

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 1 of 57

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Prairie Doc: The Physician-Patient](#)
- [3- Boys DAK XII-NEC Clash Pairings](#)
- [4- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [5- Glimpses From Greenfield 2022-Week 2](#)
- [6- Groton Robotics Pancake Feed Ad](#)
- [7- Weather Pages](#)
- [12- Daily Devotional](#)
- [13- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [14- Subscription Form](#)
- [15- News from the Associated Press](#)

UpComing Events

Monday, Jan. 24

JH Boys basketball at Northwestern. 7th grade game at 6 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

Postponed: Boys Basketball (C, JV, V) at Northwestern.

Wrestling at Ipswich, 6 p.m.

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.

5 p.m.: Boys Basketball vs. Lennox at Madison

Monday, Jan. 31

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

Tuesday, Feb. 1

Boys Basketball hosts Langford Area with JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity

Thursday, Feb. 3

Basketball Doubleheader at Faulkton

Friday, Feb. 4

Wrestling triangular at Preshop

Saturday, Feb. 5

Girls basketball at Madison

10 a.m.: Wrestling at Stanley County

Boys Basketball with Clark/Willow Lake at Groton (7th grade at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade, JV and Varsity).

Monday, Feb. 7

Junior High Boys Basketball at Aberdeen Christian. 7th grade at 6 p.m. followed by 8th grade.



Tuesday, Feb. 8

Girls Basketball hosting Tiospa Zina with JV game at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Boys Basketball vs. North Central at Edmunds Central with JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Thursday, Feb. 10

Basketball Double Header at Milbank. 4 p.m.: Girls JV at elementary gym, Boys C game at Armory; 5 p.m.: Girls C game at elementary gym, Boys JV at Armory. 6:15 p.m.: Girls Varsity at HS Gym, 7:45 p.m. Boys Varsity at HS Gym.

Friday, Feb. 11

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Saturday, Feb. 12

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Saturday, February 12, 2022

9 a.m.: State Junior High Wrestling at Pierre
Basketball Doubleheader with Mobridge-Pollock in Groton. Girls JV at 1 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity

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

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

© 2022 Groton Daily Independent

The Physician-Patient

Last spring, I was at home washing my hands, and as I glanced up into the mirror, I noticed something unusual. My bathroom light hit my neck just right as I swallowed and there it was: a prominent lump. I diagnosed myself with a thyroid nodule and wondered how I, a physician, had failed to notice this large protuberance before that moment.

Thyroid nodules are quite common. In some cases, they are noticed by the patient (like me) or are found on exam.

In many cases they are found on accident when someone has an imaging test like a CT scan, MRI, or ultrasound, done for some other reason. The vast majority of thyroid nodules are benign, only five percent or less representing thyroid cancer.

Typically, if a thyroid nodule is found, thyroid labs and a formal thyroid ultrasound will be recommended. The size and characteristics of the nodule on the ultrasound helps to guide whether a fine needle aspiration (a type of biopsy) should be performed. Many nodules are fluid filled and small, which we know conveys almost no risk of being cancerous, so those can be watched without biopsy.

In my case the nodule was medium sized, two centimeters in diameter, and had slight irregularity such that it was "mildly suspicious" and did warrant biopsy. As a physician-patient awaiting my procedure, I knew that the data said my nodule was still very low risk of being cancerous, but I still had some anxiety about the worst-case scenario.

My colleague, a surgeon, performed my fine needle aspiration expertly the next month. The procedure was easy, done in the office with minimal discomfort. She drained out enough fluid that I no longer had a visible neck lump afterward. My results returned benign, a huge relief.

My thyroid nodule story is a typical one and leaves me with the following advice for others. If a nodule is characterized as benign on ultrasound, rest assured, as these guidelines are sound and based in excellent data. If your doctor recommends a biopsy, try not to lose too much sleep; the procedure is very tolerable, and still most nodules are benign.

I had the good fortune of knowing that even if my mass turned out to be cancer, most thyroid cancers have excellent cure rates. However, I am oddly grateful to have had a small taste of the health stress my patients deal with daily. I hope it improves my doctoring.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 3 of 57

DAK XII – NEC “CLASH”

Boys Basketball / January 29, 2022

SCHEDULE

AUX GYM (Middle School Gym)

- 11:45 / #11 Seeds / Sisseton (37.750) vs Tri-Valley (37.600)
- 1:15 / #10 Seeds / Webster Area (37.778) vs Canton (38.917)
- 2:45 / #9 Seeds / Redfield (38.100) vs Madison (39.600)
- 4:15 / #8 Seeds / Aberd Roncalli (38.500) vs Dell Rapids (41.900)
- 5:45 / #7 Seeds / Milbank (40.000) vs. Vermillion (42.200)

MAIN GYM (High School Gym)

- 11:00 / #6 Seeds / Hamlin (41.556) vs Elk Point-Jefferson (42.500)
- 12:30 / #5 Seeds / Clark-Will Lake (41.571) vs Tea Area (43.500)
- 2:00 / #4 Seeds / Parkston (41.636) vs West Central (43.700)
- 3:30 / #3 Seeds / Deuel (42.182) vs SF Christian (43.818)
- 5:00 / #2 Seeds / Groton Area (44.00) vs Lennox (43.917)
- 6:30 / #1 Seeds / Lakota Tech (44.125) vs Dak Valley (46.364)

***** Game times are NOT rolling *****

**DAK XII schools (listed second above) will be considered “home” and will wear white uniforms

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 4 of 57

Weekly Vikings Roundup

Divisional Playoff Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

Never in NFL history have three playoff games in the same weekend ended on last-second field goals. That is exactly what happened to the top-seeded Packers and Titans, as well as the defending champion Buccaneers. To top it off, the Chiefs need a last-second field goal to take their game into overtime.

It started on Saturday afternoon in Nashville. Despite being sacked nine times, Bengal quarterback Joe Burrow showed why he was the #1 pick in the 2020 draft. Burrow hung in there all day long, throwing for 348 yards. After a Titan turnover at mid-field late in the fourth quarter, Burrow hit his former college teammate JaMarr Chase on a 19-yard completion to set up the winning field goal. The comment of the day came from the Bengal rookie kicker Evan McPherson just before going out to hit the game-winning 52-yard field goal: he looked at Joe Burrow and said, "looks like we are going to the AFC Championship game". Final score: 19-16.

The late game on Saturday pitted the Green Bay Packers against the San Francisco 49ers. The Packers were the biggest favorite for the weekend and after marching the opening kickoff for a quick touchdown, it appeared the rout was on.

The Niners had to step up on defense to keep the game close and the game came down to special teams. While leading 7-0, Aaron Rodgers engineers a typical two-minute drive to end the half but the Niner's special teams blocked a field goal attempt as the half ended.

Late in the fourth quarter with the Packers punting from deep in their end, the Niner's unit comes through again to block a punt and run it in for the score to tie the game with just four minutes remaining. That was plenty of time for another ARodg late-game comeback but not this time. The Packers were forced to punt and the Niners needed to go 80-yards to try to win the game. Deebo Samuel leads the Niners down inside the 30-yard line and set up a Robbie Gould game-winning 44-yard field goal as time expired. Lambeau Field was silenced but the Skol chant could be heard at the Minnesota Wild game as the crowd learned of the outcome. Final score: 13-10.

Moving onto Sunday, the LA Rams go to Tampa Bay and end what may be Tom Brady's final game. The Rams led for most of the game only to let the Buccaneers tie it late. Matthew Stafford hits Cooper Kupp on two passes for 65-yards in the final seconds to allow the Rams to escape with a 30-27 victory.

The marquee match-up of the weekend came on Sunday night between the Chiefs and Bills. For three quarters, it was a pretty mundane game for two offensive powerhouses with arguably the two best young QB's in the game, Josh Allen and Pat Mahomes. The Chiefs led by two points going into the fourth quarter. It was a proverbial chess match most of the way, but then all heck broke loose in the fourth.

What looked like the final dagger by the Bills with a touchdown and three-point lead with just thirteen seconds to go, Pat Mahomes marches the Chiefs down the field in just two plays to set up another game-ending playoff field goal but this time to take the game into overtime. The Chiefs win the coin toss in overtime and Mahomes hits Travis Kelce with a game-winning touchdown, spoiling the Bills' attempt to get back to the AFC championship game. Instead, the Chiefs will be the first team to host it for the fourth year in a row. Final score, 42-36.

Change is in the air for a few players.

Tom Brady is hinting at retirement and if he goes, so will his tight end Gronkowski, ending what many say is one of the most prolific QB-TE duos in football.

Aaron Rodgers suggested he played his last game as a Green Bay Packer, and Davante Adams may be too expensive for the Packers to resign in 2022. If they are gone, we'll all get to see just how good of a coach LaFleur is when you don't have future Hall-of-Famers running your offense.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 5 of 57

Glimpses From Greenfield 2022–Week 2

The second week of the 2022 Session found a number of legislators taking to meeting from remote locations because of COVID afflictions. Last Monday night, I swabbed my nose, and when the test yielded my results a few minutes later, I was greeted by bright pink and vivid blue lines. Immediately, I began planning to return to Clark where I quarantined the remainder of the week. On Tuesday, there were three of us in “COVID jail”. On Wednesday, one of the Senators returned from his Week 1 quarantine, so only two of us “dialed it in” by meeting remotely. However, Thursday, we were back up to three, and by Friday, there were five Senators in COVID quarantine. Upon speaking with Representative Greenfield, I learned that a significant number of House members were also meeting from remote locations. Meeting remotely is only an option for those who are dealing with COVID, as we want to protect each other from being exposed to the virus, while not allowing people to abuse the remote option for other reasons. We maintain the outlook that if at all possible, people need to be at the Capitol in-person to meet with constituents who travel to Pierre to participate in the process. For any of you who I missed last week, please know that I would have been there if I could have been there. Also, to my 99- and 97-year-old grandparents who are learning for the first time that I had COVID last week, I didn’t want to worry you so I asked people not to tell you!

Although I was away, I was EXTREMELY BUSY via electronics. Appropriations met, both as a House/Senate Joint Committee, and in sub-groups appointed to deal with specific issues. One such group that I am the chairman of has been discussing options for addressing the sales tax rate. In 2016, when the additional one-half percent was imposed, there was an amendment put on the bill stating that we would systematically roll the tax rate back to 4% if-and-when we were allowed to impose sales tax on sales that took place through “remote” internet sellers. As you know, South Dakota argued successfully before the Supreme Court that all sales, whether on Main Street or through cyberspace should and could be treated the same. Now that the taxes are being equally applied, there is a focus on attempting to make good on that statute. In future weeks, I will apprise you of progress being made on the issue.

Another sub-committee I am chairing is looking at the processes we follow regarding allocating and expending the unprecedented amounts of federal tax dollars that continue to flow into SD due to COVID legislation passed by Congress. That group’s work is in its infancy, as we have only had about an hour-and-a-half preliminary meeting. More to come on that front, as well.

Some of the issues we deal with in Pierre take on a much higher profile than others. Still other bills seek to “clean-up” problems and oversights that exist in current law. One such bill is SB 29 which seeks to delineate between regular motor vehicles and highway maintenance vehicles. It is not a glamorous issue, but it is a good example of how we attempt to clarify ambiguities that exist within the law whether they are brought up by bureaucrats or constituents. In this case, current law says that all motorists must abide by minimum speed limits on interstate highways. However, it does not provide for an exception for highway equipment operated by personnel performing maintenance duties. This is so common sense that it is surprising it ever came up. However, as they say, “Words have meaning.” When a law sweeps EVERYBODY into the same category, it sometimes overlooks things. I say this as a reminder that if you have an issue that just “doesn’t seem right”, you should bring it up and see whether it is covered somewhere else, or if it needs to be addressed via legislation.

Another such issue that will be discussed in a future article was brought to my attention by Randy Angermeier who heads up the Clark Ambulance Service, as it relates to processes they follow and costs they incur because of our law. According to Randy, we are the only state in the Union who hasn’t changed their law as new medical technologies allow for cost-savings, while not jeopardizing the safety of those they serve. Stay tuned in future weeks as that issue works its way through the process.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 6 of 57

The most notable bill of the second week was SB 46, which the Governor brought forward to deal with the “women in sports” issue. This has gotten all kinds of attention over the past few years, so I will not go on at-length about it. I look at it from a safety and fairness perspective. Regarding safety, we acknowledge that certain individuals have physical attributes that would serve to put them at an advantage or disadvantage over others. One argument that had never crossed my mind until this weekend is that in SD for decades, the SDHSAA has required wrestlers to participate within certain weight groups. From time-to-time, you will hear of a youngster who doesn’t meet the minimum weight for wrestling in the 106-pound division. On the flip-side, I remember when I was in school, one of my friends actually had to cut weight so he didn’t exceed 285 pounds in order to wrestle Heavyweight. The policies are objective—dare I say, agnostic—as to what the muscular attributes are of any of the kids participating. They simply assume it is reasonable to confine people to certain weight classifications, without allowing for somebody deemed too light or too heavy to participate until they achieve the minimum or maximum allowable weight. Again, the focus is on safety. On the fairness front, although not all boys or all girls are built the same, it stands to reason that biology dictates boys have increased heart, lung, and muscular capacities that will allow them certain advantages. If even one biological boy takes away opportunities from one biological girl, not to mention scholarship opportunities at the next lever, the spirit of Title IX is being subverted. I commend the Governor for her leadership on this issue. It cannot go unnoticed that because of what we have seen taking place as biological males have begun taking opportunities and accolades from biological females across the country, as well as the Governor taking a very active lead on this issue, last year’s legislation passed the Senate 20-15, while this year’s legislation passed the same body comprised of the same membership, 27-6, with 2 excused.

Until next time, please pray for continued health and wisdom for ALL those you care about. As a legislator, I covet the prayers of those who lift us up. Thank you. God’s blessing to each of you.

Brock

Groton Robotics Pancake Feed

Sponsored by Groton Lions Club

Sunday, January 30, 2022

10:00am-1:00pm

Groton Community Center



Pancakes, Sausage, Coffee, Milk and Juice will be served!

Free will donation!

Proceeds will go to Groton Robotics.

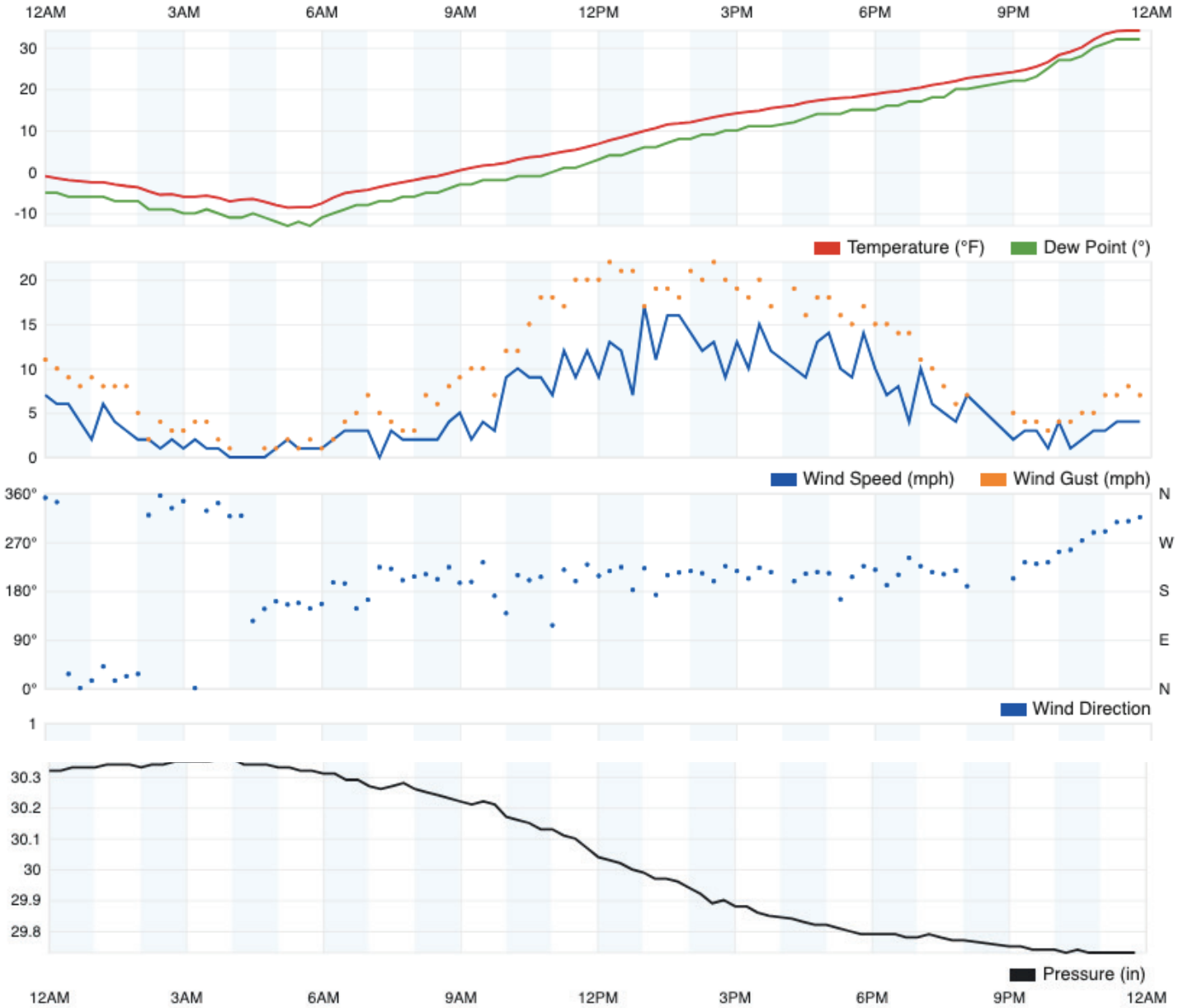


Carnival of Silver Skates performing at 2pm & 6:30pm!

