

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

### Thursday, Jan. 20

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

### Friday, Jan. 21

Debate Speech Fiesta at Watertown High School  
**Postponed to Feb. 5:** 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.

### Monday, Jan. 24

Boys Basketball at Northwestern. 7th at 3:30, 8th at 4:30, C at 5:15, then JV and Varsity to follow.  
Wrestling at Ipswich, 6 p.m.

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

“

You must train your intuition – you must trust the small voice inside you which tells you exactly what to say, what to decide.

–Ingrid Bergman



### Thursday, Jan. 27

Girls Basketball at Northwestern. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

### Saturday, Jan. 29

Groton Area Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m.  
Boys Basketball at NEC-DAK12 Clash in Madison

### Monday, Jan. 31

Junior High Boys Basketball with Redfield at Groton. 7th at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade game

## 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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## Groton Area COVID-19 Report

Groton Area School District

Active COVID-19 Cases

Updated January 19, 2022; 12:46 PM

**Increase of 5 from  
Tuesday**

J K	K G	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1 0	1 1	1 2	S t a f f	T o t a l
0	2	1	2	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	6	5	31
Change	0	0	-1	+1	0	0	+1	0	0	0	0	+1	+1	+3	+5

### Northern State University releases fall 2021 dean's list

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Northern State University in Aberdeen, S.D., has released the dean's list for the fall 2021 semester.

Students who have earned at least a 3.5 grade point average for the semester are eligible for the dean's list.

**nBath:** Andrew Buechler, Samantha Ferguson, Kaitlyn Kassube, Megan Malsa, Collin Schmidt

**Claremont:** Kayla Jensen

**Columbia:** Hattie Weismantel

**Frederick:** Lauren Geranen, Miranda Lai

**Groton:** Jaimen Farrell, Alyssa Fordham, Braden Freeman, Kasey Hinman, Logan Hinman, Eh Tha You Say, Audrey Wanner

**Langford:** Emily Palmer

**Stratford:** Peyton Ellingson, Christine Stoltenberg, Justin Waldner

**Westport:** Lucas Fredrick, Trevor Goehring, Mckenzie Hasebroek

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## Conde National League

**Jan. 10 Team Standings:** Pirates 13, Giants 12, Mets 10, Cubs 10, Braves 9, Tigers 6

**Men's High Games:** Ryan Bethke 195, 191; Russ Bethke 182, 190; Tim Olson 172

**Men's High Series:** Ryan Bethke 537, Russ Bethke 521, Tim Olson 459

**Women's High Games:** Vickie Kramp 191, Sam Bahr 167, Nancy Radke 162

**Women's High Series:** Nancy Radke 469, Vickie Kramp 430, Sam Bahr 410

## Groton Prairie Mixed

**Jan. 13 Team Standings:** Cheetahs 11 ½, Chipmunks 11, Shih Tzus 8 ½, Jackelopes 6, Foxes 6, Coyotes 5

**Men's High Games:** Ron Belden 222, Brad Larson 188, Lance Frohling 183

**Women's High Games:** Nicole Kassube 177, Karen Spanier 176, Brenda Waage 170

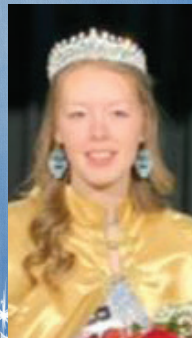
**Men's High Series:** Ron Belden 514, Larry Frohling 492, Brad Larson 488

**Women's High Series:** Vicki Walter 467, Nicole Kassube 460, Karen Spanier 453

### *Snow Queen Thank You*

I want to thank the Groton Snow Queen Committee for sponsoring me at the State Snow Queen Festival in Aberdeen. I would also like to thank the local businesses that donated to my basket: Purina, Beauty Brew Boutique, Lori's Pharmacy, S & S Lumber, Groton Dairy Queen and the Groton Vet Clinic. Thank you all for the generous donations. I had an amazing time and met many wonderful girls. Thank you for making it all possible.

**Christina Zoellner**



## 2021 Visitor Spending in South Dakota Sets All Time Record

PIERRE, S.D. – Visitor spending in South Dakota set an all-time record in 2021.

According to the annual study conducted by Tourism Economics, visitors to South Dakota spent 4.4 billion dollars, an increase of 30% over 2020. This surpasses all previous records by 6%. South Dakota was officially the first state to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels of visitor spending.

South Dakota also welcomed 13.5 million visitors, an increase of 26% over 2020.

“South Dakota’s tourism industry stayed open for business and open for visitors, working tirelessly to support millions of visitors who chose South Dakota as their vacation destination,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Their record-breaking efforts have contributed to our state’s record revenues, jump-starting our state’s economy to make it the strongest in the nation.”

The tourism industry remains essential to South Dakota’s economy providing an indispensable source of job creation and household income to thousands. 54,208 jobs in South Dakota were supported by the tourism industry, which generated 1.8 billion dollars income for those families.

“Tourism in South Dakota is a job-creating, revenue-generating machine that plays a vital role in supporting the state’s economy year after year,” said Jim Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism. “It’s not just valuable for the State of South Dakota -- these efforts impact communities and families throughout our state.”

In 2021, tourism generated \$344 million in state & local tax revenue. Without tourism in South Dakota, each household would pay an additional \$980 more in taxes each year.

To view the full 2021 Tourism Economics report, visit [SDVisit.com](http://SDVisit.com).

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism and the South Dakota Arts Council. The department is led by Secretary James Hagen.



## James Valley Thunder placed third at Bismarck Tourney

The James Valley Thunder traveling basketball team placed third in their tournament in Bismarck on Sunday. James Valley Thunder defeated South Prairie Knockouts, 28-19, they were defeated by Dream, 43-17, and came back to beat War Party, 34-22.

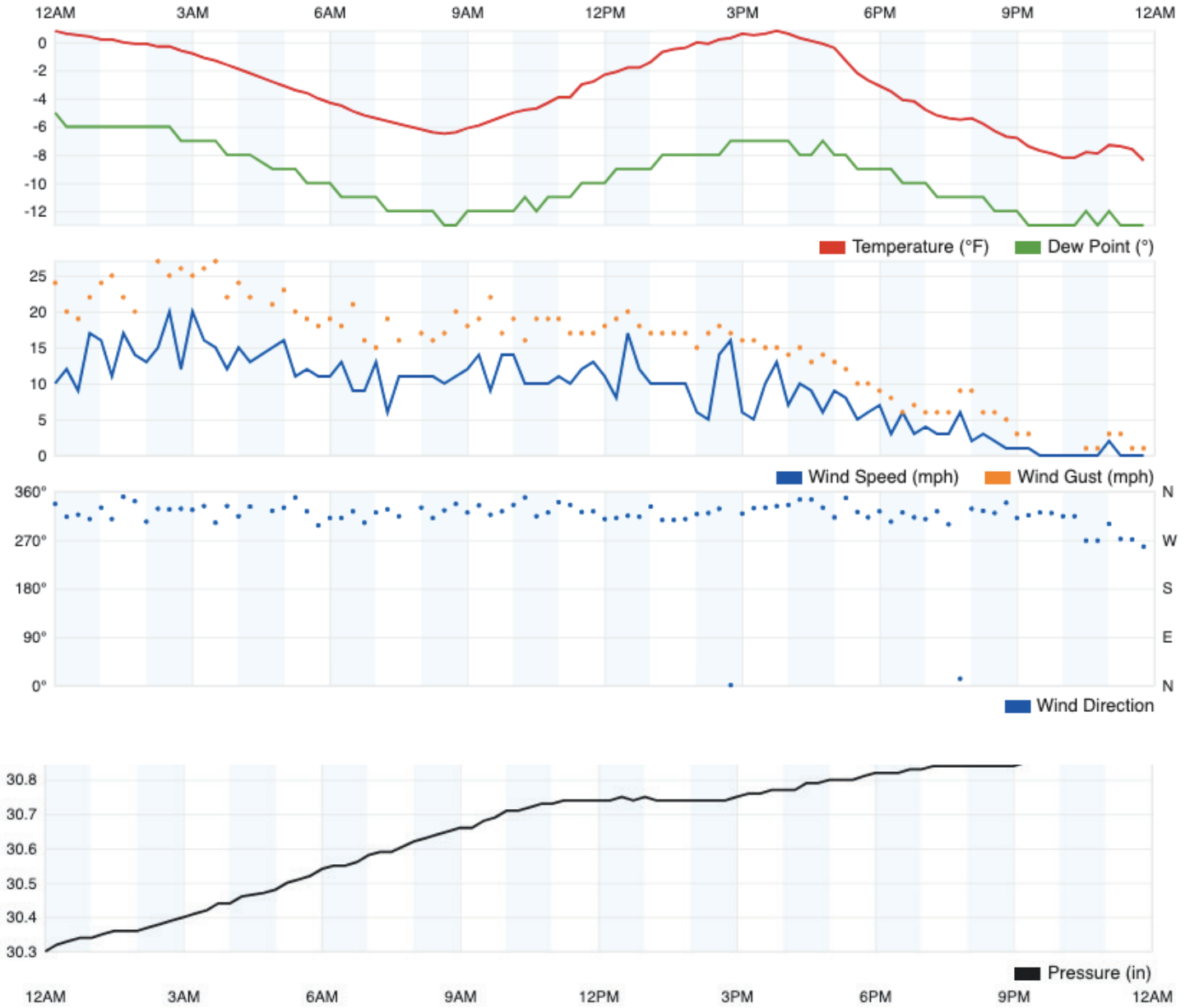
**Back: Kamdyn Borge, Sydney Locke, Chesney Weber, Brooklyn Spanier, Bentley Pickrel  
Front: Arianna Dinger, Tevan Hanson, Abby Fjeldheim, Makenna Krause**

Coached by: Justin Hanson and Ryan Fjeldheim

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wind Chill Warning

<b>Overnight</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Thursday Night</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Friday Night</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
					
Clear	Cold	Mostly Clear then Partly Cloudy and Breezy	Slight Chance Snow and Breezy then Snow Likely <span style="color: blue;">20% → 60%</span>	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
<span style="color: blue;">Low: -11 °F</span>	<span style="color: red;">High: 9 °F</span>	<span style="color: blue;">Low: 4 °F</span> ↑	<span style="color: red;">High: 32 °F</span>	<span style="color: blue;">Low: 3 °F</span>	<span style="color: red;">High: 25 °F</span>

## Arctic Chill Continues Today – Increasing Winds

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD  
Graphic Created  
1/20/2022 2:52 AM

### Temperatures

	Thu						Fri								Sat			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am
<b>Aberdeen</b>	-11	-4	8	10	5	7	8	9	12	20	28	30	29	25	20	15	9	11
<b>Britton</b>	-18	-10	-2	0	-3	2	5	7	10	16	22	24	23	22	16	10	4	3
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	-3	6	15	18	16	13	16	19	24	33	36	37	33	26	23	18	16	18
<b>Eureka</b>	-10	-2	11	12	8	7	10	12	16	25	32	34	30	22	17	11	7	10
<b>Gettysburg</b>	-6	3	13	15	10	10	11	13	16	26	34	36	31	25	19	14	11	14
<b>Kennebec</b>	-2	7	19	21	16	14	15	16	18	30	38	40	34	30	26	20	17	21
<b>McIntosh</b>	-3	5	14	17	13	13	16	19	25	33	35	34	29	22	17	15	11	15
<b>Milbank</b>	-14	-7	1	2	-5	-4	1	3	7	15	21	23	24	24	21	15	10	7
<b>Miller</b>	-5	4	15	16	11	10	12	13	15	25	34	36	31	29	23	17	13	16
<b>Mobridge</b>	-4	4	16	18	13	13	15	17	21	31	38	39	32	26	20	17	14	17
<b>Murdo</b>	-1	10	21	24	19	17	19	21	24	34	39	40	34	30	26	22	19	23
<b>Pierre</b>	-2	7	19	22	18	16	17	18	20	31	40	42	36	31	26	22	18	21
<b>Redfield</b>	-7	0	12	13	9	7	8	9	12	21	30	32	28	26	21	16	11	14
<b>Sisseton</b>	-13	-8	1	1	-4	-2	3	7	11	18	23	25	26	26	20	15	10	6
<b>Watertown</b>	-13	-8	3	4	-1	0	2	4	6	13	20	22	24	24	20	14	9	7
<b>Wheaton</b>	-19	-14	-7	-6	-10	-7	-3	0	4	13	20	22	24	24	18	13	6	4

Arctic chill will remain in the air today, with a push of milder air tonight into Friday before the next cold front swings through. Here is a look at our temperatures through early Saturday.

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## Light Snow Moving In Friday\* (inch or less accumulation)



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD  
Graphic Created  
1/20/2022 2:54 AM

\*May mix with a little rain in western/central SD  
With above freezing temps

### Friday

	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
<b>Aberdeen</b>							5	9	26	60	60	60	45	24	7	14	14	14	14	14	14
<b>Britton</b>							1	11	22	37	60	60	60	42	23	29	29	29	29	29	29
<b>Eagle Butte</b>			10	21	21	60	60	60	37	31	7	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Eureka</b>					1	20	60	60	60	56	18	3	12	3	0	8	8	8	8	8	8
<b>Gettysburg</b>						12	47	60	60	60	30	11	1	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5
<b>Kennebec</b>							5	12	26	60	60	60	20	0	1	5	5	5	5	5	5
<b>McIntosh</b>	2	9	29	49	60	56	41	38	24	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Milbank</b>											5	15	27	60	47	36	36	36	36	36	36
<b>Miller</b>								2	10	41	60	60	39	6	0	13	13	13	13	13	13
<b>Mobridge</b>			1	2	23	60	60	60	60	36	11	0	2	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Murdo</b>						12	24	59	60	60	60	27	0	0	1	6	6	6	6	6	6
<b>Pierre</b>						14	25	60	60	60	55	12	0	0	1	5	5	5	5	5	5
<b>Redfield</b>									1	22	60	60	60	33	13	16	16	16	16	16	16
<b>Sisseton</b>									1	13	29	49	60	60	49	38	38	38	38	38	38
<b>Watertown</b>											7	14	37	60	47	29	29	29	29	29	29
<b>Wheaton</b>											12	59	60	60	52	33	33	33	33	33	33

### Probability of Precipitation

A weak system and cold front will swing through the region Friday. Generally an inch or less of snow is anticipated, with a few spots in central South Dakota warm enough for a little mix or sprinkles. Winds will be breezy to gusty, but this looks to be too little snow to present a widespread problem.



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## Today in Weather History

January 20, 1944: A late January warm-up occurred on this date in weather history in 1944. Temperatures rose into the upper 50s to the mid-60s across central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Overnight lows in the 20s and lower 30s were above the normal highs for the year. Record highs were set at Aberdeen, Kennebec, Sisseton, and Watertown. Watertown rose to 56 degrees, Sisseton rose to 58 degrees, Aberdeen rose to 60 degrees, and Kennebec rose to 65 degrees. Also, Mobridge rose to 57 degrees, and Pierre rose to 61 degrees.

1863: The famous "Mud March" begins in the Fredericksburg area of Virginia.

1937 - The wettest Inaugural Day of record with 1.77 inches of rain in 24 hours. Temperatures were only in the 30s as Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in for his second term. (David Ludlum)

1943 - Strange vertical antics took place in the Black Hills of South Dakota. While the temperature at Deadwood was a frigid 16 degrees below zero, the town of Lead, just a mile and a half away, but 600 feet higher in elevation, reported a balmy 52 degree reading. (David Ludlum)

1954 - The temperature at Rogers Pass, MT, plunged to 70 degrees below zero to establish a new record for the continental U.S. (David Ludlum)

1978 - A paralyzing "Nor'easter" produced a record 21 inches of snow at Boston, 15 to 20 inches in Rhode Island, and one to two feet of snow in Pennsylvania. Winds along the coast of Connecticut gusted to 70 mph. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Gale force winds lingered along the northern Atlantic coast in the wake of a holiday weekend storm. High winds along the eastern slopes of the Northern Rockies gusted to 67 mph at Livingston MT, and high winds in southern California gusted to 70 mph near San Bernardino. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A storm in the Upper Midwest produced heavy snow and gale force winds. Up to 27.5 inches of snow was reported along the Lake Superior shoreline of Michigan, with 22 inches at Marquette. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The temperature in the Washington D.C. area warmed into the lower 50s for the Presidential Inauguration during the late morning hours, before gusty northwest winds ushered in colder air that afternoon. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - While heavy thunderstorm rains drenched the Central Gulf Coast States, with 4.23 inches reported at Centreville AL in 24 hours, unseasonably warm weather continued across Florida. Five cities in Florida reported record high temperatures for the date. Tampa FL equalled their record high for January of 85 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

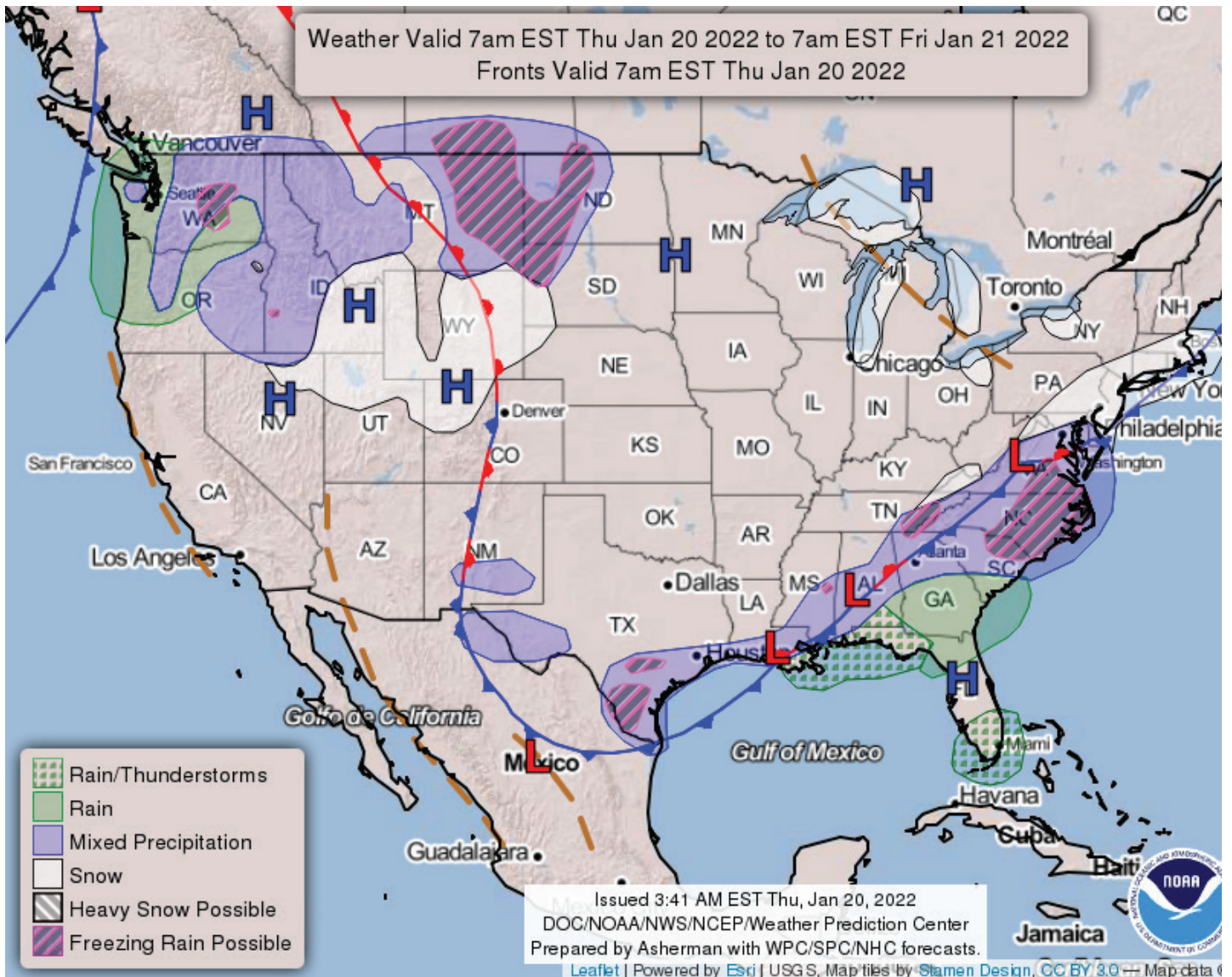
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 1 °F at 3:32 PM**  
**Low Temp: -9 °F at 11:57 PM**  
**Wind: 29 mph at 2:18 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 60 in 1944**  
**Record Low: -29 in 1936**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 1°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.38**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.43**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.38**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.43**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:23:51 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:23:51 PM**



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## SAVE ME, LORD

Jennifer never met a stranger. No matter where she was or who she met, she always made friends quickly. Once when traveling on a train, she became bored and decided to walk down the aisle and chat with the folk who were on the train with her. Smilingly she went from seat to seat greeting the passengers. Everyone wanted to know who she was and who she was going to visit. Without any notice, the train entered a tunnel and darkness filled the passenger car before the bright lights came on. Little Jennifer ran down the aisle shouting, "Help, Mom! Where are you? I need you!" Standing in the aisle, her mother reached out to her, hugged her and said, "It's O.K. I'm right here with you, Jennifer. Don't be afraid."

When things are going well, and we are enjoying prosperity, it is difficult to admit that we need anyone's help. But when the "lights go out," we all tend to run to someone who we believe can help us.

The author of Psalm 116 was going through a dark and difficult time in his life. Things looked dismal. He was overcome with trouble and sorrow. "Then," he wrote, "I called on the name of the Lord; O Lord, save me!"

In four simple words, he said everything that needed to be said. There was no time for formalities, and no need for any particular posture. Problems erupted. Help was needed. God was listening. Problem solved!

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Length is not part of the equation. Sincerity and righteousness are what make prayer powerful.

Prayer: Lord, in our dark times we run to You. Teach us and help us to walk with You in the light. We need You all the time! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!" Psalm 116:4

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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

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- Colored ..... \$74.55/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$21.30/year

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Groton, SD 57445-0034

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

## Groton Daily Independent

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

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

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

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



## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

08-18-19-25-32

(eight, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-five, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$59,000

Lotto America

16-19-32-35-51, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 2

(sixteen, nineteen, thirty-two, thirty-five, fifty-one; Star Ball: one; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$6.47 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$376 million

Powerball

11-15-43-55-61, Powerball: 10, Power Play: 3

(eleven, fifteen, forty-three, fifty-five, sixty-one; Powerball: ten; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$62 million

### Investigators say South Dakota AG was untruthful about crash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Criminal investigators on Wednesday told South Dakota lawmakers that they didn't believe the state's attorney general when he told them he never saw the body of the man he fatally struck on the night of the 2020 crash.

Investigators said they doubted Attorney General Jason Ravensborg's insistence, both in public and in law enforcement interviews, that he initially thought he hit an animal on Sept. 12, 2020, pointing to what they believed were two slips in Ravensborg's account as he was being interviewed by law enforcement officers.

"He said he saw him. The only other person out there was Joe Boever," North Dakota Special Agent Joe Arenz said, referring to a point in the Republican attorney general's interview where he said that as he was surveying the accident scene, he turned around and saw "him."

"So I know exactly where I turn around and saw him," Ravensborg said during the recorded interview with investigators, before quickly correcting himself: "I didn't see him. I did not see him."

A South Dakota House committee is weighing whether Ravensborg should face impeachment charges for his conduct. He pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors last year and has said he didn't realize he struck the man, 55-year-old Joseph Boever, until returning to the scene the next day.

The investigators determined that Ravensborg would have walked right past Boever's body and the flashlight Boever had been carrying as Ravensborg looked around the scene the night of the crash. The flashlight was still illuminated the next morning.

"I believe he would have had to see him," North Dakota Special Agent Arnie Rummel told lawmakers.

The investigators, who were called in from out of state to avoid a conflict of interest, also testified that Ravensborg said in the interview that he didn't see what he hit "until impact." To detectives, that was another slip that became "a piece of evidence" leading them to doubt Ravensborg's claims.

"When the story changes, in my opinion, they are not being straightforward and telling the truth," Rummel said, referring to Ravensborg initially telling them he had not been scrolling through his cellphone, then later acknowledging he had in the minutes before the crash.

