

# Groton Daily Independent

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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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## Six grapplers place at Battler Invite

Several Groton Area wrestlers placed at the Potter County Wrestling Tournament held Saturday. Placing fourth were Christian Ehresmann, Korbin Kucker and Cole Bisbee; placing fifth were Lane Krueger and Brevin Fliehs; and Porter Johnson placed sixth. Groton Area placed seventh in a field of 20 teams.

### **113: Porter Johnson (10-15) placed 6th and scored 8.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Cade Costello (Harding County) 12-12 won by fall over Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 (Fall 0:52)

Cons. Round 1 - Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Cons. Round 2 - Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 won by fall over Abrym Heinert (Newell) 1-10 (Fall 2:55)

Cons. Round 3 - Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 won by decision over Taylor Merkel (Clark Willow Lake) 10-10 (Dec 8-5)

Cons. Semi - Nicholas Schlachter (Potter County) 15-9 won by fall over Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 (Fall 4:48)

5th Place Match - Xavier Donovan (Chamberlain) 6-5 won by major decision over Porter Johnson (Groton) 10-15 (MD 13-0)

### **132: Pierce Kettering (18-11) scored 7.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Pierce Kettering (Groton) 18-11 won by fall over CJ Fitzsimmons (Deuel) 4-13 (Fall 2:00)

Quarterfinal - Matthew Wolf (South Border) 15-5 won by decision over Pierce Kettering (Groton) 18-11 (Dec 8-3)

Cons. Round 2 - Pierce Kettering (Groton) 18-11 won by fall over Gage Baumgarn (Webster) 11-18 (Fall 2:56)

Cons. Round 3 - Quinn Long (Chamberlain) 7-12 won by fall over Pierce Kettering (Groton) 18-11 (Fall 1:25)

### **138: Brevin Fliehs (16-7) placed 5th and scored 7.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Ethan Mcelhone (Clark Willow Lake) 15-9 won by major decision over Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 (MD 13-0)

Cons. Round 2 - Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 won by decision over Tucker Adkins (Deuel) 2-13 (Dec 10-6)

Cons. Round 3 - Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 won by decision over Jackson Charron (Pierre T.F. Riggs) 1-2 (Dec 7-6)

Cons. Semi - Bryce Reuer (Chamberlain) 14-10 won by decision over Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 (Dec 4-2)

5th Place Match - Brevin Fliehs (Groton) 16-7 won by decision over Caden Wilson (Faulkton Area) 8-12 (Dec 7-0)

### **145: Christian Ehresmann (18-5) placed 4th and scored 16.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 18-5 won by fall over Jaxon Ducheneaux (Pierre T.F. Riggs) 14-12 (Fall 1:00)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 18-5 won by decision over Colton Brady (Stanley County) 19-15 (Dec 8-6)

Semifinal - Chase VanDerBoom (Newell) 25-4 won by fall over Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 18-5 (Fall 3:57)

Cons. Semi - Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 18-5 won by fall over Jaxon Ducheneaux (Pierre T.F. Riggs) 14-12 (Fall 4:08)

3rd Place Match - Lucas Arcoren (Sully Buttes) 16-10 won by tech fall over Christian Ehresmann (Groton) 18-5 (TF-1.5 5:00 (19-4))

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## **152: Korbin Kucker (15-12) placed 4th and scored 16.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 15-12 won by fall over Timmy McGaugh (Faulkton Area) 2-8 (Fall 1:50)

Quarterfinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 15-12 won by fall over Korbin Whiteley (Deuel) 12-8 (Fall 2:23)

Semifinal - Gunnar Kvistad (Clark Willow Lake) 20-4 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton) 15-12 (Fall 3:02)

Cons. Semi - Korbin Kucker (Groton) 15-12 won by decision over Lincoln Fortin (Warner) 11-7 (Dec 6-1)

3rd Place Match - Korbin Whiteley (Deuel) 12-8 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton) 15-12 (Fall 2:13)

## **160: Cole Bisbee (22-9) placed 4th and scored 17.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Cole Bisbee (Groton) 22-9 won by fall over Ty Graesser (Chamberlain) 1-2 (Fall 3:21)

Quarterfinal - Cole Bisbee (Groton) 22-9 won by fall over Taylor Meier (South Border) 1-2 (Fall 1:16)

Semifinal - Landon Schumacher (Linton HMB) 19-8 won by decision over Cole Bisbee (Groton) 22-9 (Dec 5-1)

Cons. Semi - Cole Bisbee (Groton) 22-9 won by major decision over Lincoln Dikoff (Faulkton Area) 9-12 (MD 13-2)

3rd Place Match - Ethan Martinmaas (Pierre T.F. Riggs) 7-9 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton) 22-9 (Fall 1:39)

## **220: Lane Krueger (15-6) placed 5th and scored 9.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Preston Cavalier (Warner) 12-7 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 (Fall 0:56)

Cons. Round 2 - Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Round 3 - Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 won by decision over Herman Frisvold (Lemmon/McIntosh) 9-9 (Dec 2-1)

Cons. Semi - Grey Gilbert (Harding County) 23-5 won in tie breaker - 1 over Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 (TB-1 1-0)

5th Place Match - Lane Krueger (Groton) 15-6 won by fall over Wyatt Powers (Chamberlain) 3-12 (Fall 3:46)

## The People at your Table

One of my favorite parables describes the difference between heaven and hell. In both places, hungry people sit at tables laden with delicious food. In hell, people suffer and starve because they cannot eat with the long utensils provided. In heaven, people are happy and thrive because they use the utensils to feed each other.

Many cultures and religions have some variation of this story. It illustrates a universal truth: we depend on each other. The current pandemic has starkly illustrated this interdependency, and it does not sit comfortably with our American culture of self-reliance and rugged individualism.

As a physician, I depend on nurses, techs, therapists, and pharmacists. I depend on hospitalists to care for patients too sick to stay home. Hospitalists depend on intensivists to care for the sickest. Doctors depend on nurses providing hands-on care at the bedside, respiratory therapists adjusting ventilators, technicians operating machines which substitute for failing organs. And we all rely on those who sterilize equipment, launder sheets, clean rooms, repair machines, and prepare food.

Two years into the Covid 19 pandemic, those of us who remain in healthcare are tired. We have enough beds, and ventilators, and protective equipment, but the human infrastructure is struggling to keep up.

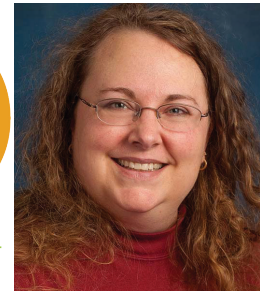
Unfortunately, we cannot simply hire more people. Becoming a physician requires 11-plus years of higher education. Most care team members have at least two years of specialized schooling which is only the beginning; learning is an ongoing process. Health systems may accelerate some of the administrative hurdles to get more people to the bedside, but we cannot accelerate the time it takes to know what to do there.

The upcoming tsunami of Omicron Covid patients threatens to swamp our health care systems. Not only are more people in need, but their needs are far more intense. In addition to Covid patients, people with other illnesses and victims of accidents still need health care services. As my colleagues and I anticipate the coming surge, we wonder how we will meet it. Who will die that with more support, might have lived?

Like the people in the parable, we need each other. Those who are eligible, please get your Covid shots and boosters. Vaccinated people are less likely to need a hospital bed, and less likely to carry the virus to someone more vulnerable. Get your flu shot. Influenza infections are skyrocketing, too. Wear a high-quality mask in public, to protect yourself and others and avoid spending long periods of time in crowds.

We all depend on each other to stay safe. Like those diners in heaven, please use the available tools and do your part for the person across the table.

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

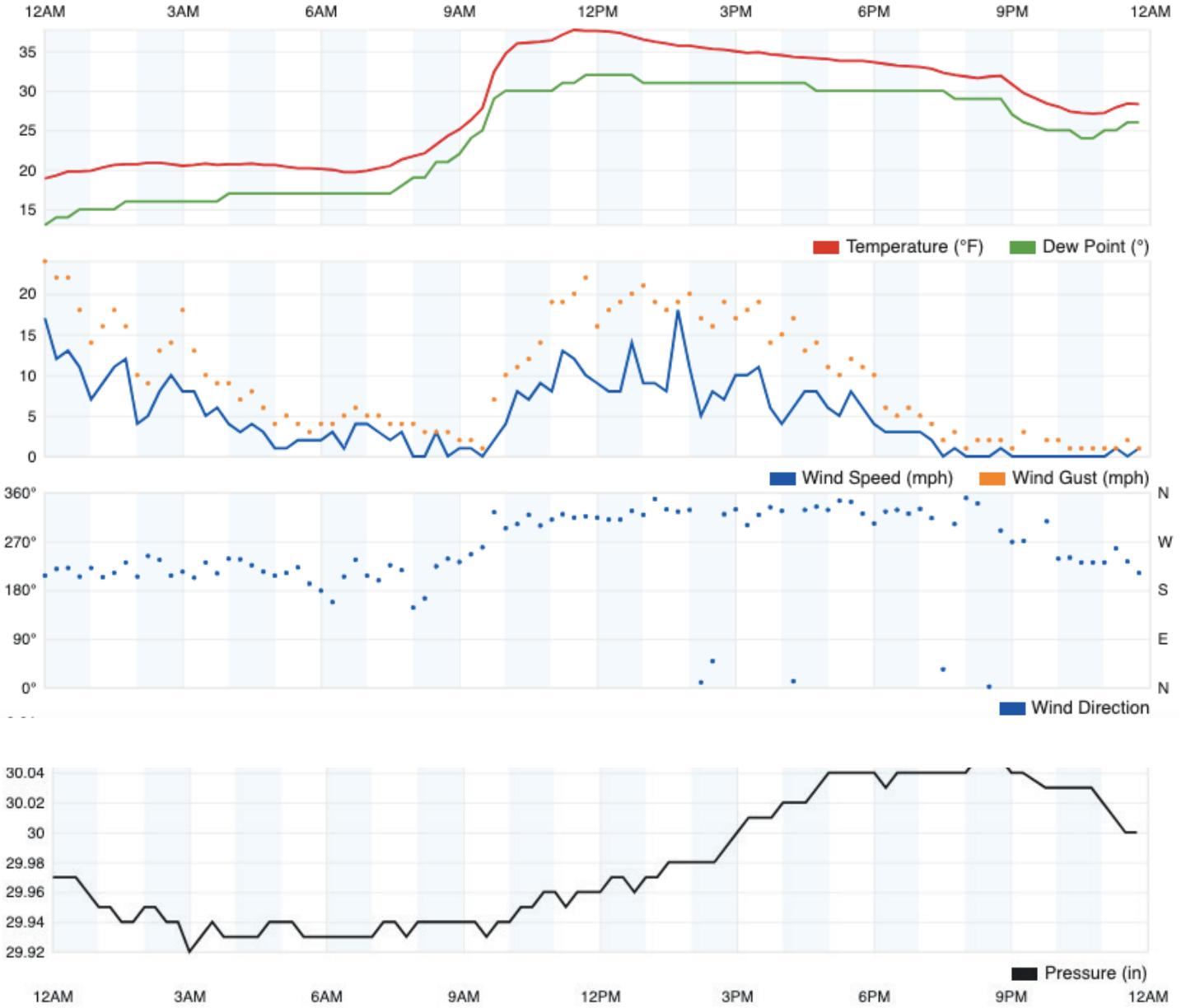


**Debra Johnston, MD**

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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M.L.King  
Day



Mostly Sunny

High: 49 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 27 °F

Tuesday



Partly Sunny  
and Breezy

High: 45 °F

Tuesday  
Night



Partly Cloudy  
and Blustery

Low: 2 °F

Wednesday



Sunny and  
Blustery

High: 13 °F

**Today**  
Highs:  
Lows 30s  
Western MN  
Upper 40s  
Central SD

**Tuesday**  
*WINDY*  
Highs:  
30s and 40s  
Temps Falling  
in the  
Afternoon

**Wednesday**  
*Cold*  
Highs:  
- 5°  
Western MN  
+15°  
Central SD

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD  
Created: 1/17/2022 4:56 AM  
www.weather.gov/abr

Above average temperatures are expected to remain across the region today and Tuesday, with highs in the 30s and 40s. However, the warmth will not last long as Arctic air invades the area Tuesday afternoon, causing falling temperatures. Windy conditions will accompany the Arctic air.

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## Halfway Report: Cold Season 2021-2022

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Oct 1<sup>st</sup> – Jan 15<sup>th</sup>

Location	Precipitation / Departure from normal	Snowfall / Departure from normal	Temperature / Departure from normal
Aberdeen	5.66" / +1.99"	15.5" / -3.7"	31.8° / +3.4°
Watertown	9.70" / +6.32" <small>2<sup>nd</sup> wettest 10.85" in 1971-72</small>	16.9" / +0.2"	31.2° / +2.5°
Sisseton	8.15" / +4.25" <small>3<sup>rd</sup> wettest 8.59" in 1977-78</small>	28.7" / +10.4" <small>9<sup>th</sup> snowiest 54.0" in 1996-97</small>	32.9° / +3.2°
Wheaton	7.30" / +2.89" <small>7<sup>th</sup> wettest 9.41" in 2009-10</small>	22.0" / +4.2"	29.6° / +0.4°
Pierre	2.46" / -0.71"	1.4" / -13.0" <small>2<sup>nd</sup> least snow 0.7" in 1982-83</small>	35.5° / +2.5°
Mobridge	4.36" / +1.74"	4.9" / -8.3"	33.9° / +3.3°
Kennebec	3.80" / +0.84"	10.5" / -6.7"	36.4° / +2.5°
Timber Lake	4.09" / +1.13"	6.5" / -9.9"	33.1° / +2.6°

Averages based on 1990-2020 values

January 15th marks the mid-way point of winter (Dec-Feb) and the cold season (Oct-Apr)! Despite some Arctic cold outbreaks, the 2021-2022 cold season has been above average temperature-wise overall so far across the area. Precipitation and snow amounts have varied wildly though, even nearing records for both surpluses and deficits for some.

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## Today in Weather History

January 17, 1996: Two to as much as fifteen inches of snow, high winds from 40 to 60 mph, and cold arctic air resulted in blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from 40 below to 70 below from the mid-morning of the 17th to the early evening of the 18th. Most schools, federal, state, and county offices were closed. Various activities are also canceled. Travel was challenging due to the near-zero visibility, with some vehicles stranded. Highway 12 from Webster to the Minnesota border and Interstate-29 closed on the 18th. Hundreds of people were stranded, with some people stranded in their vehicles. Some pheasants and wildlife were lost due to the snow-packed so hard they could not dig out. Some snowfall amounts include; 2 inches at Highmore, 3 inches at Pierre and 9NE Reliance, 5 inches at Mobridge, Presho, Roscoe, 10SE Stephan, and Ree Heights, 6 inches at Tulare, 7 inches 12W Tulare and 5E 3S Faulkton, 8 inches 11E 2S Hosmer and at Doland, 9 inches at Mellette, Aberdeen, and Redfield, and 10 inches at Eureka and Britton, and 12 inches at Wilmot, Rosholt, and Ortonville, Minnesota. Fifteen inches occurred at Wheaton, Clinton, and Graceville. The extreme wind chills and some blowing snow continued across central and north-central South Dakota into the early evening of the 18th.

January 17, 2012: Below are some very rare lake effect waterspouts. Chris Westcott took these pictures in the vicinity of Lower Brule. The waterspouts form from the instability created when the air associated with the Missouri River's relatively warm open waters interacts with the frigid air located just above the surface. These types of waterspouts have a very short lifespan and dissipate just as quickly as they form. Chris saw six of them at one time.

1490: On the night of January 17 through the 18th, a "certain fine rain, which froze whilst it fell, and make icicles upon trees" occurred in Florence, Italy. "There was such a quantity of it that the weight bowed the trees down to the ground and broke the branches." The above is from "A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516" by Landucci, Luca.

1706: Scientist, inventor, and founding father Benjamin Franklin was born on this day. He is credited with discovering electricity, inventing lightning rods, and mapping the Gulf Stream. After the Icelandic volcanic eruption of Laki in 1783 and the subsequent harsh winter of Europe in 1784, Franklin connected the causal nature of these two events.

1837: The green flash was first documented by Captain Back of the H. M. S. Terror while in the Arctic during 1836-1837. He wrote: "In the morning, however, at a quarter before ten o'clock while standing on an ice hummock about 17 feet high, and looking toward the east, I had observed the upper limb of the sun, as it filled a triangular cleft on the ridge of the headland, of the most brilliant emerald color, a phenomenon which I had not witnessed before in these regions."

1893: Delaware's coldest temperature of -17 F occurred on January 17th, 1893, in Millsboro.

1916: Reno, Nevada, received 22.5 inches of snow, its greatest 1-day snowfall total ever.

1982: Strong chinook winds caused severe wind damage in Boulder, Colorado. A wind gust of 118 mph was recorded on the roof of the Environmental Research Laboratories (ERL), and a wind gust of 137 mph was measured atop the roof of the NCAR building (in the southwest part of the city, 600 feet above ground level). The high winds uprooted trees and damaged roofs.

1994: On January 17, 1994, at 4:31 a.m. PST, a magnitude 6.7 earthquake centered in Northridge struck the southern California area. Known as the Northridge Earthquake, it caused at least 57 fatalities (a subsequent study put the death toll at 72, including heart attacks) and injured thousands.

1999: An F4 tornado tracked across southern Jacksonville, Tennessee, damaging more than 200 homes and 55 buses. The storm killed six people and injured 106.

2016: A potent storm system developed and tracked quickly eastward across the Gulf of Mexico and toward Florida on Saturday, January 16, 2016. The impacts from this storm reached west-central and southwest Florida during the early morning hours of Sunday, January 17, 2016. A squall line of strong to severe thunderstorms, just ahead of the cold front, produced periodic wind damage and isolated tornadoes as it quickly moved ashore across west-central and southwest Florida and pushed across the state. Two EF2 tornadoes touched down, one near Siesta Key in Sarasota County and the other near Duette in Manatee County. Two adults were killed and four others injured when their mobile home rolled over and was destroyed by the tornado in Manatee County.



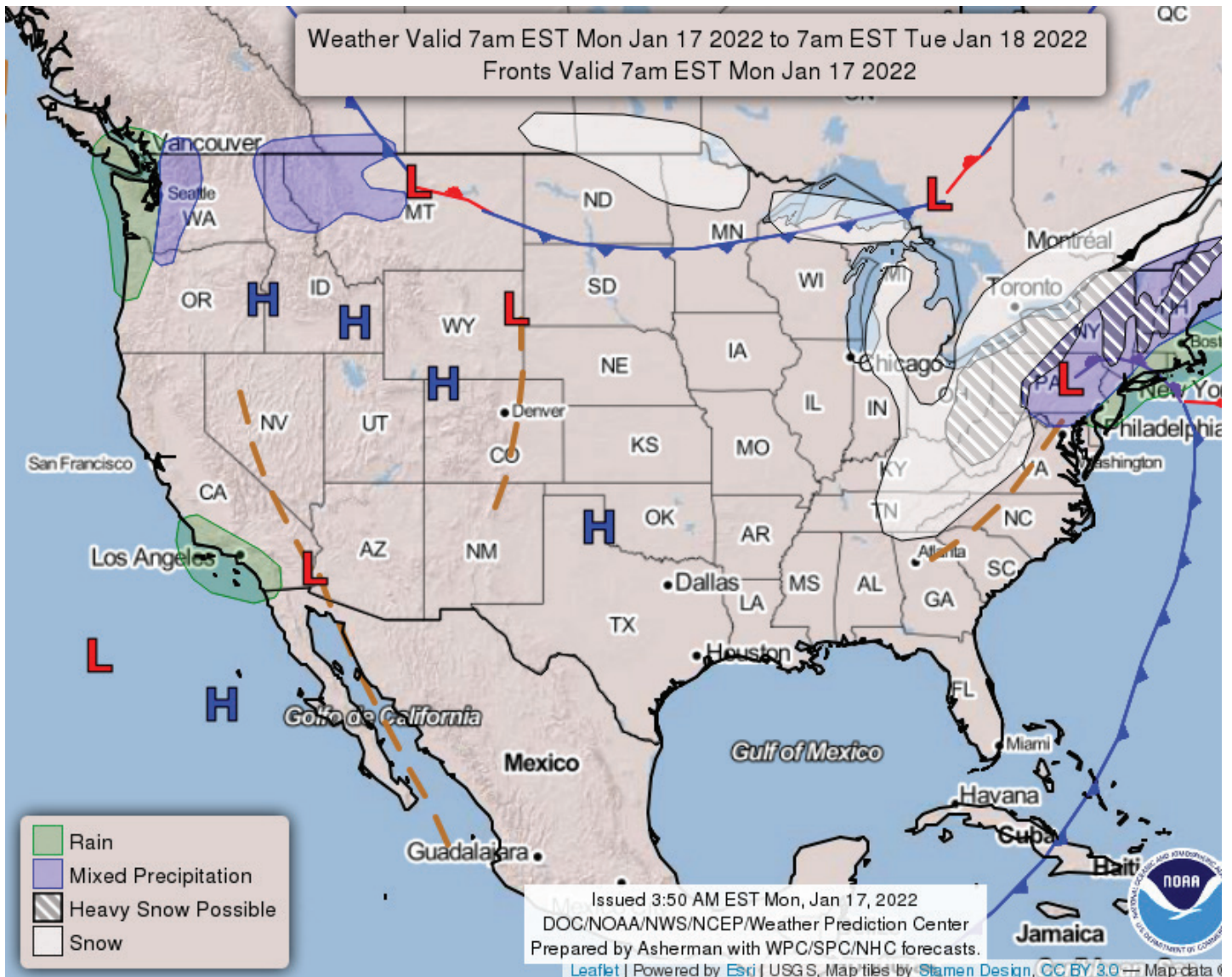
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather      Today's Info

**High Temp: 38 °F at 11:25 AM**  
**Low Temp: 19 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 12:00 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 48 in 1947**  
**Record Low: -32 in 1997**  
**Average High: 23°F**  
**Average Low: 1°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.33**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.43**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.33**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.43**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:19:51 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04:35 AM**



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## LET HIM IN!

He'd been away at school for several months. When he arrived home, it was one o'clock in the morning. But he was anxious to see his fiancée. After all, he drove for many hours with a box of candy and a large bouquet of flowers next to him on the front seat.

When he arrived at his fiancée's home, he ran up the steps - flowers and candy tucked under his arm - and rang the doorbell. From a window in her room upstairs she shouted, "Go away. Come back in the morning. I've been asleep for hours."

Anger swept over him. First, he rammed his fist through the window in the door. Then he stuffed the candy and flowers through the broken window. Still, in a rage, he started his car and drove it into the front of her house. Finally, when there was no response, he left.

