Pospisil wrote that Djokovic wouldn't have tried to go to Australia at all and "been home with his family" had he not received the medical exemption.

Djokovic has won nine Australian Open titles, including three in a row, and a total of 20 Grand Slam

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singles trophies, tied with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most in the history of men's tennis. Djokovic's dominance of late has been particularly impressive, winning four of the last seven major tournaments and finishing as the runner-up at two others.

The only time he did not get at least to the final in that span was at the 2020 U.S. Open, where he was disqualified in the fourth round for hitting a ball that inadvertently hit a line judge in the throat after a game.

Because Djokovic has withdrawn from the tournament after Monday's schedule was released, he has been replaced in the field by what's known as a "lucky loser" — a player who loses in the qualifying tournament but gets into the main draw because of another player's exit before competition has started.

That player is Italian Salvatore Caruso, who is ranked 150th in the world.

Prince Harry files court claim over UK police protection

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry has filed a claim for a judicial review against the British government's decision not to let him personally pay for police protection while in the U.K.

The Duke of Sussex's legal representative said Saturday that Harry wants to bring his children Archie and Lilibet to visit his home country from the U.S. but that is too risky without police protection.

The representative said Harry wanted to fund the police protection himself. His private security team in the U.S. doesn't have adequate jurisdiction abroad or access to U.K. intelligence information, they said.

"The Duke and Duchess of Sussex personally fund a private security team for their family, yet that security cannot replicate the necessary police protection needed whilst in the U.K.," a statement said.

"In the absence of such protection, Prince Harry and his family are unable to return to his home."

Harry and his wife Meghan lost publicly funded police protection in the U.K. when they stepped down as senior working royals and moved to California in 2020.

The claim to a judicial review was filed in September to challenge the decision-making behind the security procedures.

The statement said Harry's security was "compromised due to the absence of police protection" during a short visit to the U.K. in July, when his car was chased by photographers as he left a charity event.

Harry and Meghan's 7-month-old daughter Lilibet has yet to meet her great-grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, and other members of the royal family.

The statement said Harry first offered to personally pay for U.K. police protection for himself and his family in January 2020, during talks with the queen over the Sussexes' future. The offer was "dismissed," the statement said.

"The goal for Prince Harry has been simple — to ensure the safety of himself and his family while in the UK so his children can know his home country," it said. "The UK will always be Prince Harry's home and a country he wants his wife and children to be safe in."

Britain's government said its security system is "rigorous and proportionate" and declined to comment on details. It also said it was inappropriate to comment on any legal proceedings.

Netanyahu negotiating plea deal in corruption trial

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is negotiating a plea deal in his corruption case, a person involved in the talks said Sunday.

The deal, which could be signed as early as this week, could usher Netanyahu off the Israeli political stage for years, paving the way for a leadership race in his Likud party and shaking up Israeli politics. Any deal could spare Netanyahu an embarrassing and protracted trial over an issue that has gripped the nation and risks tarnishing his legacy.

Reports of a deal angered critics who said it would undermine the rule of law.

"The man who worked to destroy the public's trust in the foundations of democracy for personal reasons is not eligible for deals," Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz tweeted. He was referring to Netanyahu's attempts after he was indicted to cast doubt on Israel's justice system, saying it was biased and pursuing

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a witch hunt against him.

Demonstrators gathered against the developing deal outside the attorney general's house Saturday evening. Any deal will likely be challenged in court.

A spokesman for Netanyahu declined to comment.

Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. The former premier, now opposition leader, denies wrongdoing.

The person involved in the negotiations said the plea deal would drop the bribery and fraud charges and scrap one case entirely.

The person asked for anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the details of the talks. He said a plea deal would likely be announced in the coming days.

The person said a number of elements remained unresolved, including the inclusion of the charge of "moral turpitude," which under Israeli law would ban Netanyahu from politics for seven years. They were also deliberating whether Netanyahu would be forced to do community service under the deal.

Including "moral turpitude" would challenge Netanyahu's vows to return to lead the country after his 12-year reign was ended last year by a coalition of ideologically disparate parties with little in common other than its opposition to his leadership. But Netanyahu, dubbed a political wizard for his ability to survive repeated attempts at ending his rule, could make a comeback when the ban expires. He would be nearly 80.

His departure from the political scene would set off a leadership race in the Likud party, with several lawmakers already promising to run. Likud isn't expected to remain as dominant without Netanyahu, but would still be a major force under a new leader.

With Netanyahu gone, the more nationalist elements of the coalition could decide to break off from the fragile union and opt to join forces with their ideological brethren.

Netanyahu is charged in three separate cases. The first alleges that Netanyahu received gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy associates.

In the second case, Netanyahu is accused of orchestrating positive coverage in a major Israeli paper in exchange for promoting legislation that would have harmed the news outlet's chief rival, a free pro-Netanyahu daily.

The third, nicknamed Case 4000, alleges that Netanyahu promoted legislation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of Israeli telecom giant Bezeq in exchange for positive coverage on its Walla news site.

Pacific tsunami threat recedes, volcano ash hinders response

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The tsunami threat around the Pacific from a huge undersea volcanic eruption began to recede Sunday, but the massive ash cloud covering the tiny island nation of Tonga prevented surveillance flights from New Zealand to assess the extent of damage.

Satellite images showed the spectacular eruption that took place Saturday evening, with a plume of ash, steam and gas rising like a mushroom above the blue Pacific waters. A sonic boom could be heard as far away as Alaska.

In Tonga it sent tsunami waves crashing across the shore and people rushing to higher ground.

The eruption cut the internet to Tonga, leaving friends and family members around the world anxiously trying to get in touch to figure out if there were any injuries. Even government websites and other official sources remained without updates on Sunday afternoon.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said there had not yet been any official reports of injuries or deaths in Tonga, but cautioned that authorities hadn't yet made contact with some coastal areas and smaller islands.

"Communication with Tonga remains very limited. And I know that is causing a huge amount of anxiety for the Tongan community here," Ardern said.

She said there had been significant damage to boats and shops along the Tongan coastline. The capital,

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Nuku'alofa, was covered in a thick film of volcanic dust, Ardern said, contaminating water supplies and making fresh water a vital need.

Aid agencies said thick ash and smoke had prompted authorities to ask people to wear masks and drink bottled water.

Ardern said New Zealand was unable to send a surveillance flight over Tonga on Sunday because the ash cloud was 63,000 feet (19,000 meters) high but they hoped to try again on Monday, followed by supply planes and navy ships.

One complicating factor to any international aid effort is that Tonga has so far managed to avoid any outbreaks of COVID-19. Ardern said New Zealand's military staff were all fully vaccinated and willing to follow any protocols established by Tonga.

Dave Snider, the tsunami warning coordinator for the National Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer, Alaska, said it was very unusual for a volcanic eruption to affect an entire ocean basin, and the spectacle was both "humbling and scary."

The tsunami waves caused damage to boats as far away as New Zealand and Santa Cruz, California, but did not appear to cause any widespread damage. Snider said he anticipated the tsunami situation in the U.S. and elsewhere to continue improving.

Tsunami advisories were earlier issued for Japan, Hawaii, Alaska and the U.S. Pacific coast. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated the eruption caused the equivalent of a magnitude 5.8 earthquake. Scientists said tsunamis generated by volcanoes rather than earthquakes are relatively rare.

Rachel Afeaki-Taumoepeau, who chairs the New Zealand Tonga Business Council, said she hoped the relatively low level of the tsunami waves would have allowed most people to get to safety, although she worried about those living on islands closest to the volcano. She said she hadn't yet been able to contact her friends and family in Tonga.

"We are praying that the damage is just to infrastructure and people were able to get to higher land," she said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote on Twitter he is "deeply concerned for the people of Tonga as they recover from the aftermath of a volcanic eruption and tsunami. The United States stands prepared to provide support to our Pacific neighbors."

Tonga gets its internet via an undersea cable from Suva, Fiji. All internet connectivity with Tonga was lost at about 6:40 p.m. local time Saturday, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network intelligence firm Kentik.

On Tonga, which is home to about 105,000 people, video posted to social media showed large waves washing ashore in coastal areas and swirling around homes, a church and other buildings. A Twitter user identified as Dr. Faka'iloatonga Taumoe'olau posted video showing waves crashing ashore.

"Can literally hear the volcano eruption, sounds pretty violent," he wrote, adding in a later post: "Raining ash and tiny pebbles, darkness blanketing the sky."

The explosion of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano, about 64 kilometers (40 miles) north of Nuku'alofa, was the latest in a series of dramatic eruptions. In late 2014 and early 2015, eruptions created a small new island and disrupted international air travel to the Pacific archipelago for several days.

Earth imaging company Planet Labs PBC had watched the island in recent days after a new volcanic vent began erupting in late December. Satellite images showed how drastically the volcano had shaped the area, creating a growing island off Tonga.

"The surface area of the island appears to have expanded by nearly 45% due to ashfall," Planet Labs said days before the latest activity.

Following Saturday's eruption, residents in Hawaii, Alaska and along the U.S. Pacific coast were advised to move away from the coastline to higher ground.

Savannah Peterson watched in shock as the water rose several feet in a matter of minutes in front of her oceanfront house in Pacifica, California, just south of San Francisco.

"It came up so fast, and a few minutes after that it was down again. It was nuts to see that happen so

quickly," she said. "I've never had water come all the way up to my front door, and today it did."

Police rescued a surfer whose board broke in powerful waves off San Francisco. In Southern California, surging waters sunk at least one boat in Ventura Harbor northwest of Los Angeles.

Tesla inks deal to get key battery component outside China

By TOM BOWKER and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Tesla is turning to Mozambique for a key component in its electric car batteries in what analysts believe is a first-of-its-kind deal designed to reduce its dependence on China for graphite.

Elon Musk's company signed an agreement last month with Australia's Syrah Resources, which operates one of the world's largest graphite mines in the southern African country. It's a unique partnership between an electric vehicle manufacturer and a producer of the mineral that is critical for lithium-ion batteries. The value of the deal hasn't been released.

Tesla will buy the material from the company's processing plant in Vidalia, Louisiana, which sources graphite from its mine in Balama, Mozambique. The Austin, Texas-based electric automaker plans to buy up 80% of what the plant produces — 8,000 tons of graphite per year — starting in 2025, according to the agreement. Syrah must prove the material meets Tesla's standards.

The deal is part of Tesla's plan to ramp up its capacity to make its own batteries so it can reduce its dependence on China, which dominates global graphite markets, said Simon Moores of United Kingdom-based battery materials data and intelligence provider, Benchmark Mineral Intelligence.

"It starts at the top with geopolitics," Moores said. "The U.S. wants to build enough capacity domestically to be able to build (lithium-ion batteries) within the USA. And this deal will permit Tesla to source graphite independent from China."

Moores said producing the batteries in the U.S. will reduce some of the questions Tesla is facing about its ties to China, where there are environmental concerns at some mines. The automaker also has set up a showroom in the region of Xinjiang, where Chinese officials are accused of forced labor and other human rights abuses against mostly Muslim ethnic minorities.

A message was left seeking comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department.

The battery industry has been confronted with a short supply of graphite in recent months, Moores said. Graphite stores lithium inside a battery until it's needed to generate electricity by splitting into charged ions and electrons.

It comes as every major automaker is racing to get into electric vehicles amid concerns about climate change.

Tesla is making almost a million electric cars per year, and sourcing enough batteries is its biggest constraint, he said.

"They've upped their own battery manufacturing capacity," Moores said, but still "they can't get enough batteries."

A new battery factory that the company is building in its new hometown of Austin, Texas, will allow it to get closer to self-sufficiency, but Moores said it is still buying batteries from other manufacturers, "and that won't change this decade."

For instance, Tesla has a deal with Panasonic to make battery cells at the automaker's battery factory near Reno, Nevada.

The deal with Syrah is part of a broader effort by automakers to secure relatively scarce raw materials for batteries as demand for electric vehicles is expected to grow, said Sam Abuelsamid, principal e-mobility analyst for Guidehouse Insights.

The deal also brings the graphite processed in Louisiana much closer to Tesla's U.S. factories.

"The pandemic pointed out to us that we've got these long, long, long supply chains, and it doesn't take much to disrupt a supply chain," said Donald Sadoway, a professor of materials chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Somebody could all of the sudden say, 'We're going to jack up the prices,' or 'We're going to refuse to ship it.'"

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It's unlikely that the Tesla deal with Syrah will rankle the Chinese government because China has plenty of markets for its graphite, including increased domestic electric vehicle production, Abuelsamid said.

China, though, is Tesla's biggest global market. It has a giant factory near Shanghai and sells about 450,000 vehicles per year there, compared with about 350,000 in the U.S., Abuelsamid said.

For the Australian mining firm, the deal is "crucial" because it has a non-Chinese purchaser for its graphite product, Moores said.

Syrah's graphite mine in Mozambique's northernmost province, Cabo Delgado, is one of the world's largest, with an ability to produce 350,000 tons of flake graphite a year.

Cabo Delgado has faced violence in recent years by Islamic extremists, an insurgency that has recently extended inland from coastal areas toward the neighboring Niassa province.

The mine is on the main road connecting the Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces, a thoroughfare that has been recently upgraded by a Chinese contractor. At a ceremony to reopen the road in December, President Filipe Nyusi called for vigilance so the road isn't used by insurgents. ____

Tom Krisher reported from Detroit.

Ethiopian diaspora torn by ethnic tensions in Tigray war

By HELINA SELEMON Associated Press

Thousands of miles away from the war in Ethiopia, the ethnic cracks have started to show in an Ethiopian church in Ohio, in a lawsuit between trustees and clergy.

The original trustees of the Holy Trinity Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Columbus have accused its clergy of switching the language of services from Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, to Tigrinya, the language of the Tigray region. They say the clergy is taking sides in a war between Tigray leaders and the Amhara, allied with the Ethiopian government, with an estimated tens of thousands of dead.

The clergy in the church in Columbus, which is home to about 40,000 Ethiopian-Americans, says Tigrinya was added on as a language rather than replacing Amharic to better reach the congregation. Church leaders say the changes weren't political in nature.

The tensions in the church reflect how the war in Ethiopia has fueled divides across the more than 3 million members of the diaspora.

"The Ethiopian social fabric ... has been torn apart," said Tewodros Tirfe, chairman of the Amhara Association of America, based in North Carolina.

The war started a little over a year ago, when a political dispute between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray leaders erupted into violence after a dispute over elections. It has now spiraled to the point where some Tigrayans are starving under a government blockade and atrocities have been reported on all sides, with the worst and most to date reported against Tigrayan civilians.

The conflict entered a new phase in late December when the Tigray forces withdrew into the Tigray region after approaching the capital, Addis Ababa, but are being pushed back by a drone-supported military offensive.

Deep disagreements about the nature and even the facts of the conflict are splintering families, friends and communities in the diaspora. Some consider themselves supporters of Tigray or of its political leaders, who belong to a party called the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, or TPLF. They argue that Tigrayans are being threatened with genocide — profiled, persecuted and killed for their ethnicity.

Saba Desta, who works in health insurance in New York, worries that ordinary people are being forgotten. Desta said she's tried to get her parents out of the northern city of Shire in Tigray, but her father is ill and unable to leave without a nurse's assistance.

"It's been breaking me, reading the reports of closing of hospitals and health centers, the restricted access to medicine," she said. "I can only believe that he's OK, that he's alive. I only have this hope to bank on."

Desta said five of her cousins, all brothers, were shot to death in front of their elderly mother by the military from neighboring Eritrea, which has been in Tigray alongside Ethiopian soldiers. Their mother died shortly after "from heartbreak," she said.

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"I'm so numb," she said. "I can't even cry anymore."

Other Ethiopians see this as a necessary war against Tigray leaders, who once ruled Ethiopia and were accused of human rights abuses while growing the country's economy.

The former ruling coalition, dominated by Tigray leaders representing 6% of the nation, appointed Abiy as prime minister in 2018, a choice largely celebrated by Ethiopians across the globe as a step towards peace and unity. Abiy transformed the federal coalition into a single Prosperity Party, and Tigrayan leaders later withdrew. Many Ethiopians feel that Tigray leaders are angry because Abiy leads with more than Tigray's interests in mind as he seeks to centralize power.

"I had been there since they were established and I had seen their plans when I was very young, and that never changed," said Teferi Zemene, a Toronto-based union organizer who grew up watching the TPLF rise to power three decades ago.

Zemene returned to Canada recently after 2½ months in Ethiopia. He visited his hometown of Dabat, about 75 kilometers (45 miles) from the northern Amhara city of Gondar, and asserted that it was destroyed by Tigray forces.

"If you see Dabat now, you would cry. They devastated the place. There's no place to even rest," he said.

Zemene said he lost relatives in the war and that he felt "the need to fight." He and other Ethiopians who oppose the Tigray forces have expressed concern that the international community and even foreign media are bent on promoting intervention by the U.S.

"We should be able to solve our problems ourselves," he said. "We didn't ask for any help."

The complexity of the war has made some rethink their position on it. Ethiopian-American journalist and activist Hermela Aregawi advocated for humanitarian work to help Tigray in the early days, but eventually distanced herself from those fundraising efforts when she felt they became politically motivated in favor of Tigrayan leaders.

"I'm Tigrayan, I care about Tigrayans, I care about Ethiopians as a whole," Aregawi said.

Negasi Beyene, a biostatistician and human rights activist in Washington, feels similarly. "My motto is, 'humanity before ethnicity,'" he said.

Growing up in Mekele, the capital of Tigray, during an earlier war, Beyene felt pressured to choose between the TPLF and other political groups when he was just 17 years old and kids his age were either killed or recruited to fight. He ultimately sided against the TPLF, and holds what he considers a minority view among Tigrayans that they started the current war.

"My sister, brother, I don't talk to them," he said. "Because they think TPLF is doing good ... Maybe the TPLF idea – if you're not with us, you're against us – has penetrated all of society."

A year into the war, there's no clear end in sight. Some support the independence of Tigray, while others don't want to see Ethiopia torn apart.

Adem Kassie Abebe, a program officer at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in the Netherlands, said that for each side, the anger and longtime grievances are real.