As a House impeachment investigative committee has sifted through the crash investigation, some Republican lawmakers' inquiries have called into question the crash investigators. The committee spent

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hours Tuesday drilling into South Dakota officials and raising questions about the governor's involvement in the investigation.

Earlier Wednesday, Gov. Kristi Noem jumped into the impeachment investigation, slamming how fellow Republicans have so far focused on questioning crash investigators rather than Ravensborg's conduct.

"It grieves me that because of a political agenda, some legislators on the committee are attacking the integrity of our law enforcement officers," the Republican governor told The Associated Press, adding that it was an "inappropriate" and "tragic" turn of the committee's attention.

The committee's investigation is happening amid an election-year split between the governor and a right wing of House Republicans.

Noem, who is seeking reelection this year while positioning for a potential White House bid in 2024, invoked support for law enforcement officers and the grief of a dead man's family as she pushed for "some justice" in the situation.

Noem has made it clear that she believes the misdemeanor charges were not enough, and wants him removed from office. She would also get to name the attorney general's replacement if he is removed. In addition to calling for his resignation and supporting the impeachment inquiry, she has used the public release of video of Ravensborg being interviewed by investigators to pressure him to step down.

The attorney general has refused, and several political allies on the House investigative committee posed questions about the governor's role in the crash investigation.

Noem said she was not involved in the investigation but stayed informed "at certain points when it was appropriate."

House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican, questioned why North Dakota's Highway Patrol had not taken over the investigation "given the political nature of the situation" between the governor and attorney general. Other Republican lawmakers, including Rep. Steve Haugaard, who is challenging Noem in the GOP primary, delved into how Noem had used the investigative materials.

Gosch said the governor had been told "not to intervene, interlude or try to influence in any way" the impeachment investigation process, adding "it's our responsibility to do our job."

Noem suggested they should focus on Ravensborg's conduct.

"This process is just to determine if the attorney general should still be the attorney general. That's the only question in front of them," Noem said. She said lawmakers should examine whether Ravensborg still has the support of law enforcement officers.

Three of the state's largest law enforcement groups last year called for Ravensborg to resign.

Although Ravensborg has stayed mostly silent on the crash investigation and impeachment inquiry, he is positioning for a reelection bid despite a challenge for the Republican nomination from former Attorney General Marty Jackley. After his trial last year, Ravensborg accused "partisan opportunists" of exploiting the situation.

Amid the political falling out with the governor, Ravensborg has also pushed a pair of inquiries into whether Noem abused the powers of her office.

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This story has corrected that Jason Ravensborg is facing a challenge for the Republican nomination through a party convention, not a primary election.

## Planned Parenthood sues to stop South Dakota abortion rule

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A federal lawsuit filed Wednesday by Planned Parenthood aims to prevent the state of South Dakota from implementing a new rule for medical abortions that would make the state one of the hardest places in the nation to get abortion pills.

The rule approved by lawmakers earlier this month requires women to return to a doctor to receive the second of two drugs used to carry out a medication abortion. Usually women receive both drugs in one visit, taking the second medication at home. The regulation is expected to go into effect later this month.

"We are hopeful the court will stop this rule from going into effect so that South Dakotans can choose for

themselves when and how to access health care services, including abortion," said Sarah Stoesz, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States.

The ACLU of South Dakota joined in filing the suit.

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem initiated the rules change in September through an executive order, ahead of the Food and Drug Administration's decision last month to permanently remove a requirement that women seeking abortion pills pick them up in person.

"Gov. Noem is focused on protecting women's health," said Ian Fury, the governor's communications director. "The ACLU and Planned Parenthood have shown that they are more worried about their bottom line."

Noem's administration argued the extra visit is necessary to make sure women don't have complications from the drug. Doctors have warned that making it harder for women to obtain the second drug is dangerous because there is greater risk of hemorrhage if they don't get it.

In addition, requiring a third trip to a health center in one week would require time and money that many patients do not have, the lawsuit states. South Dakota will be the only state to require three visits for a medication abortion, according to Planned Parenthood.

## Trans athlete ban pushed by Noem clears South Dakota Senate

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate on Wednesday passed a bill proposed by Republican Gov. Kristi Noem that would ban transgender women and girls from participating in school sports leagues that match their gender identity.

The bill cleared the Senate with wide support from Republicans. It will next proceed to the House, where Republican lawmakers have introduced their own legislation with the same ban but a sharper enforcement mechanism.

The governor has turned the ban on transgender athletes from women's sports into a campaign issue, launching a nationwide ad touting her work on the issue. Last year, a bill that would have created a similar ban caused a falling out between social conservatives and Noem, who issued a "style and form veto" against a bill she criticized as flawed.

Opponents have decried the latest proposal as an effort to bully children for the sake of a political cause that has not been an issue in South Dakota.

"Passage of this bill would directly hurt children," Jennifer Phalen, who has a transgender daughter, told lawmakers during a committee hearing on the bill last week. "It would directly hurt my daughter and take away her freedom to participate in activities with her peers."

On the Senate floor Wednesday, Republicans latched onto the cause of equal opportunity for women as they argued that transgender athletes would have a competitive advantage in female sports.

"In life or sports, the playing field has rarely been even for males versus females," said Republican Sen. Jessica Castleberry, adding that male athletes are bigger, faster and stronger than female athletes.

The high school activities association evaluates applications from transgender athletes on a case-by-case basis and has only once allowed a trans girl to play in a girls' league. She did not spoil the competition, the athletics association has said.

Senators acknowledged that the proposed law would put the state's public schools at legal risk and amended the bill to reduce the legal punishments that students can seek if the law were to be violated. Several Republicans joined arguments against the bill, saying it would toss the state into an unnecessary and costly legal fight.

"We're squandering the taxpayers' money to advance an ideological crusade," said Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba.

If the bill passes the Legislature, South Dakota could be the 10th Republican-dominated state to adopt such a ban on transgender women or girls. In two of those states — Idaho and West Virginia — the laws have been halted by federal judges. The U.S. Department of Justice has challenged bans in other states, slamming them as violations of federal law.



## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. January 17, 2022.

Editorial: An Early Push For SD Medicaid Expansion

Medicaid expansion is coming before South Dakota voters in 11 months, but one high-profile state organization is not wasting any time to promote the effort, and probably for good reason.

Last week, the South Dakota Municipal League (SDML) announced its endorsement of Constitutional Amendment D, a ballot measure that would expand federal Medicaid health benefits to those ages 18-65 whose income is no more than 133% of the federal poverty level. It would also apply to those who meet other federal eligibility criteria.

Amendment D went through the petition process and was officially approved two weeks ago for the November ballot.

According to South Dakota Public Broadcasting (SDPB), it's been estimated by the Legislative Research Council (LRC) that expansion would cover 42,500 extra South Dakotans in the first year.

As of last summer, South Dakota was one of 12 states in the country — and the only one in the five-state area — that has not expanded Medicaid to cover a greater population of the poor, as provided under the Affordable Care Act.

The SDML is actively advocating for Amendment D now.

"I see ... Medicaid expansion as throwing a lifeline to rural hospitals specifically," said Steve Allender, SDML president and mayor of Rapid City. "But not just them. All the other hospital systems — the larger hospital systems in South Dakota — suffer with this as well."

The non-partisan LRC estimated that Medicaid expansion would cost the state \$166 million the first five years but would produce about \$162 million in general fund savings. The investment offers a great return: HealthInsurance.org reports that South Dakota is leaving \$384 million in federal funds on the table by not expanding Medicaid.

Proponents of Medicaid expansion say the program would compel more uninsured people to seek medical care — which, during the COVID pandemic, could be vital — and might help avoid more chronic issues, even deaths.

Part of the reason why the SDML may be pursuing early advocacy is because a June ballot issue could alter the process of approving ballot measures, moving the passage threshold from 50% to 60% for any measure that raises taxes or fees, or mandates the appropriation of at least \$10 million over the first five years. SDPB reported last week that one state senator has said he supports the June proposal, in part, in order to make Medicaid expansion harder to pass by voters this November.

Also, Gov. Kristi Noem has stated she opposes Medicaid expansion, which probably means a lot of Republican lawmakers in Pierre this session will likely be resistant to a legislative passage of expansion, which is what Montana lawmakers did when its voters rejected expansion a few years ago.

Medicaid expansion could bring a lot of primary medical care to those who need it most, and it could produce financial savings and perhaps save lives in the process. While hurdles are aligning against it, support is also forming for it. That would include public opinion, where a few polls have indicated growing support for expansion.

At the very least, the pandemic has magnified the need for health care access, particularly in rural, remote areas. Medicaid expansion could be a big key to addressing that issue.

That's the message the Municipal League will be sending out in the months ahead. And it's an argument well worth considering.

END

## Plan to add campsites at Custer State Park draws opposition

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A significant increase in the number of tourists in the Black Hills since the start

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of the coronavirus pandemic prompted Gov. Kristi Noem to push for spending nearly \$10 million to add campsites to Custer State Park.

But former park officials, some lawmakers and private campground owners have raised concerns over how the additional 175 campsites would impact wildlife and increase vehicle traffic.

Noem and the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks want to develop a 75-acre site in the west central portion of the park.

Private campground owners are rallying against the project, and former GFP and park officials are urging caution, the *Argus Leader* reported.

Some private campground owners say they feel betrayed by Noem's proposal.

"We just feel we can't compete against the financial might of state government," said Bill Paterson, owner of the Big Pine Campground about a mile southwest of the city of Custer. "We always thought she was a governor who would be on the side of small business, but frankly, it's standing on the throats of small business."

The project has caused some apprehension among former caretakers of the park like John Cooper, former GFP secretary, and Rollie Noem, an in-law relative of the governor who was director of Custer State Park from 1985 to 2004.

They said the increased activity in Barnes Canyon area specifically has the potential to drive wildlife away. Rollie Noem said the area is prime elk habitat and human activity is going to disturb that.

## Voting bill collapses, Democrats unable to change filibuster

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Voting legislation that Democrats and civil rights leaders say is vital to protecting democracy collapsed when two senators refused to join their own party in changing Senate rules to overcome a Republican filibuster after a raw, emotional debate.

The outcome Wednesday night was a stinging defeat for President Joe Biden and his party, coming at the tumultuous close to his first year in office.

Despite a day of piercing debate and speeches that often carried echoes of an earlier era when the Senate filibuster was deployed by opponents of civil rights legislation, Democrats could not persuade holdout senators Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia to change the Senate procedures on this one bill and allow a simple majority to advance it.

"I am profoundly disappointed," Biden said in a statement after the vote.

However, the president said he is "not deterred" and vowed to "explore every measure and use every tool at our disposal to stand up for democracy."

Voting rights advocates are warning that Republican-led states nationwide are passing laws making it more difficult for Black Americans and others to vote by consolidating polling locations, requiring certain types of identification and ordering other changes.

Vice President Kamala Harris briefly presided over the Senate, able to break a tie in the 50-50 Senate if needed, but she left before the final vote. The rules change was rejected 52-48, with Manchin and Sinema joining the Republicans in opposition.

The nighttime voting brought an end, for now, to legislation that has been a top Democratic priority since the party took control of Congress and the White House.

"This is a moral moment," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga.

The Democrats' bill, the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act, would make Election Day a national holiday, ensure access to early voting and mail-in ballots — which have become especially popular during the COVID-19 pandemic — and enable the Justice Department to intervene in states with a history of voter interference, among other changes. It has passed the House.

Both Manchin and Sinema say they support the legislation, but Democrats fell far short of the 60 votes needed to push the bill over the Republican filibuster. It failed to advance 51-49 on a largely party-line vote. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., cast a procedural vote against so the bill could be

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considered later.

Next, Schumer put forward a rules change for a "talking filibuster" on this one bill. It would require senators to stand at their desks and exhaust the debate before holding a simple majority vote, rather than the current practice that simply allows senators to privately signal their objections.

But that, too, failed because Manchin and Sinema were unwilling to change the Senate rules a party-line vote by Democrats alone.

Emotions were on display during the floor debate.

When Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., asked Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky whether he would pause for a question, McConnell left the chamber, refusing to respond.

Durbin said he would have asked McConnell, "Does he really believe that there's no evidence of voter suppression?"

The No. 2 Republican, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, said at one point, "I am not a racist."

McConnell, who led his party in doing away with the filibuster's 60-vote threshold for Supreme Court nominees during Donald Trump's presidency, warned against changing the rules again.

McConnell derided the "fake hysteria" from Democrats over the states' new voting laws and called the pending bill a federal takeover of election systems. He admonished Democrats in a fiery speech and said doing away with filibuster rules would "break the Senate."

Manchin drew a roomful of senators for his own speech, upstaging the president's news conference and defending the filibuster. He said changing to a majority-rule Senate would only add to the "dysfunction that is tearing this nation apart."

Several members of the Congressional Black Caucus walked across the Capitol for the proceedings. "We want this Senate to act today in a favorable way. But if it don't, we ain't giving up," said Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., the highest-ranking Black member of Congress.

Manchin did open the door to a more tailored package of voting law changes, including to the Electoral Count Act, which was tested during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol. He said senators from both parties are working on that and it could draw Republican support.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said a bipartisan coalition should work on legislation to ensure voter access, particularly in far-flung areas like her state, and to shore up Americans' faith in democracy.

"We don't need, we do not need a repeat of 2020 when by all accounts our last president, having lost the election, sought to change the results," said Murkowski.

She said the Senate debate had declined to a troubling state: "You're either a racist or a hypocrite. Really, really? Is that where we are?"

At one point, senators broke out in applause after a spirited debate between Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, among the more experienced lawmakers, and new Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., over the history of the Voting Rights Act.

Sinema sat in her chair throughout much of the day's the debate, largely glued to her phone, but rose to her feet to deliver her vote against the rules change.

In a statement, Sinema said the outcome "must not be the end of our work to protect our democracy." But she warned, "these challenges cannot be solved by one party or Washington alone."

Schumer contended the fight is not over and he ridiculed Republican claims that the new election laws in the states will not end up hurting voter access and turnout, comparing it to Trump's "big lie" about the 2020 presidential election.

Democrats decided to press ahead despite the potential for high-stakes defeat as Biden is marking his first year in office with his priorities stalling out in the face of solid Republican opposition and the Democrats' inability to unite around their own goals. They wanted to force senators on the record — even their own party's holdouts — to show voters where they stand.

Once reluctant himself to change Senate rules, Biden has stepped up his pressure on senators to do just that. But the push from the White House, including Biden's blistering speech last week in Atlanta comparing opponents to segregationists, is seen as too late.

## Cut off by volcano, Tongans relieved as contact restored

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — As the massive undersea Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted on Saturday, Tongans from around the world gazed on as their relatives livestreamed images of billowing clouds of ash, gas and steam emerging from beneath the depths.

Then darkness.

The eruption severed Tonga's single fiber-optic cable, rendering the entire Pacific archipelago offline and unable to communicate with the rest of the world — and leaving their loved ones terrified about what might have happened.

"It was absolutely crazy," said Koniseti Liutai, a Tongan who lives in Australia.

"We were talking with family and relatives, because they were excitedly showing us the volcano's activities, then we heard the explosion and the big bang and everything went dark," he said. "Then the next information we got was the tsunami warning and then the tsunami hitting; we were all absolutely fearing the worst."

It wasn't only family and friends who could not get through. Huge ash clouds made backup communication by satellite phone next to impossible, and world leaders were not even able to get in touch with their Tongan counterparts to see what help they needed.

As the ash cleared, satellite communication improved and Tonga's telecoms operator, Digicel, said it had been able to restore international call services to some areas late Wednesday.

It cautioned, however, that due to the high number of calls and the limited capacity of its satellite link that people may need to try repeatedly to get through — something experienced by Liutai, who is deputy president of the Tonga Australia Chamber of Commerce.

"My first direct information was this morning," he said Thursday. "My daughter, after 100 phone calls during the day and night, got through to my aunts, my mum's sisters, and we were in tears of joy — it was three in the morning, but for us it was like the middle of the day; we were so pumped and so happy."

So far, three people have been confirmed killed after the volcanic eruption 64 kilometers (40 miles) north of Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa, and the tsunami that followed. Several small settlements in outlying islands were wiped off the face of the map, according to the Red Cross and official reports, necessitating the evacuation of several hundred residents.

With the resumption of some communications, more photos have begun to emerge of the destruction, showing the once-verdant islands turned a charcoal black by a thick coating of volcanic dust.

Coastlines are strewn with debris, while people work to clean streets and walkways.

The 2-centimeter (0.78 inch) layer of ash that rendered the runway at Fua'amotu International Airport unusable has now been cleared, and the first flights carrying fresh water and other aid arrived Thursday.

A repair ship is being sent from Papua New Guinea to work on the undersea cable, but it will take some time to get to Tonga and the company in charge estimates it could take longer than a month to repair the line.

Given that the cable runs right through the volcanic zone, any new volcanic activity could completely scupper even that timeline.

For Liutai, who runs a business in Tonga, regular visits had allowed him to stay in close touch in the past, but with COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, he has come to rely on video calls like many other Tongans living abroad.

With that possibility now cut off, at least for the near future, he's hoping at least better telephone connections will soon be available so that the 106,000 residents of Tonga can better reach the outside world to tell their friends and family what's going on.

"It's something we've become so used to, talking to each other and sharing information with the ease of social media," the 52-year-old said. "But when something scary has happened and you fear the worst, and even the government statement was general with no information, we were all nervous wrecks."

## **EXPLAINER: What does it mean for COVID-19 to be endemic?**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

Some European countries such as Spain are making tentative plans for when they might start treating COVID-19 as an "endemic" disease, but the World Health Organization and other officials have warned that the world is nowhere close to declaring the pandemic over. A look at what endemic means and the implications for the future.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A DISEASE TO BE ENDEMIC AS OPPOSED TO PANDEMIC?**

Diseases are endemic when they occur regularly in certain areas according to established patterns, while a pandemic refers to a global outbreak that causes unpredictable waves of illness.

The World Health Organization has said that redefining the coronavirus as an endemic disease is still "a ways off," according to Catherine Smallwood, an infectious diseases expert in the agency's European headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark. "We still have a huge amount of uncertainty and a virus that is evolving quickly," she said earlier this month.

For many countries, designating a disease as endemic means that fewer resources will be available to combat it, since it will likely no longer be considered a public health emergency.

### **WHO WILL DECIDE WHEN COVID-19 IS ENDEMIC?**

Most wealthy countries will probably make that decision themselves depending on how the virus is circulating within their borders and on the potential for new cases to cause big outbreaks. The COVID-19 vaccines, medicines and other measures widely available in rich countries will likely help them curb outbreaks long before the virus is brought under control globally.

The WHO does not technically declare pandemics. Its highest alert level is a global health emergency, and COVID-19 has warranted that distinction since January 2020. The U.N. health agency has convened an expert committee every three months since then to reassess the situation.

It's likely the pandemic will be over when the WHO's experts declare that COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency, but the criteria for that decision are not precisely defined.

"It's somewhat a subjective judgment because it's not just about the number of cases. It's about severity and it's about impact," said Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief.

Others have pointed out that designating COVID-19 as endemic is arguably a political question rather than a scientific one, and it speaks to how much disease and death national authorities and their citizens are willing to tolerate.

### **WHAT IS SPAIN PROPOSING?**

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said last week that falling death rates for COVID-19 suggest that it's time for European officials to start considering whether the disease should be considered endemic. That means Spanish officials would no longer need to record every COVID-19 infection and that people with symptoms would not necessarily be tested, but they would continue to be treated if they are sick. The proposal has been discussed with some EU officials, but no decisions have been made.

In October, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control issued advice on how countries might transition to more routine surveillance of COVID-19 after the acute phase of the pandemic. Among its recommendations, the agency said countries should integrate their monitoring of the coronavirus with other diseases like flu and test a representative sample of COVID-19 cases, rather than attempting to test every person with symptoms.

### **DOES ENDEMIC MEAN THE PROBLEM IS OVER?**

No. Many serious diseases, including tuberculosis and HIV, are considered endemic in parts of the world and continue to kill hundreds of thousands of people every year. Malaria, for example, is considered endemic in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and is estimated to cause more than 200 million cases every year, including about 600,000 deaths.

"Endemic in itself does not mean good," Ryan said. "Endemic just means it's here forever."

Health officials warn that even after COVID-19 becomes an established respiratory virus like seasonal flu, the virus will continue to be fatal for some.

Even after the pandemic ends, "COVID will still be with us," said Dr. Chris Woods, an infectious disease

expert at Duke University. "The difference is people won't be dying indiscriminately because of it, and it will be so routine that we will have much better and fairer access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for all."

## **EXPLAINER: How UK Conservatives can change their leader**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Some Conservative lawmakers in Britain are talking about ousting their leader, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has been tarnished by allegations that he and his staff held lockdown-breaching parties during the coronavirus pandemic.

If Johnson does not heed calls to resign — and he insists he won't — he could be toppled through a no-confidence vote.

Here's how the Conservative Party goes about challenging and changing leaders.

### THE NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE

A no-confidence vote in the party leader is triggered if 15% of Conservative lawmakers — currently 54 — write a letter to Graham Brady, head of a powerful group of Conservative legislators known as the 1922 Committee. It is called that because it was founded by lawmakers first elected that year to consolidate their power inside the party.

Letters can be delivered in person, by post or by email, and no one but Brady knows how many letters he has already received.

If Brady receives 54 letters, he will call a no-confidence vote, to be held within hours or days, in which all 359 Tory legislators can cast secret ballots. Johnson would need 180 votes to win. If he gets that many votes, there could not be another challenge for a year.

If Johnson loses, he would resign and a party leadership contest would be held in which he would be barred from running. He would remain party leader and prime minister until a replacement is chosen.

### THE LEADERSHIP CONTEST

Conservative leadership contests have two stages. In the first stage, Conservative lawmakers hold an initial vote on all the candidates. The candidate with lowest number of votes drops out, and voting continues until there are two contenders left.

If there are only two candidates, they proceed to the second stage. In that part, the final two candidates are put to a vote of the full party membership across the country.

In the last leadership contest in 2019, a field of 10 candidates was whittled down to Johnson and former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt. Johnson won handily with about two-thirds of postal votes cast by party members.

The winner of the vote becomes Conservative Party leader and prime minister, without the need for a national election.

### THE CONTENDERS

Any Conservative legislator is eligible to run to replace Johnson as party leader. The two names most often mentioned are Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, both senior ministers with strong followings in the party.

Other possible contenders include Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, who ran against Johnson last time; Cabinet Minister Michael Gove, one of the most powerful members of Johnson's government; Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who leads the country's coronavirus response; and Hunt, who has said he hasn't abandoned hope of becoming prime minister one day.

## **Europe considers new COVID-19 strategy: accepting the virus**

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — When the coronavirus pandemic was first declared, Spaniards were ordered to stay home for more than three months. For weeks, they were not allowed outside even for exercise. Children

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were banned from playgrounds, and the economy virtually stopped.

But officials credited the draconian measures with preventing a full collapse of the health system. Lives were saved, they argued.

Now, almost two years later, Spain is preparing to adopt a different COVID-19 playbook. With one of Europe's highest vaccination rates and its most pandemic-battered economies, the government is laying the groundwork to treat the next infection surge not as an emergency but an illness that is here to stay. Similar steps are under consideration in neighboring Portugal and in Britain.

The idea is to move from crisis mode to control mode, approaching the virus in much the same way countries deal with flu or measles. That means accepting that infections will occur and providing extra care for at-risk people and patients with complications.

Spain's center-left prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, wants the Europe Union to consider similar changes now that the surge of the omicron variant has shown that the disease is becoming less lethal.

"What we are saying is that in the next few months and years, we are going to have to think, without hesitancy and according to what science tells us, how to manage the pandemic with different parameters," he said Monday.

Sánchez said the changes should not happen before the omicron surge is over, but officials need to start shaping the post-pandemic world now: "We are doing our homework, anticipating scenarios."

The World Health Organization has said that it's too early to consider any immediate shift. The organization does not have clearly defined criteria for declaring COVID-19 an endemic disease, but its experts have previously said that it will happen when the virus is more predictable and there are no sustained outbreaks.

"It's somewhat a subjective judgment because it's not just about the number of cases. It's about severity, and it's about impact," said Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief.