Our Lord is much different. He gently knocks at the door of our hearts wanting to enter into our lives. "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me." While the Lord stands at the door of our heart and gently knocks, He will not force His way in nor leave in anger.

The Psalmist wrote, "Judah became His sanctuary." What a beautiful picture! Their hearts became His very own holy place. God redeems us because He wants to dwell within us, that we might become His holy place!

He wants to make our hearts His home, but we must invite Him in. He will never force His way into our lives.

Prayer: Come, Heavenly Father, and make our heart Your home and allow us to become Your Holy Place. Abide in us and teach us to abide in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: - Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion. Psalm 114:2

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## 2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,  
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am  
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)  
SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start  
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start  
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start  
(4th of July)  
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
Dacotah Bank Back To School Supply Drive  
Professional Management Services Check-R-Board Days  
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion  
Baseball Tourney  
Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am  
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm  
JVT School Supply Drive  
Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm  
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot  
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm  
Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm  
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)  
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

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## News from the Associated Press

### Lakota woman promotes healing power with nature's medicines

By HANNAH YANG Minnesota Public Radio News

MANKATO, Minn. (AP) — Megan Schnitker learned from a young age that she could turn to nature's medicine to ease many of the aches and pains she experienced while growing up on a farm in South Dakota. "You're jumping on bales, you're playing in the creek, you're chasing cows and horses and all that other stuff. So things happen," she said.

When she'd get injured, her uncle would show her which plants could help soothe her pain.

"My uncle Neil started teaching me about (healing plants) when we were pretty little because it was like, you know, as soon as the sun comes up, you go outside and play or you help do chores all day," said Schnitker. "And so you know, cuts, scrapes, burns, all that other stuff happens, bee stings and bug bites, because it's the farm."

She learned that plantain could help relieve foot pain. Goldenrod helps with digestion and lady's mantle can be used to ease menstruation discomfort. That healing knowledge had been passed down through the generations from the elders of her tribe, Minnesota Public Radio News reported.

When she became an adult, Schnitker said her great-grandmother explained the role of medicinal plants in traditional Lakota culture.

"The stories behind the plants and how we used to use plants, the way we used to prepare them, the way we used to harvest them, and the way that we're supposed to harvest our food and our medicines," she said.

As her interest in the healing properties of plants grew, Schnitker realized she wanted to share her knowledge with others.

In 2018, she launched Lakota Made from her kitchen and sold her homemade herbal soaps, salves and tinctures mainly at markets and festivals.

Then her husband suggested she sell her products online. Schnitker already had a large Facebook following and soon a flurry of online orders followed.

When she outgrew her home business, she opened a shop in Mankato's historic Old Town.

She gathers plants found in her own backyard and on public lands to make her self-care products. She sells between 60 to 70 different items and Schnitker, who describes herself as an Indigenous traditional herbalist, makes all of them herself.

Since the products have not been evaluated or approved by the Food and Drug Administration, Schnitker is not allowed to say that they can cure or prevent disease.

Her store smells of herbal soaps infused with eucalyptus and lavender. Handmade star quilts hang from the ceiling. Shelves and tables are stocked with tonics and dried teas.

"We have like 12 different blends of teas. And then we have infused honeys," she said.

In the store's basement, employees package, tape and prepare shipments.

Dried plants and herbs hang from a metal fence, and freshly poured wax soap molds are set up to cure overnight.

When the shop opened in July, the basement production seemed big enough to handle the volume of orders — but not anymore.

"We've been joking about it, but it's really not a joke that we have outgrown this space," said Clare Carroll, an executive assistant who has been with the company since it operated out of Schnitker's home. "And so now we're trying to figure out what the next step is. It's been a crazy, crazy wild ride."

But Schnitker is not ready to leave Old Town Mankato just yet. The store's location was a deliberate choice.

Just a few blocks away is the memorial to the 38 Dakota men who were hanged in a mass execution during the U.S.-Dakota War in 1862.

Schnitker said Lakota elders and her family members were reluctant for her to set up her shop so near

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a site that represents so much pain for her people, but she said she is determined to reclaim a presence for Indigenous people and to help them heal.

"Having this physical store, this physical presence here, we're more than just a voice," she said. "We're actually truly here."

Schnitker plans to host workshops and classes out of Lakota Made where community members can make their own products, and learn about the original uses of native plants.

She is also passing along her knowledge about the healing properties of plants to her children, who she says are learning more each day about their Lakota identity and to be proud of it.

"Because if we don't, we're going to lose it, you know, and I don't want to lose it," she said. "I want to keep passing it down for all future generations."

## Proposed Fargo-Moorhead science museum gets \$1 million gift

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A proposed science museum in the Fargo and Moorhead, Minnesota area has received a \$1 million donation from a local business leader.

Officials with the Fargo-Moorhead Science Museum say the gift from John Ballantyne will help with facility planning and feasibility studies for the facility in the community of about 250,000 people.

Ballantyne is co-founder of the Fargo biological sciences company Aldevron and serves as its chief scientific officer.

"The concept of the museum and what it means for the area is long overdue and just based on a relatively brief conversation with the board, I know the group has what it takes to make this a reality," Ballantyne said.

The museum would focus on the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, collectively known as STEM. The plans includes a mobile STEM classroom.

Aldevron's operations began in a laboratory at North Dakota State University in 1998 and have grown to include sites in Madison, Wisconsin, and Freiburg, Germany.

## North Dakota beekeeping supply to serve top US honey states

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A commercial beekeeping supply business has opened in far southwestern North Dakota that will serve people in three of the top five honey producing states in the country.

State Department of Commerce officials say Commercial Bee Supply in Hettinger is meant bolster the beekeeping and other agriculture sectors in the community and region. It is within comfortable driving distance for producers in the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming.

"These are some of the largest honey-producing states in the country, and we look forward to being a local resource for them," said Blake Shook, the supply's director of strategic planning.

North Dakota leads the nation in honey production, and together with Montana and South Dakota produced nearly half of all U.S. honey in 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The project was backed by local and state incentive programs. It is expected to create 12 full-time jobs.

"As the No. 1 honey producer in the nation, North Dakota is a fitting hub for beekeeping supplies and is home to many residents who rely on our state's ability to remain a competitive leader in the honey market," North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum said.

Hettinger is located minutes away from the South Dakota border and about an hour from the Montana border.

## On MLK Day, Yellen says US economy is unfair to Black people

ATLANTA (AP) — The U.S. economy "has never worked fairly for Black Americans — or, really, for any American of color," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a speech delivered Monday, one of many by national leaders acknowledging unmet needs for racial equality on Martin Luther King Day.

Major events for the holiday also included the annual Martin Luther King Jr. service at the slain civil rights leader's Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, whose senior pastor, U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock, was hosting

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Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and other politicians.

Monday would have been the 93rd birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was just 39 when he was assassinated in 1968 while helping sanitation workers strike for better pay and workplace safety in Memphis, Tennessee.

King, who delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech while leading the 1963 March on Washington and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, remains one of the world's most beloved figures. He considered racial equality inseparable from alleviating poverty and stopping war. His insistence on nonviolent protest continues to influence activists pushing for civil rights and social change.

Yellen referred to King's famous speech in remarks she recorded for delivery at the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network breakfast in Washington, noting the financial metaphor he used when describing the founding fathers' promises of equality.

King said on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that "America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned." He called it "a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds. But we refuse to believe the bank of justice is bankrupt!"

"It is compelling rhetoric, but I also think Dr. King knew it was a more than a metaphor. He knew that economic injustice was bound up in the larger injustice he fought against. From Reconstruction, to Jim Crow, to the present day, our economy has never worked fairly for Black Americans – or, really, for any American of color," Yellen said.

She said the administration of President Joe Biden has sought to ensure that no economic institution fails to work for people of color. Equity was built into the American Rescue Plan so that communities of color would get pandemic relief, and Treasury is injecting \$9 billion into Community Development Financial Institutions and Minority Depository Institutions traditionally poorly served by the financial sector.

"There is still much more work Treasury needs to do to narrow the racial wealth divide," she said.

The King Center said the 10 a.m. service, featuring a keynote by the Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, would be broadcast live on Atlanta's Fox TV affiliate and on Facebook, YouTube and thekingcenter.org. Atlanta's planned events also included a march, a rally and a voter registration drive by the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda and Youth Service America.

"On this King Holiday, I call us up to shift our priorities to reflect a commitment to true peace and an awareness of our interconnectedness, interdependence, and interrelatedness," King Center CEO Bernice King said in a statement. "This will lead us to a greater understanding of our responsibilities to and for each other, which is crucial for learning to live together, achieving 'true peace,' and creating the Beloved Community."

## China's Xi rejects 'Cold War mentality,' pushes cooperation

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping called Monday for greater world cooperation against COVID-19 and said China would send an additional 1 billion doses of vaccine to other countries, while urging other powers to discard a "Cold-War mentality" at a time of rising geopolitical tensions — a veiled swipe at the United States.

The Chinese leader touted his country's efforts to share vaccines, fight climate change and promote development at home and abroad as he delivered the opening speech of a virtual gathering hosted by the World Economic Forum. The online event is being held in place of its annual January meeting in Davos, Switzerland, because of health concerns linked to the coronavirus pandemic.

The global outbreak that has claimed over 5.5 million lives and upended the world economy was another theme. In a panel session on the virus, Moderna's CEO said the vaccine maker was working on a single-shot booster for both COVID-19 and the flu, while U.S. infectious diseases expert Dr. Anthony Fauci lamented as "very disturbing" the reluctance of many Americans to follow basic measures like mask-wearing and getting vaccinated.

"This is such a formidable virus," Fauci said, noting the difficulty in achieving herd immunity against

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COVID-19 because of the tendency of immunity to fade, even after vaccination. "You make the virus have an advantage when you don't implement in a unified way all the very well-recognized public health measures, particularly the vaccines."

Xi, who hasn't left China since the coronavirus emerged in early 2020, said in his speech that China has exported over 2 billion doses of its COVID-19 vaccines to over 120 countries and international institutions. He announced plans to provide an additional 1 billion — including a donation of 600 million doses to Africa and an extra 150 million to Southeast Asia.

By comparison, managers of the U.N.-backed COVAX program to ship vaccines to developing countries announced over the weekend that it has now delivered 1 billion vaccine doses.

Xi touched on standard themes from previous talks to international audiences, including responding to trading partners' complaints by promising to open China's state-dominated economy wider to private and foreign competition.

His comments come as tensions between the United States and China have simmered on topics like Taiwan, intellectual property, trade, human rights and the South China Sea.

"We need to discard Cold War mentality and seek peaceful coexistence and win-win outcomes. Our world today is far from being tranquil," said Xi, through a translator. "Protectionism and unilateralism can protect no one. They ultimately hurt the interests of others as well as one's own. Even worse are the practices of hegemony and bullying, which run counter to the tide of history.

"A zero-sum approach that enlarges one's own gain at the expense of others will not help," he added. "The right way forward for humanity is peaceful development and win-win cooperation."

Xi said China "stands ready to work with" other governments on climate but announced no new initiatives and offered no resources. He said it was up to developed countries to provide money and technology.

After Xi spoke, Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said during a session on the future of COVID-19 that he hoped the U.S.-based company would have a combined vaccine booster ready to test in advanced research in the second quarter, saying a best-case scenario would be if the single shot covering both flu and COVID-19 would be ready for use next year.

"I don't think it would happen in every country, but we believe it's possible to happen in some countries next year," Bancel said.

Moderna has been heavily criticized for prioritizing distribution of its COVID-19 vaccines to rich countries; only a fraction of its supply has gone to poor countries via COVAX. He said the company was aiming to make about 2 to 3 billion doses this year and hopes to have data from a new vaccine tweaked to address the omicron variant in March.

The annual Davos gathering usually takes place in person in the Alpine snows of eastern Switzerland, drawing hundreds of business leaders, cultural elites, academics and government leaders. Leaders of countries like Germany, Colombia and Japan were set to address the gathering that runs through Friday.

On tap later Monday were speeches by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, as well as a panel on technology cooperation.

## Support flows to 'changed' Texas synagogue after standoff

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The tight-knit congregation at a Texas synagogue where four people were held hostage by an armed captor during a 10-hour standoff over the weekend traces its roots back to a gathering organized over 20 years ago by a handful of families who were new to the area.

"It was a Jewish holiday and we were just feeling kind of isolated and unsure who else was living here that was Jewish," Anna Salton Eisen, a founder and former president of Congregation Beth Israel, said Sunday.

Since that start in 1998, the congregation in the Fort Worth suburb of Colleyville has grown to about 140 families, built its own synagogue and hired a rabbi known throughout the area for building bridges with other faiths.

Eisen said she has been bowled over by the intensity of the support the congregants have gotten dur-



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ing the hostage ordeal, but that she also has gotten a "painful awakening" that "our history is now going to be changed."

Eisen, who noted security at their synagogue has been taken "very seriously, very seriously" for a long time, said a message of support from a member the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, where 11 worshippers were killed in a 2018 attack, made her realize "this is part of who we are and how we move forward and respond to this is something we have to think about."

Rabbi Jeffrey Myers of Tree of Life, who survived the massacre there, America's deadliest antisemitic attack, said in a statement that alongside the relief that the Texas hostages were safe, "my heart is heavy."

"While everyone is physically safe, they are also forever changed," Myers said. "My own community knows too well the pain, trauma and lost sense of security that comes when violence forces its way in, especially into our sacred spaces."

The standoff in Texas ended around 9 p.m. Saturday when the last hostages ran out of the synagogue and an FBI SWAT team rushed in. The captor, Malik Faisal Akram, 44, was killed.

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who was among the hostages, credited the security training his congregation had gotten over the years for getting him and the others through the ordeal.

He said in a statement they appreciated "all the love, prayers and support from our local community and throughout the world."

"We are grateful for the outcome," Cytron-Walker said. "We are resilient and we will recover."

Andrew Marc Paley, a Dallas rabbi who was called to the scene to help families and hostages upon their release, said that by all accounts, Cytron-Walker was a calm and comforting presence during the ordeal.

"He made every effort to those who were with him to sort of remain calm and to, you know, diffuse the situation to the best they can," he said.

Jawaid Alam, president of the Islamic Center of Southlake, told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram that Cytron-Walker is a personal friend who has promoted peace and cooperation across faiths.

"He is a peace-loving person, a Rabbi and Jewish leader, but a true friend of the Muslim community," Alam said.

Cytron-Walker has been the synagogue's first full-time rabbi since 2006. The synagogue's website says the married father of two loves welcoming everyone from "interfaith families to LGBT individuals and families to those seeking to find a spiritual home in Judaism, along with all others."

"We have newcomers, we have people who have been here a longtime and have seen each other's children grow up and have been together through all the ups and downs — the joys and hardships of life," Eisen said. "We're tight-knit, we're not a very large congregation."

Eisen said she knew they were welcome in the community, but didn't quite realize how much until the outpouring came as the ordeal unfolded.

"Now I really feel welcome here. It was a life-changing thing," she said.

Eisen, who has been cautious about going out during the pandemic to protect her mother, a Holocaust survivor who turns 100 on Saturday, said she started watching the Facebook livestream of the hostage-taking during the services when alerted by another member.

"It felt impossible to watch and impossible not to watch," she said.

It was especially hard, she said, to tell her mother what had happened. "It was so difficult for me, because she thought this can't happen here," Eisen said.

## How's he doing? Americans weigh in on Biden's performance

By The Associated Press undefined

President Joe Biden took office at a particularly polarized time in American history, so it's not surprising that citizens are divided on his performance at the one-year mark.

A Georgia history teacher who voted for Biden would give him a "C" grade, faulting the president for not pushing earlier to end the filibuster in the Senate but supportive of his Build Back Better plan.

A retired nurse in Iowa who supported Pete Buttigieg in the Democratic primary says she's been im-

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pressed by the way Biden has upheld the dignity of the office.

A registered independent in Arizona who voted for former President Donald Trump says Biden's first year has been "pretty bad," citing the shutdown of the Keystone XL oil pipeline and the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal.

Here's what else Americans have to say about the job Biden has done so far:

## THE TRUMP-TO-BIDEN VOTER

Craig Prichard believes Donald Trump should be in jail. But he's far from your typical anti-Trumper: He voted for him in 2016.

But not in 2020. "No, sir," says the 65-year-old self-described independent from Des Moines, Iowa.

Prichard is still angry at Trump over the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, saying he believes the former president caused it. But it was Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic that led Prichard to vote for Biden in 2020.

"Trump wanted to make it look like COVID was going away," Prichard says. "That wasn't the way to take care of it."

Prichard, who for 40 years built farm machinery, worked construction and eventually retired after a stint at a meatpacking plant last year, says Biden is "handling COVID as well as he can" while juggling a number of other issues.

"Biden, you can tell he's trying to handle the pandemic, food prices, gas prices, Russia, all at the same time, and he doesn't seem to care how he looks," Prichard says. "Because it's not real good right now for him, even though there's less people dying than if Trump were there."

"Trump, turns out, only cared about how he looked," Prichard says.

## THE TEACHER WHO GIVES BIDEN A 'C' GRADE

Kai Uchimura, a high school history teacher who lives in Decatur, Georgia, voted for Biden in 2020. He'd give him a "C" grade so far.

Uchimura, 26, describes himself as leaning left on most issues, though he is not a registered Democrat. He says he supports Biden's social policy bill that remains stalled in Congress, but thinks Democrats have done a poor job of explaining its benefits.

"That Build Back Better plan, it seemed like no one knew what was in the bill except for the cost," he says.

He also faults Biden for not pushing earlier to end the filibuster in the Senate that requires 60 votes to advance most legislation. Last week, for the first time, Biden directly advocated eliminating the filibuster in order to debate and vote on election and voting rights legislation.

"I know that when he was coming into office, he had this message of trying to unite the country and extend a hand across the aisle," Uchimura says. "But I wish he would have recognized earlier that this era of bipartisanship seems to be pretty much on thin ice."

## THE BIDEN VOTER WHO DECRIES POLARIZATION

Lynn Manning-John, a school principal on a Native American reservation on the Nevada-Idaho border, is pleased with Biden's first year in office but worries his presidency has further polarized her community.

At a Walmart in Elko County, Nevada, a ranching region that heavily supported the former president, she's overheard customers complain about how Biden's agenda has permeated "Trump country."

"There is just a reluctance to support the current president," the 45-year-old independent voter says. "There's pushback towards anything that he puts forward, even if it's good and common sense." She was especially happy with Biden's nomination of Deb Haaland, a fellow Native American, as interior secretary.

The superintendent and five out of seven school board members in Elko County resigned last year during protests from parents' groups opposed to lesson plans about equity and diversity in the parts of the county outside the Duck Valley Indian Reservation.

Manning-John sees the resignations and the parents' demands as an outgrowth of the backlash to Biden's 2020 victory.

Biden's election win is still unreal to many Americans, she says.

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"And the absolute revolt that has come about since absolutely goes directly to the school boards," she says.

## THE BIDEN VOTER WARY OF LIBERALS

Patrick Sweeney voted for Biden but has been disappointed the president hasn't pushed back more against the left wing of the Democratic Party.

"I wish he would claim and stake out the middle ground, and be more that, 'This is what the Democratic Party represents,'" says Sweeney, a 62-year-old retired educator in a Phoenix suburb who is not affiliated with a political party.

"So much of the conversation seems to get focused on the extreme left wing of the Democratic Party and progressive positions," Sweeney says. "I think he needs to be more front and center in countering that."

Sweeney is pleased with the infrastructure bill Biden signed into law but wishes he'd stopped there instead of pushing a massive increase in social service spending.

"I was enthusiastic about the original infrastructure plan," Sweeney says. "I think it's long overdue, and I was really glad to see it, and I think that could've and should've been a great accomplishment. Get the bulldozers and shovels rolling and get to work. She adds: "The Build Back Better plan, I think there's too much in there that I don't see the need for it, or I don't know that the federal government is the solution for it."

## THE TRUMP VOTER WHO'S NOT IMPRESSED

Eric Ollarsaba says Biden's presidency has been "pretty bad." But the 33-year-old Trump voter isn't surprised.

"He's pretty much doing exactly what I expected him to do," says Ollarsaba, a registered independent who lives in Phoenix and works at an online car retailer. "He's a career politician."

He is disappointed Biden shut the Keystone XL oil pipeline, and he was appalled by the chaotic U.S. military exit from Afghanistan.

"We're probably going to be reliant on other countries for energy, which I could potentially see leading to another conflict, or us involving ourselves in another war," Ollarsaba says. "I think we still needed a U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Not major military operations, but we still need a presence and I think that would make that region — at least for the United States — a little less dangerous."

The U.S. should not have had to rely on the Taliban's cooperation to evacuate Americans from Afghanistan, he says. He worries ceding influence there will allow terrorist groups to gain a foothold.

## THE DEMOCRAT WHO PREFERRED MAYOR PETE

Biden wasn't Kathleen Paul's first pick. The 74-year-old retired nurse liked Pete Buttigieg in the Democratic primary.

"I thought Biden was sort of 'Jokin' Joe,'" Paul says. "He said things that were so off-the-cuff when (Barack) Obama was president. I thought, 'Can we really take this guy seriously?'"

Turns out, a bit to her surprise, she can.

"I've been really impressed with the way he upholds the dignity of the office, the way he expresses himself," says Paul, a self-described liberal Democrat from Des Moines, Iowa. "I knew he had experience and had been through tragedy. But I didn't know he could project the weight of that."

She credits Biden with following the science in his handling of the pandemic but faults him for his naïve optimism in setting last July 4 as the date by which 70% of the nation's eligible population would be vaccinated. That goal was reached months later but the percentage has slipped under 70% because younger children were made eligible.

She was also upset by the chaotic pullout from Afghanistan, saying the administration should have foreseen the end result: "Bombs going off, people running down runways after planes."

"They made the move, and it was not well done," she says. "If you're there for 20 years, what's another

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six months to pull the Band-Aid off a little more slowly?"

## THE BIDEN VOTER WHO WANTS HIM TO TOOT HIS OWN HORN

Natalie Rawlings, a registered Democrat who voted for Biden, says the president doesn't get enough credit for all the things that are going right, like the strong job market that has made it easier for workers to switch jobs.

But she thinks that's partly his own fault.

"I don't know why he's having such a hard time with the messaging," says Rawlings, a 50-year-old Atlanta resident who works for a Fortune 500 company. "Did Biden think his plans were going to sell themselves?"

She also thinks Biden has misjudged his ability to cajole his former colleagues in the Senate to back his agenda.

"Biden has bit off more than he can chew," she says. "Maybe if he did things more incrementally, but now that would appear like he's backpedaling."

