

# Groton Daily Independent

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## UpComing Events

**Sunday, Feb 20:** Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

**Monday, Feb. 21**

NO SCHOOL - President's Day

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla. - RETURNING

Boys Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina - JV game to start after JH games followed by varsity.

Junior High Basketball vs. Warner. Starting at 4 p.m. in the arena.

**Tuesday, Feb. 22**

Girls Basketball regions begin. Groton plays Milbank at Sisseton at 7:30 p.m.

**Thursday, Feb. 24**

Girls Basketball regions

**Friday, Feb. 25**

Boys Basketball vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Center. Not sure if there is a C game yet.

Junior High Basketball at Webster with 7th grade playing at 7 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

Debate National Qualifiers

**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.

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## United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

### Sunday, February 20, 2022

Conde Worship 9:00 AM  
NO Sunday School 10:00 AM  
Groton Worship 11:00 AM

### Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Bible Study 10:00 AM  
Missions Meeting 7:00 PM

### Wednesday, February 23, 2022

Community Coffee Hour 9:30 AM  
Confirmation Snack Time 3:30 PM  
Confirmation 4:00 PM

### Sunday, February 27, 2022

Conde Worship 9:00 AM  
Sunday School 10:00 AM  
Groton Worship 11:00 AM

## St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

## St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

### Weekend Mass Schedule

Saturday 4:30pm Groton  
Sunday 8:30am Groton & 11:00am Turton

### Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton  
Sat 10am Newman Center

### Confessions:

Sat. 3:45-4:15pm & Sun. 7:45am to 8:15am (G)  
Sun. 10:30-10:45am (T)

### Weekday

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

## Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

### Sunday, Feb. 20

9:am Worship / Communion  
10:15am Grace Alone Study  
NO SUNDAY SCHOOL  
Newsletter deadline

### Monday, Feb. 21

6:30am Bible Study

### Wednesday, Feb. 23

6:00pm Confirmation  
6:30pm League

### Sunday, Feb. 27

9am Worship  
10:15am Sunday School & Grace Alone Study

## St. John's Lutheran Church

Groton

### Sunday, Feb. 20

8 a.m.: Bible Study  
9 a.m.: St. John's Worship with Communion  
10 a.m.: Sunday School  
11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship with Communion

### Monday, Feb. 21

7:30 p.m.: Christian Literature Circle

### Tuesday, Feb. 22

9 a.m.: Quilting

### Wednesday, Feb. 23

3:45 p.m.: Confirmation

### Sunday, Feb. 27

8 a.m.: Bible Study  
9 a.m.: St. John's Worship  
10 a.m.: Sunday School  
11 a.m.: Zion Lutheran Worship

To submit your monthly or  
weekly church calendar, email  
to  
[news@grotonsd.net](mailto:news@grotonsd.net)

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## Three Groton Grapplers advance to state

Christian Ehresmann at 145 pounds, Lane Krueger at 285 pounds and Cole Bisbee at 160 pounds will advance to the state wrestling tournament after placing in the top four at the regional tournament held Saturday in Britton. Ehresmann placed second, Krueger placed third and Bisbee placed fourth. Pierce Ketterling placed fifth at 132 pounds. The state starts Thursday at the Denny Sanford PREMIER Center in Sioux Falls.

### **132: Pierce Ketterling (38-17) placed 5th and scored 12.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Dylan Zell (Kingsbury Co) 39-5 won by fall over Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 (Fall 3:37)

Cons. Round 2 - Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 won by fall over Isaac Ramirez (Sully Buttes) 1-22 (Fall 0:54)

Cons. Round 3 - Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 won by major decision over Riley Steen (Sisseton) 7-19 (MD 10-1)

Cons. Semi - Parker Geditz (Faulkton Area) 32-4 won by decision over Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 (Dec 9-2)

5th Place Match - Pierce Ketterling (Groton Area) 38-17 won by injury default over Keaton Rohlfs (Redfield ) 8-4 (Inj. 0:00)

### **138: Brevin Fliehs (28-18) scored 1.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Brevin Fliehs (Groton Area) 28-18 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Clayton Dulany (Warner/Northwestern) 37-14 won by fall over Brevin Fliehs (Groton Area) 28-18 (Fall 1:18)

Cons. Round 2 - Brevin Fliehs (Groton Area) 28-18 won by decision over Tucker Adkins (Deuel) 9-29 (Dec 8-1)

Cons. Round 3 - Luke Steffensen (Kingsbury Co) 26-18 won by fall over Brevin Fliehs (Groton Area) 28-18 (Fall 1:50)

### **145: Christian Ehresmann (38-8) placed 2nd and scored 22.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-8 won by fall over Dasher Davidson (Britton-Hecla) 13-21 (Fall 2:54)

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-8 won by fall over Sheldon Balderston (Kingsbury Co) 3-17 (Fall 2:26)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-8 won in tie breaker - 1 over Elliot Bratland (Clark/Willow Lake) 30-19 (TB-1 3-1)

1st Place Match - Mason Whitley (Redfield ) 37-12 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 38-8 (Dec 6-2)

### **152: Korbin Kucker (30-21) scored 3.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 30-21 received a bye ( ) (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Josh Long (Sisseton) 23-17 won by decision over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 30-21 (Dec 10-7)

Cons. Round 2 - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 30-21 won by fall over Timmy McGaugh (Faulkton Area) 3-13 (Fall 2:36)

Cons. Round 3 - Caleb Clark (Kingsbury Co) 27-19 won by decision over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 30-21 (Dec 12-11)

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## 160: Cole Bisbee (34-13) placed 4th and scored 15.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-13 won by fall over Damion Johnson-Horn (Potter Co) 5-21 (Fall 0:50)

Quarterfinal - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-13 won by major decision over Kaden St. Pierre (Hamlin/Castlewood) 21-22 (MD 14-1)

Semifinal - Russell Sheets (Sioux Valley) 40-8 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-13 (Fall 1:26)

Cons. Semi - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-13 won by decision over Tucker Anderson (Kingsbury Co) 28-17 (Dec 3-2)

3rd Place Match - Lincoln Dikoff (Faulkton Area) 21-20 won in sudden victory - 1 over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 34-13 (SV-1 7-5)

## 285: Lane Krueger (28-9) placed 3rd and scored 16.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 28-9 won by forfeit over Forfeit Forfeit (Hamlin/Castlewood) 9-12 (For.)

Semifinal - Avery Nichols (Clark/Willow Lake) 9-5 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 28-9 (Fall 4:55)

Cons. Semi - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 28-9 won by decision over Ethan Skarnagel (Sisseton) 18-17 (Dec 1-0)

3rd Place Match - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 28-9 won by fall over Parker Bode (Faulkton Area) 23-21 (Fall 1:42)

Guest Speaker  
Nicole J Phillips  
The Kindness Podcast

You're  
Invited!

RESET

womens conference

SATURDAY, MARCH 5  
AT ROSE HILL CHURCH

IT'S TIME TO RESET AND ENJOY A DAY OF  
FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP, LUNCH, AND MORE!

Rose Hill Evangelical Free Church  
12099 Rose Hill Rd, Langford SD  
Saturday, March 5, 2022  
10 am to 3 pm

Women and girls of all generations are welcome.  
Childcare will be available.

REGISTER FOR THIS FREE EVENT  
ONLINE AT ROSEHILLEFC.COM



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## Reede Lights up 3-Point Land in Win over UMary

Bismarck, N.D. – The Northern State University men’s basketball team capped off the regular season on Saturday with an 8-point, road victory over the University of Mary. The Wolves head into the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament with a 19-11 record on the year.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 78, MARY 70

Records: NSU 19-11 (13-9 NSIC), MARY 10-16 (9-12 NSIC)

Attendance: 1021

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern led 35-25 at the half and tallied 43 points in the second to seal the victory
- The game saw three tie scores and seven lead changes with each team shooting above 40.0% from the floor
- The Wolves shot 49.1% from the floor, 51.7% from the 3-point line, and 75.0% from the foul line
- They recorded 24 points in the paint, 11 points off the bench from Kailleb Walton-Blanden, ten fast break points, and eight points off turnovers
- NSU was out-rebounded 33-to-35 in the win, however recorded a game high 22 assists and 15 made 3-pointers
- In addition, the Wolves added three blocks and two steals
- Four Wolves scored in double figures, led by Augustin Reede who connected all 24 of his points from beyond the arc
- Sam Masten dished out a career high ten assists, while four of the starting five record five rebounds or more

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Augustin Reede: 24 points, 66.7 3-Pt FG% (8-12), 3 assists
- Jacksen Moni: 16 points, 54.5 FG%, 6 rebounds
- Sam Masten: 11 points, 10 assists, 8 rebounds
- Kailleb Walton-Blanden: 11 points, 55.6 FG%, 3 rebounds

### UP NEXT

Northern will return to action in the NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament. Full tournament details including opening round opponents and location will be released later this evening, following the conclusion of the full league slate.