Speaking at a World Economic Forum panel on Monday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious diseases doctor in the U.S., said COVID-19 could not be considered endemic until it drops to "a level that it doesn't disrupt society."

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has advised countries to transition to more routine handling of COVID-19 after the acute phase of the pandemic is over. The agency said in a statement that more EU states in addition to Spain will want to adopt "a more long-term, sustainable surveillance approach."

Just over 80% of Spain's population has received a double vaccine dose, and authorities are focused on boosting the immunity of adults with third doses.

Vaccine-acquired immunity, coupled with widespread infection, offers a chance to concentrate prevention efforts, testing and illness-tracking resources on moderate to high-risk groups, said Dr. Salvador Trenche, head of the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine, which has led the call for a new endemic response.

COVID-19 "must be treated like the rest of illnesses," Trenche told The Associated Press, adding that "normalized attention" by health professionals would help reduce delays in treatment of problems not related to the coronavirus.

The public also needs to come to terms with the idea that some deaths from COVID-19 "will be inevitable," Tranche said.

"We can't do on the sixth wave what we were doing on the first one: The model needs to change if we want to achieve different results," he said.

The Spanish Health Ministry said it was too early to share any blueprints being drafted by its experts and advisers, but the agency confirmed that one proposal is to follow an existing model of "sentinel surveillance" currently used in the EU for monitoring influenza.

The strategy has been nicknamed "flu-ization" of COVID-19 by Spanish media, although officials say that the systems for influenza will need to be adapted significantly to the coronavirus.

For now, the discussion about moving to an endemic approach is limited to wealthy nations that can afford to speak about the worst of the pandemic in the past tense. Their access to vaccines and robust public health systems are the envy of the developing world.

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It's also not clear how an endemic strategy would coexist with the "zero-Covid" approach adopted by China and other Asian countries, and how would that affect international travel.

Many countries overwhelmed by the record number of omicron cases are already giving up on massive testing and cutting quarantine times, especially for workers who show no more than cold-like symptoms. Since the beginning of the year, classes in Spanish schools stop only if major outbreaks occur, not with the first reported case as they used to.

In Portugal, with one of the world's highest vaccination rates, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa declared in a New Year's speech that the country had "moved into an endemic phase." But the debate over specific measures petered out as the spread soon accelerated to record levels — almost 44,000 new cases in 24 hours reported Tuesday.

However, hospital admissions and deaths in the vaccinated world are proportionally much lower than in previous surges.

In the United Kingdom, mask-wearing in public places and COVID-19 passports will be dropped on Jan. 26, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Wednesday saying that the latest wave had "peaked nationally."

The requirement for infected people to isolate for five full days remains in place, but Johnson said he will seek to scrap it in coming weeks if the virus data continues to improve. Official statistics put at 95% the share of the British population that has developed antibodies against COVID-19 either from infection or vaccination.

"As COVID becomes endemic, we will need to replace legal requirements with advice and guidance, urging people with the virus to be careful and considerate of others," Johnson said.

For some other European governments, the idea of normalizing COVID-19 is at odds with their efforts to boost vaccination among reluctant groups.

In Germany, where less than 73% of the population has received two doses and infection rates are hitting new records almost daily, comparisons to Spain or any other country are being rejected.

"We still have too many unvaccinated people, particularly among our older citizens," Health Ministry spokesman Andreas Deffner said Monday.

Italy is extending its vaccination mandate to all citizens age 50 or older and imposing fines of up to 1,500 euros for unvaccinated people who show up at work. Italians are also required to be fully vaccinated to access public transportation, planes, gyms, hotels and trade fairs.

## Security scanners across Europe tied to China govt, military

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

At some of the world's most sensitive spots, authorities have installed security screening devices made by a single Chinese company with deep ties to China's military and the highest levels of the ruling Communist Party.

The World Economic Forum in Davos. Europe's largest ports. Airports from Amsterdam to Athens. NATO's borders with Russia. All depend on equipment manufactured by Nuctech, which has quickly become the world's leading company, by revenue, for cargo and vehicle scanners.

Nuctech has been frozen out of the U.S. for years due to national security concerns, but it has made deep inroads across Europe, installing its devices in 26 of 27 EU member states, according to public procurement, government and corporate records reviewed by The Associated Press.

The complexity of Nuctech's ownership structure and its expanding global footprint have raised alarms on both sides of the Atlantic.

A growing number of Western security officials and policymakers fear that China could exploit Nuctech equipment to sabotage key transit points or get illicit access to government, industrial or personal data from the items that pass through its devices.

Nuctech's critics allege the Chinese government has effectively subsidized the company so it can undercut competitors and give Beijing potential sway over critical infrastructure in the West as China seeks to establish itself as a global technology superpower.



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"The data being processed by these devices is very sensitive. It's personal data, military data, cargo data. It might be trade secrets at stake. You want to make sure it's in right hands," said Bart Groothuis, director of cybersecurity at the Dutch Ministry of Defense before becoming a member of the European Parliament. "You're dependent on a foreign actor which is a geopolitical adversary and strategic rival."

He and others say Europe doesn't have tools in place to monitor and resist such potential encroachment. Different member states have taken opposing views on Nuctech's security risks. No one has even been able to make a comprehensive public tally of where and how many Nuctech devices have been installed across the continent.

Nuctech dismisses those concerns, countering that Nuctech's European operations comply with local laws, including strict security checks and data privacy rules.

"It's our equipment, but it's your data. Our customer decides what happens with the data," said Robert Bos, deputy general manager of Nuctech in the Netherlands, where the company has a research and development center.

He said Nuctech is a victim of unfounded allegations that have cut its market share in Europe nearly in half since 2019.

"It's quite frustrating to be honest," Bos told AP. "In the 20 years we delivered this equipment we never had issues of breaches or data leaks. Till today we never had any proof of it."

## 'IT'S NOT REALLY A COMPANY'

As security screening becomes increasingly interconnected and data-driven, Nuctech has found itself on the front lines of the U.S.-China battle for technology dominance now playing out across Europe.

In addition to scanning systems for people, baggage and cargo, the company makes explosives detectors and interconnected devices capable of facial recognition, body temperature measurement and ID card or ticket identification.

On its website, Nuctech's parent company explains that Nuctech does more than just provide hardware, integrating "cloud computing, big data and Internet of Things with safety inspection technologies and products to supply the clients with hi-tech safety inspection solution."

Critics fear that under China's national intelligence laws, which require Chinese companies to surrender data requested by state security agencies, Nuctech would be unable to resist calls from Beijing to hand over sensitive data about the cargo, people and devices that pass through its scanners. They say there is a risk Beijing could use Nuctech's presence across Europe to gather big data about cross-border trade flows, pull information from local networks, like shipping manifests or passenger information, or sabotage trade flows in a conflict.

A July 2020 Canadian government security review of Nuctech found that X-ray security scanners could potentially be used to covertly collect and transmit information, compromise portable electronic devices as they pass through the scanner or alter results to allow transit of "nefarious" devices.

The European Union put measures in place in late 2020 that can be used to vet Chinese foreign direct investment. But policymakers in Brussels say there are currently no EU-wide systems in place to evaluate Chinese procurement, despite growing concerns about unfair state subsidies, lack of reciprocity, national security and human rights.

"This is becoming more and more dangerous. I wouldn't mind if one or two airports had Nuctech systems, but with dumping prices a lot of regions are taking it," said Axel Voss, a German member of the European Parliament who works on data protection. "This is becoming more and more a security question. You might think it's a strategic investment of the Chinese government."

The U.S. — home to OSI Systems, one of Nuctech's most important commercial rivals — has come down hard against Nuctech. The U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the U.S. National Security Council, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration, and the U.S. Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security all have raised concerns about Nuctech.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration told AP in an email that Nuctech was found ineligible to

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receive sensitive security information. Nuctech products, TSA said, "are not authorized to be used for the screening of passengers, baggage, accessible property or air cargo in the United States."

In December 2020, the U.S. added Nuctech to the Bureau of Industry and Security Entity List, restricting exports to them on national security grounds.

"It's not just commercial," said a U.S. government official who was not authorized to speak on the record. "It's using state-backed companies, with state subsidies, low-ball bids to get into European critical infrastructure, which is civil airports, passenger screening, seaport and cargo screening."

In Europe, Nuctech's bids can be 30 to 50 percent below their rivals', according to the company's competitors, U.S. and European officials and researchers who study China. Sometimes they include other sweeteners like extended maintenance contracts and favorable loans.

In 2009, Nuctech's main European competitor, Smiths Detection, complained that it was being squeezed out of the market by such practices, and the E.U. imposed an anti-dumping duty of 36.6 percent on Nuctech cargo scanners.

"Nuctech comes in with below market bids no one can match. It's not a normal price, it's an economic statecraft price," said Didi Kirsten Tatlow, and co-editor of the book, "China's Quest for Foreign Technology." "It's not really a company. They are more like a wing of a state development drive."

Nuctech's Bos said the company keeps prices low by manufacturing in Europe. "We don't have to import goods from the U.S. or other countries," he said. "Our supply chain is very efficient with local suppliers, that's the main reason we can be very competitive."

Nuctech's successes abound. The company, which is opening offices in Brussels, Madrid and Rome, says it has supplied customers in more than 170 countries and regions. Nuctech said in 2019 that it had installed more than 1,000 security check devices in Europe for customs, civil aviation, ports and government organizations.

In November 2020, Norwegian Customs put out a call to buy a new cargo scanner for the Svinesund checkpoint, a complex of squat, grey buildings at the Swedish border. An American rival and two other companies complained that the terms as written gave Nuctech a leg up.

The specifications were rewritten, but Nuctech won the deal anyway. The Chinese company beat its rivals on both price and quality, said Jostein Engen, the customs agency's director of procurement, and none of Norway's government ministries raised red flags that would have disqualified Nuctech.

"We in Norwegian Customs must treat Nuctech like everybody else in our competition," Engen said. "We can't do anything else following EU rules on public tenders."

Four of five NATO member states that border Russia — Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland — have purchased Nuctech equipment for their border crossings with Russia. So has Finland.

Europe's two largest ports — Rotterdam and Antwerp, which together handled more than a third of goods, by weight, entering and leaving the EU's main ports in 2020 — use Nuctech devices, according to parliamentary testimony.

Other key states at the edges of the EU, including the U.K., Turkey, Ukraine, Albania, Belarus and Serbia have also purchased Nuctech scanners, some of which were donated or financed with low-interest loans from Chinese state banks, according to public procurement documents and government announcements.

Airports in London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Athens, Florence, Pisa, Venice, Zurich, Geneva and more than a dozen across Spain have all signed deals for Nuctech equipment, procurement and government documents, and corporate announcements show.

Nuctech says it provided security equipment for the Olympics in Brazil in 2016, then President Donald Trump's visit to China in 2017 and the World Economic Forum in 2020. It has also provided equipment to some U.N. organizations, procurement records show.

## RISING CONCERNS

As Nuctech's market share has grown, so too has skepticism about the company.

Canadian authorities dropped a standing offer from Nuctech to provide X-ray scanning equipment at more than 170 Canadian diplomatic missions around the world after a government assessment found an

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“elevated threat” of espionage.

Lithuania, which is involved in a diplomatic feud with China over Taiwan, blocked Nuctech from providing airport scanners earlier this year after a national security review found that it wasn't possible for the equipment to operate in isolation and there was a risk information could leak back to China, according to Margiris Abukevicius, vice minister for international cooperation and cybersecurity at Lithuania's Ministry of National Defense.

Then, in August, Lithuania approved a deal for a Nuctech scanner on its border with Belarus. There were only two bidders, Nuctech and a Russian company — both of which presented national security concerns — and there wasn't time to reissue the tender, two Lithuanian officials told AP.

“It's just an ad hoc decision choosing between bad and worse options,” Abukevicius said. He added that the government is developing a road map to replace all Nuctech scanners currently in use in Lithuania as well as a legal framework to ban purchases of untrusted equipment by government institutions and in critical sectors.

Human rights concerns are also generating headwinds for Nuctech. The company does business with police and other authorities in Western China's Xinjiang region, where Beijing stands accused of genocide for mass incarceration and abuse of minority Uighur Muslims.

Despite pressure from U.S. and European policymakers on companies to stop doing business in Xinjiang, European governments have continued to award tens of millions of dollars in contracts — sometimes backed by European Union funds — to Nuctech.

Nuctech says on its Chinese website that China's western regions, including Xinjiang, are “are important business areas” for the company. It has signed multiple contracts to provide X-ray equipment to Xinjiang's Department of Transportation and Public Security Department.

It has provided license plate recognition devices for a police checkpoint in Xinjiang, Chinese government records show, and an integrated security system for the subway in Urumqi, the region's capital city. It regularly showcases its security equipment at trade fairs in Xinjiang.

“Companies like Nuctech directly enable Xinjiang's high-tech police state and its intrusive ways of suppressing ethnic minorities. This should be taken into account when Western governments and corporations interface with Nuctech,” said Adrian Zenz, a researcher who has documented abuses in Xinjiang and compiled evidence of the company's activities in the region.

Nuctech's Bos said he can understand those views, but that the company tries to steer clear of politics. “Our daily goal is to have equipment to secure the world more and better,” he said. “We don't interfere with politics.”

## COMPLEX WEB OF OWNERSHIP

Nuctech opened a factory in Poland in 2018 with the tagline “Designed in China and manufactured in Europe.” But ultimate responsibility for the company lies far from Warsaw, with the state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council in Beijing, China's top governing body.

Nuctech's ownership structure is so complex that can be difficult for outsiders to understand the true lines of influence and accountability.

Scott Kennedy, a Chinese economic policy expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said that the ambiguous boundaries between the Communist Party, state companies and financial institutions in China — which have only grown murkier under China's leader, Xi Jinping — can make it difficult to grasp how companies like Nuctech are structured and operate.

“Consider if the roles were reversed. If the Chinese were acquiring this equipment for their airports they'd want a whole variety of assurances,” Kennedy said. “China has launched a high-tech self-sufficiency drive because they don't feel safe with foreign technology in their supply chain.”

What is clear is that Nuctech, from its very origins, has been tied to Chinese government, academic and military interests.

Nuctech was founded as an offshoot of Tsinghua University, an elite public research university in Beijing. It grew with backing from the Chinese government and for years was run by the son of China's former leader, Hu Jintao.

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Datenna, a Dutch economic intelligence company focused on China, mapped the ownership structure of Nuctech and found a dozen major entities across four layers of shareholding, including four state-owned enterprises and three government entities.

Today the majority shareholder in Nuctech is Tongfang Co., which has a 71 percent stake. The largest shareholder in Tongfang, in turn, is the investment arm of the China National Nuclear Corp. (CNNC), a state-run energy and defense conglomerate controlled by China's State Council. The U.S. Defense Department classifies CNNC as a Chinese military company because it shares advanced technologies and expertise with the People's Liberation Army.

Xi has further blurred the lines between China's civilian and military activities and deepened the power of the ruling Communist Party within private enterprises. One way: the creation of dozens of government-backed financing vehicles designed to speed the development of technologies that have both military and commercial applications.

In fact, one of those vehicles, the National Military-Civil Fusion Industry Investment Fund, announced in June 2020 that it wanted to take a 4.4 percent stake in Nuctech's majority shareholder, along with the right to appoint a director to the Tongfang board. It never happened — "changes in the market environment," Tongfeng explained in a Chinese stock exchange filing.

But there are other links between Nuctech's ownership structure and the fusion fund.

CNNC, which has a 21 percent interest in Nuctech, holds a stake of more than 7 percent in the fund, according to Qichacha, a Chinese corporate information platform. They also share personnel: Chen Shutang, a member of CNNC's Party Leadership Group and the company's chief accountant serves as a director of the fund, records show.

"The question here is whether or not we want to allow Nuctech, which is controlled by the Chinese state and linked to the Chinese military, to be involved in crucial parts of our border security and infrastructure," said Jaap van Etten, a former Dutch diplomat and CEO of Datenna.

Nuctech maintains that its operations are shaped by market forces, not politics, and says CNNC doesn't control its corporate management or decision-making.

"We are a normal commercial operator here in Europe which has to obey the laws," said Nuctech's Bos. "We work here with local staff members, we pay tax, contribute to the social community and have local suppliers."

But experts say these touchpoints are further evidence of the government and military interests encircling the company and show its strategic interest to Beijing.

"Under Xi Jinping, the national security elements of the state are being fused with the technological and innovation dimensions of the state," said Tai Ming Cheung, a professor at UC San Diego's School of Global Policy and Strategy.

"Military-civil fusion is one of the key battlegrounds between the U.S. and China. The Europeans will have to figure out where they stand."

## First aid flights arrive in Tonga after big volcano eruption

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The first flights carrying fresh water and other aid to Tonga finally arrived Thursday after the Pacific nation's main airport runway was cleared of ash left by a huge volcanic eruption.

New Zealand and Australia each sent military transport planes that were carrying water containers, kits for temporary shelters, generators, hygiene supplies and communications equipment. The Australian plane also had a special sweeper to help keep the runway clear.

The deliveries were dropped off without the military personnel coming in contact with people at the airport in Tonga. That's because Tonga is desperate to make sure foreigners don't bring in the coronavirus. It has not had any outbreaks of COVID-19 and has reported just a single case since the pandemic began.

Rear Admiral James Gilmour, the commander of New Zealand's Joint Forces, said there had been a "mam-

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moth effort" by Tongan troops "to clear that runway by hand. And they've achieved that this afternoon."

Australia said the assistance would help Tonga's government meet the community's needs and support the immediate clean-up efforts.

Japan also said it would send emergency relief, including drinking water and equipment for cleaning away volcanic ash. Two C-130 Hercules aircraft and a transport vessel carrying two CH-47 Chinook helicopters would leave possibly Thursday, the Defense Ministry said.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi told reporters that his ministry "will do everything we can for the disaster-hit people of Tonga."

U.N. humanitarian officials report that about 84,000 people — more than 80% of Tonga's population — have been impacted by the volcano's eruption, U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said, pointing to three deaths, injuries, loss of homes and polluted water.

Communications with Tonga remain limited after Saturday's eruption and tsunami appeared to have broken the single fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga with the rest of the world. That means most people haven't been able to use the internet or make phone calls abroad, although some local phone networks are still working.

One phone company, Digicel, said Thursday it had managed to restore the ability to make international calls from some places by using a satellite link, but that people would need to be patient due to high demand. It said it hoped to enhance its service over the coming days.

A navy patrol ship from New Zealand is also expected to arrive later Thursday. It is carrying hydrographic equipment and divers, and also has a helicopter to assist with delivering supplies.

Officials said the ship's first task would be to check shipping channels and the structural integrity of the wharf in the capital, Nuku'alofa, following the eruption and tsunami.

Another New Zealand navy ship carrying 250,000 liters (66,000 gallons) of water is on its way. The ship can also produce tens of thousands of liters of fresh water each day using a desalination plant.

Three of Tonga's smaller islands suffered serious damage from tsunami waves, officials and the Red Cross said.

The U.N.'s Dujarric said "all houses have apparently been destroyed on the island of Mango and only two houses remain on Fonoifua island, with extensive damage reported on Nomuka." He said evacuations are underway for people from the islands.

According to Tongan census figures, Mango is home to 36 people, Fonoifua is home to 69 people, and Nomuka to 239. The majority of Tongans live on the main island of Tongatapu, where about 50 homes were destroyed.

Dujarric said the most pressing humanitarian needs are safe water, food and non-food items, and top priorities are reestablishing communication services including for international calls and the internet.

Tonga has so far avoided the widespread devastation that many initially feared.

## Lebanon's poorest scavenge through trash to survive

By LUJAIN JO Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — In the dark streets of a Beirut now often without electricity, sometimes the only light that shines is from headlamps worn by scavengers, searching through garbage for scrap to sell.

Even trash has become a commodity fought over in Lebanon, mired in one of the world's worst financial crises in modern history.

With the ranks of scavengers growing among the desperately poor, some tag trash cans with graffiti to mark their territory and beat those who encroach on it. Meanwhile, even better-off families sell their own recyclables because it can get them U.S. dollars rather than the country's collapsing currency.

That's left the poor even poorer and fearful for their futures.

"There's a lot of poor people like me," said Hoda, a 57-year-old Lebanese mother who has been reduced to scavenging. "But people don't know it. They know what they see, but not what's hidden."

The fight for garbage shows the rapid descent of life in Beirut, once known for its entrepreneurial spirit,

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free-wheeling banking sector and vibrant nightlife. Instead of civil war causing the chaos, the disaster over the past two years was caused by the corruption and mismanagement of the calcified elite that has ruled Lebanon since the end of its 1975-90 conflict.

More than half the population has been plunged into poverty. The Lebanese pound has nose-dived. Banks have drastically limited withdrawals and transfers. Hyperinflation has made daily goods either unaffordable or unavailable, forcing those coming back from abroad to fill their suitcases with everything from baby food to heart medication.

Trash had been a problem even before the crisis, with major protests in past years against neglect by authorities who sometimes allowed garbage to pile up in the streets.

Now, teenagers carrying giant plastic bags roam the streets looking through dumpsters for scraps they can sell.

The trade once used to be the realm of Syrians who fled their own country's grinding civil war.

"Nowadays, we go to the dump where we sell what we collect, only to find Lebanese people getting out of their cars to sell their recyclables," said one Syrian, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. "Restaurant employees and building janitors also started to sort trash in order to sell it before throwing the rest out."

Hoda, who gave just her first name for fear of trouble with authorities, turned to scavenging to support her six daughters, ranging from ages nine to 22, and two grandchildren.

She used to sell vegetables on a cart, but police confiscated her wares six different times. She sold tissue boxes, but the currency collapse left her unable to afford them.

Then her son Mohammed asked her to join him in scavenging for garbage. Hoda goes to her spot in Beirut's relatively upscale Hamra neighborhood daily and works sometimes until 2 a.m. gathering plastics, cans and anything else she thinks she can sell or use.

Once a week, Mohammed takes everything they collect to sell to dealers who specialize in the trade. One kilogram (2.2 pounds) of plastic bags goes for 20 U.S. cents, other plastics for 30 cents, while each kilo of aluminium gets \$1. While that doesn't sound like much, the collapse of the Lebanese pound means \$1 goes much farther.

That access to dollars makes scavenging even more dangerous now. Mohammed said he was beaten up once for crossing into another's scavenger's territory and collecting from a marked dumpster.

"When dollars started to rise, people couldn't afford to eat and they started scavenging, and each started to have their own bin," Mohammed said. "If one is standing by a bin and another scavenger comes, a fight will break out."

"One of the reasons I asked my mother to join me doing this work is hoping that they wouldn't beat me up when they find my mother with me," he said.

Thugs roaming the streets on motorcycles sometimes target scavengers at the end of day to steal the recyclables they collected.

"They are ready to kill a person for a plastic bag," Mohammed said.

Recyclables aren't the only items Hoda picks up. In her dark room with no windows and no electricity, Hoda keeps scavenged goods that pile up on the floor. A bucket of white paint to maybe use for her room. A light bulb she hopes to use if she ever gets power.

On a recent day, Hoda's 16-year-old daughter was struggling with her 2-month-old baby's diarrhea and asked for baby diapers, milk, and bottle nipples. Hoda's eyes sunk in sadness and she shook her head.

"My only dream is to have a house for my family and me, where I live like a mother, where I live like a human being," Hoda said, her face wet with tears. "I always laugh and joke around with people, but the inside of my heart is black. I don't let them sense that I am upset. I keep it to myself, keep it inside my heart."

Her most treasured item is a tent she received from protesters during Lebanon's 2019 protests. She hopes she'll be able to use it in future protests against the country's rulers.

"The politicians who rule us deserve to be burned, they are the reason why we are here," Hoda said. "They eat with spoons of gold while we search for a piece of bread to eat from the floor."

## **New Zealand says it won't use lockdowns when omicron spreads**

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand is among the few remaining countries to have avoided any outbreaks of the omicron variant — but Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Thursday an outbreak was inevitable and the nation would tighten restrictions as soon as one was detected.

But she also said that New Zealand would not impose the lockdowns that it has used previously, including for the delta variant.

"This stage of the pandemic is different to what we have dealt with before. Omicron is more transmissible," Ardern said. "That is going to make it harder to keep it out, but it will also make it more challenging to control once it arrives. But just like before, when COVID changes, we change."