It's still early, but she's skeptical he'll be a two-term president.

"I can't see a clear path for Biden into a second term," she says.

## THE TRUMP VOTER PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY SOME BIDEN INITIATIVES

J.J. Goicoechea, a cattle rancher from Eureka, Nevada, voted for Trump and plans to vote Republican again, but he says he's been pleasantly surprised with the Biden administration's agricultural initiatives, including those tailored to small family farms and ranches like his.

Farms and ranches have received more than \$1 billion in relief dollars since Biden took office. The administration has worked to fund independent processors after beef plants closed during the pandemic and engaged farmers in regards to climate change, working to incentivize them to offset carbon emissions through tactics like planting carbon-capturing crops.

But Goicoechea, 47, worries the attempt to strengthen regulations and the Packers and Stockyards Act could have unintended consequences and raise costs in an industry where many ranchers already operate on small margins. He attributes inflation to the government spending and relief programs that the administration has helped push through Congress and says it has raised costs on everything needed to operate a cattle ranch.

"The cost of doing business has just almost doubled over where it was last year," Goicoechea says, citing the prices of hay, fuel, fertilizer and tires for pickups and tractors. "I'm a little concerned about where that's going. We keep asking for help, they give us a little monetary help, and that kind of drives inflation up higher."

## THE SOCIAL WORKER WHO IS RETHINKING HER VOTE

Gina Massiah reluctantly voted for Biden, considering him the better of two bad options. But now the 49-year-old social worker isn't so sure.

"Yes, there was a lot of division," the Brooklyn resident says of the Trump era. But with Trump, "you knew what you were getting."

"Was he a bigot? He was all of that. None of us are perfect. We all come with things, right? But I think he would have gotten a lot more done had he gotten reelected." She adds: "I absolutely favor him over Biden. And woo, that's a Black person saying that, right?"

"That might sound insane to some people that I'm saying that," she says, "but that's how I feel."

Massiah, a registered Democrat who doesn't feel bound to either party, lumps Biden in with other politicians who make big promises but "forget about you" once they get into office.

She's particularly dismayed by the lack of progress on racial issues. While she said many had held out hope because Vice President Kamala Harris is a woman of color, "we're still getting gunned down by police. We're still getting targeted when we go into the stores."

Massiah is exhausted.

"I'm just fed up. Truly fed up."



## Suspected drone attack in Abu Dhabi kills 3, wounds 6

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A suspected drone attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeting a key oil facility in Abu Dhabi killed three people and sparked a separate fire at Abu Dhabi's international airport on Monday, police said.

Police in the United Arab Emirates identified the dead as two Indian nationals and one Pakistani. It did not identify the wounded, who police said suffered minor to moderate injuries at an industrial area where Abu Dhabi's state-owned energy company runs a pipeline network and an oil tanker storage facility.

Three transport tankers caught fire at the facility, while another fire was sparked at an extension of Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Police said that while an investigation was underway, preliminary findings indicated there were small flying objects, possibly belonging to drones, that fell in the two areas and may have caused the explosion and fire. They said there was no significant damage from the incidents, without offering further details.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed they were behind an attack targeting the United Arab Emirates on Monday, without immediately elaborating. The Iranian-backed Houthis have claimed several attacks that Emirati officials later denied took place.

The incident comes as Yemen's yearslong war rages on and as an Emirati-flagged vessel was recently captured by the Houthis. Although the UAE has largely withdrawn its own forces from the conflict tearing apart the Arab world's poorest nation, it is still actively engaged in Yemen and supports local militias there fighting the Houthis.

The UAE has been at war in Yemen since early 2015, and was a key member of the Saudi-led coalition that launched attacks against the Houthis after the group overran the capital of Yemen and ousted the internationally backed government from power.

The Houthis have come under pressure in recent weeks and are suffering heavy losses as Yemeni forces, allied and backed by the UAE, have pushed back the rebels in key southern and central provinces of the country, dashing Houthi efforts to complete their control of the entire northern half of Yemen.

Yemen's government-aligned forces reclaimed the entire southern province of Shabwa from the Houthis earlier this month and made advances in nearby Marib province. They were aided by the UAE-backed Giants Brigades and had help from Saudi airstrikes.

The airport fire in Abu Dhabi was described by police as "minor" and took place at an extension of the international airport that is still under construction. For years, the airport home to Etihad Airways has been building its new Midfield Terminal, but it was not clear if that was where the fire took place.

Etihad Airways said "precautionary measures resulted in a short disruption for a small number of flights" and that airport operations have returned to normal. Abu Dhabi Airports did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The other blast struck three petroleum transport tankers near a complex for the Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. in the Musaffah industrial area. The company describes it as a pipeline and terminal facility located some 22 kilometers (13 miles) from the center of the city of Abu Dhabi, where 36 storage tanks also supply transport trucks carrying fuel. It is also a short distance from Al-Dhafra Air Base, a military installation that hosts U.S. and French forces.

The location of the ADNOC facility where the tankers caught fire is approximately 1,800 kilometers (1,100 miles) northeast of Saada, the Houthis' stronghold in Yemen.

While Emirati troops have been killed in the war in Yemen, the conflict so far has not directly affected daily life in the wider UAE, a country with a vast foreign workforce that is also home to Dubai, a glitzy city of sky scrapers and five-star hotels.

The incident comes as South Korea's President Moon Jae-in is visiting the UAE. During a meeting with Emirati Prime Minister and Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum on Sunday, the two

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countries reportedly reached a preliminary deal valued at some \$3.5 billion sell mid-range South Korean surface-to-air missiles to the UAE.

At an event attended by the South Korean president earlier in the day, Emirati Energy Minister Suhail Mazrouei declined to comment on the explosion at ADNOC's facility, saying only that police would provide updates on their investigation.

The Houthis have used bomb-laden drones to launch crude and imprecise attacks aimed at Saudi Arabia and the UAE over the course of the six-year-long war. The group has also launched missiles at Saudi airports, oil facilities and pipelines, and used booby-trapped boats for attacks in key shipping routes.

Though there have been civilian deaths in Saudi Arabia from some of these attacks, the overwhelming number of civilian deaths in the conflict have been in Yemen. The war has killed 130,000 people in Yemen — both civilians and fighters — and has exacerbated hunger and famine across the impoverished country.

Torbjorn Soltvedt, an analyst at the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft, noted that while the Houthis have claimed responsibility for an attack on the UAE, Iraqi-based militias have also threatened the Emiratis with attacks.

"Today's attack comes only days after Iran-backed groups threatened to strike against Abu Dhabi in response to alleged Emirati interference in Iraqi politics," he said.

He said the attack highlights the missile and drone threat faced by the UAE and the region's other main oil producers. He said unless Gulf Arab states find a solution to diffuse regional tensions "they will remain vulnerable to attacks."

## Winter storm whipping East Coast with snow, thunderstorms

By JULIE WALKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A dangerous winter storm was bringing significant snowfall, strong thunderstorms and blustery winds to the northeastern U.S. on Monday.

A foot (30 centimeters) of snow was forecast for parts of New England, New York state, Ohio and Pennsylvania through Tuesday morning, and nearly 75,000 customers in the region were without power as of Monday morning.

Forecasters in Buffalo, New York, said the snow was falling fast.

"WOW! (Latest) snow measurement at 1 AM was 4.6 inches in the last hour at the Buffalo Airport!" the National Weather Service in Buffalo tweeted overnight. "And tack on another 4 inches in the last hour ending at 2 AM! Total so far since late Sun evening - 10.2 inches."

New York City and Boston were spared the heaviest snowfall, which was accumulating at higher elevations in western Massachusetts, eastern Pennsylvania and parts of New England. A severe thunderstorm warning remained in effect for New York City early Monday, and high winds made travel treacherous across the region.

"We've had a very strong area of low pressure that's kind of moved up the coast, with pretty heavy snowfall accumulations from Tennessee, North Carolina all the way into the northeast," said meteorologist Marc Chenard at the weather service's headquarters in College Park, Maryland.

The highest snowfall accumulations so far have been in the North Carolina mountains, at over a foot, Chenard said.

"The bigger cities — New York, Boston — it's warmed up, it's rain there," he said.

Forecasters said wind gusts in the major city could top out around 45 mph (72 kph), and around 60 mph (97 kph) on Long Island.

The howling winds spread a fire that destroyed a motel and two other structures in coastal Salisbury, Massachusetts, early Monday.

Sleet and rain were the main threats for much of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. Periods of snowfall transitioned to rain overnight. NWS meteorologists in Boston said wind gusts could reach 70 mph (113 kph).

The massive winter system brought similar conditions to the Southeast on Sunday. Multiple states re-

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ported inches of snow, and two people died Sunday in North Carolina when when their car drove off the road and into trees in the median as the storm blew mixed precipitation through.

Severe thunderstorms in Florida spun up a tornado with 118 mph (190 kph) winds, destroying 30 mobile homes and majorly damaging 51 more. Three minor injuries were reported.

Wet roadways in the South were expected to refreeze Monday, creating icy conditions for motorists.

Plow trucks were scattered along roads and highways up the East Coast, working to clear the way for travelers. Some crashes were reported in the early morning hours, including an ambulance involved in a wreck on Interstate 279 in Pittsburgh, KDKA-TV reported. It was unclear whether anyone was injured.

## Djokovic lands in Serbia after deportation from Australia

By DARKO BANDIC and DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Novak Djokovic could be barred from the French Open later this year because he's not vaccinated against COVID-19, a possibility that raised the stakes for the tennis star just hours after he was deported from Australia and prevented from defending his Australian Open title.

A plane carrying the No. 1-ranked player touched down in his native Serbia on Monday, closing at least the first chapter in a dizzying drama that has resonance in the world of elite sports, Australian pandemic politics and the polarized debate over the coronavirus shots.

Djokovic was expected to receive a hero's welcome from his countrymen, many of whom think he was unfairly treated in Australia. But only handful of fans waving the Serbian flag greeted him at the airport in the capital, Belgrade.

At the same time, clouds gathered over what would come next for the player: French officials said a new law requiring vaccination to enter sports venues would have no exceptions. Much could change between now and the start of the French Open, which is the next Grand Slam, in late May. But that raised the possibility the recent saga in Australia would be not just a blip but an ongoing challenge for the unvaccinated athlete, who is increasingly being held up as a hero by the anti-vaccine movement.

Djokovic had argued that he was exempt from strict Australian vaccination rules because he had recently recovered from COVID-19. But once he arrived in the country, Australian authorities said that exemption wasn't valid. They eventually cited the public interest and revoked his visa, saying his presence could stir up anti-vaccine sentiment and that kicking him out was necessary to keep Australians safe.

As he flew home from Australia, a member of the French Parliament added a new twist. Christophe Castaner said a new law that will exclude unvaccinated people from sports venues, restaurants and other public places will apply anyone who wants to play in the French Open — a reversal of plans to create a "bubble" around the tournament.

France's sports ministry said Monday once the new law is in place, there will be no exceptions until further notice.

For now, a warm welcome awaits Djokovic, who has overwhelming support in his native Serbia where his closest family lives. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has accused the Australian government of "harassing" the top-ranked tennis star and urged him to return home.

"God bless you Novak," read one of the banners held by the fans at the airport as he whisked through the passport control and customs and then driven by his brother Djordje to his apartment in Belgrade.

The legal battle over whether Djokovic held a valid exemption to vaccine rules that would allow him to play in the Australian Open ended Sunday with his deportation.

Vaccination amid the pandemic is a requirement for anyone at the Australian Open, which started Monday in Melbourne. Djokovic has won nine titles there previously. He had hoped this year to win his 21st Grand Slam singles trophy there, breaking the record he shares with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most in the history of men's tennis. Federer is not playing while recovering from injury, but Nadal is competing.

More than 95% of all Top 100 men and women in their tours' respective rankings are vaccinated. At least two other men — American Tennys Sandgren and Frenchman Pierre-Hugues Herbert — skipped the first

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major tournament of the year due to the vaccine requirement.

Djokovic's attempt to get the medical exemption for not being vaccinated sparked anger in Australia, where strict lockdowns in cities and curbs on international travel have been employed to try to control the spread of the coronavirus since the pandemic began.

Djokovic tested positive in Belgrade on Dec. 16, but received the result late Dec. 17, he said, and scrapped all his commitments except a long-standing interview with L'Equipe newspaper the following day. He later described this "an error" of judgment.

Asked if Djokovic would face any penalties for flouting his isolation while being infected when he returns to Serbia, Serbian officials said he would not because the country is not in a state of emergency.

Djokovic has almost an iconic status in Serbia, whose president had called the court hearing in Australia "a farce with a lot of lies."

"Novak, welcome home, you know that we all support you here," said Snezana Jankovic, a Belgrade resident. "They can take away your visa, but they cannot take away your Serbian pride."

## Tennis star's deportation exposes Australian border debate

By ROD MCGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Weary after two years of some of the harshest COVID-19 border restrictions in the world, many Australians wanted tennis star Novak Djokovic kicked out of their country for traveling to a tennis tournament without being vaccinated.

But the backdrop to the government's tough line on the defending Australian Open champion — and Prime Minister Scott Morrison's description of the expulsion as a "decision to keep our borders strong" — dates to nearly a decade ago. It also shines a light on Australia's complicated, and strongly criticized, immigration and border policies.

Back in 2013, the border issue wasn't unvaccinated foreigners like Djokovic but thousands of asylum seekers from Asia, the Middle East and Africa who flocked to Australia on rickety fishing boats from Indonesian ports.

Now, with the next election due by May, Djokovic has become the new focus of the government's claim to a tough stance on border protection that leaders hope will win votes. The opposition, meanwhile, argues that Djokovic has exposed government failures in border control and its pandemic response.

Refugee activists say the tennis star's treatment exposes the harsh treatment of dozens of others detained because of visa issues.

Widespread anger followed a Djokovic post on social media on Jan. 4 that said he had been granted "exemption permission" to fly quarantine-free to Australia to play tennis. He had been approved by an automated visa application process days earlier.

Djokovic arrived at a time when some Australians' overseas relatives still aren't able to visit because their COVID-19 vaccine types aren't recognized by Australian authorities.

Tennis fan Holly McCann, who attended the first day of the Australian Open on Monday, said Djokovic did not deserve to be an exception to strict border rules.

"It should be the rule is the rule, regardless of your status," McCann said. "I have nothing against him personally, but I don't think he should be an exception."

When an expletive-laden off-air conversation between Seven Network television anchors Mike Amor and Rebecca Maddern savaging Djokovic's character and government bungling of his case was somehow posted online, viewer responses were overwhelmingly positive, suggesting a strong urge for Djokovic to be kicked out.

A poll published by The Sun Herald and Sunday Age newspapers on Sunday showed 71% of respondents did not want Djokovic to be allowed to stay in Australia.

In 2013, when a conservative coalition won the first of three consecutive elections, Morrison, the then-new minister for Immigration and Border Protection, played a key role in revamping what had seemed to many the insurmountable and politically damaging problem of daily unauthorized boat arrivals.



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Morrison took credit as government vessels turned back boats and asylum seekers were sent to immigration centers on poor island nations instead of the Australian mainland.

Djokovic's days in Australia were largely spent in the cramped Park Hotel, which is used for immigration detention, while he fought in the courts to stay in Melbourne. This was welcomed by refugee advocates for the international attention it focused on 60 other people kept in the same high-rise building because they don't have visas.

When Djokovic's visa was first canceled, Morrison tweeted, "Rules are rules, especially when it comes to our borders."

But Melbourne-based refugee advocate Ian Rintoul noted that unlike other refugees and asylum seekers who shared the Park Hotel with the wealthy celebrity, Djokovic was not handcuffed when he was escorted from the building.

"Many people learned that there are refugees being held prisoner by the Australian government for the first time because of Novak Djokovic," Rintoul said. "That's the silver lining to this fiasco."

The political decision to deport Djokovic was made by Immigration Minister Alex Hawke after a court overturned a previous decision by a border official to cancel his visa on procedural grounds when he arrived at Melbourne airport 11 days earlier.

Confusingly, Australia canceled Djokovic's visa twice for different reasons.

In the first instance, the visa was canceled because his diagnosis with COVID-19 in Serbia last month did not qualify him for an exemption from Australia's border rules. Foreign visitors have to be fully vaccinated or provide a medical certificate as evidence that they cannot be inoculated for health reasons.

Djokovic had relied on exemptions from vaccine rules provided by Tennis Australia and the Victoria state government.

The 34-year-old Serb was finally deported because Hawke regarded him as a "talisman of a community of anti-vaccination sentiment" whose presence might encourage Australians to emulate his flouting of pandemic safety measures.

Border protection has been a recurring theme in Morrison's rise to power. While popular at home, the border policies were widely criticized as inhumane and an abrogation of Australia's international obligations to refugees.

Those in hotel detention with Djokovic came to Australia from camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea for medical treatment and then gained a court injunction preventing them from being sent back. Some have been detained in hotels for more than two years, Rintoul, the refugee advocate, said.

For almost two years following the start of the pandemic, thousands of Australians were refused permission to travel overseas to visit dying relatives, attend funerals and weddings or be introduced to newborn family members.

Considered cruel by many, the travel ban kept Australia's pandemic death toll down and was supported by a majority of Australians.

But a relaxation of travel restrictions a month ago because of high vaccination levels and the arrival of the highly contagious omicron variant have resulted in Australia recording as many coronavirus infections in the first weeks of 2022 as it tallied in the previous two years of the pandemic.

Morrison has laid the blame for Djokovic's ill-fated Australian trip squarely on the tennis star.

But opposition spokesperson Kristina Keneally said there was no excuse for the government issuing a visa in the first place for "a known anti-vax proponent."

"This has been a monumental bungle at our borders by the Morrison government. They want to run around and pat themselves on the back about it. They deserve a kick up the backside," she said.

## Jill Biden: I didn't expect 'healing role' as first lady

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Her husband campaigned to help unite the country, but Jill Biden says "healing" a nation wounded by a deadly pandemic, natural and other disasters and deep political polarization is among

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her chief roles as first lady, too.

Wrapping up a year in which she saw herself as a key member of President Joe Biden's team, the first lady told The Associated Press that she found herself taking on a role that "I didn't kind of expect, which was like a healing role, because we've faced so much as a nation."

Jill Biden spoke sitting in the sunshine near a swimming pool at a Las Vegas hotel a day after she and the president comforted families in Louisville, Colorado, where a huge swath of homes burned to the ground in a late December wildfire. She hugged people as they stood in front of the charred ruins of their lives and later offered public condolences for dogs and other pets killed in the blaze.

Such trips offer increasingly rare opportunities for the White House to step out of the partisan gridlock that defines Washington. For the most part, Jill Biden isn't caught up in the capital's frenzy, giving her the chance instead to serve as something of an ambassador between her husband's administration and communities across the country, regardless of their political leanings.

Her visits to Colorado and to see victims of a deadly Christmas parade crash in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and a trip last Friday to tornado-ravaged areas of Kentucky are a "prime example" of the responsibility she feels, she said. It's what she would want as a regular person who survived a natural disaster or other tragedy.

"I would want to know that my president and first lady cared about me," Biden said. "I think that's an important part of what I do. I mean, just helping people through the tough times."

Biden, 70, has experienced her share of tough times.

She and Joe Biden wed less than five years after his first wife and infant daughter were killed in a 1972 automobile crash, and at age 26 she became a mother to his two surviving young sons. In 2015, the couple buried one of those boys, Beau, after he died of brain cancer at age 46.

The first lady has lost several close friends to breast cancer, and empathized with the people in Colorado because her own home in Delaware once caught fire after a lightning strike.

"I know the tough things that we've been through in our life and I know the, how much the acts of kindness have meant to me and to Joe," Biden said. "So I just know what a difference it makes when you show up. I think showing up is really important."

She showed up in a lot of places in the year past, traveling in the middle of a pandemic at a pace that far exceeded the president's — all while continuing her other full-time job: as an English and writing professor at Northern Virginia Community College. She has taught there since 2009.

Biden is the first first lady to continue her career — she's a lifelong teacher — and hold a paying job outside the White House.

The New Jersey-born, Pennsylvania-raised first lady spent the past year dropping in at schools, COVID-19 vaccination sites, military bases, Native American reservations and other locations in 35 states. That includes a dozen mostly Southern states that did not vote for her husband for president. By contrast, he touched down in 24 states, excluding trips home to Delaware.

"The pandemic really did not constrain her a great deal and she was able to move forward and do all of these things: teach and advocate for people to get vaccinated and make some visits to military installations and cancer centers," said Myra Gutin, a professor at Rider University who writes about first ladies. "That's pretty major."

At vaccination sites, Jill Biden encouraged people to get protected and held hands with both grown-ups and kids getting their jabs. At schools, she toured classrooms and spoke with students about writing in journals to help them cope during the pandemic. At military bases, she thanked military spouses and other family members for sacrificing alongside their loved ones in uniform.

On the policy front, Joining Forces, the first lady's White House initiative to support military families, and the National Security Council last year announced a first round of administration commitments to help military spouses with employment, child care and other matters.

But she suffered a policy defeat when the president dropped a proposal for tuition-free community college — something she has spent years advocating for — from a sweeping social welfare and climate change bill after some key Democratic senators objected to the size of the package.

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Other presidents' wives also have played the role of national healer. Katherine Jellison, a history professor at Ohio University who studies first ladies, recalled the actions of Lucy Webb Hayes after the Civil War and during Reconstruction.

Hayes, wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes, showcased American plants and wildlife, "something that Americans from all regions could get behind," by having them depicted on White House china, Jellison said. Hayes also invited representatives from states that were on opposite sides of the Civil War to social events.

"She worked hard to unify the country in a variety of interesting ways," Jellison said.

Besides her role as healer, Jill Biden also fulfilled the traditional first lady function of representing the United States abroad.

She flew off on one solo foreign trip, to Tokyo to root for U.S. athletes at the delayed 2020 Olympic Games. She also accompanied the president on overseas trips to England and Rome.

Her husband's inauguration, coming after his two earlier failed attempts at the presidency, "just took my breath away," Jill Biden recalled.

For her, the White House "is a magical place." When she wakes up, she thinks, "Wow, look where I am." But she also feels there's a lot of work to do in the country and, because of that, she can't "get my coffee and sit in bed and watch the news."

"I've always said that if I were ever given this platform I would never waste it. Not one day," the first lady said. "That's why when I wake every day I think, 'What can I do today? ... What am I doing? Where am I going? What's the strategy? What's the plan?'"

Her plans for 2022 include keeping her focus on education, military families and doing more work promoting cancer research. She will continue to teach.

"But then I want to layer some other things on," Jill Biden added, describing her desire to bring art and artists to the White House and her hope that the pandemic will recede enough to allow the White House to reopen to tourists and more socializing.