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## Wolves Fall to Marauders in Regular Season Finale

Bismarck, N.D. – The Northern State women’s basketball team was unable to win on the final day of the regular season, falling to UMary 92-69.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 69, UMARY 92

Records: NSU 12-14 (9-12 NSIC), UMARY 13-15 (7-12 NSIC)

Attendance: 250

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Laurie Rogers scored the first four points of the game for Northern State and the Wolves jumped out to an early 13-8 lead, however UMary responded with a 10-3 run to end the period and take an 18-16 lead

- After trailing by nine midway through the second quarter, Rogers and Rianna Fillipi sparked a mini 6-0 run to get back within three points

- The Marauders ended the first half on a 12-2 run, to take a 44-31 lead into halftime

- Four 3-pointers in the final quarter by Haley Johnson, Abbey Holmes and Rachel Garvey cut the lead to 16 points in the final minutes

- Northern State shot 37.7 percent from the field, 42.9 percent from 3-point range, and 64.7 percent from the free throw line

- Northern dished out 19 assists for the third consecutive game, tying a season best

- The Marauders out-rebounded the Wolves 38-34 in the game

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Laurie Rogers: 17 points, 9 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 block

Haley Johnson: 9 points, 2 rebounds, 5 assists, 1 steal

Lexi Roe: 9 points, 4 rebounds, 2-3 3-pointers

### UP NEXT

Northern State will await the announcement of the conference tournament bracket and their opponent later tonight after the conclusion of today’s games.

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## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



*"Head of an African Man  
Wearing a Turban"  
by Peter Paul Rubens (1609)*

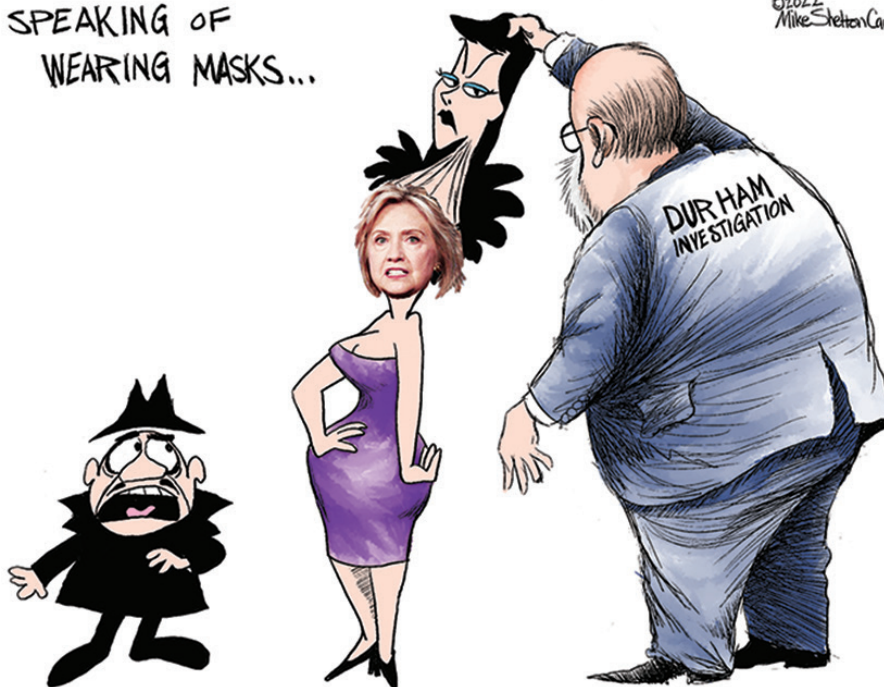
*...I delivered the poor who cried out,  
the fatherless and the one who had  
no helper. The blessing of a perishing  
man came upon me, and I caused  
the widow's heart to sing for joy.*

*I put on righteousness, and  
it clothed me; my justice was  
like a robe and a turban.*

🌀 JOB 29: 12-14 🌀

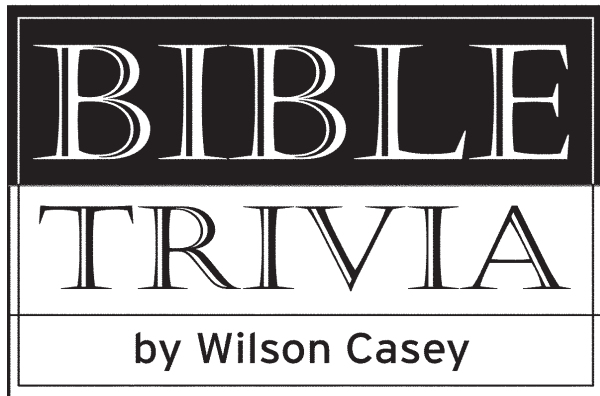
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SPEAKING OF  
WEARING MASKS...



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by Healthy Exchanges  
**Sweet Fruit Focaccia**

1. Is the book of James in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. From 2 Samuel 6, who died after accidentally touching the Ark of the Covenant? *Achan, Zedekiah, Naboth, Uzzah*

3. In Judges 13, to whose wife did an angel appear, telling her she'd conceive a son? *Samson, Manoah, Josiah, Cain*

4. What godly son was born to Hannah and Elkanah in answer to prayer? *Ezekiel, Paul, Samuel, Hosea*

5. From Judges 14, what animal took Samson by surprise attack? *Bear, Fox, Lion, Boar*

6. Who burned David's city of Ziklag? *Amalekites, Nazarites, Gibeonites, Israelites*

ANSWERS: 1) New; 2) Uzzah; 3) Manoah; 4) Samuel; 5) Lion; 6) Amalekites

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

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Wow! You mean THIS started with a can of biscuits!? It sure did -- but it doesn't look or taste like it.

2 tablespoons fat-free milk  
Sugar substitute to equal 2 tablespoons sugar  
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1 (7.5-ounce) package refrigerated buttermilk biscuits  
1/4 cup apricot spreadable fruit  
1/4 cup raisins  
1/4 cup chopped pecans

1. Preheat oven to 450 F. Spray a 9-inch pie plate with butter-flavored cooking spray.

2. In a small bowl, combine milk, sugar substitute and cinnamon. Separate biscuits. Dip each biscuit into milk mixture, then arrange in prepared pie plate. Drizzle any remaining milk mixture evenly over top of biscuits.

3. Gently stir spreadable fruit to soften, then evenly spread over biscuit tops. Sprinkle raisins and pecans evenly over all.

4. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Place pie plate on a wire rack and let set for at least 15 minutes. Cut into 6 wedges. Serves 6.

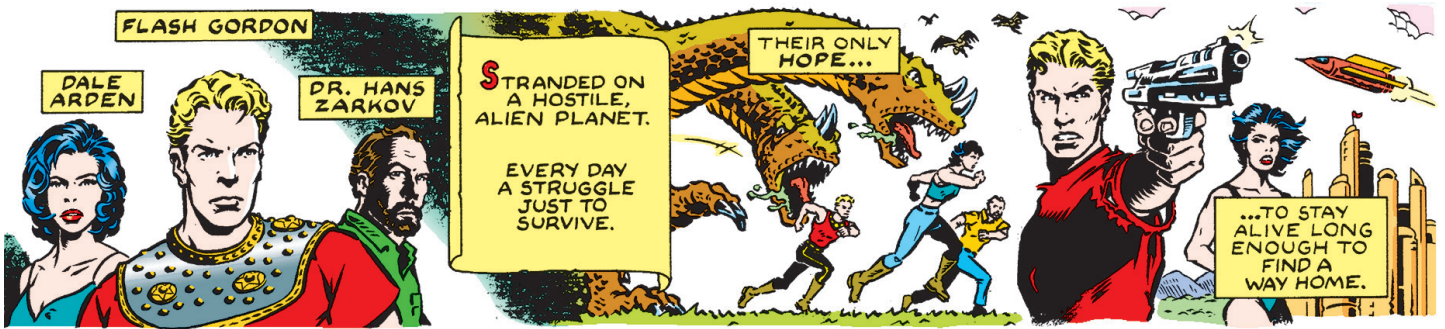
\* Each serving equals: 199 calories, 7g fat, 3g protein, 31g carb., 360mg sodium, 1g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 1 Starch, 1 Fruit, 1 Fat.