Ardern said that within 24 to 48 hours of omicron being detected in the community, the nation would move into its "red" setting. That would allow businesses to remain open and domestic travel to continue, but would require schoolchildren to wear masks and limit crowds to 100 people.

Currently most of New Zealand is at the "orange" setting, which requires some mask wearing and proof of vaccination but doesn't limit crowd sizes.

About 93% of New Zealanders aged 12 and over are fully vaccinated and 52% have had a booster shot. The country has just begun vaccinating children aged between 5 and 11.

New Zealand has managed to contain the spread of the delta variant, with an average of about 20 new cases each day. But it has seen an increasing number of people arriving into the country and going into mandatory quarantine who are infected with omicron.

That has put strain on the quarantine system and prompted the government to limit access for returning citizens while it decides what to do about reopening its borders, angering many people who want to return to New Zealand.

Opposition leader Christopher Luxon said Ardern had planned poorly for omicron and had managed to secure into the country less than one rapid COVID-19 test per person.

"That is a stunning indictment on the government's lazy lack of planning," he said.

Ardern said the most important thing that people could do was to get a booster shot, which would reduce the severity of an omicron infection and allow most people to recover at home rather than needing hospital care.

## **New approach to teaching race in school divides New Mexico**

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press / Report for America

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — A proposal to overhaul New Mexico's social studies standards has stirred debate over how race should be taught in schools, with thousands of parents and teachers weighing in on changes that would dramatically increase instruction related to racial and social identity beginning in kindergarten.

The revisions in the state are ambitious. New Mexico officials say they hope their standards can be a model for the country of social studies teaching that is culturally responsive, as student populations grow increasingly diverse.

As elsewhere, the move toward more open discussion of race has prompted angry rebukes, with some critics blasting it as racist or Marxist. But the responses also provide a window into how others are wrestling with how and when race should be taught to children beyond the polarizing debates over material branded as "critical race theory."

The responses have not broken down along racial lines, with Indigenous and Latino parents among those expressing concern in one of the country's least racially segregated states. While debates elsewhere have centered on the teaching of enslavement of Black people, some discussions in New Mexico, which is 49% Hispanic and 11% Native American, have focused on the legacy of Spanish conquistadors.

"We refuse to be categorized as victims or oppressors," wrote Michael Franco, a retired Hispanic air traffic controller in Albuquerque who said the standards appeared aimed at categorizing children by race

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and ethnicity and undercutting the narrative of the American Dream.

The New Mexico Public Education Department's proposed standards are aimed at making civics, history, and geography more inclusive of the state's population so that students feel at home in the curriculum and prepared for a diverse society, according to public statements.

"Our out-of-date standards leave New Mexico students with an incomplete understanding of the complex, multicultural world they live in," Public Education Secretary Designate Kurt Steinhaus said. "It's our duty to provide them with a complete education based on known facts. That's what these proposed standards will do."

The plan calls for students to learn about different "identity groups" in kindergarten and "unequal power relations" in later grades. One part of the draft standards would require high school students to "assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systemic inequity" for opportunities for members of identity groups. In a first for the state, ethnic studies and the history of the LGBT rights movement also would be introduced into the curriculum.

An Albuquerque pastor, Rev. Sylvia Miller-Mutia, welcomed the change in her written comment, arguing children see race early, and that learning about it in school can dismantle stereotypes early. When her eldest child was 3, she said that her Filipino dad wasn't American because he has dark skin, while her mother was American because she has light skin.

"Already, a cultural script that said to be American is to be light-skinned had somehow seeped into my preschooler's consciousness," Miller-Mutia said in an interview.

Many Democratic-run states across the country are looking to diversify those cultural scripts, while Republican-run ones are putting up guardrails against possible changes. California was among the first states last year to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement. Texas passed a law requiring teachers to present multiple perspectives on all issues and one Indiana lawmaker proposed that teachers be required to take a "neutral" position.

The education department in New Mexico is reviewing over 1,300 letters on the proposed standards along with dozens of comments from an online forum in November. The standards were written with input from 64 people around the state, mostly social studies teachers, and are to be published next spring with revisions.

Among the authors was Wendy Leighton, a Santa Fe middle school history teacher. As a leader of the revisions for the history section of the standards, she said the goal was to take marginalized groups like indigenous, LGBTQ and other people "that are often not in textbooks or pushed to the side and making them kind of more closer to the center."

Identity was the center of a class she taught in December, where students learning about the Salem witch trials identified which groups were at the center of power — clergy, men — and which were on the margins — women, servants.

"What's a marginalized group in America today?" she asked the class.

State Republicans have argued that parents should teach their children sensitive topics like race and that there are bigger priorities in a state that ranks toward the bottom in academic achievement.

"The focus that I feel is urgent is math, reading and writing. Not social studies standards," said state Rep. Rebecca Dow, one of six candidates for the Republican nomination for governor next year, hoping to unseat Democratic incumbent Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Some parents who wrote public comments said they would rather homeschool their children than have them learn under the proposed standards.

"Struggle and adversity have never been limited to one specific race or ethnicity. Neither has privilege," wrote Lucas Tieme, a father of five public school students, who are white.

Tieme, a bus driver for Rio Rancho public schools, said his wife was homeschooled so they'd be ready to take their kids out of school if it came to that.

Some parents who support the changes generally are skeptical of introducing race for the youngest students.



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Sheldon Pickering, 41, has two adopted children who are Black, and has seen casual racism against his kids escalate as they reach adolescence in Farmington, near the southeast corner of Utah and the eastern part of the Navajo Nation. He has had "the talk" with his Black son, instructing him how to interact with police. But Pickering, who is white, worries about schools introducing too much too soon.

"If we start too early, we rob kids of this rare time in their life that they have just to be kids," said Pickering, a cleaning business owner. "They just get to be these amazing little kids and enjoy life without preconceived notions, without context."

## **Biden says nation weary from COVID but rising with him in WH**

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden acknowledged that the pandemic has left Americans exhausted and demoralized but insisted at a news conference marking his first year in office that he has "outperformed" expectations in dealing with it.

Facing sagging poll numbers and a stalled legislative agenda, Biden conceded Wednesday he would likely have to pare back his "build back better" recovery package and instead settle for "big chunks" of his signature economic plan. He promised to further attack inflation and the pandemic and blamed Republicans for uniting in opposition to his proposals rather than offering ideas of their own.

This is a perilous time for Biden: The nation is gripped by a disruptive new surge of virus cases, and inflation is at a level not seen in a generation. Democrats are bracing for a potential midterm rout if he can't turn things around.

Biden insisted that voters will come to embrace a more positive view of his tenure — and of his beleaguered party — in time. His appeal to voters for patience came with a pledge to spend more time outside Washington to make the case to them directly.

Biden also addressed the brewing crisis on the Ukraine border, where Russia has massed some 100,000 troops and raised concerns that Moscow is ready to launch a further invasion.

The president said his "guess" is Russia may move further but he believes President Vladimir Putin doesn't want full-blown war. He declared Russia would pay a "dear price" if Putin launches a military incursion.

"He has to do something," Biden said of Putin. "He is trying to find his place in the world between China and the West."

Biden suggested a "minor incursion" might elicit a lesser response than a full-scale invasion of the country, a comment that drew immediate condemnation from some corners.

"President Biden basically gave Putin a green light to invade Ukraine by yammering about the supposed insignificance of a 'minor incursion,'" said Republican Sen. Ben Sasse.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki indicated in a subsequent statement that that wasn't necessarily about tanks and troops.

"President Biden also knows from long experience that the Russians have an extensive playbook of aggression short of military action, including cyberattacks and paramilitary tactics. And he affirmed today that those acts of Russian aggression will be met with a decisive, reciprocal, and united response," she said.

Biden held forth for 1 hour and 50 minutes in the East Room of the White House, appearing to relish the opportunity to parry questions from two dozen journalists with doses of wit and a few flashes of anger. At several points, he looked at his watch, smiled and kept calling on reporters.

He fielded questions about inflation, nuclear talks with Iran, voting rights, political division, Vice President Kamala Harris' place on the 2024 ticket, trade with China and the competency of government. Those questions showed the multitude of challenges confronting the president, each of them as much a risk as an opportunity to prove himself.

The president began by reeling off early progress in fighting the virus and showcasing quick passage of an ambitious bipartisan roads-and-bridges infrastructure deal. But his economic, voting rights, police reform and immigration agenda have all been thwarted in a barely Democratic-controlled Senate, while inflation has emerged as an economic threat to the nation and a political risk for Biden.

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Despite his faltering approval numbers, Biden claimed to have “probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen” in a country still coping with the coronavirus.

“After almost two years of physical, emotional and psychological impact of this pandemic, for many of us, it’s been too much to bear,” Biden said.

“Some people may call what’s happening now ‘the new normal,’” he added, his voice rising. “I call it a job not yet finished. It will get better.”

On his nearly \$2 trillion economic agenda that West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin has blocked from moving forward, Biden said he’ll pass the parts of the package that can net sufficient votes. This likely means not extending the expanded child tax credit or providing financial support to community colleges, Biden said.

“I think we can break the package up, get as much as we can now, come back and fight for the rest,” he said, later adding that he would apply the same strategy to his voting reform agenda.

The social spending bill was once viewed as a catch-all home for various progressive priorities, but now Democrats are sensing a need to deliver a solid accomplishment to voters in the midterm year and are beginning to come to terms with a slimmed-down package that can overcome Manchin’s reticence.

The White House and congressional Democratic leaders are expected to refocus their attention on it beginning next week, after the all-but-certain collapse of the Democrats’ push on voting rights legislation. Talks to craft a new bill that meets Manchin’s demands and can garner the virtually unanimous Democratic support needed to pass Congress will likely take weeks.

The Democrats’ goal is to have a package — or be on the cusp of one — that Biden can highlight in his March 1 State of the Union address.

If Biden seemed to have one set of regrets so far, it was his inability because of the coronavirus to connect with more Americans outside the capital. He noted that this challenge was most acutely felt by Black voters who wanted him to push more aggressively on expanding access to voting.

“I don’t get a chance to look people in the eye because of both COVID and things that are happening in Washington,” he said.

Speaking as Democrats were mounting a doomed effort to change Senate rules to pass the voting measure, Biden said he still hoped that it would pass in some form and wasn’t prepared yet to discuss possible executive actions on the issue. The vote spotlighted the constraints on Biden’s influence barely a week after he delivered an impassioned speech in Atlanta suggesting opponents of the measures were taking a historical stance alongside segregationists and exhorting senators to action.

Still, he said he understood that civil rights groups were anxious and frustrated about the lack of action, particularly Black voters who question why he didn’t press the issue harder and earlier.

There are at least 19 Republican-backed laws in states that make it harder to vote, and Jan. 6 insurrection supporters are filling local election posts and running for office.

It was Biden’s seventh solo news conference as president. The ongoing threat from the coronavirus was evident in the setup of Wednesday’s gathering: A limited number of reporters were allowed to attend and all had to have been tested for the virus and wear masks.

The president used the event to pay heed to growing anxiety about rising prices. Staring down an inflation rate that has gone from 1.7% at his inauguration to 7%, he called on the Federal Reserve to lessen its monetary boosting of the economy by raising interest rates, which would in theory help to reduce inflation.

“Given the strength of our economy, and the pace of recent price increases, it’s important to recalibrate the support that is now necessary,” Biden said. “Now, we need to get inflation under control.”

Despite it all, Biden said he’s convinced the country is still with him — even if they don’t tell that to pollsters.

“I don’t believe the polls,” he said.

## Supreme Court allows Jan. 6 committee to get Trump documents

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a rebuff to former President Donald Trump, the Supreme Court is allowing the

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release of presidential documents sought by the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection.

The justices on Wednesday rejected a bid by Trump to withhold the documents from the committee until the issue is finally resolved by the courts. Trump's lawyers had hoped to prolong the court fight and keep the documents on hold.

Following the high court's action, there is no legal impediment to turning over the documents, which are held by the National Archives and Records Administration. They include presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts and handwritten notes dealing with Jan. 6 from the files of former chief of staff Mark Meadows.

The committee already has begun to receive records Trump wanted kept secret, said Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., and Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the committee chairman and vice chairwoman, respectively.

"The Supreme Court's action tonight is a victory for the rule of law and American democracy," Thompson and Cheney said in a statement pledging to "uncover all the facts about the violence of January 6th and its causes."

White House spokesman Mike Gwin called the ruling "an important step forward" for the investigation, "and in ensuring accountability for an unprecedented assault on our democracy and the rule of law."

The House committee agreed to defer its attempt to get some documents, at the request of the Biden White House. The current administration was concerned that releasing all of the Trump administration documents sought by the committee could compromise national security and executive privilege.

Alone among the justices, Clarence Thomas said he would have granted Trump's request to keep the documents on hold.

Trump's attorneys had asked the high court to reverse rulings by the federal appeals court in Washington and block the release of the records even after President Joe Biden waived executive privilege over them.

In an unsigned opinion, the court acknowledged there are "serious and substantial concerns" over whether a former president can win a court order to prevent disclosure of certain records from his time in office in a situation like this one.

But the court noted that the appeals court determined that Trump's assertion of privilege over the documents would fail under any circumstances, "even if he were the incumbent."

It said the issue of a former president's ability to claim executive privilege would have to wait for another day.

The court took issue with the conclusion of the appeals court that downplayed a former president's interests, suggesting that the current president could in essence ignore his predecessor's claims.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who worked in the White House under President George W. Bush, wrote separately to argue that "a former President must be able to successfully invoke the Presidential communications privilege for communications that occurred during his Presidency, even if the current President does not support the privilege claim."

But Kavanaugh, a Trump appointee, did not object to the outcome Wednesday, and neither did the other two justices Trump selected, Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett.

Before and after the riot, Trump promoted false theories about election fraud and suggested the "real insurrection" was on Election Day, when he lost to Biden.

Repeating arguments they made before lower courts, Trump's attorneys had urged the justices to step in, arguing that the case concerned all future occupants of the White House. Former presidents had "a clear right to protect their confidential records from premature dissemination," Trump's lawyers said.

"Congress cannot engage in meandering fishing expeditions in the hopes of embarrassing President Trump or exposing the President's and his staff's sensitive and privileged communications for the sake of exposure," they added.

But the House committee responded in its high court brief that although the facts of the case are "unprecedented," the decision was "not a difficult one."

There was no explanation for the timing of the court's action. But the National Archives told the appeals court and Trump's lawyers that it would turn over some documents it asserted were not part of the court

case on Wednesday absent a new court order.

Also on Wednesday, the House committee investigating the Capitol insurrection issued subpoenas to leaders of an alt-right group who appeared at events promoting baseless claims of voter fraud after the 2020 election.

The committee demanded records and testimony from Nick Fuentes and Patrick Casey — internet personalities who have promoted white supremacist beliefs — regarding what lawmakers say is their promotion of unsupported claims about the election and their presence on Capitol grounds on Jan. 6, 2021.

Since its creation last summer, the committee has interviewed almost 350 people as it seeks to create a comprehensive record of the attack and the events leading up to it.

## **Biden approval hits new low at one year mark: AP-NORC poll**

By AAMER MADHANI and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden ends his first year in the White House with a clear majority of Americans for the first time disapproving of his handling of the presidency in the face of an unrelenting pandemic and roaring inflation, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

More Americans disapprove than approve of how Biden is handling his job as president, 56% to 43%. As of now, just 28% of Americans say they want Biden to run for re-election in 2024, including only 48% of Democrats.

Asked on Wednesday at a wide-ranging news conference about his flagging popularity, Biden responded, "I don't believe the polls."

It's a stark reversal from early in Biden's presidency.

In July, 59% of Americans said they approved of Biden's job performance in an AP-NORC poll. His approval rating dipped to 50% by late September in the aftermath of the chaotic and bloody U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan and amid surging coronavirus infections and the administration's fitful efforts to push economic, infrastructure and tax policies through Congress.

The latest poll shows that Americans' confidence in Biden's handling of the pandemic — seen as a strength early in his administration — has further eroded as the omicron variant strains the health care system and further exhausts an American electorate that had hoped life would be back to a semblance of normalcy by now.

Just 45% say they approve of Biden's handling of COVID-19, down from 57% in December and from 66% in July 2021.

Americans are even more downbeat about his handling of the economy, with just 37% approving. Growing angst about his economic policies comes as inflation rose at its fastest pace in nearly 40 years last month, a 7% spike from a year earlier that is increasing household expenses and eating into wage gains.

Joyce Bowen, 61, of Knoxville, Tennessee, said Biden deserves credit for encouraging Americans to get vaccinated, but she expressed frustration about the administration's response to soaring inflation.

The part-time cleaner at a public library said she and her older brother, who she helps support, have been eating less meat to offset rising grocery costs and intermittent spikes at the gas pump that have whittled the purchasing power of her \$754 biweekly paycheck.

"It's just hard to keep food on the table and gas in the tank," said Bowen, who voted for Biden but said she'd prefer he didn't run again in 2024.

Only about a quarter were very confident that Biden "has the mental capability to serve effectively as president" or "is healthy enough to serve effectively as president." Close to half are not confident in Biden's mental capability or health.

Asked by a reporter at Wednesday's news conference about other polling that shows a significant percentage of Americans had concerns about Biden's mental health, the president shrugged off those findings.

Gary Cameron, 66, of Midwest City, Oklahoma, said the president's verbal gaffes and age — at 79 Biden is the oldest U.S. president in history — don't give him confidence that Biden has the skill or energy to

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pull the country out of its malaise.

"Whenever he does a speech on television, in your mind, you're thinking 'God, is this guy even going to get through this this speech?'" said Cameron, an independent who voted for Donald Trump in 2020.

Other respondents said that Biden's age — and life experience that's come with it — has proven to be an asset.

Nicole Jensen-Oost, 79, of Plano, Texas, said that Biden has demonstrated leadership and empathy through the pandemic by speaking of his own personal grief.

Biden frequently raises the deaths of his first wife and a daughter in a 1972 car crash as well as the loss of an adult son who died of cancer as he has sought to reassure Americans who have lost loved ones to the virus.

"This man has heart," said Jensen-Oost, a Democrat and among the minority of respondents who said Biden is healthy enough to serve effectively as president. "He's compassionate and the country needs that right now. We didn't see a lot of compassion in the previous four years."

The poll shows only about a quarter of Americans think the phrase "strong leader" describes Biden very well, while about that many say it's a somewhat good description. Roughly half say he is not a strong leader. Views of Biden's understanding of "the needs and problems of people like you" are similar.

Just 16% think Biden's presidency has made the country more united; 43% think it's more divided.

Harlan Epstein, of Cleveland, didn't vote for Biden but was hopeful that the 46th president, who sold himself to American voters as a consensus builder, would govern from the ideological middle.

But Epstein, an independent, said Biden's push for a \$2 trillion climate and social services spending bill and his effort to force larger employers to require their workers to get vaccinated or undergo regular testing have undercut Biden's centrist reputation.

"He's got to tamp down his far-left wing and start focusing on moderate policies," Epstein said.

Some on the left have also been frustrated with Biden.

The president's first-year legislative victories included passage of a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package and a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill, but he failed to win passage of his signature domestic spending initiative.

Zachary Lindahl, 34, of Raleigh, North Carolina, said he was disappointed that Biden has been unable to pass the spending package dubbed "Build Back Better," as Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona balk at the costs and scope.

"It started off well with them passing the \$1,400 checks," said Lindahl, referring to stimulus payments that were part of the coronavirus relief package passed early in Biden's term. "But as time went on, it's been just more of the status quo. Any big idea, they are willing to compromise it down until there is no longer anything there."

Not all is lost for Biden: Many continue to be at least somewhat positive toward the president, his character and his governing.

The new AP-NORC poll shows Biden is in a better position than Trump was at a similar point in his presidency. In February of 2018, just 35% of Americans said they approved of Trump,

Overall, though, 28% of Americans say they have "a great deal of confidence" in Biden to effectively manage the White House, down from 44% who said that one year ago, just after Biden took office. Another 33% say they have some confidence, while 38% say they have hardly any confidence in Biden to manage the executive branch.

Rev. Joseph Courtney, 32, an Episcopal chaplain in Los Angeles, said that Biden in some ways has been pretty much the president he expected, bringing a measure of confidence to the electorate by empowering experts and scientists in the country's battle against the health and economic crises caused by the pandemic.

But Courtney said that Biden has yet to deliver on his promise to build consensus with Republicans or even some of the more conservative lawmakers in his Democratic party. Biden on the campaign trail said that his experience over 36 years in the Senate — and eight years as vice president — would help him rebuild Washington's "broken" politics.

"He just keeps getting railroaded time and time again," Courtney said. "I don't understand specifically

what he's adding to the presidency that would make me want to support him running another term."

## **EXPLAINER: What are US military options to help Ukraine?**

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is not planning to answer a further Russian invasion of Ukraine by sending combat troops. But he could pursue a range of less dramatic yet still risky military options, including supporting a post-invasion Ukrainian resistance.

The rationale for not directly joining a Russia-Ukraine war is simple. The United States has no treaty obligation to Ukraine, and war with Russia would be an enormous gamble, given its potential for expanding in Europe, destabilizing the region, and escalating to the frightening point of risking a nuclear exchange.

Doing too little has its risks, too. It might suggest an acquiescence to future Russian moves against other countries in eastern Europe, such as the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, although as NATO members those three have security assurances from the United States and the rest of the alliance.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is in Europe this week to speak with officials in Ukraine, consult NATO allies and then meet Friday with his Russian counterpart, has asserted "an unshakable U.S. commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity." But he has not publicly defined the limits of that commitment.

How far, then, might the United States and its allies go to help Ukraine defend itself if the buildup of Russian forces along Ukraine's borders leads to an invasion?

### **WHY NOT CONTEST A RUSSIAN INVASION?**

Going to war against Russia in Ukraine could tie up U.S. forces and resources for years and take a heavy toll in lives with an uncertain outcome at a time when the Biden administration is trying to focus on China as the chief security threat.

On Wednesday, Biden said it was his "guess" that Russian President Vladimir Putin will end up sending forces into Ukraine, although he also said he doesn't think Putin wants all-out war. Biden did not address the possibility of putting U.S. ground troops in Ukraine to stop an invasion, but he previously had ruled that out.

Biden said he is uncertain how Putin will use the forces he has assembled near Ukraine's border, but the United States and NATO have rejected what Moscow calls its main demand — a guarantee that the Western alliance will not expand further eastward. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 after the ouster of Ukraine's Moscow-friendly leader and also intervened in eastern Ukraine that year to support a separatist insurgency. More than 14,000 people have been killed in nearly eight years of fighting there.

The stakes in Ukraine are high — militarily and politically. Lawmakers have intensified their criticism of Biden's approach to Putin. Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, accused Biden of "handwringing and appeasement," but he has not urged sending combat troops. Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, called for an urgent "nonstop airlift" of military equipment and trainers into Ukraine.

Philip Breedlove, a retired Air Force general who served as the top NATO commander in Europe from 2013 to 2016, said in an interview he does not expect or recommend that the United States send combat troops into Ukraine. Instead, Washington and its allies should be looking for ways to help Ukraine defend its own airspace and territorial waters, where it faces overwhelming Russian superiority, he said.

"Those are things we should be considering as an alliance and as a nation," he said. "If Mr. Putin is allowed to invade Ukraine and there were to be little or no consequence, we will see more of the same."

### **WHAT ARE BIDEN'S OTHER OPTIONS?**

Given its clear military inferiority, Ukraine could not prevent Russian forces from invading. But with help from the United States and others, Ukraine might deter Putin from acting if he were convinced that the costs would be too high.

"The key to thwarting Russian ambitions is to prevent Moscow from having a quick victory and to raise the economic, political, and military costs by imposing economic sanctions, ensuring political isolation

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from the West, and raising the prospect of a prolonged insurgency that grinds away the Russian military,” Seth Jones, a political scientist, and Philip Wasielewski, a former CIA paramilitary officer, wrote in a Jan. 13 analysis for the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The Biden administration has suggested it is thinking along similar lines.

**HOW IS THE U.S. SUPPORTING UKRAINE’S MILITARY NOW?**

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby says there are about 200 National Guard soldiers in Ukraine to train and advise local forces, and on Tuesday he said there are no plans to augment their number. There also are an undisclosed number of U.S. special operations troops providing training in Ukraine. Kirby wouldn’t say whether the U.S. soldiers would pull out in the event of a Russian invasion, but he said the Pentagon would “make all the appropriate and proper decisions to make sure our people are safe in any event.”