Groton Daily Independent

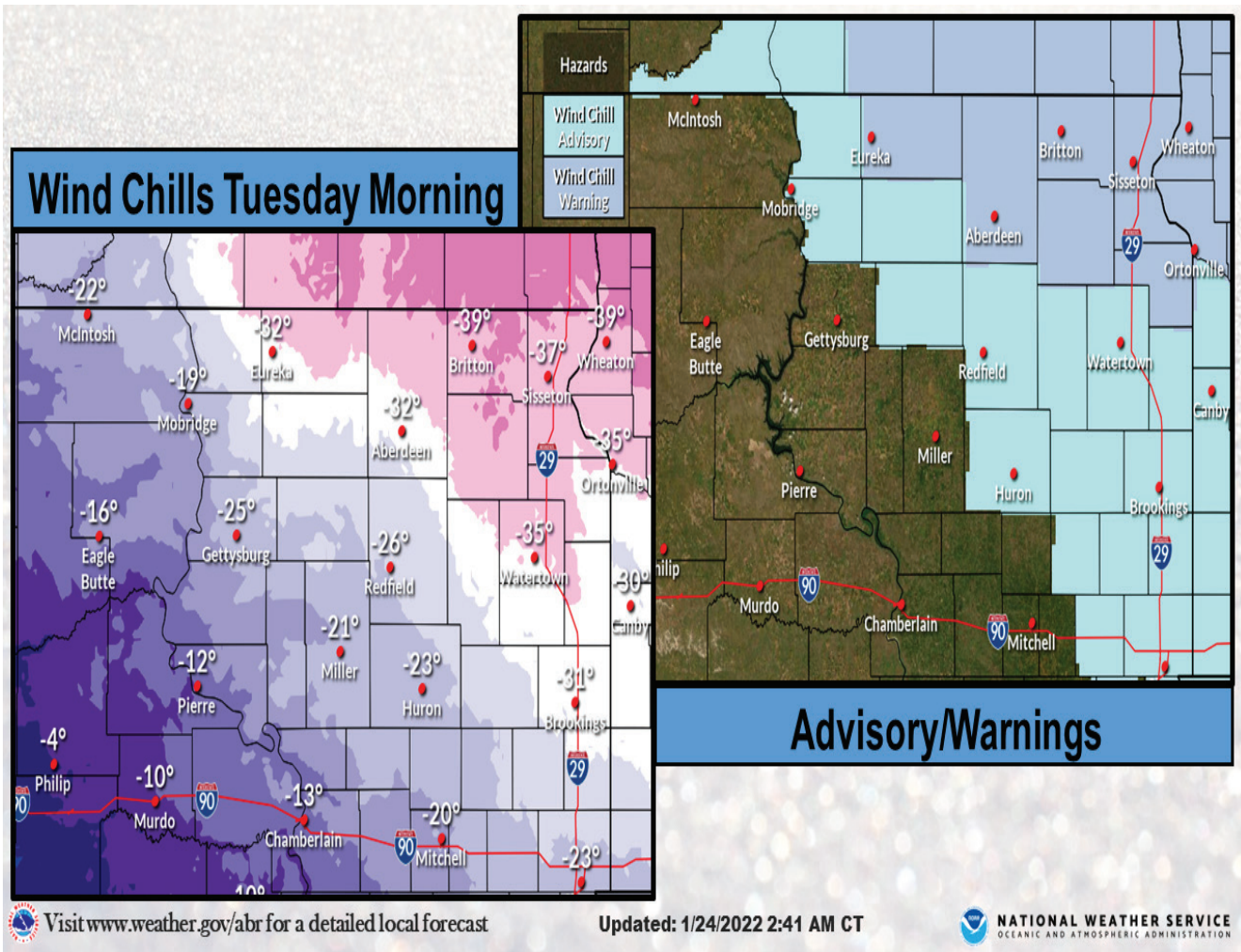
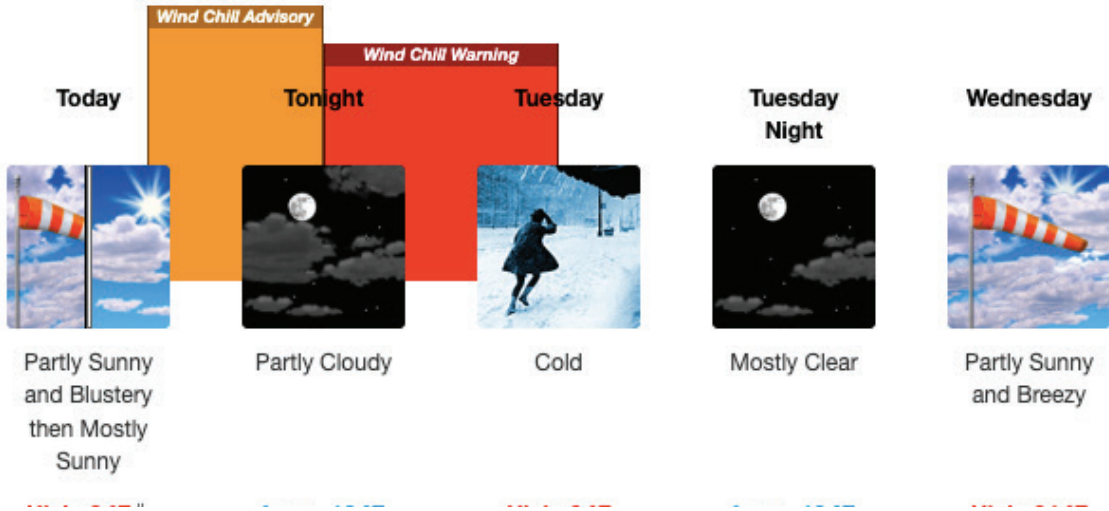
Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 8 of 57

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 9 of 57



Arctic air works back into the region so we will again have dangerous wind chills to deal with. Cold persists until the next system brings milder air back into the region Wednesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 10 of 57

Today in Weather History

January 24, 1972: Snowfall of a dusting to as much as 8 inches accompanied by 30 to 40 mph winds resulted in widespread blowing and drifting snow across much of South Dakota. Many roads were blocked by drifting snow. Visibilities were near zero at times. Many activities were canceled or postponed.

January 24, 1985: Blizzard conditions associated with an Arctic front moved into western Minnesota and northeast South Dakota during the afternoon and continued into the evening. The blizzard brought travel to a standstill. Winds increased to 40 to 60 mph. Many roads were closed due to drifts of snow. Temperatures fell rapidly behind the front with wind chills of 30 to 50 below zero overnight. There were some accidents and stranded motorists. Many vehicles went into the ditch, with many people stranded. The National Guard was called upon to search for stranded motorists. Portions of northeast South Dakota experienced near-blizzard conditions as wind speeds gusted to near 60 mph with dangerous travel conditions.

1940: A record-breaking 19.9 inches of snow fell in Richmond, Virginia, on this day. The storm, which began on the 23rd, produced 21.6 inches of snow for the Richmond area. The headline in the Richmond Times-Dispatch was "Blizzard Sweeps State, Bringing Deep Snow; Public Schools Closed."

1967: A tornado outbreak across the Central U.S. was the furthest north ever recorded in the winter up to that time. Severe weather occurred across a good portion of the southeast and east-central Iowa. Two-inch hail fell at Armstrong, and over two dozen tornadoes were reported. Five miles north of Fort Madison, one fatality occurred from a tornado, along with six injuries. A tornado causing F4 damage killed 3 people and injured 216 in St. Louis County, Missouri. Storms also affected parts of northern and central Illinois. One strong tornado in Mason County killed one person and injured three others. Another tornado moved across the Champaign-Urbana metropolitan area, injuring five people. Other strong tornadoes were reported across Carroll County in Mt. Carroll, where 12 people were injured, and near Gladstone in Henderson County. Funnel clouds were reported across the southwest section of Chicago, IL. Iowa had never recorded a tornado in January before this outbreak. 32 total tornadoes occurred, 14 of them in Iowa. Nine twisters occurred in Missouri, 8 in Illinois, and 1 in Wisconsin.

1916 - The temperature at Browning MT plunged 100 degrees in just 24 hours, from 44 degrees above zero to 56 degrees below zero. It was a record 24 hour temperature drop for the U.S. (Weather Channel) (National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1935 - Snowstorms hit the northeastern U.S. and the Pacific Northwest producing record 24 hour snowfall totals of 23 inches at Portland ME and 52 inches at Winthrop MA. (David Ludlum)

1956 - Thirty-eight inches of rain deluged the Kilauea Sugar Plantation of Hawaii in 24 hours, including twelve inches in just one hour. (David Ludlum)

1963 - A great arctic outbreak reached the southern U.S. The cold wave broke many records for duration of cold weather along the Gulf Coast. A reading of 15 degrees below zero at Nashville TN was an all-time record low for that location. (David Ludlum)

1982 - Chinook winds plagued the foothills of southeastern Wyoming and northern and central Colorado for the second straight Sunday. The winds gusted to 140 mph at Wondervu CO, located northeast of Denver. Chinook winds a week earlier produced wind gusts to 137 mph. (Storm Data)

1987 - Temperatures in Minnesota plunged far below the zero mark. International Falls MN reported a morning low of 35 degrees below zero, and Warroad MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 45 below zero. A storm developing in northeastern Texas produced severe thunderstorms with large hail in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas. Camden AR reported golf ball size hail. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A blizzard rapidly developed in the north central U.S. In just one hour weather conditions in eastern North Dakota switched from sunny skies, light winds and temperature readings in the 20s, to rapidly falling temperatures and near zero visibility in snow and blowing snow. High winds in Wyoming, gusting to 72 mph at Gillette, produced snow drifts sixteen feet high. Northwestern Iowa experienced its second blizzard in just 24 hours. High winds in Iowa produced wind chill readings as cold as 65 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

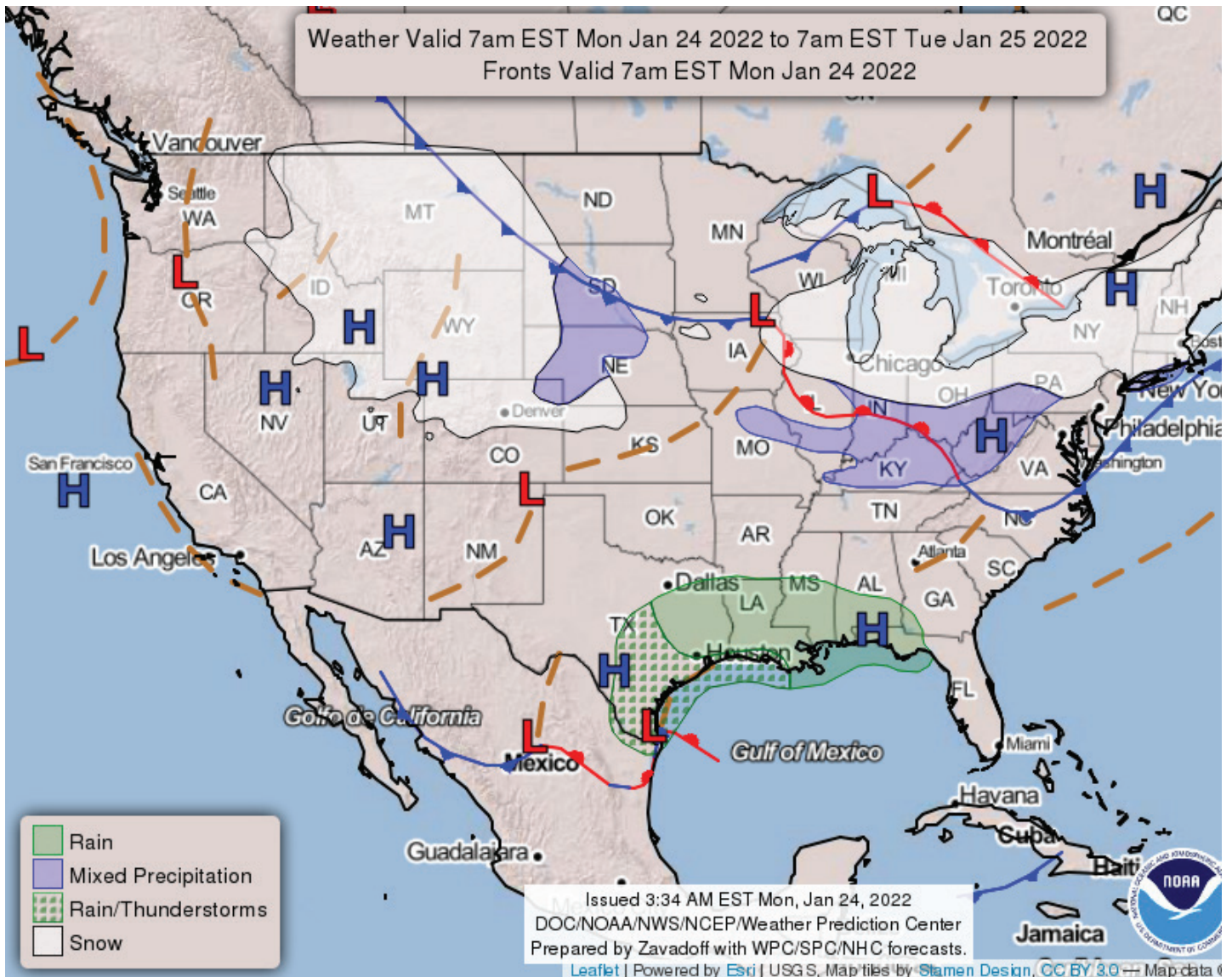
Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 11 of 57

Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 34 °F at 11:55 PM
Low Temp: -9 °F at 5:22 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 11:49 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 60 in 1981
Record Low: -35 in 1915
Average High: 24°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.44
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.43
Average Precip to date: 0.44
Precip Year to Date: 0.43
Sunset Tonight: 5:29:22 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:45 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 12 of 57



DOES SIZE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Have you ever heard that "bigger is better" or that "smaller is insufficient?" Some think that size makes a difference. And there may be times when both are true.

Psalm 117 provides a significant statement on size. It is the shortest chapter in the Bible. Yet it contains some of the largest themes in the Word of God.

For example, "Praise the Lord, all you nations." The Lord is not limited to any one nation or country. God did not send His Son to be the Savior of one particular group. His Word states that "The Father sent the Son to be the savior of the world..." There is no Biblical basis to believe that our Lord loves some one more than He does every one. The word world includes every continent - from the most God-hating to the most God-honoring.

It also states that His love is not limited: "For great is His love for us." Our God has no favorites. We may question why others are more prosperous than we are or have more of life's goods than we do. But that does not mean that they are loved more than anyone else. God gave them what He did for a particular reason, and He gives us what He did for a particular reason. They, as well as the rest of us, will be accountable to Him for each of His gifts. It is never what He gives us, but how we bless God and others with His gifts that He gives us.

Finally, His "faithfulness endures forever." God is not nice today and spiteful tomorrow. Who He is today He will be tomorrow and throughout eternity. His pledges and promises are predictable. His Word proves that fact.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for a love that includes all of us and Your faithfulness that will not waver. You truly deserve all our praise! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD. Psalm 117

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 13 of 57

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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 14 of 57

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

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

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

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

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

E-mail _____

Password _____

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

paypal.me/paperpaul



News from the Associated Press

Rescue dog from Louisiana lifts spirits at Yankton monastery

By RANDY DOCKENDORF Yankton Press and Dakotan

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — The newest member of Sacred Heart Monastery walks on all fours and begs for food. She also likes a good scratch behind the ears and going for walks on a leash.

In short, she leads a dog's life.

She's Lexi, a purebred Yorkshire Terrier some refer to as the "Monastery Mascot." The dog, who turns 4 this spring, arrived last October to live with the 69 Benedictine Sisters on the hill overlooking the Missouri River.

Lexi has brought joy to the nuns, but she has also found happiness after leading a difficult life and being transported hundreds of miles to South Dakota.

"We call her Lexi, the rescue dog, because she was rescued after Hurricane Ida in Louisiana," said Sister Maribeth Wentzlaff, referring to the major storm Aug. 26-Sept. 4, 2021.

The match quickly came together.

"When there was the hurricane in Louisiana, the dogs had to go to shelters," Sister Maribeth said. "When the shelters were getting flooded, the dogs needed someone to rescue them. What a neat match when an animal can find a place that really cares about them."

While the match occurred quickly, it was the answer to a long-held prayer among the nuns, especially Sister Maribeth, the Yankton Press and Dakotan reported.

"I was diagnosed with Parkinson's last July, so I had done a lot of reading about how dogs or other animals help people with Parkinson's calm down the tremors and the shaking," she said.

"I have wanted a dog for a long time. I kept in contact with Heartland Humane Society to be on the lookout for a dog. But it had to be a certain type that didn't shed, preferably was a female and wasn't just a new puppy."

Then came the unexpected call. A Sioux Falls animal shelter learned it would be getting a shipment of displaced dogs from Louisiana, and officials wondered if the nuns were still interested and able to take one of the incoming canines.

"Heartland Humane Society was going to get 300 rescue dogs from Louisiana, so they were contacting all of their local shelters, including the one here in Yankton," Sister Maribeth said.

"The dogs would arrive at Sioux Falls in four or five days. They had a healthy dog for us and were going to bring her down to the monastery."

The nuns were overjoyed to welcome the Yorkie, reminiscent of St. Francis of Assisi and his love for animals. And in a manner befitting the monastery, the nuns named the dog Lexi — after a prayer known as the *Lectio (lexy-o) Divina*.

The prayer can be recited by anyone and combines Scripture readings with reflection, Sister Maribeth said.

"You pray and reflect on whatever comes to you, some wisdom or insight," she said. "And here, Lexi was someone who could teach us some wisdom because we learn a lot from dogs and other animals. They give us unconditional love, and they just bring out the happiness and joy in all of us."

Before she arrived, Lexi was hit by a car that broke her pelvis and required surgery, Sister Maribeth said.

But the nun believes Lexi was injured in additional ways.

"Lexi has been a real day brightener for people. They look forward to seeing her, and she just loves attention," the nun said. "I think, honestly, she was abused when she was young. She wasn't in a family who really cared for her and truly loved her. Now, she is learning how to trust. She has a lot of people around her at one time."

Sister Margo Tschetter has seen many of the same signs that the dog was mistreated in the past.

"I really think she was abused by a man at one time, so she has a hard time with men employees (at the monastery)," she said. "Some of them can visit with her and pet her, while others she wants nothing

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 16 of 57

to do with them.”

The Sisters knew the dog would face a major transition living among the 69 nuns, along with monastery employees and visitors. The nuns formed a team to plan for the dog’s arrival and needed care.

The nuns knew the dog couldn’t be allowed in the dining room or certain other areas. In addition, the dog would need someone to care for her, feed her, take her for walks and make sure that she received general care.

At first, Lexi was housed in the main section of the care center (infirmary or nursing home). However, the center created too much activity and stimulation for the newly-arrived dog.

After rethinking the situation, the nuns made Sister Margo’s room the dog’s home during the day and Sister Maribeth’s room as the canine’s place at night. Lexi was free to come and go, and nuns come to visit her.

“It’s stabilized Lexi a lot more,” Sister Maribeth said. “And a lot of the Sisters stop by Margo’s room for some ‘Lexi time.’”

Sister Margo relishes her role as “dog whisperer.”

“Lexi reminds me of when I was growing up. We always had dogs at our house,” she said. “So, when we got Lexi, it was a breath of fresh air, something different that gave some of the Sisters something to do and something different to talk about.”

The canine companionship has become especially important with the pandemic entering its third year, Sister Margo said. The monastery has been closed to the public since March 13, 2020. The nuns recently opened Sunday Mass in Bishop Marty Chapel to outside worshippers, requiring masks for all persons.

However, the recent surge of a new variant may mean a return to some of the former rules, Sister Maribeth said. “With omicron, we just had a COVID meeting and are tightening things up again,” she said.

With the ongoing pandemic, Lexi has lifted spirits and benefited the nuns’ mental health and need for outside socialization, Sister Margo said.

“I think it has really helped all of us. A lot of places have the Eden project where they bring animals into a place,” she said. “They have found research showing animals bring new life to those that they’re around and give people something to look forward to.”

Lexi has worked on her socialization skills, Sister Maribeth said.

“Lexi is learning how to shake hands and all sorts of other things. She’s really learning the tricks of the trade,” the nun said.

After the initial shock of arriving from weather in the Deep South, Lexi has adjusted well to South Dakota winters, Sister Margo said.

“Lexi loves going outside,” the nun said. “When the Sisters put on their winter coats to go out and take her for a walk, she acts perfectly comfortable. I think she has a really thick undercoat.”

But not always, Sister Maribeth said.

“When we had our first snow, 6 or 7 inches, it came to her chest,” the nun said. “She’s from Louisiana, and she didn’t know what to make of it. Now, she lifts her paws high when she walks in the snow.”

Lexi holds an extremely sensitive sense of smell and recognizes the different sights, sounds and smells of the Sisters and where she has been taken for walks, Sister Margo said.

The dog has even adapted to the surrounding wildlife, she added.

“The squirrels drive her nuts, but the coyotes didn’t bother her when they were howling the other night,” she said.

Lexi has given a new dimension to monastery life, especially during a pandemic that limits contact with the outside world, Sister Margo said.

“It’s so satisfying to have Lexi around. I think it has you seeing a different way of a new life, and I think COVID has a lot to do with that,” she said. “You get (69) people living together, that’s one thing, but having the animal makes things completely different. They also have a need to be cared for and to be sheltered, fed and loved.”

Sister Maribeth agrees, noting the dog has lifted spirits, including hers.

“When I look at Lexi, I wonder what rescue dogs have to go through before they find a forever home,

what it must be like for her to finally feel safe and in a place where she doesn't need to be afraid of losing her home," the nun said

Sister Maribeth believes the monastery's newest member has made life better.

"It's just so comforting to me, having a different kind of companion where she's learning new tricks and there's always something different with her," the nun said.

"Yet at night, she has her own bed right beside my bed. You can go to sleep, and both of you have that sense of peace and rest."

Spearfish man charged in shooting death of his wife

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — A Spearfish man is accused in the shooting death of his wife early Saturday morning, authorities said.

Dreau Rogers, 33, has been arrested and charged with first degree murder in the killing of 43-year-old Destiny Rogers, Spearfish police said.

Police said Dreau Rogers is also charged with possession and ingestion of a controlled substance, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Police responded to a 911 call seeking medical assistance at 12:48 a.m. Saturday, when police discovered that Destiny Rogers had suffered a gunshot wound. She was pronounced dead at a local hospital.

It's not clear if Dreau Rogers has an attorney.

Assange wins first stage in effort to appeal US extradition

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won the first stage of his effort to overturn a U.K. ruling that opened the door for his extradition to U.S. to stand trial on espionage charges.

The High Court in London gave Assange permission to appeal the case to the U.K. Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court must agree to accept the case before it can move forward.

"Make no mistake, we won today in court," Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, said outside the courthouse, noting that he remains in custody at Belmarsh Prison in London.

"We will fight this until Julian is free," she added.

The Supreme Court normally takes about eight sitting weeks after an application is submitted to decide whether to accept an appeal, the court says on its website.

The decision is the latest step in Assange's long battle to avoid a trial in the U.S. on a series of charges related to WikiLeaks' publication of classified documents more than a decade ago.

Just over a year ago, a district court judge in London rejected a U.S. extradition request on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. U.S. authorities later provided assurances that the WikiLeaks founder wouldn't face the severe treatment his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk.

The High Court last month overturned the lower court's decision, saying that the U.S. promises were enough to guarantee Assange would be treated humanely.

Those assurances were the focus of Monday's ruling by the High Court.

Assange's lawyers are seeking to appeal because the U.S. offered its assurances after the lower court made its ruling. But the High Court overturned the lower court ruling, saying that the judge should have given the U.S. the opportunity to offer the assurances before she made her final ruling.