"Saying 'I understand you're angry,' that would go a long way (for) both sides," he said. "That opens a channel."

Tirfe of the Amhara Association of America blames the war on a federalist governing system that ties the country's dozens of ethnicities to land and power, pitting them against each other. So long as Ethiopia has this system, he said, "there will be another war."

What he and others note, though, is that more Ethiopians are now determined to be heard.

"It's good to see so many Ethiopians actively involved," he said. "We're not coming (together) as one, but hopefully one day. We'll be a force."

Typhoons, wildfires, missiles: Teen flies solo round world

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Avoid typhoon in the Philippines. Check.

Steer clear of massive California wildfires. Check.

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Keep away from test missiles in North Korea. What? Wait.

As teenage pilot Zara Rutherford flew ever onward in a record-challenging global odyssey, she met little as strange or scary as when she tried to squeeze in between North Korean airspace and a massive cloud threatening to cut off passage for her ultralight plane.

"Well, they test missiles once in a while without warning," Rutherford said. More importantly, she was just 15 minutes from flying over one of the last places one should enter uninvited.

So she radioed her control team to ask if she could cut the corner over the isolationist communist dictatorship to get to Seoul. "Straight away they said: 'Whatever you do, do not go into North Korean airspace!'" Fortunately the clouds cooperated enough and she didn't have to continue the crash course in applied geopolitics.

At the age of 19, she is set to land her single-seater Shark sport aircraft in Kortrijk, Belgium, on Monday, more than 150 days after setting out to become the youngest woman to circumnavigate the world solo. American aviator Shaesta Waiz was 30 when she set the previous benchmark.

Flying runs in her blood since both her parents are pilots and she has been traveling in small planes since she was 6. At 14, she started flying herself and about 130 hours of solo flights prepped her for the record attempt, which she hopes will also have a bigger meaning.

With the final touchdown in a plane that looks like a fly among the giants parked at an airport like New York's JFK, the Belgian-British teenager wants to infuse young women and girls worldwide with the spirit of aviation — and an enthusiasm for studies in the exact sciences, mathematics, engineering and technology.

Two mathematical statistic stands out for her — only 5% of commercial pilots and 15% of computer scientists are women.

"The gender gap is huge," she said.

Yet once the canopy closed over her cockpit and another six- to eight-hour flight began, lofty thoughts of global outreach receded as she concentrated on one lonely individual — herself.

Using Visual Flight Rules, basically going on sight only, danger lurked even closer than when she would be able to use fancy navigational instruments to lead her through the night, clouds or fog.

Crossing northern California from Palo Alto towards Seattle, she headed into the huge wildfires blighting the area. The higher she climbed to avoid the smoke — up to 10,000 feet — the tougher it was to keep her eyes on the ground.

"The smoke was building up and up, to the point that the whole cabin stank of smoke and I could not see anything but a burnished orange color," Rutherford said. She had to abort her route and make an unscheduled landing in Redding, California.

Over Siberia, the light played tricks on her vision, sometimes casting doubt whether she saw mountains or clouds. "And for me clouds are a really big deal. Especially in Russia," with its biting cold. Cutting through such clouds, too much ice might build up on her wings, paralyzing control. "At that point your plane is no longer a plane," she said.

That, or any other mishap, could have happened on a section of the route where she once saw only one village in six hours.

"I realized if something goes wrong, I'm hours and hours and hours away from rescue and it was -35 C (-31 F) on the ground. And so I thought, actually, I don't know how long I can survive -35," Rutherford said. She didn't have to find out.

The project would have been tough enough in normal times, but the pandemic added another complication — which indirectly led to the North Korean adventure.

Alternative plans to go over China to Seoul were ditched when the Chinese refused permission citing COVID-19, which, Rutherford said, "was slightly frustrating because I'm in the plane at 6,000 feet (around 1,800 meters). I'd be very impressed if I could pass on COVID like this."

Overall, bad weather, a flat tire and visa issues added another two months to the planned three-month project. The Associated Press spoke to Rutherford by telephone in Crete, Greece, and even there, the weather over the Balkans was so awful it delayed her for days.

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Which gave her time to ponder the fickleness of fate. "When you're fearing for your life, it puts things into perspective a little bit more," she said. "I mean, a cloud — a cloud — could kill me."

In wealthy nations, "we grow up in a world with a huge amount of safety nets," she said. "Actually flying over Alaska, Russia or Greenland, that's when you realize — actually, there is no safety net. Like, this is really just me. There's nobody here to help me if anything is wrong."

The wider world though, which by now has become "this small planet" to her, turned out to hold out much more than fear. She spoke dreamily of the Saudi Arabian desert with its changing colors of sand and rock, the barrenness of northern Alaska, the huge circular Apple Park in Cupertino, California, or the sight of what's been called the world's loneliest house on Iceland's deserted island of Ellioaey.

And she's come to appreciate some simpler pleasures too.

"Before, it was — yeah — it was about the grand adventure," she said. "But actually I think, you know, watching TV with your cat has its special things as well. It is very unique as well."

Omicron exposes inflexibility of Europe's public hospitals

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

STRASBOURG, France (AP) — A World Health Organization official warned last week of a "closing window of opportunity" for European countries to prevent their health care systems from being overwhelmed as the omicron variant produces near-vertical growth in coronavirus infections.

In France, Britain and Spain, nations with comparatively strong national health programs, that window may already be closed.

The director of an intensive care unit at a hospital in Strasbourg is turning patients away. A surgeon at a London hospital describes a critical delay in a man's cancer diagnosis. Spain is seeing its determination to prevent a system collapse tested as omicron keeps medical personnel off work.

"There are a lot of patients we can't admit, and it's the non-COVID patients who are the collateral victims of all this," said Dr. Julie Helms, who runs the ICU at Strasbourg University Hospital in far eastern France.

Two years into the pandemic, with the exceptionally contagious omicron impacting public services of various kinds, the variant's effect on medical facilities has many reevaluating the resilience of public health systems that are considered essential to providing equal care.

The problem, experts say, is that few health systems built up enough flexibility to handle a crisis like the coronavirus before it emerged, while repeated infection spikes have kept the rest too preoccupied to implement changes during the long emergency.

Hospital admissions per capita right now are as high in France, Italy and Spain as they were last spring, when the three countries had lockdowns or other restrictive measures in place. England's hospitalization rate of people with COVID-19 for the week ending Jan. 9 was slightly higher than it was in early February 2021, before most residents were vaccinated.

This time, there are no lockdowns. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, a population health research organization based at the University of Washington, predicts that more than half of the people in WHO Europe's 53-country region will be infected with omicron within two months.

That includes doctors, nurses and technicians at public hospitals.

About 15% of the Strasbourg hospital system's staff of 13,000 was out this week. In some hospitals, the employee absentee rate is 20%. Schedules are made and reset to plug gaps; patients whose needs aren't critical must wait.

The French public hospital's 26 ICU beds are almost all occupied by unvaccinated patients, people "who refuse care, who refuse the medicine or who demand medicines that have no effectiveness," Helms said.

She denied 12 requests for admission Tuesday, and 10 on Wednesday night.

"When you have three patients for a single bed, we try to take the one who has the best odds of benefiting from it," Helms said.

In Britain, like France, omicron is causing cracks in the health system even though the variant appears to cause milder illness than its predecessors. The British government this month assigned military personnel, including medics, to fill in at London hospitals, adding to the ranks of service members already helping

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administer vaccines and operate ambulances.

At the Royal Free Hospital in London, Dr. Leye Ajayi described a patient who faced delays in his initial cancer diagnosis.

"Unfortunately, when we eventually got round to seeing the patient, his cancer had already spread," Ajayi told Sky News. "So we're now dealing with a young patient in his mid-50s who, perhaps if we'd seen him a year ago, could have offered curative surgery. We're now dealing with palliative care."

Nearly 13,000 patients in England were forced to wait on stretchers more than 12 hours before a hospital bed opened, according to figures released last week from the National Health Service.

Britain has a backlog of around 5.9 million people awaiting cancer screenings, scheduled surgeries and other planned care. Some experts estimate that figure could double in the next three years.

"We need to focus on why performance has continued to fall and struggle for years and build the solutions to drive improvement in both the short and long term," said Dr. Tim Cooksley, president of the Society for Acute Medicine.

Having the capacity to accommodate a surge is crucial, and it's just this surge capacity that many in Europe were surprised to learn their countries lacked. The people in a position to turn that around were the same ones dealing with the crisis daily.

In the midst of the first wave, in April 2020, WHO's Europe office put out a how-to guide for health systems to build slack into their systems for new outbreaks, including identifying a temporary health workforce.

"Despite the fact that countries thought they were prepared for a pandemic that might come along, they were not. So it's building the ship as it sails," said Dr. David Heymann, who previously led the World Health Organization's infectious diseases department.

But France had been cutting back hospital beds — and doctors and nurses — for years before the pandemic. Building it back up in a matter of months proved too much when the current wave infected hospital staff by the hundreds each day. Even allowing symptomatic COVID-19-positive health workers to report for work hasn't been enough.

Britain's NHS Confederation, a membership organization for sponsors and providers, says the public health service went into the pandemic with a shortage of 100,000 health workers that has only worsened.

The first wave of the pandemic pushed Spain's health system to its limit. Hospitals improvised ways to treat more patients by setting up ICUs in operating rooms, gymnasiums and libraries. The public witnessed, appalled, retirees dying in nursing homes without ever being taken to state hospitals that were already well over capacity.

After that, the Spanish government vowed not to let such a collapse happen again. Working with regional health departments, it designed what officials call "elasticity plans" to deal with sudden variations in service demands, especially in ICUs.

The idea is that hospitals have the equipment and, in theory, the personnel, to increase capacity depending on the need. But critics of government health policy say they've warned for years of inadequate hospital staffing, a key driver of the difficulty delivering care in the current wave.

"The key thing is flexibility, having flexible buildings that can expand, having staff that are flexible in terms of accepting task shifting, having flexibility in terms of sharing loads more of a regional structure," said Dr. Martin McKee, a public health professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Ultimately, though, McKee said: "A bed is an item of furniture. What counts is the staff around it," McKee said.

Helms, the Strasbourg intensive care doctor, knows that all too well. Her unit has space for 30 beds. But it has only enough staff to care for the patients in the 26 beds currently occupied, a situation unlikely to change quickly after omicron burns through the region.

In the same hospital's infectious diseases unit, frantic schedulers are borrowing staff from elsewhere in the facility, even if it means non-COVID-19 patients get less care.

"We're still in the middle of a complex epidemic that is changing every day. It's hard to imagine what we need to build for the future for other epidemics, but we're going to have to reflect on the system of how we organize care," said Dr. Nicolas Lefebvre, who runs the infectious diseases unit at the Strasbourg hospital.

He said Europe is prepared to handle isolated outbreaks as it has in the past, but the pandemic has exposed weakened foundations across entire health systems, even those considered among the world's best.

Frédéric Valletoux, the head of the French Hospital Federation, said policymakers at the national level are acutely aware of the problem now. For 2022, the federation has requested more resources from nursing staff on up.

"The difficulty in our system is to shake things up, especially when we're in the heart of the crisis," Valletoux said.

Hostages safe after Texas synagogue standoff; captor dead

By JAKE BLEIBERG, ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

COLLEYVILLE, Texas (AP) — Four hostages are safe and their captor is dead after an hourslong standoff that began when the man took over services at a Texas synagogue where he could be heard ranting on a livestream and demanding the release of a Pakistani neuroscientist who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. Army officers in Afghanistan.

One hostage held Saturday at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville was released during the standoff; three others got out about 9 p.m. when an FBI SWAT team entered the building, authorities said. The hostage taker was killed and FBI Special Agent in Charge Matt DeSarno said a team would investigate "the shooting incident."

Video from Dallas TV station WFAA shows people running out a door of the synagogue, and then a man holding a gun opening the same door just seconds later, before he turns around and closes the door. Moments later, several rounds of gunfire can be heard, followed by the sound of an explosion.

FBI and police spokeswomen declined to answer questions about who shot the man.

DeSarno said the hostage taker was specifically focused on an issue not directly connected to the Jewish community, and there was no immediate indication that the man was part of any broader plan. But DeSarno said the agency's investigation "will have global reach."

It wasn't clear why the attacker chose the synagogue.

Law enforcement officials who were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity earlier said that the hostage-taker demanded the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaida. He also said he wanted to be able to speak with her, according to the officials. Siddiqui is in federal prison in Texas.

DeSarno said Saturday night that the man had been identified "but we are not prepared to release his identity or confirm his identity at this time."

A rabbi in New York City received a call from the rabbi believed to be held hostage in the synagogue to demand Siddiqui's release, a law enforcement official said. The New York rabbi then called 911.

Police were first called to the synagogue around 11 a.m. and people were evacuated from the surrounding neighborhood soon after that, FBI Dallas spokeswoman Katie Chaumont said.

Saturday's services were being livestreamed on the synagogue's Facebook page for a time. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that an angry man could be heard ranting and talking about religion at times during the livestream, which didn't show what was happening inside the synagogue.

Shortly before 2 p.m., the man said, "You got to do something. I don't want to see this guy dead." Moments later, the feed cut out. A Meta company spokesperson later confirmed that Facebook removed the video.

Multiple people heard the hostage-taker refer to Siddiqui as his "sister" on the livestream. But John Floyd, board chair for the Houston chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, — the nation's largest Muslim advocacy group — said Siddiqui's brother, Mohammad Siddiqui, was not involved.

"This assailant has nothing to do with Dr. Aafia, her family, or the global campaign to get justice for Dr. Aafia. We want the assailant to know that his actions are wicked and directly undermine those of us who are seeking justice for Dr. Aafia," said Floyd, who also is legal counsel for Mohammad Siddiqui. "We have confirmed that the family member being wrongly accused of this heinous act is not near the DFW Metro

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area.”

Texas resident Victoria Francis told the AP that she watched about an hour of the livestream before it cut out. She said she heard the man rant against America and claim he had a bomb.

“He was just all over the map. He was pretty irritated and the more irritated he got, he’d make more threats, like ‘I’m the guy with the bomb. If you make a mistake, this is all on you.’ And he’d laugh at that,” she said. “He was clearly in extreme distress.”

Francis, who grew up near Colleyville, tuned in after she read about the hostage situation. She said it sounded like the man was talking to the police department on the phone, with the rabbi and another person trying to help with the negotiations.

Colleyville, a community of about 26,000 people, is about 15 miles (23 kilometers) northeast of Fort Worth. The synagogue is nestled among large houses in a leafy residential neighborhood that includes several churches, a middle and elementary school and a horse farm.

Congregation Beth Israel is led by Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who has been there since 2006 as the synagogue’s first full-time rabbi. He has worked to bring a sense of spirituality, compassion and learning to the community, according to his biography, and he loves welcoming everyone, including LGBT people, into the congregation.

Anna Salton Eisen, a founder and former president of the synagogue, said the congregation has about 140 members and Cytron-Walker has worked hard to build interfaith relationships in the community, including doing pulpit swaps and participating in a community peace walk. She described Saturday’s events as “surreal.”

“This is unlike anything we’ve ever experienced. You know, it’s a small town and it’s a small congregation,” Eisen said as the hostage situation was ongoing. “No matter how it turns out it’s hard to fathom how we will all be changed by this, because surely we will be.”

President Joe Biden issued a statement thanking law enforcement after the hostage situation ended.

“There is more we will learn in the days ahead about the motivations of the hostage taker. But let me be clear to anyone who intends to spread hate—we will stand against anti-Semitism and against the rise of extremism in this country,” Biden said.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Twitter that he had been monitoring the situation closely. “This event is a stark reminder that antisemitism is still alive and we must continue to fight it worldwide,” he wrote. He said he was “relieved and thankful” that the hostages were rescued.

The standoff had prompted increased security in other places, including New York City, where police said that they had increased their presence “at key Jewish institutions” out of an abundance of caution.

Siddiqui earned advanced degrees from Brandeis University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before she was sentenced in 2010 to 86 years in prison on charges that she assaulted and shot at U.S. Army officers after being detained in Afghanistan two years earlier. The punishment sparked outrage in Pakistan among political leaders and her supporters, who viewed her as victimized by the American criminal justice system.

In the years since, Pakistan officials have expressed interest publicly in any sort of deal or swap that could result in her release from U.S. custody, and her case has continued to draw attention from supporters. In 2018, for instance, an Ohio man who prosecutors say planned to fly to Texas and attack the prison where Siddiqui is being held in an attempt to free her was sentenced to 22 years in prison.

Allen-led Bills throttle division rival Patriots, 47-17

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — The lingering sting of being embarrassed on home turf by the New England Patriots didn’t sit well with defensive end Jerry Hughes and the Buffalo Bills.

On Saturday night, the Bills did something about it by erasing any doubt of who now rules the AFC East.

Josh Allen set a team playoff record with five touchdown passes, including two to Dawson Knox, and Devin Singletary ran for two scores in the first half of a 47-17 throttling of the division-rival Patriots in a

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wild-card playoff game.

Meanwhile, Hughes was part of a defense that ended Mac Jones' rookie season by intercepting him twice, sacking him three times and limiting him to throwing two mean-nothing touchdown passes in the second half with the game well out of reach.

In defeating the Patriots for the second time in three weeks, Hughes noted he was motivated by how reporters specifically questioned safeties Jordan Poyer and Micah Hyde as being embarrassed following a 14-10 loss on Dec. 6. It was a game in which the Patriots attempted just three passes while trampling Buffalo's defense with 222 yards rushing to counter wind gusts of 30-plus mph.

"There was a lot of disrespect coming toward our defense. And so we felt like the only way to shut people up is to go out there and play football and let you guys sit and watch and talk," Hughes said. "And that's what we're doing right now, playing football."

The margin of defeat was the largest in the playoffs for New England in coach Bill Belichick's tenure, which began in 2000.

And while the winds were relatively calm Saturday, the Bills were hot in frigid conditions, with a game-time temperature of 7 degrees.

Allen finished 21 of 25 for 308 yards in a game Buffalo became the NFL's first team in the Super Bowl era to score on each of its seven possessions that didn't end with a kneelown.