"It's going to be an exciting year. It's got to be a better year with the pandemic," the first lady said. "I mean everybody, I think everybody across this country is saying, 'C'mon, it's got to be a better year.'"

## Ex-leader Poroshenko returns to Ukraine to appear in court

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on Monday returned to Ukraine to face court on treason charges he believes are politically motivated.

At the Kyiv airport, where he arrived on a flight from Warsaw on Monday morning, Poroshenko was greeted by several thousand cheering supporters. Some carried banners reading "We need democracy," and "Stop repressions."

From the airport, Poroshenko headed straight to court, which will rule on whether to remand him in custody pending investigation and trial.

A prosecutor has alleged that Poroshenko, owner of the Roshen confectionery empire and one of Ukraine's richest businessmen, was involved in the sale of large amounts of coal that helped finance Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014-15.

Poroshenko's assets have been frozen as part of its investigation into the allegations of high treason. The former leader of Ukraine faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Poroshenko insists that he is innocent. He accuses his successor, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, of seeking to discredit him politically to distract from Ukraine's widespread problems, including economic woes and rising deaths from COVID-19.

The charges are the latest in a string of accusations leveled against Poroshenko since he was defeated by Zelenskyy in 2019. The allegations have generated concerns of undemocratic score-settling in Ukraine and also alarmed Ukraine's allies. They come as Russia has built up troops along the Ukraine border and the United States has voiced concerns that Russian President Vladimir Putin might be planning an invasion of Ukraine.

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Poroshenko was defeated by voters following a corruption scandal and a mixed record on reforms, but he emerged with strong patriotic credentials for his work in rebuilding the Ukrainian army as it fought Russian-backed insurgent fighters in the east.

Zelenskyy says he is waging a fight against oligarchs that is aimed at reducing their influence in Ukraine's political and economic life.

Poroshenko has been outside of Ukraine for weeks, meeting with leaders in Brussels, Berlin and other European capitals.

Outside the Kyiv airport on Monday, the ex-president greeted a large crowd of his supporters and delivered an elaborate speech, urging them to follow him to the courthouse. He called the charges against him "a challenge to all of us."

"(The authorities) are setting us back 10 years. We're here not to defend Poroshenko, we're here to join forces and defend Ukraine," Poroshenko said. "United Ukraine is strong, and a strong Ukraine is capable of pushing back (against) Putin."

His supporters also viewed charges against him as politically motivated. "It is a revenge of the authorities and an attempt by Zelenskyy to eliminate his biggest rival in Ukraine's politics," Anton Ivashchenko, 42, told The Associated Press at the airport. "Persecution of Poroshenko sows animosity and discord among those who push for ... Ukraine's closer ties with the West."

## Texas rabbi: Security training paid off in hostage standoff

By JAKE BLEIBERG and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

COLLEYVILLE, Texas (AP) — U.S. and British authorities Monday continued an investigation into the weekend standoff at a Texas synagogue that ended with an armed British national dead and a rabbi crediting past security training for getting him and three members of his congregation out safely.

Authorities identified the hostage-taker as a 44-year-old British national, Malik Faisal Akram, who was killed Saturday night after the last hostages ran out of Congregation Beth Israel around 9 p.m. The FBI said there was no early indication that anyone else was involved, but it had not provided a possible motive.

The investigation stretched to England, where late Sunday police in Manchester announced that two teenagers were in custody in connection with the standoff. Greater Manchester Police tweeted that counter-terrorism officers had made the arrests but did not say whether the pair faced any charges.

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker said security training at his suburban Fort Worth congregation over the years is what allowed him and the other three hostages to make it through the 10-hour ordeal, which he described as traumatic.

"In the last hour of our hostage crisis, the gunman became increasingly belligerent and threatening," Cytron-Walker said in a statement. "Without the instruction we received, we would not have been prepared to act and flee when the situation presented itself."

Video of the standoff's end from Dallas TV station WFAA showed people running out a door of the synagogue, and then a man holding a gun opening the same door just seconds later before he turned around and closed it. Moments later, several shots and then an explosion could be heard.

Authorities have declined to say who shot Akram, saying it was still under investigation.

Akram could be heard ranting on a Facebook livestream of the services and demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaida who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. Army officers in Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden called the episode an act of terror. Speaking to reporters in Philadelphia on Sunday, Biden said Akram allegedly purchased a weapon on the streets.

Federal investigators believe Akram purchased the handgun used in the hostage taking in a private sale, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing. Akram arrived in the U.S. at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York about two weeks ago, a law enforcement official said.

Akram arrived in the U.S. recently on a tourist visa from Great Britain, according to a U.S. official who



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spoke on condition of anonymity because the information was not intended to be public. London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement that its counter-terrorism police were liaising with U.S. authorities about the incident.

FBI Special Agent in Charge Matt DeSarno had said Saturday night that the hostage-taker was specifically focused on an issue not directly connected to the Jewish community. It wasn't clear why Akram chose the synagogue, though the prison where Siddiqui is serving her sentence is in nearby Fort Worth.

On Sunday night, the FBI issued a statement calling the ordeal "a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted." The agency said the Joint Terrorism Task Force is investigating.

Michael Finfer, the president of the congregation, said in a statement "there was a one in a million chance that the gunman picked our congregation."

Akram used his phone during the course of negotiations to communicate with people other than law enforcement, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

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.

Texas resident Victoria Francis, who said she watched about an hour of the livestream, said she heard the man rant against America and claim he had a bomb. Biden said there were apparently no explosives, despite the threats.

"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," Francis said. "He was clearly in extreme distress."

Colleyville, a community of about 26,000 people, is about 15 miles (23 kilometers) northeast of Fort Worth. Reached outside his home Sunday, Cytron-Walker declined to speak at length about the episode. "It's a little overwhelming as you can imagine. It was not fun yesterday," he told the AP.

Andrew Marc Paley, a Dallas rabbi who was called to the scene to help families and hostages upon their release, said Cytron-Walker acted as a calm and comforting presence. The first hostage was released shortly after 5 p.m. That was around the time food was delivered to those inside the synagogue, but Paley said he did not know if it was part of the negotiations.

Cytron-Walker said his congregation had received training from local authorities and the Secure Community Network, which was founded in 2004 by a coalition of Jewish organizations and describes itself as "the official safety and security organization" of the Jewish community in North America. Michael Masters, the CEO of the organization, said the congregation had provided security training in August and had not been previously aware of Akram.

The standoff led authorities to tighten security in other places, including New York City, where police said that they increased their presence "at key Jewish institutions" out of an abundance of caution.

## Grandstanding fears as Norwegian mass killer seeks parole

By MARK LEWIS Associated Press

STAVANGER, Norway (AP) — Norwegian mass killer Anders Behring Breivik goes to court, Tuesday, after 10 years behind bars, claiming he is no longer a danger to society and attempting to get an early release from his 21-year sentence.

The far right terrorist has shown no remorse since slaying 77 people in a bomb and gun massacre in 2011, and families of victims and survivors fear he will grandstand his extreme views during the hearing, which experts say is unlikely to deliver him an early release.

Randi Rosenqvist, the psychiatrist who has followed up Breivik since his 2012 jailing, says "I can say that I do not detect great changes in Breivik's functioning," since his criminal trial when he bragged about the scale of his slaughter, or his 2016 human rights case, when he raised his hand in a Nazi salute.

"In principle and practice someone seeking parole would have to show remorse, and to show that they

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understand why such acts cannot be repeated," she said.

She will give evidence at his hearing and submit the psychiatric report, which is typically crucial if criminals are to demonstrate they are no longer dangerous.

"That is unlikely to happen," said Berit Johnsen, research professor at University College of Norwegian Correctional Service. "I think it is quite obvious that there still is a high risk that he will commit new crimes if he is released."

The hearing is due to last three days, but the verdict will not be announced for several weeks.

It was July 22, 2011, when, after months of meticulous preparations, Breivik set off a car bomb outside the government headquarters in Oslo, killing eight people and wounding dozens. He then drove to the island of Utøya, where he opened fire on the annual summer camp of the left-wing Labor Party's youth wing. Sixty-nine people there were killed, most of them teenagers, before Breivik surrendered to police.

In 2012 Breivik was handed the maximum 21-year sentence with a clause — rarely used in the Norwegian justice system — that he can be held indefinitely if he is still considered a danger to society. It is this clause that means he can demand a parole hearing after 10 years. And while this likely means a lifelong sentence, it also opens the possibility that Breivik can demand annual parole hearings where he can broadcast his views, says Johnsen.

"According to Norwegian law he has a right now to go before a judge," said Øystein Storrøvik, Breivik's defense lawyer. "He emphasizes that right. And his motivation for doing so is difficult for me to have an opinion on."

Storrøvik confirmed that Breivik will call the Swedish neo-Nazi Per Oberg to speak in his defense. He would not otherwise outline the basis of Breivik's case, but made it clear that nobody should expect contrition.

"According to the law there is no obligation that you have to be remorseful," said Storrøvik. "So it is not a legal main point. Absolutely the legal problem is whether he is dangerous."

Lisbeth Kristine Røynealand, who heads a family and survivors support group, fears giving Breivik a platform could inspire likeminded ideologues. "I think he is doing this as a way of getting attention. The only thing I am afraid of is if he has the opportunity to talk freely and convey his extreme views to people who have the same mindset," she said.

She pointed to the case of Norwegian shooter Philip Manshaus who, inspired by the 2019 New Zealand terror attacks, murdered his stepsister and attempted to storm a mosque.

Breivik has form for grandstanding to try to further his extremist goals. During his 2012 trial, he entered the courtroom daily flashing a closed fist salute, and telling grieving parents that he wished he had killed more. He has been trying to start a fascist party in prison and reached out by mail to right-wing extremists in Europe and the United States. Prison officials seized many of those letters, fearing Breivik would inspire others to commit violent attacks.

In 2016, he sued the government, saying his isolation from other prisoners, frequent strip searches and the fact that he was often handcuffed during the early part of his incarceration violated his human rights. He made a Nazi salute toward journalists during the case which he initially won, but was overturned by higher courts in 2017.

Beyond providing a pulpit for the killer, the case could re-open psychological wounds for families of victims, and survivors, says Røynealand.

"I think personally it is absurd he has this possibility. I think he is ridiculous, but you have to remember that him having all this attention will be hard for the survivors and the parents and some people can be retraumatized."

At the time of the attacks, Breivik claimed to be the commander of a secret Christian military order plotting an anti-Muslim revolution in Europe. Investigators found no trace of the group. In 2016 he described himself as a traditional neo-Nazi, saying his earlier crusader image was just for show.

Breivik has three cells to himself in the high-security wing of Skien prison. The cells are equipped with video game consoles, a television, a DVD player, electronic typewriter, newspapers and exercise machines. He also has daily access to a larger exercise yard. Rosenqvist said his conditions are "excellent" and that he has been given the opportunity to pass his high school exams and is now studying at university level.

The court that convicted him in 2012 found him criminally sane, rejecting the prosecution's view that he was psychotic. Breivik didn't appeal his sentence.

## Trailblazing Arab lawmaker shakes up Israeli politics

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Mansour Abbas broke a longstanding taboo when he led his Arab party into Israel's governing coalition last year. The bold move appears to be paying dividends.

Abbas, a once obscure politician, is the linchpin of the shaky union, securing hefty budgets and favorable policies for his constituents and even winning an audience with the king of Jordan.

"We are equal partners the whole way, part of the coalition, for the first time in the state of Israel," Abbas recently told the Israeli news site Ynet. "We are compromising to solve the Arab society's problems."

Abbas' pragmatic approach has secured funding for housing, electricity and crime-fighting in Israel's traditionally neglected Arab sector. He also has not been afraid to confront his partners to get what he needs.

But he also is being forced to perform a delicate balancing act between the desires of his Arab voters and his Jewish coalition partners. His every move is being watched by his constituents, whose stake in the country's democracy could falter if he fails to bring long-term changes.

"The fact that Arabs are sitting around the table in government is no small matter," said Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya, director of the Arab Society in Israel program at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank. "The question is will this political power translate to actions that citizens feel in their day-to-day lives?"

Abbas made history last June when his small Islamist party became the first Arab faction to join an Israeli coalition. Through Israel's 73-year history, Arab parties have remained in the opposition, slamming the government and wanting no part in policies against their Palestinian brethren in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Their Jewish counterparts have often viewed them as potential security threats and enemies from within.

Palestinian citizens of Israel make up a fifth of Israel's 9.4 million people. While many are integrated into Israeli society, the community is generally poorer and less educated than Jews and has long faced discrimination and questions about its loyalty. Arab voter turnout has typically been lower than Jews and reached a nadir in elections last year.

The coalition, made up of 61 lawmakers out of Israel's 120-seat Knesset, now relies on Abbas' four party members to pass legislation, approve a budget and keep the government afloat.

Abbas, 47, heads the Ra'am party, a moderate conservative Islamist party with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Ra'am's constituents are predominantly Bedouin Arabs, who are among the country's poorest citizens.

A dentist by education, Abbas has led Ra'am in the Knesset since 2019, taking on membership in various parliamentary committees but hardly registering in mainstream Israeli politics.

As Israel descended into a protracted political logjam, with four elections in the span of two years, Abbas emerged as the antidote to the chaos.

Ahead of elections in March 2021, Abbas broke Ra'am off from a union of Arab parties and hinted the faction would sit in a coalition under the right terms, no matter who was leading it.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held unprecedented talks with Abbas on joining forces, reportedly promising him a list of policies that would deal with rampant crime and housing issues in the Arab community. But Netanyahu's ultra-nationalist allies opposed cooperation with Abbas and the talks collapsed.

When legislator Yair Lapid was then asked to form a government, he picked up where Netanyahu left off and Ra'am became a key member of the current coalition.

Made up of eight parties that run the gamut from nationalist factions to dovish parties that support Palestinian statehood, the unwieldy coalition headed by former West Bank settler leader Naftali Bennett promised to put divisive issues aside. It has focused instead on subjects that wouldn't rattle the coalition's stability, including the pandemic and the economy.

The Palestinian issue, traditionally of central importance to Arab parties, has been largely ignored.

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Abbas has insisted he is not ignoring long-standing Palestinian aspirations for statehood in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Family ties bind the Palestinian citizens of Israel and those living in the occupied lands.

Abbas told a podcast after the coalition was formed, "Ra'am wants to focus on the pressing issues in Arab society." His office declined interview requests.

Ra'am has pushed ahead with its priorities from inside the coalition. It secured an unprecedented multibillion-dollar budget for the Arab community, aiming to improve living conditions and minimize record-breaking crime rates. At Ra'am's behest, the government has moved to authorize some unrecognized Bedouin villages in the southern Negev desert and connect thousands of illegally built homes to electricity.

"Governments of Israel over time neglected the Negev and didn't deal with the root problems," said Faiz Abu Sahiban, the mayor of the Bedouin city of Rahat and an Abbas supporter. "It's the first time the state of Israel is hearing from the Bedouin."

The diverse opinions have inevitably clashed. Last week, Abbas threatened to withhold his party's votes in the parliament in protest against tree planting on land claimed by Bedouin in the Negev, a crisis that led to the forestry project being suspended. Ra'am has also pushed back on efforts by nationalist coalition elements to extend a law that prevents Palestinians who marry Israeli citizens from obtaining residency rights.

Abbas is repeatedly labeled a terrorist sympathizer by opposition ultra-nationalist lawmakers. A social conservative, he also opposes pro-LGBT legislation in a coalition with an openly gay minister.

He has also faced criticism from Palestinian citizens of Israel. Recently, he caused an uproar in the Arab public when he recognized Israel as a Jewish state at a business conference.

Right-wing Israeli leaders have repeatedly called on Palestinians to recognize Israel's Jewish character, and the predominantly Jewish audience erupted in applause to the remarks.

But Arab critics, including the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, accused Abbas of forsaking the Palestinian cause.

"They (Ra'am) bear responsibility for everything this government decides, including budgets for West Bank settlements," veteran Arab lawmaker Ahmad Tibi said last month.

Still, Abbas' entry into the coalition followed years of Arab public opinion in favor of greater Arab participation in decision-making. His failures and achievements could help determine future Arab political engagement.

"If the Arab public sees that what Mansour Abbas did is effective and brought a change, I have no doubt that voter turnout will increase dramatically," said Mohammad Magadli, a political analyst with the Arabic language Nas Radio and Israeli Channel 12 TV.

"It would mean that Israel would become a real democracy."

## Fund to preserve, assist Black churches gets \$20M donation

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — A new effort to preserve historic Black churches in the United States has received a \$20 million donation that will go to help congregations including one that was slammed during the tornado that killed more than 20 people in Mayfield, Kentucky, last month.

Lilly Endowment Inc., which supports religious, educational and charitable causes, contributed the money to the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund as seed funding for the Preserving Black Churches Project, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which launched the fund.

The announcement about the donation from the Lilly Endowment was timed to coincide with the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday on Monday.

Rather than simply replacing broken windows or straightening rafters, the project will provide assistance with things including asset management and helping historic churches tell their own stories, said Brent Leggs, executive director of the fund.

St. James AME Church, founded in 1868 just three years after the Civil War and crumpled by the Mayfield



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twister, will receive \$100,000 as the first recipient of the project's special emergency funding, Leggs said.

With its sanctuary virtually destroyed and only 15 or so active members, all of whom are older, St. James AME needs all the help it can get, said the Rev. Ralph Johnson, presiding elder of a church district that includes the congregation. Black churches served a vital role after the war ended and Black people no longer were considered the property of white people.

"Once the slaves were freed one of the things they wanted to start was a church home. They wanted to work out their spiritual salvation and have a place to congregate, and they also were used as schools and other things," he said.

Black churches have been a key element of the African American community through generations of faith and struggle, and preserving them isn't just a brick-and-mortar issue but one of civil rights and racial justice, Leggs said in an interview.

"Historically Black churches deserve the same admiration and stewardship as the National Cathedral in Washington or New York's Trinity Church," he said. Trinity, where Alexander Hamilton and other historic figures are buried, was near Ground Zero and became a national touchstone after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In all, the project plans to assist more than 50 Black churches nationwide over the next three years, including some that are vacant or set for demolition or are struggling with inadequate funding, aging members and dwindling membership. While active congregations are the main priority, funding can also go to old church buildings that now house projects like community centers or treatment programs, Leggs said.

"It still stewards the legacy of the Black church but for a new purpose," he said.

The fund previously has assisted congregations including Mother Emmanuel AME Church, where white supremacists killed nine parishioners during a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, and Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, a stalwart of the civil rights movement which was bombed in the 1950s.

The Action Fund, which has raised more than \$70 million, has assisted with more than 200 preservation projects nationally. It was started by the National Trust for Historic Preservation after clashes between white supremacists and protesters during the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.

The fund calls itself the largest-ever attempt to preserve sites linked to African American history.

## Djokovic leaves Australia but debate goes on in vaccine saga

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

Australia sent Novak Djokovic home, but opinion remains divided worldwide on the No. 1 men's tennis player and whether he should have been allowed to compete in the Australian Open despite not being vaccinated against COVID-19.

At a tennis center in Phoenix on Sunday, employee Stan Taylor said the lobby was abuzz with just one question as players arrived: "What do you think about Novak Djokovic?"

There was no consensus on whether the No. 1 men's player had tried to game the system in seeking an exemption to Australia's strict vaccination rules or had the right to defend his title at the Open. In the end, the country's immigration minister revoked his visa on public interest grounds, and Djokovic was deported Sunday.

Taylor said he knows Djokovic has favored unconventional approaches all his life, but he wanted to see the tennis star display leadership in the polarizing COVID-19 vaccine debate.

"I love to watch him do battle," said Taylor, who lives in Phoenix and has closely followed the saga. "I've watched him snatch victory from the mouth of defeat. .... So he loves the game, but this thing was not something to get on the soapbox about. He chose the wrong fight, and he lost."

Djokovic received an exemption to vaccination rules to play in the Australian Open, based on a previous coronavirus infection. But upon arrival, border officials said the exemption was not valid and moved to deport him — sparking a 10-day legal battle and an ongoing political drama.

Djokovic has overwhelming support from his home country of Serbia, whose president said Australia embarrassed itself and urged his countryman to return where he would be welcomed.

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The tennis player has also been held up as a hero by some in the anti-vaccine movement. One protester raised a poster in support of the tennis star at a rally in the Netherlands on Sunday.

Others were quick to criticize. One of Italy's greatest tennis players, Adriano Panatta, called Djokovic's expulsion from Australia "the most natural epilogue of this affair."

"I don't see how Australia could have granted the visa. He committed big errors, he created an international case when he could have done without that," Panatta said to the Italian news agency LaPresse.

French tennis player Alize Cornet, meanwhile, expressed sympathy while reserving judgment.

"I know too little to judge the situation," she posted on Twitter. "What I know is that Novak is always the first one to stand up for the players. But none of us stood for him. Be strong."

British player Andy Murray said he hoped that such a situation wouldn't be repeated at the next tournament.

At this stage, Djokovic could still play in the next Grand Slam tournament, the French Open in May-June — if virus rules don't change before then. Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu confirmed earlier this month that Djokovic would qualify for a "health bubble" that allows unvaccinated players to train and play.

The same could be true for Wimbledon. England has allowed exemptions from various coronavirus regulations for visiting athletes, if they remain at their accommodation when not competing or training. The U.S. Tennis Association, which runs the U.S. Open, has said it will follow whatever rules are set out by the federal, state and local governments when it comes to vaccination status.

A Djokovic appearance at those tournaments certainly would attract those who want to see great players in action, said Dillon McNamara, who runs a tennis academy in Las Vegas.

"I'm not a Novak Djokovic fan at all ... but I would have really liked to see him play," he said, arguing the Australian Open could have put measures in place to keep the tournament safe beyond barring the unvaccinated.

Perhaps there is only one thing everyone can agree on. As Murray put it: "The situation has not been good all round for anyone."

## Retirement awaits Roethlisberger after 42-21 loss in KC

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger raised some eyebrows ahead of their wild-card game against the defending AFC champion Chiefs on Sunday night when he admitted that "we probably aren't supposed to be here."

Well, he wasn't wrong.

After taking an early lead on T.J. Watt's fumble return for a touchdown, the Steelers watched Patrick Mahomes guide the Chiefs to six consecutive touchdown drives. So by the time Roethlisberger finally led Pittsburgh past midfield for the first time, midway through the third quarter, the outcome of what was likely his final game had been decided.

The Chiefs advanced to face Buffalo in the divisional round next Sunday night with a 42-21 blowout of the Steelers.