The administration said Wednesday it is providing a further \$200 million in defensive military aid to Ukraine. Since 2014 the United States has provided Ukraine with about \$2.5 billion in defense assistance, including anti-tank missiles and radars.

**HOW MIGHT THE U.S. HELP UKRAINE AFTER AN INVASION?**

It’s not clear. National security adviser Jake Sullivan said last week that the U.S. would “dramatically ramp up” support for Ukraine’s “territorial integrity and sovereignty.” But he did not spell out how that might be done.

The administration says it also is open to sending military reinforcements to NATO allies on the eastern front who want American reassurance.

Jones and Wasielewski say that in addition to implementing severe sanctions against Russia in the event of an invasion, the United States should provide Ukraine with a broad range of military assistance at no cost. This would include air defense, anti-tank and anti-ship systems; electronic warfare and cyber defense systems; small arms and artillery ammunition, and other items.

“The United States and NATO should be prepared to offer long-term support to Ukraine’s resistance no matter what form it ends up taking,” they wrote. This aid could be delivered overtly with the help of U.S. troops, including special operations forces, or it could be a CIA-led covert action authorized by President Biden, they added.

That would carry the risk of putting U.S. personnel in the line of fire — and drawing the United States into the very combat it’s determined to avoid.

## **Voting bill collapses, Democrats unable to change filibuster**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Voting legislation that Democrats and civil rights leaders say is vital to protecting democracy collapsed late Wednesday when two senators refused to join their own party in changing Senate rules to overcome a Republican filibuster after a raw, emotional debate.

The outcome was a stinging defeat for President Joe Biden and his party, coming at the tumultuous close to his first year in office.

Despite a day of piercing debate and speeches that often carried echoes of an earlier era when the Senate filibuster was deployed by opponents of civil rights legislation, Democrats could not persuade holdout senators Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia to change the Senate procedures on this one bill and allow a simple majority to advance it.

“I am profoundly disappointed,” Biden said in a statement after the vote.

However, the president said he is “not deterred” and vowed to “explore every measure and use every tool at our disposal to stand up for democracy.”

Voting rights advocates are warning that Republican-led states nationwide are passing laws making it more difficult for Black Americans and others to vote by consolidating polling locations, requiring certain types of identification and ordering other changes.

Vice President Kamala Harris briefly presided over the Senate, able to break a tie in the 50-50 Senate if needed, but she left before the final vote. The rules change was rejected 52-48, with Manchin and Sinema

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joining the Republicans in opposition.

The nighttime voting brought an end, for now, to legislation that has been a top Democratic priority since the party took control of Congress and the White House.

"This is a moral moment," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga.

The Democrats' bill, the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act, would make Election Day a national holiday, ensure access to early voting and mail-in ballots — which have become especially popular during the COVID-19 pandemic — and enable the Justice Department to intervene in states with a history of voter interference, among other changes. It has passed the House.

Both Manchin and Sinema say they support the legislation, but Democrats fell far short of the 60 votes needed to push the bill over the Republican filibuster. It failed to advance 51-49 on a largely party-line vote. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., cast a procedural vote against so the bill could be considered later.

Next, Schumer put forward a rules change for a "talking filibuster" on this one bill. It would require senators to stand at their desks and exhaust the debate before holding a simple majority vote, rather than the current practice that simply allows senators to privately signal their objections.

But that, too, failed because Manchin and Sinema were unwilling to change the Senate rules a party-line vote by Democrats alone.

Emotions were on display during the floor debate.

When Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., asked Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky whether he would pause for a question, McConnell left the chamber, refusing to respond.

Durbin said he would have asked McConnell, "Does he really believe that there's no evidence of voter suppression?"

The No. 2 Republican, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, said at one point, "I am not a racist."

McConnell, who led his party in doing away with the filibuster's 60-vote threshold for Supreme Court nominees during Donald Trump's presidency, warned against changing the rules again.

McConnell derided the "fake hysteria" from Democrats over the states' new voting laws and called the pending bill a federal takeover of election systems. He admonished Democrats in a fiery speech and said doing away with filibuster rules would "break the Senate."

Manchin drew a roomful of senators for his own speech, upstaging the president's news conference and defending the filibuster. He said changing to a majority-rule Senate would only add to the "dysfunction that is tearing this nation apart."

Several members of the Congressional Black Caucus walked across the Capitol for the proceedings. "We want this Senate to act today in a favorable way. But if it don't, we ain't giving up," said Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., the highest-ranking Black member of Congress.

Manchin did open the door to a more tailored package of voting law changes, including to the Electoral Count Act, which was tested during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol. He said senators from both parties are working on that and it could draw Republican support.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said a bipartisan coalition should work on legislation to ensure voter access, particularly in far-flung areas like her state, and to shore up Americans' faith in democracy.

"We don't need, we do not need a repeat of 2020 when by all accounts our last president, having lost the election, sought to change the results," said Murkowski.

She said the Senate debate had declined to a troubling state: "You're either a racist or a hypocrite. Really, really? Is that where we are?"

At one point, senators broke out in applause after a spirited debate between Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, among the more experienced lawmakers, and new Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., over the history of the Voting Rights Act.

Sinema sat in her chair throughout much of the day's the debate, largely glued to her phone, but rose to her feet to deliver her vote against the rules change.

In a statement, Sinema said the outcome "must not be the end of our work to protect our democracy."



But she warned, "these challenges cannot be solved by one party or Washington alone."

Schumer contended the fight is not over and he ridiculed Republican claims that the new election laws in the states will not end up hurting voter access and turnout, comparing it to Trump's "big lie" about the 2020 presidential election.

Democrats decided to press ahead despite the potential for high-stakes defeat as Biden is marking his first year in office with his priorities stalling out in the face of solid Republican opposition and the Democrats' inability to unite around their own goals. They wanted to force senators on the record — even their own party's holdouts — to show voters where they stand.

Once reluctant himself to change Senate rules, Biden has stepped up his pressure on senators to do just that. But the push from the White House, including Biden's blistering speech last week in Atlanta comparing opponents to segregationists, is seen as too late.

## **EXPLAINER: The federal charges against 3 cops in Floyd death**

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Three former officers who were with Derek Chauvin during the arrest that led to George Floyd's death face federal trial this week on charges they violated the Black man's civil rights. Jury selection begins Thursday in the federal case against J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

Floyd, 46, died on May 20, 2020, after Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd's neck and pinned him to the street for 9 1/2 minutes as he was facedown and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down Floyd's legs. Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

### THE FEDERAL CHARGES

Kueng, Lane and Thao are broadly accused of willfully depriving Floyd of his constitutional rights while acting under "color of law," or government authority. Chauvin pleaded guilty to one count of violating Floyd's civil rights and will not be on trial with his former colleagues.

Thao and Kueng are charged with willfully violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Chauvin. The indictment says they knew what Chauvin was doing and that Floyd was handcuffed, unresisting and eventually unresponsive. It's not clear why Lane, who held Floyd's legs, is not mentioned in that count, but evidence shows he asked twice whether Floyd should be rolled on his side.

Kueng, Lane and Thao are all charged with willfully depriving Floyd of his liberty without due process, specifically depriving him of the right to be free from an officer's deliberate indifference to his medical needs. The indictment says the three men saw Floyd needed medical care and willfully failed to aid him.

Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

### HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE STATE CASE?

The three officers are also charged in state court with aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter. State prosecutors must prove the officers helped Chauvin commit murder or manslaughter, while federal prosecutors must show they violated Floyd's rights, essentially by failing to intervene or provide medical help.

Mark Osler, a former federal prosecutor and now a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, drew this distinction: The state case is about what the officers did, and the federal case is about what they didn't do.

The state trial is scheduled to begin June 13.

### RARE PROSECUTIONS

To bring federal charges in deaths involving police, prosecutors must believe that an officer acted under the "color of law," or government authority, and willfully deprived someone of their constitutional rights, including the right to be free from unreasonable seizures or the use of unreasonable force. That's a high legal standard; an accident, bad judgment or simple negligence on the officer's part isn't enough to support federal charges.

Essentially, prosecutors must prove that the officers knew what they were doing was wrong but did it

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anyway.

Historically, federal charges have been brought after a state case was unsuccessful, Phil Turner, another former federal prosecutor, said. He pointed to the 1991 police beating of Rodney King as an example. After the Los Angeles officers were acquitted in state court, federal charges were brought "because the state system failed and it was obvious to everyone that it was a miscarriage of justice," Turner said. Two of the four officers were ultimately convicted in federal court.

Most of the high-profile fatal shootings by police in recent years have not resulted in federal charges, though activists have called for them. An exception is the case of Michael Slager, a white South Carolina police officer who fatally shot Walter Scott in the back as the unarmed, 50-year-old Black man ran from a 2015 traffic stop.

Slager's state murder case ended with a hung jury and mistrial in 2016. A year later, he pleaded guilty in federal court to violating Scott's civil rights; prosecutors dropped state murder charges. Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Over the last 20 years, several corrections officers have been convicted of violating the civil rights of inmates who have died after they were denied medical care — sometimes after an assault. The allegation involving deprivation of medical care is similar to the count all three former Minneapolis officers face in Floyd's death.

## WHAT SENTENCE COULD THEY FACE?

Federal civil rights violations that result in death are punishable by up to life in prison or even death, but those sentences are extremely rare. Federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that indicate the officers would get much less if convicted.

## NCAA adopts new policy for transgender athletes

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA has adopted a sport-by-sport approach for transgender athletes, bringing the organization in line with the U.S. and International Olympic Committees.

Under the new guidelines, approved by the NCAA Board of Governors on Wednesday, transgender participation for each sport will be determined by the policy for the sport's national governing body, subject to review and recommendation by an NCAA committee to the Board of Governors.

When there is no national governing body, that sport's international federation policy would be in place. If there is no international federation policy, previously established IOC policy criteria would take over.

"Approximately 80% of U.S. Olympians are either current or former college athletes," NCAA President Mark Emmert said in a release. "This policy alignment provides consistency and further strengthens the relationship between college sports and the U.S. Olympics."

The NCAA policy is effective immediately, beginning with the 2022 winter championships.

NCAA rules on transgender athletes returned to the forefront when Penn swimmer Lia Thomas started smashing records this year. She was on the men's team her first three years, but she is competing for the women this season after transitioning.

The Board of Governors is suggesting NCAA divisions allow for additional eligibility if a transgender student-athlete loses eligibility based on the policy change. That flexibility is provided they meet the NCAA's new guidelines.

"We are steadfast in our support of transgender student-athletes and the fostering of fairness across college sports," Georgetown President John DeGioia said in a release. "It is important that NCAA member schools, conferences and college athletes compete in an inclusive, fair, safe and respectful environment and can move forward with a clear understanding of the new policy."

## Jury selection to start in federal trial over Floyd's death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Jury selection is scheduled to begin Thursday in the federal trial for three former Minneapolis police officers who are charged with violating George Floyd's constitutional rights while fellow

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Officer Derek Chauvin used his knee to pin the Black man to the street.

J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are broadly charged with depriving Floyd of his civil rights while acting under government authority. Separately, they are charged in state court with aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter.

Legal experts say the federal trial will be more complicated than the state trial, scheduled for June 13, because prosecutors in this case have the difficult task of proving the officers willfully violated Floyd's constitutional rights — unreasonably seizing him and depriving him of liberty without due process.

"In the state case, they're charged with what they did. That they aided and abetted Chauvin in some way. In the federal case, they're charged with what they didn't do — and that's an important distinction. It's a different kind of accountability," said Mark Osler, a former federal prosecutor and professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law.

As Phil Turner, another former federal prosecutor, put it, prosecutors must show the officers should have done something to stop Chauvin, rather than show they did something directly to Floyd.

Would-be jurors have already answered an extensive questionnaire. Starting Thursday, they will be brought into a federal courtroom in St. Paul, where U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson will question them in groups. The process will continue until a group of 40 is chosen. Then, each side will get to use their challenges to strike jurors. In the end, 18 jurors will be picked, including 12 who will deliberate and six alternates.

Magnuson said he thought the process could be done in two days, unlike the state trial for Chauvin, where the judge and attorneys questioned each juror individually and spent more than two weeks picking a panel.

Floyd, 46, died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin pinned him to the ground with his knee on Floyd's neck for 9 1/2 minutes while Floyd was facedown, handcuffed and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back and Lane held down his legs. Thao kept bystanders from intervening.

Chauvin was convicted in April on state charges of murder and manslaughter and is serving a 22½-year sentence. In December, he pleaded guilty to a federal count of violating Floyd's rights.

Federal prosecutions of officers involved in on-duty killings are rare. Prosecutors face a high legal standard to show that an officer willfully deprived someone of their constitutional rights; an accident, bad judgment or negligence isn't enough to support federal charges.

Essentially, prosecutors must prove that the officers knew what they were doing was wrong, but did it anyway.

Kueng, Lane and Thao are all charged with willfully depriving Floyd of the right to be free from an officer's deliberate indifference to his medical needs. The indictment says the three men saw Floyd clearly needed medical care and failed to aid him.

Thao and Kueng are also charged with a second count alleging they willfully violated Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not stopping Chauvin as he knelt on Floyd's neck. It's not clear why Lane is not mentioned in that count, but evidence shows he asked twice whether Floyd should be rolled on his side.

Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

Federal civil rights violations that result in death are punishable by up to life in prison or even death, but those stiff sentences are extremely rare and federal sentencing guidelines rely on complicated formulas that indicate the officers would get much less if convicted.

"This trial is going to present an evolutionary step beyond what we saw at the Chauvin trial because we're not looking at the killer, but the people who enable the killer. And that gets a step closer to the culture of the department," Osler said.

## Airlines cancel some flights after reduced 5G rollout in US

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Some flights to and from the U.S. were canceled on Wednesday even after AT&T and

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Verizon scaled back the rollout of high-speed wireless service that could interfere with aircraft technology that measures altitude.

International carriers that rely heavily on the wide-body Boeing 777, and other Boeing aircraft, canceled early flights or switched to different planes following warnings from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Chicago-based plane maker.

Airlines that fly only or mostly Airbus jets, including Air France and Ireland's Aer Lingus, seemed less affected by the new 5G service.

Airlines had canceled more than 320 flights by Wednesday evening, or a little over 2% of the U.S. total, according to FlightAware. That was far less disruptive than during the Christmas and New Year's travel season, when a peak of 3,200, or 13%, of flights were canceled on Jan. 3 due to winter storms and workers out sick with COVID-19.

A trade group for the industry, Airlines for America, said cancellations weren't as bad as feared because AT&T and Verizon agreed to temporarily reduce the rollout of 5G near dozens of airports while industry and the government work out a longer-term solution.

At O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Sudeep Bhabad said his father-in-law's flight to India was cancelled.

"They have to resolve this problem," Bhabad said. "It would have been a lot better if they had resolved it way before and we knew this in advance, instead of, like, finding out when we are here at the airport."

Similar mobile networks have been deployed in more than three dozen countries, but there are key differences in how the U.S. networks are designed that raised concern of potential problems for airlines.

The Verizon and AT&T networks use a segment of the radio spectrum that is close to the one used by radio altimeters, devices that measure the height of aircraft above the ground to help pilots land in low visibility. The Federal Communications Commission, which set a buffer between the frequencies used by 5G and altimeters, said the wireless service posed no risk to aviation.

But FAA officials saw a potential problem, and the telecom companies agreed to delay their rollout near more than 80 airports while the agency assesses which aircraft are safe to fly near 5G and which will need new altimeters.

The FAA gave approval Wednesday for more types of planes to land in low visibility near 5G signals, including the Boeing 777. By evening, however, nearly 40% of the U.S. airline fleet was still waiting to be cleared. That percentage was expected to shrink as the FAA continued to review other planes and altimeters.

"I assume whatever process they are using could be used to clear the rest," said Randall Berry, a professor of electrical engineering at Northwestern University.

The FAA says there are several reasons why the 5G rollout has been more of a challenge for airlines in the U.S. than in other countries: Cellular towers use a more powerful signal strength than those elsewhere; the 5G network operates on a frequency closer to the one many altimeters use, and cell tower antennae point up at a higher angle. A telecom industry group, CTIA, disputes the FAA's claims.

Some experts say poor coordination and cooperation among federal agencies is as much to blame as any technical issues.

"The fights around this from federal agencies have just gotten more and more intense," said Harold Feld, an expert on telecom policy at the advocacy group Public Knowledge.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency said it wasn't aware of any problems on the continent caused by 5G interference. To mitigate airline interference, French telecom providers reduce the strength of their high-speed networks near airports.

Boeing Co. said in a statement it would work with airlines, the FAA and others to ensure that all planes can fly safely as 5G is rolled out.

In the meantime, airlines scrambled to adjust to the new reality.

Emirates, which relies heavily on the 777, halted flights to several American cities on Wednesday, but maintained service to Los Angeles, New York and Washington.

"We hope to resume our U.S. services as soon as possible," the state-owned airline said.

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Tim Clark, president of Emirates, told CNN it was "one of the most delinquent, utterly irresponsible" situations he'd ever seen as it involved a failure by government, science and industry.

Japan's All Nippon Airways canceled 20 flights to cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, while Japan Airlines said eight of its flights were affected Wednesday.

Air India said on Twitter it would cancel flights to Chicago, Newark, New York and San Francisco because of the 5G issue. But it also said it would try to use other aircraft on U.S. routes — a course several other airlines took.

Korean Air, Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific and Austrian Airlines said they substituted different planes for flights that were scheduled to use 777s. Germany's Lufthansa swapped out one kind of 747 for another on some U.S.-bound flights.

American Airlines Chief Operating Officer David Seymour said in a memo to staff that the carrier canceled four flights while it awaited FAA approval of equipment on its Airbus aircraft.

Choi Jong-yun, a spokeswoman of Asiana Airlines, which uses Airbus planes for flights to the U.S., said it hadn't been affected so far.

FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement that the 5G "deployment can safely co-exist with aviation technologies in the United States, just as it does in other countries around the world." However, she urged the FAA to conduct its safety checks with "both care and speed."

## Supreme Court allows Jan. 6 committee to get Trump documents

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a rebuff to former President Donald Trump, the Supreme Court is allowing the release of presidential documents sought by the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection.

The justices on Wednesday rejected a bid by Trump to withhold the documents from the committee until the issue is finally resolved by the courts. Trump's lawyers had hoped to prolong the court fight and keep the documents on hold.

Following the high court's action, there is no legal impediment to turning over the documents, which are held by the National Archives and Records Administration. They include presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts and handwritten notes dealing with Jan. 6 from the files of former chief of staff Mark Meadows.

The committee already has begun to receive records Trump wanted kept secret, said Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., and Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the committee chairman and vice chairwoman, respectively.

"The Supreme Court's action tonight is a victory for the rule of law and American democracy," Thompson and Cheney said in a statement pledging to "uncover all the facts about the violence of January 6th and its causes."

White House spokesman Mike Gwin called the ruling "an important step forward" for the investigation, "and in ensuring accountability for an unprecedented assault on our democracy and the rule of law."

The House committee agreed to defer its attempt to get some documents, at the request of the Biden White House. The current administration was concerned that releasing all of the Trump administration documents sought by the committee could compromise national security and executive privilege.

Alone among the justices, Clarence Thomas said he would have granted Trump's request to keep the documents on hold.

Trump's attorneys had asked the high court to reverse rulings by the federal appeals court in Washington and block the release of the records even after President Joe Biden waived executive privilege over them.

In an unsigned opinion, the court acknowledged there are "serious and substantial concerns" over whether a former president can win a court order to prevent disclosure of certain records from his time in office in a situation like this one.

But the court noted that the appeals court determined that Trump's assertion of privilege over the documents would fail under any circumstances, "even if he were the incumbent."

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It said the issue of a former president's ability to claim executive privilege would have to wait for another day.

The court took issue with the conclusion of the appeals court that downplayed a former president's interests, suggesting that the current president could in essence ignore his predecessor's claims.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who worked in the White House under President George W. Bush, wrote separately to argue that "a former President must be able to successfully invoke the Presidential communications privilege for communications that occurred during his Presidency, even if the current President does not support the privilege claim."

But Kavanaugh, a Trump appointee, did not object to the outcome Wednesday, and neither did the other two justices Trump selected, Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett.

Before and after the riot, Trump promoted false theories about election fraud and suggested the "real insurrection" was on Election Day, when he lost to Biden.

Repeating arguments they made before lower courts, Trump's attorneys had urged the justices to step in, arguing that the case concerned all future occupants of the White House. Former presidents had "a clear right to protect their confidential records from premature dissemination," Trump's lawyers said.

"Congress cannot engage in meandering fishing expeditions in the hopes of embarrassing President Trump or exposing the President's and his staff's sensitive and privileged communications 'for the sake of exposure,'" they added.

But the House committee responded in its high court brief that although the facts of the case are "unprecedented," the decision was "not a difficult one."

There was no explanation for the timing of the court's action. But the National Archives told the appeals court and Trump's lawyers that it would turn over some documents it asserted were not part of the court case on Wednesday absent a new court order.

Also on Wednesday, the House committee investigating the Capitol insurrection issued subpoenas to leaders of an alt-right group who appeared at events promoting baseless claims of voter fraud after the 2020 election.

The committee demanded records and testimony from Nick Fuentes and Patrick Casey — internet personalities who have promoted white supremacist beliefs — regarding what lawmakers say is their promotion of unsupported claims about the election and their presence on Capitol grounds on Jan. 6, 2021.

Since its creation last summer, the committee has interviewed almost 350 people as it seeks to create a comprehensive record of the attack and the events leading up to it.

## **Biden says nation weary from COVID but rising with him in WH**

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden acknowledged Wednesday that the pandemic has left Americans exhausted and demoralized but insisted at a news conference marking his first year in office that he has "outperformed" expectations in dealing with it.

Facing sagging poll numbers and a stalled legislative agenda, Biden conceded he would likely have to pare back his "build back better" recovery package and instead settle for "big chunks" of his signature economic plan. He promised to further attack inflation and the pandemic and blamed Republicans for uniting in opposition to his proposals rather than offering ideas of their own.

This is a perilous time for Biden: The nation is gripped by a disruptive new surge of virus cases, and inflation is at a level not seen in a generation. Democrats are bracing for a potential midterm rout if he can't turn things around.

Biden insisted that voters will come to embrace a more positive view of his tenure — and of his beleaguered party — in time. His appeal to voters for patience came with a pledge to spend more time outside Washington to make the case to them directly.

Biden also addressed the brewing crisis on the Ukraine border, where Russia has massed some 100,000 troops and raised concerns that Moscow is ready to launch a further invasion.

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The president said his "guess" is Russia may move further but he believes President Vladimir Putin doesn't want full-blown war. He declared Russia would pay a "dear price" if Putin launches a military incursion.

"He has to do something," Biden said of Putin. "He is trying to find his place in the world between China and the West."

Biden suggested a "minor incursion" might elicit a lesser response than a full-scale invasion of the country, a comment that drew immediate condemnation from some corners.

"President Biden basically gave Putin a green light to invade Ukraine by yammering about the supposed insignificance of a 'minor incursion,'" said Republican Sen. Ben Sasse.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki indicated in a subsequent statement that that wasn't necessarily about tanks and troops.

"President Biden also knows from long experience that the Russians have an extensive playbook of aggression short of military action, including cyberattacks and paramilitary tactics. And he affirmed today that those acts of Russian aggression will be met with a decisive, reciprocal, and united response," she said.

Biden held forth for 1 hour and 50 minutes in the East Room of the White House, appearing to relish the opportunity to parry questions from two dozen journalists with doses of wit and a few flashes of anger. At several points, he looked at his watch, smiled and kept calling on reporters.

He fielded questions about inflation, nuclear talks with Iran, voting rights, political division, Vice President Kamala Harris' place on the 2024 ticket, trade with China and the competency of government. Those questions showed the multitude of challenges confronting the president, each of them as much a risk as an opportunity to prove himself.

The president began by reeling off early progress in fighting the virus and showcasing quick passage of an ambitious bipartisan roads-and-bridges infrastructure deal. But his economic, voting rights, police reform and immigration agenda have all been thwarted in a barely Democratic-controlled Senate, while inflation has emerged as an economic threat to the nation and a political risk for Biden.