"That sounds like some Pop Warner stuff," defensive tackle Harrison Phillips said.

No need to remind Patriots linebacker Matthew Judon.

"Shoot, every drive we couldn't get a stop was frustrating," Judon said. "It wasn't only one play. It wasn't one, single player. It was everything. It was the whole game."

The Allen-led offense was so efficient it gained 480 yards offense on just 51 snaps before backup Mitchell Trubisky finished the game with three kneelowns.

"I think we feel good," Allen said. "There's some things that we can clean up and work on. But at the end of the day, we moved on, we're on to the next one and it doesn't matter what we did today. It's what we do next week."

The third-seeded Bills advanced to the divisional round to host either the Cincinnati Bengals, who beat the Raiders earlier in the day, or travel to Kansas City, depending on the outcome of the Chiefs game against Pittsburgh on Sunday. A trip to Kansas City would feature a rematch of last year's AFC championship game, which the Chiefs won 38-24.

The 30-point margin of victory and 47 points scored were the second most by the Bills in a playoff game behind a 51-3 win over the Los Angeles Raiders in the AFC championship game on Jan. 20, 1991.

The game was essentially over at halftime, when Buffalo gained 300 yards of total offense, had 19 first downs and built a 27-3 lead.

The Bills rolled into the postseason by winning their final four games to clinch their second consecutive division title. After losing 35 of 40 meetings to New England from 2000 to 2019, Buffalo has now defeated the Patriots in four of the past five meetings, coinciding with Tom Brady's departure to Tampa Bay.

The Patriots limped into the playoffs by losing three of their last four, and were effectively outclassed in Jones' postseason debut.

"Get ready to go next year. There's nothing we can do now that can change the outcome of what happened tonight or whatever, the last, since December," center David Andrews said. "It's frustrating. It's disappointing. Missed opportunity. It's fleeting."

New England's previous worst playoff loss under Belichick was a 33-14 defeat to Baltimore also in the wild-card round on Jan. 10, 2010.

Jones struggled in finishing 24 of 38 for 232 yards with two touchdowns to Kendrick Bourne, including a 4-yarder in the final two minutes. Jones was also intercepted twice in closing his season with a combined seven touchdowns passing and seven interceptions in his final five outings.

The Bills put the Patriots on their heels from the opening drive, with Allen patiently waiting in the pocket before scrambling to his right and avoiding a sack. Before stepping out of bounds, Allen lobbed an 8-yard

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pass to a wide-open Knox in the back right corner of the end zone.

Buffalo's defense then snuffed out the Patriots' opening drive with Hyde having the speed and angle to make a leaping interception in snatching the ball away just before Nelson Agholor was about to catch it in the end zone. Jones was also intercepted on New England's opening drive of the second half, when his pass intended for Hunter Henry was deflected by linebacker Matt Milano and picked off by Levi Wallace.

FOLK FEST

Nick Folk's 44-yard field goal with 1 second left in the first half extended his streak to 56 attempts made from under 50 yards. That matched the NFL record set by Tennessee's Ryan Succop, whose mark spanned the 2014-17 seasons. Folk hasn't missed a field goal attempt of 49 yards or less since missing a 45-yarder in the 2020 season opener against Miami.

BRRRRR

The game was the fourth-coldest in Bills history with a game-time temperature of 7 degrees, and the wind-chill making it feel like minus-4.

The coldest game was played 28 years ago to the day in Buffalo's 29-23 win over the then-Los Angeles Raiders 29-23 in a divisional playoff game en route to the Bills make their fourth consecutive — and last — Super Bowl appearance. The game-time temperature was zero, with the wind-chill making the conditions feel like minus-32.

UP NEXT

Patriots: Season over.

Bills: Travel to face either Kansas City Chiefs or host the Cincinnati Bengals.

Tsunami threat recedes from huge Pacific volcanic eruption

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The tsunami threat around the Pacific from a huge undersea volcanic eruption began to recede Sunday, while the extent of damage to Tonga remained unclear.

Satellite images showed the spectacular eruption that took place Saturday evening, with a plume of ash, steam and gas rising like a mushroom above the blue Pacific waters. A sonic boom could be heard as far away as Alaska.

In Tonga it sent tsunami waves crashing across the shore and people rushing to higher ground.

The eruption cut the internet to Tonga, leaving friends and family members around the world anxiously trying to get in touch to figure out if there were any injuries and the extent of the damage. Even government websites and other official sources remained without updates on Sunday afternoon.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said there had not yet been any official reports of injuries or deaths in Tonga, but cautioned that authorities hadn't yet made contact with some coastal areas and smaller islands.

"Communication with Tonga remains very limited. And I know that is causing a huge amount of anxiety for the Tongan community here," Ardern said.

She said there had been significant damage to boats and shops along the Tongan coastline. The capital, Nuku'alofa, was covered in a thick film of volcanic dust, Ardern said, contaminating water supplies and making fresh water a vital need.

Aid agencies said thick ash and smoke had prompted authorities to ask people to wear masks and drink bottled water.

Ardern said New Zealand was unable to send a military surveillance flight over Tonga on Sunday because the ash cloud was 63,000 feet (19,000 meters) high but they hoped to send the flight on Monday, followed by supply planes and navy ships.

One complicating factor to any international aid effort is that Tonga has so far managed to avoid any outbreaks of COVID-19. Ardern said New Zealand's military staff were all fully vaccinated and willing to follow any protocols established by Tonga.

Dave Snider, the tsunami warning coordinator for the National Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer, Alaska,

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said it was very unusual for a volcanic eruption to affect an entire ocean basin, and the spectacle was both "humbling and scary."

The tsunami waves caused damage to boats as far away as New Zealand and Santa Cruz, California, but did not appear to cause any widespread damage. Snider said he anticipated the tsunami situation in the U.S. and elsewhere to continue improving.

Tsunami advisories were earlier issued for Japan, Hawaii, Alaska and the U.S. Pacific coast. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated the eruption caused the equivalent of a magnitude 5.8 earthquake. Scientists said tsunamis generated by volcanoes rather than earthquakes are relatively rare.

The Tonga Meteorological Services said a tsunami warning was declared for all of the archipelago, and data from the Pacific tsunami center said waves of 80 centimeters (2.7 feet) were detected.

Rachel Afeaki-Taumoepeau, who chairs the New Zealand Tonga Business Council, said she hoped the relatively low level of the tsunami waves would have allowed most people to get to safety, although she worried about those living on islands closest to the volcano. She said she hadn't yet been able to contact her friends and family in Tonga.

"We are praying that the damage is just to infrastructure and people were able to get to higher land," she said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote on Twitter he is "deeply concerned for the people of Tonga as they recover from the aftermath of a volcanic eruption and tsunami. The United States stands prepared to provide support to our Pacific neighbors."

Tonga gets its internet via an undersea cable from Suva, Fiji. All internet connectivity with Tonga was lost at about 6:40 p.m. local time, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network intelligence firm Kentik.

On Tonga, which is home to about 105,000 people, video posted to social media showed large waves washing ashore in coastal areas and swirling around homes, a church and other buildings. A Twitter user identified as Dr. Faka'iloatonga Taumoe'olau posted video showing waves crashing ashore.

"Can literally hear the volcano eruption, sounds pretty violent," he wrote, adding in a later post: "Raining ash and tiny pebbles, darkness blanketing the sky."

The explosion of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano was the latest in a series of dramatic eruptions. Earth imaging company Planet Labs PBC had watched the island in recent days after a new volcanic vent there began erupting in late December.

Satellite images captured by the company show how drastically the volcano had shaped the area, creating a growing island off Tonga.

"The surface area of the island appears to have expanded by nearly 45% due to ashfall," Planet Labs said days before the latest activity.

Following Saturday's eruption, residents in Hawaii, Alaska and along the U.S. Pacific coast were advised to move away from the coastline to higher ground and to pay attention to instructions from their local emergency management officials, said Snider.

"We don't issue an advisory for this length of coastline as we've done — I'm not sure when the last time was — but it really isn't an everyday experience," Snider said.

Savannah Peterson watched in shock as the water rose several feet in a matter of minutes in front of her oceanfront house in Pacifica, California, just south of San Francisco.

"It came up so fast, and a few minutes after that it was down again. It was nuts to see that happen so quickly," she said. "I've never had water come all the way up to my front door, and today it did."

Police rescued a surfer whose surfboard broke in powerful waves off San Francisco.

Farther south in Santa Cruz, California, officials were taking stock of damage after a surge damaged boats and inundated low-lying streets and parking lots, sending cars afloat.

In Southern California, surging waters sunk at least one boat in Ventura Harbor northwest of Los Angeles.

New Zealand's private forecaster, Weather Watch, tweeted that people as far away as Southland, the country's southernmost region, reported hearing sonic booms from the eruption. Others reported that

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many boats were damaged by a tsunami that hit a marina in Whangarei, in the Northland region.

Earlier, the Matangi Tonga news site reported that scientists observed massive explosions, thunder and lightning near the volcano after it started erupting early Friday. Satellite images showed a 5-kilometer (3-mile) -wide plume rising into the air to about 20 kilometers (12 miles).

The Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano is located about 64 kilometers (40 miles) north of Nuku'alofa. In late 2014 and early 2015, a series of eruptions in the area created a small new island and disrupted international air travel to the Pacific archipelago for several days.

There is not a significant difference between volcanoes underwater and on land, and underwater volcanoes become bigger as they erupt, at some point usually breaching the surface, said Hans Schwaiger, a research geophysicist with the Alaska Volcano Observatory.

With underwater volcanoes, however, the water can add to the explosivity of the eruption as it hits the lava, Schwaiger added.

Before an explosion, there is generally an increase in small local earthquakes at the volcano, but depending on how far it is from land, that may not be felt by residents along the shoreline, Schwaiger said.

In 2019, Tonga lost internet access for nearly two weeks when a fiber-optic cable was severed. The director of the local cable company said at the time that a large ship may have cut the cable by dragging an anchor. Until limited satellite access was restored people couldn't even make international calls.

Southern Cross Cable Network's Veverka said limited satellite connections exist between Tonga and other parts of the world but he did not know if they might be affected by power outages.

Verdict soon in Djokovic's deportation appeal in Australia

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — A verdict is expected later Sunday in tennis star Novak Djokovic's appeal against a deportation order that threatens his participation in the Australian Open.

Federal Court Chief Justice James Allsop said earlier Sunday he and two fellow judges hoped to reach a verdict within hours after the court hearing ended. The top-ranked male tennis player needs to win the appeal to defend his Australian Open title in play that begins on Monday.

Djokovic is scheduled to play the last match on Monday at the Rod Laver Arena, according to Tennis Australia, the tournament organizer, which announced the timing for Monday's matches after the court adjourned. Djokovic is due to play Miomir Kecmanovic, a fellow Serb ranked 78th in the world.

Djokovic fought in a daylong urgent hearing the government's attempt to deport him based on Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's assessment that the top-ranked player is considered a "talismán of a community of anti-vaccination sentiment."

Hawke's lawyer Stephen Lloyd took aim at Djokovic's anti-vaccination stance and his "history of ignoring COVID safety measures."

Lloyd pointed to Djokovic testing positive for COVID-19 last month and attending a French media interview while infectious and removing his mask for a photo shoot. Djokovic has acknowledged that he made an error of judgment in those actions.

"The minister took the view that his presence in Australia would encourage people to emulate his apparent disregard for ... safety measures," Lloyd said.

Lloyd said that Djokovic's "presence in Australia was seen to pose an overwhelming risk."

The minister canceled Djokovic's visa on Friday on the grounds that his presence in Australia may be a risk to the health and "good order" of the Australian public and "may be counterproductive to efforts at vaccination by others in Australia."

Australia has one of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the world.

Djokovic's lawyers argued that the minister provided no evidence that Djokovic's presence in Australia may "foster anti-vaccination sentiment."

Djokovic's lawyer Nick Wood also said the minister had failed to take into account how deporting Djokovic might "galvanize anti-vax activists," as happened when the 34-year-old Serb faced deportation shortly

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after arriving in Melbourne on Jan. 5.

Djokovic supporters had called for a boycott of the Australian Open.

Hundreds of activists held a peaceful rally outside the Melbourne Park complex that hosts the Australian Open on Saturday and planned another for Monday over Djokovic's treatment.

"We're at Rod Laver Arena to support Novak. He's won nine (Australian Open) titles here. Hopefully this will be No. 10 -- if he can get out of quarantine and get his visa back," said Harrison McLean, one of the rally organizers. "We're a peaceful movement, here to raise awareness and support everyone's freedom of choice."

Lloyd said Hawke realized that canceling Djokovic's visa "would result in some level of unrest." But the minister's concerns about the consequences of the Serb staying were greater.

Djokovic spent Saturday night in an immigration detention hotel after he and his lawyers met with immigration officials earlier in the day.

He was permitted to leave the hotel to spend Sunday in his lawyers' offices, under the guard of two immigration officials, while the challenge was heard via video conference.

Djokovic had spent four nights confined to a hotel near downtown Melbourne before being released last Monday when he won a court challenge on procedural grounds against his first visa cancellation.

Deportation from Australia can lead to a three-year ban on returning to the country, although that may be waived, depending on the circumstances.

The Health Department advised that Djokovic was a "low" risk of transmitting COVID-19 and a "very low" risk of transmitting the disease at the Australian Open.

Djokovic, who has won the last three Australian Open titles, is seeking a record 21st Grand Slam singles title. He is currently tied with Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer for the most by a man in history.

In a post on social media Wednesday that constituted his most extensive public comments yet on the episode, Djokovic blamed his agent for checking the wrong box on his travel document in a declaration on arrival in Australia, calling it "a human error and certainly not deliberate."

Hawke downplayed Djokovic's failure to disclose his travels to Spain and Serbia in the 14 days before he landed in Australia. Hawke said he was "minded to give it some weight in favor of cancellation" of his visa.

The episode has touched a nerve in Australia, and particularly in Victoria state, where locals went through more than 260 days of lockdowns during the worst of the pandemic.

Australia faces a massive surge in virus cases driven by the highly transmissible omicron variant. On Friday, the nation reported 130,000 new cases, including nearly 35,000 in Victoria state. Although many infected people aren't getting as sick as they did in previous outbreaks, the surge is still putting severe strain on the health system and disrupting supply chains.

Djokovic's supporters in Serbia have been dismayed by the visa cancellations. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic accused the Australian government of "harassing" and "maltreating" Djokovic and asked whether Morrison's government is just trying to score political points ahead of upcoming elections.

"Why didn't you return him back right away, or tell him it was impossible to get a visa?" Vucic asked the Australian authorities in a social media address. "Why are you harassing him and why are you maltreating not only him, but his family and an entire nation that is free and proud."

Everyone at the Australian Open is required to be vaccinated.

According to Grand Slam rules, if Djokovic is forced to pull out of the tournament before the order of play for Day 1 is announced, No. 5 seed Andrey Rublev would move into Djokovic's spot in the bracket.

If Djokovic withdraws from the tournament after Monday's schedule is released, he would be replaced in the field by what's known as a "lucky loser" — a player who loses in the qualifying tournament but gets into the main draw because of another player's exit before competition has started.

Microsoft discloses malware attack on Ukraine govt networks

By FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Microsoft said late Saturday that dozens of computer systems at an unspecified number

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of Ukrainian government agencies have been infected with destructive malware disguised as ransomware, a disclosure suggesting an attention-grabbing defacement attack on official websites was a diversion. The extent of the damage was not immediately clear.

The attack comes as the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine looms and diplomatic talks to resolve the tense stand-off appear stalled.

Microsoft said in a short blog post that amounted to the clanging of an industry alarm that it first detected the malware on Thursday. That would coincide with the attack that simultaneously took some 70 government websites temporarily offline.

The disclosure followed a Reuters report earlier in the day quoting a top Ukrainian security official as saying the defacement was indeed cover for a malicious attack.

Separately, a top private sector cybersecurity executive in Kyiv told The Associated Press how the attack succeeded: The intruders penetrated the government networks through a shared software supplier in a so-called supply-chain attack in the fashion of the 2020 SolarWinds Russian cyberespionage campaign targeting the U.S. government.

Microsoft said in a different, technical post that the affected systems "span multiple government, non-profit, and information technology organizations." It said it did not know how many more organizations in Ukraine or elsewhere might be affected but said it expected to learn of more infections.

"The malware is disguised as ransomware but, if activated by the attacker, would render the infected computer system inoperable," Microsoft said. In short, it lacks a ransom recovery mechanism.

Microsoft said the malware "executes when an associated device is powered down," a typical initial reaction to a ransomware attack.

Microsoft said it was not yet able to assess the intent of the destructive activity or associate the attack with any known threat actors. The Ukrainian security official, Serhiy Demedyuk, was quoted by Reuters as saying the attackers used malware similar to that used by Russian intelligence. He is deputy secretary of the National Security and Defense Council.

A preliminary investigation led Ukraine's Security Service, the SBU, to blame the web defacement on "hacker groups linked to Russia's intelligence services." Moscow has repeatedly denied involvement in cyberattacks against Ukraine.

Tensions with Russia have been running high in recent weeks after Moscow amassed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border. Experts say they expect any invasion would have a cyber component, which is integral to modern "hybrid" warfare.

Demedyuk told Reuters in written comments that the defacement "was just a cover for more destructive actions that were taking place behind the scenes and the consequences of which we will feel in the near future." The story did not elaborate and Demedyuk could not immediately be reached for comment.

Oleh Derevianko, a leading private sector expert and founder of the ISSP cybersecurity firm, told the AP he did not know how serious the damage was. He said also unknown is what else the attackers might have achieved after breaking into KitSoft, the developer exploited to sow the malware.

In 2017, Russia targeted Ukraine with one of the most damaging cyberattacks on record with the NotPetya virus, causing more than \$10 billion in damage globally. That virus, also disguised as ransomware, was a so-called "wiper" that erased entire networks.

Ukraine has suffered the unfortunate fate of being the world's proving ground for cyberconflict. Russia state-backed hackers nearly thwarted its 2014 national elections and briefly crippling parts of its power grid during the winters of 2015 and 2016.