"I mean, shoot, we thought last week was going to be the end," Roethlisberger said. "We got blessed to play another football game. Didn't end the way we wanted it to, but it's a blessing to play this football game. How lucky are we that we get to play football for a living? We have to count our blessings."

Still, it was the Steelers' fourth straight playoff loss — their last win came in the divisional round in Kansas City almost five years ago to the day — and in each they trailed by at least 21 points. Two of those defeats came at home when Pittsburgh was a heavy favorite, including a wild-card loss to the Browns last season.

The difference this time? For Roethlisberger, it appears there won't be a next time.

The six-time Pro Bowl quarterback, who returned the Steelers to prominence with a pair of Super Bowl wins, made it clear he expects this season to be his last. And if that's the case, the performance by the 39-year-old Roethlisberger in his 23rd career playoff start — tied for fourth with Joe Montana among all NFL quarterbacks — will be one to forget.

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His passes fluttered. They floated. They certainly lacked the zip they had early in his career.

They also didn't produce enough offense.

The Steelers went three-and-out on their first three series. They punted on their first seven, a streak only interrupted by Najee Harris losing his first career fumble. Indeed, it wasn't until there were 6 1/2 minutes left in the third quarter, and the Chiefs already led 35-7, that Roethlisberger even managed to move Pittsburgh past the 50-yard line.

He was actually quite sharp on that drive, hitting all eight of his throws with a TD pass to Diontae Johnson. But the rest of the game, Roethlisberger was about as dull as could be. He was 29 of 44 for 215 yards passing.

"He's one special, unique guy," Steelers wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster said. "When I first came in, I tell everybody, I used to watch Big Ben and I always wondered what it was like to be in that huddle, to go down field and score the winning touchdown. Fast-forward 10 years and I'm in that huddle. I can give my career to that man, everything he's done up until now. I appreciate him so much."

Roethlisberger came into the game with 5,757 yards passing in the postseason, and needed just 99 more to leap Montana and Brett Favre on the career list. But it looked like that would be a stretch at halftime, when the Chiefs were dominating the Pittsburgh offensive line and Roethlisberger was 5 of 14 for 24 yards.

He finally got the yardage he needed on a throw to Chase Claypool with 12 1/2 minutes left in the game. It was good for one more line in his career portfolio that is already full, and just might one day land him in the Hall of Fame.

"I just told him I have so much respect for him," said Mahomes, who sought Roethlisberger out after the game. "I watched him growing up and the way he plays the game, he competes to the very end. And he did that this whole entire season and who knows what the future is, but it was great to be here and witness him."

Roethlisberger won 165 games, threw for more than 64,000 yards and kept the success going through hundreds of teammates and plenty of controversy and drama. His career began with winning the AFC Offensive Rookie of the Year award and it ended with Roethlisberger leading a team few thought playoff-worthy to the postseason.

"I will say I'm really proud of the way guys fought," he said. "We had guys, whether it was linesmen or backs or receivers or tight ends, step up and literally fought to the end. Guys never quit, even to the last second, even when it was out of our grasp. I'm just so proud to call these guys brothers and play for them."

## Texas rabbi: Captor grew "belligerent" late in standoff

By JAKE BLEIBERG and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

COLLEYVILLE, Texas (AP) — A rabbi who was among four people held hostage at a Texas synagogue said Sunday that their armed captor grew "increasingly belligerent and threatening" toward the end of the 10-hour standoff, which ended with an FBI SWAT team rushing into the building and the captor's death.

Authorities identified the hostage-taker as a 44-year-old British national, Malik Faisal Akram, who was killed Saturday night after the last hostages ran out of Congregation Beth Israel around 9 p.m. The FBI said there was no early indication that anyone else was involved but had not provided a possible motive.

The investigation stretched to England, where late Sunday police in Manchester announced that two teenagers were in custody in connection with the standoff. Greater Manchester Police tweeted that counter-terrorism officers had made the arrests but did not say whether the pair faced any charges.

President Joe Biden called the episode an act of terror. Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker credited security training that his suburban Fort Worth congregation has received over the years for getting him and the other three hostages through the ordeal, which he described as traumatic.

"In the last hour of our hostage crisis, the gunman became increasingly belligerent and threatening," Cytron-Walker said in a statement. "Without the instruction we received, we would not have been prepared to act and flee when the situation presented itself."

Akram could be heard for a time ranting on a Facebook livestream of the services and demanding the

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release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaida who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. Army officers in Afghanistan.

Video of the standoff's end from Dallas TV station WFAA showed people running out a door of the synagogue, and then a man holding a gun opening the same door just seconds later before he turned around and closed it. Moments later, several shots and then an explosion could be heard.

Authorities have declined to say who shot Akram, saying it was still under investigation.

Speaking to reporters in Philadelphia on Sunday, Biden said Akram allegedly purchased a weapon on the streets.

Federal investigators believe Akram purchased the handgun used in the hostage taking in a private sale, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing. Akram arrived in the U.S. at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York about two weeks ago, a law enforcement official said.

Akram arrived in the U.S. recently on a tourist visa from Great Britain, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the information was not intended to be public. London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement that its counter-terrorism police were liaising with U.S. authorities about the incident.

FBI Special Agent in Charge Matt DeSarno had said Saturday night that the hostage-taker was specifically focused on an issue not directly connected to the Jewish community. It wasn't clear why Akram chose the synagogue, though the prison where Siddiqui is serving her sentence is in Fort Worth.

On Sunday night, the FBI issued a statement calling the ordeal "a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted." The agency said the Joint Terrorism Task Force is investigating.

Michael Finfer, the president of the congregation, said in a statement "there was a one in a million chance that the gunman picked our congregation."

Authorities said police were first called to the synagogue around 11 a.m. and people were evacuated from the surrounding neighborhood soon afterward.

Akram used his phone during the course of negotiations to communicate with people other than law enforcement, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

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.

"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.

Texas resident Victoria Francis, who said she watched about an hour of the livestream, said she heard the man rant against America and claim he had a bomb. Biden said there were apparently no explosives, despite the threats.

"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," Francis said. "He was clearly in extreme distress."

Colleyville, a community of about 26,000 people, is about 15 miles (23 kilometers) northeast of Fort Worth. By Sunday morning, the police perimeter around the synagogue had shrunk to half a block in either direction and FBI agents could be seen going in and out of the building. A sign saying "Love" — with the "o" replaced with a Star of David — was planted in a neighbor's lawn.

Reached outside his home Sunday, Cytron-Walker declined to speak at length about the episode. "It's a little overwhelming as you can imagine. It was not fun yesterday," he told the AP.

Andrew Marc Paley, a Dallas rabbi who was called to the scene to help families and hostages upon their release, said Cytron-Walker acted as a calm and comforting presence. The first hostage was released shortly after 5 p.m. That was around the time food was delivered to those inside the synagogue, but Paley said he did not know if it was part of the negotiations.

"He appeared a little unfazed, actually, but I don't know if that was sort of shock or just the moment,"



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Paley said of the first hostage who was released.

Cytron-Walker said his congregation had received training from local authorities and the Secure Community Network, which was founded in 2004 by a coalition of Jewish organizations and describes itself as "the official safety and security organization" of the Jewish community in North America. Michael Masters, the CEO of the organization, said the congregation had provided security training in August and had not been previously aware of Akram.

The standoff led authorities to tighten security in other places, including New York City, where police said that they increased their presence "at key Jewish institutions" out of an abundance of caution.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Twitter that "this event is a stark reminder that antisemitism is still alive and we must continue to fight it worldwide."

## Celebrated Tuskegee Airman Charles McGee dies at 102

By DOUGLASS K. DANIEL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Charles McGee, a Tuskegee Airman who flew 409 fighter combat missions over three wars and later helped to bring attention to the Black pilots who had battled racism at home to fight for freedom abroad, died Sunday. He was 102.

McGee died in his sleep at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, said his son, Ron McGee.

After the U.S. entry into World War II, McGee left the University of Illinois to join an experimental program for Black soldiers seeking to train as pilots after the Army Air Corps was forced to admit African Americans. In October 1942 he was sent to the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama for flight training, according to his biography on the website of the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

"You could say that one of the things we were fighting for was equality," he told The Associated Press in a 1995 interview. "Equality of opportunity. We knew we had the same skills, or better."

McGee graduated from flight school in June 1943 and in early 1944 joined the all-Black 332nd Fighter Group, known as the "Red Tails." He flew 136 missions as the group accompanied bombers over Europe.

More than 900 men trained at Tuskegee from 1940 to 1946. About 450 deployed overseas and 150 lost their lives in training or combat.

In recent years the Tuskegee Airmen have been the subject of books, movies and documentaries highlighting their courage in the air and the doubts they faced on the ground because of their race. In 2007 a Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award from Congress, was issued to recognize their "unique military record that inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces."

McGee remained in the Army Air Corps, later the U.S. Air Force, and served for 30 years. He flew low-level bombing and strafing missions during the Korean War and returned to combat again during the Vietnam War. The National Aviation Hall of Fame says his 409 aerial fighter combat missions in three wars remains a record.

He retired as a colonel in the Air Force in 1973, then earned a college degree in business administration and worked as a business executive. He was accorded an honorary commission promoting him to the one-star rank of brigadier general as he turned 100. Another event marked his centennial year: He flew a private jet between Frederick, Maryland, and Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

In 2020, McGee drew a standing ovation from members of Congress when introduced by President Donald Trump during his State of the Union address.

In addition to encouraging young men and women to pursue careers in aviation, McGee was a source of information about the Tuskegee Airmen and offered a unique perspective on race relations of the era through the airmen's nonprofit educational organization.

"At the time of the war, the idea of an all African American flight squadron was radical and offensive to many," McGee wrote in an essay for the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

"The prevailing opinion was that blacks did not possess the intelligence or courage to be military pilots. One general even wrote, 'The Negro type has not the proper reflexes to make a first-rate fighter pilot.' The Tuskegee Airmen certainly proved men like him wrong."

Charles Edward McGee was born Dec. 7, 1919, in Cleveland, the son of a minister who also worked as a

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teacher and social worker and was a military chaplain. He graduated from high school in Chicago in 1938.

Survivors include daughters Charlene McGee Smith and Yvonne McGee, 10 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren and a great-great grandchild. His wife of more than 50 years, Frances, died in 1994.

A family statement described McGee as "a living legend known for his kind-hearted and humble nature, who saw positivity at every turn."

In tweets Sunday honoring McGee, both Vice President Kamala Harris and Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III called him an American hero.

"While I am saddened by his loss, I'm also incredibly grateful for his sacrifice, his legacy, and his character. Rest in peace, General," Austin wrote.

In his Smithsonian essay, McGee wrote that he was often asked why the Tuskegee Airmen were so successful in combat.

"I would say it was because of our courage and perseverance," he wrote. "We dreamed of being pilots as boys but were told it was not possible. Through faith and determination we overcame enormous obstacles. This is a lesson that all young people need to hear."

He added: "I am most proud of my work as a Tuskegee Airman that helped bring down racial barriers and defeat the Nazis."

## N. Korea fires short-range missiles in 4th launch this year

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea Monday in its fourth weapons launch this month, South Korea's military said, with the apparent goal of demonstrating its military might amid paused diplomacy with the United States and pandemic border closures.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North likely fired two short-range ballistic missiles from an area in Sunan, the location of Pyongyang's international airport. The missiles were launched four minutes apart Monday morning and flew around 380 kilometers (236 miles) on a maximum altitude of 42 kilometers (26 miles) before landing in waters off the country's northeastern coast, it said.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the missiles did not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to its allies, but highlighted the destabilizing impact of the North's "illicit" weapons program. Japan's Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said the missiles landed outside the Japan's exclusive economic zone, and the chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, condemned North Korea's actions as threats to peace.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is visiting the United Arab Emirates, instructed officials to make "utmost efforts to ensure stability" on the Korean Peninsula, his office said. It also said members of the presidential National Security Council stressed the need to revive nuclear diplomacy with Pyongyang.

North Korea had conducted a pair of flight tests of a purported hypersonic missile on Jan. 5 and Jan. 11 and also test-fired ballistic missiles from a train Friday in an apparent reprisal over fresh sanctions imposed by the Biden administration last week for its continuing test launches.

North Korea has been ramping up tests in recent months of new, potentially nuclear-capable missiles designed to be maneuverable and fly at low altitudes, which potentially improve their chances of evading and defeating missile defenses in the region.

Some experts say North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is going back to a tried-and-true tactic of pressuring his neighbors and the U.S. with missile launches and outrageous threats before offering negotiations meant to extract concessions.

A U.S.-led diplomatic push aimed at convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program collapsed in 2019 after the Trump administration rejected the North's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Kim has since pledged to further expand a nuclear arsenal he clearly sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

His government has so far rejected the Biden administration's call to resume dialogue without preconditions, saying that Washington must first abandon its "hostile policy," a term Pyongyang mainly uses to

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describe sanctions and combined U.S.-South Korea military exercises.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies, said the North may have conducted another launch to pressure Washington and could continue to dial up its testing activity after vowing stronger action over what it perceives as U.S. hostility.

Last week, the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on five North Koreans over their roles in obtaining equipment and technology for the North's missile programs in its response to the North's earlier tests this month.

The State Department ordered sanctions against another North Korean, a Russian man and a Russian company for their broader support of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction activities, and the Biden administration also said it would pursue additional U.N. sanctions over the North's continued tests.

The announcement of the sanctions just came hours after North Korean state media said Kim Jong Un oversaw a successful test of a hypersonic missile on Tuesday, which was the country's second test of the system in a week, and claimed that the weapon would greatly increase the country's "war deterrent."

The North also on Friday fired two short-range ballistic missiles from a train in an apparent retaliation against the fresh U.S. sanctions tied to the hypersonic tests. Friday's test came hours after the North's Foreign Ministry issued a statement berating the Biden administration over the new sanctions and warned of "stronger and certain reaction" if Washington maintains its confrontational stance.

## **Brady throws for 2 TDs, SB champions dominate Eagles 31-15**

By FRED GOODALL AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — As the game clock expired, Tom Brady raised his arms in triumph along the sideline, whirled and tossed a football into the stands.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers and their jubilant 44-year-old quarterback took the first step on what they hope will be a journey back to the Super Bowl, dominating the Philadelphia Eagles 31-15 in a NFC wild-card playoff victory Sunday.

"It only gets tougher from here," said the seven-time Super Bowl winner, who's trying to help the Bucs become the first team to repeat as NFL champions since the Brady-led New England Patriots won back-to-back titles in the 2003 and 2004 seasons.

Tampa Bay (14-4) set the tempo from the start, with Brady leading a pair of long TD drives in the opening quarter and building the lead to 17-0 by halftime.

The three-time league MVP finished off the Eagles with TD passes of 2 yards to Rob Gronkowski and 36 yards to Mike Evans, improving his dazzling playoff record to 35-11 in a record 46 postseason starts.

The Bucs defense did its part, too, intercepting Jalen Hurts twice in the Philadelphia quarterback's playoff debut.

"We did some good things," Brady said. "I think we're just going to have to keep doing what we did today. Everyone's got to touch it, make some explosive plays. Did a good job possessing it, the defense played great, so it was a great team win. Special teams played awesome — one of the best days we had on special teams all year."

Brady completed 29 of 37 attempts without an interception while extending his postseason record for TD passes to 85.

But the Bucs had matters well in hand before the reigning Super Bowl MVP found Gronkowski wide open in the middle of the end zone to make it 24-0 midway through the third quarter. The 6-foot-5 Evans punctuated his TD catch for a 31-0 lead with a front flip over the goal line.

Brady targeted Evans 10 times, completing nine of the throws for 117 yards. He's 5-0 in postseason games since joining the Bucs in 2020 after 20 seasons with the Patriots.

"I don't ever take it for granted," Evans said of Brady's leadership. "When he came to this team I knew he was going to change the franchise. He's done that and then some. He makes sure we're always ready to play. He makes sure that we know what we're doing and he makes sure that we give it our all. That's all you can ask for from a leader."

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The Eagles (9-9) scored on Boston Scott's 34-yard run and Hurts' 16-yard TD pass to Kenneth Gainwell both in the fourth quarter. A 2-point conversion trimmed Philadelphia's deficit to 16 with 4:45 remaining, but that was as close as it would get.

"We didn't play good enough today, I didn't play good enough today," said Hurts, who was wearing a protective boot on his left foot after the game.

"This game does not define us, does not define who we are. We know all the different things that we've overcome. I know as a football team we'll be back," added Hurts, who at 23 is the youngest QB to start a playoff game for the Eagles. "We'll be back. This is a feeling that will kind of simmer in our hearts, simmer for us all."

Giovani Bernard scored on a 2-yard run and Ke'Shawn Vaughn, a second-year pro filling in for injured running backs Leonard Fournette and Ronald Jones, covered the final yard of a 70-yard drive that put the Bucs up 14-0.

Brady led the NFL in passing yards, touchdowns, attempts and completions this season, but Tampa Bay gained the upper hand in this one by running the ball and keeping it away from Hurts and the league's leading rushing attack.

The Bucs ran 25 plays to Philadelphia's eight in the first quarter, outgaining the Eagles 137 yards to 17 and compiling an 11-1 edge in first downs.

It didn't get much better after that, with a Tampa Bay defense fortified by the return of injured linebackers Lavonte David, Shaquil Barrett and Jason Pierre-Paul turning away Hurts' most promising drive of the opening half with Mike Edwards' end zone interception.

The Eagles won four of their last five games to earn the No. 7 playoff seeding in the NFC, however the turning point in their season came when running the ball became a focal point of the offense during the second half of a 28-22 home loss to the Bucs.

The Eagles ran for at least 130 yards in their next nine games, including seven in a row with more than 175. Hurt led the team with 784 yards and 10 yards rushing, becoming the eighth quarterback in NFL history to throw for more than 3,000 yards and run for more than 750.

Hurts finished his playoff debut 23 of 43 passing for 258 yards. He ran for a team-high 39 yards on eight attempts, with the Eagles finishing with 95 yards rushing overall — well below their season average of 159.7 per game.

"I didn't sense for a moment that the moment was too big for them. I just think we made some mistakes," first-year Eagles coach Nick Sirianni said. "We just didn't make some plays. We didn't coach good enough at the end of the day."

## INJURIES

Eagles: LB T.J. Edwards (elbow) left in the second half and did not return.

Buccaneers: While David and Bernard were activated from injured reserve, RB Leonard Fournette (hamstring) was not. With RB Ronald Jones (ankle) inactive, that created a bigger role for Vaughn. ... All-Pro RT Tristan Wirfs limped off with an ankle injury a little over a minute into the game. He returned briefly in the second quarter, before taking the rest of the day off.

## UP NEXT

Eagles: Enter offseason with lingering questions about whether Hurts is the answer at quarterback moving forward.

Buccaneers: Host NFC divisional game next Sunday afternoon against the winner of the Cardinals-Rams game being played Monday night.

## 49ers hang on over Cowboys 23-17 in chaotic wild-card finish

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Pro Football Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Kyle Shanahan walked onto the field with an emphatic nod, believing his San Francisco 49ers had beaten the Dallas Cowboys in a chaotic wild-card finish that left many not sure what was happening.



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The official word came a short time later.

Deebo Samuel ran 26 yards for a touchdown for a comfortable lead in the third quarter before the Cowboys rallied and ran out of time trying to get a final play in the 49ers' 23-17 victory Sunday.

"I'm still trying to figure out where I'm at," Shanahan said after coaching San Francisco's first playoff victory at Dallas in a storied postseason rivalry. "It's pretty emotional out there. Lots of opportunities to win the game. Those guys (Cowboys) just kept fightin'. We made a couple mistakes there at the end. We shouldn't have let it get there."

The 49ers (11-7) overcame an interception by Jimmy Garoppolo when they led by 13 in the fourth quarter, and now are headed to a divisional playoff next Saturday night at Green Bay two years after reaching the Super Bowl and losing to Kansas City.

The wait for Dallas (12-6) to reach even an NFC championship game will tick up to 27 years after another first-game flameout in the postseason for Dak Prescott, the second in three trips over six seasons for the star quarterback. It was his first playoff game since signing a \$40-million-a-year contract in the offseason.

Prescott ran for a touchdown to get Dallas within a score after Garoppolo's interception, and he had plenty of time to get his team in front for the first time on a drive that ended near midfield. His desperation fourth-down pass was just out of receiver Cedrick Wilson's reach.

A 14th penalty from the NFL's most-penalized team in the regular season helped San Francisco run out most of the clock, and the 49ers intended to go for the win on fourth down when a run from Samuel ended up short — by inches after the ball was nudged up on review.

Instead, San Francisco punted after a false start, giving Dallas one more chance. Without enough time, as it turned out.

The Cowboys started at their 20 with 32 seconds to go. Wilson pitched to CeeDee Lamb on a hook-and-ladder play for 20 yards, and Dalton Schultz gained 9 yards before getting out of bounds with 14 seconds remaining.

Prescott took off on a designed run and slid at the end of a 17-yard run, with about eight seconds to go. Umpire Ramon George bumped Prescott trying to set the spot. The snap from the San Francisco 24 came after the clock expired.

Dallas coach Mike McCarthy suggested Prescott was slowed by the collision with George, and that a sideline official assured him the play was being reviewed.

"The communication that I was given on the sideline was they were reviewing it," McCarthy said. "They were going to put time back on the clock. And the next thing I know, they're running off the field."

Players from both teams streamed onto the field immediately after Prescott took the snap and spiked the ball, and many did a U-turn as officials discussed the play. Then referee Alex Kemp announced the game was over.

"It was like the whole day, it really was," Garoppolo said of the final sequence. "It was a dogfight, hell of an atmosphere out here. I mean, the fans were nuts. It was everything we thought it was going to be. It was fun."

Kemp said in a pool report George was trailing the play at a proper distance and acted appropriately to get the ball spotted correctly. The umpire has to touch the ball before another play can happen.

Kemp said the decision that the snap came after the clock had expired was made on the field, not on a replay assist from New York.

"The umpire was simply spotting the ball properly," Kemp said. "He collided with the players as he was setting the ball because he was moving it to the proper spot."

The 49ers were in control in the fourth quarter, but not leaning on the running game they figured could carry them to a win when Garoppolo threw an interception to Anthony Brown that set up Prescott's 7-yard scoring run.

Garoppolo's mistake wasn't long after Prescott was picked off at the Dallas 26 by K'Waun Williams and Samuel ran untouched on a cutback up the middle to the end zone on the next play for a 23-7 lead.

San Francisco lost star pass rusher Nick Bosa to a concussion just before halftime when he was crunched

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in the head and neck area by teammate D.J. Jones. But the 49ers kept enough pressure on Prescott, finishing with five sacks while holding the NFL's No. 1 offense to 307 yards.