The High Court gave Assange permission to appeal so the Supreme Court can decide "in what circumstances can an appellate court receive assurances from a requesting state ... in extradition proceedings."

Assange's lawyers have argued that the U.S. government's pledge that Assange won't be subjected to extreme conditions is meaningless because it's conditional and could be changed at the discretion of American authorities.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse linked to WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of leaked military

and diplomatic documents.

Assange, 50, has been held at the high-security Belmarsh Prison since 2019, when he was arrested for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years holed up inside Ecuador's Embassy in London. Assange sought protection in the embassy in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Lawyers for Assange argue that their client shouldn't have been charged because he was acting as a journalist and is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of the press. They say the documents he published exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

China tests 2M in Beijing, lifts COVID lockdown in Xi'an

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A cluster of COVID-19 cases in Beijing has prompted authorities to test millions and impose new measures two weeks ahead of the opening of the Winter Olympics, even as the city of Xi'an in north-central China lifted on Monday a monthlong lockdown that had isolated its 13 million residents.

Officials in Beijing said they would conduct a second round of mass testing of the Fengtai district's 2 million residents, where the majority of the capital's 40 coronavirus cases since Jan. 15 have been found. That came a day after authorities announced that anyone who buys or who has bought fever, cough or certain other medicines in the past two weeks would be required to take a COVID-19 test within 72 hours.

The severe measures, despite a relatively low number of cases, illustrate the acute concern of government officials in the run-up to the Olympics, which open in Beijing on Feb. 4.

"The current epidemic prevention situation is still grim and complicated and all departments across the city must act proactively and swiftly," Beijing city spokesperson Xu Hejian said.

"The overall situation is controllable," he added.

The ruling Communist Party's "zero tolerance" COVID-19 policy mandates lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing whenever a case is discovered. Anti-virus measures have intensified in the past month with lockdowns in Xi'an and two other cities, and the partial suspension of train and plane routes to Beijing to stop travel from areas with outbreaks.

Overall, the number of reported new cases has been falling in China from more than 100 a day at the peak of the Xi'an outbreak to 18 on Sunday, six of which were in Beijing. Despite the drop, pandemic controls remain stepped-up ahead of the Olympics, where all participants will be tested every day and be completely isolated from the general public.

On top of the first round of mass testing in Beijing's Fengtai district, targeted testing was conducted Sunday at residential communities in six other districts, the Beijing Daily reported. It wasn't fully clear who was being tested. The newspaper said that in one community, an official said that if a resident had been to a high-risk area in Fengtai or Fangshan, another affected district, occupants of the entire building would have to be tested twice.

The government told people in areas of Beijing deemed at high risk for infection not to leave the city. A number of nearby provinces reported cases linked to the outbreaks in the capital, including Shandong and Hebei provinces. The city of Shenyang in Liaoning province reported a positive test result in a person with no symptoms, also linked to the Beijing clusters.

The announcement by the city of Xi'an Monday followed the restart of commercial flights from the city over the weekend. The major tourism center and former imperial capital, famed as the home of the Terracotta Warrior statue army, struggled to get food to some residents in the early days of the lockdown, after people were confined to their homes.

Access to Xi'an was suspended Dec. 22 following an outbreak attributed to the delta variant of the coronavirus. The city is about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) southwest of Beijing.

Other outbreaks prompted the government to impose travel bans on a number of cities, including the port of Tianjin, about an hour from Beijing. The stiff regulations are credited with preventing major nationwide outbreaks and China has reported relatively few cases of the highly infectious omicron variant.

The Olympics are being held under strict controls that are meant to isolate athletes, staff, reporters and officials from residents. Athletes are required to be vaccinated or undergo a quarantine after arriving in China.

Organizers on Monday said 39 people among the 2,586 athletes, team officials and others who arrived after Jan. 4 had tested positive for the virus upon landing at Beijing airport. Another 33 people who had already entered the bubble isolating participants from the general public later tested positive, the organizing committee said on its website.

The statement did not identify those who tested positive other than to say they were "outside stakeholders," a term that excludes athletes or coaches. China mandates 21 days of quarantine for people arriving from abroad, but had waived that for those coming for the Olympics on condition they tested negative for the virus.

UK to probe lawmaker's claim she was fired over Muslim faith

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday ordered an investigation into a Conservative lawmaker's claim that she was fired from a government job in part because of her Muslim faith — the latest allegation of wrongdoing that is shaking the Conservative government and Johnson's grip on power.

Former Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani says that when she was demoted in 2020, a government whip said her "Muslimness" was "making colleagues uncomfortable." She told the Sunday Times that she was told "there were concerns that I wasn't loyal to the party as I didn't do enough to defend the party against Islamophobia allegations."

Chief Whip Mark Spencer identified himself as the person who spoke to Ghani in 2020, but called her allegation "completely false."

Johnson's office said Monday that the prime minister had asked government officials "to establish the facts about what happened." It said Johnson "takes these claims very seriously."

Ghani was elected to Parliament in 2015 — the Conservatives' first female Muslim lawmaker — and was made a junior minister in 2018. At the time her boss, then Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, said it was proof the Conservatives "were a party of opportunity." But some have accused the party of failing to stamp out anti-Muslim prejudice under Johnson, who in 2018 compared women who wear face-covering veils to "letter boxes."

Two senior Cabinet ministers, Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, spoke in support of Ghani and said her claims must be investigated.

"It takes a lot of bravery for someone to stand up and say: 'My religion was taken into consideration when I was being assessed for what I do as a job,'" Zahawi said. "That should never happen and there is no room for it."

Ghani's claim has deepened the rifts roiling Johnson's governing party, which is being wracked by allegations about lockdown-breaching parties in the prime minister's office while Britain was under coronavirus restrictions.

The "partygate" allegations have infuriated many in Britain, who were barred from meeting up with friends and family for months in 2020 and 2021 to curb the spread of COVID-19. They are being investigated by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, whose report, expected this week, will be a pivotal moment for the prime minister.

Ghani's allegation comes after another Conservative legislator, William Wragg, accused party whips of intimidating and blackmailing members of Parliament to ensure they supported the government. Wragg says he is meeting with police this week to discuss his claims.

A handful of Conservative lawmakers have called for Johnson to resign. If Gray's report is highly critical,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 20 of 57

more may be emboldened to call for a no-confidence vote in Johnson that could result in his ouster.

Even if he makes it through the week, many Conservatives have decided Johnson's days in office are numbered, and weakness at the top is letting party divisions spill into the open.

NATO sends ships, jets east as Ireland rejects Russia drills

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO said Monday that it's putting extra forces on standby and sending more ships and fighter jets to eastern Europe, as Ireland warned that new Russian war games off its coast are not welcome given tensions over whether President Vladimir Putin intends to attack Ukraine.

The U.S.-led military organization said that it is beefing up its "deterrence" presence in the Baltic Sea area. Denmark is sending a frigate and deploying F-16 war planes to Lithuania; Spain will also send warships and could send fighter jets to Bulgaria; and France stands ready to send troops to Romania.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said NATO will "take all necessary measures to protect and defend all allies." He said: "We will always respond to any deterioration of our security environment, including through strengthening our collective defense."

The announcement came as European Union foreign ministers sought to put on a fresh display of resolve in support of Ukraine, and paper over concerns about divisions on the best way to confront any Russian aggression.

"We are showing unprecedented unity about the situation in Ukraine, with the strong coordination with the U.S.," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who is chairing their meeting, told reporters in Brussels.

Asked whether the EU would follow a U.S. move and order the families of European embassy personnel in Ukraine to leave, Borrell said: "We are not going to do the same thing." He said he is keen to hear from Secretary of State Antony Blinken about that decision.

Britain on Monday also announced it is withdrawing some diplomats and dependants from its embassy in Kyiv. The Foreign Office said the move was "in response to the growing threat from Russia."

Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesman, Oleg Nikolenko, said the U.S. decision was "a premature step" and a sign of "excessive caution." He said that Russia is sowing panic among Ukrainians and foreigners in order to destabilize Ukraine.

Germany is monitoring developments, but German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stressed that "we must not contribute to unsettling the situation further; we need to continue to support the Ukrainian government very clearly and above all maintain the stability of the country."

Arriving at the EU meeting, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said he would inform his counterparts that Russia plans to hold war games 240 kilometers (150 miles) off Ireland's southwest coast — in international waters but within Ireland's exclusive economic zone.

"This isn't a time to increase military activity and tension in the context of what's happening with and in Ukraine," Coveney said. "The fact that they are choosing to do it on the western borders, if you like, of the EU, off the Irish coast, is something that in our view is simply not welcome and not wanted right now, particularly in the coming weeks."

During Monday's meeting, which Blinken will attend virtually, the ministers will restate Europe's condemnation of the Russian military build-up near Ukraine, involving an estimated 100,000 troops, tanks, artillery and heavy equipment, diplomats and officials said ahead of the meeting.

They'll renew calls for dialogue, notably through the European-backed "Normandy format," which helped to ease hostilities in 2015, a year after Putin ordered the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Fighting in eastern Ukraine has killed around 14,000 people and still simmers today.

Should Putin move on Ukraine again, the ministers will warn, Russia would face "massive consequences and severe costs." Those costs would be of a financial and political nature. The EU insists that it stands ready to slap hefty sanctions on Russia within days of any attack.

Over the weekend, some of the member countries closest to Russia — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — confirmed that they plan to send U.S.-made anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine, a move en-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 21 of 57

dorsed by the United States.

But questions have been raised about just how unified the EU is. Diverse political, business and energy interests have long divided the 27-country bloc in its approach to Moscow. Around 40% of the EU's natural gas imports come from Russia, much of it via pipelines across Ukraine.

Gas prices have skyrocketed, and the head of the International Energy Agency has said that Russian energy giant Gazprom was already reducing its exports to the EU in late 2021 despite high prices. Putin says Gazprom is respecting its contract obligations, not putting the squeeze on Europe.

The EU's two major powers appear most cautious. Germany's Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia, which is complete but yet to pump gas, has become a bargaining chip. French President Emmanuel Macron has renewed previously rejected calls for an EU summit with Putin.

Late last year, France and Germany initially expressed doubts about U.S. intelligence assessments that Moscow might be preparing to invade.

Late on Saturday, the head of the German navy, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schoenbach, resigned after coming under fire for saying that Ukraine would not regain the Crimean Peninsula, and for suggesting that Putin deserves "respect."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban plans to meet with Putin next week to discuss a Russian-backed project to expand a Hungarian nuclear power plant.

Still, diplomats and officials said hard-hitting sanctions are being drawn up with the EU's executive branch, the European Commission. But they were reluctant to say what the measures might be or what action by Russia might trigger them.

The aim, they said, is to try to match the doubts Putin has sowed about his intentions for Ukraine with uncertainty about what any retaliatory European action might look like, or when it would come.

Taliban hold first talks in Europe since Afghan takeover

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

OSLO, Norway (AP) — The Taliban and western diplomats have begun their first official talks in Europe since they took over control of Afghanistan in August.

The closed-door meetings were taking place at a hotel in the snow-capped mountains above the Norwegian capital. Taliban representatives will be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by the United States and other Western countries be released as Afghanistan faces a precarious humanitarian situation.

"We are requesting them to unfreeze Afghan assets and not punish ordinary Afghans because of the political discourse," said Taliban delegate Shafiullah Azam on Sunday night. "Because of the starvation, because of the deadly winter, I think it's time for the international community to support Afghans, not punish them because of their political disputes."

Ahead of the talks, western diplomats met with Afghan women's rights activists and human rights defenders to hear from civil society in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora about their demands and assessment of the current situation on the ground. The meeting was attended by representatives of the EU, the U.S., Britain, France, Italy and hosts Norway.

Standing silent as attendees gathered, women's rights activist Heda Khamoush, who lives in Kabul, held up the photos of Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhel, two women arrested by the Taliban last week following an anti-Taliban protest against the compulsory Islamic headscarf, or hijab, for women. They haven't been seen since.

Rejecting the accusation the Taliban had abducted them, Azam said he was "not aware of that" and suggested activists may be using this event to seek asylum.

Speaking after the meeting, women's rights activist Mahbouba Seraj angrily rejected this and warned that "if they continue this way — to tell us something and do something else — that's when the trust is going to break, completely."

The three-day talks opened on Sunday with direct meetings between the Taliban and civil society rep-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 22 of 57

representatives.

A joint statement tweeted overnight by Zabihullah Mujahid, the Afghan deputy culture and information minister, said "participants of the meeting recognized that understanding and joint cooperation are the only solutions to all the problems of Afghanistan," and emphasized that "all Afghans need to work together for better political, economic and security outcomes in the country."

Seraj acknowledged the progress made. "Yes, they were listening. I should say that," she said Monday morning. "We gave them a paper. We asked them what we wanted. They took it. They were very, very cordial about it."

The talks come at a crucial time for Afghanistan as freezing temperatures are compounding misery from the downward spiral that has come with the fall of the U.S.-backed government and the Taliban takeover.

Aid groups and international agencies estimate about 23 million people, more than half the country, face severe hunger and nearly 9 million are on the brink of starvation. People have resorted to selling possessions to buy food, burning furniture for warmth and even selling their children. The United Nations has managed to provide some liquidity and allowed the Taliban administration to pay for imports, including electricity.

Faced with the Taliban's request for funds, Western powers are likely to put the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan high on their agenda, along with the West's recurring demand for the Taliban administration to share power with Afghanistan's minority ethnic and religious groups.

Since sweeping to power in mid-August, the Taliban have imposed widespread restrictions, many of them directed at women. Women have been banned from many jobs outside the health and education fields, their access to education has been restricted beyond sixth grade and they have been ordered to wear the hijab. The Taliban have, however, stopped short of imposing the burqa, which was compulsory when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban have increasingly targeted Afghanistan's beleaguered rights groups, as well as journalists, detaining and sometimes beating television crews covering demonstrations.

A U.S. delegation, led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West, plans to discuss "the formation of a representative political system; responses to the urgent humanitarian and economic crises; security and counterterrorism concerns; and human rights, especially education for girls and women," according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department.

The Scandinavian country, home to the Nobel Peace Prize, is no stranger to diplomacy. It has been involved in peace efforts in a number of countries, including Mozambique, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Colombia, the Philippines, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Myanmar, Somalia, Sri Lanka and South Sudan.

EXPLAINER: Why effort to help Afghanistan is falling short

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As winter deepens, a grim situation in Afghanistan is getting worse. Freezing temperatures are compounding misery from the downward spiral that has come with the fall of the U.S.-backed government and the Taliban takeover.

Aid groups and international agencies estimate about 23 million people, more than half the country, face severe hunger and nearly 9 million are on the brink of starvation. People have resorted to selling possessions to buy food, burning furniture for warmth and even selling their children.

The U.S. government this month announced \$308 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and is working with the U.N. and organizations such as the World Bank to provide additional help. The Biden administration has also sought to clarify that U.S. sanctions on the Taliban shouldn't block humanitarian aid. But there is growing pressure to do more, such as unfreezing Afghan government funds held at the New York Federal Reserve Bank.

A look at the situation:

HOW DID CONDITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN GET SO BAD SO FAST?

Life in Afghanistan was precarious before the Taliban takeover in August, with more than half the people surviving on less than \$2 a day. About 80% of the entire budget of the U.S.-backed Afghan government

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 23 of 57

came from international donor funds. More than half of all children under 5 were expected to face acute malnutrition, according to the U.N. In addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was suffering through a prolonged drought, devastating in a country where agriculture makes up 25% of GDP.

The withdrawal of the U.S. after 20 years of war meant an end to the military and other support that made up about half of the economy. Most government employees had not been paid in the two months before the Taliban takeover. Since then, about half a million Afghans have lost their jobs, including many women pushed out of the workforce by the Taliban.

Afghans at home can get only limited amounts of any money they have in bank accounts because of a currency shortage. Meanwhile those abroad are having trouble sending help to family back in Afghanistan, in part because banks are reluctant to do business in a country whose leaders are under U.S. sanctions.

There is food in the markets, but many people can't afford to buy it, said Ciaran Donnelly, head of crisis response at the International Rescue Committee. "This is a humanitarian crisis, an economic collapse and a state failure all wrapped up in one," said Donnelly. "And they're feeding off each other."

WHAT HAS THE U.S. DONE SO FAR TO HELP?

President Joe Biden said the U.S. would continue to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan after the withdrawal, which was set in motion after a peace deal signed with the Taliban under President Donald Trump. The administration notes that the U.S. is still the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and is contributing to a U.N. effort to raise more than \$5 billion for the country.

But the U.S. has not recognized the new government or lifted sanctions on the Taliban and its senior leaders for providing a haven to al-Qaida while it plotted the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. That has created at least a perception that sending money or doing business in Afghanistan is off-limits.

A senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal policy discussions, acknowledged there's a perception that the sanctions are broader than the Taliban leadership. The official said the U.S. has sought to dispel it in part with what are known as "special licenses," issued in December to assure international organizations, other nations and NGOs that they could provide humanitarian aid despite the sanctions.

The official said the U.S. also is working with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to take money that had been set aside for Afghan reconstruction before the Taliban takeover and use it for humanitarian relief.

Roya Rahmani, a former Afghan ambassador to the U.S., said she doesn't support recognizing the new government but said the issue must be "untangled" from discussions of humanitarian aid, which is crucial even if some of it winds up in the hands of the Taliban.

"There is a very potent and real catastrophe boiling up in Afghanistan, and people are suffering now," she said.

WHAT ABOUT AFGHAN MONEY FROZEN IN THE U.S.?

There is nearly \$7 billion in Afghan funds at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York that have been frozen since the Taliban takeover in August. The Taliban has demanded the money, but it can't be transferred to them because of the sanctions. Complicating matters, families of people killed in the Sept. 11 attacks have filed a claim to the funds to pay the judgment in a lawsuit they filed against al-Qaida and the Taliban.

A letter sent Thursday to Biden, with the signatures of 41 mostly Democratic members of Congress, urged the president to "ensure that a substantial share" of the frozen assets is used for humanitarian relief, arguing that deteriorating conditions will lead to the country "once again become a breeding ground for terrorist organizations" such as al-Qaida.

Shah Mehrabi, an economics professor at Montgomery College in Maryland and a board member of the Afghanistan Central Bank, says a portion of the frozen funds should be used to help stabilize prices in the country, pay the salaries of civil servants and help keep the private sector alive. Otherwise, he warns, the economy could go into free fall.

"I don't think that's in our interests and in the interests of the United States," Mehrabi said "And I think the United States knows that as well."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 24 of 57

The senior administration official said the administration is discussing the fate of the frozen funds but has to let the judicial process play out involving the legal claim filed by the Sept. 11 victim families.

Meanwhile, the Taliban and Western diplomats have started their first official talks in Europe since the Taliban took over control of Afghanistan in August. Taliban representatives will be certain to press their demand that money frozen by the United States and other Western countries, totaling nearly \$10 billion, be released.

IS THERE MORE THE US AND OTHERS CAN DO?

Aid groups and others have urged the Treasury Department to issue "comfort letters" to businesses and governments assuring them they won't face legal consequences for doing business in Afghanistan, though the official said the general licenses were intended to accomplish just that.

The administration could also encourage the unfreezing of Afghan government assets in banks outside the U.S. Rahman, the former ambassador, says the international community should sit down and come up with "creative" solutions such as some form of mobile banking to make it easier for Afghans overseas to get money to their families.

Whatever is done, it should be soon, Rahman says.

"Starvation and suffering fosters hopelessness," she said, "and hopelessness fosters extremism, terrorism and much worse."

France bars unvaccinated from restaurants, sports venues

People who aren't vaccinated against COVID-19 are no longer allowed in France's restaurants, bars, tourist sites and sports venues unless they recently recovered from the virus.

The new law came into effect Monday requiring a "vaccine pass" that is central to the government's anti-virus strategy.

France is registering Europe's highest-ever daily coronavirus infection numbers, and hospitals are continuing to fill up with virus patients, though the number of people in intensive care units has dropped in recent days.

The government has imposed few other restrictions amid the surge in the omicron variant, focusing instead on the vaccine pass, approved by France's parliament and Constitutional Council last week.

Omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant, according to studies. Omicron spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had previously been infected by prior versions of the virus.

Critics question whether the pass will make much difference in a country where 94% of French adults have had at least one vaccine dose, and scattered groups held protests Saturday against the new law. The government hopes that it protects the most vulnerable and reduces pressure on crowded ICUs, where most patients are unvaccinated.

Since last summer, France has required a "health pass" to go to any cafe, museum, movie theater or take a regional train or domestic flight. But until Monday, unvaccinated people could activate the pass by getting a recent negative test. The new pass only works for people who are fully vaccinated, and those who recently recovered from the virus.

France, meanwhile, opened up access to booster shots to 12- to 17-year-olds on Monday.