In Friday's mass web defacement, a message left by the attackers claimed they had destroyed data and placed it online, which Ukrainian authorities said had not happened.

The message told Ukrainians to "be afraid and expect the worst."

Ukrainian cybersecurity professionals have been fortifying the defenses of critical infrastructure since 2017, with more than \$40 million in U.S. assistance. They are particularly concerned about Russian attacks on the power grid, rail network and central bank.

Hostages safe after Texas synagogue standoff; captor dead

By JAKE BLEIBERG, ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

COLLEYVILLE, Texas (AP) — A man held hostages for more than 10 hours Saturday at a Texas synagogue where he could be heard ranting in a livestream and demanding the release of a Pakistani neuroscientist who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. Army officers in Afghanistan.

One of the four hostages held at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville was released during the standoff; three others were rescued when authorities entered the building about 9 p.m., authorities said. The hostage taker was killed and FBI Special Agent in Charge Matt DeSarno said a team would investigate "the shooting incident."

An FBI and a police spokeswoman declined to answer questions about who shot the man.

DeSarno said the hostage taker was specifically focused on an issue not directly connected to the Jewish community and there was no immediate indication that the man had been part of any broader plan, but DeSarno said the agency's investigation "will have global reach."

Law enforcement officials who were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity earlier said that the hostage-taker demanded the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaida. He also said he wanted to be able to speak with her, according to the officials. Siddiqui is in federal prison in Texas.

DeSarno said Saturday night that the man had been identified "but we are not prepared to release his identity or confirm his identity at this time."

A rabbi in New York City received a call from the rabbi believed to be held hostage in the synagogue to demand Siddiqui's release, a law enforcement official said. The New York rabbi then called 911 .

Police were first called to the synagogue around 11 a.m. and people were evacuated from the surrounding neighborhood soon after that, FBI Dallas spokesperson Katie Chaumont said.

The services were being livestreamed on the synagogue's Facebook page for a time. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that an angry man could be heard ranting and talking about religion at times during the livestream, which didn't show what was happening inside the synagogue.

Shortly before 2 p.m., the man said, "You got to do something. I don't want to see this guy dead." Moments later, the feed cut out. A Meta company spokesperson later confirmed that Facebook removed the video.

Multiple people heard the hostage-taker refer to Siddiqui as his "sister" on the livestream, but Faizan Syed, the executive director of Council on American-Islamic Relations in Dallas Fort-Worth Texas, told The Associated Press that Siddiqui's brother, Mohammad Siddiqui, was not involved. Syed said CAIR's support and prayers were with the people being held in the synagogue.

Texas resident Victoria Francis told the AP that she watched about an hour of the livestream before it cut out. She said she heard the man rant against America and claim he had a bomb.

"He was just all over the map. He was pretty irritated and the more irritated he got, he'd make more threats, like 'I'm the guy with the bomb. If you make a mistake, this is all on you.' And he'd laugh at that," she said. "He was clearly in extreme distress."

Francis, who grew up near Colleyville, tuned in after she read about the hostage situation. She said it sounded like the man was talking to the police department on the phone, with the rabbi and another person trying to help with the negotiations.

Colleyville, a community of about 26,000 people, is about 15 miles (23 kilometers) northeast of Fort Worth. The synagogue is nestled among large houses in a leafy residential neighborhood that includes several churches, a middle and elementary school and a horse farm.

Congregation Beth Israel is led by Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who has been there since 2006 as the synagogue's first full-time rabbi. He has worked to bring a sense of spirituality, compassion and learning to the community, according to his biography, and he loves welcoming everyone, including LGBT people, into the congregation.

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Anna Salton Eisen, a founder and former president of the synagogue, said the congregation has about 140 members and Cytron-Walker has worked hard to build interfaith relationships in the community, including doing pulpit swaps and participating in a community peace walk. She described Saturday's events as "surreal."

"This is unlike anything we've ever experienced. You know, it's a small town and it's a small congregation," Eisen said as the hostage situation was ongoing. "No matter how it turns out it's hard to fathom how we will all be changed by this, because surely we will be."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki tweeted Saturday evening that President Joe Biden had been briefed and was receiving updates from senior officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said he was monitoring the situation closely. "We pray for the safety of the hostages and rescuers," he wrote on Twitter.

CAIR, the nation's largest Muslim advocacy group, condemned the attack Saturday afternoon.

"This latest antisemitic attack at a house of worship is an unacceptable act of evil," CAIR National Deputy Director Edward Ahmed Mitchell said in a statement. "We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community, and we pray that law enforcement authorities are able to swiftly and safely free the hostages. No cause can justify or excuse this crime."

Siddiqui earned advanced degrees from Brandeis University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before she was sentenced in 2010 to 86 years in prison on charges that she assaulted and shot at U.S. Army officers after being detained in Afghanistan two years earlier. The punishment sparked outrage in Pakistan among political leaders and her supporters, who viewed her as victimized by the American criminal justice system.

In the years since, Pakistan officials have expressed interest publicly in any sort of deal or swap that could result in her release from U.S. custody, and her case has continued to draw attention from supporters. In 2018, for instance, an Ohio man who prosecutors say planned to fly to Texas and attack the prison where Siddiqui is being held in an attempt to free her was sentenced to 22 years in prison.

Bengals hold on, finally win in playoffs, 26-19 over Raiders

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

CINCINNATI (AP) — Paul Brown Stadium nearly shook in triumph. The city of Cincinnati might have, too.

Its latest hero, Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, merely seemed to shrug after leading his team to its first playoff victory in 31 years, 26-19 over Las Vegas on Saturday in an AFC wild-card game.

"It's exciting for the city, for the state, but we are not going to dwell on that, we are moving forward," said Burrow, who threw two touchdown passes. "This is expected, this isn't like the icing on top of the cake, this is the cake. So we are moving on."

Burrow led an efficient offense that scored on six drives, Evan McPherson became the first rookie to make four field goals without a miss in a postseason debut, and Germaine Pratt sealed it with a fourth-down interception in the dying seconds.

It was a victory three decades in the making for the Bengals (11-7). After going from worst to first in the AFC North with a generally young roster, they ended that embarrassingly long postseason drought that included eight consecutive defeats.

"Who Dey" indeed.

Coach Zac Taylor said game balls were going to team owner Mike Brown and to the city itself.

"Some of them might not understand the significance of what happened today," he said of his players. "The city can finally enjoy ... this team and take the pressure off of the last 31 years. Today was significant for a lot of people."

Their next opponent will depend on results in the other two AFC wild-card games this weekend.

"It's going to be fun tomorrow to watch the games knowing we have the win," said Burrow, the top overall selection in the 2020 draft who led the NFL in completion percentage this season. He went 24 for 34 for 244 yards Saturday.

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Helped by some problematic officiating by Jerome Boger's crew that might have allowed Burrow's touchdown pass to Tyler Boyd to count when it shouldn't have, the Bengals also extended a lengthy postseason drought for the Raiders (10-8). Las Vegas, which won its final four games to squeeze into the playoffs, last won in the postseason in the 2002 AFC championship game.

Cincinnati made it 4 for 4 on scoring drives late in the first half, though with some controversy. Burrow rolled right to avoid pressure and threw from close to the sideline. Play continued despite an erroneous whistle by an official, who thought Burrow stepped out of bounds. Boyd caught the 10-yard pass in the back of the end zone for a 20-6 lead. The play counted, to protests from the Raiders, who cited the rule that the ball should be returned to the previous spot.

And Las Vegas lost by seven points.

"We just ran out of time today," said interim coach Rich Bisaccia. "We did some uncharacteristic things with some penalties and gave up some drives and didn't capitalize when we had it in the red zone at times. So it just didn't go our way today."

Daniel Carlson, the league's top scorer, made a 47-yard field goal on the game's opening possession, and the Bengals countered. And kept scoring, though mostly field goals. Burrow took Cincinnati 75 yards in 10 plays, connecting with C.J. Uzomah in the front of the end zone from the 7 to make it 7-3. Burrow threw for 65 yards on the drive and Uzomah celebrated his score with the Ickey Shuffle.

Then the Bengals' defense stepped up with their sacks leader, Trey Hendrickson, stripping Carr of the ball. Defensive tackle Larry Ogunjobi rumbled 11 yards with it to the Raiders 10, but Las Vegas held and McPherson made a 31-yard field goal.

The mistakes kept coming for the visitors. Peyton Barber touched a botched kickoff heading out of bounds at the Raiders 2, putting them in a hole. All-Pro punter A.J. Cole got off a 58-yarder, but Trent Taylor's 14-yard return set up Cincinnati once more in prime position.

Ja'Marr Chase, who had nine receptions for 116 yards, kept victimizing the Raiders, his 38-yard reception getting the Bengals to the 6. McPherson made a 30-yarder for a 13-3 lead. It soon was 13-6 on Carlson's 28-yard field goal.

Then came Boyd's TD, followed by an impressive two-minute drill covering 80 yards for Las Vegas, capped by Carr's 14-yard pass to Zay Jones that made it 20-13. McPherson, a fifth-round draft pick last April, made two more second-half field goals, as did Carlson.

Carr finished 29 of 54 for 310 yards.

The crowd of 66,277 fans hungry for some playoff gold had to hold their breath before getting it.

"I think Germaine has made a really big step this year, Taylor said. "I thought last year was a good step, I think this year he has made a tremendous jump. Super reliable for us."

INJURIES

Raiders: LB Divine Deablo (concussion) left in the second quarter moments after being beaten by Uzomah on a 29-yard pass play. DT Quinton Jefferson hurt his foot. CB Brandon Facyson left with a concussion.

Bengals: DT Mike Daniels injured his groin in the first quarter and did not return. Ogunjobi was carted off early in the third period with a foot injury. Hendrickson went out with a concussion in the third quarter. They finished with just two healthy defensive tackles.

UP NEXT

The Raiders head home to contemplate missed opportunities.

The Bengals move into the divisional round of the AFC playoffs.

Woman killed in subway shove at Times Square

By JENNIFER PELTZ and CAROLYN THOMPSON

NEW YORK (AP) — A woman was pushed to her death in front of a subway train at the Times Square station Saturday, police said, a little more than a week after the mayor and governor announced plans to boost subway policing and outreach to homeless people in New York City's streets and trains.

The man believed responsible fled the scene but turned himself in to transit police a short time later,

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Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said at a news conference with Mayor Eric Adams at the station.

The 40-year-old victim, identified as Michelle Alyssa Go of New York, was waiting for a southbound R train around 9:40 a.m. when she was apparently shoved, according to police.

"This incident was unprovoked, and the victim does not appear to have had any interaction with the subject," Sewell said.

A second woman told police the man had approached her minutes earlier and she feared he would push her onto the tracks.

"He approaches her and he gets in her space. She gets very, very alarmed," Assistant Chief Jason Wilcox said, describing the earlier encounter. "She tries to move away from him and he gets close to her, and she feels that he was about to physically push her onto the train. As she's walking away she witnesses the crime where he pushes our other victim in front of the train."

Police on Saturday night identified the suspect as 61-year-old Simon Martial. Martial, who police said is homeless, was charged with second-degree murder. It was not immediately known whether he had an attorney who could comment.

Wilcox said Martial has a criminal history and has been on parole.

"He does have in the past three emotionally disturbed encounters with us that we have documented," he said.

Subway conditions and safety have become a worry for many New Yorkers during the pandemic. Although police statistics show major felonies in the subways have dropped over the past two years, so has ridership, making it difficult to compare.

And some recent attacks have gotten public attention and raised alarms. In September, three transit employees were assaulted in separate incidents on one day. Several riders were slashed and assaulted by a group of attackers on a train in lower Manhattan in May, and four separate stabbings — two of them fatal — happened within a few hours on a single subway line in February.

In recent months there have been several instances of people being stabbed, assaulted or shoved onto the tracks at stations in the Bronx, Brooklyn and at Times Square.

Saturday's attack against Go, who was of Asian descent, also raised concerns amid a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in New York and around the country. Police officials said the killing, including whether it was a hate crime, was under investigation, but noted that the first woman Martial allegedly approached was not Asian. Martial is Black.

"This latest attack causing the death of an Asian American woman in the Times Square subway station is particularly horrifying for our community," Margaret Fung, executive director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, said. She said the community was still mourning the Dec. 31 death of Yao Pan Ma, a Chinese immigrant who was attacked in April while collecting cans in East Harlem.

"These attacks have left Asian Americans across the city and across the country feeling vulnerable and they must stop," Fung said in a statement.

Adams, who has been mayor for two weeks, has noted that a perception of danger could drive more people to eschew the subway, complicating the city's economic recovery as it tries to draw people back to offices, tourist attractions and more.

"We want to continue to highlight how imperative it is that people receive the right mental health services, particularly on our subway system," the mayor said Saturday. "To lose a New Yorker in this fashion will only continue to elevate the fears of individuals not using our subway system."

"Our recovery is dependent on the public safety in this city and in the subway system," Adams said.

Under his predecessor, Bill de Blasio, the city repeatedly said it was deploying more police to subways after attacks last year and pressure from transit officials. The agency that runs the subway system, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, sped up work to install security cameras in all 472 subway stations citywide, finishing that project in September.

However, the city also has repeatedly faced complaints in recent years about heavy-handed policing in subways. Protests erupted, for example, after police were seen on bystander video handcuffing a woman they said was selling churros without a license at subway stations in 2019 and punching a Black teenager during a brawl on a subway platform that same year.

Six police officers were assigned to the station Saturday, authorities said.

Joining Adams last week to discuss the state of the subways, Gov. Kathy Hochul said she was planning to put together five teams of social workers and medical professionals to help the city guide people living on streets and subways to shelter, housing and services.

Both Hochul and Adams are Democrats.

Ralph Emery, famed country music broadcaster, dies at 88

By The Associated Press undefined

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Ralph Emery, who became known as the dean of country music broadcasters over more than a half-century in both radio and television, died Saturday, his family said. He was 88.

Emery passed away peacefully of natural causes, surrounded by family, at Tristar Centennial Medical Center in Nashville, his son, Michael, told The Associated Press. He had been hospitalized for a week.

Beginning his career at small radio stations and then moving into television as well, Emery was probably best known for his work on the Nashville Network cable channel. From 1983 to 1993, he was host of the channel's live talk-variety show "Nashville Now," earning the title "the Johnny Carson of cable television" for his interviewing style. From 2007 to 2015, Emery hosted a weekly program on RFD-TV, a satellite and cable TV channel.

He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2007.

"Ralph Emery's impact in expanding country music's audience is incalculable," said Kyle Young, CEO of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, in a statement Saturday. "On radio and on television, he allowed fans to get to know the people behind the songs. Ralph was more a grand conversationalist than a calculated interviewer, and it was his conversations that revealed the humor and humanity of Tom T. Hall, Barbara Mandrell, Tex Ritter, Marty Robbins and many more. Above all, he believed in music and in the people who make it."

Born on March 10, 1933 in McEwen, Tennessee, Emery attended broadcasting school in Nashville and got his first radio job at WTPR in Paris, Tennessee. He later worked at radio stations in Louisiana and the Nashville area before signing on in 1957 at Nashville's WSM, the station that carries the Grand Ole Opry, until 1972.

His autobiography, "Memories," came out in 1991, followed by "More Memories" in 1993 and "The View From Nashville: On the Record with Country Music's Greatest Stars" in 1998.

Emery hosted "Pop Goes the Country," a syndicated TV show, from 1974 through 1980. From 1981 to 1983, he was host of "Nashville Alive," on cable station WTBS.

On the talk-variety show "Nashville Now," Emery sat at a desk, interviewing country music stars and others, much like Carson chatted with celebrities on NBC's "Tonight" show.

Emery also briefly had his own recording career in the early 1960s. "I'm not a singer and that was one of the major problems," he confessed in a 1990 interview.

"Ralph had a deep love for his family, his friends and his fans," a family statement said, adding that Emery leaves behind his wife, Joy Emery, three sons, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements were pending.

Emery's death was first reported by The Tennessean.

Headed to disaster? US, Russia harden stances in talks

By MATTHEW LEE and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The failure of last week's high-stakes diplomatic meetings to resolve escalating tensions over Ukraine has put Russia, the United States and its European allies in uncharted post-Cold War territory, posing significant challenges for the main players to avoid an outright and potentially disastrous confrontation.

Unlike previous disagreements that have arisen since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the current Ukraine

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crisis and seemingly insurmountable differences between Washington and Moscow carry real risks of debilitating economic warfare and military conflict that are exacerbated by the dangers of miscalculation and overreaction.

For the U.S. and its NATO and other European allies, nothing less than a vast pullback of the roughly 100,000 Russian troops now deployed near the Ukrainian border will prove that Russian President Vladimir Putin has any intention of negotiating in good faith. For the Russians, the West's absolute refusal to consider a ban on NATO expansion and the withdrawal of troops from Eastern Europe is proof of its perfidy.

Potential concessions are complicated by the fact neither Putin nor President Joe Biden wants to be seen as backing down before either domestic or foreign audiences.

The refusal thus far by each side to climb down from what the other regards as unrealistic and maximalist demands has left the prospects for diplomacy in limbo, with the U.S. and its allies accusing Russia of stoking tensions for no legitimate reason and the Russians complaining again that the Americans are the aggressors.

Some believe the situation will have to become even more dire before the impasse can be broken.

"The gap in perceptions is so broad that a new and dangerous escalation could be necessary to make the parties open up their imagination and search for agreements," Fyodor Lukyanov, the head of the Moscow-based Council for Foreign and Defense Policies, observed in a commentary.

For Western analysts, it seems a situation in which Putin will have to compromise if conflict is to be avoided. Some think Putin's focus on NATO, which has struggled for years with questions about its relevance, may have given the alliance a new lease on life.

"This is an extremely uncertain and tense period without an obvious way out unless Putin backs down," said Jeff Rathke, a Europe expert and former U.S. diplomat who is currently president of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"He's talked himself into a frenzy that is hard to walk away from if he doesn't get the fundamental redrawing of the European security architecture that he claims to want. He's shown he's ready to play chicken with the threat of massive military force to bring that about and he's certainly gotten everyone's attention, but he hasn't changed anyone's views," Rathke said.