Despite his faltering approval numbers, Biden claimed to have "probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen" in a country still coping with the coronavirus.

"After almost two years of physical, emotional and psychological impact of this pandemic, for many of us, it's been too much to bear," Biden said.

"Some people may call what's happening now 'the new normal,'" he added, his voice rising. "I call it a job not yet finished. It will get better."

On his nearly \$2 trillion economic agenda that West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin has blocked from moving forward, Biden said he'll pass the parts of the package that can net sufficient votes. This likely means not extending the expanded child tax credit or providing financial support to community colleges, Biden said.

"I think we can break the package up, get as much as we can now, come back and fight for the rest," he said, later adding that he would apply the same strategy to his voting reform agenda.

The social spending bill was once viewed as a catch-all home for various progressive priorities, but now Democrats are sensing a need to deliver a solid accomplishment to voters in the midterm year and are beginning to come to terms with a slimmed-down package that can overcome Manchin's reticence.

The White House and congressional Democratic leaders are expected to refocus their attention on it beginning next week, after the all-but-certain collapse of the Democrats' push on voting rights legislation. Talks to craft a new bill that meets Manchin's demands and can garner the virtually unanimous Democratic support needed to pass Congress will likely take weeks.

The Democrats' goal is to have a package — or be on the cusp of one — that Biden can highlight in his March 1 State of the Union address.

If Biden seemed to have one set of regrets so far, it was his inability because of the coronavirus to connect with more Americans outside the capital. He noted that this challenge was most acutely felt by Black voters who wanted him to push more aggressively on expanding access to voting.

"I don't get a chance to look people in the eye because of both COVID and things that are happening in Washington," he said.

Speaking as Democrats were mounting a doomed effort to change Senate rules to pass the voting

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measure, Biden said he still hoped that it would pass in some form and wasn't prepared yet to discuss possible executive actions on the issue. The vote spotlighted the constraints on Biden's influence barely a week after he delivered an impassioned speech in Atlanta suggesting opponents of the measures were taking a historical stance alongside segregationists and exhorting senators to action.

Still, he said he understood that civil rights groups were anxious and frustrated about the lack of action, particularly Black voters who question why he didn't press the issue harder and earlier.

There are at least 19 Republican-backed laws in states that make it harder to vote, and Jan. 6 insurrection supporters are filling local election posts and running for office.

It was Biden's seventh solo news conference as president. The ongoing threat from the coronavirus was evident in the setup of Wednesday's gathering: A limited number of reporters were allowed to attend and all had to have been tested for the virus and wear masks.

The president used the event to pay heed to growing anxiety about rising prices. Staring down an inflation rate that has gone from 1.7% at his inauguration to 7%, he called on the Federal Reserve to lessen its monetary boosting of the economy by raising interest rates, which would in theory help to reduce inflation.

"Given the strength of our economy, and the pace of recent price increases, it's important to recalibrate the support that is now necessary," Biden said. "Now, we need to get inflation under control."

Despite it all, Biden said he's convinced the country is still with him — even if they don't tell that to pollsters.

"I don't believe the polls," he said.

## Pentagon releases first video of botched Kabul airstrike

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon has declassified and publicly released video footage of a U.S. drone strike in Kabul that killed 10 civilians in the final hours of a chaotic American withdrawal that ended a 20-year war in Afghanistan.

The New York Times obtained the footage through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against U.S. Central Command, which then posted the imagery to its website. It marks the first public release of video footage of the Aug. 29 strike, which the Pentagon initially defended but later called a tragic mistake.

The videos include about 25 minutes of footage from what the Times reported were two MQ-9 Reaper drones, showing the scene of the strike prior to, during and after a missile struck a civilian car in a courtyard on a residential street. Indistinct images show individuals moving in or near the attack zone.

The military has said it struck what it thought was an extremist with the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate who might imminently detonate a bomb near the Kabul airport, where a hurried evacuation was still under way. Three days earlier a suicide bombing at the airport had killed 13 U.S. troops and more than 160 Afghans. When it later acknowledged its error in the Aug. 29 drone strike, Central Command said it determined that the man driving the car had nothing to do with the IS group.

The man was Zemari Ahmadi, who worked for Nutrition and Education International, a U.S.-based aid organization.

## Chances were missed to stop U. of Michigan sexual abuse

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Complaints that a University of Michigan sports doctor was committing sexual assault went back decades, long before a \$490 million settlement this week with victims, but no one stepped forward to ensure that Robert Anderson would be kicked off campus.

The many missed opportunities were described in detail last May when a law firm hired by the university released its findings about Anderson, who died in 2008 after working at U-M for nearly 40 years.

WilmerHale found at least 20 occasions when a student, athlete or other individual spoke with university staff about Anderson.

"There was an undercurrent of rumors, jokes, innuendo and expressions of concern about Dr. Anderson throughout his career at the university," the report said. "University personnel failed to appreciate the



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significance of what they heard. We found no evidence that anyone inquired into his conduct or referred him for investigation.”

Yet WilmerHale also found critical events that could have made a difference, according to the report:

## A WRESTLER COMPLAINS

In 1975, Tad DeLuca wrote a 10-page letter to his coach about a range of issues, including Anderson’s insistence that athletes “drop your drawers” for a rectal exam, no matter the reason for a visit. No action was taken. The coach, Bill Johannesen, told investigators that he he couldn’t recall any complaints about Anderson. In 2018, 43 years later, DeLuca wrote to athletic director Warde Manuel about Anderson, a letter that led to a police investigation.

## ADMINISTRATOR GETS ANGRY

Thomas Easthope, who supervised the University Health Service, heard complaints that Anderson was “fooling around with boys,” a reference to him taking advantage of gay students, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Easthope claimed he fired Anderson — “Bob, you’re outta here” — but Anderson merely stopped being health service director. By 1981, he had moved to the athletic department. Before he died in 2021, Easthope acknowledged that he didn’t tell local authorities about Anderson. “We live in a different time, and it’s not like that today,” he said.

## DID BO KNOW?

Some football players said they told legendary coach Bo Schembechler about Anderson molesting them in the 1970s. Schembechler, who died in 2006, told one to “toughen up.” The disclosure has caused division in Schembechler’s family, with some saying he never would have flippantly dismissed complaints. A son, Matt Schembechler, said he was an Anderson victim and that he told his dad.

There have since been calls to remove Schembechler’s campus statue and take his name off a football building.

Athletic director Don Canham was informed about Anderson, too, but took no action, athletes said. Canham died in 2005.

The overall failure to intervene gave the doctor “countless occasions” to harass, abuse and assault patients during his 37-year career, the report said.

Anderson’s victims included pilots and others in the aviation field who needed physicals for employment. The Federal Aviation Administration had certified him as a medical examiner in southeastern Michigan.

“He continued to provide medical services to student athletes and other patients — and to engage in sexual misconduct with large numbers of them — for the rest of his career,” the report said.

## Rare, pristine coral reef found off Tahiti coast

By VICTORIA MILKO AP Science Writer

Deep in the South Pacific, scientists have explored a rare stretch of pristine corals shaped like roses off the coast of Tahiti. The reef is thought to be one of the largest found at such depths and seems untouched by climate change or human activities.

Laetitia Hédouin said she first saw the corals during a recreational dive with a local diving club months earlier.

“When I went there for the first time, I thought, ‘Wow — we need to study that reef. There’s something special about that reef,’” said Hédouin, a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research in Moorea, French Polynesia.

What struck Hédouin was that the corals looked healthy and weren’t affected by a bleaching event in 2019. Corals are tiny animals that grow and form reefs in oceans around the world.

Globally, coral reefs have been depleted from overfishing and pollution. Climate change is also harming delicate corals — including those in areas neighboring the newly discovered reef — with severe bleaching caused by warmer waters. Between 2009 and 2018, 14% of the world’s corals were killed, according to a 2020 report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Project.

The newfound reef, stretching 2 miles (3 kilometers), was studied late last year during a dive expedition

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supported by UNESCO. Unlike most of the world's mapped corals, which are found in relatively shallow waters, this one was deeper — between 115 feet (35 meters) to 230 feet (70 meters).

Exploring such depths posed a challenge: the deeper a diver goes underwater, the shorter amount of time can be safely spent at each depth. The team was equipped with special tanks and did 200 hours of diving to study the reef, including taking photographs, measurements and samples of the coral.

The reef is in a spot where many researchers haven't spent a lot of time in, said former National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration oceanographer Mark Eakin.

"We'll be seeing more of these discoveries as the technology is applied to these locations," said Eakin. "We may find some bigger ones somewhere, but I think this is always going to be an unusual reef."

The recent volcanic eruption in Tonga that triggered tsunami waves across the Pacific has not affected the reef off Tahiti, said Hédouin.

Hédouin hopes the research can help experts understand how the reef has been resilient to climate change and human pressures, and what role these deeper corals might play in the ocean ecosystem. More dives are planned in the coming months.

"We know very little about the ocean, and there's still so much that needs to be recorded, needs to be measured," said Julian Barbière, the head of UNESCO's marine policy and regional coordination.

## AP FACT CHECK: Biden puffs up claims of virus, job gains

By AMANDA SEITZ and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a self-appraisal that didn't always fit with the facts, President Joe Biden on Wednesday made the dubious assertion that he's outperformed all expectations on the pandemic in his first year and inflated his contribution to COVID-era economic growth.

A look at some of Biden's comments in a news conference that stretched for nearly two hours:  
PANDEMIC

BIDEN on COVID-19: "I didn't overpromise. I have probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen."

THE FACTS: That's a stretch. The month before the election, he vowed: "I'm going to shut down the virus, not the country." The pandemic is obviously far from being shut down — instead it's been surging. The world may be headed to a future in which the virus becomes a manageable risk, not one in which it vanishes.

It is not true that he has outperformed everyone's expectations on the coronavirus. Vaccine supplies have been a success; COVID-19 tests have been a widely acknowledged failure that the administration is trying to fix by making the tests free and sending them to homes. Biden conceded Wednesday that more tests should have been available sooner.

Biden himself set higher expectations than have been met when he held a July 4 event headlined a celebration of "Independence Day and Independence from COVID-19." His remarks acknowledged the rising delta variant while stating "we're closer than ever to declaring our independence from a deadly virus."

BIDEN: "We just made surprise medical bills illegal in this country."

THE FACTS: He ignores the fact that President Donald Trump signed that consumer protection into law before leaving office in December 2020. The achievement is Trump's.

The act prevents patients from being hit with "surprise" medical bills if they seek emergency care from a health provider that is not in their insurance plan's network. It also protects patients from unanticipated charges if an out-of-network medical provider works on a patient at an in-network hospital. It requires hospitals, doctors and insurers to sort out those charges in a resolution process.

Biden's administration developed rules implementing the law over the past year, before it took effect Jan. 1.

ECONOMY

BIDEN: "We created 6 million new jobs, more jobs in one year than any time before."

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THE FACTS: He's taking too much credit. As Trump did before him, Biden makes some grandiose economic claims that gloss over one central reason for historic growth — the U.S. population is far larger than in past decades (and continued to grow last year, despite COVID-19 deaths).

The economy added 6.4 million jobs in 2021, the most on government records dating back to 1939, but part of that is just a natural rebound from what had been the steepest job loss on record in 2020, when 9.4 million jobs were cut.

And since the late 1970s, the U.S. population has grown by more than 100 million people, so any hiring surge under Biden will be larger in raw numbers than that achieved by his predecessors. On a percentage basis, the number of jobs in the U.S. grew 4.5% in 2021. That is still a sizeable increase — the biggest since 1978 — but not a record-breaker.

Many economists do credit Biden's \$1.9 trillion financial rescue package, approved in March, for accelerating growth and hiring, but some also blame it for fueling a surge in demand that overwhelmed supply chains and pushed inflation up to four-decade highs.

## **A fraud case against Trump? Not a slam dunk, experts say**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, BERNARD CONDON and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, Donald Trump punctuated his reality TV spiels and presidential speeches with claims that his business and his many gold-plated properties were “huge,” “amazing,” the biggest and the best.

Now the New York attorney general's office says it has uncovered evidence that his comments were not just puffery for the public. The office's civil investigation into Trump found that he and his company regularly fudged the value of assets on financial statements given to banks, insurers and tax authorities.

But that doesn't mean the Trump Organization will be shut down, Trump Tower padlocked and the former president hauled off to prison.

Lawyers who examined the details of the allegations told The Associated Press that while Attorney General Letitia James could potentially bring a lawsuit alleging fraud, she will face two major hurdles: proving both an intent to deceive and that banks that loaned Trump money were actually fooled.

“Were you sloppy, lazy or overoptimistic about your prospects? If you were, that may be bad business, but it doesn't necessarily rise to fraud,” said Will Thomas, an assistant professor of business law at the University of Michigan.

The attorney general, a Democrat, still has not taken any legal action against Trump in her nearly three-year investigation, but in a court filing Tuesday her lawyers argued that there was enough evidence of wrongdoing to demand that Trump and his oldest children, Donald Jr. and Ivanka, answer questions under oath.

Among the allegations, her office says Trump's company inflated its worth by doing things like stating that his Trump Tower penthouse was nearly triple its actual size and including golf-fee revenue from club members who didn't exist.

The Trump Organization said in a statement Wednesday that the investigation was “baseless” and politically motivated.

Trump's business practices are also the subject of a grand jury investigation being overseen by the Manhattan district attorney.

Prosecutors have revealed little about the evidence in that criminal case, but they have indicated in public court filings that it covers much of the same ground as the attorney general's civil probe. James has assigned some investigators to help with that investigation.

One important question is whether any misrepresentations in the company's financial statements “were intentional, knowing and intended to deceive,” said David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor who reviewed the evidence for AP.

Intent is difficult to prove with real estate because it is an illiquid asset whose value, unlike publicly traded shares, isn't being set by different investors constantly buying and selling, but by estimates, and

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often flawed ones.

"Even experts applying the same set of valuation tools might reasonably disagree about the ultimate valuation," Thomas said.

Another problem is proving that banks, insurers and others doing business with the Trump Organization actually believed the false numbers.

According to James' filing, a bank said it received financial statements in 2014 from Trump's accounting firm verifying he had a net worth of \$5.8 billion and liquidity of \$302 million. A loan officer involved in that transaction testified in James' investigation that if he had been aware of misstatements on Trump's statement of financial condition, he would have killed the deal.

Trump's dubious financial statements also helped him secure \$300 million in loans for three of his properties from Deutsche Bank, James' office said. The bank accepted the financial statements without objection and, in internal memoranda, emphasized Trump's reported financial strength as a factor in lending to him, James' office said.

"The credit exposure is being recommended based on the financial profile of the Guarantor," one of the memos said, referring to Trump.

"The way they set out the evidence says to me that she plans to conclude her investigation with some sort of lawsuit," said former federal prosecutor Jennifer Rodgers, referring to the attorney general. "She wouldn't characterize their case as strongly as she did if she didn't think they were going to get there in the end and file some sort of civil action."

One potential problem for the attorney general is that many of the company's financial statements included a line warning that the numbers were not audited, a warning that Trump lawyers are sure to highlight in any case.

Daniel Horwitz, a former Manhattan district attorney prosecutor, says it's unclear that any professional lenders or insurers would have relied on those documents, or not taken them with a grain of salt.

"Were they fooled, were they duped? Did the lenders care about this? If they didn't really care about mistakes or inaccuracies, it's going to be pretty difficult to prove a case," he said.

The purpose of the document filed by James's office was to show the court her reasons for compelling testimony from Trump and his oldest children.

Another son helping to run the business, Eric Trump, had already given testimony in 2020 for six hours, though it's not clear what the attorney general learned from it. She said the second-oldest son invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in response to more than 500 questions.

New York University law professor Stephen Gillers said getting the other Trumps to testify may not be the only reason for filing so detailed a document.

"What the AG means to telegraph is, 'You can't hide. We've got the goods. You're dead.' She may or may not be exaggerating, but Trump world has to worry that she's not — and that's what James wants," Gillers said. "It's like when a country displays its guns and tanks in a military parade, meant to warn opponents, 'Don't mess with us.'"

## Colorado coal town grapples with future as plant shuts down

By PATTY NIEBERG Associated Press/Report for America

CRAIG, Colorado (AP) — In a quiet valley tucked away from Colorado's bustling ski resorts, far from his hometown in northern Mexico, Trinidad Loya found a way to support his family's American dream: Coal.

He, his son and grandson — all named Trinidad Loya — worked for the coal plant in Craig, Colorado, with the eldest Loya starting more than 30 years ago. The plant currently employs 180 people, paying higher salaries and bringing far more job security than most other jobs in the area.

But that's all about to change.

The coal plant is closing, along with the mine that feeds it and has nearly 115 more employees, and all the workers will lose their jobs over the next decade, according to Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc. which partially owns and operates the Craig Station.

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That will mean a tough transition for the Loyas and other workers who've made a life in Craig, a rural town with a population 9,000 that draws elk hunters from around the world to its scenic surroundings.

"A power plant job, especially in a rural community like Craig -- those are what I call cradle to grave jobs," said Richard Meisinger, business manager of the 111 chapter of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union which represents the bargaining unit at the Craig plant and nearly 4,200 members across Colorado and Wyoming. "People hire on there when they're young anticipating that they are going to work at that power plant there their entire workable lifespan."

The same scenario is playing out in other small towns across the U.S. After decades of relying on coal for their workforce, tax base and way of life, the towns face uncertain futures as new state and national legislation forces the retirement of fossil fuels because of the worsening effects of human-caused climate change. Only a few towns have a viable plan to transition to cleaner energy, like one in Wyoming chosen for a Bill Gates-backed nuclear power plant.

The impact spreads beyond the plants workers and is felt by the rest of the community, too. In Craig, much of the infrastructure of the county is supported by the coal plant workers, who make an average of \$100,000 a year, compared with a \$40,000 average salary across the county.

Now, some workers will retire, while others, like the younger Loyas, must find a new way to support their families, and possibly leave Craig behind.

On Monday, the youngest Loya, started an apprenticeship position at another Tri-State owned facility across the state in Pueblo — some 300 miles (483 kilometers) away from Craig where he lives with his wife and two children, ages 7 and 3. When he's not working as a sub-station technician there, he plans on making the five-hour drive to come home and see his family. He took a pay cut for the position.

He's holding out hope a job opens at the Craig plant due to job movement within the plant. In the meantime, he'll stay with a sister in Pueblo and hope for the best.

"It felt right to our family at the time," Loya said.

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Craig sits in the heart of Colorado's western front, only 40 miles (64 kilometers) from the popular Steamboat Springs ski area.

Cows and lambs graze on farmlands. Creeks stream out of the nearby rivers. Deer traverse downtown Craig at night, munching on grass and curiously peeking around closed storefronts and offices. The rural escape is why many of those who grow up in Craig choose to stay.

In winter months, the town, known as the elk hunting capital of the world, houses thousands of hunter groups donned in camouflage and bright orange who come to the area in search of game. Tens of thousands of hunters stay in the town's hotels and frequent the local restaurants. According to a Colorado Parks and Wildlife report, the hunting industry brought \$136 million to northwest Colorado in 2017.

Moffat County is made up of millions of acres of public lands, and its mineral deposits of high-volatility and low-sulfur coal brought the industry to town and sustained families for decades.

The town has reinvented itself before.

What was once a last stop on the Denver and Salt Lake Railway which allowed for nationwide agricultural exports like wool, soon the area became a money-maker for the oil industry and then a source of uranium. The oil fields and uranium mills left Craig by the 1960s as demands changed, but by the 1970s, coal was king in Colorado with companies buying up mines and others like Colorado-Ute Electric Association purchasing lands to build a power plant. This would eventually become the Craig Station.

Now, the town is changing again.

The owners of the Craig Station decided to close the 1,285-megawatt, three-unit plant over a ten-year period. Unit 1 and 2, owned by PacifiCorp, Platte River Power Authority, Salt River Project, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association and Xcel Energy, are set to close in 2025 and 2028. Unit 3, solely owned by Tri-State, will retire by 2030.

As the coal industry goes, so will nearly half of Moffat County's gross domestic product, Peterson said. It could affect services like healthcare, fire departments, infrastructure and upkeep for neighborhoods and roadways.

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According to Ray Beck, former Moffat County commissioner and mayor of Craig, the county's biggest source of revenue is property tax. Moffat County's 2020 assessed value was nearly \$430 million with 62% coming from the top 10 taxpayers, all energy-related businesses.

"We can't recover from that," Beck said.

A scenario put together by the Moffat County assessor found that the economic situation would only get worse as the plant's three units shut down over time. According to the forecast, in 10 years when the entire powerplant shuts down, it would take 65 Super Walmarts and 93 Hampton Inns to replace the assessed value, Beck said.

The loss of coal jobs in a community like Craig also will hurt small businesses whose customers are primarily coal workers and have disposable income, said Jennifer Holloway, executive director of the Craig Chamber of Commerce.

That's bad news for Gino's Pizzeria, the West Twin Cinema and Thunder Rolls Bowling Center.

When discussions about the end of coal began, many in the town were in denial and some thought the decision would waver with the political winds.

But that hasn't happened, and people are now facing the reality of the loss of their way of life.

"We're taking people who generationally have been taught that they are the heroes in this story and suddenly they don't differentiate between coal is bad and they are bad," said Sasha Nelson, executive director of workforce education and economic development at Colorado Northwestern Community College in Craig. "That is the message that we're sending to some extent and that's a hard one for proud people, for hard-working people, people who struggled, to be receiving. And there's a lot of resistance and pushback."

Tim Osborn, the power plant manager, estimates that they'll lose another 10 or so workers in 2022.

"I forecasted all the way out to 2029 and we should have about 100 people here — if they're all here in 2029 — that are age 55 and up," Osborn said. "Attrition is the driver, that's what I'm counting on throughout the process. It appears we can do that."

The attrition of workers retiring or moving on is already being felt. Many plant workers described picking up additional hours of overtime as well as doubling their work during shifts due to the lack of bodies available in certain plant positions.

Many of the plant workers are finding their morale has gone down as the closure date inches closer.

"It's hard to get out of bed every day to go to work," said Ron Geary, an electrician at the plant with a full gray beard and self-deprecating humor who treasures the work he does and the people he works with. One of his fears during this transition is the mental health of his colleagues who are losing a part of their identity and job security with retirement plan.

"The coal miners, like my dad, they're invested in that work because it's a way for them to participate in our nation and be patriots. I mean you're providing electricity for the rest of the country to develop and grow and become successful," said Holloway, 49, who grew up in the area and stayed to work at the Chamber of Commerce.

Many coal workers are frustrated and angry at the decisions made by Denver-based politicians that affect rural communities. They see other nations like China and India continuing to build new coal mines and think it's hypocritical.

Two-thirds of the world's coal is used for electric power, according to Carlos Fernandez Alvarez, a senior energy analyst for the International Energy Agency. For western, more developed nations which have diversified their power systems and become more efficient, energy demands are not increasing. But for developing countries such as China and India, power demand is rising due to population growth and wider electrification efforts, so the transition is more difficult, he said.

Power demand in India is expected to grow faster than anywhere in the world over the next two decades as the economy grows and ever more extreme heat increases demand for air conditioning that so much the rest of the world takes for granted.

"It's OK as long as it's not on American soil, but they're gonna shut us down because we produce a little

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too much (carbon dioxide) when they're doing the same thing there?" Wes Lytle, a coal worker at the Craig plant, said about other nations.

One of the hardest parts of losing the plant is helping people find new jobs with employment benefits that provide a comparable lifestyle that coal families currently enjoy.

For the Loyas, as for other coal families, the power plant afforded them a lifestyle they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Nelson is trying to figure out how to help coal workers find their next opportunity. Over the last year, she has created a catalog of courses with industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeship-like training for members of the community who need help figuring out what's next.

As she's studied other transition communities, Nelson says worker transitions are typically split into three categories: one-third will have the means to retire between now and the final closure date, one-third will follow the industry or a similar field and one-third will retrain for a new career, open a business and some will become unemployed.

In Spoon River College in Canton, Illinois, the community was given a four-month notice before two coal plants closed in 2019. Twenty percent of workers sought retraining with help from the community college. But 14% didn't find new jobs and were unemployed in summer 2021.