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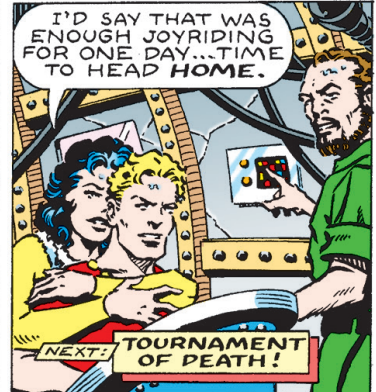
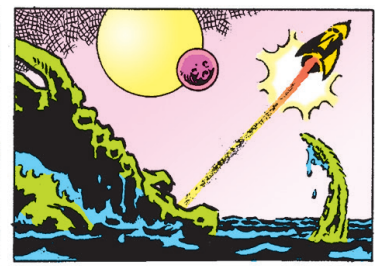
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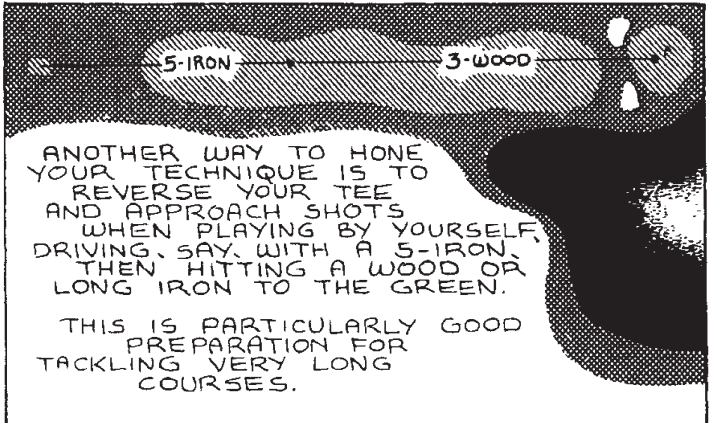
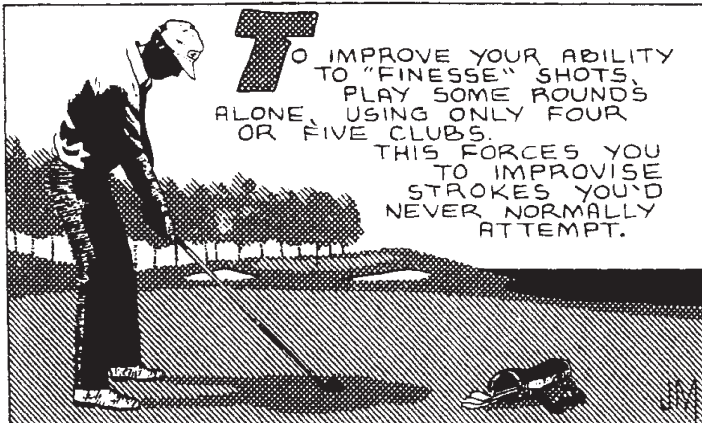


## FLASH GORDON

2-13 By JIM KEEFE



## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



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## The Truth About Fasting Before Blood Tests



---  
DEAR DR. ROACH: My daughter is a registered nurse, and tells me that when getting blood tests, it is not necessary to fast eight to 12 hours even though my doctor says to do so. Four hours is enough, she claims. Is this true, or is my daughter trying to be a doctor, if you know what I mean? --- L.C.

ANSWER: I probably agree with your daughter the nurse more than I do with your doctor in this case. Most routine blood testing does not require fasting. There is controversy about whether cholesterol testing is best done fasting or not: Most recent evidence suggests that fasting is not necessary. However, many physicians still continue to use fasting levels, as that is what they are used to. Nonfasting numbers may reflect the true state of risk to the arteries more so than fasting levels.

A few seldom-ordered tests, such as insulin levels, may need to be drawn precisely a certain period of time after feeding to be able to interpret them. In most cases, your daughter is probably right that prolonged fasting is unnecessary. I still recommend following your doctor's orders.

Your daughter is providing you with up-to-date medical knowledge. Any nurse or doctor should do the same.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: Is it true that all orange juice is dangerous except organic? I heard on a radio show something about food's having been contaminated by Roundup. The man said, "It's in our orange juice." It was said (I think) that only organic was safe. What do you think about this orange juice issue? -- J.J.V.S.

ANSWER: I read the report showing that all orange juice brands tested positive for glyphosate, a commonly used herbicide, but one that is never applied to trees, in organic or conventional farming. The levels in the report, which was not published in a peer-reviewed journal, are extremely low, 3 to 17 parts per billion. The Environmental Protection Agency allowable level in citrus fruit is 500 parts per billion.

The risk from glyphosate in orange juice is negligible. I don't recommend large amounts of any type of fruit juice due to sugar content, which is a bigger threat than glyphosate, in my opinion. Stick to a glass a day.

\*\*\*

DEAR DR. ROACH: A recent column commented on liquid bandages for a home first aid kit. What else should be in a home first aid kit? -- K.L.

ANSWER: Depending how large a family you have, how active you are, how often you travel and what types of activities you enjoy, your ideal first aid kit might vary a bit from standard guidelines. I found one pretty complete list from U.C San Diego at [tinyurl.com/kitforfirstaid](http://tinyurl.com/kitforfirstaid). Most of the kit is for care of minor lacerations, but there are some additional types of supplies as well. The list includes several medications: If you use those, be sure you replace them after expiration. Several well-stocked first aid kits are available for sale online, some for as little as \$25.

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

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**Back to 15** — There is no other plotline that I love more than when a character mysteriously goes back in time and gets to relive a period of their earlier life (“17 Again” is a favorite). So, I am all over this new series from Brazil in which 30-year-old Anita “hits control-Z in real life” and wakes up in her 15-year-old self’s bedroom. Discontented with the way her adult life has turned out, Anita is thrilled at a chance for a do-over in the pre-iPhone olden days. Maisa Silva stars as the younger Anita and Camila Queiroz as the adult version. (Netflix)

**Wasteland** — “When it goes bloop ... bloop ... bloop ... get ready, here it comes.” And by “it” the interviewee means a most unfortunate bubbling up of filth in her bathtub. Reminiscent of the events made famous by Erin Brockovich, this four-part docuseries unpacks the widespread scourge of excess wastewater, inadequate treatment facilities and the serious health consequences of otherwise unpotable water in communities throughout our country. Created by CBS Reports, the series explores how we got to the point of collapsing sewers and polluted riverways, and what it will take to prevent further disastrous fallout. (Paramount+)

**The 355** (PG-13) — Five women who all work for different intelligence agencies in different countries pool their skills to track and fight a common invisible enemy in order to prevent World War III. But these aren’t Charlie’s Angels. If 007 was smart enough to work in concert with his equals to get the job done in half the time so he could get back home to his kids, he might be as tough as these women. Starring Jessica Chastain, Diane Kruger, Penelope Cruz, Lupita Nyong’o

and Fan Bingbing. (Peacock)

**No Exit** (R) — Most people, upon finding a child trapped in a van in the parking lot of a highway rest area during a blizzard, would not merely tell the freezing, terrified kid to hang tight and then go back inside to silently try to figure out which one of their fellow stranded travelers was a psychotic kidnapper. No, most people would run back inside yelling that there’s a kid trapped in a van and grab anything possible to break the child free. But most people aren’t the protagonist of a psychological thriller movie. Premieres Feb. 25. (Hulu)



Peacock TV

## Jessica Chastain in “The 355”

**Secrets of the Zoo: Tampa** — Nat-Geo brings it again with the third season of their zoo series, this time profiling the work of the exotic animal caretakers at Zoo Tampa (previous seasons were filmed at Ohio’s Columbus Zoo). Far more complicated than simply tossing hay to elephants and spending the day on pooper-scooper duty, the zookeepers show that animal care is a 24/7 job and you never know what new issue might arise. Rescues, rehabilitations, fostering orphans, releasing rehabbed short-stayers and new births are all part of the gig. (Disney+)

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1. Archie Bell released one solo album after the breakup of The Drells. Name the album.

2. Levi Stubbs, Abdul "Duke" Fakir, Renaldo "Obie" Benson and Lawrence Payton were the founders of what group?

3. "Higher Love" became a chart topper for which artist?

4. What group released "Walk of Life"?

5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "When I was a young man and never been kissed, I got to thinkin' over how much I had missed."

#### Answers

1. "I Never Had It So Good," in 1980. Bell continued to perform with The Drells now and then for the next

two decades.

2. The Four Aims. They later called themselves The Four Tops because they didn't want to be confused with the Ames Brothers.

3. Steve Winwood, in 1986. The song also netted two Grammys in 1987, beating Whitney Houston's "Greatest Love of All" for Record of the Year.

4. Dire Straits, in 1985.

5. "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," by The Weavers in 1951. Legend says Pete Seeger of The Weavers borrowed a 1937 Lead Belly blues version, which was rewritten from an Irish song about a farmer and his cow named Dicky. Others, including Jimmie Rodgers and Jackson Browne, have released versions.