U.S. officials from Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan to chief negotiator Wendy Sherman have said it is Russia that faces a "stark choice." De-escalate or face punishing sanctions and the opposite of what it wants: an increased NATO presence in Eastern Europe and a more well-armed Ukraine.

Yet in Russia, officials say the shoe is on the other foot. They have cast their demands as an "absolute imperative" and have argued that the Western failure to meet them makes talks on other issues irrelevant.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the U.S. and Russia reached "some understandings" during last week's talks. "But in general, in principle, we can now say that we are staying on different tracks, on totally different tracks, and this is not good, and this is disturbing," he said in an interview on CNN's "Fareed Zakaria GPS" to be broadcast on Sunday.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday that Russia had vainly tried for years to persuade the U.S. and its allies to engage in talks on the non-deployment of intermediate-range missiles to Europe, limits on war games and rules to avoid dangerously close encounters between Russian and allied warships and aircraft until the U.S. and NATO expressed willingness to discuss those issues this week.

He attributed the change in approach to a U.S. desire to shift attention away from Russia's main demands, adding that Moscow will focus on NATO non-expansion. And he insisted that it's the U.S. that's formulating the position in talks while other allies just march on its orders.

"To be frank, everyone understands that the prospect for reaching a deal depends on the U.S.," Lavrov said. He said whatever the U.S. says about the need to consult allies in negotiations "are just excuses and attempts to drag the process out."

Thus, the stalemate.

The West's approach has been to have "as much diplomatic effort as possible to de-escalate," said

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Andrew Weiss, vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he oversees research in Washington and Moscow on Russia and Eurasia.

"The problem we've got is that the Russians mean business, and they've shown us in a bunch of cases, in 2014, in 2008, that they're prepared to go to war to get these things, and we're not," he said. "And that's the challenge."

The tough and uncompromising Russian positions have led some to believe that Moscow will only up the ante after receiving what all sides expect will be formal, written refusals from the U.S. and NATO to accede to its demands.

Indeed, the chief Russian negotiator in the talks, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, suggested Thursday that Moscow might respond to rejections by escalating matters outside of Europe through the potential deployment of troops to Cuba and Venezuela. The U.S. has called such a suggestion "bluster" and said it would respond decisively if it happened.

"The lack of a diplomatic solution logically leads to the further exacerbation of the crisis," wrote Dmitri Trenin, the head of the Carnegie Moscow Center, in an online analysis.

Trenin predicted that a set of "military-technical measures" that Putin said Russia would take if the West rejects its demands could include "a broad array of moves ... from the deployment of new weapons systems in various regions to much stronger military ties with Belarus and a closer coordination with the Chinese partners."

Still, there's a risk that by focusing his ire on NATO, Putin may have inadvertently strengthened its hand, especially with its newer members like the Baltic states, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

"For countries that have joined NATO since the Cold War, you can definitely say that NATO is more relevant to them now than it was a year ago or in 2014," Rathke said. "Anyone who thought that NATO was no longer relevant to European security has been taught a lesson in the last few months. And it's only going to get worse."

Legal risks in sedition conspiracy case against Oath Keepers

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

The seditious conspiracy case against members and associates of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group marks the boldest attempt so far by the government to prosecute those who attacked the U.S. Capitol, but invoking the rarely used charge carries considerable risks.

Still, legal experts who have reviewed the indictment unsealed this past week against Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and 10 others said prosecutors stand a good chance of winning convictions on allegations that the defendants were working together to use force to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power.

The Civil War-era charge is hard to prove, and scholars say overzealousness in applying it, going back centuries, also discredited its use.

The experts who examined the indictment against the 11 Oath Keepers members and associates said the government's case is supported by detailed allegations that participants in the plot discussed their plans in encrypted chats, traveled to the nation's capital from across the country, organized into teams, used military tactics, stashed weapons outside Washington in case they felt they were needed and communicated with each other during the riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

"This is as good a case as you could bring," said Carlton Larson, a law professor at the University of California at Davis who is an expert in treason law.

In the weeks leading up to the insurrection, the indictment alleged, Oath Keepers discussed trying to overturn the results of the 2020 White House election, preparing for a siege by purchasing weapons and setting up battle plans.

"We aren't getting through this without a civil war. Too late for that. Prepare your mind, body, spirit," the indictment quoted Rhodes as writing in a November 2020 chat after President Donald Trump was projected to have been defeated by Democrat Joe Biden.

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Authorities say several members of the Oath Keepers shouldered their way through the crowd on Jan. 6 and into the Capitol in a military-style stack formation. Group members are accused of setting up "quick reaction force" teams that stationed weapons outside of Washington and were prepared to deliver arms to group members and associates if they believed the need arose.

In late December 2020, Rhodes wrote in a chat that the only chance Trump had to succeed in overturning the election outcome was if he and the Oath Keepers frightened members of Congress and "convince them it will be torches and pitchforks time is (sic) they don't do the right thing. But I don't think they will listen," according to the indictment.

Rhodes did not enter the Capitol building on Jan. 6, but authorities say he was communicating with Oath Keepers outside on the Capitol grounds. Phillip Linder, one of the lawyers representing Rhodes, said his client intends to fight the charges. Rhodes remains jailed in Texas and has a detention hearing this coming Thursday.

"We believe he is not a flight risk, not a danger and should be released," Linder said after Rhodes' first court appearance on Friday.

Rhodes has said in interviews with right-wing hosts that there was no plan to storm the Capitol and that the members who did so went rogue. But he has continued to push the lie that the 2020 election was stolen.

University at Albany assistant professor Sam Jackson, author of the book "Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group," said it wasn't clear to him before the indictment whether Rhodes or Oath Keepers leaders were involved in a plot to attack the Capitol.

"Now it's clear that that is the case," he said. "It's also clear that national leadership was not solely focused on some anticipated or perceived threat from antifa or other opponents of Donald Trump. But they really were thinking about, 'OK, how do we prevent the certification of the Electoral College vote if members of Congress don't see things the way that we do?'"

The last sedition case was filed in 2010 against members of a Michigan militia. Two years later, they were acquitted by a judge who said their hateful diatribes didn't prove they ever had detailed plans for a rebellion.

Lawyer William Swor, who represented Hutaree militia leader David Stone, said prosecutors in the decade-old case failed to prove that group members were "more than just talking" and were "actively planning to oppose the government."

"It's a substantial burden on the government and it is a substantial risk," he said. "If the government fails to meet its burden, they're out on the street."

Among the last successful convictions for seditious conspiracy stemmed from the storming of the Capitol in 1954 when four Puerto Rican nationalists opened fire on the House floor, wounding five representatives.

Mark Pitcavage, a senior research fellow at the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism, said the collapse of earlier sedition cases against far-right extremists suggests that judges and juries may have difficulty believing that a small group of people "seriously thought they could take on the entire U.S. government."

Pitcavage said prosecutors in the case against Oath Keepers appear to have a "tremendous amount of evidence about planning beforehand" as well as compelling video evidence of the group members storming the Capitol.

"That sort of evidence was largely missing from all these previous cases," Pitcavage said. "Sedition cases, in my opinion, are always inherently risky to a certain degree. But I do think prosecutors in this case have a far stronger case to make for the jury than some of their predecessors did."

If convicted of seditious conspiracy, the defendants could face a maximum prison sentence of 20 years, compared with five for the other conspiracy charges.

In all, more than 700 people have been arrested and charged with federal crimes in the Jan. 6 riot. More than 70 defendants remain detained on riot charges. At least 186 defendants have pleaded guilty to riot-related charges as of Thursday.

Final valuation of Prince's estate pegged at \$156.4 million

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MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The six-year legal battle over pop superstar Prince's estate has ended, meaning the process of distributing the artist's wealth could begin next month.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune reports that the Internal Revenue Service and the estate's administrator, Comerica Bank & Trust, agreed to value Prince's estate \$156.4 million, a figure that the artist's heirs have also accepted.

The valuation dwarfs Comerica's earlier \$82.3 million appraisal. The Internal Revenue Service in 2020 had valued the estate at \$163.2 million.

Prince, who died of a fentanyl overdose in 2016, did not leave a will.

Since then, lawyers and consultants have been paid tens of millions of dollars to administer his estate and come up with a plan for its distribution. Two of Prince's six sibling heirs, Alfred Jackson and John R. Nelson, have since died. Two others are in their 80s.

"It has been a long six years," L. Londell McMillan, an attorney for three of Prince's siblings, said at a hearing Friday in Carver County District Court.

In the end, the estate will be almost evenly divided between a well-funded New York music company — Primary Wave — and the three oldest of the music icon's six heirs or their families.

The IRS and Comerica settled last spring on the real-estate portion of Prince's estate. But the trickier task of valuing intangible assets such as rights to Prince's music was not completed until October.

As part of the agreement, the IRS dropped a \$6.4 million "accuracy-related penalty" it had levied on Prince's estate. The Minnesota Department of Revenue, which agreed on the estate's valuation, also has dropped an accuracy penalty, the filing said.

Taxes on Prince's fortune will run into the tens of millions of dollars.

Just over \$5 million of Prince's estate will be exempted from taxes under federal law, but thereafter the tax rate is 40%. In Minnesota, the first \$3 million is tax-exempt; after that, much of Prince's estate will likely be taxed at 16%.

In mid-2020, Comerica sued the IRS in U.S. Tax Court, saying the agency's calculations of the estate's value were riddled with errors. A tax trial set for March in St. Paul has been canceled because of the settlement.

Comerica, in a court filing Friday, said that while the IRS settlement was "fair and reasonable," it believes it would have "prevailed" in the tax court case. Comerica said it told Prince's heirs that if lowering estate taxes was their "primary interest" they should continue pressing the IRS and — if need be — go to trial.

"Instead, the members of the heir group have uniformly communicated to (Comerica) their strong desire that the estate settle with the taxing authorities," the filing said.

Italian menswear innovator Nino Cerruti dies at 91

By COLLEEN BARRY AP Fashion Writer

MILAN (AP) — Nino Cerruti, the Italian fashion designer credited with revolutionizing menswear in the 1960s and who gave Giorgio Armani his first fashion break, has died, Italian media reported Saturday. He was 91.

Cerruti died in northwestern Italy, where his family has operated a textile company since 1881, the Italian news agency LaPresse reported. The Italian daily Corriere said he had been hospitalized for hip surgery.

Cerutti inherited the family business, based in the city of Biella in the Piedmont region, at age 20 upon his father's death in 1950. He launched his first menswear company, Hitman, in 1957 near Milan, dedicated to creating sartorial elegance on an industrial scale and becoming part of the nascent men's ready-to-wear sector.

Armani was hired as a young talent at the Hitman factory in the mid-1960s.

Armani recalled Cerruti as a creative entrepreneur with "an acute eye, a true curiosity, the ability to dare," adding that "his gentle way of being authoritative, even authoritarian" would be missed.

"Even if our contacts thinned with the years, I have always considered him one of the people who has had a real and positive influence on my life," Armani said in a statement. "From him, I learned not only the taste for sartorial softness, but also the importance of a well-rounded vision, as a designer and as an

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entrepreneur.”

In 1967, Cerruti founded the luxury menswear fashion house Cerruti 1881 in Paris, then the international fashion capital, while maintaining production in Italy. The softened silhouette, use of colors and the attention to both innovative design and tradition won clients like French film star Jean-Paul Belmondo.

Soon, Cerruti was in demand in Hollywood, with his designs worn on and off screen by such stars as Michael Douglas in “Basic Instinct,” Richard Gere in “Pretty Woman, and Tom Hanks in “Philadelphia.”

Cerruti also launched a womenswear line as well as perfumes, watches, accessories and leather goods. He also at one point was the designer for the Ferrari Formula 1 team.

Cerruti sold the company in the early 2000s, giving up also the design role. But he never severed ties with the fashion house, even as he turned his focus to the textile business, taking a front-row seat at Paris runway shows.

News of his death spread through the fashion world during Milan Fashion Week menswear previews.

Carlo Capasa, president of Italy’s fashion chamber, remembered Cerruti as “a great innovator” who was also “one of Italy’s chicest men.”

“He was the first to understand the importance of creativity in menswear and to give space to a young designer of immense talent like Giorgio Armani, changing the very criteria of how to dress,” Capasa said. “He was one of the first to have a strong international presence, representing to the world that unique combination of creativity and quality that came to characterize and still characterizes Italian fashion.”

Catastrophe averted as fire near chemical plant is contained

PASSAIC, N.J. (AP) — A dramatic fire near a chemical plant burned through the night and into Saturday in northern New Jersey but led to no evacuation orders or serious injuries — just heavy smoke that was seen and smelled in nearby New York City.

The fire at Majestic Industries and the Qualco chemical plant in Passaic was in buildings housing plastics, pallets and chlorine, officials said, but catastrophe was averted.

Crews battled pockets of the blaze into the afternoon, Passaic Mayor Hector Lora said, but it was contained.

The fire was prevented from reaching the main chemical plant, which could have endangered the densely populated New York City suburbs of New Jersey, Lora said.

Nearby residents were advised to close their windows but were not required to evacuate, with officials saying air quality remained acceptable and would be monitored.

Some residents fled nonetheless.

“It’s worrying. You don’t know what’s going to happen,” Joel Heredia told WCBS-TV.

Frigid weather froze water from hydrants and hoses, hampering boats trying to draw water from the Passaic River and causing firefighters to slip and fall, Lora said. One firefighter went to the hospital with an eye injury, he said.

Security guard Justin Johnson told WCBS-TV he was working alone, checking water pressure, when he noticed smoke coming from a smokestack-like tower. He wasn’t sure what to make of it but called the fire department as alarms went off.

Passaic Fire Chief Patrick Trentacost said three fire trucks on the scene were frozen in ice Saturday afternoon as temperatures remained below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, NorthJersey.com reported.

The 300-foot (91-meter) by 400-foot (122-meter) building was vacant but being used to store plastics, pallets and some chlorine, Trentacost said. Some fire remained in the basement under the roof but “it was a total collapse of a three-story building.”

The AP Interview: Taliban pledge all girls in schools soon

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan’s new Taliban rulers say they hope to be able to open all schools for girls across the country after late March, their spokesman told The Associated Press on Saturday, of-

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fering the first timeline for addressing a key demand of the international community.

Since the Taliban takeover in mid-August, girls in most of Afghanistan have not been allowed back to school beyond grade 7. The international community, reluctant to formally recognize a Taliban-run administration, is wary they could impose similar harsh measures as during their previous rule 20 years ago. At the time, women were banned from education, work and public life.

Zabihullah Mujahid, who is also the Taliban's deputy minister of culture and information, said their education departments are looking to open classrooms for all girls and women following the Afghan New Year, which starts on March 21. Afghanistan, like neighboring Iran, observes the Islamic solar Hijri Shamsi calendar.

Education for girls and women "is a question of capacity," Mujahid said in the interview.

Girls and boys must be completely segregated in schools, he said, adding that the biggest obstacle so far has been finding or building enough dorms, or hostels, where girls could stay while going to school. In heavily populated areas, it is not enough to have separate classrooms for boys and girls — separate school buildings are needed, he said.

"We are not against education," Mujahid stressed, speaking at a Kabul office building with marble floors that once housed Afghan attorney general's offices and which the Taliban have adopted for their culture and information ministry.

The Taliban dictates so far have been erratic, varying from province to province. Girls have not been allowed back to classrooms in state-run schools beyond grade 7, except in about 10 of the country's 34 provinces. In the capital, Kabul, private universities and high schools have continued to operate uninterrupted. Most are small and the classes have always been segregated.

"We are trying to solve these problems by the coming year," so that schools and universities can open, Mujahid said.

The international community has been skeptical of Taliban announcements, saying it will judge them by their actions — even as it scrambles to provide billions of dollars to avert a humanitarian catastrophe that the U.N. chief this week warned could endanger the lives of millions.

With a breakdown of services and only sporadic electricity in the bitterly cold Afghan winters, most people rely on firewood and coal for heat. Among the hardest hit are some 3 million Afghans who live as refugees within their own country, having fled their homes because of war, drought, poverty or fear of the Taliban.

Earlier this month, the United Nations launched a \$5 billion appeal for Afghanistan, the single largest appeal for one country.

Washington has spent \$145 billion on reconstruction and development projects in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban regime. Yet even before the Taliban recaptured the country, the poverty rate was 54% —and a 2018 Gallup poll revealed unprecedented misery among Afghans.

Mujahid appealed for economic cooperation, trade and "stronger diplomatic relations." So far, neither Afghanistan's neighbors nor the United Nations seem ready to grant formal recognition which would help open up the Afghan economy. However U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called for greater economic development, saying it's critical to rapidly inject liquidity into the Afghan economy "and avoid a meltdown that would lead to poverty, hunger and destitution for millions."

The international community has called for a more representative government that includes women as well as ethnic and religious minorities. While all members of the new Taliban Cabinet are men and most are Taliban members, Mujahid said there are exceptions such as the deputy finance minister and officials in the economics ministry who are holdovers from the previous, U.S.-backed administration.

Mujahid also said 80% of civil servants who have returned to work were employees under the previous administration. Women are working in the health and education sector and at Kabul International Airport in customs and passport control, he added. He did not say if or when women would be allowed to return to work in government ministries.

He also told the AP that most of the new government's revenue will come from customs that the Taliban will collect at border crossings with Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian nations to the north. Without offering figures, he claimed the Taliban have brought in more revenue in their first four months in power

than the previous government in over a year.

He appealed on Afghans who have fled to return to their homeland. Since the takeover, there have been cases of opponents arrested, journalists beaten, rights workers threatened and demonstrations by women dispersed by heavily armed Taliban troops firing in the air.

Mujahid acknowledged incidents of Taliban members harassing Afghan civilians, including humiliating young men and forcibly cutting their hair.

"Such crimes happen, but it is not the policy of our government," he said, adding that those responsible were arrested.

"This is our message. We have no dispute with anyone and we don't want anyone to remain in opposition or away from their country."