"That 14% of folks that become unemployed, that concerns me," Nelson said. "Who are those folks and how do we help them and support them?"

In Craig, some workers are trying to plan ahead. Christine Schneider, 50, a water chemistry technician, has already sold her home and is living in an apartment. She's also started training for a commercial driver's license and is considering moving to Texas to be with her daughter.

"There's a chance I might still make it to 62 out there but I'm not wagering everything on that," she said.

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Plenty of people are trying to make sure it's not the end for Craig or the workers.

Discussions are underway to decide what comes next for the plant facilities. Osborn, the plant manager, says the ideal situation would be to repurpose some of the plant's equipment for renewable energy projects and keep people in the town employed.

"There's technology that doesn't even exist right now that we would hopefully be able to study and implement and design and keep people employed here in town and still be a viable place of employment," Osborn said.

Sean Hovorka, a production superintendent at the Trapper Mine and recently elected member of the town's city council, sees a future in mining because of renewables.

"You look at windmills, solar panels, any of that -- you've gotta have mining for it," he said. "You've gotta have the lithium that goes into the batteries for your Teslas and all that stuff. Mining is, it's gonna be a critical field and we knew that we were gonna be part of the green energy movement."

"With the direction that the green energy is going you're only gonna need more copper, you're only going to need more, nickel, cobalt, lithium -- all of those other things that have to be mined," Hovorka said.

Brent Wanner, head of power sector modelling and analysis for the World Energy Outlook, an annual publication by the International Energy Agency, said the power sector is in a good position to lead the change in large-scale clean energy transitions. The industry leads the way in emissions declines and is already transitioning away from coal to new options.

The older Loya said it's disappointing to see the end of the plant, which holds his family's American legacy, but he prefers not to see it as a doomsday scenario.

"There's always a light at the end of the tunnel," he said. "Maybe this will become a hydrogen plant."

## What comes next in New York's investigation of Donald Trump

NEW YORK (AP) — After investigating former President Donald Trump for several years, New York Attorney General Letitia James used a court filing Tuesday to outline much of the evidence her investigators have gathered so far. The legal memo claimed the Republican's company used "fraudulent or misleading"

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valuations of its assets while seeking loans and tax breaks.

Here's what this development could mean for Trump and his namesake company:

IS DONALD TRUMP ACCUSED OF A CRIME?

At this point, he hasn't been charged with any wrongdoing. New York's attorney general has yet to decide whether she even wants to file a civil lawsuit.

WHO IS LETITIA JAMES?

New York's attorney general, a Democrat elected in 2018, sued Trump multiple times on behalf of the state over his policies as president. She has also sued the National Rifle Association and was instrumental in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's fall from power. She released a report over the summer saying the Democrat sexually harassed 11 women. James briefly ran for governor this past fall before deciding to run for re-election as attorney general.

WHAT IS SHE INVESTIGATING?

James' office has been examining whether the Trump Organization got loans or tax breaks by lying about the value of Trump's assets. Long before he became president, Trump was scrutinized over claims about the size of his personal fortune and the value of his properties. It isn't illegal to fib to the public about how much your penthouse is worth, but it could be a crime to lie about the value of assets to banks, business partners or tax authorities.

WHAT HAS SHE FOUND SO FAR?

Her office said investigators had found a pattern in which the Trump Organization had used dubious or unsupported methods to exaggerate the worth of things it owned.

In one example out of many, the legal filing said the company boosted the estimated value of Trump's Manhattan penthouse by \$200 million by saying it was nearly three times its actual size.

Trump's financial statements containing the pumped-up values were then submitted to banks to obtain credit and to comply with terms of existing loans, James' office said. The attorney general's office said inflated financial statements once helped Trump secure \$300 million in loans from Deutsche Bank.

The legal filing said the company also overvalued land donations made in New York and California to justify millions of dollars in tax deductions.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF MAKING THESE ACCUSATIONS NOW?

Tuesday's filing was meant to persuade a judge that Donald Trump and two of his children, Don Jr. and Ivanka, should be forced to answer questions under oath.

New York University law professor Stephen Gillers says James also likely feels "she has a duty to tell the public what she is doing and why," given how intensely Trump has criticized the investigation and claimed it is motivated by political hatred.

It might also be meant to intimidate Trump.

"It's like when a country displays its guns and tanks in a military parade, meant to warn opponents, 'Don't mess with us,'" Gillers said.

WHAT IS THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION?

It's a company through which Trump manages his many entrepreneurial affairs, including his investments in office towers, hotels and golf courses and his many marketing deals.

WASN'T THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION ALREADY IN LEGAL TROUBLE?

Yes. The company and its chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, were indicted on tax fraud charges in July. They are accused of conspiring to pay senior executives lucrative fringe benefits off the books. That criminal investigation, overseen by the Manhattan district attorney, is separate from James' civil probe.

WHAT DO THE TRUMPS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT ALL THIS?

The Trump Organization issued a statement calling the investigation "baseless" and politically motivated. It said James had "defrauded New Yorkers by basing her entire candidacy on a promise to get Trump at all costs without having seen a shred of evidence and in violation of every conceivable ethical rule." Donald Trump Jr. tweeted that James should be disbarred.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the immediate future, a judge will decide whether to require Donald Trump, Ivanka Trump and Donald



Trump Jr. to submit to questioning.

Once her investigation is complete, James could file a lawsuit in which the state would seek financial penalties against Trump or his company, or even a ban from being involved in certain types of businesses. Separately, the Manhattan district attorney has also convened a grand jury to examine many of the same issues and see whether there is enough evidence for criminal charges.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR DONALD TRUMP'S POLITICAL FUTURE?

This doesn't move the needle much. Trump's supporters and critics are equally wedded to their positions. If Trump does run for president in 2024, any criminal case that arises could be disruptive — but an indictment or even conviction on criminal charges doesn't bar anyone from seeking the presidency. Trump has even used the probe to galvanize supporters, airing an anti-James video at an Arizona rally last weekend.

## French actor Gaspard Ulliel, 37, dies after ski accident

By NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

LYON, France (AP) — French actor Gaspard Ulliel, known for appearing in Chanel perfume ads as well as film and television roles, died Wednesday after a skiing accident in the Alps, local authorities said. He was 37.

Ulliel portrayed the young Hannibal Lecter in 2007's "Hannibal Rising" and fashion mogul Yves Saint Laurent in the 2014 biopic "Saint Laurent." He is also in the upcoming Marvel series "Moon Knight," and was the advertising face of the Chanel men's fragrance Bleu de Chanel.

While skiing Tuesday afternoon at La Rosière resort, Ulliel collided with another skier on an intermediate slope after turning left, presumably to join his friends on an adjoining slope, Anne Gaches, the Savoie prosecutor in Albertville, said in a statement Wednesday.

Preliminary findings from an investigation indicated that "both skiers fell to the ground after the collision," the prosecutor said. Ulliel was "motionless and unconscious when rescuers arrived," while the other skier was unharmed, Gaches said.

The director of the La Rosière resort, Jean Regaldo, told BFM television that Ulliel was not wearing a helmet when rescuers arrived. Helmets are not required on French ski slopes but are strongly recommended.

Regaldo said weather conditions were "perfect" at the time of the accident and that there were no rocks in the area of the collision, which he described as easily accessible.

Ulliel was transported by helicopter to Grenoble University Hospital, where doctors tried to revive him, she said. The actor was pronounced dead Wednesday shortly after 4 p.m., Gaches said.

The office of the actor's agent confirmed that Ulliel died on Wednesday.

Ulliel started performing at age 11, alongside renowned actress Sandrine Bonnaire, and went on to win two of France's top cinema awards, the Cesar. A dog bite on his face at age six left him with a trademark scar.

He played a French revolutionary, a dying playwright, a vanished World War I soldier, a budding serial killer, iconic fashion designer. French President Emmanuel Macron called him "one of the incarnations of French cinema today," and tributes poured in from shocked colleagues and fans around the world.

"On each of his film sets, he left behind the memory of a dedicated worker, always ready to listen, respected by all the teams because he was respectful of everyone," Macron said in a statement.

Prime Minister Jean Castex tweeted an homage that said, "Gaspard Ulliel grew up with cinema and cinema grew up with him. They loved each other madly."

The House of Chanel said in a statement it has lost its "ambassador of 12 years and a friend."

"We have been fortunate to have had by our side all these years a person endowed with great culture, an immense talent, and of unparalleled kindness. He will be sorely missed," Chanel said.

The accident conjured up memories of when Formula One great Michael Schumacher was seriously injured in a 2013 skiing accident in the French ski resort of Meribel, 50 kilometers (30 miles) from where Ulliel was skiing. Both were treated at Grenoble University Hospital.

Schumacher, who was wearing a helmet, suffered serious head injuries when he fell and hit the right

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side of his head on a rock off the side of a demarcated slope. The German auto racing legend was skiing with his teenage son while on a family vacation in the Alps.

Schumacher, 53, has not been seen in public in eight years, and his family has revealed few details of his condition since the accident. His wife, Corinna, said in a Netflix documentary last year that her husband is "different, but he is here" and that the family, including the couple's son, Mick, now a Formula One driver himself, cares for him.

After Ulliel's accident, the mountain police service for the Rosiere ski area said its personnel have been carrying out five or six rescues per day as the snow hardened in recent days.

In the neighboring Haute-Savoie region, a 5-year-old girl was killed Saturday when a skier crashed into her. The man was handed preliminary manslaughter charges, according to the Haute-Savoie prosecutor, who cited excessive speed as the likely reason for the accident.

Funeral information was not immediately announced. French media reports say Ulliel is survived by a young son from his relationship with French model-actor Gaelle Pietri.

## U. of Michigan reaches \$490M settlement over sexual abuse

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER and LARRY LAGE Associated Press

The University of Michigan announced a \$490 million settlement Wednesday with more than 1,000 people who say they were sexually assaulted by a sports doctor during his nearly four-decade career at the school.

The university said 1,050 people will share in the financial settlement, the latest in several large payouts made by American universities following accusations of repeated sexual abuse by employees.

Individuals and their attorneys will determine how to split \$460 million, with no input from the university, the school said in a statement. An additional \$30 million will be set aside for future claims.

Board of Regents Chair Jordan Acker told reporters that the agreement will resolve all survivor claims.

"We must support healing and restoration of trust in an environment where safety is paramount," Acker said. "This agreement is an important step in that direction."

Attorney Parker Stinar said the settlement was reached Tuesday night. The university had been in mediation to resolve multiple lawsuits by mostly men who said Dr. Robert Anderson sexually abused them during routine medical examinations.

"It has been a long and challenging journey, and I believe this settlement will provide justice and healing for the many brave men and women who refused to be silenced," said Stinar, who represents about 200 victims.

Tad DeLuca, the whistleblower whose letter to Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel alleging sexual assault sparked an investigation into Anderson, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview that he found no joy in the settlement and worries that it will leave deeper issues unaddressed.

"The settlement is going to gloss things over so Michigan can go back to having a glossy block 'M' and look wonderful for the world," DeLuca said, referring to the university's logo. "But the situation on campus is horrible."

Anderson worked at the university from 1966 until his 2003 retirement and was director of the university's Health Service and a physician for multiple athletic teams, including football. A number of football players and other athletes have come forward to accuse Anderson, who died in 2008, of sexually abusing them.

A report by a firm hired by the school determined that staff missed many opportunities to stop Anderson over his 37-year career. The university regularly is ranked among the top public universities in the U.S.

The settlement has to be approved by the board which is expected to vote at its February meeting, Acker said. It also has to be approved by 98% of claimants and the court overseeing the suits.

The deal came roughly two weeks after a state senator announced new bipartisan legislation that would retroactively give the accusers a 30-day window to sue the school for damages regardless of legal time limits and bar the university from using the government immunity defense. The bills, which were poised for introduction this week, were promoted as a way to provide the victims more certainty and increase pressure on the school for a resolution.

Early this week, two men who say they were sexually assaulted by Anderson also said they were hoping

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that a change in leadership with the weekend firing of university President Mark Schlissel would allow the school to be more accountable toward abuse victims.

Keith Moree and Robert Stone told reporters Tuesday that the Ann Arbor school is ripe for a culture change as its board conducts a search to permanently replace Schlissel, who was removed Saturday due to an alleged "inappropriate relationship with a university employee."

University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald said Schlissel's firing "had no impact on the mediation effort in this matter."

The settlement with Anderson's victims is one of several agreed to by universities following sex abuse scandals. They include Michigan State University's agreement to pay \$500 million to settle claims from more than 300 women and girls who said they were assaulted by Larry Nassar, who was a campus sports doctor and a doctor for USA Gymnastics.

That settlement, announced in May 2018, was considered the largest at the time, far surpassing the \$100 million-plus that Penn State University has paid to settle claims by at least 35 people who accused assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky of sexual abuse.

Last year, the University of Southern California agreed to an \$852 million settlement with more than 700 women who have accused the college's longtime campus gynecologist, Dr. George Tyndall, of sexual abuse.

## US begins offering 1B free COVID tests, but many more needed

By MATTHEW PERRONE and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time, people across the U.S. can log on to a government website and order free, at-home COVID-19 tests. But the White House push may do little to ease the omicron surge, and experts say Washington will have to do a lot more to fix the country's long-troubled testing system.

The website, COVIDTests.gov, allows people to order four at-home tests per household, regardless of citizenship status, and have them delivered by mail. But the tests won't arrive for seven to 12 days, after omicron cases are expected to peak in many parts of the country.

The White House also announced Wednesday that it will begin making 400 million N95 masks available for free at pharmacies and community health centers. Both initiatives represent the kind of mass government investments long seen in parts of Europe and Asia, but delayed in the U.S.

"Should we have done more testing earlier? Yes, but we're doing more now," President Joe Biden said Wednesday, recapping his first year in office.

Experts say the plan to distribute 1 billion tests is a good first step, but it must become a regular part of the pandemic response. In the same way that it has made vaccines free and plentiful, the government must use its purchasing power to assure a steady test supply, they say.

"The playbook for rapid tests should look exactly like the playbook for vaccines," said Zoe McLaren, a health economist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. "They're both things that help keep cases down and help keep COVID under control."

A home test two-pack commonly sells for more than \$20 at the store — if you can find one, amid the omicron-triggered rush to get tested. Since last week, insurance companies have been required to cover the cost of up to eight at-home rapid tests bought at drugstores or online retailers.

The four tests per home made available through the government website may not go very far in some households.

Kristen Keymont, 30, is a voice and piano teacher who teaches online and shares a house in Ipswich, Massachusetts, with her partner and two other people. When one of her housemates tested positive just before Christmas, she and her partner spent \$275 buying more than a dozen tests.

"One test each is nice, I guess," she said. "I'm glad we have them, but we're still going to need to buy more if one of us gets exposed."

It would be better, she said, if requests were linked to each person rather than each residential address.

Also, some people who live in buildings with multiple units had their requests for tests rejected, with the website saying tests had already been ordered for that address. As those complaints surfaced on

social media, people began sharing advice on how to enter apartment or unit numbers in a way that the website would accept them.

There have been nearly 50 million visits to the test-ordering website since it went online Tuesday, according to a federal analytics site.

The U.S. bungled its initial rollout of government-made COVID-19 tests in the early days of the outbreak and has never really gotten back on track. While private companies are now producing more than 250 million at-home tests per month, that is still not enough to allow most Americans to frequently test themselves.

The Biden administration focused most of its early COVID-19 efforts on rolling out vaccines. As infections fell last spring, demand for testing plummeted and many manufacturers began shutting down plants. Only in September — after the delta surge was in full swing — did the Biden administration announce its first federal contracts designed to jump-start home test production.

Countries like Britain and Germany purchased and distributed billions of the tests soon after they became available last year.

“If you leave the manufacturers to their own devices, they’re just going to respond to what’s happening right now,” said Dr. Amy Karger, a testing specialist at the University of Minnesota Medical School. “And then there’s not a lot of bandwidth if something surprising happens, as it did with omicron.”

Even with government intervention, the U.S. faces a massive testing load because of its population, which is five times larger than Britain’s.

The U.S. would need 2.3 billion tests per month for all teens and adults to test themselves twice per week. That’s more than double the number of at-home tests the administration plans to distribute over several months.

Dr. David Michaels, a former member of Biden’s COVID-19 advisory board, said the administration will probably need to request more federal money to fund testing for years to come.

“Congress was willing to put trillions of dollars into infrastructure primarily to improve transportation. This is infrastructure,” said Michaels, a public health professor at George Washington University. “We need billions more in testing to save lives and maintain the economy.”

For now, testing will probably continue to be strained. And even the most bullish proponents say the U.S. will have to carefully weigh where home tests can have the greatest benefit — for instance, by dispensing them to those most vulnerable to the virus.

“The fact is we just don’t have that kind of mass testing capacity in the U.S.” said Dr. Michael Mina, chief science officer for home testing service eMed, who once called for using billions of tests per month to crush the pandemic. “We should now be thinking about how to use these tests in a strategic way. We don’t want to just dilute them out across the population.”

Mina was until recently a professor at Harvard and has informally advised federal officials on testing.

Mina and others acknowledge widespread use of rapid tests is not without its downsides. Results from at-home tests are seldom reported to health authorities, giving an imperfect picture of the spread and size of the pandemic.

More than 2 million test results a day are being reported to U.S. health officials, but nearly all of them come from laboratory-processed tests. Some researchers estimate the real number of daily tests is roughly 5 million, when accounting for at-home ones.

## Three of Tonga’s smaller islands badly damaged by tsunami

By MOUSSA MOUSSA and DAVID RISING Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Three of Tonga’s smaller islands suffered serious damage from tsunami waves, officials and the Red Cross said Wednesday, as a wider picture begins to emerge of the destruction caused by the eruption of an undersea volcano near the Pacific archipelago nation.

U.N. humanitarian officials report that about 84,000 people — more than 80% of Tonga’s population — have been impacted by the volcano’s eruption, U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said, pointing to three deaths, injuries, loss of homes, and polluted water.

Communications have been down throughout Tonga since the eruption on Saturday, but a ship made it

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to the outlying islands of Nomuka, Mango and Fonoifua on Wednesday, and reported back that few homes remain standing after settlements were hit with 15-meter (49 feet) -high waves, said Katie Greenwood, the head of delegation in the Pacific for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which had two people aboard the vessel to help assess the damage.

"Very unfortunate information has come to light overnight about the three islands that we were really worried about — that they have all suffered devastating consequences as an effect of these incoming waves," she told The Associated Press in an interview from Fiji. "Most of the structures and dwellings on those islands have been completely destroyed."

The U.N.'s Dujarric said "all houses have apparently been destroyed on the island of Mango and only two houses remain on Fonoifua island, with extensive damage reported on Nomuka." He said evacuations are under way for people from the islands.

He said the most pressing humanitarian needs are safe water, food and non-food items, and top priorities are re-establishing communication services including for international calls and the internet.

"The clean-up of the international airport continues, and it is hoped that it will be operational on Thursday," Dujarric said. As for the port, it is understood that ships will be able to dock on the main island of Tongatapu.

Tonga has not yet made clear its needs from the international community, and complicating matters is the country's concern over the possible spread of COVID-19, which it has effectively kept outside its borders except for one case reported in a traveler from New Zealand in October.

Tonga is hoping for "almost contactless disaster relief" as a precaution, the Red Cross' Greenwood said, acknowledging that this would complicate efforts but is also understandable amid the pandemic.

"They really don't want to exchange one disaster for another," she said.

Some 60% of Tonga's 106,000 people have already received two doses of a COVID vaccine, and nearly 70% have received at least one dose, according to Our World in Data.

In anticipation of the country's needs, New Zealand has already sent two ships. One is carrying 250,000 liters (66,000 gallons) of water and a desalination plant with the capacity to produce 70,000 more liters (18,492 gallons) per day, and another is bringing a survey and diving team to help assess the damage to shipping channels, ports and wharf infrastructure.

They're expected to take three to four days to arrive, though one estimate was that they could be there as early as Friday, said Peeni Henare, New Zealand's defense minister.

"We don't know what the shipping lanes look like, and so we want to, of course, proceed with a bit of caution as we get closer to the Tongan islands," he said.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said the teams en route would also be available to help if needed with the evacuation of the approximately 150 people who live on the devastated outlying islands.

"We stand ready to assist where it is useful to the government of Tonga, and where they are satisfied with COVID protocols," she said.

Australia is also preparing to send aid by air and ship, and Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he expected to talk with his counterpart in Tonga later Wednesday to better understand what is needed.

"Our defense forces have stood up their operation and are deploying as necessary and directed," he said. "So we feel deeply for our family in Tonga."

The volcano coated the main island with a 2-centimeter (0.78 inch) layer of ash, which has rendered the 2.6-kilometer (1.6 miles) runway at Fua'amotu International Airport unusable. Volunteers have been working to sweep ash away to clear a path for aid planes to land, but the U.N. said Wednesday that ash continued to fall.

Mahuta said the runway was not thought to be damaged beneath the ash, but that they would not know for sure until it was all cleared.

A New Zealand reconnaissance aircraft has already flown over the impacted islands and provided the data to Tonga's government.

Communications have been severely restricted because the single underwater fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga to the rest of the world was likely severed in the eruption. The company that owns the

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cable said the repairs could take weeks.

Satellite images captured the spectacular eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano, with a plume of ash, steam and gas rising like a giant mushroom above the South Pacific. The volcano is located about 64 kilometers (40 miles) north of Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa.

The heavy amount of ash in the air has also meant that satellite communications have been sporadic but they are improving, Greenwood said.

So far, it seems the country has avoided the widespread devastation that many initially feared.

The government said Tuesday it has confirmed three deaths — two local residents and a British woman — though it has cautioned the toll is expected to rise as more reports come in from outlying areas.

On Tonga's main island of Tongatapu, perhaps the biggest problem is the ash that has transformed it into a gray moonscape, contaminating the rainwater that people normally rely on to drink.

Greenwood said people had been warned in advance to protect their water supplies, and that clean drinking water remained the top need.

"Water is definitely, 100 percent, the top priority at this point in time, along with shelter needs," she said.

Meantime, Tonga's Red Cross, which has about 20 people and 100 trained volunteers, is already distributing shelter kits and other supplies, she said.

In Sydney, the deputy president of the Tonga Australia Chamber of Commerce, Koniseti Liutai, said his organization was facilitating free shipping containers for members of the local Tongan community to send aid to their relatives back home.

In particular, he said they were trying to address specific needs they had identified, those of the elderly or disabled.

"We know that the government of Tonga and Australia and New Zealand and others are addressing food and water," he said. "We're trying to be a little bit more specified for family requirements."

## Prior infection, vaccines provide best protection from COVID

By MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A new study in two states that compares coronavirus protection from prior infection and vaccination concludes getting the shots is still the safest way to prevent COVID-19.

The study examined infections in New York and California last summer and fall and found people who were both vaccinated and had survived a prior bout of COVID-19 had the most protection.

But unvaccinated people with a past infection were a close second. By fall, when the more contagious delta variant had taken over but boosters weren't yet widespread, that group had a lower case rate than vaccinated people who had no past infection.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which released the study Wednesday, noted several caveats to the research. And some outside experts were cautious of the findings and wary of how they might be interpreted.

"The bottom line message is that from symptomatic COVID infection you do generate some immunity," said immunologist E. John Wherry of the University of Pennsylvania. "But it's still much safer to get your immunity from vaccination than from infection."

Vaccination has long been urged even after a prior case of COVID-19 because both kinds of protection eventually wane — and there are too many unknowns to rely only on a past infection, especially a long-ago one, added immunologist Ali Ellebedy at Washington University in St. Louis.

"There are so many variables you cannot control that you just cannot use it as a way to say, 'Oh, I'm infected then I am protected,'" Ellebedy said.

The research does fall in line with a small cluster of studies that found unvaccinated people with a previous infection had lower risks of COVID-19 diagnosis or illness than vaccinated people who were never before infected.

The new study's findings do make sense, said Christine Petersen, a University of Iowa epidemiologist. She said a vaccine developed against an earlier form of the coronavirus is likely to become less and less

effective against newer, mutated versions.

However, experts said, there are a number of possible other factors at play, including whether the vaccine's effectiveness simply faded over time in many people and to what extent mask wearing and other behaviors played a part in what happened.

Another thing to consider: The "staunchly unvaccinated" aren't likely to get tested and the study only included lab-confirmed cases, Wherry said.