Democrats make surprising inroads in redistricting fight

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats braced for disaster when state legislatures began redrawing congressional maps, fearing that Republican dominance of statehouses would tilt power away from them for the next decade.

But as the redistricting process reaches its final stages, that anxiety is beginning to ease.

For Democrats, the worst case scenario of losing well over a dozen seats in the U.S. House appears

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 25 of 57

unlikely to happen. After some aggressive map drawing of their own in states with Democratic legislatures, some Democrats predict the typical congressional district will shift from leaning to the right of the national vote to matching it, ending a distortion that gave the GOP a built-in advantage over the past five House elections.

"We have stymied their intent to gerrymander their way to a House majority," Kelly Ward Burton, head of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, said of the GOP.

The nation's congressional maps won't be settled for several more months. Republicans in some large states like Florida have yet to finalize proposed changes, giving the GOP a last-minute opportunity to seek an advantage.

But the picture could come into greater clarity this week when New York's redistricting commission submits to the state legislature a second attempt to draw a map. If the Democratic-controlled Legislature rejects the map, it can take over drawing new lines in Democrats' favor. That would almost certainly blunt the GOP advantage that has been in place since the last redistricting process in 2010.

The jockeying in state capitals has implications not just for Democrats' uphill effort to maintain a majority in the U.S. House in this year's midterm elections. It will affect the broader balance of power in Washington and state legislatures for the remainder of the decade.

While Republicans say they've achieved their goals so far, they're surprised at how much Democrats have tried to expand the number of seats their party can win. The GOP has taken a markedly different approach by aiming to shore up its vulnerable members' districts, transforming competitive seats into safe ones.

That's in part because Republicans already expanded the map with aggressive redistricting after the 2010 census, when they controlled more states. Now, as the lines are adjusted to meet last year's census figures, they are locking in their gains while Democrats are taking risks to fight back.

In a wave election, Democrats could lose even more seats in the maps they have drawn because they spread their voters so thin, analysts say. And, if political coalitions shift in upcoming years, seats Democrats thought were within reach could suddenly disappear.

"Republicans have given themselves pretty good tsunami protection," said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks redistricting. "But for Democrats, if it rains a little, their house is flooded."

The Democratic push comes as the party has unsuccessfully fought to ban partisan gerrymandering nationwide — their elections bill barring the practice died in the Senate last week during a Republican filibuster. Li said Democrats, however, are still gerrymandering in states they control, sometimes aggressively as in Illinois, other times relatively lightly, as in New Mexico and Oregon.

In contrast, experts say Republicans, who control more states, have gerrymandered heavily in places like Texas, North Carolina and Ohio. But the GOP's Ohio maps were tossed out by the state Supreme Court this month, and Democrats are hopeful North Carolina's high court follows suit with the districts there, part of the reason for the party's increased optimism.

The next and biggest opportunity for Democrats is in New York, which will test how much power Democrats are willing to give up to fight gerrymandering. Saying they wanted to take partisanship out of redistricting, Democrats there in 2014 backed a ballot measure to put the process in the hands of a bipartisan commission. But the state legislature can overrule the commission. In 2014 it was divided between Democratic and Republican control. Now Democrats have a supermajority in both houses.

The New York Legislature already rejected the commission's first attempt at maps, and can seize control if it rejects the second one, due by Tuesday.

"The Democratic leadership and those on the far left that run the show in Albany, they're hellbent to take this process over to derail the commission, and to have the the party bosses in Albany draw the maps," said Nick Langworthy, chairman of the New York GOP. "I think that they looked at a handful of states to give them a shot to hold on to the majority."

Republicans need only to net five seats in November's election to gain control of the U.S. House. They started the redistricting cycle controlling line-drawing in states representing 187 House seats while Democrats controlled only 75.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 26 of 57

That means the final outcome will inevitably favor the GOP, no matter how hard Democrats fight back, said Kimbrall Brace, a veteran redistricting consultant. "They're ending up still putting a Republican flavor on the overall plan," Brace said.

So far, the GOP has gained a handful of seats in the maps that have been finalized, but it's hard to put a precise number on how many because half of the states have yet to formally adopt maps. If Democrats are aggressive, for example, they could net four seats in New York and largely wipe out the GOP's national gains. But then Republicans in Florida could counter with a gerrymander.

Still, Republicans have passed up multiple opportunities to pad their margins even more.

In Missouri, some GOP state lawmakers are fuming that the legislature is advancing a plan that locks in the status quo rather than trying to turn Democratic Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's Kansas City-area seat to the GOP. In Indiana, Republicans did not split up the Gary-based district represented by Democratic Rep. Frank Mrvan.

Even in Georgia, where Republicans flooded a seat in the Atlanta suburbs held by Democratic Rep. Lucy McBath with GOP voters, they balked at doing the same to her Democratic neighbor, Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux. Instead, they packed Democratic voters into Bourdeaux's district, making it safer so no other Republicans' seats would be at risk.

Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said shoring up Republican incumbents is the party's top priority. He cites Texas, where the GOP-drawn maps make the few Democratic seats even more Democratic. That stacks up more Republican voters in the 23 GOP-held congressional districts and transforms them into safe seats. Republicans and their backers spent \$20 million on races in the state during the 2020 cycle. Now, Kincaid said, they can direct the money elsewhere.

"This cycle has unfolded just about exactly as we expected it to — with the exception that Democrats have placed a bigger bet than I expected," Kincaid said.

In contrast to the GOP, Democrats have been eager to spread their voters around, even at the possible expense of their own incumbents.

The starkest example is in Nevada, where the party's mapmakers moved liberal voters from Rep. Dina Titus' once-overwhelmingly Democratic Las Vegas district to shore up two neighboring swing seats represented by Democratic Reps. Steven Horsford and Susie Lee. That may keep all three seats safely Democratic in a good year, but puts them all at risk in a tough election cycle for Democrats like the current one.

Burton contended that tactical decisions like those made by Nevada Democrats and others elsewhere are not gerrymandering, but simply drawing lines to make seats competitive.

"We are not scared of the voters," Burton said. "We are not scared of districts where voters decide the outcome."

Joel Wertheimer, a Democratic civil rights lawyer and analyst for the liberal group Data for Progress, has predicted for months that redistricting will shift the typical congressional district from about two percentage points to the right of the national vote to the five-point margin of Biden's 2020 popular vote victory.

He credits it to a change in the mindset of Democrats willing to risk bigger losses for an eventual better shot at the 218 seats needed to control the House.

"I think the calculation that Democrats are making is, do we care if we have 180 or 190 seats?" Wertheimer said. "I just want to have the majority."

Burkina Faso's President Kabore is held by mutinous soldiers

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — Burkina Faso's President Roch Marc Christian Kabore is being held by mutinous soldiers, two of the rebellious soldiers told The Associated Press by phone early Monday. They did not say where Kabore is being held, but said he is in a safe place.

Gunshots were heard late Sunday night near the president's residence and in the early hours of Monday a battle took place at the presidential palace while a helicopter flew overhead. The roads of the capital were empty Sunday night except for checkpoints heavily guarded by mutinous soldiers.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 27 of 57

State news station RTB was heavily guarded on Monday morning.

Fighting began on Sunday when soldiers took control of the Lamizana Sangoule military barracks in the capital, Ouagadougou. Civilians drove into town in a show of support for the rebellion but were broken up by security forces firing tear gas. The mutiny came a day after a public demonstration calling for Kabore's resignation, the latest in a series of anti-Kabore protests as anger has mounted over his government's handling of the Islamic insurgency.

The government has not made any statements since Sunday when Minister of Defense Aime Barthelemy Simpore told state broadcaster RTB that a few barracks had been affected by unrest not only in Ouagadougou but in other cities, too. He denied, however, that the president had been detained by the mutineers, even though Kabore's whereabouts was unknown.

"Well, it's a few barracks. There are not too many," Simpore said.

Kabore had been leading Burkina Faso since being elected in 2015 after a popular uprising ousted longtime strongman President Blaise Compaore who was in power for nearly three decades. Kabore was reelected in November 2020 for another five-year term, however, frustration has been growing at his inability to stem the spread of jihadist violence across the country. Attacks linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group are escalating, killing thousands and displacing more than an estimated 1.5 million people.

The military has suffered losses since the extremist violence began in 2016. In December more than 50 security forces were killed in the Sahel region and nine security forces were killed in the Center North region in November.

Angry mutinous soldiers told the AP that the government was disconnected from its forces in the field and that their colleagues were dying and they wanted military rule. The soldiers put a man on the phone who said that they were seeking better working conditions for Burkina Faso's military amid the escalating fight against Islamic militants. Among their demands are increased manpower in the battle against extremists and better care for those wounded and the families of the dead.

About 100 military members have planned the takeover since August, according to one of the mutinous soldiers. The organizers never met in the same location more than twice and always outside of the capital, he said. They used messaging apps like Signal, WhatsApp and Telegraph to plan, he said.

Regional experts say the Kabore government was overstretched but it's unlikely the mutiny will change anything.

"Burkina Faso's army is profoundly ill-equipped and unprepared for the war it's asked to fight. It's out of its depth. Its frustration with an equally out of its depth government is understandable. Regrettably, this (rebellion) is unlikely to improve anything," said Michael Shurkin, a former political analyst at the CIA and director of global programs at 14 North Strategies, a business intelligence consultancy based in Dakar, Senegal, who has concentrated on analyzing West Africa's Sahel region for 15 years.

With the weekend protests, Burkina Faso's population is already showing signs of supporting a takeover.

"People are tired with this situation of insecurity. Every day people are killed. In Burkina, there are areas that can't be accessed. We have lost a big part of our territory," said Jean-Baptiste Ilboudou a civilian near the military base where gunshots were heard.

The West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS, which already has suspended Mali and Guinea in the past 18 months over military coups, issued a statement of support for Burkina Faso's embattled president and urged dialogue with the mutineers.

Earlier this month, authorities had arrested a group of soldiers accused of participating in a foiled coup plot. It was not immediately known whether there was any connection between those soldiers and the ones who led this coup. Military prosecutors said nine soldiers and two civilians were being held in connection with the plot.

West Africa has seen a spate of military coups in West Africa over the past 18 months, causing ECOWAS to suspend two member states simultaneously for the first time since 2012.

In August 2020, a mutiny at a Malian military barracks led to the democratically elected president being detained. He later announced his resignation on national television, and the junta leader there doesn't

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 28 of 57

want to hold new elections for four more years.

In September 2021, Guinea's president also was overthrown by a military junta that remains in power.

Burkina Faso, too has seen its share of coup attempts and military takeovers. In 1987, Compaore came to power by force. And in 2015, soldiers loyal to him attempted to overthrow the transitional government put into place after his ouster. The army was ultimately able to put the transitional authorities back in power, who led again until Kabore won an election and took office.

Analysis: Crisis in Ukraine a showdown of two world views

By JOHN DANISZEWSKI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The crisis in Ukraine is hardly going away — a showdown of two world views that could upend Europe. It carries echoes of the Cold War and resurrects an idea left over from the 1945 Yalta Conference: that the West should respect a Russian sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

Since coming to power in 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked steadily and systematically to reverse what he views as the humiliating breakup of the Soviet Union 30 years ago.

While massing troops along Ukraine's border and holding war games in Belarus, close to the borders of NATO members Poland and Lithuania, Putin is demanding that Ukraine be permanently barred from exercising its sovereign right to join the Western alliance, and that other NATO actions, such as stationing troops in former Soviet bloc countries, be curtailed.

NATO has said the demands are unacceptable and that joining the alliance is a right of any country and does not threaten Russia. Putin's critics argue that what he really fears is not NATO, but the emergence of a democratic, prospering Ukraine that could offer an alternative to Putin's increasingly autocratic rule that Russians might find appealing.

Russia's present demands are based on Putin's long sense of grievance and his rejection of Ukraine and Belarus as truly separate, sovereign countries, rather than as part of a much older Russian linguistic and Orthodox motherland that should be joined with, or at least friendly toward, Moscow.

In a millennium-spanning treatise last summer titled, "The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin tipped his hand. He insisted that the separation of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus into separate states today is artificial, due largely to political mistakes during the Soviet period and, in the case of Ukraine, driven by a malevolent "anti-Russia project" supported by Washington since 2014.

His Russo-centric view of the region poses a crucial test for U.S. President Joe Biden, who already is grappling with crises on multiple domestic fronts — the coronavirus pandemic, resurgence of inflation, a divided nation in which a large segment of the electorate refuses to acknowledge his presidency and a Congress that has blocked many of his social and climate goals.

Biden has ruled out military intervention to support Ukraine, and instead has employed intense diplomacy and rallied Western allies to support what he promises will be severe and painful sanctions against Russia if it dares to invade Ukraine. But depending on how the situation plays out, he has admitted he could have trouble keeping all the allies on board.

The Russian leader has already invaded Ukraine once, with little reaction. Russia took Crimea back from Ukraine in 2014 and has supported pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists fighting the Kyiv government in the Donbass region, a quiet war that has killed 14,000 people, more than 3,000 of them civilians.

Putin's strategy has been to try to recreate the power and a defined sphere of influence that Russia lost with the fall of the Berlin Wall, at least in the area of the former Soviet Union. He has bristled at what he sees as Western encroachment into the countries of the former Warsaw Pact -- which had once formed a pro-Soviet buffer between the USSR and NATO.

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were allowed to join NATO in 1999, followed in 2004 by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.

Subjected to post-World War II Soviet domination, the countries were eager to join the Western defensive alliance and the Western free-market system to secure independence and prosperity after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 29 of 57

For similar reasons, both Ukraine and Georgia also want in, and have been recognized by NATO as aspiring members of the alliance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked Western leaders to take on Ukraine's request for membership with greater urgency as a signal to Moscow that the West will defend Ukraine's independence.

Russia contends that NATO expansion violates commitments made to it after the Berlin Wall's collapse in exchange for Moscow's acceptance of the reunification of Germany. U.S. officials deny any such promises were made.

Early in his presidency, Putin did not show adamant opposition to NATO. He suggested in a 2000 BBC interview that Russia might even be interested in joining; years later, he said he had raised that prospect with U.S. President Bill Clinton before Clinton left office in 2001.

Now, however, Putin sees the alliance as threatening Russia's security.

But the newer NATO countries take the opposite view. They regard Russia, which boasts the region's largest military and a vast nuclear arsenal, as the real threat, which is why they rushed to join NATO — afraid that a strengthened Russia might someday try to reimpose its dominance.

A disputed election in Belarus led to months-long mass demonstrations against longtime Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko. Alienated from his own people and unrecognized as a legitimate president in the West, Lukashenko has been driven closer into Putin's protective embrace.

Similarly, after civil unrest in Kazakhstan just weeks ago, Russia sent in troops to help that former Soviet republic's president restore order as part of a peacekeeping mission of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization alliance. The troops have since departed the country.

Putin's aim has been to reimpose ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbors, while challenging and dividing the West. Rather than leading Russia in a more democratic direction, he appears to now reject the very idea of liberal democracy as a sustainable model, seeing it rather as a conceit the West uses to pursue its own aims and humiliate its foes.

He came to power vowing to restore to Russia a sense of greatness. He seized back economic control from the oligarchs, crushed rebels in Chechnya, gradually strangled independent media and upped investment in the military. More recently, he has banned Russia's few remaining human rights organizations.

Beyond Russia's borders, his secret services have overseen the assassinations of critics and meddled in foreign elections, including offering clandestine support to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the pro-Brexit campaign in Britain and various right-wing European parties that oppose European integration.

He told an interviewer in 2019 that "liberalism is obsolete," implying that the dominant Western ideal of liberal democracy no longer has a place in the world. The idea that Ukrainians are independent and could be freely choosing their own alliances is to him a charade.

"All the subterfuges associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country," he wrote in his essay last summer.

"I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia."

The challenge for Biden, NATO and the European Union is whether their collective resolve and solidarity can protect Ukraine's vision of itself as part of the West, and whether Putin's Russian nationalist ambitions in the region will succeed or fail.

Party-hard Dubai ponders new workweek debate: When's brunch?

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Friday will never be the same again.

For those with means in Dubai, the former first day of the weekend carried a gluttonous party tradition — an hourslong affair with infinite supply of seafood, pizza, dessert and Veuve Clicquot Champagne set to pulsing music known simply in this city-state as "Friday brunch."

But starting this year, the United Arab Emirates shifted its weekend from Friday and Saturday to Saturday

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 30 of 57

and Sunday — a move to align with global markets and Western schedules.

Now, Emirati government employees work a half day with time for worship and family gatherings on Islam's holy day. Most of the nation's expatriate-dominated private sector, however, works the full day.

That has thrown Dubai's beloved Friday brunch — a key revenue source for COVID-19-battered restaurants that revel in Instagram-worthy, booze-soaked buffets — into disarray.

"The traditional 12 p.m. Friday brunch is extinct," said Adrian John, who along with his wife Lucy Melts started a popular Dubai brunch review website called Mr. and Mrs. Brunch.

Friday brunch in Dubai involves far more than the midday meals enjoyed in other major cities like New York and London. For those not rendered immobile after four hours of feasting, there's the post-brunch brunch, evening brunch with more booze and midnight party brunch.

"It's the experience Dubai is known for. It helped put Dubai on the map," said Samantha Wood of the FoodDiva restaurant review website.

Luxury hotels and restaurants each have their own brunch style. One steakhouse offers a James Bond theme with a background of spy movie music. Cash rains from the ceiling of the Waldorf Astoria hotel at a brunch inspired by the Martin Scorsese film "The Wolf of Wall Street."

There is a karaoke brunch boasting lip-sync battles and another featuring a giant spread of lamb shanks beside a petting zoo. Hotels roll out dessert trays with chocolate fountains evocative of Willy Wonka.

The fixed prices may seem expensive — all-you-can-drink Champagne packages cost over \$200 — but cheaper options exist. Devotees insist that unlimited booze remains a deal in a city where every drink poured in a bar is subject to a 30% municipality tax.

Brunch spots also have their own clientele. At CE LA VI, a sprawling rooftop with an infinity pool and stunning views of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest tower on the planet, a group of Russian tourists cloaked in Balenciaga leather strained their necks to snap selfies on a recent Saturday morning. Businessmen flashed Rolexes as they loaded up on Parker House rolls. A table of well-coiffed young women debated the best place to get breast implants.

At Filia, a lower-key Italian spot at the SLS Hotel downtown, a group of expat mothers picked Parmesan from a dish the size of a car wheel and shouted to be heard over the DJ's deafening party tunes.

Locked in a culinary arms race to attract Dubai's big spenders, brunch destinations are now keen to keep the extravaganza alive despite the weekend upheaval.

The industry has sought to remake itself with a new tagline: "Saturday is the new Friday." Any Sunday brunch would serve as a hangover breakfast, managers say, a family friendly affair to recover and launch the week with quick appetizers and light mimosas.

"People party on weekends, so naturally Saturday should be the new party brunch," said Andrea Sacchi, the chief operating officer of the upscale Roberto's Restaurant & Lounge in the glitzy Dubai International Financial Center. "We changed the branding, collateral, scheduling, reservation systems."

But uncertainty reigns as residents mourn the loss of a Dubai rite.

"There's an element of sadness," said Melts, the other half of Mr. and Mrs. Brunch, who came to Dubai 12 years ago from Reading, England. "It was so nice to be different from the world, to be like: 'Look, it's Friday, we're brunching while our friends back home are working.'"

Without Friday, restaurant executives wonder whether Dubai brunch can keep its luster.

Since the change took effect on Jan. 2, many of Dubai's hottest brunch spots have felt lukewarm.

"The numbers are not that great at the moment on Saturdays compared to last year," said Arun Edakkeppurath, manager of the glass-enclosed Observatory Bar & Grill with drop-dead views of Dubai's Palm Jumeirah artificial island.

The restaurant now receives a flood of calls from bewildered government employees, teachers and others who work a half-day on Friday, demanding to know what happened to their famous brunch.

"I think people will react slowly to the changes," he added.

Other brunch places have reported empty tables since the weekend shift.

"There have been a large amount of cancellations," said Sadhan Adhikary, assistant restaurant manager

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 31 of 57

of Jazz@PizzaExpress, which scrambled this year to push its brunch to Saturday and rebook its music acts for Friday, the new party night. "But it's hard to say the reason."

Business usually slows as residents tighten their belts after New Year's Eve spending binges, he said. A sense of trepidation also has returned to the pandemic-era boomtown as the omicron variant drives a major surge in infections.

Industry-wide, "we still really don't know how people will react," said Nicolas Budzynski, LPM Restaurant & Bar's global operations director. "I think there is anxiety. It has created some confusion."

LPM has moved its classic brunch to Sunday, betting that Saturdays will be overscheduled with errands and Sundays will be better suited to festivities and family gatherings.

"I can tell you that Saturday is not the new Friday," he argued. "It doesn't replace a day that was quiet only because of prayers."