Kazakhstan activists recall path from protest to bloodshed

By KIRILL ZARUBIN and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

ALMATY, Kazakhstan (AP) — The mass protests in Kazakhstan began peacefully over the New Year's weekend, with marchers denouncing a sharp rise in fuel prices. They spread quickly from the western part of the Central Asian nation to more populous areas, eventually reaching its largest city of Almaty.

But something changed over the course of a week.

Groups of armed men appeared in Almaty, with some seen riding in cars without license plates or with their faces covered. Marchers at the peaceful protests say these men began urging them to storm government buildings, promising to give them guns.

Clashes with police soon broke out, and by the night of Jan. 5, Almaty was in chaos. City Hall was burning, as were cars and buses; stores were looted; and attempts were made to storm the presidential residence. Gunshots were heard in the streets, the internet was blacked out, and even the airport was briefly seized.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has blamed the unrest on "terrorists" who received foreign training and support.

But nearly two weeks after the events that led to scores of deaths and about 16,000 arrests, the government has not presented any evidence to support its allegation of outside involvement.

It remains unclear whether these more violent actors were individuals taking advantage of the mayhem to loot and vandalize stores, or if they were part of organized groups with larger political motives.

Protesters, however, say their rallies were somehow undermined, leading to the crackdown by security forces. Tokayev has said authorities didn't use force at peaceful demonstrations.

Although the protests began over the higher price of fuel, the scope and the agenda of the demonstrations expanded quickly. Large crowds rallied in major cities, venting their frustration with worsening living conditions and inequality under the authoritarian government that has maintained a tight grip on power for over three decades in the energy-rich nation of 19 million.

Much of that occurred under longtime leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down in 2019 in favor of Tokayev, his hand-picked successor, but has maintained behind-the-scenes influence. The slogan "Shal ket!" — "Old man go!" — was chanted at rallies.

"A significant part of the people are those who came at the call of their hearts to express their attitude towards the authorities, because they are tired, because they do not feel like the state is providing them with social security," said human rights activist Galym Ageleuov, president of the Liberty Foundation.

Tokayev initially tried to calm the crowds by announcing a 180-day cap on fuel prices and removing Nazarbayev as head of the National Security Council, a move widely seen as an attempt to end the former leader's patronage while also consolidating power.

But the protests continued, and the violence escalated amid the peaceful rallies in Almaty.

A protester whose first name is Bezshan said that on Jan. 5, armed men approached and asked young people in the crowd to help them storm a police station. "They said they would hand out weapons," he told The Associated Press, recalling the incident more than a week later. AP has chosen not to publish the full names of protesters interviewed out of caution for their security.

Beken, another protester, said he also saw "provocateurs" at the rally that day, urging an attack on police:

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"We tried to stop them as much as we could, telling them: 'Everyone, stay put.' We don't need weapons, we came out to a peaceful rally," he said.

On Jan. 6, security forces opened fire and killed dozens of protesters. At least 12 officers also were reported killed. The next day, Tokayev announced he had given security forces shoot-to-kill orders to halt the violent unrest, saying: "We intend to act with maximum severity regarding lawbreakers."

Almaty police spokeswoman Saltynat Azirbek called the Jan. 5 attack on the police department "a proper battle."

The attackers "didn't put forward any demands," she told reporters. "They deliberately came to destroy, to kill."

She also insisted police were unarmed when working at unsanctioned demonstrations in Almaty, but she didn't clarify whether she meant the Jan. 6 rally.

Amid the bloodshed, Tokayev also called in troops from the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led military alliance of six former Soviet states, which helped restore order.

Some saw the blaming of foreign instigators as a pretext for bringing in the mostly Russian forces.

"In order to invite Russian troops, you need a serious reason ... that is not an internal standoff with the people," political analyst Dimash Alzhayev said in an interview. "So naturally, (the authorities) needed to come up with terrorists."

A protester named Marat told AP that the authorities "haven't so far showed us a single terrorist," citing only the highly publicized arrest of Vikram Ruzakhunov, a well-known jazz pianist from neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

The musician appeared on Kazakh television after his arrest with large bruises on his face and said in the broadcast he had flown in and was promised money for participating in the protests.

Kyrgyz authorities protested Ruzakhunov's arrest and demanded that Kazakhstan release him. He was freed shortly afterward, and upon returning to Kyrgyzstan said his statement on Kazakh TV was false — he was visiting a friend in Almaty and got swept up while trying to leave the city.

Ruzakhunov told a Kyrgyz broadcaster that while in jail, his cellmates said the quickest way to get released was to confess to a false story, so that's what he did.

Alzhanov, the analyst, noted that Kazakh state broadcasters amplified the government's message by repeatedly airing video of the turmoil.

"They continued broadcasting the visuals, so the government was interested in communicating them to a broad audience," he said, adding that the state of emergency that was declared provided a pretext to suppress the demonstrations with force.

A protester named Daulet told AP that he believed the "security forces deliberately painted the protesters as some kind of a fringe group prepared to riot."

Beken, the protester who described seeing what he called "provocateurs," criticized the security forces "for shooting at their own people." He said a Jan. 6 rally he attended featured protesters walking toward the military with a white flag.

"It is unfathomable. I can't understand it. How is this possible?" he said.

Biden backers 'not seeing the results' a year into his term

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Just over a year ago, millions of energized young people, women, voters of color and independents joined forces to send Joe Biden to the White House. But 12 months into his presidency, many describe a coalition in crisis.

Leading voices across Biden's diverse political base openly decry the slow pace of progress on key campaign promises. The frustration was especially pronounced this past week after Biden's push for voting rights legislation effectively stalled, intensifying concerns in his party that fundamental democratic principles are at risk and reinforcing a broader sense that the president is faltering at a moment of historic consequence.

"People are feeling like they're getting less than they bargained for when they put Biden in office. There's

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a lot of emotions, and none of them are good," said Quentin Wathum-Ocama, president of the Young Democrats of America. "I don't know if the right word is 'apoplectic' or 'demoralized.' We're down. We're not seeing the results."

The strength of Biden's support will determine whether Democrats maintain threadbare majorities in Congress beyond this year or whether they will cede lawmaking authority to a Republican Party largely controlled by former President Donald Trump. Already, Republicans in several state legislatures have taken advantage of Democratic divisions in Washington to enact far-reaching changes to state election laws, abortion rights and public health measures in line with Trump's wishes.

If Biden cannot unify his party and reinvigorate his political coalition, the GOP at the state and federal levels will almost certainly grow more emboldened, and the red wave that shaped a handful of state elections last year could fundamentally shift the balance of power across America in November's midterm elections.

For now, virtually none of the groups that fueled Biden's 2020 victory are happy.

Young people are frustrated that he hasn't followed through on vows to combat climate change and student debt. Women are worried that his plans to expand family leave, child care and universal pre-K are stalled as abortion rights erode and schools struggle to stay open. Moderates in both parties who once cheered Biden's centrist approach worry that he's moved too far left. And voters of color, like those across Biden's political base, are furious that he hasn't done more to protect their voting rights.

"We mobilized to elect President Biden because he made promises to us," Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., told The Associated Press, citing Biden's pledge to address police violence, student loan debt, climate change and voter suppression, among other issues.

"We need transformative change — our very lives depend on it," Bush said. "And because we haven't seen those results yet, we're frustrated — frustrated that despite everything we did to deliver a Democratic White House, Senate and House of Representatives, our needs and our lives are still not being treated as a top priority. That needs to change."

Facing widespread frustration, the White House insists Biden is making significant progress, especially given the circumstances when he took office.

"President Biden entered office with enormous challenges — a once-in-a-generation pandemic, economic crisis and a hollowed-out federal government. In the first year alone, he has delivered progress on his promises," said Cedric Richmond, a senior adviser to the president. He pointed to more than 6 million new jobs, 200 million vaccinated Americans, the most diverse Cabinet in U.S. history and the most federal judges confirmed in a president's first year since Richard Nixon.

Richmond also highlighted historic legislative accomplishments Biden signed into law — specifically, a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief bill that sent \$1,400 checks to most Americans and a subsequent \$1 trillion infrastructure package that will fund public works projects across every state in the nation for several years.

In an interview, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a leading voice in the Democratic Party's left wing, described Biden's pandemic relief package as among the most significant pieces of legislation ever enacted to help working people.

"But a lot more work needs to be done," he said.

Like other Biden allies, Sanders directed blame for the president's woes at two Senate Democrats: Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. They are blocking the president's plan to protect voting rights by refusing to bypass the filibuster, having already derailed Biden's "Build Back Better" package, which calls for investments exceeding \$2 trillion for child care, paid family leave, education and climate change, among other progressive priorities.

"It has been a mistake to have backroom conversations with Manchin and Sinema for the last four months, or five months," Sanders said. "Those conversations have gotten nowhere. But what they have done is demoralize tens of millions of Americans."

But blaming fellow Democrats will do little to improve Biden's political standing.

According to Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research polling released last month, the president's approval ratings have been falling among virtually every demographic as the pandemic continues to rage, inflation soars and the majority of his campaign promises go unfulfilled. A series of legal

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setbacks in recent days stand to make things worse. The Supreme Court on Thursday blocked Biden's vaccine and testing requirements for big businesses.

About 7 in 10 Black Americans said they approved of Biden in December, compared with roughly 9 in 10 in April. Among Hispanics, support dipped to roughly half from about 7 in 10.

Just half of women approved of Biden last month compared to roughly two-thirds in the spring.

There was a similar drop among younger voters: Roughly half of Americans under 45 approved of the president, down from roughly two-thirds earlier in the year. The decline was similar among those age 45 and older. And among independents, a group that swung decidedly for Biden in 2020, just 40% of those who don't lean toward a party approved of Biden in December, down from 63% in April.

"Biden is failing us," said John Paul Mejia, the 19-year-old spokesman for the Sunrise Movement, a national youth organization focused on climate change. "If Biden doesn't use the time he has left with a Democratic majority in Congress to fight tooth and nail for the promises that he was elected on, he will go down in history as a could-have-been president and ultimately a coward who didn't stand up for democracy and a habitable planet."

Christian Nunes, president of the National Organization for Women, said she wants to see more urgency from Biden in protecting women's priorities.

"In these times, we need somebody who's going to be a fighter," she said.

Nunes called on Biden to work harder to protect voting rights and access to abortion, which have been dramatically curtailed in several Republican-led states. A looming Supreme Court decision expected this summer could weaken, or wipe away, the landmark *Roe v. Wade* precedent that made abortion legal.

"We are in a really dire time right now. We're seeing so many laws passed that are really challenging peoples' constitutional rights," Nunes said. "We need someone who's going to say we're not going to tolerate this."

Charlie Sykes, an anti-Trump Republican who backed Biden in 2020, said the president is also in danger of losing moderate voters in both parties unless he can shift his party's rhetoric more to the middle when talking about public safety, crime and voting.

"He ran as very much a centrist, center-left candidate, but I think that a lot of moderate swing voters are feeling a little bit left out and wondering where the Joe Biden of 2020 went," Sykes said.

Having only been in office for a year, Biden may have time to turn things around before the November midterms — especially as Trump reemerges as a more visible player in national politics. In recent years, nothing has unified Democrats more than Trump himself.

Mary Kay Henry, president of the two-million-member Service Employees International Union, said her members want more from Washington, but they would be out in full force this year to remind voters of the work Biden has already done to address concerns about the pandemic and economic security.

"President Biden is not the obstacle," Henry said, pointing to the "intransigent Republican caucus in the Senate" who have unified against Biden's Build Back Better package and his plan to protect voting rights. "We're going to have this president's back."

Not everyone is as willing to commit to the Democratic president.

"We need to see Joe Biden the fighter. That's kind of where I'm at," said Wathum-Ocama, the Young Democrats of America president. "The unifier is appropriate at times. But we need somebody who's going to fight for our issues if we're going to come out and turn out for him in '22."

Official: Alec Baldwin surrenders phone for shooting probe

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Alec Baldwin has surrendered his cellphone to authorities as part of the investigation into a fatal shooting on a New Mexico film set last fall, a law enforcement official said.

Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office spokesman Juan Rios said Baldwin's phone was turned over Friday to law enforcement officials in Suffolk County, New York, who will gather the information from the phone and provide it to Santa Fe County investigators, the Santa Fe New Mexican reported.

Sheriff's office investigators in December obtained a search warrant for the phone's contents in their

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investigation into the Oct. 11 shooting on the "Rust" film set at Bonanza Creek Ranch near Santa Fe.

Baldwin was an actor and co-producer, and the search warrant for his phone sought text messages, images, videos, calls or any other information related to the movie.

Authorities have said Baldwin's prop revolver discharged a live round during a rehearsal, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Baldwin's lawyer, Aaron Dyer, said his client had been cooperating with authorities throughout the course of the investigation, and the delay in providing information from the phone was no indication otherwise.

"Alec voluntarily provided his phone to the authorities this morning so they can finish their investigation," Dyer said Friday in a statement. "But this matter isn't about his phone, and there are no answers on his phone."

Baldwin, who has denied any wrongdoing in the shooting, and said in an Instagram message on Jan. 8 that New Mexico needed to go through New York law enforcement and that the process of specifying exactly what is needed took time.

"They can't just go through your phone and take your photos, or your love letters to your wife, or what have you," he said.

Baldwin has said he didn't know the gun he was holding contained a live round when it went off. Investigators are trying to find the source of the live round.

No charges have been filed in the shooting.

Clap, don't chant: China aims for 'Zero COVID' Olympics

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

Athletes will need to be vaccinated — or face a long quarantine — take tests daily and wear masks when not competing or training. Clapping is OK to cheer on teammates, not chanting. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be sent into isolation and unable to compete until cleared for discharge.

Welcome to the Beijing Olympics, where strict containment measures will aim to create a virus-proof "bubble" for thousands of international visitors at a time when omicron is fueling infections globally.

The prevention protocols will be similar to those at the Tokyo Games this summer, but much tighter. That won't be a stretch in Beijing, with China having maintained a "Zero COVID" policy since early in the pandemic.

Still, China's ability to stick to its zero-tolerance approach nationally is already being tested by the highly transmissible omicron variant, which is more contagious than earlier variants of the virus and better able to evade protection from vaccines.

With just weeks to go before the Feb. 4 start of the Games, more than 20 million people in six cities are under lockdown after recent outbreaks.

Here's how the Games will work.

DO ATHLETES HAVE TO BE VACCINATED?

Yes, athletes and other participants including team staff and news media need to be fully vaccinated to be allowed in the designated Olympic areas without completing a 21-day quarantine. Those areas will consist of the Olympic Village, game venues, other select spots and dedicated transport.

That's different from the Tokyo Games, where participants didn't have to be vaccinated.

Participants are considered fully vaccinated according to the definitions outlined by their countries. Before boarding their flights, everyone also needs to provide two recent negative tests from approved labs.

The threat of being sidelined by a positive test is adding to the pressure for athletes.

Mogul skier Hannah Soar said she's avoiding contact with people indoors and behaving as if everyone has the virus: "We're basically at the point of acting like it's March 2020."

WHAT ABOUT DAILY LIFE?

Upon arrival at the airport in Beijing, participants will have their temperatures taken and be tested with throat and nasal swabs. An Olympics official who recently arrived on site said at a press briefing the process took him 45 minutes, though organizers note times might vary.

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A bus will then take people to their designated lodging, where they'll wait up to six hours for test results to clear them to move about in approved areas. Restrictions on movement within that "closed loop" are intended to seal off any potential contact between Olympic participants and the local population.

Throat swabs for testing will be required daily for all participants. In Tokyo, participants spit into vials for antigen tests.

Standard prevention measures are being encouraged, such as ventilating rooms and keeping a distance of about 3 feet (1 meter) from others – or 6 feet (2 meters) from athletes.

Masks that are N95 or of a similar caliber will also be required in indoor and outdoor areas with few exceptions, such as when people are eating or drinking. Dining halls will have partitions and seating capacity will be reduced to help maintain distancing.

In spaces where distancing isn't possible, such as elevators, talking isn't allowed. Staff will be stationed in key areas to help guide people and ensure protocols are being followed.

WHAT HAPPENS IF AN ATHLETE TESTS POSITIVE?

In Tokyo, organizers say 33 athletes tested positive during the Games. Of those, 22 were withdrawn from competition. Even with the tightened precautions in Beijing, experts say some positive tests are likely, especially with omicron in play.

If an athlete or other participant tests positive but doesn't have symptoms, they'll need to go into isolation in a dedicated hotel. They'll be provided with meals and can open their windows for fresh air but won't be able to leave their rooms, which organizers say will be about 270 square feet (25 square meters).

Athletes can request fitness equipment for training.

People with no symptoms can leave isolation after two days of negative tests. Organizers say those testing positive will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but it might still be too late for athletes to compete.

As a general rule, organizers say the panel will review those who keep testing positive for more than 14 days.

Those who test positive and have symptoms have to go into isolation in a hospital. They'll also need to two days of negative tests to be let loose, as well as three days of normal temperatures and symptoms subsiding.

Organizers have said athletes who recover after testing positive ahead of the Games will also be assessed on a case-by-case basis in a "more flexible manner."

WILL THERE BE FANS?

Spectators from overseas won't be allowed. As for local fans, Beijing organizers say they're finalizing rules for their attendance.

It's not clear how the recent outbreaks around China will factor into the decisions. But organizers of the Tokyo Games had also planned to allow some domestic fans, before scrapping the idea because a surge in local cases. The result was surreal scenes of athletes competing in empty stadiums.

Even if some fans are allowed in Beijing, their presence will be muted. Everyone is being asked to clap instead of shouting or singing, as had been the plan in Tokyo.

CAN IT WORK?

Despite the omicron-fueled surge hitting many parts of the world including China, organizers may still be able to pull off the Olympics without as much disruption as some fear.

Olympic athletes are highly motivated to avoid infection so they can compete, noted Dr. Sandro Galea, a public health expert at Boston University. And even if it's harder with omicron, he noted it's no mystery what people need to do to avoid infection — take prevention measures, such as limiting exposure to others.

Rising above reality: How Djokovic bends his mind to succeed

By JOCELYN GECKER and JEROME PUGMIRE Associated Press

To his critics, Novak Djokovic has been cavalier and reckless in the face of a deadly pandemic. But students of the tennis star's game note that bending reality has been a secret to his success, until now.