"It may be that we're not picking up as many reinfections in the unvaccinated group," he said.

CDC officials noted other limitations. The study was done before the omicron variant took over and before many Americans received booster doses, which have been shown to dramatically amplify protection by raising levels of virus-fighting antibodies. The analysis also did not include information on the severity of past infections, or address the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19.

The study authors concluded vaccination "remains the safest strategy" to prevent infections and "all eligible persons should be up to date with COVID-19 vaccination."

The researchers looked at infections in California and New York, which together account for about 18% of the U.S. population. They also looked at COVID-19 hospitalizations in California.

Overall, about 70% of the adults in each state were vaccinated; another 5% were vaccinated and had a previous infection. A little under 20% weren't vaccinated; and roughly 5% were unvaccinated but had a past infection.

The researchers looked at COVID-19 cases from the end of last May until mid-November, and calculated how often new infections happened in each group. As time went on, vaccine-only protection looked less and less impressive.

By early October, compared with unvaccinated people who didn't have a prior infection, case rates were: — 6-fold lower in California and 4.5-fold lower in New York in those who were vaccinated but not previously infected.

— 29-fold lower in California and 15-fold lower in New York in those who had been infected but never vaccinated.

— 32.5-fold lower in California and 20-fold lower in New York in those who had been infected and vaccinated.

But the difference in the rates between those last two groups was not statistically significant, the researchers found.

Hospitalization data, only from California, followed a similar pattern.

## **Jewish leaders renew antisemitism fight after hostage case**

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Although the FBI initially said the man who held four people hostage at a Texas synagogue was focused on an issue "not specifically related to the Jewish community," the captor voiced beliefs that Jews controlled the world and had the power to arrange the release of a prisoner, survivors said after their escape.

The gunman's words were all too familiar to Jewish leaders and terror experts, who saw the attack on Congregation Beth Israel as yet another in the rising number of antisemitic hate crimes, a sign of the continued need of vigilance and interfaith solidarity.

The hostage-taker — identified by authorities as Malik Faisal Akram — "thought he could come into a synagogue, and we could get on the phone with the 'Chief Rabbi of America' and he would get what he needed," Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker told the Forward, a Jewish news site.

The hourslong standoff ended after the last hostage ran out of the Colleyville synagogue and an FBI SWAT team rushed in. Akram was killed, though authorities have declined to say who shot him.

The attack recalled recent deadly assaults on synagogues, including Pittsburgh's Tree of Life in 2018 and California's Chabad of Poway in 2019. Unlike those attacks, when assailants linked to white nationalist motives went on shooting rampages soon after entering, Akram took hostages to have them to use their influence to obtain the release of Aafia Siddiqui.

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Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist who is suspected of having ties to al-Qaida and was convicted of trying to kill U.S. troops in Afghanistan, is serving a lengthy sentence in a prison in nearby Fort Worth.

Jeffrey Cohen, another of the synagogue hostages, said Akram "did not come there to kill Jews" but tried to use them in the belief they could get Siddiqui released.

Akram "had bought into the extremely dangerous, antisemitic trope that Jews control everything, that we could call President (Joe) Biden and have him release her," Cohen told the Times of Israel.

Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, said that while only Akram himself knew his motives, his words reflect "a misguided and conspiratorial mindset."

"The idea that Jews are overwhelmingly, disproportionately powerful and control America is completely mainstream" in some politically Islamist factions, similar to tropes among white nationalists, he said.

And he said Siddiqui's case is a "cause celebre" in those factions. Siddiqui herself voiced "chilling" words at her court proceedings, blaming her conviction on Israel and asking for genetic tests on jurors for possible Jewish connections, he said.

On Saturday, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Dallas field office said the hostage-taker was focused on an issue "not specifically related to the Jewish community." But on Sunday, the FBI called the ordeal "a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted."

Akram "was looking for a Jewish target," said Nachman Shai, Israel's Cabinet minister for diaspora affairs. "If it's not about Jews, why didn't he walk into a church, a mosque or a supermarket there?"

The attack resonated in Jewish communities across the country, including those that had been attacked before.

"It's upsetting to me whenever Jews are under attack, whenever human beings are under attack," said Beth Kissileff, a Pittsburgh author and member of New Light Congregation. The congregation was one of three meeting in the Tree of Life building that lost members in the Oct. 27, 2018, attack that claimed 11 lives.

She hopes survivors of the Pittsburgh attack — who were consoled in 2018 by Muslim survivors of a deadly mosque attack in Quebec — can offer similar support to those in Colleyville. "People reached out to us, and we want to reach out," she said.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the denomination Beth Israel is affiliated with, noted that Muslim, Christian and other faith leaders quickly gathered to support the congregants.

"While the uptick of antisemitism is clear, we've never lived in a community where there's more solidarity," he said.

Anna Eisen, the founding president of Beth Israel, experienced that first-hand, citing support "from neighbors, strangers, churches, the governor" and others.

"I feel safer," she said. "I know now I'm a part of this community and this country."

Some advocacy groups and lawmakers have cited the Texas hostage situation in calling on the Senate to take up Biden's nomination of Deborah Lipstadt to serve as a special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism.

The Emory University professor's nomination languished last year, forcing Biden to resubmit her name two weeks ago. The Anti-Defamation League called on the Senate to "act now" to show the urgency of confronting antisemitism.

"We need to treat antisemitism not as an aberration but an everyday reality," said Jonathan Greenblatt, chief executive officer of the ADL.

Rabbi Noah Farkas, the president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, said he has been speaking with rabbinic colleagues in the wake of the Texas incident and many have trepidations about leading services.

"To be a Jew in America today, to wear Jewish ritual garb like the yarmulke or a Star of David, is an act of courage, and I would say defiance as well," Farkas said.

The attack underscores how "the Jewish community is an affected and targeted group," said Bradley Orsini, senior national security adviser for Secure Community Network, which consults with major Jewish organizations on security.



He took part in a weekend webinar that drew about 1,600 Jewish community leaders to update them on the Colleyville situation. "We really need to keep preparedness in front of us," he said.

## Russia says it will take nothing less but NATO expansion ban

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia maintained a tough posture Wednesday amid the tensions over its troop buildup near Ukraine, with a top diplomat warning that Moscow will accept nothing less but "watertight" U.S. guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation at the security talks with the U.S. in Geneva last week, reaffirmed that Moscow has no intentions of invading Ukraine as the West fears, but said that receiving Western security guarantees is an imperative for Moscow.

The talks in Geneva and a related NATO-Russia meeting in Brussels last week were held as Russia has amassed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine in what the West fears might herald an invasion.

Amid the soaring tensions, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Ukraine on Wednesday to reassure it of Western support in the face of what he called "relentless" Russian aggression. In Strasbourg, French President Emmanuel Macron urged the European Union to quickly draw up a new security plan containing proposals to help ease tensions with Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday that talks between Blinken and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov set for Friday in Geneva are "extremely important."

In a move that further beefs up forces near Ukraine, Russia has sent an unspecified number of troops from the country's far east to its ally Belarus, which shares a border with Ukraine, for major war games next month. Ukrainian officials have said that Moscow could use Belarusian territory to launch a potential multi-pronged invasion.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday that some troops already have arrived in Belarus for the Allied Resolve 2022 drills that will run through Feb. 20. It said the exercise will be held at five firing ranges and other areas in Belarus and involve four Belarusian air bases.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday it's too early to tell whether talks could defuse the crisis, adding that "after years of rising tensions, staying silent is not a sensible option."

"The Russian side is aware of our determination," Scholz told the World Economic Forum. "I hope they also realize that the gains of cooperation outweigh the price of further confrontation."

Russia has denied that it intends to attack its neighbor but demanded guarantees from the West that NATO will not expand to Ukraine or other former Soviet nations or place its troops and weapons there. It also has urged NATO to roll back the deployments of its troops and weapons to Central and Eastern European nations that have joined the alliance after the end of the Cold War.

Washington and its allies firmly rejected Moscow's demands but kept the door open to possible further talks on arms control and confidence-building measures to reduce the potential for hostilities.

Ryabkov insisted, however, that there can't be any meaningful talks on those issues if the West doesn't heed the main Russian requests for the non-expansion of NATO. He warned that the Russian demands "constitute a package, and we're not prepared to divide it into different parts, to start processing some of those at expense of standing idle on others."

The Russian diplomat said Ukraine's increasingly close ties with NATO allies pose a major security challenge to Russia.

"We see the threat of Ukraine becoming ever more integrated in NATO without even acquiring a formal status of a NATO member state," Ryabkov said, pointing at Western powers supplying Ukraine with weapons, training its troops and conducting joint drills. "This is something that goes right to the center of Russia's national security interests, and we will do our utmost to reverse this situation."

Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 after mass protests prompted Ukraine's Moscow-friendly leader to flee to Russia. At the same time, Russia also cast its support behind a separatist insurgency that swept over large areas in eastern Ukraine. More than 14,000 people have been killed in

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nearly eight years of fighting there.

Asked if Russia could accept a moratorium on NATO's expansion eastward, an idea circulated by some political experts, Ryabkov answered with a firm no, saying that Moscow has seen the West backtrack on previous promises.

He emphasized that "for us, the matter of priority is achievement of watertight, bulletproof, legally binding guarantees" that Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations will not join the alliance.

Ryabkov suggested that the U.S. could also take a unilateral obligation to never vote for NATO membership for Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations.

Russia has urged the U.S. and NATO to provide a quick written response. Peskov told reporters Russia expects to receive it "within days."

## "The Voice of Holland" talent show hit by #MeToo scandal

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — The Dutch talent show "The Voice of Holland" has been taken off the air in the Netherlands amid a sexual misconduct scandal that has cast a shadow over the future of the TV ratings juggernaut in the country where it was first conceived by a media mogul.

The furor is one of the most serious #MeToo reckonings yet to hit the Dutch entertainment world and focuses on a show created in the Netherlands but broadcast in local versions around the globe.

It also draws in a family considered television royalty in the Netherlands — the original creator John de Mol and his sister Linda, a television star in her own right in the Netherlands and Germany who last weekend split from "The Voice of Holland's" pianist and band leader after he admitted having sexual contacts with some contestants.

The Dutch scandal erupted after a local broadcaster's YouTube show called "BOOS" — the Dutch word for angry — contacted "The Voice of Holland" to say it has spoken to victims of "sexually transgressive behavior" on the show and is planning to broadcast a program about their allegations on Thursday.

Prosecutors have received two complaints in recent days against one of the show's panelists, Dutch rapper Ali Bouali. His lawyer, Bart Swier, said Wednesday that the artist known as Ali B denies any wrongdoing. Swier declined to comment further.

The complaints, which Swier said were filed Jan. 11 and on Tuesday, will trigger investigations to establish whether Ali B should face any criminal charges.

Even Prime Minister Mark Rutte has weighed in on the scandal swirling around one of the Netherlands' most popular TV shows.

"I think everybody is very shocked and it's good that it is investigated," he told the Dutch daily De Telegraaf.

Dutch broadcaster RTL, which airs "The Voice of Holland," reacted swiftly to the reports, saying over the weekend that it was suspending the show. It called the allegations "very serious and shocking" and said they weren't known to RTL.

Dutch media reported Wednesday that RTL had suspended its ties with Ali B as a result of the complaints. The network did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The show's pianist and band leader, Jeroen Rietbergen, quit over the weekend and issued a statement acknowledging his actions.

"During my years of involvement with "The Voice of Holland," I had contact of a sexual nature with some women involved in the program and exchanged sexually tinted WhatsApp messages," he said in a statement to the RTL Boulevard entertainment news show.

Rietbergen went on to say that after initially considering the sexual encounters "as reciprocal and equal," he later came to understand that the women "may have experienced this very differently. This insight has made me realize that my behavior has been completely wrong."

His statement also suggested the show's producers had known about his actions and cautioned him in the past. Rietbergen's lawyer didn't immediately respond to a call and email seeking comment.

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Rietbergen's partner, Linda de Mol, said in a statement on her website that she split from Rietbergen after the scandal broke and was taking a break from her own television career.

RTL said it contacted the show's producer ITV Studios, which agreed to "immediately initiate a diligent, independent investigation." The Dutch broadcaster said that "Participants, employees, everyone must be able to work in complete safety. There is no room for interpretation in this. The priority now is to get the facts on the table."

ITV Studios said: "Our highest priority is to provide a safe and supportive environment for everyone who participates in — or works on — our shows and ITV Studios has a zero-tolerance policy towards the type of behavior it is said to have taken place."

The company said its investigation aims to "build a complete picture of what happened" and encouraged victims or witnesses to speak to the investigation.

Dutch singer Anouk said she was quitting as one of the show's panelists, who first get to know contestants by listening to them "blind" from a swiveling chair facing away from the stage before going on to mentor them.

"I don't want to work in a place where for years a number of men have abused their position and deliberately chose to keep it quiet and look the other way," she said in an Instagram video.

The Dutch public broadcast organization NPO also took action as a result of the scandal, sending a letter to public networks urging them to make sure they have sufficient checks for misconduct.

"We treat everyone equally and respectfully," the organization said Tuesday in a letter to the broadcasters. "Attention is paid to unequal power relationships and dependency relationships, where there may be an increased risk of undesirable transgressive behavior."

## **Biden to give away 400 million N95 masks starting next week**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will begin making 400 million N95 masks available for free to U.S. residents starting next week, now that federal officials are emphasizing their better protection against the omicron variant of COVID-19 over cloth face coverings.

The White House announced Wednesday that the masks will come from the government's Strategic National Stockpile, which has more than 750 million of the highly protective masks on hand. The masks will be available for pickup at pharmacies and community health centers across the country. They will begin shipping this week for distribution starting late next week, the White House said.

This will be the largest distribution of free masks by the federal government to the public since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In early 2020, then-President Donald Trump's administration considered and then shelved plans to send masks to people at their homes. President Joe Biden embraced the initiative after facing mounting criticism this month over the inaccessibility — both in supply and cost — of N95 masks as the highly transmissible omicron variant swept across the country.

After facing similar criticism over a winter shortage of COVID-19 at-home test kits, Biden this week launched a website for Americans to order four rapid tests to be shipped to their homes for free, with the first tests to ship later this month.

The White House said the masks will be made available at pharmacies and community health centers that have partnered with the federal government's COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday updated its guidance on face coverings to more clearly state that properly fitted N95 and KN95 masks offer the most protection against COVID-19. Still, it didn't formally recommend N95s over cloth masks.

The best mask "is the one that you will wear and the one you can keep on all day long, that you can tolerate in public indoor settings," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said last week.

Details were not immediately available on the specifics of the program, including the sort of masks to be provided, whether kid-size ones will be available and whether the masks could be reworn.

The White House said that "to ensure broad access for all Americans, there will be three masks avail-

able per person.”

N95 or KN95 masks are more widely available now than at any other time during the pandemic, though they are often more costly than less-protective surgical masks or cloth masks.

## Tracking Biden's 1st-year progress delivering on promises

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — During his first year in office, President Joe Biden took action on a number of his key campaign promises, from rebuilding U.S. alliances globally to distributing vaccines across America and the world.

But others remain works in progress or dependent on Congress to address. That's particularly true of his promises to reform the nation's immigration system, where Biden is caught between the demands of his Democratic base and Latino voters and the realities of a steep influx of migrants to the U.S.

A look at where Biden stands on some of his key promises as he rounds out his first year:

### COVID-19

— Reach a semblance of normalcy by Christmas 2021.

Broken. The delta and then the omicron variants drove fresh records in infections, spikes in hospitalizations, business closures and shortages of goods nationwide over the holiday season.

— Provide Americans with 1 billion home tests.

In progress. In December, Biden pledged to provide 500 million rapid tests amid a surge in the highly transmissible omicron variant, and announced plans last week to distribute an additional 500 million tests. A distribution website launches Wednesday.

— Provide 100 million vaccine shots to Americans in his first 100 days, and vaccinate 70% of the world's population against COVID by September 2022.

In progress. Biden surpassed the domestic vaccination goal, but only about 61% of the world's population has received one dose.

— Safely reopen a majority of K-8 schools and keep them open.

Mostly accomplished. Schools are largely back to in-person learning, but the omicron surge has caused closures and other issues in a handful of school districts nationwide.

— Pass a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief legislative package.

Done; the bill passed last March. It also delivered on his promise to provide \$2,000 in direct aid payments to Americans.

### CLIMATE

— Rescind Keystone XL oil pipeline permit, protect the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, rejoin the Paris climate agreement and embrace the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol to reduce harmful hydrofluorocarbons, or HFC's.

Done.

— Ban new oil and gas leases on federal lands and offshore waters.

Broken. The administration has proposed reforms to the nation's oil and gas leasing program but hasn't embraced a full ban.

### ECONOMY

— Roll back President Donald Trump's 2017 cuts to corporate tax rates.

Broken. Biden's social and environmental spending package included tax hikes on corporations and the wealthy, but the bill is currently stalled in the Senate.

— Pause federal student debt payments.

Done.

— Order a review of U.S. supply chains.

Done.

### IMMIGRATION

— Raise refugee cap to 125,000, up from the 15,000 set by Trump.

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Not close. Biden signed an executive order in February raising the cap to 62,500 refugees.

— Surge humanitarian resources to the border and encourage public-private partnerships to deal with an increase in migration there.

Yes, but officials have still struggled to deal with the influx of migrants at the border. Biden signed an executive order asking officials to prepare plans for using humanitarian resources there. He has yet to establish new public-private partnerships.

— Reform the U.S. asylum system.

Incomplete. Biden signed an executive order in February directing his officials to craft a strategy for migration, including refugees and asylum seekers, and while he promised last year to implement a new “humane” asylum system, there’s been no sign of specifics from the White House. And the Biden administration has continued a Trump-era policy that allows Customs and Border Protection to quickly expel migrants who enter the country without authorization to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

— Reverse Trump-era policies on travel restrictions on people from a number of Muslim-majority countries, funding and building the border wall, a provision discouraging migrants from using public benefits, and one expanding criteria for deporting immigrants.

Done.

— Streamline and improve the naturalization process for green-card holders.

In progress. Biden signed an executive order in February to improve the naturalization process, and the Department of Homeland Security has since revoked some Trump-era rules.

— End family separation policy and create a task force to reunite families separated at the border.

Done. Biden signed executive orders ending the policy and establishing a task force focused on reuniting families. Only a handful of families have been reunited thus far due to difficulties locating the parents.

— Protect young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents by reinstating the Obama-era policy defending them and their families from deportation.

In progress. Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in March his agency was issuing a rule to “preserve and fortify” the policy, which would deprioritize young immigrants from deportation, but the policy itself is still facing challenges in court.

— End prolonged migrant detention and invest in a case-management system to process people.

Broken. There’s been no announcement of added investments in case-management systems. While the administration said in March it would attempt to release parents and children within 72 hours of their arrival, officials acknowledged that hundreds of children have been held by Border Patrol for much longer. The administration is struggling with an increase in unaccompanied minors arriving at the border and a lack of facilities to house them.

## DOMESTIC POLICY

— Reverse transgender military ban.

Done.

— Establish police oversight board.

Abandoned. The Biden administration decided to scrap the idea based on input from civil rights groups and police unions.

— Direct attorney general to deliver a list of recommendations for restructuring the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and other Justice Department agencies to better enforce gun laws.

Not yet.

— Direct FBI to issue report on delays in background checks for gun purchases.

Not yet.

## FOREIGN POLICY

— “End the forever wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East” and terminate U.S. involvement in the Yemen civil war.

Mixed. The U.S. ended the 20-year war in Afghanistan in August, albeit in a bloody and chaotic fashion. The administration, however, announced in November it would sell \$650 million worth of air-to-air missiles

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Saudi Arabia, a central player in the Yemen conflict.

— Put human rights at the center of foreign policy.

Mixed. Biden has repeatedly called out China for targeting democracy activists in Hong Kong and human rights abuses against Uyghur and ethnic minorities. He's also raised concerns about the jailing and treatment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. He declined to hold Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, directly responsible for the killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi despite U.S. intelligence showing Salman approved of the hit.

— Improve ties with allies who had rocky relations with Trump.

Mixed. Biden won praise from allies for his efforts to reclaim U.S. leadership on climate issues. Indo-Pacific leaders have been pleased by coordination efforts on China policy. Biden acknowledged his administration stumbled with the rollout of a deal to provide nuclear submarine technology to Australia, a move that torpedoed a \$66 billion French deal and led to Paris temporarily recalling its ambassador to Washington. His decision to move forward with the U.S. military withdrawal in Afghanistan rankled some NATO allies who sought to extend the mission to stave off a Taliban takeover.

— Quickly rejoin the nuclear deal with Iran so long as Tehran comes back into compliance.

Not accomplished. Indirect talks haven't collapsed, but White House hopes are fading.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 20, the 20th day of 2022. There are 345 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 20, 1942, Nazi officials held the notorious Wannsee conference, during which they arrived at their "final solution" that called for exterminating Europe's Jews.

On this date:

In 1265, England's first representative Parliament met for the first time.

In 1801, Secretary of State John Marshall was nominated by President John Adams to be chief justice of the United States.

In 1841, the island of Hong Kong was ceded by China to Great Britain. (It returned to Chinese control in July 1997.)

In 1936, Britain's King George V died after his physician injected the mortally ill monarch with morphine and cocaine to hasten his death; the king was succeeded by his eldest son, Edward VIII, who abdicated the throne 11 months later to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson.

In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first chief executive to be inaugurated on Jan. 20 instead of March 4.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th President of the United States.

In 1964, Capitol Records released the album "Meet the Beatles!"

In 1981, Iran released 52 Americans it had held hostage for 444 days, minutes after the presidency had passed from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan.

In 1986, the United States observed the first federal holiday in honor of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

In 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as the nation's 44th, as well as first African American, president.

In 2011, federal authorities orchestrated one of the biggest Mafia takedowns in FBI history, charging 127 suspected mobsters and associates in the Northeast with murders, extortion and other crimes spanning decades.

In 2020, Chinese government experts confirmed human-to-human transmission of the new coronavirus, saying two people caught the virus from family members and that some health workers had tested positive.

Ten years ago: France threatened to withdraw early from Afghanistan after an Afghan soldier killed four French troops and wounded 15 in a setback for the U.S.-led coalition's efforts to build a national army and

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allow foreign troops to go home. Singer Etta James, 73, died in Riverside, California.

Five years ago: Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the United States, pledging emphatically to empower America's "forgotten men and women." Protesters registered their rage against the new president in a chaotic confrontation with police just blocks from the inaugural parade.

One year ago: Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States, declaring that "democracy has prevailed." Kamala Harris – the first female vice president, and the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent to hold the position – was sworn in by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. With Washington on edge, troops in riot gear lined the streets, and armored vehicles and concrete barriers blocked the empty streets around the Capitol building. Three new senators were sworn into office after Biden's inauguration, securing a Senate majority for Democrats. Donald Trump was at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida by the time Biden was sworn in; he was the first president in modern history to boycott his successor's inauguration. Leaving the White House, Trump hinted at a comeback, saying, "We'll see each other again."

Today's Birthdays: Former astronaut Buzz Aldrin is 92. Olympic gold medal figure skater Carol Heiss is 82. Singer Eric Stewart is 77. Movie director David Lynch is 76. Country-rock musician George Grantham (Poco) is 75. Israeli activist Natan Sharansky is 74. Actor Daniel Benzali is 72. Rock musician Paul Stanley (KISS) is 70. Rock musician Ian Hill (Judas Priest) is 70. Comedian Bill Maher (MAR) is 66. Actor Lorenzo Lamas is 64. Actor James Denton is 59. Rock musician Greg K. (The Offspring) is 57. Country singer John Michael Montgomery is 57. Sophie, Countess of Wessex, is 57. Actor Rainn Wilson is 56. Actor Stacey Dash is 55. TV personality Melissa Rivers is 54. Actor Reno Wilson is 53. Singer Edwin McCain is 52. Actor Skeet Ulrich is 52. Rap musician Questlove (questlove) (The Roots) is 51. Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley is 50. Rock musician Rob Bourdon (Linkin Park) is 43. Singer-songwriter Bonnie McKee is 38. Country singer Brantley Gilbert is 37. Rock singer Kevin Parker (Tame Impala) is 36. Actor Evan Peters is 35.