"Guys just stepping up big in big key situations, that's really what it was all day," Garoppolo said. "Early on, we got it rolling with the offense and the defense just throughout the entire day. We got some dogs on our defense, man. It's fun."

San Francisco scored on its first four possessions, but three times settled for field goals from Robbie Gould to help keep the Cowboys close.

Rookie Elijah Mitchell ran for 96 yards and the game's first points on a 4-yard run. Samuel had 72 yards on 10 carries and three catches for 38 yards.

As was the case most of the season, Dallas couldn't get the running game going with Ezekiel Elliott. The two-time rushing champion had 31 yards on 12 carries as the Cowboys were outgained 169-77 on the ground.

Prescott was 23 of 43 for 254 yards. Garoppolo, whose future with the 49ers beyond this season is uncertain with rookie Trey Lance waiting his turn, was 16 of 25 for 172 yards.

Dallas was down 13-0 when Prescott threw a 20-yard touchdown pass to Amari Cooper. The Cowboys had the final possession of the first half and the opening drive of the second half to get closer and couldn't.

"The team should not have been in a position to make that last play be something controversial," Dallas owner Jerry Jones said. "I'm not going to make it bigger than it is."

The talk shows will do that for him.

## MONEY KICKER

Gould is now the career leader for makes in the playoffs without a miss at 18. Two of his field goals were from at least 50 yards (53, 52).

## INJURIES

Concussions almost sidelined the best pass rushers for both teams. Before Bosa was injured, standout Dallas rookie Micah Parsons was evaluated for a concussion in the first quarter. He quickly returned.

## UP NEXT

49ers: Head to Green Bay to take on Aaron Rodgers and the Packers in the divisional round next Saturday night.

Cowboys: Season ends with the first wild-card loss in three playoff trips for Prescott.

## Snow, ice blast through South with powerful winter storm

By PAMELA SAMPSON and KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A dangerous winter storm combining high winds and ice swept through parts of the U.S. Southeast on Sunday, knocking out power, felling trees and fences and coating roads with a treacherous, frigid glaze.

Tens of thousands of customers were without power in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida. Highway patrols reported hundreds of vehicle accidents, and a tornado ripped through a trailer park in Florida. More than 1,200 Sunday flights at Charlotte Douglas International were cancelled — more than 90% of the airport's Sunday schedule, according to the flight tracking service flightaware.com.

Winter Storm Izzy dumped as much as 10 inches of snow in some areas of western North Carolina as the system moved across the southeastern U.S., said Brian Hurley, a meteorologist with the Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

First Sgt. Christopher Knox, a North Carolina Highway Patrol spokesperson, said that by midafternoon, the agency had responded to 300 car crashes and nearly 800 calls for service. Two people died Sunday when their car drove off the road and into trees in a median east of Raleigh. The driver and passenger, both 41-year-old South Carolina residents, were pronounced dead at the scene of the single-vehicle crash. Knox said investigators believe the car was driving too fast for the conditions, described as mixed winter precipitation.

Durham police tweeted a photo of a tractor-trailer that slid off the N.C. Highway 147 overpass in Durham.

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The truck's cab appeared to have landed upright on Highway 15-501 below, while the trailer came down in a vertical position from the bridge to the highway below. Police spokesperson Kammie Michael said the driver was stable with injuries that did not appear life-threatening.

Kristen Baker Morrow's 6-year-old son made snow angels after their home in Crouse, North Carolina, got four inches of snow Sunday morning, but she said they couldn't stay outside long because of the uncomfortable wind chill.

"It took 30 to 45 minutes to get everything on for about 10 minutes in the snow, but it was definitely worth it for him, to get our pictures and make some memories," said Morrow, a 35-year-old registered nurse.

Outages, which had ballooned to a quarter-million customers earlier in the day, stood at around 130,000 customers by late Sunday, according to poweroutage.us. North Carolina was hardest hit, peaking at some 90,000 outages. Parts of Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Virginia and Kentucky also lost power.

The National Weather Service confirmed a tornado with 118 mph winds (190 kph) struck southwest Florida. The weather service said the tornado was on the ground for almost two miles (3 kilometers) with a maximum path width of 125 yards (115 meters). Thirty mobile homes were destroyed and 51 had major damage. Three minor injuries were reported.

Edward Murray, 81, told the Naples Daily News that he was inside his mobile home Sunday morning when a tornado picked it up and tossed it on top of his neighbor's home.

"That's my house that's turned upside down," he told the newspaper. "The tornado took me off my feet, blew me toward the east wall and buried me under the sink, refrigerator, kitchen chairs and everything else."

Murray and his daughter, Cokie, escaped unharmed, crawling from the wreckage.

"I was so happy when I saw the sky," Murray told the newspaper. "I said to the devil, 'It's not going to be today.'"

Virginia State Police said traffic came to a standstill on Interstate 81 in Roanoke County for several hours Sunday afternoon after a tractor-trailer jackknifed and the cab of the truck disconnected from the trailer in the northbound lanes. Two additional accidents occurred in the traffic backup, one with minor injuries. "Please stay off the roads if possible. Begging again! Hazardous conditions," read a tweet from VDOT's Salem office.

At Mountain Crossings, a hikers' outfitting store on the Appalachian Trail near Georgia's Blood Mountain, a handful of hikers were trekking up the mountain in the snow, employee Julia Leveille said Sunday.

"We're open, but it's kind of a mess up here," she said by phone. A tree fell along the highway about a mile south of the store, and crews were working to clear it, she said.

Despite the heavy snow and ice in the area, several hikers had already started hiking from Georgia to Maine, Leveille said.

"You've got to really like the snow for that, because you're heading north and into higher mountains and you could see some nasty storms," she said.

Most of the hikers who stopped in Sunday were ascending Blood Mountain on a day hike. At 4,458 feet (1,359 meters), it's the highest peak on Georgia's portion of the Appalachian Trail.

In Tennessee, there were multiple reports of abandoned and wrecked cars on snow-covered roads.

The storm system could cause hazardous driving conditions over a large portion of the eastern U.S. through Monday as the wet roadways refreeze in southern states and the storm turns and moves northward through the Mid-Atlantic states and New England.

"It's a very expansive storm," Hurley said. "A lot of real estate is going to get four to eight inches of snow and a lot more are also going to get to get some of that ice accumulation."

New York City was expected to be spared most, if not all, of the snowfall, but Long Island and Connecticut coastal areas were expecting gale conditions. Upstate New York was projected to get hit with up to a foot of snow along with high winds.

Six to 13 inches (15 to 33 centimeters) of snow was expected in parts of east-central Ohio and western Pennsylvania from Sunday afternoon.

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## For Oath Keepers and founder, Jan. 6 was weeks in the making

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Two days after the election on Nov. 3, 2020, the Oath Keepers were already convinced that victory had been stolen from President Donald Trump and members of the far-right militia group were making plans to march on the U.S. Capitol.

"We aren't getting through this without a civil war," the group's leader, Stewart Rhodes, wrote fellow members, according to court documents. "Too late for that. Prepare your mind. body. spirit."

Four days later, when The Associated Press and other news outlets declared Democrat Joe Biden the winner, the documents say Rhodes told Oath Keepers to "refuse to accept it and march en-masse on the nation's Capitol."

The indictment last week of Rhodes, the leader of the Oath Keepers, and 10 other members or associates was stunning in part because federal prosecutors, after a year of investigating the insurrection of Jan. 6, 2021, charged them with seditious conspiracy, a rarely-used Civil War-era statute reserved for only the most serious of political criminals.

But the documents also show how quickly Trump's most fervent and dangerous supporters mobilized to subvert the election results through force and violence, even though there was no widespread election fraud and Trump's Cabinet and local election officials said the vote had been free and fair.

Hundreds of people have been charged in the violent effort to stop the congressional certification of Biden's victory. Many were animated by Trump's speech at a rally near the White House, just before the riot, where he said: "We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

But for Rhodes and others, there was no need for Trump's words of encouragement. Action was already planned.

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Elmer Stewart Rhodes III, 56, founded the Oath Keepers in 2009. He and some friends decided they would form an organization around the perception of "imminent tyranny," concerned about federal overreach and a series of unrecognized threats, like the government was planning to attack its own citizens. He recruited current and former military, police and first responders.

Rhodes, out of high school, joined the Army and became a paratrooper, but was honorably discharged after he was injured during a night parachuting accident, according to a biography on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website on extremism.

He went to night school at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. His first job in politics was supervising interns for Ron Paul, who was then a Republican congressman from Texas. Rhodes later went to Yale Law School, graduating in 2004 and clerking for Arizona Supreme Court Justice Michael Ryan.

Rhodes moved to Montana and relocated his defense practice there but took a "hard right turn away from politics" the SPLC said, and launched the Oath Keepers.

He has said there were about 40,000 Oath Keepers at its peak; one extremism expert estimates the group's membership stands at about 3,000 nationally. Before long, Rhodes was neglecting his law practice to work on the Oath Keepers. He was disbarred in 2015.

Members pledge to "fulfill the oath all military and police take to 'defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic,'" and to defend the Constitution, according to its website.

Their motto: "Not on our watch!"

The Oath Keepers engaged in a series of confrontations with the government during years of Barack Obama's presidency. The most notable was an armed standoff against the federal government at Bundy Ranch in Bunkerville, Nevada.

Then Trump was elected in 2016. While Rhodes insisted the Oath Keepers were nonpartisan, they came to the nation's capital in January 2017, when Trump took office, to protect peaceful "American patriots" from "radical leftists."

"During this time, Rhodes became increasingly conspiratorial, adopting and peddling a number of fringe



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right-wing conspiracy theories with the assistance of his friend Alex Jones," according to the book "Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group," by University at Albany assistant professor Sam Jackson. Jones is a conspiracy theorist and Infowars host.

When it looked like Trump was going to lose the 2020 presidential election to Biden, the Oath Keepers got to work, prosecutors said.

On Nov. 9, 2020, Rhodes instructed his followers during a GoToMeeting call to go to Washington to let Trump know "that the people are behind him," and he expressed hope that Trump would call up the militia to help stay in power, authorities say.

"It will be a bloody and desperate fight," Rhodes warned. "We are going to have a fight. That can't be avoided."

The Oath Keepers worked as if they were going to war, discussing weapons and training. Days before the attack on the Capitol, one defendant suggested in a text message getting a boat to ferry weapons across the Potomac River to their "waiting arms," prosecutors say.

On Dec. 14, 2020, as the electors in the states cast their votes, Rhodes published a letter on the Oath Keepers' website "advocating for the use of force to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power," according to the documents.

As that transition in Washington drew close, Oath Keepers spoke of an arsenal they would keep just a few minutes away and grab if needed. Rhodes is accused of spending \$15,500 on firearms and related equipment including a shotgun, AR-15, mounts, triggers, scopes and magazines, prosecutors said.

Others came prepared, too.

"Everyone coming has their own technical equipment and knows how to use it," wrote Edward Vallejo, who also was charged in the conspiracy.

Oath Keepers staged the guns in hotels just outside of the District of Columbia. Rhodes said they were "QRFs" —military-speak for quick reaction force, according to court papers.

On the morning of Jan. 6, 2021, Vallejo and others were on a podcast discussing the possibility of armed conflict. Members turned up wearing camouflaged combat attire and in helmets. They entered the Capitol with the large crowds of rioters who stormed past police barriers and smashed windows, injuring dozens of officers and sending lawmakers running.

The indictment against Rhodes alleges Oath Keepers formed two teams, or "stacks," a military term. The first stack split up inside the building to separately go after the House and Senate. The second stack confronted officers inside the Capitol Rotunda, the indictment said.

Other Trump supporters were getting in the fray, too.

The building was breached. The congressional certification had stopped. Rumors circulated that the left-wing antifa had breached the seat of American democracy. "Nope. I'm right here, these are Patriots," Rhodes wrote to his leadership group in a secure chat.

"All I see Trump doing is complaining," Rhodes wrote, according to prosecutors. "I see no attempt by him to do anything. So the patriots are taking it in their own hands. They've had enough."

One of the stacks hunted for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., but could not find her. Members of Congress were cowering in fear and Pelosi had been sent to a secure location. The siege continued for hours, until law enforcement finally gained control.

"We are acting like the founding fathers" one wrote in the throes of the melee. "Can't stand down."

An Oath Keeper was the first defendant to plead guilty in the Jan. 6 melee. Jon Ryan Schaffer also agreed to cooperate with the government's investigation and the Justice Department has promised to consider putting him in the witness security program, suggesting it saw him as a valuable cooperator in the probe.

Other cracks in the group are showing. Before his arrest, Rhodes sought to distance himself from those who have been arrested, insisting the members went rogue and there was never a plan to enter the Capitol.

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Court documents show discord among the group as early as the night of the attack. Someone identified in the records only as "Person Eleven" blasted the group "a huge f—n joke" and called Rhodes "the dumba— I heard you were," court documents say.

After the riot, the North Carolina Oath Keepers branch said it was splitting from Rhodes' group. Its president told The News Reporter newspaper it wouldn't be "a part of anything that terrorizes anybody or goes against law enforcement."

A leader of an Arizona chapter also slammed Rhodes and those facing charges, saying on CBS' "60 Minutes" that the attack "goes against everything we've ever taught, everything we believe in."

The Oath Keepers are having money troubles, too. The group lost the ability to process credit card payments online after the company demanded that Rhodes disavow the arrested members and he refused, Rhodes said in a March interview for far-right website Gateway Pundit. People are instructed instead to mail in applications and dues.

For a long time it didn't look as though Rhodes would be charged. More than a dozen of his members were arrested on conspiracy accusations, and Rhodes was referred to in their indictments as "Person One."

But as the months wore on it seemed increasingly unlikely anyone would face anything more serious like sedition — when two or more people in the United States. conspire to "overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force" the government, or to levy war against it, or to oppose by force and try to prevent the execution of any law.

That's in part because such charges are rarely used and hard to win. The last time U.S. prosecutors brought a seditious conspiracy case was in 2010 in an alleged Michigan plot by members of the Hutaree militia to incite an uprising against the government. But a judge ordered acquittals on the sedition conspiracy charges at a 2012 trial. The last successful prosecution was in 1995 when an Egyptian cleric and nine followers were convicted of seditious conspiracy and other charges in a plot to blow up the United Nations, the FBI's building, and two tunnels and a bridge linking New York and New Jersey.

The Jan 6 investigation has been long and tedious. The FBI is still looking for suspects and agents have combed through a mountain of evidence to link people with images from the day.

So far, more than 700 people have been charged. Most face lower-level crimes of entering a restricted building. About 150 people have been charged with assaulting police officers at the Capitol. And members of another far-right group the Proud Boys have been indicted on simple conspiracy charges that bring five years behind bars if convicted.

Rhodes was arrested Thursday and faced a judge on Friday who ordered him held in custody. After the hearing, his lawyers said he entered a not guilty plea and plans to fight the charges against him.

Jackson, the author of the Oath Keepers book, said Rhodes has been good at staying out of trouble in the past, but his public rhetoric became much more inflammatory leading up to Jan. 6 attack.

"This is entirely speculation on my part, but perhaps Rhodes felt like he would no longer get the attention that he needed if he continued to be moderate and had to become more inflammatory in his rhetoric," he said.

## Bronx fire victims' funeral draws huge outpouring of grief

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The caskets were brought one by one — all 15 of them — on a frigid winter day, as hundreds of mourners filled a Bronx mosque Sunday to bid farewell to those who died exactly a week ago trying to escape their smoke-filled apartment building.

Many hundreds more huddled outside, peering into the mosque's windows or watching on big-screen televisions, to pay their respects after New York City's deadliest fire in three decades.

"One week they were with us ... now they're gone," said Musa Kabba, the imam at the Masjid-Ur-Rahmah mosque, where many of the deceased had prayed. "Last Sunday it happened, and today we are about to bury these families. It is hard."

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In all, 17 people died in the fire, which authorities said was sparked by a faulty space heater in a third-floor apartment. Among the dead were eight children as young as 2, whose tiny caskets underscored the day's loss.

All of those who lost their lives collapsed and were overcome by smoke while trying to descend the building's stairwell.

Sunday's mass funeral at the Islamic Cultural Center capped a week of prayers and mourning within a close-knit community hailing from West Africa, most with connections to the small country of Gambia — where four of the victims would be buried, officials said. Eleven of the victims were transported to a cemetery in New Jersey.

Earlier in the week, burial services were held for two children at a mosque in Harlem.

"This is a sad situation. But everything comes from God. Tragedies always happen, we just thank Allah that we can all come together," said Haji Dukuray, the uncle of Haja Dukuray, who died with three of her children and her husband.

Men and women alike wept openly as six children and nine adults were given final rites before their caskets were returned to the hearses.

Ibrahim Saho's reddened eyes welled with tears as he rattled off the family names of the deceased. "A lot of people, too many people," he said, dabbing tears.

Amid the mourning, there was also frustration and anger, as family, friends and neighbors of the dead tried to make sense of the tragedy.

"There's outcry. There's injustice. There's neglect," said Sheikh Musa Drammeh, who was among those leading the response to the tragedy.

Some residents said space heaters were sometimes needed to supplement the building's heat, and apartment repairs weren't always done in a timely fashion — if at all.

Because of the magnitude of the tragedy, funeral organizers insisted on a public funeral to bring attention to the plight of immigrant families across New York City.

"We want the world to know that they died because they lived in the Bronx," Drammeh asserted. "If they lived in midtown Manhattan, they would not have died. Why? Because they wouldn't need to use space heaters. This is a public outcry. Therefore, there has to be responsibility from the elected officials to change the conditions that causes death every single day."

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin, as well as two officials representing the Gambian government, attended the funeral services.

"When tragedies occur, we come together," Schumer said.

Adams later added that he was there "to express the pain all New Yorkers are experiencing."

New York Attorney General Letitia James vowed to investigate, saying "there were conditions in that building that should have been corrected."

The investigation into the fire is ongoing.

The fire itself was contained to one unit and an adjoining hallway, but investigators said the door to the apartment and a stairway door many floors up had been left open, creating a flue that allowed plumes of black, choking smoke to quickly spread throughout the 19-story building.

New York City fire codes generally require apartment doors at larger apartment developments to be spring-loaded and slam shut automatically.

In the wake of the deaths, a coalition of officials — including federal, state and city lawmakers — announced a legislative agenda they hoped would stiffen fire codes and building standards to prevent similar tragedies from happening.

The proposals range from requiring that space heaters automatically shut off, to mandating that federally funded apartment projects install self-closing doors on units and stairwells, which would have to be inspected on a monthly basis.

As families bid farewell to their loved ones, others remained in hospitals, some in serious condition because of smoke inhalation.

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Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Sunday that \$2 million in aid would be available to help families recover from the tragedy, including help to replace damaged property and money to help with rent or finding a new place to live.

The Mayor's Fund, Bank of America and other groups said 118 families displaced by the fire would each get \$2,250 in aid.

Fundraisers have collected about \$400,000 thus far.

All week, family members had been anxious to lay their loved ones to rest in line with Islamic tradition, which calls for burial as soon after death as possible. But complications over identifying the victims delayed their release to funeral homes.

## Jeff Goldblum, Kyle MacLachlan bookend Prada menswear show

By COLLEEN BARRY AP Fashion Writer

MILAN (AP) — Jeff Goldblum infused Milan Fashion Week with some levity on Sunday as he shimmied down the Prada runway in a dark overcoat that cast a dramatic silhouette.

The latest menswear collection in the two-year-old collaboration between Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons as co-creative directors was at once elemental and celebratory, presenting elevated versions of everyday pieces.

"We were thinking about meaningful fashion, pieces that make sense," Prada said in show notes. "Clothes that make people feel important, and that are therefore, in themselves, important, not something to discard."

Kyle MacLachlan and Goldblum respectively opened and closed the runway show that featured eight other actors, chosen by the designers to represent "real men, recognized figures," enhancing reality.

Both wore long overcoats. Goldblum's was set off dramatically with furry trim, while MacLachlan's was contrasted with shimmering pants and shirt in light blue. Closing the show, Goldblum emerged hilariously from a purple-lit tunnel, as if surprised to find himself on a runway, then sashayed merrily along.

Guests at the Fondazione Prada's exhibition space were seated in well-spaced velvet-covered theater seats.

Outerwear and work clothes formed the backbone of the collection, sturdy, durable pieces. Statement pieces like long overcoats were trimmed in technical mohair, thick along the hem, and ringing the upper arms. At times, shoulders were accentuated, and a belt pulled tight at the waist for maximum form.

The designers continued their exploration of the uniform, as the world makes on-again, off-again moves back into the office amid the coronavirus pandemic, proposing elegant, lightweight and nearly formless coveralls in silk tech, leather and cotton.

"They replace the traditional, historical shirt/tie/bow tie, and give a new energy and reality, a younger attitude also," Simons said.

The designers also gave the collection flashes of color, in orange, yellow and icier hues. Looks were finished with matching colored gloves. Statement earrings were shaped like robots or the new Prada triangular logo. Bags included futuristic triangular shapes or double-cylinder backpacks.

With the pandemic still raging, fashion designers took differing, even opposing, views of the current moment: That we are moving out of the darkness and toward the light — or that it is time to hunker down.

Indian designer Dhruv Kapoor took the former view, in a collection that unites masculine forms with psychedelic designs with the underling message that it is mind over matter.

"I really want to push the power of the mind through this collection," said Kapoor. "That is what I want, to spread love through the brand."

"Linear time is an illusion" is embroidered in a burst of pink on a tailored overcoat, a job that takes 20-25 days to complete. Another slogan promotes "parallel worlds," the notion that we can be in more than one place at a time. Felt hats with thick fringe represent dreadlocks worn by yogis and considered auspicious.

By contrast, Rome-based American designer Justin Gall's debut Milan runway collection exuded the need for protection, to hunker down and wait it out.

The looks could outfit squads of survivalists caught in a dystopia, with a mashup of puffer jackets, vests and quilted trousers, layered or alternated with faux fur elements. Hoods were cinched tight over



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dark sunglasses, and pants alternated between heavy-duty leather with utility pockets and light-weight parachute pants.

"A motivation of mine is survival. That is what we are trying to do now," Gall said backstage.

## **Bidens pack carrots, apples into boxes during food bank stop**

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden packed carrots and apples into food boxes for the hungry and chatted with volunteers Sunday at a food bank as part of a day of service for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

The couple traveled about a half-hour from their Wilmington, Delaware, residence to Philabundance, a hunger relief organization in Philadelphia which serves about 140,000 people a week in the Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey region. Before heading to the warehouse floor where conveyor belts carried cardboard boxes full of donated food, Biden said the child tax credit needed to be renewed.

The traditional day of service is on the holiday, Monday, but there was a bad winter storm heading for the area and events were being rescheduled around the region.