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## Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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## GRIN and BEAR IT



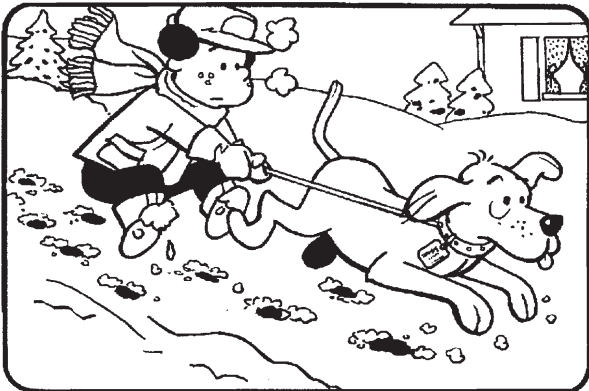
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Wagner

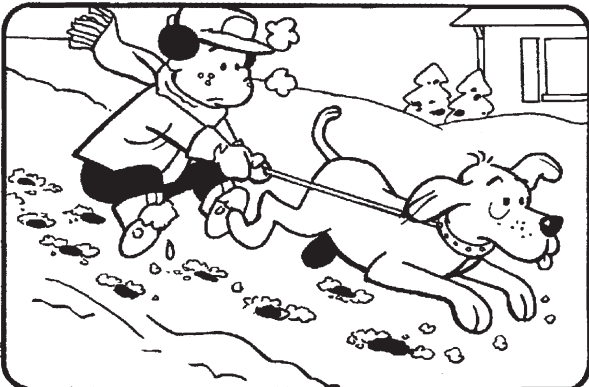
"I am honored ... considering the price of tomatoes!"

## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Tree is missing. 2. Pocket is missing. 3. Scarf end is missing. 4. Tail is different. 5. Tag is missing. 6. Curtains are missing.



• “Snow will better slide off a shovel that has been sprayed with furniture polish.” — *T.L. in Minnesota*

• Here’s an old tip, but a good one: Before going away on vacation, put a couple of ice cubes in a plastic baggie, and set it at the front of the freezer. When you return, if there is any evidence of melting, you will know you lost power while you were gone. If the bag is one big, flat cube, you lost power long enough to suspect all your refrigerator items of being spoiled.

• To temporarily get a winter frost effect on a window, use this fun recipe: Dissolve 4 to 6 tablespoons of Epsom salts in a beer. When the salt is dissolved, dip a clean rag in the mixture and wipe it on your windowpane. As it dries, crystals will form, creating a frost effect. This is a great solution for a window you don’t want to be clear but also don’t want to permanently alter. The effect washes off with soap and water.

• “If you get a residue inside your coffee cups when they go through the dishwasher, it might be time to give your machine a once-over. In the meantime, spray the insides of the coffee cups with a bleach-based cleaner like 409 just before your turn it on. That should help.” — *E.T. in Michigan*

• Cut your kitchen sponge in half, or even thirds. You can clean just as well with a smaller sponge, and you will extend its life, saving you money. A smaller sponge dries out more quickly, too.

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

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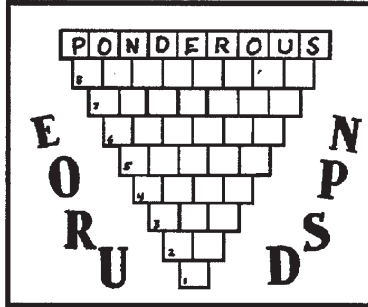
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**SEE WHAT!** Look for a sign in this crystal ball. What sign can it be? Draw lines from 1 to 2 to 3, etc. to find out.

## Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman



### FIND PONDEROUS STEPWORDS

START at the bottom and work your way up in this PONDEROUS word test.

Each word is composed of one or more of the letters — E, O, R, U, D, S, P, N — shown. Each term has one more letter than its predecessor. Definitions, from bottom up:

- Scorecard letter for a baseball flub.
- Compass direction.
- Ballpoint item.
- Sign in shop window.
- Lying flat out.
- Man, woman or child.
- Send a reply.
- Big fast-food burgers: Quarter- —

Time limit: 2 minutes.

1. E. 2. NE. 3. Pen. 4. Open. 5. Prone. 6. Person. 7. Respond. 8. Ponders.

**S-CURVES!** Letter S completes each of these seven-letter series: 1. MNOPQR—. 2. OTFFS—. 3. SMTWTF—. 4. MAMJJA—. See if you can explain why. Hint: Each is an initial letter.

1. S is next letter in alphabet. 2. S stands for seven. 3. S stands for Saturday. 4. S stands for September.

**DOT'S NICE!** An intricate circle-and-line design shown here provides a challenging wits test. It is possible to place nine checkmarks among the various circles so that no two checks appear in the same row, column or diagonal line.

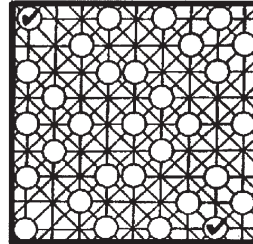
Two starter checks are already in place. See if you can insert the remaining seven.

Remember, nine checks are required. Just one on any line.

How quickly can you comply?

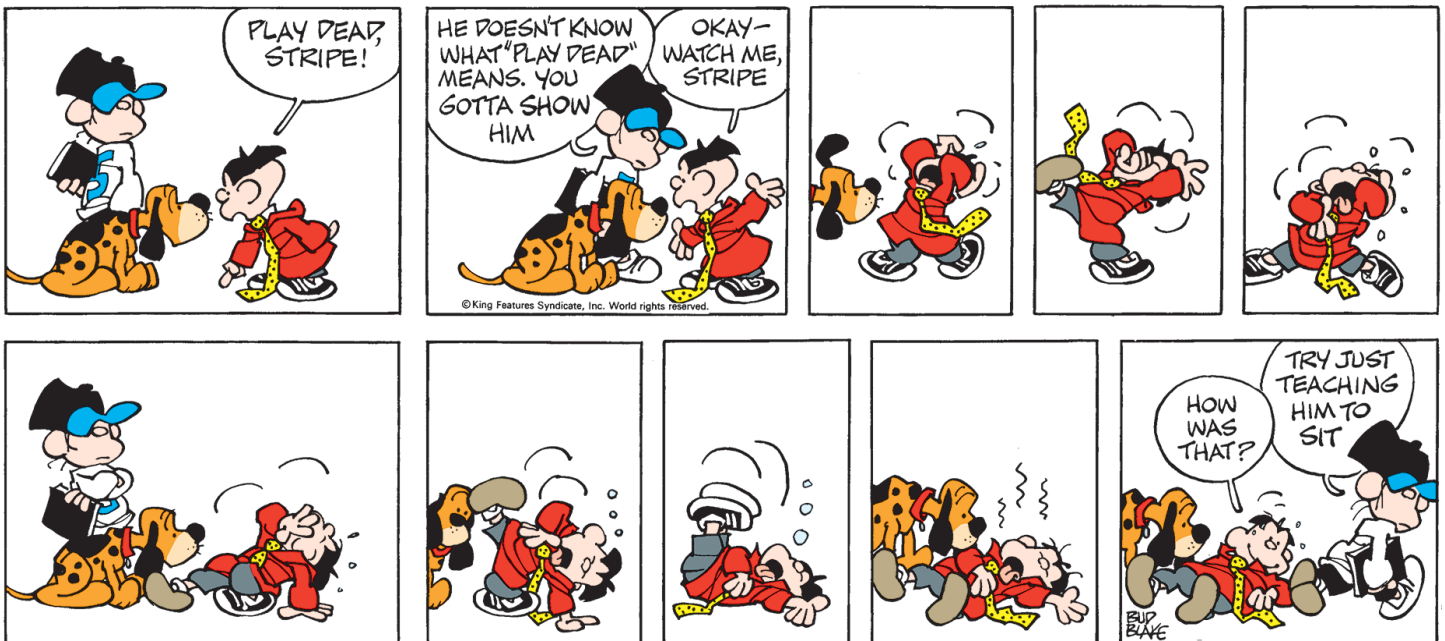
P.S.: Have an eraser handy.

Check 2nd circle second row; 2nd circle third row; 2nd fourth; 5th fifth; 1st sixth; 3rd seventh; 1st eighth.



## TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Atlas page
- 4 Ivy League University
- 9 Science room
- 12 GPS suggestion
- 13 Haunting
- 14 Docs' org.
- 15 1989 Al Pacino film
- 17 Decks in the ring
- 18 Small battery
- 19 Yard tools
- 21 "Understood"
- 24 Membership
- 25 Tolkien beast
- 26 Civil War soldier
- 28 Pulitzer category

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12				13						14		
15			16							17		
			18				19		20			
21	22	23					24					
25				26		27		28			29	30
31			32		33		34		35			
36				37		38		39		40		
		41			42		43		44			
45	46						47					
48				49		50				51	52	53
54				55						56		
57				58						59		

- 31 Abound
- 33 Narc's org.
- 35 Dr. McGraw
- 36 Anticipate
- 38 Chips go-with
- 40 Sugar suffix
- 41 Mark Harmon TV series
- 43 School break
- 45 Shun
- 47 Owned
- 48 Sashimi fish
- 49 New York City's — Park
- 54 Decay
- 55 Ryan or Tatum
- 56 Gaiety
- 57 Sauce source
- 58 Actions
- 59 Turf
- 8 Required
- 9 Sierra Nevada resort
- 10 Cupid's specialty
- 11 Low range
- 16 Granola grain
- 20 John Irving hero
- 21 Teeny bit
- 22 Got bigger
- 23 Maryland beach town
- 27 Nap site
- 29 Avoid
- 30 Pub orders
- 32 Lansing's st.
- 34 Dunce
- 37 Steering system part
- 39 Gems from oysters
- 42 Pigs
- 44 LPs' successors
- 45 Jug handles
- 46 "Scram!"
- 50 Churchill gesture
- 51 Conditions
- 52 Pair
- 53 Conclusion

### DOWN

- 1 "— Miniver"
- 2 Packed away
- 3 Shell-game item
- 4 "No cheating!"
- 5 Akin
- 6 Acapulco gold
- 7 "The First — Club"



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## — King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

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

## LAFF - A - DAY



"I hate to disturb you, Johnson, but you have a customer."

## Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas

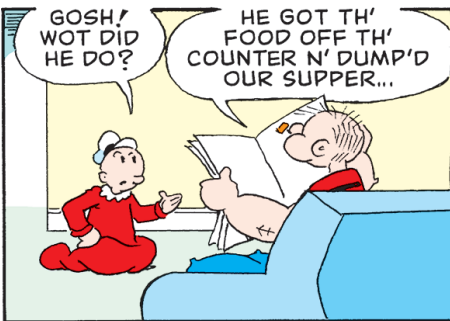
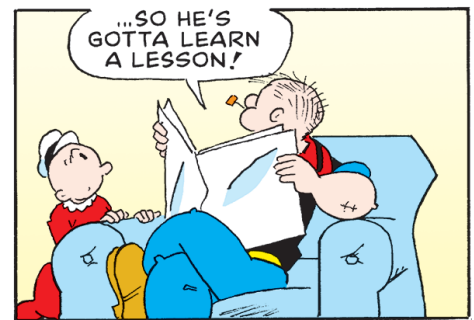
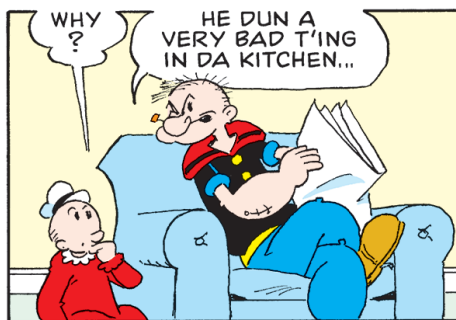
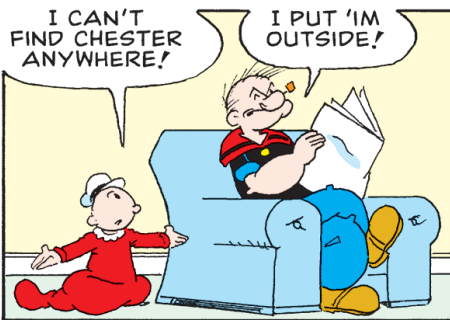
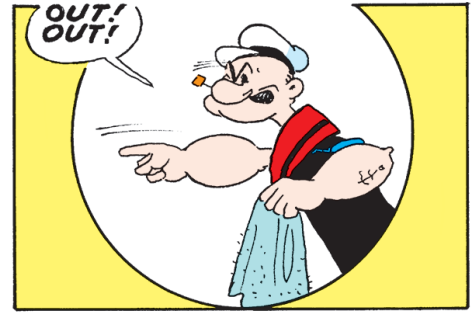
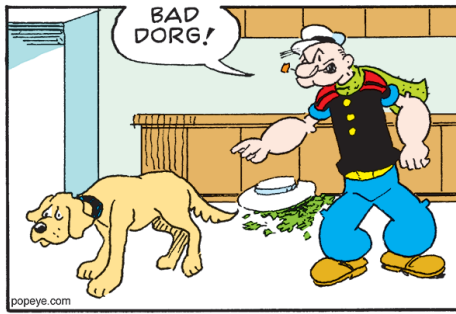
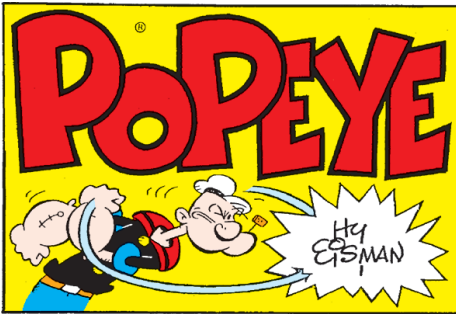


FUN FOR THE  
HOLE FAMILY

KOPERVAS

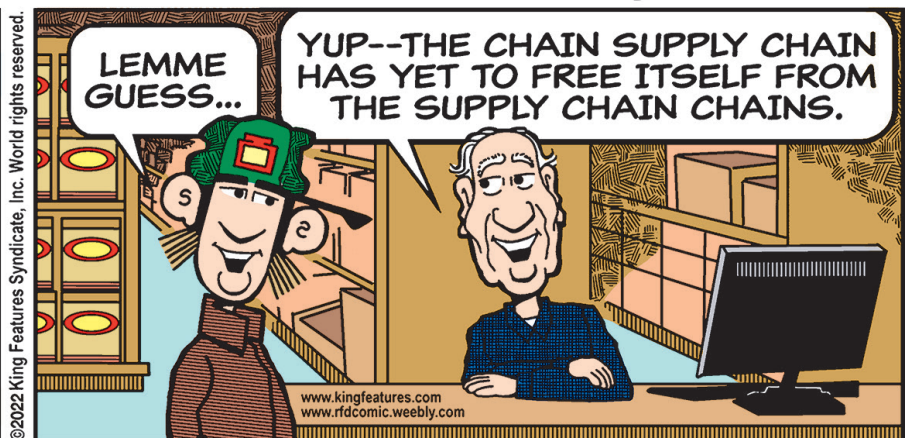
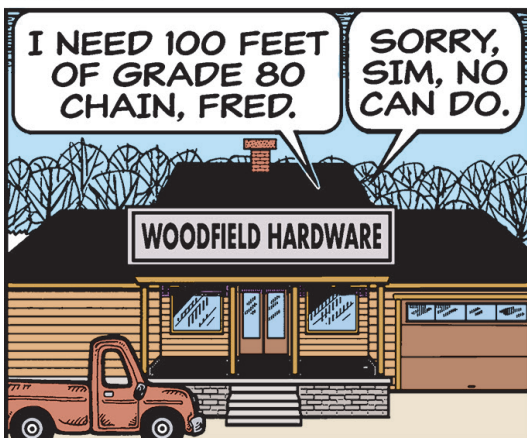
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## R.F.D.

by Mike Marland

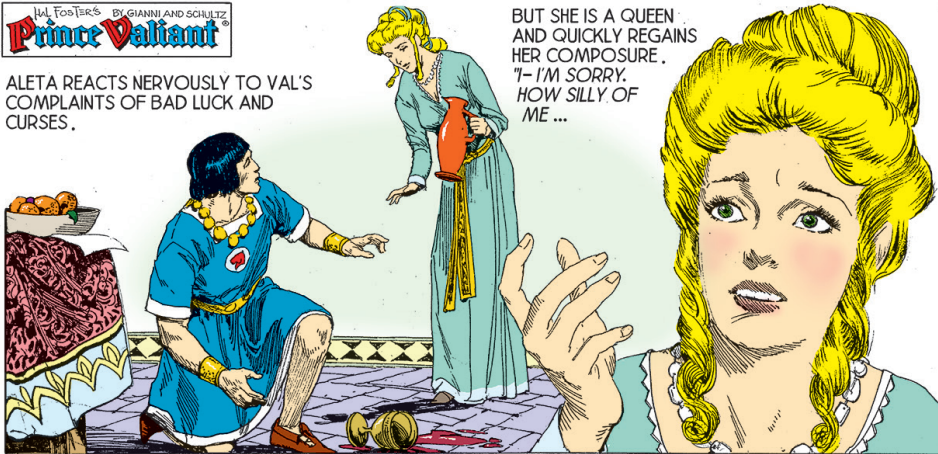


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Jim Foster's BY GIANNI AND SCHULZ  
**Prince Valiant**

ALETA REACTS NERVOUSLY TO VAL'S COMPLAINTS OF BAD LUCK AND CURSES.