John, who still reminisces about the all-you-can-drink brunch on a luxury yacht where he met Mrs. Brunch over a decade ago, believes Friday had a magic formula for success that may never be regained.

"I remember being fresh off the boat, thinking: 'Wow, what is place? This is amazing, this is just brilliant,'" he said. "Friday brunch will always be something romantic. We'll always have those years."

PG&E's criminal probation to end amid ongoing safety worries

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Pacific Gas & Electric is poised to emerge from five years of criminal probation, despite worries that nation's largest utility remains too dangerous to trust after years of devastation from wildfires ignited by its outdated equipment and neglectful management.

The probation, set to expire at midnight Tuesday, was supposed to rehabilitate PG&E after its 2016 conviction for six felony crimes from a 2010 explosion triggered by its natural gas lines that blew up a San Bruno neighborhood and killed eight people.

Instead, PG&E became an even more destructive force. Since 2017 the utility has been blamed for more than 30 wildfires that wiped out more than 23,000 homes and businesses and killed more than 100 people.

"In these five years, PG&E has gone on a crime spree and will emerge from probation as a continuing menace to California," U.S. District Judge William Alsup wrote in a report reviewing his oversight of the utility.

While on probation, PG&E pleaded guilty to 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter for a 2018 wildfire that wiped out the town of Paradise, about 170 miles (275 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco. Now PG&E faces more criminal charges in two separate cases, for a Sonoma County wildfire in 2019 and a Shasta County fire in 2020. PG&E has denied any criminal wrongdoing in those fires.

Even more potential criminal charges loom. California regulators already have linked PG&E to the massive Dixie Fire last year, when a tree is believed to have hit the utility's distribution lines in the Sierra Nevada — part of a sprawling, often rugged service territory covering 16 million Northern Californian customers.

During its probation, PG&E also plunged into bankruptcy for the second time in less than 20 years. Before emerging from bankruptcy last year, PG&E reached settlements of more than \$25.5 billion, including \$13.5 billion earmarked for wildfire victims that may fall short of doling out the amount initially promised.

PG&E's conduct prompted its court-appointed monitor, Mark Filip, to raise alarms about the utility's wildfire prevention efforts, though he applauded the "sustained and substantial" improvements in its natural gas operations.

"We doubt anyone would seriously contend PG&E's performance has been adequate, or that substantial improvement is not still imperative," Filip's team wrote in a report filed with Alsup late last year.

PG&E, a 117-year-old company, generates about \$20 billion in revenue annually while serving a 70,000-square-mile (181,300-square-kilometer) service area in the northern and central part of California that includes farmland, forests, big cities and the world's technology hub in Silicon Valley.

Alsup, who repeatedly excoriated PG&E during its probation, last year signaled he was interested in keeping the utility under his watch. But he dropped the idea earlier this month after the U.S. Attorney's Office filed documents saying it didn't plan to seek an extension of PG&E's probation, citing the "unique

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 32 of 57

history and circumstances" of the case.

"We have tried hard to rehabilitate PG&E," Alsup wrote in his final report. "As the supervising district judge, however, I must acknowledge failure."

Alsup declined an interview request from The Associated Press to elaborate on his concerns about PG&E.

Catherine Sandoval, an energy professor at Santa Clara University and a former California power regulator, believes Alsup was far too hard on himself, although she agrees PG&E hasn't proven it should be freed from supervision. She blames federal prosecutors for backing off an attempt to extend PG&E's probation because "there appears to be no binding case law on this point," according to the U.S. attorney's report.

"If there was ever a test case for whether a company's probation can be extended, PG&E is it," Sandoval asserted during an interview. She also unsuccessfully fought to hold a hearing to extend the utility's probation in 58-page brief filed with Alsup earlier this month.

Noah Stern, the federal prosecutor handling PG&E's probation, didn't respond to a request for comment.

While acknowledging its problems, PG&E claimed in a report to the judge that its electricity grid is "fundamentally safer" now than in January 2017. It also defended the roughly 40,000 employees and contractors who maintain its operations.

"Vilifying them and threatening to criminalize the exercise of professional judgment or the making of honest mistakes serves neither safety nor fairness, and instead severely detracts from PG&E's efforts to bring the skills of the best and brightest to bear on stopping wildfires," PG&E lawyers wrote. "We are all in this together."

As signs of its progress, PG&E cited the more than 3.3 million trees near its equipment that were either trimmed or removed in the past two years.

The utility says it now spends \$1.4 billion annually to trim or remove trees, up from \$400 million annually in 2017. But Alsup estimated PG&E still has a seven-year backlog of high-risk trees that need trimming or removal.

The company also cited a sweeping overhaul of its board and management, including bringing in Patricia Poppe as its new CEO last year. Poppe, a former Michigan utility executive, became PG&E's fifth CEO in five years, part of an unusually high turnover rate that the company's federal monitor said makes reform more difficult.

"We know there is more to do," PG&E's lawyers told Alsup in their final probationary report. "These are not just words on a page or a poster, they are a commitment to make it right and make Californians safe."

PG&E declined further comment about the end of its probation.

Sandoval, who was among the regulators overseeing PG&E as a commissioner for the California Public Utilities Commission from 2011 to 2017, accused PG&E officials of being mired in a pattern of "cognitive immaturity" and "lazy thinking" that should require its executives and board to submit to counseling.

"PG&E, the corporation, needs the training an individual criminal defendant would have received in prison to break the cycle of criminal thinking that endangers public safety," Sandoval wrote in her brief to Alsup.

In his separate report, Filip suggested California consider regulatory changes or new approaches to keep PG&E in check.

The federal monitor cautioned that in PG&E's service territory, the consequences of a single misstep — a missed hazard tree, the failure to replace corroded hardware on power lines — can be "death and destruction."

Mugler, French fashion icon known for sculpted designs, dies

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — French fashion designer Manfred Thierry Mugler, whose dramatic designs were worn by celebrities like Madonna, Lady Gaga and Cardi B, has died. He was 73.

He died Sunday, his official Instagram account said. "May his soul Rest In Peace," it said in a post that was all black with no image. It did not give a cause of death.

Mugler, who launched his brand in 1973, became known for his architectural style, defined by broad shoul-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 33 of 57

ders and a tiny waist. The use of plastic-like futuristic fabric in his sculpted clothing became a trademark. He defined haute couture over several decades, dressing up Diana Ross and Beyonce at galas, on red carpets and runways.

His designs weren't shy about being outlandish, at times resembling robotic suits with protruding cone shapes. Mugler also had a popular perfume line, which he started in the 1990s.

The fashion world filled with an outpouring of sympathy. Bella Hadid, an American model, said "Nononono," followed by an image of a sad face, while American actress January Jones responded with a heart mark, from their official Instagram accounts.

Besides clothes, Mugler created films and photographs, and was a dancer, acrobat as well as avid bodybuilder, stressing he always wanted to explore the human body as art.

"I've always felt like a director, and the clothes I did were a direction of the everyday," Mugler told Interview Magazine.

Queries on his funeral arrangements were not immediately answered.

Trial to begin for cops accused of violating Floyd's rights

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The federal trial for three former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights as Derek Chauvin pinned the Black man's neck to the street is expected to begin Monday with opening statements, after a jury of 18 people was swiftly picked last week.

J. Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are broadly charged with depriving Floyd of his civil rights while acting under government authority. All three are charged for failing to provide Floyd with medical care and Thao and Kueng face an additional count for failing to stop Chauvin, who was convicted of murder and manslaughter in state court last year.

Legal experts say prosecutors have to prove Kueng, Lane and Thao willfully violated Floyd's constitutional rights, while defense attorneys are likely to blame Chauvin for Floyd's murder, which was videotaped and triggered worldwide protests, violence and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Floyd, 46, died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin pressed 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.

Attorneys for the Floyd family have said bystander video shows that the three officers "directly contributed to (Floyd's) death and failed to intervene to stop the senseless murder."

On Thursday, 18 people were chosen for the jury; 12 will deliberate and six will be alternates. Two of the jurors — one expected to deliberate and one alternate — appear to be of Asian descent. The rest appear to be white. The jurors include people from the Twin Cities area, the suburbs and southern Minnesota. The court declined to provide demographic information.

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

The indictment charges Thao, who is Hmong American; Lane, who is white; and Kueng, who is Black, 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.

U.S. District Judge Magnuson told jurors that the trial could last four weeks. It's not known whether any of the three officers will testify. It's also not clear whether Chauvin will testify, though many experts who spoke to The Associated Press believe he won't.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 34 of 57

Lane, Kueng and Thao also face a separate state trial in June on charges they aided and abetted both murder and manslaughter.

Chiefs rally past Buffalo 42-36 in OT in wild playoff game

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — In a never-say-die showdown between two of the NFL's top teams, and two of its bright young quarterbacks, the Bills and Chiefs played a classic Sunday night decided by one of them calling tails and the other making him pay for it.

Josh Allen's decision on the overtime coin toss was his only mistake for Buffalo all night.

Patrick Mahomes promptly followed it by marching Kansas City downfield against the NFL's top-ranked but exhausted defense, then finding Travis Kelce in the corner of the end zone from 8 yards, giving the Chiefs a memorable 42-36 victory — and never giving his burgeoning rival an opportunity with the ball.

"It worked out well for us this time," said Mahomes, who has his team playing in its fourth consecutive AFC title game. "When you have two teams going back and forth, it stinks when you don't get to see the other guy go. But all you can do is play the rules the way the rules are explained, and that's what we did."

Did it perfectly, too, setting up a showdown next Sunday against Cincinnati for another trip to the Super Bowl.

"The guys didn't flinch," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said "You talk about an epic game, well, that's the way the players took it. They had tremendous respect for Buffalo and they knew it was going to be a battle and they kept going."

What was Reid's advice for Mahomes down the stretch?

"When it's grim, be the grim reaper, and go get it," Reid said. "He made everyone around him better."

The lead changed hands three times in the final two minutes of regulation, and there were 25 points scored over that stretch. Harrison Butker, who earlier had missed a field goal and extra point, drilled a 49-yarder as time expired to force the extra session, and when the Chiefs won the coin toss, Mahomes took care of the rest.

He finished with 378 yards passing and three touchdowns, including a 64-yarder to Tyreek Hill during the thrilling final minutes of regulation and the clutch throw to Kelce that sent players streaming off the bench.

"We got tremendous leaders on both sides of the ball, whether it's offense, defense or special teams," Hill said. "Nobody panicked. Nobody was like, 'Oh, the game is over, there's 13 seconds left.' We just made plays."

Allen did everything he could to prevent another season-ending loss inside Arrowhead Stadium. He threw a go-ahead touchdown pass to Gabriel Davis with 1:54 left in the regulation, then another to Davis — his playoff-record fourth TD catch of the game — with 13 seconds remaining in regulation.

Allen's only mistake? His coin toss call.

He finished with 329 yards passing, and Davis with eight catches for 201 yards, as the Bills lost their ninth straight road playoff game — a streak that includes last year's loss to Kansas City in the AFC title game.

"It's just tough, you know? To be in that moment again," Allen said. "It sucks the way it happened, you know? We wanted to win that game. We had opportunities. Just, yeah, taking it all in, holding onto that feeling, and making sure we don't feel like this again — back-to-back years in the same spot. It's tough to take in."

All told, Mahomes and Allen each threw for at least 300 yards and three touchdowns, completed at least 70% of their passes without an interception, and — get this — led their teams with at least 65 yards rushing.

No other quarterback in NFL history has accomplished those feats in a game, regular season or post-season.

"The Chiefs are a good football team. We knew it was going to take a heck of an effort coming out here," Bills coach Sean McDermott said, "and I thought the guys gave us that effort, starting with Josh and all the way down the line. But those guys are hurt, we're disappointed — we're all disappointed, we're

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 35 of 57

all sick to our stomach. You move on and you try and get yourself to learn from it, but it stings. It stings. I'm not going to sugarcoat it. It stings."

It was a playoff game for the history books, but the first 58 minutes few will remember.

The final two minutes and overtime, few will forget.

The Chiefs were leading 26-21 when Allen, who had been nearly perfect all night, connected with Davis for the third time in the game — a fourth-and-13 dart finished off a 17-play, 75-yard drive and gave the Bills the lead.

Not to be outdone, the Chiefs answered when Mahomes found Hill over the middle. The fleet-footed wide receiver ran away from cornerback Levi Wallace for a 64-yard touchdown that gave Kansas City the right lead back.

Then it was the Bills' turn again: Allen threw a 28-yard pass to Davis, hit him again for 12 yards, then found Emmanuel Sanders along the sideline to give McDermott's team a chance with 17 seconds on the clock.

Allen hit Davis right between the numbers, their 19-yard strike giving him the postseason-record — but not the victory.

That's because Mahomes wasn't done conjuring up playoff magic. He found Hill for 19 yards, then hit Kelce for 25 more on a schoolyard-style play, giving Butker a chance to try a 49-yarder into a slight, chilly breeze as time expired.

Naturally, it split the uprights.

Overtime.

A fitting way to end a divisional-round weekend filled with last-second heroics.

"Yeah, obviously not the way we wanted to end our season," Bills safety Jordan Poyer said. "Man, the offense did everything they had to do. Defense, we had to go out there and make a stop, weren't able to do it. It's just a tough feeling, man. Just a really tough feeling, hard to put in words. It sucks. It's something we've got to live with."

INJURIES

Bills: CB Micah Hyde left with an undisclosed injury he sustained on the final play of regulation.

Chiefs: Tyrann Mathieu left on the opening drive with a concussion after the Pro Bowl safety was hit by teammate Jarran Reed's knee. ... CB Charvarius Ward was hurt trying to tackle Allen with 5 1/2 minutes left in the game.

UP NEXT

The Chiefs get a visit from Cincinnati next Sunday, becoming the first franchise in NFL history to host four consecutive conference championship games. The 49ers play the Rams for the NFC title in the nightcap.

Cruise ship changes course after US judge orders seizure

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON The Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A cruise ship that was supposed to dock in Miami has instead sailed to the Bahamas, after a U.S. judge granted an order to seize the vessel as part of a lawsuit over \$4 million in unpaid fuel.

Cruise trackers show Crystal Symphony currently docked in the Bahamian island of Bimini.

"We all feel we were abducted by luxurious pirates!" passenger Stephen Heard Fales posted on Facebook.

Some passengers were taken by ferry to Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale on Sunday. The ferry ride was apparently "uncomfortable due to inclement weather," according to a statement from a Crystal Cruises spokesperson. The company said guests were also taken to local airports, but wouldn't comment on the lawsuit.

It was not immediately clear how many passengers were aboard, with one news outlet reporting 300 and another, 700. According to the company website, the vessel can carry up to 848 passengers.

The ship was scheduled to arrive in Miami on Saturday. But a federal judge there issued an arrest warrant for the ship Thursday, a maritime practice where a U.S. Marshal goes aboard a vessel and takes charge of it once it enters U.S. waters.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 36 of 57

Passengers and entertainers said on social media they were surprised to find out about the legal case. One guest posted a letter on Facebook from Crystal Cruises Management that said the change in itinerary was due to "non-technical operational issues."

Elio Pace, a musician who has toured off and on with the ship since 2013, said about about 30-50 crew disembarked because their contracts ended. Another 400 crew members don't know when they'll get off, or if they'll remain employed.

"This is a human story. This is about people and their jobs," Pace told The Associated Press.

The lawsuit was filed in a Miami federal court by Peninsula Petroleum Far East against the ship under a maritime procedure that allows actions against vessels for unpaid debts. The complaint says Crystal Symphony was chartered or managed by Crystal Cruises and Star Cruises, which are both sued for breach of contract for allegedly owing \$4.6 million in fuel.

Crystal Cruises announced earlier this week that it was suspending operations through late April. Besides Crystal Symphony, it has two other ships currently cruising, which end their voyages on Jan. 30 in Aruba and on Feb. 4 in Argentina.

"Suspending operations will provide Crystal's management team with an opportunity to evaluate the current state of business and examine various options moving forward," the company said in a statement earlier this week.

Gay's 30-yard FG lifts Rams over Brady, Buccaneers 30-27

By FRED GOODALL AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Matthew Stafford stood on the sideline helplessly watching Tom Brady be Tom Brady, leading another exhilarating comeback.

This time, though, the seven-time Super Bowl champion left too much time on the clock, giving Stafford a chance to create some playoff magic of his own.

Turns out, 42 seconds was just enough for the Los Angeles quarterback to pull off a Brady-like finish that sent the Rams to the NFC championship game for the second time in four seasons with a 30-27 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sunday.

"We knew it wasn't going to be easy," Stafford said. "I mean, we sure let 'em back in the game with a bunch of mistakes on offense. Our defense played outstanding. We've got to clean some stuff up, do a little better job in the turnover department.

"This is a tough team, man, this is what we're all about. Just happy to get a win and keep on moving."

Stafford threw for 366 yards and two touchdowns without an interception, and the team's biggest off-season acquisition used a pair of long completions to NFL receiving leader Cooper Kupp to position the Rams for Matt Gay's 30-yard field goal as time expired.

"Man, I'm still trying to process everything. That was a crazy game," linebacker Von Miller said after the win over the defending Super Bowl champions. "I knew it was going to come down to the end. All the times that I've played Tom Brady, it always comes down to the end. No lead that we had was safe. I'm so proud of these guys. Everybody's name was called and everybody answered the bell.

"Nobody was perfect, but we still found a way to win it."

The Rams (14-5) will host next Sunday's NFC title game against the San Francisco 49ers, aiming for a second trip to the Super Bowl in four seasons.

Brady rallied the Bucs from a 27-3 second-half deficit with help from three of the Rams' four turnovers, tying the game on Leonard Fournette's 9-yard run on fourth-and-inches with 42 seconds remaining.

The NFL's all-time passer leader didn't get an opportunity to finish the job.

And it's uncertain if that was the final game for Brady, who's undecided on retirement.

"I haven't put a lot of thought into it," said the 44-year-old quarterback, who led the league with a career-best 5,136 yards passing while also throwing for a league-high 43 TDs during the regular season.

Stafford, obtained in the offseason in a trade that sent Jared Goff to Detroit, led the Rams downfield after the ensuing kickoff, using completions of 20 and 44 yards to Kupp to set up Gay's third field goal of

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 37 of 57

the day.

"What an interesting game, what an amazing sign of resilience," Rams coach Sean McVay said. "A lot of things didn't go our way in the second half, but guys kept battling and found a way."

Earlier, Stafford found Kupp wide open behind the Bucs secondary on a 70-yard scoring play that put Los Angeles up 17-3 early in the second quarter.

"Man, he's the heart and soul of this offense," Stafford said. "What he's able to do down in, down out, whether it's in the pass game, run game — he's an unbelievable competitor."

Stafford, who had never won a postseason game before beating Arizona in the previous week's wild-card round, completed 28 of 38 passes without an interception. The 13-year veteran also scored on a 1-yard run.

Brady, meanwhile, completed 30 of 54 passes for 329 yards, one touchdown and one interception. He was sacked three times and lost a fumble.

Fournette also scored on a 1-yard run for Tampa Bay, which pulled within 27-20 on Brady's 55-yard TD throw to Mike Evans, who made the catch with Jalen Ramsey in pursuit with 3:20 left.

"A lot of guys made a bunch of different plays to get us back into it," Brady said. "We got behind. They made us pretty one-dimensional. We showed a lot of fight. But at the end of the day, when you lose a game you lose a game."

The Bucs (14-5), who lost to the Rams for third time in two seasons, were trying to become the first team to repeat as Super Bowl champions since the Brady-led New England Patriots during the 2004 season.

Stafford completed nine of his first 12 passes for 176 yards and TDs to Kupp and Kendall Blanton to open a 17-3 lead early in the second quarter.

It was 20-3 at halftime, and the Bucs were fortunate their deficit wasn't bigger. With the Rams on the verge of scoring again in the closing seconds of the second quarter, Cam Akers fumbled at the Tampa Bay 1 and Tampa Bay's Antoine Winfield recovered to keep the defending champs from falling farther behind.

The Rams built the lead to 27-3 on Stafford's quarterback sneak, with help along the way from some uncharacteristic mistakes by the Bucs. That included unsportsmanlike conduct penalties on defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh for taunting and Brady, who was flagged while arguing unsuccessfully for what he felt should have been a penalty on the Rams for a hit that appeared to bloody his lip.

"He got in my face in an aggressive manner and used abusive language," referee Shawn Hochuli told a pool reporter of Suh after the game. "As for the hit, we did not think that it rose to the level of roughing the passer."

The Rams hurt themselves plenty, too, especially while trying to put the game away in the second half.

Kupp, who had nine catches for 183 yards, lost a fumble, and the offense failed to take advantage of Miller sacking Brady to a force a fumble at the Tampa Bay 25 when center Brian Allen snap sailed past Stafford in shotgun formation and recovered by the Bucs.

Finally, Suh forced a second fumble by Akers at the Los Angeles 30, giving Brady an opportunity to tie it in the last two minutes.