The dizzying saga playing out in Australia over Djokovic's refusal to get vaccinated against the coronavirus

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has cemented his image as the defiant figure in men's tennis and made the world's No. 1 player an unwitting new hero to the anti-vax movement. He has earned a new, and surely unwanted, nickname: No-vax.

In many ways, Djokovic has handled the pandemic like he would a tennis match, ignoring long odds and favoring alternative remedies over traditional medicine. His unconventional approaches to physical and mental fitness over the years have included consulting spiritual gurus, laying in hyperbaric chambers, visiting healing "pyramids" and working with a coach to develop reality-distortion skills.

But the current reality is that every player at the Australian Open, which starts Monday, needs a COVID-19 vaccine or a valid medical exemption to participate. The country's immigration minister canceled the unvaccinated Djokovic's visa on Friday, citing health and "good order" considerations.

Djokovic, who has appealed the decision, now finds himself facing likely deportation and at the center of a polarizing issue, with fans on either side of the vaccine debate.

For the top-ranked 34-year-old player from Serbia, the timing could not be worse. This Australian Open was supposed to be the stage of a crowning achievement as he seeks his record 21st Grand Slam title, a feat that would catapult him past rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, with whom he is tied at 20.

Fellow players and former coaches have urged Djokovic to acquiesce to a COVID-19 vaccine, saying tennis needs him on the court, not stoking political debates.

"All this could have been avoided, like we've all done, by getting vaccinated," Spanish tennis star Garbiñe Muguruza said during a pre-tournament news conference in Melbourne on Saturday. "Everybody knew very clearly the rules. You just have to follow them, and that's it. I don't think it's that difficult."

Boris Becker, a former top-ranked player who coached Djokovic from 2013-2016, said the same determination and stubbornness that fuels Djokovic's strength on court can also be his weakness.

"He is a street fighter. That is his mentality, and it is what made him big and so successful. It is hard to change that," Becker said in a recent interview with BBC Sport.

Djokovic has often attributed his toughness to growing up in war-ravaged Serbia in the 1990s. In Serbia, Djokovic is revered as a national hero, who overcame the odds in a country economically crippled by war with little tennis pedigree and few tennis courts to become the world's No. 1 player.

As a child in Belgrade, Djokovic developed an early passion for tennis. He trained at a club that used an empty swimming pool as a makeshift tennis court. He has spoken of practice sessions getting cut short and running to bomb shelters, and huddling with his family for nights on end, as NATO jets targeted the Serbian capital in 1999 during the war over Kosovo.

Being exposed to emotional trauma so young gave him an early perspective on overcoming adversity, and crystalized his motivation.

"Most people don't decide what they want from life when they're 6 years old, but I had," Djokovic wrote in his 2013 diet and fitness book, "Serve to Win." Inspired by watching Pete Sampras win Wimbledon on TV, he decided it would be him one day. "For the next 13 years, I gave every day of my life to reaching my goal."

Djokovic won his first major tournament title at the Australian Open in 2008, but it was three years before he captured another.

The turning point of his career came in 2011, when Djokovic won 10 titles that included three Grand Slams and he achieved the No. 1 ranking in men's tennis for the first time.

"It wasn't a new racquet, a new workout, a new coach, or even a new serve that helped me. It was a new diet," Djokovic wrote in his book, which explained how going gluten-free helped end his years of battling frequent fatigue during long matches, occasionally collapsing on court and having trouble breathing.

Players typically speak in awe of Djokovic's talent, his physical agility that can produce jaw-dropping performances and how he has mastered his mental game. "His best trait is his mind," American player Sam Querrey said last year about Djokovic.

In 2016, Djokovic teamed up with Pepe Imaz, a Spanish coach who had a modest tennis career and then opened a Marbella-based tennis academy with the motto, "Amor y Paz" (Love and Peace). It was after working with Imaz that Djokovic began his now-trademark gesture of turning to all four sides of the tennis

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court when he wins and throwing love to the fans from his heart.

He also delved into meditation to help calm his mind and learned visualization techniques that he says allowed him to feel elevated above stressful situations.

Djokovic described the method to an audience at the tennis academy in 2016, seated on a stage alongside Imaz. Imagine being stuck in a traffic jam and feeling frustrated and confused by all the cars, the people, the sounds, he said.

"What if for a second, instead of being part of the traffic, you are outside of the traffic on the hill, and you are observing the traffic?" Djokovic said.

He has applied those techniques to tennis.

After saving two match points to beat Federer in a five-set thriller in the 2019 Wimbledon final, Djokovic explained how he coped during what was "probably the most mentally demanding match" of his career, playing against arguably the most-loved tennis player of all time.

"So when the crowd is chanting 'Roger,' I hear Novak," he said. "I try to convince myself."

Some of Djokovic's convictions have drawn negative headlines. In May 2020, he claimed during an Instagram live interview with self-styled wellness guru Chervin Jafarieh that people could use positive thinking to alter the composition of toxic food and polluted water.

Djokovic and his wife, Jelena, share New Age, esoteric beliefs and together have visited the Bosnian hill town of Visoko, where some believe that four hills shaped like pyramids offer healing powers, a claim disputed by scientists.

The tennis star's visits have spurred tourism to the site where Bosnian amateur archaeologist Semir Osmanagic opened a pyramid park that features a web of underground tunnels he claims emit a special energy.

Osmanagic, who has been photographed giving Djokovic personal tours of the park, supports the player's anti-vaccine stance.

"He is an outstanding athlete who is very strict about what he eats, drinks and what he puts in his body, and he is standing up for freedom of choice," Osmanagic told AP.

Unlike the heavy criticism Djokovic has faced internationally, he has widespread support in Serbia, where the revoking of his Australian visa is viewed as anti-Serb. Until the drama Down Under began, Djokovic had refused to say if he was vaccinated but it was clear that he was vaccine sceptic.

"I'm personally against vaccines and I wouldn't want anyone to force me to take one so I can travel," he said during an April 2020 online chat with other Serbian tennis players.

His vaccination status is not Djokovic's first controversy, but the drawn-out saga at the Australian Open is raising questions about his legacy.

Djokovic faced criticism earlier in the pandemic for organizing a tennis tournament in the Balkans in June 2020, a time when professional tennis was shut down. Photos and videos emerged showing players ignoring social distancing and partying afterhours without masks. The tournament was abandoned after several players, including Djokovic and his wife tested positive for the coronavirus.

A few months later, he was kicked out of the U.S. Open after hitting a ball in frustration and it slammed into the throat of a line judge. It was unintentional, and Djokovic repeatedly apologized, but his action spotlighted a fiery temperament that he works hard to suppress.

"He's already had enough moments and enough question marks to definitely tarnish his legacy," ESPN tennis commentator Pam Shriver said in a recent conference call. "But certainly nothing will ever tarnish his record."

Players at Melbourne Park considered the same question on Saturday.

"He still won 20 Grand Slams. He still has the most weeks as world No. 1. He still has the most Masters Series (titles)," said Alexander Zverev, the 2020 U.S. Open runner-up who is close to Djokovic. "Don't question his legacy because of this."

Defending Australian Open women's champion Naomi Osaka called the vaccine saga an unfortunate situation: "He's such a great player, and it's kind of sad that some people might remember him this way."

A digital divide haunts schools adapting to virus hurdles

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

When April Schneider's children returned to in-person classrooms this year, she thought they were leaving behind the struggles from more than a year of remote learning. No more problems with borrowed tablets. No more days of missed lessons because her kids couldn't connect to their virtual schooling.

But coronavirus cases in her children's New York City classrooms, and the subsequent quarantines, sent her kids back to learning from home. Without personal devices for each child, Schneider said they were largely left to do nothing while stuck at home.

"So there you go again, with no computer, and you're back to square one as if COVID just begun all over again in a smaller form," Schneider said.

As more families pivot back to remote learning amid quarantines and school closures, reliable, consistent access to devices and home internet remains elusive for many students who need them to keep up with their schoolwork. Home internet access for students has improved since the onset of the pandemic with help from philanthropy, federal relief funding and other efforts — but obstacles linger, including a lack of devices, slow speeds and financial hurdles.

Concerns around the digital divide have shifted toward families that are "underconnected" and able to access the internet only sporadically, said Vikki Katz, a communication professor at Rutgers University.

"It's about whether or not you can withstand the disruptions of these quick pivots in ways that don't derail your learning," she said.

In two studies, one conducted in 2015 and another in 2021, Katz and other researchers surveyed low-income families with young children. While rates of home internet access and computer ownership are up significantly, the proportion of lower-income families whose internet access is unreliable or insufficient remained roughly the same.

A year into the pandemic, more than half the families Katz surveyed reported that their children's ability to tune into online classes had been disrupted in some way.

Racial and income divides persist in home internet access, according to data from the Pew Research Center. One survey conducted in April of 2020 found that during the initial school closures, 59% of lower-income families faced digital barriers, such as having to log on from a smartphone, not having a device or having to use a public network because their home network was not reliable enough.

About 34% of households making less than \$30,000 reported having trouble paying for their home internet bill, as did 25% of those making between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Compared to white households, Black and Latino families were less likely to have access to broadband and a computer at home.

For Schneider's children, not having enough working devices at home during the previous school year for remote learning meant missing assignments and classes. The kids struggled to focus on their work, even if they received paper assignments. During quarantine periods this year, she said, they were largely unable to participate in any instruction at all.

"Without the equipment ... their experience was that they were more off than on," Schneider said. "As soon as they said school was going to back up ... I just had to take my chances and send them. They needed not to be out of school any longer."

Even before the pandemic sent most schools to some form of remote learning, classrooms have increasingly embraced the role of technology in teaching, creating a "homework gap" between those who do and do not have access to internet and devices at home. Roughly 2.9 million school children lived in households without internet access, according to pre-pandemic Census data, and about 2.1 million lived in households without a laptop or desktop computer.

Some families are frustrated more hasn't been done to close the gap.

When her grandchildren's Pittsburgh school moved to online learning in March of 2020, Janice Myers and her four grandchildren shared a single laptop. One month, she struggled to afford the internet bill on her fixed retirement income. She tried to access the company's \$10 monthly rate designed to keep

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low-income kids connected during the pandemic, but said she was told she did not qualify because she was an existing customer.

This school year, the children were adjusting well to in-person learning until a quarantine sent them home for a week, Myers said. Around Thanksgiving, the school shut down in-person classes again, this time for nearly three weeks. Both times, the school did not send the children home with tablets, leaving them with little instruction except a thin packet of worksheets, she said.

"To my mind, you had an entire school year to learn how to be better prepared, and how to be proactive and how to incorporate a Plan B at the drop of a hat," she said. "There was no reason why every student, when they returned to school, didn't receive or keep their laptop."

Among the districts using some of their federal relief money to boost home internet access is California's Chula Vista Elementary School District, which is incorporating the cost of hotspots and other internet services into the budget for the next three years. It gives priority for internet hot spots to kids who have the most trouble connecting to school, such as foster children and youth experiencing housing instability.

Assistant superintendent Matthew Tessier said the district found many low-income families may have internet access through a wireless phone, but faced limits like data caps and set monthly minutes. Those caps often made connecting kids to homework and online resources a challenge even before the pandemic.

Identifying which kids are in greater need and having devices ready to go can help minimize the impact of disruptions to learning, Katz said.

"All these conversations we keep having about learning loss, whether or not we should use that term, places the responsibility and the blame for what kids have learned on the students and the family ... instead of recognizing that this is still the school's responsibility to bridge this gap when they send kids home," Katz said.

Governors turn to budgets to guard against climate change

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Their state budgets flush with cash, Democratic and Republican governors alike want to spend some of the windfall on projects aimed at slowing climate change and guarding against its consequences, from floods and wildfires to dirty air.

Democratic governors such as California's Gavin Newsom and Washington's Jay Inslee have been clear about their plans to boost spending on climate-related projects, including expanding access to electric vehicles and creating more storage for clean energies such as solar. Newsom deemed climate change one of five "existential threats" facing the nation's most populous state when he rolled out his proposed state budget this past week.

In Republican-led states, governors want to protect communities from natural disasters and drought, even as many of them won't link such spending to global warming.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey this past week pitched \$1 billion for water infrastructure as drought grips the Western U.S., shriveling water supplies for cities and farms. Idaho Gov. Brad Little, who has acknowledged climate change's role in worsening wildfires, proposed \$150 million for five years' worth of fire-fighting costs, plus more for new fire personnel. In South Carolina, Gov. Henry McMaster called on lawmakers to spend \$300 million in federal money for, among other things, protecting the state's coastline against flooding, erosion and storm damage.

"I can think of no more meritorious use of taxpayer funds than to protect these pristine properties for future generations of South Carolinians," he said as he presented his proposed state budget, which also includes \$17 million to use in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural disasters.

Governors' proposals are just the first step in budget negotiations, and they'll have to work with state lawmakers on the final details. Many governors will issue their plans in the coming weeks, with some already telegraphing their priorities. New York's Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, used her state of the state address to call for \$500 million in spending on offshore wind projects.

This year's discussions on how to spend taxpayers' money comes not only as many states are seeing

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massive budget surpluses, but also as the negative effects of changing weather patterns are becoming ever harder to ignore. As drought continued in much of the West, an unseasonable December wildfire ripped through a Colorado neighborhood near Boulder. Deadly off-season tornados ravaged Kentucky, and several hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast. Late summer temperatures soared to sweltering, record-breaking levels in the Pacific Northwest.

"The climate crisis is not an abstraction. It is something that I and every governor in the United States, almost on a weekly basis, have to deal with," Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, said this past week.

Meanwhile, Democratic President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion package of social and environmental initiatives is stalled in Congress, leaving the prospect of more federal money to fight climate change uncertain. States, mostly led by Democrats, took on a larger role advancing climate policies during former Republican President Donald Trump's time in office.

Most states are awash in money as tax collections have exceeded expectations because of strong consumer spending and rising prices, which together have bolstered sales tax revenue. On top of that, states are taking in billions of dollars in federal pandemic relief and are preparing for a big boost in federal infrastructure money after Congress passed a \$1 trillion public works bill in November. Beyond increasing climate spending, states are looking to the windfall to pad their reserves, cut taxes, boost funding for education and increase affordable housing.

California is home to the most ambitious climate spending, with Newsom calling for \$22 billion for various projects spread over the next five years. The bulk of that would go to transportation projects such as electrifying school buses and expanding vehicle charging stations into disadvantaged communities. He also proposed another \$2 billion for clean energy development and storage.

California-based companies that work to address climate change and develop green technologies could be eligible for tax credits. Through programs to build more housing in downtown corridors and make communities more walkable, Newsom threaded his efforts to tackle climate change throughout his budget proposal.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and legislative leaders promised increased investments related to wildfires, such as adding fire response equipment and training for firefighters, after last month's Boulder County wildfire. The Democratic governor has requested about \$75 million for such efforts, and the Democratic-led Legislature has signaled it wants more.

Polis also wants to spend \$425 million on electrifying bus and truck fleets, aerial and ground monitoring of oil and gas emissions, and more.

"From extreme floods to megafires to seemingly never-ending ozone alerts, our state's long-term health is on the line. ... We have to do everything in our power to make sure this is not the new normal," Colorado Senate Majority Leader Steve Fenberg said.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, has asked the state legislature to fund the creation of a "climate change bureau," with a 15-member staff and \$2.5 million initial budget.

It would implement pollution standards for vehicles and push the state's economy toward a point where just as much carbon is being taken out of the atmosphere as is being emitted. Her administration has offered limited details on the proposal.

Even as they prioritize climate initiatives, many governors are balancing those plans with a need to support their state's current economy as it transitions away from a dependence on fossil fuels. In New Mexico, the output of oil and natural gas has surged to an all-time high under Lujan Grisham's administration. At least one-fourth of the state's general fund budget can be traced to income from the oil and natural gas industries – underwriting public education, health care and other services.

In some states, it's lawmakers who are driving climate spending. Democrats who control Maryland's legislature are pushing a climate change measure that would reduce methane emissions, modernize the electric grid and invest in green technology.

The package, subject to negotiations, would accelerate the state's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The current plan is to cut emissions by 40% of 2006 levels by 2030. The Democrats' new plans is to raise that emissions reduction to 60%.

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They also want to set a goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045, meaning at least as much carbon is being removed from the atmosphere as what's being emitted. Money for climate programs could come from the state's \$4.6 billion budget surplus and federal infrastructure funding.

Maryland Democrats have enough members to override any vetoes by Republican Gov. Larry Hogan, though he has previously supported efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

State Sen. Paul Pinsky, a Democrat, said advancing climate policy has political merits, particularly in the state that is home to Chesapeake Bay, the nation's largest estuary. All Maryland state lawmakers are up for re-election this year, as are about two-thirds of governors across the U.S.

"I think legislators want to be able to run on something, and people should be accountable," Pinsky said. "Do they support the environment and this kind of bold action or not?"

Prince Andrew, accuser seek witnesses in sex abuse lawsuit

LONDON (AP) — Lawyers for Prince Andrew and Virginia Giuffre have filed their initial requests for witnesses in her lawsuit accusing the British royal of sexually abusing her at age 17.

Recently released documents show that the prince's legal team is seeking witness accounts from her husband, Robert Giuffre, and her psychologist, Judith Lightfoot, as part of the civil case filed in the U.S.

Giuffre's lawyers, meanwhile, are seeking witness accounts from the prince's former assistant and a woman who claims to have seen him at a London nightclub with her during the time in question.

The lawsuit cleared a hurdle after a judge earlier this week refused Andrew's request to have it dismissed.

Giuffre sued Andrew, 61, in August, saying she was coerced into sexual encounters with him in 2001 by Epstein and his longtime companion, Ghislaine Maxwell. Giuffre said she was sexually abused by Andrew at Maxwell's London home, at Epstein's New York mansion and at Epstein's estate in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The prince has strenuously denied Giuffre's allegations, telling the BBC in 2019 that sex with Giuffre "didn't happen" and that he had "no recollection" of meeting her.