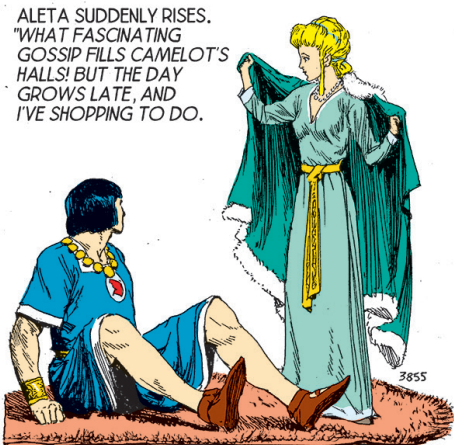
BUT SHE IS A QUEEN AND QUICKLY REGAINS HER COMPOSURE. 'I- I'M SORRY. HOW SILLY OF ME ...



'I SUPPOSE THE LOSS OF PRUDENCE... AND ALL YOUR TALK OF BEWITCHMENTS... UNSETTLES ME WITH STRANGE IMAGES.



'ENOUGH OF SUCH GLOOMY THINGS! TELL ME OF THIS NEW WIFE OF DRACO'S.' SO VAL RELATES WHAT LITTLE HE KNOWS OF THE MYSTERIOUS MALDUBH.



ALETA SUDDENLY RISES. 'WHAT FASCINATING GOSSIP FILLS CAMELOT'S HALLS! BUT THE DAY GROWS LATE, AND I'VE SHOPPING TO DO.

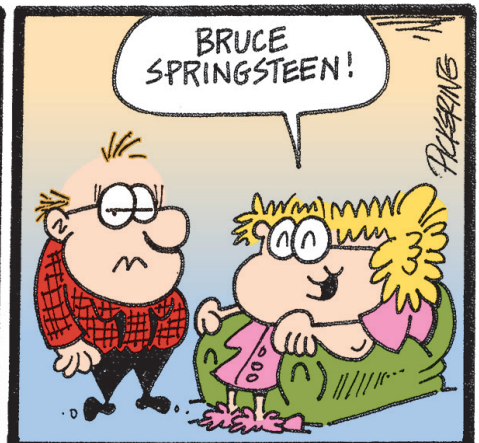
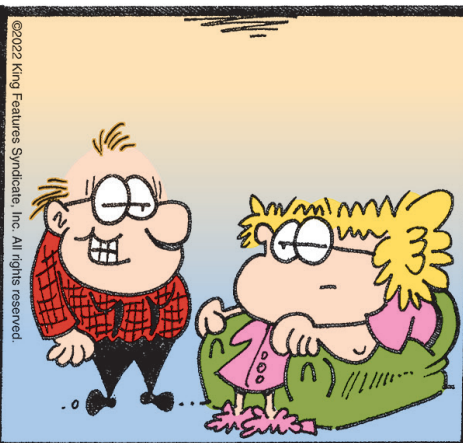


'BE A DEAR AND STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.' THEN SHE IS GONE. VAL SIGHS RUEFULLY. HE CAN FIND NO LUCK, EVEN WITH HIS WIFE.

NEXT:  
Black market

## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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PICKERING

## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Beware of ice

The local television weather guy made an announcement recently that was, I think, meant to be uplifting. He said, "And winter is now half over!"

Instead, I took it the other way: We still have half of this winter to get through.

My main complaint this year is ... ice. It's sneaky, it's everywhere, it's apparently invisible in the right circumstances, and yes, it's slick.

There I was, hauling a load of groceries out of the back of the car, having picked them up curbside from the store and arriving home after dark. One of the bags had fallen over and spilled its contents, requiring me to bend over and lean forward at the same time to retrieve the items that had rolled. Unbeknownst to me, my foot was on a piece of ice. I did not fall, but I did twist my leg in a way that legs are not meant to be twisted. Within an hour the pain hit.

By Day 3 I was wondering if I'd broken something. Day 4 was a bit bet-

ter, and I knew I was on the mend ... if only I could better plan my trips up and out of the recliner to fetch something instead of making multiple trips through the house for Kindle, water bottle, TV remote and more. Worse, I suppose, was that the cat was upset that she wasn't allowed on my lap during those days. She sat, with a hurt expression, across the room from me for four days.

I think there are multiple lessons to be learned from my brief foray into pain and incapacity, but the most important one is this: Schedule curbside grocery pickup for daylight hours. Don't arrive home in the dark in the winter if there's the slightest chance of ice. It will find you.

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1. Name the World Golf Hall of Famer, known as the “Queen of American Golf,” who won six U.S. Women’s Amateur Championships from 1922-35.

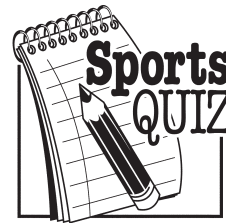
2. Pitcher Carl Erskine threw two no-hitters and won a World Series during the 1950s as a member of what team?

3. Name the Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver for the Indianapolis Colts who set a record (since broken) for catches in a single season with 143 in 2002.

4. What variation of bowling is similar to ten-pin bowling but has shorter pins, a smaller ball and bowlers rolling three balls per frame?

5. The boxer known as Kid Gavilan, who held the undisputed welterweight title from 1951-54, hailed from what Caribbean nation?

6. What was the name of the hockey exhibition team formed by Wayne



by Ryan A. Berenz

6. Gretzky during the 1994-95 NHL lockout?

7. What two college football teams played in the Nov. 19, 1966, “Game of the Century” that ended in a 10-10 tie?

## Answers

1. Glenna Collett-Vare.
2. The Brooklyn Dodgers.
3. Marvin Harrison.
4. Duckpin bowling.
5. Cuba.
6. The Ninety Nine All Stars.
7. The Michigan State Spartans and Notre Dame Fighting Irish.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





## Pets Keep Owners Fit and Healthy

**DEAR PAW'S CORNER:** I've read that pets can keep seniors healthy, through reducing stress, etc. How does that work? — *Joel P., Fort Myers, Fla.*

**DEAR JOEL:** Researchers have found that seniors who own pets have a reduced rate of stress-related ailments, so they've theorized that having an animal companion helps seniors feel less alone and somewhat empowered as they care for a cat, dog, fish or other pet. The unconditional love and affection that pets provide can help their owners feel needed and important, and can help to enhance their quality of life. So, the simple act of caring for a pet can create a longer, happier life for many people.

But there are more benefits to pet

ownership. Owners are more likely to interact with other animal lovers. They tend to exercise more than pet-less people — especially dog owners, who must take their pooches for frequent walks.

Of course, if a senior doesn't want a dog or cat, the idea shouldn't be pushed. Owners must be able to care for, walk and feed their pets, and provide training and activities. Not everyone can meet these requirements. There also are financial considerations, such as regular veterinary care, food and medicine.

An alternative to owning a pet is to visit one (or have one visit) occasionally. There are organizations across the United States that sponsor pet visits for seniors who love animals but cannot care for one full-time. These visits help provide some of the health benefits of pet ownership to those who otherwise would not receive them.

If nothing else, take time out to say hello to the neighbor's dog, or spend time with relatives and their pets. They'll love the attention, and you'll love the stress relief that pets can provide.

*Send your tips, questions or comments to [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).*

## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

\* Valentina hot sauce was named for the intrepid Valentina Ramirez Avitia, who at 17 posed as a man to join the Mexican Revolution. She made it all the way to the rank of lieutenant before being expelled upon the accidental discovery of her braids.

\* American fashion model Jeremy Meeks' police mugshot was so good that he got a modeling contract while still in jail.

\* In 1524, a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary at Latvia's Riga Cathedral was accused of being a witch. At its trial by water it was thrown into the

Dvina River, where it floated, resulting in a guilty verdict -- and burning.

\* Missing a remote? Try looking where you last sat: A 2011 study found that 49% of the time it was in a couch, while 8% were found in the bathroom, another 8% in a dresser drawer, 4% in the fridge/freezer (your guess is as good as ours on that one) and 2% turned up outside.

\* Twelve-year-old Rhiley Morrison swallowed 54 magnetic balls to see if he could get metal to stick to his stomach, as well as what they looked like when he went to the toilet. He survived the experiment after six hours of surgery and a two-week hospital stay.

\* The wood frog can hold its urine for up to eight months.

\* Violets can be smelled for only a few moments at a time because their scent comes from ionine, which shuts smell receptors off after simulating them. After a few breaths, the scent pops up again.