"We scratched and clawed. They kept giving us the ball and giving us chances," Evans said. "We took advantage of them, just couldn't get the stop at the end."

INJURIES

Rams: Played without LT Andrew Whitworth, who was hurt during the wild-card round victory over Arizona.

Buccaneers: CB Carlton Davis left the field favoring his right shoulder late in the first half but finished the game. ... Punt returner Jaelon Darden left with a possible concussion in the fourth quarter..

UP NEXT

Rams: Host the NFC championship game against the NFC West-rival 49ers, who have beaten Los Angeles six straight times.

Buccaneers: Await word on whether the 44-year-old Brady will retire or return for a 23rd NFL season.

4 killed, 1 hurt in 'ambush' shooting at house party near LA

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 38 of 57

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Four people were killed and one was wounded when multiple shooters opened fire at a house party near Los Angeles early Sunday, authorities said.

Police responded around 1:30 a.m. to reports of shots fired at a home in the city of Inglewood, Mayor James Butts told reporters.

Two women and two men were shot and killed and another man was hospitalized in critical condition and expected to survive, CBS2 reported.

Butts called the shooting an “ambush” involving multiple weapons including a rifle and a handgun. The mayor described the incident as the worst single shooting crime in Inglewood since the 1990s.

The victims appear to have been targeted, he added.

Butts urged the suspects to turn themselves in. “We will find you and prosecute you,” he said.

Authorities are searching for multiple suspects, he said. Officers interviewed witnesses and canvassed the neighborhood looking for possible security camera footage.

The man who survived admitted being a member of a street gang in another city and investigators are trying to determine if the shooting was gang related, CBS2 said.

Inglewood is a city of about 100,000 people 10 miles (16 km) southwest of downtown Los Angeles. It’s home to SoFi Stadium, where the Super Bowl will be played next month.

In mourning yet again, NYC prepares to honor fallen officer

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A city reeling from a recent spate of violence prepared to lay to rest a rookie police officer being hailed as an inspiration to his immigrant community, as investigators sought to make sense of a domestic dispute that left another officer “fighting for his life.”

Funeral services for New York City Police Officer Jason Rivera were being finalized, as his comrades in blue mourned the loss of the 22-year-old who joined the force to make a difference in what he had described as a “chaotic city.”

A solemn scene unfolded Sunday with a column of uniformed police officers, as well as a line of firefighters, flanking the streets as a hearse carrying the fallen officer left the medical examiner’s office.

Burial rites were scheduled for Friday, city officials said, with services Thursday at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

Rivera and Officer Wilbert Mora were shot Friday night while answering a call about an argument between a woman and her adult son. Mora, 27, suffered a serious head wound, police said.

During a Sunday morning appearance on CNN, Mayor Eric Adams stressed the urgency “to deal with the underlying issues that are impacting crime in our city and has become a stain on the inner cities across our country.”

He said his police force would revamp a plainclothes anti-crime unit aimed at getting guns off the streets. The unit had been disbanded in 2020 over concerns it accounted for a disproportionate number of shootings and complaints.

“The symbol of that soiled coat with red blood is really what we’re talking about here in not only New York City, but across America,” Adams said.

The medical examiner ruled Rivera’s death a homicide after an autopsy found he died from gunshot wounds to the head and torso.

Mora, who has been with the NYPD for four years, remained in life-threatening condition, Adams said Sunday. Police said he would be transferred from Harlem Hospital to NYU Langone Medical Center.

“It just really has impacted our entire city, if not the entire country. And this is coming after having five officers shot, the 11-month baby shot in Brooklyn,” the mayor said.

The shooting is the latest in a string of crimes that have unnerved the nation’s most populous city and the country’s largest police force, with 36,000 officers.

In the three weeks since Adams took office, a 19-year-old cashier was shot to death as she worked a late-night shift at a Burger King, a woman was pushed to her death in a subway station, and a baby was critically injured by a stray bullet while in a parked car with her mother. With the Harlem shooting Friday night, four police officers had been shot in as many days.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 39 of 57

The man police say opened fire Friday, Lashawn J. McNeil, 47, was also critically wounded and hospitalized. Details about what led to the deadly confrontation were still emerging.

Officials said a woman who made an emergency call Friday said she was ill and that her son who had come up to take care of her had become "problematic." Adams said the woman did not specify the problem.

Authorities said three officers went to the apartment after the call came in. The officers spoke with the woman and another son, but there was no mention of a weapon, police said.

After Rivera and Mora walked from the front of the apartment down a narrow hallway to check on McNeil, he swung open a bedroom door and began shooting, police said. Both officers were gunned down before they could pull their weapons and defend themselves, police said.

As McNeil tried to flee, a third officer who had stayed with McNeil's mother in the front of the apartment shot at McNeil and wounded him in the head and arm, NYPD Chief of Detectives James Essig said.

McNeil had a 2003 drug conviction in New York City. He also had several out-of-state arrests. In 1998, he was arrested in South Carolina on suspicion of unlawfully carrying a pistol, but records show the matter was later dismissed. In 2002, he was arrested in Pennsylvania on suspicion of assaulting a police officer, Essig said.

McNeil had been married but the couple separated nearly two decades ago, according to Theresa Noa, who is married to his ex-wife's brother. She said McNeil had four children from that marriage.

Police said the gun used in Friday's shooting, a .45-caliber Glock pistol with a high-capacity drum magazine capable of holding up to 40 extra rounds, had been stolen in Baltimore in 2017.

On Sunday, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that a multistate task force would meet Wednesday to begin work to stanch the flow of illegal guns, which she and Adams blame for gun-related violence.

"Too many lives have been lost because of illegal firearms that should never have been on our streets," she said.

More than 50 agencies from nine Northeastern states are taking part, she said.

Hochul cited NYPD data tracing nearly 4,500 illegal guns as coming from out of state, most from southern states that generally have laxer gun laws.

Adams, a former NYPD captain, joined the governor in calling on the federal government to do more to round up stolen guns like the one used in Friday's shooting.

Rivera joined the force in November 2020.

Growing up in Manhattan's Inwood neighborhood, he noticed tensions with police, according to a brief essay titled "Why I Became a Police Officer," a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

In that essay, Rivera wrote about how he was bothered by witnessing his brother being stopped and frisked. But his attitudes changed when he also saw how the department was trying to improve relationships with communities.

"I realized how impactful my role as a police officer would go in this chaotic city," he wrote.

US draws down Ukraine embassy presence as war fears mount

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department on Sunday ordered the families of all American personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine to leave the country amid heightened fears of a Russian invasion.

The department told the dependents of staffers at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv that they must leave the country. It also said that non-essential embassy staff could leave Ukraine at government expense.

The move came amid rising tensions about Russia's military buildup on the Ukraine border that were not eased during talks Friday between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva.

State Department officials stressed the Kyiv embassy will remain open and that the announcement does not constitute an evacuation. The move had been under consideration for some time and does not reflect an easing of U.S. support for Ukraine, the officials said.

In a statement, the State Department noted recent reports that Russia was planning significant military action against Ukraine. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry has accused NATO countries of escalating

tensions around Ukraine with disinformation.

The State Department added: "The security conditions, particularly along Ukraine's borders, in Russia-occupied Crimea, and in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine, are unpredictable and can deteriorate with little notice. Demonstrations, which have turned violent at times, regularly occur throughout Ukraine, including in Kyiv."

The department's travel advisory, which had warned against traveling to Ukraine because of COVID-19 as well as the tensions over Russia, was changed Sunday to carry a stronger warning.

"Do not travel to Ukraine due to the increased threats of Russian military action and COVID-19. Exercise increased caution in Ukraine due to crime and civil unrest. Some areas have increased risk," the department advised.

The travel advisory for Russia was also changed: "Do not travel to Russia due to ongoing tension along the border with Ukraine, the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens, the embassy's limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia, COVID-19 and related entry restrictions, terrorism, harassment by Russian government security officials, and the arbitrary enforcement of local law."

The State Department would not say how many Americans it believes are currently in Ukraine. U.S. citizens are not required to register with embassies when they arrive or plan to stay abroad for extended periods.

Gunfire near home of Burkina Faso's leader after army mutiny

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — Gunfire rang out late Sunday near the home of Burkina Faso's embattled President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, raising the specter that a military coup might still be under way after mutinous soldiers seized a military base earlier in the day.

Government officials had sought to reassure people that the situation was under control even as shots rang out for hours at the army base. But by day's end anti-government protesters supporting the mutineers also had set fire to a building belonging to Kabore's party.

It was not immediately known whether Kabore was at home but several people in the area told The Associated Press that in addition to gunfire they could hear helicopters hovering overhead.

A mutinous soldier also told AP by phone that heavy fighting was under way near the presidential palace, a claim that could not immediately be independently corroborated.

Sunday's mutiny came one day after the latest public demonstration calling for Kabore's resignation as anger has mounted over the government's handling of the Islamic insurgency. Anti-government protesters lent public support to the mutinous soldiers, prompting security forces to use tear gas to disperse crowds in the capital.

The West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS, which already has suspended Mali and Guinea in the past 18 months over military coups, issued a statement of support for Burkina Faso's embattled president and urged dialogue with the mutineers.

Defense Minister Aime Barthelemy Simore told state broadcaster RTB that a few barracks had been affected by unrest not only in the capital of Ouagadougou but in other cities, too. He denied, however, that the president had been detained by the mutineers, even though Kabore's whereabouts remained unknown.

"Well, it's a few barracks. There are not too many," Simore said. "In some of these barracks, the calm has already returned. So that's it for the moment. As I said, we are monitoring the situation."

A news headline on the state broadcaster described the gunfire as "acts of discontent by soldiers."

"Contrary to some information, no institution of the republic has been targeted," the headline continued.

At the Lamizana Sangoule military barracks in the capital, however, angry soldiers shot into the air Sunday, directing their anger over army casualties at the president. About 100 motorcycles later left the base, chanting in support of the mutineers, but were stopped when security forces deployed tear gas.

The soldiers put a man on the phone with The Associated Press who said that they were seeking better working conditions for Burkina Faso's military amid the escalating fight against Islamic militants. Among their demands are increased manpower in the battle against extremists and better care for those wounded

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 41 of 57

and the families of the dead. The mutinous soldiers also want the military and intelligence hierarchy replaced, he said.

There were signs Sunday that their demands were supported by many in Burkina Faso who are increasingly distressed by the attacks blamed on al-Qaida and Islamic State-linked groups. Thousands have died in recent years from those attacks and around 1.5 million people have been displaced.

"We want the military to take power," said Salif Sawadogo as he tried to avoid tear gas on the streets of Ouagadougou. "Our democracy is not stable."

Kabore first took office in 2015, winning the election held after longtime President Blaise Compaore was ousted in a popular uprising.

Still, Kabore has faced growing opposition since his reelection in November 2020 as the country's Islamic extremism crisis has deepened. Last month he fired his prime minister and replaced most of the Cabinet, but critics have continued calling for his resignation.

On Sunday, protesters who supported the army mutiny said they had had enough of Kabore even though the next presidential election isn't until 2025. Demonstrator Aime Birba said the violence under Kabore has been unlike anything Burkina Faso experienced during the nearly three decades Compaore was in power.

"We are currently under another form of dictatorship," he said. "A president who is not able to take security measures to secure his own people is not a president worthy of the name."

Earlier this month, authorities had arrested a group of soldiers accused of participating in a foiled coup plot. It was not immediately known whether there was any connection between those soldiers and the ones who led a mutiny Sunday. Military prosecutors said nine soldiers and two civilians were being held in connection with the plot.

West Africa has seen a spate of military coups in West Africa over the past 18 months, causing the regional bloc known as ECOWAS to suspend two member states simultaneously for the first time since 2012.

In August 2020, a mutiny at a Malian military barracks led to the democratically elected president being detained. He later announced his resignation on national television, and the junta leader there doesn't want new elections for four more years.

In September 2021, Guinea's president also was overthrown by a military junta that remains in power to this day.

Burkina Faso, too has seen its share of coup attempts and military takeovers. In 1987, Compaore came to power by force. And in 2015, soldiers loyal to him attempted to overthrow the transitional government put into place after his ouster. The army was ultimately able to put the transitional authorities back in power, who led again until Kabore won an election and took office

Blind man who rescued 5 after Oklahoma City bombing dies

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Raymond Washburn, a blind man who was credited with helping rescue five people from the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, has died. He was 75.

Washburn died on Jan. 16 at his home in Oklahoma City, and funeral services were held for him Friday in Bristow, about 70 miles (113 kilometers) northeast of the city.

His cousin Richard Wittman told KWTU in Oklahoma City that he was proud of Washburn not only for what he did on the day of the bombing, but for how he lived his entire life.

"So, in that sense, he was a hero in the way he was able to function, make his way in life, work, his everyday life," Wittman said.

Washburn owned and operated a snack bar on the fourth floor of the Alfred P. Murrah Building when a truck bomb ripped through the structure on April 19, 1995, killing 168 people.

Four customers and an employee were in the snack bar when the blast occurred.

In an interview recorded for the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, Washburn described how he led his customers and employee out of his snack bar.

"I had the advantage over them because not being able to see. I felt like that you know, this is one time

that you know you want to try to help somebody as much as you can. I knew how to get out. I just didn't know what was going to be in our way," Washburn said.

Princella Smith, one of Washburn's friends, said during his funeral that his heart "illuminated the darkness" on the day of the bombing and helped lead people to safety.

"He told them to march, and march down this stairwell. He said, 'You gotta come on. We gotta get out of here,'" Smith said.

Washburn was a member of the Yuchi Tribe in Oklahoma.

Russia rejects UK claim of trying to replace Ukraine leader

By JIM HEINTZ and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's Foreign Ministry on Sunday rejected a British claim that the Kremlin is seeking to replace Ukraine's government with a pro-Moscow administration, and that former Ukrainian lawmaker Yevheniy Murayev is a potential candidate.

Britain's Foreign Office on Saturday also named several other Ukrainian politicians it said had links with Russian intelligence services, along with Murayev who is the leader of a small party that has no seats in parliament.

Those politicians include Mykola Azarov, a former prime minister under Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian president ousted in a 2014 uprising, and Yanukovich's former chief of staff, Andriy Kluyev.

"Some of these have contact with Russian intelligence officers currently involved in the planning for an attack on Ukraine," the Foreign Office said.

Murayev told The Associated Press via Skype that the British claim "looks ridiculous and funny" and that he has been denied entry to Russia since 2018 on the grounds of being a threat to Russian security. He said that sanction was imposed in the wake of a conflict with Viktor Medvedchuk, Ukraine's most prominent pro-Russia politician and a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Murayev's Nashi party — whose name echoes the former Russian youth movement that supported Putin — is regarded as sympathetic to Russia, but Murayev on Sunday pushed back on characterizing it as pro-Russia.

"The time of pro-Western and pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine is gone forever," he said in a Facebook post.

"Everything that does not support the pro-Western path of development of Ukraine is automatically pro-Russian," Murayev told The AP.

He also said he supports Ukraine having neutral status and believes that "striving for NATO is tantamount to continuing the war." Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists have been fighting in the country's east since 2014, a conflict that has killed more than 14,000.

Ukrainian political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko described Murayev as a significant figure in Ukraine's pro-Russia camp, but added: "Murayev is a second-place player. I don't think Murayev has direct connections in the Kremlin."

The U.K. government made the claim based on an intelligence assessment, without providing evidence to back it up. It comes amid high tensions between Moscow and the West over Russia's designs on Ukraine and each side's increasing accusations that the other is planning provocations.

"The disinformation spread by the British Foreign Office is more evidence that it is the NATO countries, led by the Anglo-Saxons, who are escalating tensions around Ukraine," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on the Telegram messaging app Sunday. "We call on the British Foreign Office to stop provocative activities, stop spreading nonsense."

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the information "shines a light on the extent of Russian activity designed to subvert Ukraine, and is an insight into Kremlin thinking."

Truss urged Russia to "deescalate, end its campaigns of aggression and disinformation, and pursue a path of diplomacy," and reiterated Britain's view that "any Russian military incursion into Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake with severe costs."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 43 of 57

Britain has sent anti-tank weapons to Ukraine as part of efforts to bolster the country's defenses against a potential Russian attack.

Mark Galeotti, who has written extensively on Russian security services, said: "I can't help but be skeptical" about the British claim.

"This is one of those situations where it is hard to know whether what we're facing is a genuine threat, a misunderstanding of the inevitable overtures that were being made to various Ukrainian figures by Russians or 'strategic communication' — which is what we call propaganda these days when we're doing it," Galeotti, who is honorary professor of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College, London, told the AP.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he could not comment specifically about the British claim, but "we've been warning about just this kind of tactic for weeks."

"This is very much part of the Russian tool kit," he said in an interview on CNN. "It runs the gamut from a large, conventional incursion or invasion of Ukraine to these kinds of destabilizing activities in an attempt to topple the government. And it's important that people be on notice about that."

The U.K. government's unusual decision to release the thinking of British spies, though not the evidence behind it, comes as Prime Minister Boris Johnson is distracted by a leadership crisis over lockdown-breaching parties by his staff during the coronavirus pandemic.

Keir Giles, a Russia expert at the international affairs think-tank Chatham House, said the British warning was a sign of "the U.K. effectively taking the lead of a strong NATO and European response to Russia's threats to Ukraine."

"With the U.S. apparently willing to engage with Russia's demands on Moscow's terms, and the EU irrelevant and asleep at the wheel, it has fallen to the U.K. to deal with the challenge both in terms of rhetoric ... and in terms of direct action, raising the likely cost of a Russian incursion in Ukraine by providing direct shipments of defensive munitions," Giles said.

Amid diplomatic efforts to defuse the crisis, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace is expected to meet Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for talks in Moscow. No timing has been given for the meeting, which would be the first U.K.-Russia bilateral defense talks since 2013.

The U.S. has mounted an aggressive campaign in recent months to unify its European allies against a new Russian invasion of Ukraine. The White House called the U.K. government assessment "deeply concerning" and said it stands with the duly elected Ukrainian government.

"The Ukrainian people have the sovereign right to determine their own future, and we stand with our democratically elected partners in Ukraine," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said.

The assessment came as President Joe Biden spent Saturday at the presidential retreat Camp David outside of Washington huddling with his senior national security team about the Ukraine situation. A White House official said the discussions included efforts to de-escalate the situation with diplomacy and deterrence measures being coordinated closely with allies and partners, including security assistance to Ukraine.

In Washington on Sunday, the U.S. State Department ordered the families of all American personnel at the American Embassy in Ukraine to leave the country amid heightened fears of a Russian invasion. The move came amid rising tensions that were not eased during talks Friday between the U.S. and Russia.

Taliban talks in Norway raise new debate about recognition

By DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

OSLO, Norway (AP) — A Taliban delegation led by acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Sunday started three days of talks in Oslo with Western officials and Afghan civil society representatives amid a deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The closed-door meetings were taking place at a hotel in the snow-capped mountains above the Norwegian capital and are the first time since the Taliban took over in August that their representatives have held official meetings in Europe.

The talks were not without controversy, however, reigniting the debate over whether they legitimize

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 44 of 57

the Taliban government, especially since they were being held in Norway, a NATO country involved in Afghanistan from 2001 until the Taliban take over last summer.

Speaking at the end of the first day of talks, Taliban delegate Shafiullah Azam told The Associated Press that the meetings with Western officials were "a step to legitimize (the) Afghan government," adding that "this type of invitation and communication will help (the) European community, (the) U.S. or many other countries to erase the wrong picture of the Afghan government."

That statement may irk the Taliban's Norwegian hosts. Earlier, Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt stressed that the talks were "not a legitimation or recognition of the Taliban."

On Sunday, 200 protesters gathered on an icy square in front of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in Oslo to condemn the meetings with the Taliban, which has not received diplomatic recognition from any foreign government.

"The Taliban has not changed as some in the international community like to say," said Ahman Yasir, a Norwegian Afghan living in Norway for around two decades. "They are as brutal as they were in 2001 and before."

Taliban leaders met with some women's rights and human rights activists on Sunday, but there was no official word about those talks.

Starting Monday, Taliban representatives will meet with delegations from Western nations and will be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by the United States and other Western countries be released as Afghanistan faces a precarious humanitarian situation.

"We are requesting them to unfreeze Afghan assets and not punish ordinary Afghans because of the political discourse," said Shafiullah Azam. "Because of the starvation, because of the deadly winter, I think it's time for the international community to support Afghans, not punish them because of their political disputes."

The United Nations has managed to provide some liquidity and allowed the Taliban administration to pay for imports, including electricity. But the U.N. has warned that as many as 1 million Afghan children are in danger of starving and most of the country's 38 million people are living below the poverty line.

Faced with the Taliban's request for funds, Western powers are likely to put the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan high on their agenda, along with the West's recurring demand for the Taliban administration to share power with Afghanistan's minority ethnic and religious groups.