Recently released documents show that Andrew's lawyers argue Giuffre "may suffer from false memories," and say she should be questioned about "theory of false memories" along with other matters discussed during her sessions with Giuffre and any prescriptions she wrote for her.

Andrew's lawyers want Robert Giuffre to be questioned about the circumstances under which the couple met around 2002 and their household finances. They want the testimony from the two, who are both Australian residents, by April 29 or as soon as possible after that.

Giuffre's lawyers, meanwhile, have filed similar requests for Andrew's side. They want testimony from his former assistant Robert Olney, whose name they say appeared in Epstein's phone book under "Duke of York," which they say indicates he knew about Andrew's travel to Epstein's properties.

Her lawyers are also seeking testimony from Shukri Walker, who they say has been quoted in news reports talking about how she saw Andrew at the London nightclub Tramp during the time period in question with a young woman who might have been Giuffre.

The AP does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they choose to come forward publicly, as Giuffre has.

2 weeks in, does NYC Mayor Eric Adams still have swagger?

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — On his eighth day as New York City's mayor, Eric Adams stood before reporters to announce federal money for a pandemic-beleaguered hospital system — and take questions about some provocative hires in his nascent administration.

Within hours, he was before the news cameras again, grappling with his first major calamity.

A fire had ripped through a Bronx apartment building, killing 17 people, including eight children. Adams called it a "horrific, horrific painful moment," stood shoulder to shoulder with other politicians, and pledged to help victims with every available resource.

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In a frenetic juxtaposition that Sunday, the new mayor stepped into the roles of cheerleader and crisis manager of the most unwieldy of cities, all the while facing questions about early controversies of his own making.

The Adams era of New York City is shaping up much like the man: fast-paced, at times contradictory, and hard to pin down.

"It's only been two weeks, but it also feels like it's been a whirlwind two weeks," said Christina Greer, a political science professor at Fordham University.

Adams himself has long defied easy categorization and cut a complex reputation.

He is a Democrat who won a crowded primary contest last year as one of the most moderate candidates in the field, but he pushes back on the idea that he's not a progressive.

He is a Black man who was brutally beaten by police officers as a teenager who went on to join the police force and become one of its few internal critics. He climbed to the rank of captain while clashing with the department's leaders. He still has deep ties to the department. He wore an NYPD hat to the scene of the Bronx fire.

He's a vegan who preaches the benefits of a morning green smoothie and meditation. He has defended, in some cases, the use of the stop-and-frisk police tactic and solitary confinement in jails.

He makes no secret of his love of New York's nightlife and members-only nightclubs, telling late-show host Stephen Colbert that as mayor, "I must test the product."

He takes the subway, like some of his predecessors, and insists it's not a show. He speaks regularly about having grown up in poverty with a single mother who cleaned houses. He is known for wearing designer loafers. He drives a Prius. He parked that Prius illegally and drove it on the sidewalk. He wants to be paid in cryptocurrency.

As mayor, Adams has made a point of being omnipresent and projecting command. He got out in front of the city's first major snowstorm of the winter, holding news conferences and releasing videos on Twitter showing him moving about the city in the snow and salting a stoop.

He presented a united city response to the fire, visiting the scene, meeting with the schoolteachers of the children who died and attending a prayer service at a mosque where many of the victims were congregants.

Adams struck the right tone, coming across as a strong manager who showed empathy, said Basil Smikle, a lecturer and director of the public policy program at Hunter College and a former executive director of the New York State Democratic Party.

Adams also ruffled feathers when he said New York, which has lost more than 36,500 people to COVID-19, needed an attitude adjustment.

"When a mayor has swagger, the city has swagger," he said. "We've allowed people to beat us down so much that all we did was wallow in COVID."

He drew more backlash when, while making a point that COVID-19 shutdowns are especially hurtful to people who can't work from home, he said "low skill" service industry workers "don't have the academic skills to sit in the corner office."

U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a former bartender, attacked his word choice, saying the idea of "low skill" jobs is "a myth perpetuated by wealthy interests to justify inhumane working conditions."

Adams has been celebrated for making diverse appointments, bringing on five women, four of whom are women of color, as deputy mayors, and hiring the city's first ever female police commissioner.

But he also raised eyebrows by hiring his brother to run his security detail, a \$210,000 job. Adams said his brother, a former police sergeant, was the most qualified person to protect him from "anarchists" and "white supremacy."

Adams was also criticized by some over his pick for deputy mayor for public safety, Philip Banks, a former top NYPD commander who had been the subject of a federal corruption investigation when he retired from the department in 2014. Adams said Banks, who was never charged, was the best person for the job.

Greer said Adams shares some qualities like two other politicians that, like him, hail from Queens: Former President Donald Trump and former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

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All three men have had a swirl of nepotism, charisma, arrogance, braggadocious behavior, and an innate understanding of people and how to connect with them, she said.

The complicated impression trailing his early weeks may foreshadow the next four years.

Smikle said Adams is cushioned, at least for now, by a lot of political capital, with officials such as Gov. Kathy Hochul seeking his alliance as she runs for reelection. He also has a diverse coalition of voters that carried him into office.

"Even if voters don't know him, they feel that he does represent their slice of life," he said.

Greer said Adams' appeal to voters might differ from day to day. "I mean, you just can't call it with him."

Expect more worrisome variants after omicron, scientists say

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Get ready to learn more Greek letters. Scientists warn that omicron's whirlwind advance practically ensures it won't be the last version of the coronavirus to worry the world.

Every infection provides a chance for the virus to mutate, and omicron has an edge over its predecessors: It spreads way faster despite emerging on a planet with a stronger patchwork of immunity from vaccines and prior illness.

That means more people in whom the virus can further evolve. Experts don't know what the next variants will look like or how they might shape the pandemic, but they say there's no guarantee the sequels of omicron will cause milder illness or that existing vaccines will work against them.

They urge wider vaccination now, while today's shots still work.

"The faster omicron spreads, the more opportunities there are for mutation, potentially leading to more variants," Leonardo Martinez, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Boston University, said.

Since it emerged in mid-November, omicron has raced across the globe like fire through dry grass. Research shows the variant is at least twice as contagious as delta and at least four times as contagious as the original version of the virus.

Omicron is more likely than delta to reinfect individuals who previously had COVID-19 and to cause "breakthrough infections" in vaccinated people while also attacking the unvaccinated. The World Health Organization reported a record 15 million new COVID-19 cases for the week of Jan. 3-9, a 55% increase from the previous week.

Along with keeping comparatively healthy people out of work and school, the ease with which the variant spreads increases the odds the virus will infect and linger inside people with weakened immune systems - giving it more time to develop potent mutations.

"It's the longer, persistent infections that seem to be the most likely breeding grounds for new variants," said Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University. "It's only when you have very widespread infection that you're going to provide the opportunity for that to occur."

Because omicron appears to cause less severe disease than delta, its behavior has kindled hope that it could be the start of a trend that eventually makes the virus milder like a common cold.

It's a possibility, experts say, given that viruses don't spread well if they kill their hosts very quickly. But viruses don't always get less deadly over time.

A variant could also achieve its main goal - replicating - if infected people developed mild symptoms initially, spread the virus by interacting with others, then got very sick later, Ray explained by way of example.

"People have wondered whether the virus will evolve to mildness. But there's no particular reason for it to do so," he said. "I don't think we can be confident that the virus will become less lethal over time."

Getting progressively better at evading immunity helps a virus to survive over the long term. When SARS-CoV-2 first struck, no one was immune. But infections and vaccines have conferred at least some immunity to much of the world, so the virus must adapt.

There are many possible avenues for evolution. Animals could potentially incubate and unleash new variants. Pet dogs and cats, deer and farm-raised mink are only a few of the animals vulnerable to the virus, which can potentially mutate within them and leap back to people.

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Another potential route: With both omicron and delta circulating, people may get double infections that could spawn what Ray calls "Frankenvariants," hybrids with characteristics of both types.

When new variants do develop, scientists said it's still very difficult to know from genetic features which ones might take off. For example, omicron has many more mutations than previous variants, around 30 in the spike protein that lets it attach to human cells. But the so-called IHU variant identified in France and being monitored by the WHO has 46 mutations and doesn't seem to have spread much at all.

To curb the emergence of variants, scientists stress continuing with public health measures such as masking and getting vaccinated. While omicron is better able to evade immunity than delta, experts said, vaccines still offer protection and booster shots greatly reduce serious illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

Anne Thomas, a 64-year-old IT analyst in Westerly, Rhode Island, said she's fully vaccinated and boosted and also tries to stay safe by mostly staying home while her state has one of the highest COVID-19 case rates in the U.S.

"I have no doubt at all that these viruses are going to continue to mutate and we're going to be dealing with this for a very long time," she said.

Ray likened vaccines to armor for humanity that greatly hinders viral spread even if it doesn't completely stop it. For a virus that spreads exponentially, he said, "anything that curbs transmission can have a great effect." Also, when vaccinated people get sick, Ray said their illness is usually milder and clears more quickly, leaving less time to spawn dangerous variants.

Experts say the virus won't become endemic like the flu as long as global vaccination rates are so low. During a recent press conference, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that protecting people from future variants — including those that may be fully resistant to today's shots — depends on ending global vaccine inequity.

Tedros said he'd like to see 70% of people in every country vaccinated by mid-year. Currently, there are dozens of countries where less than a quarter of the population is fully vaccinated, according to Johns Hopkins University statistics. And in the United States, many people continue to resist available vaccines.

"These huge unvaccinated swaths in the U.S., Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere are basically variant factories," said Dr. Prabhat Jha of the Centre for Global Health Research at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. "It's been a colossal failure in global leadership that we have not been able to do this."

In the meantime, new variants are inevitable, said Louis Mansky, director of the Institute for Molecular Virology at the University of Minnesota.

With so many unvaccinated people, he said, "the virus is still kind of in control of what's going on."

Let the challenges begin! Time for contesting census is here

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Detroit's mayor believes tens of thousands of residents in the majority-Black city were missed in the 2020 census. Somerton, Arizona, leaders are incredulous the Census Bureau says they lost residents during a decade when the overwhelmingly Hispanic community grew enough to warrant a new high school.

And college towns across the U.S. believe they were undercounted as students fled campuses shuttered by the coronavirus.

The time for communities with a beef about how they were counted in the 2020 census has arrived.

At the start of the new year, the U.S. Census Bureau began accepting challenges from states, counties, cities and tribal nations about one of the most difficult counts in recent memory, due to the pandemic, political interference from the Trump administration, hurricanes and wildfires.

The scope for making challenges through the Count Question Resolution program is narrow, and few local governments got their numbers changed after the 2010 census. But the bureau has made adjustments when past errors were revealed.

Unprecedented hurdles in 2020 may heighten the need for tweaks this time around. Many leaders worry that inaccurate figures could cost their jurisdictions their share of the \$1.5 trillion the federal government distributes annually based on census numbers.

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Along with concerns about undercounted racial and ethnic groups and college students, some small towns believe a new privacy method the Census Bureau used for the first time skewed their numbers. And officials in areas with large institutions like prisons or military barracks worry that pandemic lockdowns left out many inmates or service members.

The census challenges won't change the number of congressional seats each state gets, or the numbers used for redrawing political districts. Those were released in August so the redrawing of district lines could be completed in time for upcoming elections.

At this point, it's hard to say how many governments will appeal through the program, which has been around since 1990. As of this week, the Census Bureau hadn't made public any applications. But states, cities, counties and tribal nations have through June 2023 to submit them.

State College, Pennsylvania, home to tens of thousands of students at Penn State University, plans to file a challenge this winter because officials believe 4,000 to 5,800 people were missed in the community of more than 40,500 residents, said Douglas Shontz, a borough spokesman.

"I'm not very optimistic but we're going to explore every route we can to ensure everyone in State College was properly counted," Shontz said in an email.

The lack of optimism may be because the scope of challenges is narrow — for mistakes made in recording boundaries or housing that was skipped over during data processing. In years past, only a few were successful. Revisions to population and housing totals were made to about 1% of the nation's 39,000 governments after the 2010 census.

"Unfortunately, the program hasn't resulted in many changes, which might be discouraging, but this is a really important opportunity to fix the numbers," said Cara Brumfield, a senior policy analyst at the Georgetown Center on Poverty & Inequality.

When they do succeed, challenges can have significant impact. After the 2010 census, the city of Houston got its population count revised from 2.09 million to 2.1 million. The addition of 812 previously uncounted residents triggered the addition of two city council seats.

Some demographers and local government officials say the program should allow for challenges for other problems, including mistakes by census takers or managers. Some say they need more latitude to use administrative records to show errors in the head count.

"We propose that 'human error' during census-taking field operations should have a remedy, if such errors are detected and substantiated," said Todd Graham, principal demographer for the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, in public comments on the program.

Citing concerns about residents being missed in Detroit, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform on Thursday asked the Census Bureau for a briefing on whether communities might be able to challenge and fix their population counts if an undercount is documented.

Local governments will soon have another way to change the numbers. Starting next year, they can hire the Census Bureau to conduct a "special census" in a re-do of the 2020 count, with the locals footing the bill. They can also challenge population estimates that use the census figures as a base upon which births, deaths and migration are added annually.

Given the 2020 problems counting people in dorms, military barracks, nursing homes and prisons during the pandemic, the Census Bureau has proposed creating a separate program to accept challenges for these "group quarters." State, city and tribal officials have been sounding the alarm about the counts because students were sent home from campuses, and prisons and nursing homes went into lockdowns when those residents were supposed to be counted.

Brumfield called the proposal "a step in the right direction." Any changes will be incorporated into future population estimates and the bureau's American Community Survey, under the proposal.

"I'm optimistic it will address a lot of concerns," Brumfield said. "It's a good sign that the bureau has been listening."

Today in History

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Jan. 16, the 16th day of 2022. There are 349 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 16, 1991, the White House announced the start of Operation Desert Storm to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. (Allied forces prevailed on Feb. 28, 1991.)

On this date:

In 27 B.C., Caesar Augustus was declared the first Emperor of the Roman Empire by the Senate.

In 1865, Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman decreed that 400,000 acres of land in the South would be divided into 40-acre lots and given to former slaves. (The order, later revoked by President Andrew Johnson, is believed to have inspired the expression, "Forty acres and a mule.")

In 1912, a day before reaching the South Pole, British explorer Robert Scott and his expedition found evidence that Roald Amundsen of Norway and his team had gotten there ahead of them.

In 1919, pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski (pah-dehr-EHF'-skee) became the first premier of the newly created Republic of Poland.

In 1920, Prohibition began in the United States as the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution took effect, one year to the day after its ratification. (It was later repealed by the 21st Amendment.)

In 1942, actor Carole Lombard, 33, her mother, Elizabeth, and 20 other people were killed when their plane crashed near Las Vegas, Nevada, while en route to California from a war-bond promotion tour.

In 1987, Hu Yaobang resigned as head of China's Communist Party, declaring he'd made mistakes in dealing with student turmoil and intellectual challenges to the system.

In 1989, three days of rioting began in Miami when a police officer fatally shot Clement Lloyd, a Black motorcyclist, causing a crash that also claimed the life of Lloyd's passenger, Allan Blanchard. (The officer, William Lozano, was convicted of manslaughter, but then was acquitted in a retrial.)

In 2002, Richard Reid was indicted in Boston on federal charges alleging he'd tried to blow up a U.S.-bound jetliner with explosives hidden in his shoes. (Reid later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2003, the space shuttle Columbia blasted off for what turned out to be its last flight; on board was Israel's first astronaut, Ilan Ramon (ee-LAHN' rah-MOHN'). (The mission ended in tragedy on Feb. 1, when the shuttle broke up during its return descent, killing all seven crew members.)

In 2007, Democratic Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois launched his successful bid for the White House.

In 2020, the first impeachment trial of President Donald Trump opened in the Senate, with senators standing and swearing an oath of "impartial justice." Trump again denounced the proceedings as a "hoax," while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said new evidence reinforced the need to call additional witnesses. (Trump would be acquitted on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.)

Ten years ago: Republican presidential front-runner Mitt Romney fended off attacks from rivals during a debate in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; hours before the debate, former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman withdrew from the race and announced his support for Romney despite their differences.

Five years ago: Turkish authorities captured an Uzbek national suspected of killing 39 people during an attack on an Istanbul nightclub during New Year's celebrations. Former NASA astronaut Eugene Cernan, to date the last man to walk on the moon, died in Houston at age 82.

One year ago: By the busload and planeload, National Guard troops poured into the nation's capital, as governors answered the urgent pleas of U.S. defense officials for more troops to help safeguard Washington in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, even as they kept anxious eyes on possible violent protests in their own states. Biden introduced his team of scientific advisers, saying they would lead with "science and truth." Phil Spector, the eccentric and revolutionary music producer who transformed rock music with his "Wall of Sound" method, died in California at 81 while serving a prison sentence for killing actor Lana Clarkson in 2003 at his mansion.

Today's Birthdays: Author William Kennedy is 94. Author-editor Norman Podhoretz is 92. Opera singer Marilyn Horne is 88. Hall of Fame auto racer A.J. Foyt is 87. Singer Barbara Lynn is 80. Country singer

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Ronnie Milsap is 79. Singer Katherine Anderson Schaffner (The Marvelettes) is 78. Country singer Jim Stafford is 78. Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger is 75. Movie director John Carpenter is 74. Actor-dancer-choreographer Debbie Allen is 72. R&B singer Maxine Jones (En Vogue) is 63. Singer Sade (shah-DAY') is 63. Pop/rock singer-songwriter Jill Sobule is 63. Rock musician Paul Webb (Talk Talk) is 60. Actor David Chokachi (CHOH'-kuh-chee) is 54. Former Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta is 53. Actor-writer-director Josh Evans is 51. Actor-comedian Jonathan Mangum is 51. Actor Richard T. Jones is 50. Actor Josie Davis is 49. Model Kate Moss is 48. Actor-playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda is 42. Country musician James Young (The Eli Young Band) is 42. Rock musician Nick Valensi (The Strokes) is 41. Actor Renee Felice Smith is 37. NFL quarterback Joe Flacco is 37. Actor Yvonne Zima is 33.