\* In 2016, the Swiss city of Lausanne banned "silent disco" events because they were too noisy.  
\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: "I'm sick of following my dreams, man. I'm just going to ask where they're going and hook up with 'em later." -- Mitch Hedberg

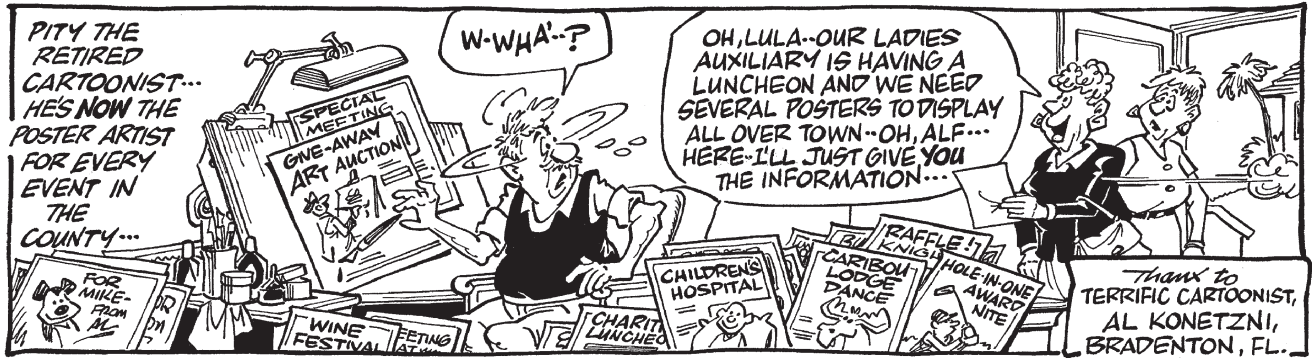
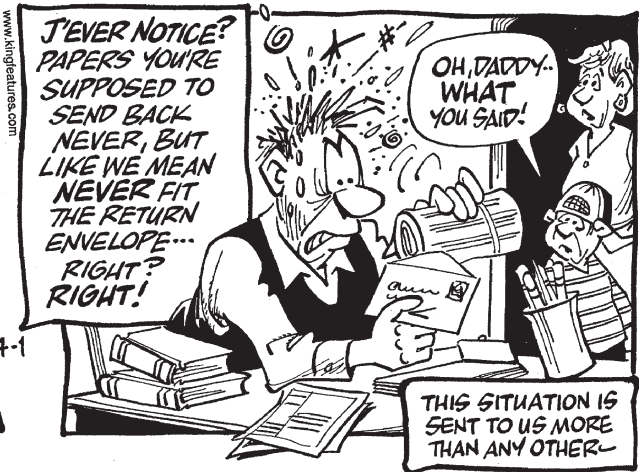
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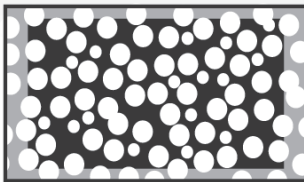
## THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

BY AL SCADUTO

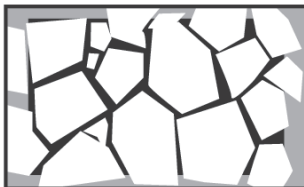


Soil particle size and the degree of compaction affect how much water drains *through* the soil vs. how much water holds *within* the soils.

### Water and soil



Fine soil has smaller particles but more numerous "pores" than a coarse soil. It retains more water within its structure, allowing plant roots to access the water.



Coarse soil has bigger particles and less "pore" space between the particles than the fine soil. It is less able to retain any water for roots to access.   
 - Brenda Weaver

Source: www.noble.org



## VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

### VA Expands Services for Senior Veterans

Services for senior veterans have been expanded, including home-based primary care, veteran-directed care and medical foster homes. The plan is to make these services — 75 home-based primary care teams, 58 medical foster homes and 70 veteran-directed care programs — available at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers in the next few years.

The purpose of these programs is to allow senior veterans to either delay going into a nursing home and select the care environment that they prefer, or to age in place at home. What they've discovered is that veterans who use these services have fewer trips to the emergency room, fewer hospital admissions and fewer stays in nursing homes.

Medical foster homes are what you'd imagine: private homes where there is a trained caregiver 24/7. While living at

one of these homes, the veteran receives home-based primary care. See [www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/Medical\\_Foster\\_Homes.asp](http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/Medical_Foster_Homes.asp) for a list of the available medical foster home programs by state.

Home-base primary care is medical services supervised by a VA physician. Typically, the veteran has complicated health needs and is unable to keep medical appointments because of illness or perhaps has a caregiver who needs help because of the responsibility for medical care. See [www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/Home\\_Based\\_Primary\\_Care.asp](http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/Home_Based_Primary_Care.asp) for more information.

Veteran-directed care lets veterans receive both the home and community-based services they desire, like choosing from a menu. Veterans often need help with activities of daily living, or there is a caregiver who needs help. Daily living activities can range from dressing, eating and taking a shower to grocery shopping and more. Each veteran is given a budget for those services, which is managed by either the veteran or the veteran's representative. This menu of services lets veterans stay in their own homes. See [www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/Veteran-Directed\\_Care.asp](http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/Veteran-Directed_Care.asp) for more information.

For a full menu of services for senior veterans, see [www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/index.asp). Caregiver information, fitness and rehab, brain health, advance care planning ... it's all there.

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



## International Energy Implications

As Russia continues an aggression campaign against its neighbor, this raises growing concerns across the globe and will have significant implications not just for Ukraine, but for the worldwide energy supply. If Russia invades Ukraine, Germany will withdrawal its approval of the Nord Stream 2, a natural gas pipeline that runs through the region. This pipeline is set to provide 15% of Europe's natural gas.

Currently, Russia supplies 39% of Europe's natural gas, and the U.S. only supplies 3.5% of Europe's supply. If Russia decides to withhold these energy resources from Europe, it could send the entire world energy market into a spiral, ballooning prices for all energy sources.

While increased globalization has delivered goods and services where needed throughout history, times of war or conflict always highlight the need for national independence. We should be working towards domestic independence for essential commodities like food, natural gas, and oil. However, the unilateral decision President Biden made in the earliest days of his presidency to cancel the Keystone XL Pipeline hinders our ability to become energy independent. I don't consider Russia and China our friend, and our reliance for essential commodities and goods is a vulnerability that we cannot afford.

I support an all-of-the-above approach to energy independence using all forms of American energy including wind, nuclear, solar, biofuels, oil, natural gas, and other traditional fuels to bolster our supplies. Increasing the use of all energy sources not only reduces our reliance on foreign oil and lowers costs for working families, but also safeguards our environment by producing it under our terms. Our country had made tremendous strides in the amount of energy we are producing domestically – President Biden has set us back.

At a time when most Americans are facing increased energy, electricity, natural gas, oil, and gasoline prices, an international dispute will dampen access to energy sources and will make prices even worse.

Whatever the outcome of the Russia – Ukraine conflict, one thing we know for sure is the importance of improving our energy infrastructure to become a more independent country.

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South Dakota Governor

**Kristi Noem**



**South Dakota:** *Under God, the People Rule*

## **Better off, but for how long?**

Are you better off than you were a year ago?

Here in South Dakota, we can confidently say, "yes." Unemployment is down and wages are up. The state economy continues to thrive. However, serious national economic concerns loom on the horizon.

President Biden and his policies have caused inflation to rise to a level not seen in 40 years. South Dakotans have paid the price. Biden's attacks on the energy industry — canceling the Keystone Pipeline and restricting drilling activity in the U.S. — has led to higher gas prices, just like we knew they would. In fact, it costs \$5.40 more to fill up the average pickup in South Dakota than it did a month ago. And one year ago, it would have cost you \$22.95 less than today to fill up. Those dollars add up quickly.

The Biden-created supply chain crisis also shows no sign of abating. Both President Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau imposed vaccine policies on truckers, exacerbating the crisis. Moreover, their policies have not had their intended effect of slowing the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, these policies have simply caused additional pain for American families.

But wait—there is more! The Federal Reserve appears to realize the very real damage that inflation has caused, but its solution – raising interest rates – will only put more pressure on the family pocketbook. Perhaps the Federal Reserve has little choice, but it will certainly cause the economy to slow down further. Wall Street knows the road ahead, and the stock market has already dropped seven percent so far this year.

These Biden-created challenges may stall the South Dakota economy or even cause it to reverse course. These Washington D.C. realities confront South Dakota elected state leaders as we plan our budget for Fiscal Year 2023 during this year's legislative session. Moreover, we must also consider drought, decreased consumer demand, and the risk of unexpected natural disaster in planning a conservative state's budget. Plus, the well of federal stimulus dollars that began flowing in response to the pandemic will dry up too.

South Dakota's strong economy can only insulate us so much from these severe challenges. Experts recognize as much. The legislature's own economists have warned that prudence and fiscal responsibility must guide us, just as they always have, as we plan for the future.