Since sweeping to power in mid-August, the Taliban have imposed widespread restrictions, many of them directed at women. Women have been banned from many jobs outside the health and education fields, their access to education has been restricted beyond sixth grade and they have been ordered to wear the hijab. The Taliban have, however, stopped short of imposing the burqa, which was compulsory when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban have increasingly targeted Afghanistan's beleaguered rights groups, as well as journalists, detaining and sometimes beating television crews covering demonstrations.

A U.S. delegation, led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West, plans to discuss "the formation of a representative political system; responses to the urgent humanitarian and economic crises; security and counterterrorism concerns; and human rights, especially education for girls and women," according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department.

The Scandinavian country, home to the Nobel Peace Prize, is no stranger to diplomacy. It has been involved in peace efforts in a number of countries, including Mozambique, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Colombia, the Philippines, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Myanmar, Somalia, Sri Lanka and South Sudan.

Gonzaga suspends Stockton's season tickets over mask rule

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Gonzaga has suspended John Stockton's basketball season tickets after the Hall of Fame point guard refused to comply with the university's mask mandate.

Stockton, one of Gonzaga's most prominent alums, confirmed the move in a Saturday interview with The Spokesman-Review.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 45 of 57

"Basically, it came down to, they were asking me to wear a mask to the games and being a public figure, someone a little bit more visible, I stuck out in the crowd a little bit," Stockton said. "And therefore they received complaints and felt like from whatever the higher-ups — those weren't discussed, but from whatever it was higher up — they were going to have to either ask me to wear a mask or they were going to suspend my tickets."

Stockton has come out against COVID-19 vaccines, mask mandates and other protective measures. Last June, he participated in a documentary titled "COVID and the Vaccine: Truth, Lies and Misconceptions Revealed."

In the interview with the Spokane newspaper, Stockton claimed without evidence that more than 100 professional athletes have died after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

"I think it's highly recorded now, there's 150 I believe now, it's over 100 professional athletes dead — professional athletes — the prime of their life, dropping dead that are vaccinated, right on the pitch, right on the field, right on the court," Stockton said.

Experts have told the AP there is "no scientific evidence" that either COVID-19 or the mRNA vaccines have increased sudden cardiac arrest, often referred to as SCA, among athletes.

The false claim that large numbers of athletes are collapsing or dying due to COVID-19 vaccines has circulated on social media for months, particularly among anti-vaccine circles, and has been rejected by medical experts.

Meanwhile, public health experts say masks are a key virus-prevention tool that are most effective when worn by a large number of people.

In a statement, Gonzaga officials said they are committed to implementing health and safety protocols, which include an indoor mask mandate. The university also requires proof of COVID-19 vaccination or a negative test taken with the last 72 hours to attend home athletic events. As a way to enforce the mask mandate, Gonzaga has suspended its food and beverage sales at games.

"We will not speak to specific actions taken with any specific individuals," the statement read. "We take enforcement of COVID-19 health and safety protocols seriously and will continue to evaluate how we can best mitigate the risks posed by COVID-19 with appropriate measures."

Stockton played for Gonzaga from 1980 to 1984, when the Zags were a middling program that never posted a record better than 17-11. The team has since retired his No. 12. A life-sized poster of Stockton in action hangs in a concourse of the McCarthy Athletic Center, part of a gallery of Gonzaga greats.

The Spokane native was a first-round draft pick of the Utah Jazz in 1984 and set an NBA record with 15,806 career assists before his retirement in 2003. He and his family have lived in Spokane since then, and he has been a fixture at Gonzaga basketball games.

Youth's overdose death renews pleas for Narcan in schools

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — The death of a 13-year-old student who apparently overdosed on fentanyl at his Connecticut school has drawn renewed pleas for schools to stock the opioid antidote naloxone, as well as for training of both staffers and children on how to recognize and respond to overdoses.

The seventh grader died Jan. 15 after falling ill at a Hartford school that did not have naloxone on hand. City officials vowed Wednesday to put the antidote in all city schools, as part of a wider drug use and overdose prevention strategy.

"Naloxone should be available in all schools, and there should be education on signs and symptoms of overdose and how to use this," said Dr. Craig Allen, vice president of addiction services for Hartford HealthCare's Behavioral Health Network. "Unfortunately, a horrible incident like this happens and suddenly everyone's vision is 20/20."

Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin said that because of the student's young age, an opioid overdose did not immediately come to mind when the school nurse and first responders, who did have naloxone, treated him.

That's why city officials are also proposing more training and curriculum changes aimed at educating

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 46 of 57

staffers, students and community members in substance use awareness and prevention, he said.

In response to the student's death, advocacy groups are repeating calls they've made for several years for schools to stock naloxone — often delivered as a nasal spray under the brand name Narcan — and train educators, support staff and students to recognize signs of opioid use and overdoses, especially because younger people are falling victim more frequently.

The powerful opioid fentanyl has been showing up in marijuana, illicit pills and other substances accessible to school-age children, experts say. Fatal overdoses in the U.S. are at record levels, fueled by fentanyl, and have been increasing among younger people, national data shows.

The National Association of School Nurses has advocated for naloxone to be in all schools since 2015 and for school nurses to help educate their communities about the signs and symptoms of substance abuse.

"It's a very unfortunate outcome," Linda Mendonca, the association's president, said about the Hartford student's death. "It brings us back to school preparedness and response plans. Having those in place is really critical."

The association created a "tool kit" for school nurses that includes information on administering naloxone and educating the community about opioid problems. The kit has been downloaded from its website more than 49,000 times, the group said.

Ethan's Run Against Addiction is one of many advocacy groups that weighed in on social media about the Hartford student's death. It is named after Ethan Monson-Dupuis, a 25-year-old Wisconsin man who died of a heroin overdose in 2016.

"This tragedy is unbearable. Our nation's opioid crisis has reached into the lives of children, into places where we want to assume that they are safe," the group said in a Facebook post Thursday. "ALL public places, including schools, must have Narcan available. We need to educate kids on how to recognize someone who is overdosing and how to use Narcan."

In addition to a nasal spray, naloxone can also be given as an injection. The National Institute on Drug Abuse says it is a safe medicine and side effects are rare but warns it doesn't reverse overdoses from other drugs. Training is needed, the agency says, because sometimes more than one dose needs to be given and people who receive the drug can experience immediate withdrawal symptoms.

It's not clear how often overdoses happen in U.S. schools, but experts and advocates say they are not common.

In late November, two school resource officers and a school nurse were given naloxone after being exposed to the synthetic opioid carfentanil, which was in a piece of paper found in a student's vape pen at Sequoyah High School in Madisonville, Tennessee, according to local media reports. The officers and nurse became lightheaded but recovered.

In 2019, high schools in the Tucson, Arizona, area began stocking naloxone in response to a student overdosing on opioids while in school. Emergency responders, who were carrying the antidote, revived the student, media reports said.

There also is no national data on how many schools have naloxone or drug use awareness training programs that include recognizing the signs of an overdose.

In a survey of Pennsylvania school nurses conducted in 2018 and published in 2020, more than half the 362 nurses who responded reported having naloxone in their schools, according to the journal Public Health Nursing.

About 5% of the nurses said naloxone had been administered in their school or at a school-sponsored activity. The most common reason for not having naloxone in schools included a lack of support and the belief it was not needed, the survey showed.

Drug use prevention is taught in many schools. And there are an array of overdose awareness and naloxone administration programs offered by local health departments and advocacy groups.

In eastern Tennessee, the Carter County Drug Prevention group has trained hundreds of children, some as young as 6, on how to use naloxone via after-school programs and other extracurricular gatherings, in response to rising overdoses, The New York Times reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 47 of 57

Twenty states had laws allowing schools to possess and administer naloxone, and seven others required schools to have naloxone-use policies as of August 2020, according to the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association, a nonprofit research and policy advocacy group. Most of the laws require training on administering the antidote.

In response to record drug overdoses, the national Office of National Drug Control Policy in November released a model law for states to consider, aimed at expanding access to naloxone, including in schools.

The Hartford student fell ill Jan. 13 at the Sport and Medical Sciences Academy and died at a hospital two days later. The teenager's name was not released. Two other students recovered after apparently being exposed to fentanyl and becoming ill, officials said.

Hartford police said they found about 40 small bags containing fentanyl in the school. Police are still investigating the overdose, and the fentanyl's source remains unclear.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 15-to-24 age group saw the largest percentage increase in drug overdose death rates from 2019 to 2020, at 49%, but had the second-lowest overall rates among age groups.

For the first time last year, U.S. overdoses deaths topped an estimated 100,000 in a one-year period, with many of the deaths linked to illicit fentanyl.

Authorities: 17 dead in nightclub fire in Cameroon's capital

By EDWIN KINDZEKA MOKI Associated Press

YAOUNDE, Cameroon (AP) — A fire erupted at a popular nightclub in the Cameroon capital of Yaounde, setting off explosions that killed at least 17 people and seriously injured seven others, government officials said Sunday.

The tragedy comes as the central African country hosts thousands of soccer players, fans and officials from across the continent for the month-long African Cup of Nations soccer tournament.

It was not immediately clear what had sparked the fire at Liv's Nightclub Yaouba in the capital's Bastos neighborhood. Workers there initially said it was caused by a short circuit. However, a government statement later Sunday suggested that fireworks had ignited the building's roof, and then the fire spread to areas where cooking gas was stored.

"The tragedy, which was caused by the explosions from fireworks regularly used in these places, first consumed the ceiling of the building and then caused two strong explosions," government spokesman Rene Emmanuel Sadi said.

The government spokesman said authorities were still trying to determine the names and nationalities of the dead and wounded. Eight people were taken to a Yaounde hospital, one of whom later died. The others remained in intensive care late Sunday.

In a statement, Cameroonian President Paul Biya called for calm and assured players and fans of their safety. His government later asked people to remain vigilant "in order to avoid the occurrence of this kind of disaster, especially when our country is hosting a large-scale sporting event."

The African Cup features teams from 24 countries and began on Jan. 9. It is the continent's biggest soccer tournament and Cameroon is hosting for the first time in 50 years. It was originally scheduled for 2021 but then was postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Cameroon team will play a round of 16 knockout game against Comoros in Yaounde on Monday.

Yaounde is the main host city and will stage another six games, including the final on Feb. 6.

Water cannon, tear gas at COVID-19 protests in Brussels

BRUSSELS (AP) — Police fired water cannons and thick clouds of tear gas Sunday in Brussels to disperse people protesting COVID-19 vaccinations and government restrictions that aim to curb the fast-spreading omicron variant.

Police said the protest in the Belgian capital drew an estimated 50,000 people, some traveling from France, Germany and other countries to take part. Protesters yelled "Liberty!" as they marched and some

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 48 of 57

had violent confrontations with police. Video showed black-clad protesters attacking a building used by the European Union's diplomatic service, hurling projectiles at its entrance and smashing windows.

A much smaller number of anti-vaccination demonstrators marched in Barcelona.

The protests followed demonstrations in other European capitals on Saturday against vaccine passports and other requirements that European governments have imposed as daily infections and hospitalizations have surged due to the omicron variant.

In Brussels, white-helmeted police riot officers repeatedly charged after protesters who ignored instructions to disperse. Police water cannon trucks fired powerful jets and snaking trails of gas filled the air.

A protest leader broadcasting over a loudspeaker yelled, "Come on people! Don't let them take away your rights!" as police officers faced off against demonstrators who hurled projectiles and insults. "Go to hell!" shouted one protester wearing a fake knight's helmet with a colorful quiff.

Brussels police said 70 people were detained and three officers and 12 demonstrators required hospital treatment.

Some protesters attacked a video team covering the march for The Associated Press, pushing and threatening the journalists and damaging their video equipment. One protester kicked one of the journalists and another tried to punch him.

Nearly 77% of Belgium's population has been fully vaccinated, and 53% have had a booster dose, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Belgium has seen more than 28,700 virus deaths overall.

In downtown Barcelona, protesters wore costumes and waved banners reading "It's not a pandemic, it's a dictatorship," as they marched against against restrictions imposed by both national and regional authorities to curb a surge in COVID-19 cases fueled by the omicron variant.

Participants included people rejecting vaccines and those who deny the existence or gravity of the virus. Few donned face masks, which are currently mandatory outdoors in Spain. Police said 1,100 people attended.

Spain, a country of 47 million, has officially recorded over 9 million coronavirus cases, although the real number is believed to be much higher. Nearly 92,000 COVID-19 patients.

With over 80% of Spain's residents vaccinated, experts have credited the shots for saving thousands of lives and averting the total collapse of its public health system.

Once allies, Stormy Daniels and Avenatti face off at trial

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Stormy Daniels, the porn star who catapulted herself and Michael Avenatti to fame with lawsuits against former President Donald Trump, will have a starring role in court beginning Monday when prosecutors try to prove that the California lawyer cheated her of \$300,000 in book proceeds.

Her testimony in Manhattan federal court will be pivotal for prosecutors trying to prove Avenatti engaged in wire fraud and aggravated identity theft to keep from giving his client money he had received from her publisher. Opening statements are set for Monday. Daniels is not expected to testify until Tuesday, at the earliest.

Avenatti, 50, has pleaded not guilty to the charges in what will be his third criminal trial in two years.

"I am completely innocent of these charges," Avenatti said in a statement issued through a publicist this weekend. "The government is spending millions of dollars to prosecute me for a case that should have never been filed. Meanwhile, they continue to allow Trump and his co-conspirators to walk free and suffer no consequences for their criminal conduct. That is not justice."

In early 2020, he was convicted of trying to extort up to \$25 million from Nike by threatening to tarnish the sportswear giant's reputation unless it met his demands. He has not yet begun serving a 2 1/2-year prison sentence. Last year, a mistrial resulted in California on charges that he cheated clients there. He awaits retrial.

The attorney-client relationship between Daniels and Avenatti seemed strong in the spring of 2018 when

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 49 of 57

the pair showed up together at a Manhattan court hearing pertaining to raids on the home and office of Michael Cohen, Trump's longtime personal attorney.

Cohen had played a role in a \$130,000 hush-money payment to Daniels to buy her silence 11 days before the 2016 presidential election. He eventually pleaded guilty to charges and served a year behind bars before finishing his three-year prison term at home.

With Avenatti's help, Daniels sued Trump to try to win back her freedom to speak openly about what she contended was a brief affair with Trump a decade earlier. As a result of the litigation in 2018, a Los Angeles judge ordered Trump to pay Daniels \$44,100 in legal fees. Trump has denied the sexual encounter.

With Daniels as a client and his growing reputation as a Trump critic, Avenatti found himself in demand on cable television news programs. He became so popular in some circles that he considered a run for president.

After Daniels signed a book deal, the pair remained close, and Avenatti was enlisted to write the forward to "Full Disclosure," which was released in the fall of 2018. In the book, Daniels revealed details about what she described as her sexual encounter with Trump and communications afterward.

But a half-year after the book was published, Avenatti was charged in three criminal cases, including the fraud he was alleged to have carried out against Daniels, whose legal name is Stephanie Clifford.

After his arrest, Avenatti insisted in Twitter posts that no money related to Daniels was ever misappropriated or mishandled and that he mostly worked unpaid for Daniels with an agreement that he would receive a percentage of any book proceeds. He said he looked "forward to a jury hearing the evidence."

'Spider-Man' comes back swinging, takes No. 1 from 'Scream'

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

After spending one weekend in second place, "Spider-Man: No Way Home" proved it still had some fight left. Sony's superhero juggernaut swung back to first place in its sixth weekend in theaters and became the sixth highest grossing film of all time, globally.

The film topped the North American charts with \$14.1 million, according to studio estimates on Sunday. Globally, it's now grossed nearly \$1.7 billion, passing the total earnings of both "Jurassic World" and "The Lion King." And in North America its \$721 million make it the fourth biggest release ever.

Peter Parker also stole first place back from "Scream," which fell about 59% — a typical drop for a horror— in its second weekend with an estimated \$12.4 million in ticket sales. The Paramount release has grossed \$51.3 million so far.

Universal and Illumination's "Sing 2" landed in third place in its fifth weekend, with \$5.7 million. The animated title has earned \$241.2 million worldwide.

There was little competition for the holdovers to contend with this weekend. The only two fresh offerings nationwide in theaters were comparatively lower-profile releases: "The King's Daughter," a fairy tale with Pierce Brosnan that was filmed in 2014 and held until now (it bombed with \$750,000 from over 2,000 locations), and "Redeeming Love," a faith-based historical romance with Nina Dobrev that cracked the top five with \$3.7 million.

"This is a very slow weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "January is typically not a big month for box office. It may be a while before we have another big breakout hit, but once we do the floodgates may open."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Spider-Man: No Way Home," \$14.1 million.
2. "Scream," \$12.4 million.
3. "Sing 2," \$5.7 million.
4. "Redeeming Love," \$3.7 million.
5. "The King's Man," \$1.8 million.
6. "The 355," \$1.6 million.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 50 of 57

7. "American Underdog," \$1.2 million.
8. "The King's Daughter," \$750,000.
9. "West Side Story," \$689,000.
10. "Licorice Pizza," \$683,357.

Don Wilson, guitarist with The Ventures, dies at 88

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — Don Wilson, co-founder and rhythm guitarist of the instrumental guitar band The Ventures, has died.

He was 88.

Wilson died Saturday in Tacoma of natural causes, surrounded by his four children, The News Tribune reported.

The band's hits included "Walk, Don't Run," and the theme song for "Hawaii Five-O." They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008.

"Our dad was an amazing rhythm guitar player who touched people all over world with his band, The Ventures," son Tim Wilson said in a statement. "He will have his place in history forever and was much loved and appreciated. He will be missed."

In the 1960s and early 1970s, 38 of the band's albums charted in the United States.

The Ventures had 14 singles in the Billboard Hot 100. With over 100 million records sold, the Ventures are the best-selling instrumental band of all time.

The band scored the No. 2 hit in the country with "Walk, Don't Run" in 1960.

Ventures founders Bob Bogle and Wilson were bricklayers when they bought guitars and chord books at a pawnshop in Tacoma in 1958.

"They were just really cheap guitars," Wilson once recalled. "They didn't stay in tune very well. But we wanted to learn."

By the next year, they had formed the Ventures, adding Nokie Edwards on bass guitar and Howie Johnson on drums.

Johnson broke his neck in a car wreck in 1961 and died in 1988. Skip Moore played drums on "Walk Don't Run," and Mel Taylor took take over on drums and rounded out the classic lineup, with Edwards on lead guitar, in 1962.

The band continued to perform through numerous lineup changes, but Wilson was the one constant throughout. He didn't miss a tour until his retirement in 2015, according to the family's statement.

Black Democrats in South Carolina giving Biden mixed reviews

By MEG KINNARD and TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Joe Biden's run for the Democratic presidential nomination was all but declared dead as he headed to the South Carolina primary in late February 2020.

He had finished fifth in New Hampshire and fourth in Iowa. Still, Biden advised skeptics to withhold judgment until a state with a large pool of Black voters, the most reliable Democratic constituency, had a chance to weigh in.

"Too often your loyalty, your commitment, your support for this party has been taken for granted," he said. "I give you my word as a Biden that I never, ever, ever will."

Black voters delivered, recasting the Democratic contest and sending Biden on his way to the White House.

Now, one year into his presidency, Biden is hoping he can maintain the support of Black voters, even as his failure to deliver on voting rights legislation and other issues has left some loyalists dispirited. Of the many challenges he confronts as he enters his second year, few are as important as retaining the strong backing from his party's base.

Just 6 in 10 Black Americans said they approved of Biden in a recent poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, down from about 9 in 10 who approved in polls conducted through the first six months of Biden's presidency.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 51 of 57

"I'm perplexed. At some points, I'm angry. I'm trying to see if there is anything redeeming," said George Hart, 73, a professor and faculty adviser to the student chapter of the NAACP at Benedict College, a historically Black institution in Columbia. "I'm just so disillusioned, I don't know what to say.

"He let so much happen from the time he became president to the time that he actually introduced the measure, it was lost," said Hart, who supported Biden in South Carolina's primary. "And we are the ones, African Americans, Black voters, who are going to pay the penalties."

Hart's was not a universal view in interviews with Black voters in South Carolina last week, but it is a worrisome sign for a president whose approval ratings are near record lows. Some Black South Carolina voters who long supported Biden's campaign hold out hope for his administration, while those who supported him reluctantly — or not at all — say they're unimpressed.

Dennis Brothers, who supported Biden "from the very beginning," said he felt things were going "pretty well," although he is frustrated by Biden not honoring a campaign promise to cancel — not delay — some amounts of student debt.

"That has been a disappointment," said Brothers, a 31-year-old media specialist from Calhoun County. "I just hope that some of those promises that were made, are kept."

In the next three years, Brothers said the administration should be more transparent about its goals, particularly on issues pertinent to Black voters such as a policing overhaul.

"We know that Rome was not built in a day," Brothers said. "I'm not going to say he's not trying, but I just wish he would try a little bit harder."