The monthly credits were part of Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package — and the president had proposed extending them for another full year as part of a separate measure focused on economic and social programs. The added boost was used by families to buy food and other supplies.

But Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., objected to extending the credit out of concern that the money would discourage people from working and that any additional federal spending would fuel inflation that has already climbed to a nearly 40-year high.

"The child tax credit was really helpful. We've got to get it renewed," Biden said.

They walked out to the warehouse floor as "Wish I Didn't Miss You" by Angie Stone played softly, donned some gloves and got to work. Jill Biden wore a Philadelphia Eagles T-shirt under her blazer in a nod to the team's playoff game Sunday afternoon against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Biden chatted with volunteers, including one man standing near a crate of macaroni and cheese who told the president his daughter was a teacher. Biden spoke of the first lady's teaching career and then asked the man for his daughter's number and said he'd give her a ring.

The food boxes contained spices, fruits, vegetables, noodles, tea and juice boxes plus peanut butter and chickpeas.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the Senate will take up voting rights legislation on Tuesday, missing a deadline he initially set for action by Monday, which is MLK Day. Biden spoke forcefully of the need to pass the legislation, likening the modern concerns over election subversion and increasing voting restrictions in states to the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Biden last week said he supported changing Senate rules to allow the slim Democratic majority to push the package through, though he later acknowledged uncertainty it can pass Congress this year following objections from Manchin and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

## **Double dealing: Legal, illicit blur in California pot market**

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On an isolated farm, greenhouses stand in regimental order, sheltered by a fringe of trees. Inside are hundreds of head-high cannabis plants in precise rows, each rising from a pot nourished by coils of irrigation tubing. Lights powerful enough to turn night into day blaze overhead.

In the five years since California voters approved a broad legal marketplace for marijuana, thousands of greenhouses have sprouted across the state. But these, under their plastic canopies, conceal a secret.

The cultivator who operates the grow north of Sacramento holds a coveted state-issued license, permitting the business to produce and sell its plants. But it's been virtually impossible for the grower to turn a profit in a struggling legal industry where wholesale prices for cannabis buds have plunged as much as 70% from a year ago, taxes approach 50% in some areas and customers find far better deals in the thriving underground marketplace.

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So the company has two identities — one legal, the other illicit.

“We basically subsidize our white market with our black market,” said the cultivator, who agreed to speak with The Associated Press only on condition of anonymity to avoid possible prosecution.

Industry insiders say the practice of working simultaneously in the legal and illicit markets is all too commonplace, a financial reality brought on by the difficulties and costs of doing business with a product they call the most heavily regulated in America.

For the California grower, the furtive illegal sales happen informally, often with a friend within the tight-knit cannabis community calling to make a buy. The state requires legal businesses to report what they grow and ship, and it’s entered into a vast computerized tracking system — known as “seed to sale” monitoring — that’s far from airtight.

“It’s not too hard” to operate outside the tracking system’s guardrails, the grower said. Plants can vary widely in what each one produces, allowing for wiggle room in what gets reported, while there is little in the way of on-site inspections to verify record-keeping. The system is so loose, some legal farms move as much as 90% of their product into the illicit market, the grower added.

The passage of Proposition 64 in 2016 was seen as a watershed moment in the push to legitimize and tax California’s multibillion-dollar marijuana industry. In 2018, when retail outlets could open, California became the world’s largest legal marketplace and another steppingstone in what advocates hoped would be a path to federal legalization, after groundbreaking laws in Colorado and Washington state were enacted in 2012.

Today, most Americans live in states with at least some access to legal legal marijuana — 18 states have broad legal sales for those 21 and older, similar to alcohol laws, while more than two-thirds of states provide access through medicinal programs.

Kristi Knoblich Palmer, co-founder of top edibles brand KIVA Confections, lamented that the migration of business into the illegal market was damaging the effort to establish a stable, consumer-friendly marketplace.

“To have this system that now appears to be failing, having people go back into the old-school way of doing things ... it does not help us get to our goal of professionalizing cannabis and normalizing cannabis,” she said.

In California, no one disputes the vast illegal marketplace continues to dwarf the legal one, even though the 2016 law stated boldly that it would “incapacitate the black market.” Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who was lieutenant governor at the time the law was approved, called it a “game changer.”

But California’s legalization push faced challenges from the start. The state’s illegal market had flourished for decades, anchored in the storied “Emerald Triangle” in the northern end of the state. Not since the end of Prohibition in 1933 had an attempt been made to reshape such a vast illegal economy into a legal one.

In October, California law enforcement officials announced the destruction of over 1 million illegal plants statewide but said they were finding larger illicit growing operations. In the cannabis heartland of Humboldt County, many illegal growers are moving indoors to avoid detection. Investigators are making arrests and serving search warrants every week, but with so many underground grows “we may never eliminate the illegal cultivation,” Sheriff William Honsal said in an email to the AP.

California’s illegal market is estimated at \$8 billion, said Tom Adams, chief executive officer of research firm Global Go Analytics. That’s roughly double the amount of legal sales, though some estimates are even larger.

In September, a cannabis company sued government regulators in state court in Orange County, alleging so-called burner distributors were using shadowy “front men” to get licenses to buy wholesale cannabis, then selling it in the illegal market to sidestep taxes.

No state is claiming to have eliminated illegal operators. U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat who co-chairs the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, said he saw little prospect for undercutting illegal markets without federal legalization, which has been stalled in Congress despite having Democrats in control of Congress and the White House.

The thriving illegal markets in California, Oregon and elsewhere are a “product of the dysfunction, the lack of resources and the fact that we don’t have a national market that is regulated,” he said.

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Like the California cultivator, many businesses do some transactions in the illicit market to help make ends meet, but others have given up on the legal economy or never bothered to enter it.

While California's legal market tightly controls how and where pot is sold, the illegal industry is easy to access and offers a doorway into a vast and profitable national market.

"Licensed players are the good guys. Yet it just never feels like we're being treated like we're on the right side of history," Knoblich Palmer said.

California's effort to establish itself as the preeminent player in the legal cannabis economy has never felt more imperiled, and talk is spreading of a Boston Tea Party-like rebellion against state policies. In a December letter to Newsom, about two dozen industry executives said the state was crippling the marijuana economy.

"The California cannabis system is a nation-wide mockery, a public policy lesson in what not to do," the business leaders wrote. Newsom has signaled he's open to change.

The anonymous grower said the burden of competing in the regulated economy simply doesn't make sense to many longtime operators who came up in the pre-Proposition 64 marketplace. There is a widespread mindset — "Why bother?" — when the illegal economy is booming and there is little law enforcement to fear.

In Los Angeles, for example, opening a retail operation can cost \$1 million or more with licensing fees, real estate costs, attorneys and inspections — if you can get a license at all. Promises of social equity programs that would assist businesses run by people of color who were targeted during the war on drugs have gotten off to an uneven start.

For the struggling legal market, "when you have quality, price and convenience working against you, that's a challenge," said Adams, the cannabis analyst. "The illicit market has all three of them."

An irony in the legal market is that wholesale prices have plummeted, shaking the supply chain. A year ago, a cultivator could get about \$1,000 a pound wholesale. Now that's dropped as low as \$300, with the market saturated.

Slap \$150 in cultivation taxes on a \$300 pound, and that's a stunning 50% rate.

Part of the problem for the industry is about two-thirds of California cities do not allow legal sales or growing — local governments control when, or if, to create legal markets, and many have banned it or failed to set up rules. Even in places that do, cities have been slow to permit storefronts to sell legal products, with less than 1,000 brick-and-mortar shops in a state with nearly 40 million people.

Meanwhile, wholesale prices for buds in the underground are significantly higher. The legal market, with limited outlets to sell it, is flooded with pot from corporate-scale growers.

Few know the industry as well as dispensary owner Jerred Kiloh, who also heads the United Cannabis Business Association, a Los Angeles-based trade group.

"No one is making money anywhere in the (legal) supply chain," he said, noting his own sales have nosedived. Kiloh sees few bright spots in the law that established California's legal market, beyond a testing program that safeguards quality and programs to expunge old criminal records for marijuana.

With Proposition 64, "we did it all wrong," he said.

## Ukraine says Russia behind cyberattack in 'hybrid war' move

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine said Sunday that Russia was behind a cyberattack that defaced its government websites and alleged that Russia is engaged in an increasing "hybrid war" against its neighbor.

The statement from the Ministry of Digital Development came a day after Microsoft said dozens of computer systems at an unspecified number of Ukrainian government agencies had been infected with destructive malware disguised as ransomware. That disclosure suggested the attention-grabbing defacement attack on official websites last week was a diversion.

"All evidence indicates that Russia is behind the cyberattack. Moscow continues to wage a hybrid war and is actively building up its forces in the information and cyberspaces," the ministry statement said.

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The attack comes as the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine looms and diplomatic talks to resolve the tense standoff appear stalled.

Microsoft said in a short blog post Saturday that it first detected the malware on Thursday. That would coincide with the attack that simultaneously took some 70 Ukrainian government websites temporarily offline.

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.

On Sunday, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said U.S. and private-sector companies were still working to determine the source of the attacks. He said the United States has warned for months about the possibility of cyberattacks from Russia and has been working with Ukraine to improve that country's defenses.

"This is part of the Russian playbook," he said on CBS television's "Face the Nation" program.

A top private sector cybersecurity executive in Kyiv, Oleh Derevianko, told The Associated Press that the intruders penetrated the government networks through a shared software supplier in a supply-chain attack like the 2020 SolarWinds Russian cyberespionage campaign that targeted the U.S. government.

In 2017, Russia targeted Ukraine with one of the most damaging cyberattacks on record with the Not-Petya virus, causing more than \$10 billion in damage globally. That virus, also disguised as ransomware, was a so-called "wiper" that erased entire networks.

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."

## By the numbers: Stats that tell story of Biden's first year

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — By some counts, President Joe Biden can lay claim to a banner first year in office. But numbers also reveal plenty of setbacks.

Most in the United States got their COVID-19 vaccines, but other countries fared better. Economic growth surged; so did inflation. America exited Afghanistan, but the war ended with a chaotic evacuation and a suicide bombing that killed 13 U.S. troops. Pandemic aid and infrastructure bills passed. Pricey legislation to advance Biden's social and climate proposals shrunk and then stalled.

Some notable numbers from Biden's first year:

—63.5% vaccination rate. Most Americans got jabbed. Countries with higher vaccination rates: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

—3.9% jobless rate. The low unemployment rate is a big highlight of Biden's first year. He inherited a coronavirus-thrashed economy with unemployment at 6.4%. Employers added 6.4 million jobs last year as unemployment dropped well below the 4.6% that the Congressional Budget Office had anticipated in July for the end of 2021.

—7% inflation. In running the economy hot, Biden got burned as inflation reached a nearly 40-year high. Higher prices led to disapproval of Biden's economic leadership. Gasoline and groceries cost more, and some notable economists said higher prices were a sign that Biden's relief package was too large.

—\$1 trillion. The cost of Biden's bipartisan infrastructure law, which includes \$550 billion in new spending. To get an agreement, Biden pulled back from the \$2.3 trillion he initially proposed. He separately proposed \$1.8 trillion for a package of social and climate initiatives, but that was modified and unable to clear the Senate. So Biden got about one-quarter of the \$4 trillion in spending he proposed.

—13 deaths. The number of U.S. troops who died in a suicide bombing at the gate of Kabul's airport during the U.S. evacuation of more than 124,000 people from Afghanistan. At least 169 Afghans were killed, with the evacuations leaving scores of Americans and tens of thousands of Afghan allies behind.



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More than 2,460 U.S. service members died in Afghanistan over the course of the two-decade war.

—1.78 million border crossings in the Southwest. Migrants began streaming across the U.S.-Mexico border once Biden became president. There were 1.78 million encounters with border agents during his first 10 full months, a four-fold increase compared with President Donald Trump's last 10 months in office.

—20 natural disasters. There were 20 extreme weather and climate disasters that each caused damages in excess of \$1 billion and killed a combined 688 people. These included a drought, two floods, 11 severe storms, four tropical cyclones, a wildfire and a winter storm. Adjusted for inflation, the U.S. has averaged 7.4 disasters annually since 1980 that caused \$1 billion or more in losses.

—24 states. Biden visited nearly half of America's 50 states during his first year. Excluding stops at his homes in Delaware, top destinations were Pennsylvania (seven times) and Michigan (five times). Both were key states in his 2020 election victory. Jill Biden went to 35 states.

—41 federal judges. Biden had 41 judges confirmed to the bench during his first year in office, more than any of his recent predecessors at the same time in their presidencies. Of those, 80% are women, and 53% are people of color, according to the White House.

—103 days. It took an average of 103 days for Biden nominees requiring Senate confirmation to be confirmed. That's longer than the average for nominees in the first years of the previous six administrations and nearly three times longer than during Ronald Reagan's first year in office, according to an analysis by the Partnership for Public Service's Center for Presidential Transition.

—nine news conferences. There will be a 10th on Wednesday. Biden has been remarkably press shy. He held nine news conferences (six solo and three joint) and 22 media interviews during his first year. That's fewer news conferences than any of his five immediate predecessors at the same point in their presidencies, and fewer media interviews than any of his recent predecessors.

—32 "not a joke" references. It's one of Biden's favorite speech lines. Among the things he said were "not a joke": Civil rights icons, labor unions that built the middle class, air pollution from Delaware chemical plants, climate change as a national security risk, California voters, Biden's disregard of polls on his economic agenda. Seriously.

## Mali's ex-President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita dies at 76

By BABA AHMED and KRISTA LARSON Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the former president of Mali who took office in a landmark election held after a destabilizing coup only to be ousted in another military takeover nearly seven years later, has died. He was 76.

Keita, known to Malians by his initials IBK, had been in declining health since his forced resignation in August 2020, and had sought medical treatment in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, shortly after his release from junta custody.

The transitional government, which is still led by the man who ousted Keita from power 18 months ago, issued a statement saying that his death Sunday in Bamako followed "a long illness."

"The government of the Republic of Mali and the Malian people salute the memory of the late great," the statement said, adding that funeral details would come later.

The news comes as the turbulent West African nation faces a deepening political crisis, with coup leader Col. Assimi Goita having no immediate plans for a return to democracy as initially promised.

Keita won Mali's historic 2013 presidential election held after an earlier coup in 2012 and a subsequent French-led military intervention the following year to oust Islamic extremists from power in the country's north. But only seven years later, Keita himself was ousted by another military takeover following months of public demonstrations against his presidency.

Keita had three years left in his final term when mutinous soldiers detained him at his residence in August 2020 after firing shots outside the house. Hours later, he appeared in a midnight broadcast on state television, telling Malians he would resign immediately.

"I wish no blood to be shed to keep me in power," Keita said at the time. "I have decided to step down

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from office.”

The country has descended into further chaos since his departure. Goita last year launched a second coup, throwing out the civilian transitional leaders and making himself president.

West African regional leaders imposed tough economic sanctions earlier this month after Goita indicated that Mali's next presidential election won't be held until 2026, after initially agreeing to an election by the end of next month. The measures halted commercial flights from most other countries in the regional bloc known as ECOWAS and froze the Malian government's assets in commercial banks.

A protest movement against Keita's presidency in 2020 saw tens of thousands demonstrate in the streets in the months leading up to his overthrow. As discontent with his leadership mounted, Keita had tried to make concessions to his critics, saying he was even open to redoing the vote. But those overtures were swiftly rejected by opposition leaders, who said they wouldn't stop short of Keita's departure.

Support for Keita also tumbled amid criticism of his government's handling of the Islamic insurgency, which significantly expanded into central Mali during his tenure. A wave of particularly deadly attacks in the north in 2019 prompted the government to close its most vulnerable outposts as part of a reorganization aimed at stemming the losses.

Keita signed a peace agreement with the former rebels, but it was never fully implemented, prolonging the instability.

In the 2013 election, Keita had emerged from a field of more than two dozen candidates to win Mali's first democratic election after a 2012 coup — a landslide victory with more than 77% of the vote. He also enjoyed broad support from former colonizer France and other Western allies. In 2018, Keita was reelected to a second term after receiving 67% of the vote.

“I will remember him as a cultured man, a great patriot and a committed pan-Africanist,” tweeted Niger's former President Mahamadou Issoufou, who led the neighboring country throughout Keita's presidency as the two nations faced the growing regional threat posed by Islamic extremists. “I lose in him a friend and a comrade.”

Born in 1945, Keita hailed from the town of Koutiala in what is now southern Mali. He studied in Bamako, Dakar, Senegal, and Paris, earning a master's degree in history with postgraduate studies in politics and international relations before entering politics.

His early posts included being ambassador to neighboring Ivory Coast and diplomatic adviser to President Alpha Oumar Konare, who took office in 1992. Keita then served as prime minister from 1994 to 2000, and later as president of the National Assembly from 2002 to 2007.

He is survived by his wife, Aminata Maiga Keita, and their four children.

## 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.

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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 on her flight 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.

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. More than 6 million people are back at work and half a billion COVID-19 vaccines have been put in arms, but the nation has a long way to go to return to its pre-pandemic state.

"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.

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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.

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



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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 scum.

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."

## 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

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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."

## **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 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."

And to think: This 11-day saga could have been avoided if Djokovic got the COVID-19 vaccine — like more than 95% of all Top 100 men and women in their tours' respective rankings — or, like at least two other players who didn't have the shots and stayed away, accepted that he wasn't allowed to enter the Australian Open. Vaccination was a requirement for anyone at the tournament: players, their coaches and other entourage members, spectators, media members and everyone else on-site, too.

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,

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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.

## **Ruled out: Australia deports Djokovic for being unvaccinated**

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday after losing a bid to stay in the country to defend his Australian Open title despite not being vaccinated against COVID-19.

A masked Djokovic was photographed in a Melbourne airport lounge with two government officials in black uniforms before he left for Dubai. It's not clear where he will go from there. Among the possibilities are Spain, Monaco or his native Serbia, where he has an almost iconic status and would likely be greeted with a hero's welcome.

The No. 1-ranked tennis star has spent the past 10 days at the center of a dizzying drama over his vaccination status that has polarized opinion worldwide and struck a chord in Australia, where coronavirus cases are surging.

The 34-year-old said he was "extremely disappointed" by a court's decision Sunday that led to his deportation. But he added that he respected the ruling and would cooperate with authorities.

The saga began when Djokovic was granted an exemption to strict vaccination rules by two medical panels and Tennis Australia in order to play in the Australian Open. That exemption, based on evidence that he recently recovered from COVID-19, apparently allowed him to receive a visa to enter Australia. But upon arrival, border officials said the exemption was not valid and moved to deport him.

The ensuing back-and-forth raised questions of whether Djokovic was unfairly given special treatment or unfairly singled out because of his celebrity status and saw many complain that the drawn-out battle at the very least made Australia look bad.

A court initially ruled on procedural grounds that Djokovic could stay, but Australian Immigration Minister Alex Hawke, who has wide powers, later decided to deport him. In addition to not being inoculated against the coronavirus, Djokovic is a vocal vaccine skeptic, and the government said his presence could stir up anti-vaccine sentiments.

Three Federal Court judges unanimously upheld the immigration minister's decision.

Djokovic said he was "uncomfortable" that the focus had been on him since his visa was first canceled on Jan. 6.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love," he said. "I will now be taking some time to rest and to recuperate, before making any further comments beyond this."

The decision dashes Djokovic's hopes of winning a record 21st Grand Slam title. He is currently tied with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most Grand Slam singles trophies in men's tennis.

A deportation order could also ban him from Australia for three years — keeping the player from the tournament he has won a record nine times in the coming years.

Just as the case has all along, the decision to deport Djokovic split opinion.

In Serbia, where Djokovic has received overwhelming support, President Aleksandar Vucic said the hear-

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ing 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.

Back in Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison hailed the decision as one "to keep our borders strong and keep Australians safe."

Hawke, the immigration minister, said those strong border policies "are also fundamental to safe-guarding Australia's social cohesion which continues to strengthen despite the pandemic."

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 ahead of elections, due by May, when Morrison's conservative coalition will seek another term.

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.

Concern over surging infections hung over Djokovic's case. Hawke called the top-ranked player a "talisman of a community of anti-vaccination sentiment."

The player has in fact become an unwitting hero to the anti-vax movement. On Sunday, a protester at a rally in Amsterdam against the Dutch government's virus lockdown brandished a sign supporting Djokovic.

Hawke's lawyer Stephen Lloyd also noted that Djokovic has a "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."

But the decision did not sit well with some.

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 would have "been home with his family" had he not received the medical exemption.

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.

## Election overhaul in Alaska aimed at reducing partisanship

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — As partisan warfare has become the norm in state legislatures and Congress, Alaska is set to embark on an experiment to see if voters themselves can disarm the combatants.

A new election system, narrowly passed by voters in 2020 and set to be used in this year's races, is aimed at getting candidates to appeal to a broad range of voters beyond their traditional base. The system would end party primaries and send the top four vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, to the general election, where ranked-choice voting would determine a winner.

The model is unique among states and viewed by supporters as a way to encourage civility and cooperation among elected officials. A sponsor of the initiative, Republican-turned-independent former state



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lawmaker Jason Grenn, called Alaska a test case "in a major way" for similar efforts being considered in other states, including Nevada.

He said the new system will reward candidates who are willing to work with others, no matter their party affiliation, and that voters will be "empowered in a different way."

"We're excited that Alaska gets to lead the way on something that we feel is really monumental towards changing the way voters act and candidates act in our political system," Grenn said.

For the changes to kick in, they must survive a challenge before the Alaska Supreme Court, which will hear arguments on Tuesday.

Critics are challenging the measure's constitutionality and allege that it would dilute the power of political parties. A state court judge last year upheld the new system.

This year's midterm ballot will feature races for U.S. Senate, the state's lone seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and governor. And under a new redistricting plan that also is the subject of litigation, all but one of the legislature's 60 seats is up for election. All will be subject to the election reforms if the high court allows them.

Scott Kendall, an attorney who helped write the ballot initiative, said working across party lines seems to be part of Alaska's "political DNA." He cited as an example the late Republican Sen. Ted Stevens, who once said his motto during his decades in Congress had been "to hell with politics; just do what's right for Alaska." One of the state's current U.S. senators, Republican Lisa Murkowski, also is known for being able to work with Democrats on some issues and occasionally bucks her own party.

Kendall said he sees the potential for new legislative alliances and coalitions under the system and for those to become more of the norm. A reliably Republican or Democratic district isn't likely to flip, but the kind of lawmaker elected to represent that district could become more collaborative, he said.

"I think it's actually going to punish people when they are obstructionists just for the sake of obstruction," he said.