Margaret Sumpter, a 64-year-old rural community advocate from Hopkins, blamed the stagnation of voting rights on congressional gridlock, not inaction from Biden, who she said was discovering that the bipartisan successes he had as a longtime senator didn't necessarily translate to the presidency.

"I think that he could push a little harder with Republicans like Mitt Romney and some of the other folks to help him to get this passed," said Sumpter, who backed billionaire businessman Tom Steyer during South Carolina's primary but then voted for Biden.

"The same thing that they're doing to him, they did it to Barack Obama," she said. "Why? Do people think Republicans are going to treat him any differently, because he's a white man? No."

Others are less patient.

Travis Lincoln attended Biden's first South Carolina rally in 2019 and even deejayed a later event, but ultimately backed tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang in the primary. Lincoln, who runs a Columbia homeless veterans organization, supported Biden in the general election but said he had been underwhelmed by Biden's presidency.

"His campaign sold us on the idea that he was going to support some Black issues, and that's not really happened," said Lincoln, 44. "The people that were in his corner thought that was going to be the best move for him. It was more political strategy than anything."

On voting rights, Lincoln said he saw the effort as doomed from the start, due to known Republican opposition. Instead, he argued, Biden should have focused on other issues where progress could have been possible, such as expunging nonviolent drug-related offenses, an issue on which Biden campaigned but has not taken executive action.

Ra Shád Frazier-Gaines cofounded Amplify Action, a nonprofit that focuses on political engagement of Black men, and voted for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders in South Carolina's primary. In Frazier-Gaines' view, Biden has talked far more than delivered.

"Black people are the reason Joe Biden is president, and I don't feel ... that there has been one time that he's ever shown us a 'thank you' by way of policy," said Frazier-Gaines. "Yes, his administration has given a lot of talented Black people opportunities to serve in different positions. All of that is cute, but that's not doing anything to put food on the tables of Black families across the country."

Still, Biden has retained the support of Rep. Jim Clyburn, the third-ranking Democrat in the U.S. House and a powerful figure in South Carolina, especially among Black voters. Rather than fault Biden about voting rights, Clyburn has focused his criticism on the two Democrats who doomed the legislation, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona.

Bre Maxwell, a Democratic National Committee member, dismissed the criticism that Biden had been

anything but authentic with the state's Black voters.

"I don't think he would have wasted all this time just for it to be lip service," said Maxwell. "I think he's very genuine, and I think he wants to keep everybody happy."

Satisfied that Biden — whom he supported in the primary and worked to get elected — is doing a good job overall, veteran civil rights activist James Felder blamed not the president but "almost obstructionists" Manchin and Sinema for the voting rights failure.

"It's really a setback for the party, and it's a setback for the country as well," said Felder, 82. "Two votes and two people holding up all the progress that we could make at this point."

To Sumpter, Biden is doing as well as could be expected and has achieved some real change, such as the enhanced child tax credit.

"He's living up to what I expected him to be able to do," Sumpter said. "There's only so much that a person can accomplish in that first year."

New conservative target: Race as factor in COVID treatment

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Some conservatives are taking aim at policies that allow doctors to consider race as a risk factor when allocating scarce COVID-19 treatments, saying the protocols discriminate against white people.

The wave of infections brought on by the omicron variant and a shortage of treatments have focused attention on the policies.

Medical experts say the opposition is misleading. Health officials have long said there is a strong case for considering race as one of many risk factors in treatment decisions. And there is no evidence that race alone is being used to decide who gets medicine.

The issue came to the forefront last week after Fox News host Tucker Carlson, former President Donald Trump and Republican Sen. Marco Rubio jumped on the policies. In recent days, conservative law firms have pressured a Missouri-based health care system, Minnesota and Utah to drop their protocols and sued New York state over allocation guidelines or scoring systems that include race as a risk factor.

JP Leider, a senior fellow in the Division of Health Policy and Management at the University of Minnesota who helped develop that state's allocation criteria, noted that prioritization has been going on for some time because there aren't enough treatments to go around.

"You have to pick who comes first," Leider said. "The problem is we have extremely conclusive evidence that (minorities) across the United States are having worse COVID outcomes compared to white folks. ... Sometimes it's acceptable to consider things like race and ethnicity when making decisions about when resources get allocated at a societal level."

Since the pandemic began, health care systems and states have been grappling with how to best distribute treatments. The problem has only grown worse as the omicron variant has packed hospitals with COVID-19 patients.

Considerable evidence suggests that COVID-19 has hit certain racial and ethnic groups harder than whites. Research shows that people of color are at a higher risk of severe illness, are more likely to be hospitalized and are dying from COVID-19 at younger ages.

Data also show that minorities have been missing out on treatments. Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published an analysis of 41 health care systems that found that Black, Asian and Hispanic patients are less likely than whites to receive outpatient antibody treatment.

Omicron has rendered two widely available antibody treatments ineffective, leaving only one, which is in short supply.

The Food and Drug Administration has given health care providers guidance on when that treatment, sotrovimab, should be used, including a list of medical conditions that put patients at high risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. The FDA's guidance says other factors such as race or ethnicity might also put patients at higher risk.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 53 of 57

The CDC's list of high-risk underlying conditions notes that age is the strongest risk factor for severe disease and lists more than a dozen medical conditions. It also suggests that doctors and nurses "carefully consider potential additional risks of COVID-19 illness for patients who are members of certain racial and ethnic minority groups."

State guidelines generally recommend that doctors give priority for the drugs to those at the highest risk, including cancer patients, transplant recipients and people who have lung disease or are pregnant. Some states, including Wisconsin, have implemented policies that bar race as a factor, but others have allowed it.

St. Louis-based SSM Health, which serves patients in Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma and Wisconsin, required patients to score 20 points on a risk calculator to qualify for COVID-19 antibody treatment. Non-whites automatically got seven points.

State health officials in Utah adopted a similar risk calculator that grants people two points if they're not white. Minnesota's health department guidelines automatically assigned two points to minorities. Four points was enough to qualify for treatment.

New York state health officials' guidelines authorize antiviral treatments if patients meet five criteria. One is having "a medical condition or other factors that increase their risk for severe illness." One of those factors is being a minority, according to the guidelines.

The protocols have become a talking point for Republicans after The Wall Street Journal ran an op-ed by political commentators John Judis and Ruy Teixeira this month complaining that New York's policy is unfair, unjustified and possibly illegal. Carlson jumped on Utah's and Minnesota's policies last week, saying "you win if you're not white."

Alvin Tillery, a political scientist at Northwestern University, called the issue a winning political strategy for Trump and Republicans looking to motivate their predominantly white base ahead of midterm elections in November. He said conservatives are twisting the narrative, noting that race is only one of a multitude of factors in every allocation policy.

"It does gin up their people, gives them a chance in elections," Tillery said.

After the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, a conservative law firm based in Madison, sent a letter to SSM Health on Friday demanding that it drop race from its risk calculator, SSM responded that it already did so last year as health experts' understanding of COVID-19 evolved.

"While early versions of risk calculators across the nation appropriately included race and gender criteria based on initial outcomes, SSM Health has continued to evaluate and update our protocols weekly to reflect the most up-to-date clinical evidence available," the company said in a statement. "As a result, race and gender criteria are no longer utilized."

America First Legal, a conservative-leaning law firm based in Washington, D.C., filed a federal lawsuit Sunday against New York demanding that the state remove race from its allocation criteria. The same firm warned Minnesota and Utah last week that they should drop race from their preference factors or face lawsuits.

Erin Silk, a spokeswoman for New York state's health department, declined to comment on the lawsuit. She said the state's guidance is based on CDC guidelines and that race is one of many factors that doctors should consider when deciding who gets treatment. She stressed that doctors should consider a patient's total medical history and that no one is refused treatment because of race or any other demographic qualifier.

Minnesota health officials dropped race from the state's criteria a day or two before receiving America Legal First's demands, Leider said. They said in a statement that they're committed to serving all Minnesotans equitably and are constantly reviewing their policies. The statement did not mention the letter from America Legal First. Leider said the state is now picking treatment recipients through a lottery.

Utah dropped race and ethnicity from its risk score calculator on Friday, among other changes, citing new federal guidance and the need to make sure classifications comply with federal law. The state's health department said that instead of using those as factors in eligibility for treatments, it would "work with communities of color to improve access to treatments" in other ways.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 54 of 57

Leider finds the criticism of the race-inclusive policies disingenuous.

"It's easy to bring in identity politics and set up choices between really wealthy folks of one type and folks of other types," he said. "It's hard to take seriously those kinds of comparisons. They don't seem very fair to reality."

It's men only in Nordic combined at the Olympics for now

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

LAKE PLACID, N.Y. (AP) — Like her brother, Annika Malacinski dreams of going to the Olympics in Nordic combined.

As wintry weather settled in at the Olympic Jumping Complex and Mount Van Hoevenberg last fall, she and Niklas trained together in this tiny town that hosted the 1980 and 1932 Winter Olympics.

The siblings fearlessly took flight off a ski jump and relentlessly pushed themselves on paved paths in roller skis alongside other Olympic hopefuls. Through it all, 20-year-old Annika knew she had no shot at competing in China in February.

Nordic combined, which combines ski jumping and cross-country skiing, is the only Olympic sport without gender equity: There is no women's competition at the Games.

"I think it's absurd that one person can fulfill his dreams this upcoming year and one just has to keep pushing for it to be in 2026," she said.

Niklas Malacinski, who like his sister holds US-Finnish dual citizenship, agreed.

"It isn't right," he said. "Even though we're both in the same sport, it's hard to talk about goals with her because I don't want to make it sound like I'm bragging about what I have a chance to do, and she does not."

The 18-year old Malacinski finished sixth at the U.S. trials and just missed being one of five Americans competing in Nordic combined in China. Perhaps at the Milan-Cortina Games in 2026, the sister and brother from Steamboat Springs, Colorado, will both have a chance to go for gold.

The International Olympic Committee executive board considered an application in 2018 that would have allowed women to compete in Nordic combined at the Beijing Games. After discussions with the International Ski Federation, the application was denied.

"The inclusion of any women's events in the Olympic Games are really important in promoting gender equality, but they also need to be at a level appropriate to be included in the Olympic Games and contesting an Olympic medal," IOC sports director Kit McConnell said in 2018. "We have seen developments in that regard. But I think there was a general feeling that further development in terms of the universality, the competitiveness of the event, and the attractiveness and following of it needed to be seen before that discussion could happen again for 2026."

Talks will resume later this year. In June, the IOC executive board is expected to decide on an application to give women access to Olympic gold in Nordic combined in 2026.

Women in the sport, and advocates for their participation in the Olympics, are optimistic about the chances for inclusion in Italy. More than 30 female athletes are competing this winter at the highest level of the sport after the debut World Cup season for women a year ago.

"I'll be surprised if we're not able to bring them in, although you never know," FIS Nordic combined race director Lasse Ottesen said recently in an interview with The Associated Press. "We've seen fantastic development the last two years. We have more and more nations taking part, and the athletes have developed in very fast to get to a good level. All the boxes have been checked from our point of view."

"Gender equity is important for the IOC, and FIS, and by bringing Nordic combined in that would complete the program in the Olympics."

While the IOC will likely face another round of questions and criticism when the Games begin with women shut out in Nordic combined, the governing body is proud to point to improvements made toward gender equality.

The IOC said the Beijing Games will set new marks for female competitors and women's sports based

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 55 of 57

on decisions its executive board made in 2018, increasing participation to 45% from 41% four years ago. Mixed team formats, such as one in ski jumping, were added to provide women with more opportunities, and sports such as speed skating now have as many women as men competing for the first time at the Olympics.

Tara Gerhaghty-Moats isn't in the mood to celebrate.

Gerhaghty-Moats won the first World Cup Nordic combined competition for women in December 2020 after being a two-time champion of the second-tier Continental Cup. She was disheartened that the rest of the debut season's events were canceled during the pandemic and were not rescheduled as some of the men's competitions were.

Last spring, she switched to biathlon.

"Being in Nordic combined showed me the underbelly of what the Olympics is all about, which is not a pristine image," Gerhaghty-Moats told AP. "FIS does not have a lot of power over the IOC, and no one holds the IOC accountable."

Earlier this month, women and men competed together in the first World Cup mixed team event in Nordic combined. Annika Malacinski teamed up with Alexa Brabec, Taylor Fletcher and Jared Shumate to put the Americans sixth of eight nations in Italy.

She lamented the gender inequity that will force her and other women to wait and hope they will have a chance to live their dreams in four years.

"I think it's insane that we are living in the 20th century and we are still experiencing inequality not only in our daily lives, but over a sport that we put our souls into," she said. "Doesn't feel good at all. As much as I love Nordic combined, it's absolutely awful having to fight with other girls on my side to get it out to the world how we are the only Olympic sport that doesn't have both men and women in the games for no reason at all."

UAE bans flying of recreational drones after fatal attack

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United Arab Emirates has banned the flying of drones in the country for recreation after Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed a fatal drone attack on an oil facility and major airport in the country.

As of Saturday, drone hobbyists and other operators of light electric sports aircraft face "legal liabilities" if caught flying the objects, the Interior Ministry said, adding it may grant exemptions to businesses seeking to film.

A rare drone and missile strike on the capital of Abu Dhabi blew up several fuel tankers and killed three people last week.

The Houthis, who hold Yemen's capital and have fought a bloody, yearslong war with a Saudi-led military coalition that includes the UAE, claimed the assault. While the UAE has largely withdrawn troops from the stalemated conflict, the country continues to be a major player and support local militias on the ground.

The UAE said the Houthis targeted the country with bomb-laden drones and cruise and ballistic missiles, adding the country had intercepted some of the projectiles. In response to the strike, the Saudi-led coalition has escalated attacks on the rebel-held parts of Yemen in the last week.

Government regulations in the UAE already restrict flying drones in residential areas as well as near, around and over airports. Drone users typically must obtain a certificate from the civil aviation authorities.

Farmers' protest in Spain highlights rural concerns

MADRID (AP) — Farmers, cattle-breeders, hunters and opposition supporters descended Sunday on the Spanish capital of Madrid to protest environmental and economic policies by Spain's left-of-center government that they say are hurting rural communities.

Sunday's protest was organized by Alma Rural 2021, a platform representing over 500 rural organizations from all corners of Spain. Members of opposition parties, ranging from centrists to far-right supporters,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 56 of 57

also attended.

The demonstration came as Spanish politicians are campaigning before an early election in Castilla-Leon, a vast region northeast of Madrid where proposals against depopulation and agricultural policies are taking center stage.

Carlos Bueno, head of Alma Rural 2021, said the protest aimed to highlight rural concerns amid what he called "ideological" attacks from the government. Concerns ranged from regulating prices for agricultural products to protections for those who breed cattle for bullfights and more subsidies for rural industries.

Tractors and bull carts headed the march along a Madrid thoroughfare, with protesters walking from the gates of the Ecology Transition Ministry — the previous Environment Ministry — to the Agriculture Ministry. Among the many banners held by protesters, one read: "Farmers speak. Who's listening?"

Spain's Ecological Transition Ministry said the country's budget for 2022 includes 4.2 billion euros (\$4.7 billion) to fight the depopulation of rural areas. Spain's rural world "doesn't need populist slogans but political involvement and resource to solve historical problems," it said in a statement.

A spat over industrial livestock farming has dominated headlines for the past month since Consumer Minister Alberto Garzón, a member of the far-left junior partner of the Socialist-led administration, criticized big cattle operations for damaging the environment and producing poor quality food for export.

His remarks caused a political storm, created divisions within the ruling coalition and led to calls by right-wing opposition parties for Garzón to resign.

Beijing district orders mass virus testing ahead of Olympics

BEIJING (AP) — People in a Beijing district with some 2 million residents were ordered Sunday to undergo mass coronavirus testing following a series of infections as China tightened anti-disease controls ahead of the Winter Olympics.

The government told people in areas of the Chinese capital deemed at high risk for infection not to leave the city after 25 cases were found in the Fengtai district and 14 elsewhere.

The ruling Communist Party is stepping up enforcement of its "zero tolerance" strategy aimed at isolating every infected person as Beijing prepares to open the Winter Games on Feb. 4 under intensive anti-virus controls.

On Sunday, Fengtai residents lined up on snow-covered sidewalks in freezing weather for testing.

The Chinese capital must "take the most resolute, decisive and strict measures to block the transmission chain of the epidemic," a city government spokesman, Xu Hejian, told a news conference.

"In principle, personnel in risk areas shall not leave Beijing," Xu said.

Nationwide, 56 new confirmed infections were reported in the 24 hours through midnight Saturday. The National Health Commission said 37 were believed to have been acquired abroad.

China has reported 4,636 deaths out of 105,603 confirmed cases and seven suspected cases since the pandemic began.

The Olympics are being held under strict controls that are meant to isolate athletes, reporters and officials from the outside world. Athletes are required to be vaccinated or undergo a quarantine after arriving in China.

Other outbreaks prompted the government to impose travel bans on the major cities of Xi'an and Tianjin.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 24, the 24th day of 2022. There are 341 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 24, 1989, confessed serial killer Theodore Bundy was executed in Florida's electric chair.

On this date:

In 1848, James W. Marshall discovered a gold nugget at Sutter's Mill in northern California, a discovery

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, Jan. 24, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 201 ~ 57 of 57

that led to the gold rush of '49.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill concluded a wartime conference in Casablanca, Morocco.

In 1945, Associated Press war correspondent Joseph Morton was among a group of captives executed by the Germans at the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp in Austria.

In 1965, British statesman Winston Churchill died in London at age 90.

In 1978, a nuclear-powered Soviet satellite, Cosmos 954, plunged through Earth's atmosphere and disintegrated, scattering radioactive debris over parts of northern Canada.

In 1984, Apple Computer began selling its first Macintosh model, which boasted a built-in 9-inch monochrome display, a clock rate of 8 megahertz and 128k of RAM.

In 1985, the space shuttle Discovery was launched from Cape Canaveral on the first secret, all-military shuttle mission.

In 1987, gunmen in Lebanon kidnapped educators Alann Steen, Jesse Turner, Robert Polhill and Mitheleshwar Singh. (All were eventually released.)

In 2003, former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge was sworn as the first secretary of the new Department of Homeland Security.

In 2011, a suicide bomber attacked Moscow's busiest airport, killing 37 people; Chechen separatists claimed responsibility.

In 2013, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced the lifting of a ban on women serving in combat.

In 2020, health officials in Chicago said a woman in her 60s had become the second U.S. patient diagnosed with a new virus that had emerged in China; she'd returned from that country in mid-January. Fifteen-year-old Coco Gauff upset defending champ Naomi Osaka in the third round of the Australian Open.

Ten years ago: Declaring the American dream under siege, President Barack Obama used his State of the Union address to deliver a populist challenge to shrink the gap between rich and poor, promising to tax the wealthy more and help jobless Americans get work and hang onto their homes. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney released his 2010 tax returns, showing that his annual income topped \$20 million and that he had paid about \$3 million in federal income taxes.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump moved swiftly to advance the controversial Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines, signing executive actions to aggressively overhaul America's energy policy and deal a sharp blow to Barack Obama's legacy on climate change. The 89th annual Academy Awards nominations were announced; the retro musical "La La Land" received a record-tying 14 nods; eight went to eventual best picture winner "Moonlight."

One year ago: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he had tested positive for COVID-19 and that the symptoms were mild; he'd been criticized for his handling of his country's pandemic and for not setting an example of prevention in public. The defending champion Kansas City Chiefs reached the Super Bowl with a 38-24 win over the Buffalo Bills in the AFC championship game; Tom Brady led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to victory over the Green Bay Packers in the NFC title game.

Today's Birthdays: Cajun musician Doug Kershaw is 86. Singer-songwriter Ray Stevens is 83. Singer-songwriter Neil Diamond is 81. Singer Aaron Neville is 81. Actor Michael Ontkean is 76. Actor Daniel Auteuil is 72. Country singer-songwriter Becky Hobbs is 72. Comedian Yakov Smirnoff is 71. South Korean President Moon Jae-in is 69. Actor William Allen Young is 68. Bandleader-musician Jools Holland is 64. Actor Nastassja Kinski is 61. R&B singer Theo Peoples is 61. Country musician Keech Rainwater (Lonestar) is 59. Comedian Phil LaMarr is 55. Olympic gold medal gymnast Mary Lou Retton is 54. R&B singer Sleepy Brown (Society of Soul) is 52. Actor Matthew Lillard is 52. Actor Merrilee McCommas is 51. Blues/rock singer Beth Hart is 50. Actor Ed Helms is 48. Actor Mark Hildreth is 44. Actor Christina Moses is 44. Actor Tatyana Ali is 43. Actor Carrie Coon is 41. Actor Daveed Diggs is 40. Actor Justin Baldoni is 38. Actor Mischa Barton is 36.