Harlow Robinson, a self-identified nonpartisan, said he is not heavily involved in politics but volunteered in support of the campaign for the election initiative. The Anchorage resident said partisanship has made government in general "dysfunctional" and hopes the new system provides more middle ground.

He said he likes the idea of coalition governance. But he said there's nothing wrong with Republican or Democratic majorities "so long as those elected officials are willing to compromise and represent the wider swath of Alaskans."

Alaska lawmakers have a history of crossing party lines to form majorities in the state House or Senate, in contrast with most other states where the majority party rules with little or no input from members of the minority party. Between 1993 and 2016, governing majorities generally favored Republicans, sometimes heavily, according to a Legislative Research Services report. Rural Democrats in the state have often joined majorities to ensure their constituents' needs are heard.

An exception to the Republican grip on power came between 2007 and 2012, a period that included a 10-10 split between Republicans and Democrats in the state Senate, adoption of a new oil tax system under then-Gov. Sarah Palin and a windfall in oil revenue. During that era, Democrats held an edge in the majority coalitions alongside as many as six Republicans.

In 2013, after Republicans reclaimed control of the chamber and with Republicans leading the House and in the governor's office, oil taxes were rolled back. Since then, Senate majorities have been largely Republican.

As lawmakers struggled with deficits following a tank in oil prices, long-time Republican-led control of the House gave way, starting in 2017, to a series of coalition majorities predominantly comprised of Democrats, even as Republicans were elected to a majority of the seats. The number of Republicans who have been part of the coalitions, however, has fallen from as many as eight in 2019 to just two in the current legislature.

The House has struggled after the last two election cycles to organize a majority, similar to political dynamics that play out in other countries. That has made governing difficult — for example, the chamber took a month to elect a speaker in 2019 and nearly as long last year.

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Republicans who joined Democrats and independents as part of a coalition in recent years have faced backlash from within their party. Many of them have been censured, labeled turncoats or lost primaries.

Grinn, who served one term in the legislature, said party primaries the last four years have been used as a "weapon" to punish lawmakers who have worked in a bipartisan fashion or who don't vote in lockstep with their party platform. The new election system would promote working together, he said.

"Now ... as opposed to worrying about my primary and having someone outflank me on the right or the left, now I can think about good policy because I will be rewarded for that," he said.

Former Alaska state Senate President Cathy Giessel plans to run for the Senate again this year after losing a Republican primary in 2020. She said she believes her work across party lines and that of another Republican senator was a "major part, possibly the only part of the reason that we lost reelection."

Giessel initially opposed the election reforms and was concerned about ranked-choice voting, a system in which voters rank candidates by order of preference and a consensus winner is selected if no one wins more than 50% of the first choices. Giessel said her concerns have eased after she has learned more about the system, which also has been used in Maine.

Giessel said she thinks the open primary "is going to more accurately result in a representative republic form of government in Alaska."

Lance Pruitt, a Republican who narrowly lost his Anchorage House seat to a Democrat in 2020, questions whether the new process will play out as supporters believe it will.

"The reality is, if this was a solution and everything was going to be hunky dory and it's all get along and in the middle, then redistricting would not be an issue. There would not be lawsuits," he said. "There's still a recognition that you have people that lean left, right. They have a disposition, even if they say, 'I'm an independent.'"

"It's a real small amount of people that are swayed every election."

## **AP FACT CHECK: Trump seeds race animus with COVID falsehood**

By CALVIN WOODWARD and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump falsely declared in a weekend rally that public health authorities are denying the COVID-19 vaccine to white people because of their race.

The former president seeded racial resentments in remarks that twisted the facts on public-health policy and exaggerated the effects of racially conscious antiviral treatment guidelines in New York.

From his speech Saturday night in Florence, Arizona:

TRUMP: "The left is now rationing lifesaving therapeutics based on race, discriminating against and denigrating ... white people to determine who lives and who dies. If you're white you don't get the vaccine or if you're white you don't get therapeutics. ... In New York state, if you're white, you have to go to the back of the line to get medical health."

THE FACTS: No, white people are not being excluded from vaccines, of which there is a plentiful supply. And there is no evidence they being sent to the "back of the line" for COVID-19 care as a matter of public health policy.

Trump distorted a New York policy that allows for race to be one consideration when dispensing oral antiviral treatments, which are in limited supply. The policy attempts to steer those treatments to people at the most risk of severe disease from the coronavirus.

It says that nonwhite race or Hispanic ethnicity "should be considered a risk factor" because long-standing health and social inequities make people of color more likely to get severely ill or die from the virus.

Trump extrapolated from that to assert wrongly that white people are being forced to "the back of the line" for health care and being shut out both from vaccines and therapeutics.

Michael Lanza, a New York City Health Department spokesman, told the New York Post that race is not used to deny treatment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found late last year that Black, Hispanic and Indigenous people were about twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than non-Hispanic whites and were notably more

likely to be hospitalized. An earlier Associated Press analysis of the pandemic's first waves found that COVID-19 was taking a disproportionately heavy toll on Black and Hispanic people.

CDC research in October reported that people in certain ethnic and racial minority groups were dying from COVID-19 at younger ages and a report from the institution Friday said minorities are less likely to receive outpatient antiviral treatment than whites.

## Rising costs add to pandemic pain for small businesses

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In just two weeks, the cost of pecans for the pies at Peggy Jean's Pies in Columbia, Missouri, has surged nearly 40%, perplexing co-owner Rebecca Miller and adding to the cost of doing business. Miller will soon have to bump up the price of her Southern Pecan, Chocolate Bourbon Pecan, and German Chocolate pies by \$2 to \$24.

While pecans have risen the most, Miller is seeing price increases across the board, from blackberries to condensed milk and eggs. She consults with three food brokers weekly to source the lowest prices for ingredients. But she still needs to charge more for the nut pies.

"We can't absorb that cost and still meet wage demands, increased cost of goods in our tins and boxes, and afford to live as a family," she said.

Sharply higher costs are yet another challenge thrown at business owners by the global pandemic. The unpredictability of shipping, labor and the coronavirus itself have created an environment where owners are often left guessing about when products might arrive and how much they'll cost. The Labor Department said Thursday that prices at the wholesale level rose a record 9.7% in December from a year ago.

"There's a tremendous amount of not just risk — risk you can calculate — but uncertainty. We just don't know what's going to happen," said Ray Keating, chief economist with the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. "Consumer demand is there, but there are just enormous supply chain constraints. All of this is feeding into price increases."

In response, owners are raising prices, cutting staff hours, dropping some goods and services and nixing free shipping in a delicate balancing act. But with low visibility into how long the higher inflation will last, some owners are increasingly worried about keeping their doors open in the long run.

"We put out new fires every single day and have had to reassess the way we do business to cater to new behaviors," said Deena Jalal, owner of plant-based ice cream chain FoMu and co-founder of wholesaler Sweet Tree Creamery in Boston.

For her FoMu shops, the cost of business overall rose about 15% in 2021 compared with 2020. She has raised prices about 10% but taken other measures, too: shifting to more delivery and cutting flavors like avocado ice cream, which became too expensive to make as avocado prices rose.

"No business can sustain the rapid increase in expenses that we have seen in the last year," Jalal said. "You used to be able to work really hard and see progress. Now you work really hard just to try to stay afloat."

Jalal is apprehensive about the long-term prospects for the small business community if inflation doesn't calm down soon. "If we have to work this puzzle for another two years, I really do think we'll see a lot of businesses — ourselves included — struggle to keep their doors open."

Elizabeth Benedict, owner of interior design firm Elizabeth Home Decor & Design in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, said prices have risen 7% to 30% for all the products she buys. She pays shipping surcharges on top of that.

"Most of these (increases) come with less than a two-week notice," she said. "We cannot guarantee any quotes that go out and have had to adjust our contract as well as all of our language on our proposals to reflect these variable conditions."

To deal with rising costs and overseas shipping delays, Benedict significantly changed her vendor list, and now shops only with U.S. brands that make products in the U.S. And she added services like e-commerce and virtual design. But she's still facing longer timelines for her projects and is not taking on new clients

until things stabilize.

"We continue to pivot with the punches, but definitely feel like we are being pushed and pulled in too many directions," she said.

Some online vendors are eliminating free shipping to combat costs. Gianluca Boncompagni, owner of e-commerce site Off Road Tents, which sells off-road and overlanding equipment, saw logistics costs quadruple. In October 2020, he paid \$6,300 for a 40-foot container coming from China. By October 2021, he was paying \$26,000 for the same sized container.

Boncompagni has raised prices about 5% and started to charge a flat shipping rate depending on item size. While he may lower prices in the future, the shipping charge is here to stay, he said.

"There is simply no way most online businesses can keep shipping pallets and less-than-truckload shipments without having to charge at least a bit for them," he said.

Some businesses are using channels they developed during the pandemic to communicate with customers about why prices are increasing, in the hopes they'll be patient.

Kialee Mulumba, founder of beauty brand Jakeala in Newport News, Virginia, has had to raise prices of her beauty products by \$1 to \$5. Her container prices have doubled — with one that used to be 50 cents now costing \$1. Prices for organic olive oil butters and conditioners have all risen 5% to 10% and shipping from China is up 5%. She also cut her four employees' hours from full time to part time.

Mulumba emailed customers to be transparent and let them know prices were going up due to the rising cost of supplies. But she has noticed a slight decrease in sales.

"I just hope the consumers support the small businesses they like — this is the time to support small business," she said. "Even if you can't purchase, you can share posts, like, or comment — that would really go far."

## Serbia's president urges Djokovic to come home

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's president called on Novak Djokovic to return to his native country on Sunday hours after the top-ranked tennis player lost his court battle to play at the Australian Open and was deported.

Djokovic's final destination was not immediately clear. He left Australia after saying he was "disappointed" with losing his appeal against deportation and adding that he needs "some time to rest and to recuperate" after the 11-day saga.

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 transit point he used when he flew to Australia on Jan. 6 after departing from Marbella, Spain.

Djokovic released a statement shortly after three Australian Federal Court judges unanimously upheld a decision made on Friday by the country's immigration minister to cancel the 34-year-old Serb's visa on public interest grounds because he is not vaccinated for COVID-19.

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. Djokovic was initially exempted from the tournament's vaccine rules because he had been infected with the virus within the previous six months.

In addition to his native Serbia, where he has an almost iconic status and overwhelming support, Djokovic could go to Marbella or Monaco where he has residences and where he has spent most of his time away from tennis.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic accused Australian authorities of "harassing" Djokovic and called the court ruling "a farce."

He said he spoke to Djokovic on Sunday.

"We can't wait to see him in Serbia, to return to his country, to come where he is always welcome," Vucic said.

"They think they humiliated Djokovic with this, the best player in the world, by the ten-day harassment,



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they humiliated themselves and Djokovic can return to his country with his head high up and look everyone in the eye."

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

Djokovic's Belgrade-based family issued a statement Sunday, indicating Djokovic could be heading to Serbia.

"We will be here to share the blows he received, to help him regain his energy, his faith in this sport, above all in fair play, which was completely absent."

Serbian populist politicians, seizing on a potential opportunity to score popularity points ahead of Serbia's elections in April, as well as the majority of the public were dismayed by Djokovic's "ordeal" in Australia.

"It is very sad that one of the greatest, world, planetary sportsmen has to experience something like that," said Aleksandra Vukojevic, a Belgrade resident.

Other politicians were in tune with the overall reaction.

"I think the decision is scandalous," Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said. "I'm disappointed and I think it showed how the rule of law functions in some other countries, that is how the rule of law does not function. It is incredible to me how we have two totally opposed court decisions within just a few days.

"As the head of the government of the Republic of Serbia I am not happy, but we should not get too emotional," Brnabic said. "In any case, I can't wait to see Novak Djokovic in our country, in Serbia, so we can go through this together and so we can offer support in these difficult moments."

Djokovic has won nine Australian Open titles, including three in a row, and a total of 20 Grand Slam singles trophies, tied with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most in the history of men's tennis.

The Serbian tennis association expressed "huge disappointment" and described the decision to deport Djokovic as "political."

"This decision has only deprived the world from watching Novak's fight for the tenth Australian Open and 21st Grand Slam title," it said in a statement.

## 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

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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 early in the week, 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 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, McLee 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.

## **At many churches, pandemic hits collection plates, budgets**

By HOLLY MEYER and HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

Biltmore United Methodist Church of Asheville, North Carolina, is for sale.

Already financially strapped because of shrinking membership and a struggling preschool, the congregation was dealt a crushing blow by the coronavirus. Attendance plummeted, with many staying home or switching to other churches that stayed open the whole time. Gone, too, is the revenue the church formerly got from renting its space for events and meetings.

"Our maintenance costs are just exorbitant," said the Rev. Lucy Robbins, senior pastor. "And we just don't have the resources financially that we used to have to be able to do the kind of ministry work that we would like."

Biltmore is just one of an untold number of congregations across the country that have struggled to stay afloat financially and minister to their flocks during the pandemic, though others have managed to weather the storm, often with help from the federal government's Paycheck Protection Program, or PPP, and sustained levels of member donations.

The coronavirus hit at a time when already fewer Americans were going to worship services — with at least half of the nearly 15,300 congregations surveyed in a 2020 report by Faith Communities Today reporting weekly attendance of 65 or less — and exacerbated the problems at smaller churches where increasingly lean budgets often hindered them from things like hiring full-time clergy.

"The pandemic didn't change those patterns, it only made them a little bit worse," said Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research and co-chair of Faith Communities Today.

Attendance has been a persistent challenge. As faith leaders moved to return to in-person worship, first the highly transmissible delta variant and now the even faster-spreading omicron have thrown a wrench into such efforts, with some churches going back online and others still open reporting fewer souls in the pews.

At Biltmore, for example, attendance at weekly services are down from around 70 pre-pandemic to just about 25 today, counting both in-person and online worship.

After congregants voted last May to put the church property, a two-building campus perched on a verdant knoll just off Interstate 40, on the market, church leaders are still figuring out what comes next, including

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where the congregation will call home. But they hope to use some of the proceeds from the property sale to support marginalized communities and causes like affordable housing.

Unlike Biltmore, Franklin Community Church, about 20 miles outside of Nashville, Tennessee, doesn't have its own sanctuary, holding services instead at a public school. That turned out to be a blessing during the pandemic, with no need to worry about a mortgage, upkeep, insurance or utilities.

"We wouldn't have survived if we'd had all that," said the Rev. Kevin Riggs, the church's pastor.

Still, it has been a battle. During the 15 months that services at Franklin went online-only, some members left for other congregations or got out of the habit of giving, according to Riggs. Weekly attendance is down from around 100 to less than 40, and the omicron spike recently forced the church to go virtual again.

The impact is felt in the collection plate: The money coming in now is just about a third of what it was before the pandemic, the pastor said. The church has cut spending where it could, turned to grants to try to make up the difference and worked to raise more money from community members who don't attend but support the church's ministries, such as serving homeless people.

"We're surviving. ... But we have felt the hurt," Riggs said.

Another struggling congregation, Friendship Baptist Church in Baltimore, is essentially living week to week. The predominantly Black church received a PPP loan of more than \$55,000, but that barely made a dent in expenses. The Rev. Alvin Gwynn Sr. has given up his pastor's salary and for now is living off Social Security checks and his other job in construction.

Slumping attendance has hurt the bottom line there, as elsewhere. Friendship Baptist counts around 900 active members but only about 150 of them are showing up, making their donations especially crucial.

The church is "surviving because of the sacrificial giving of the 150," said Gwynn, who doesn't intend to start drawing a paycheck again until the church is stable. "They give way, way more than a normal offering each Sunday individually."

During the pandemic, experts said many congregations embraced online giving, which could boost contributions by \$300 per person annually, according to The Faith Communities Today report.

More broadly, various other surveys and reports show a mixed picture on congregational giving nationwide.

Gifts to religious organizations grew by 1% to just over \$131 billion in 2020, a year when Americans also donated a record \$471 billion overall to charity, according to an annual report by GivingUSA. Separately, a September survey of 1,000 protestant pastors by the evangelical firm Lifeway Research found about half of congregations received roughly what they budgeted for last year, with 27% getting less than anticipated and 22% getting more.

Hope Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas, a largely upper-middle-class congregation of about 400, is among those that have enjoyed relative stability despite the pandemic.

The Rev. Josh Robinson had expected contributions to drop off when in-person services paused for more than a year, but they remained steady. So have member pledges for upcoming gifts in 2022. Some in the congregation even donated their government stimulus checks to the church, which used them to set up a fund to provide direct financial assistance to those who lost income due to the pandemic.

It all prompted the pastor to reexamine his own approach to the pandemic.

"I needed to step back and think, what did it mean for me as a spiritual leader to not have the same faith mindset, since I was anticipating a downturn?" Robinson said. "Here were the members of the church stepping up — I had to lean into that. And rightfully, I was able to do so with great joy."

Even before, the church had embraced frugality in order to pay down its debt, which has fallen from \$2 million in 2013 to less than \$300,000 today.

When services went virtual, savings on utilities and other costs helped keep the budget balanced. PPP loans of some \$290,000 were also key to maintaining employees on the payroll and offsetting lost revenue from renting out space and other services.

At West Harpeth Primitive Baptist Church, another church in Franklin, giving is down but only slightly. Hewitt Sawyers, the pastor, attributes that to the scant turnover among the more than 150-year-old historically Black congregation's members, many of whom are committed to financially supporting the church



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and work in sectors that were less damaged by the pandemic than others.

"We've just been wonderfully, wonderfully blessed," Sawyers said.

Budget projections for this year are rosy enough that West Harpeth leaders are hopeful they can tackle a needed building renovation.

"We are extremely optimistic about it," Sawyers said. "We're planning on trying to do that in '22, and we feel very, very, very comfortable about trying to get that done."

## 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 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. Some schools in Beijing have also closed early and moved classes online ahead of the winter holidays.

The Lama Temple in Beijing, a popular tourist spot, will also be closed from Monday as part of anti-epidemic efforts, the temple said Sunday.

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.

## Prince Harry files court claim over UK police protection

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

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

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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."

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

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 North America in 2020. The couple said their decision was due to what they described as unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media.

The couple first went to Canada before settling in the United States. They stated that they privately funded security for their move to the U.S. after then President Donald Trump said his government wouldn't pay for their protection.

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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 17, the 17th day of 2022. There are 348 days left in the year. This is Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 17, 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered his farewell address in which he warned against "the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

On this date:

In 1917, Denmark ceded the Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces launched the first of four battles for Monte Cassino in Italy; the Allies were ultimately successful.

In 1950, the Great Brink's Robbery took place as seven masked men held up a Brink's garage in Boston, stealing \$1.2 million in cash and \$1.5 million in checks and money orders. (Although the entire gang was caught, only part of the loot was recovered.)

In 1955, the submarine USS Nautilus made its first nuclear-powered test run from its berth in Groton (GRAH'-tuhn), Connecticut.

In 1966, the Simon & Garfunkel album "Sounds of Silence" was released by Columbia Records.

In 1977, convicted murderer Gary Gilmore, 36, was shot by a firing squad at Utah State Prison in the first U.S. execution in a decade.

In 1994, the 6.7 magnitude Northridge earthquake struck Southern California, killing at least 60 people, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1995, more than 6,000 people were killed when an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 devastated

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the city of Kobe (koh-bay), Japan.

In 1996, Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman and nine followers were handed long prison sentences for plotting to blow up New York-area landmarks.

In 1997, a court in Ireland granted the first divorce in the Roman Catholic country's history.

In 2016, Iran released three Americans, former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati, Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian and pastor Saeed Abedini, as part of a prisoner swap that also netted Tehran some \$100 billion in sanctions relief.

In 2020, U.S. health officials announced that they would begin screening airline passengers from central China for the new coronavirus; people traveling from Wuhan, China, would have their temperature checked and be asked about symptoms. President Donald Trump added to his legal team for his impeachment trial retired law professor Alan Dershowitz and Ken Starr, the independent counsel who investigated President Bill Clinton.

Ten years ago: Italian officials released a recording of a furious Coast Guard officer demanding that Capt. Francesco Schettino (frahn-CHEHS'-koh skeh-TEE'-noh), commander of the grounded Costa Concordia, re-board the ship to direct its evacuation after the vessel rammed into a reef on Jan. 13. Johnny Otis, the "godfather of rhythm and blues" who wrote and recorded the R&B classic "Willie and the Hand Jive," died in Los Angeles at age 90.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama granted clemency to Chelsea Manning, allowing the transgender Army intelligence officer convicted of leaking more than 700,000 U.S. documents to go free nearly three decades early. Donald Trump's choice to head the Interior Department, Rep. Ryan Zinke, rejected the president-elect's claim that climate change was a hoax, telling his Senate confirmation hearing it was indisputable that environmental changes were affecting the world's temperature and that human activity was a major reason.

One year ago: An Associated Press review found that veterans of President Donald Trump's unsuccessful campaign had key roles in the Washington rally that spawned a deadly assault on the U.S. Capitol. U.S. defense officials said they were worried about an insider attack or other threat from service members involved in securing President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration; the concerns prompted the FBI to vet all 25,000 National Guard troops coming into Washington for the event. Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was arrested at a Moscow airport as he returned from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.

Today's Birthdays: Former FCC chairman Newton N. Minow is 96. Actor James Earl Jones is 91. Talk show host Maury Povich is 83. Pop singer Chris Montez is 80. R&B singer William Hart (The Delfonics) is 77. Actor Joanna David is 75. Actor Jane Elliot is 75. Rock musician Mick Taylor is 74. R&B singer Sheila Hutchinson (The Emotions) is 69. Singer Steve Earle is 67. Singer Paul Young is 66. Actor-comedian Steve Harvey is 65. Singer Susanna Hoffs (The Bangles) is 63. Movie director-screenwriter Brian Koppelman is 61. Actor-comedian Jim Carrey is 60. Actor Denis O'Hare is 60. Former first lady Michelle Obama is 58. Actor Joshua Malina is 56. Singer Shabba Ranks is 56. Actor Naveen Andrews is 53. Electronic music DJ Tiesto is 53. Rapper Kid Rock is 51. Actor Freddy Rodriguez is 47. Actor-writer Leigh Whannel is 45. Actor-singer Zoey Deschanel is 42. Dancer Maksim Chmerkovskiy (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 42. Singer Ray J is 41. Actor Diogo Morgado is 41. Country singer Amanda Wilkinson is 40. Former NBA player Dwyane Wade is 40. Actor Ryan Gage is 39. DJ-singer Calvin Harris is 38. Folk-rock musician Jeremiah Fraites is 36. Actor Jonathan Keltz is 34. Actor Kelly Marie Tran (Film: "Star Wars: The Last Jedi") is 33. Actor Kathrine Herzer is 25.