Because we have taken the prudent approach during my time as Governor, we have kept taxes low and protected our AAA credit rating. We fully fund our pension — the No. 1 state in the nation for the least

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pension liability — and balance our budget every single year. We must continue our fiscally responsible approach.

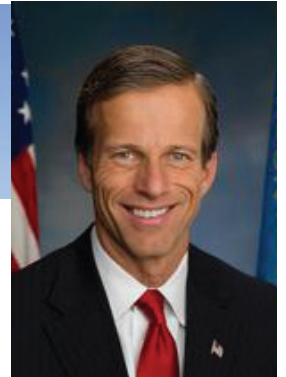
Unfortunately, just this week a few legislators chose to ignore the economic warning signs and the words of their experts, and instead they painted an overly optimistic vision of the economy with their projected state revenue estimates. They see South Dakota's strong growth and assume it will continue forever at its current record-breaking pace.

Let me be clear – South Dakota is in a far better position than other states because of the responsible approach that we have taken, because we stayed open for business, because people are visiting and moving to our state in huge numbers, and because new businesses moved here or expanded in South Dakota. But we are still a small state, and we must plan for the challenges that we see coming.

When a farmer sees storm clouds on the horizon, she doesn't say, "It will be fine. We have had a great year, so this storm cannot do any damage." Instead, she makes sure she has the supplies to handle whatever comes. She checks the generators to ensure they work. And she brings the animals into the barn as necessary to make sure they are protected. Just like the weather, the economy can take a bad turn quickly, and we need to prepare for all scenarios.

South Dakota's economy is unquestionably better than it was a year ago, but that story is not true around the nation in other states. We did not cause the economic storm, but thanks to President Biden it is coming anyway. South Dakota needs to be ready.

**John Thune**  
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



## Standing Up For South Dakota Producers

Agriculture is the lifeblood for many South Dakotans. Farming and ranching isn't just an occupation, it's a proud and honest way of life. As a longtime member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, standing up for our producers is a top priority.

Cattle producers have faced significant market disruptions in recent years. It strikes me, at least, that while producers struggle to make ends meet, the largest meatpackers in the country have seen record profit margins. Something doesn't add up. Since the early days of the pandemic, I have urged the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the four large meatpackers that control more than 80 percent of the beef processing capacity in our country. It's critically important that producers have a fair and transparent system to market their cattle, and I urge the Justice Department to conclude its work to determine if any improper or anticompetitive activity has occurred.

Regulatory uncertainty and burdens have also hurt producers. Unfortunately, President Biden is resurrecting President Obama's 2015 attempt to regulate ditches, prairie potholes, and ephemeral streams. I recently led all Senate Republicans in urging the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to suspend their rulemaking to redefine the scope of waters protected under the Clean Water Act (CWA), specifically "waters of the United States" (WOTUS), until the U.S. Supreme Court completes its consideration of *Sackett v. EPA*, a case that is expected to have major implications on CWA enforcement. The CWA calls for only "navigable waters" to be regulated – think rivers and streams that connect to larger bodies of water.

The WOTUS rule would not only be time consuming to have every water feature examined, but it lacks even a drop of common sense. It could also be incredibly expensive should you run afoul of D.C. regulators who are looking to halt every day farming and ranching practices. The Biden administration should freeze its WOTUS rulemaking until the Supreme Court makes its decision, otherwise farmers and ranchers will have even more uncertainty to deal with during the upcoming planting season.

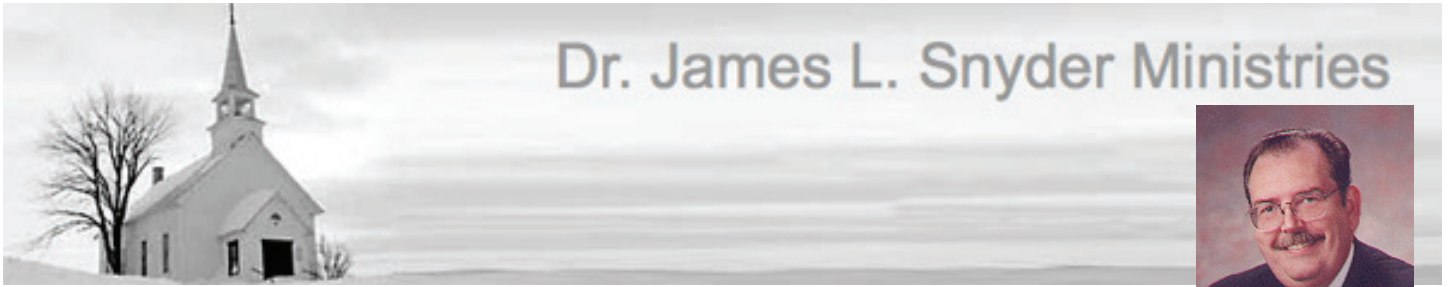
Instead of imposing new, unnecessary regulations, the administration should focus on meaningful measures to address the supply chain crisis. For some time now, I've heard reports of ocean carriers unreasonably refusing to transport certain goods – often American agricultural products. My bipartisan bill, the Ocean Shipping Reform Act, which I introduced this month, is designed to address this problem and create a more level playing field, benefitting South Dakota producers, small businesses, and consumers.

Under my bill, the Federal Maritime Commission is given more authority to respond to unfair ocean carrier practices, while bringing greater efficiency and transparency to a process that leaves many shippers – especially small businesses – frustrated. These improvements will bring long-term positive changes to the maritime supply chain, which I hope will benefit producers by ensuring export markets remain open, fair, and competitive.

Agriculture is a tough business, and producers are some of the toughest people I know. They have had to endure tremendous challenges over the past few years, from trade disputes to weather to the pandemic. No matter what, I will keep doing everything I can to stand up for the priorities of South Dakota producers.

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## What's so Cool about a Cucumber?

When it comes to vegetables, I am no connoisseur at all. The only vegetable I really like is carrot cake. According to The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, that is not a vegetable.

We often discuss vegetables, and she has brought to me a lot of proof that carrot cake is not a vegetable.

"Why then," I argue, "do they use the word carrot when they talk about this particular cake?"

She will then stare at me, one of her vicious stares by which I get the message.

Then we argued that an apple fritter is not a fruit.

She wins in both of these arguments, but I still have yet to give in to her argument. Sometimes, as a famous psychologist says, it's better to be happy than to be right. I understand completely what he's talking about.

Then recently, I heard my wife say that something was "as cool as a cucumber."

I've heard that phrase so many times and still do not quite understand what it really means. I know that a cucumber is a vegetable, but I'm not really cool about vegetables.

We were driving somewhere, she was in the driver's seat, and I'm not quite sure what we passed, but she said to me, "Look at that. That's as cool as a cucumber if you ask me."

I wish I could remember what it was, but I was very confused when she made that comment. Up to this point, I had never heard her mention that phrase before. I've heard a lot of people say it, and I just shrug it off, but now you have The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage using that phrase which was rather stunning to me.

At the time, I looked at her and said, "What's so cool about a cucumber?"

As she was driving, she laughed and said to me, "Oh, you know what I mean."

For a veteran husband such as I, to know what his wife means when she says anything is beyond the realm of reality. I like to live in reality, but oftentimes, I don't.

I think during my life I have eaten a cucumber. It's not that I don't like a cucumber; I would rather have something else like a vegetable of my own choosing, a carrot cake, for instance.

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I'm not sure what cucumbers are, and I don't want to ask my wife because then she will tell me and at the next lunch or dinner, there will be several cucumbers on my plate. So I don't want that to happen.

I know what being cool is all about; I just don't know how a cucumber can be cool about anything.

If a cucumber is the standard of coolness, I will never be cool.

I could come up with different slogans, like, "As cool as an apple fritter."

If I understand the word cool, nothing is more cool than a fresh apple fritter. If you've ever had an apple fritter, you know exactly what I'm talking about. To me, being cool has nothing whatsoever to do with vegetables.

Of course, if you're a vegetarian, you will disagree with me all the way. I'm not a vegetarian; I'm more of a fruitarian. In my mind vegetables aren't cool, but some fruit is rather cool to me.

I know my definition of fruit is not the same as my wife's definition. As long as we have been married, over 50 years, this is the only argument we have yet to settle. So I let her think she's right along this line, which makes me happy. Can you imagine if she ever found out that I was actually right along this line, how unhappy she would be?

I may not really understand the phrase, but I will say, to this date, our marriage has been "as cool as a cucumber." I may not understand it, but I am happy if it makes my wife happy.

Whatever a cucumber has to do with anything, I'm not too concerned about. Let her have her cucumbers as long as she lets me have my apple fritters. A good marriage allows the other to have their way as long as their way is not my way.

Even after 50 years, I'm still trying to navigate this marriage ship. So, the other day I thought I could make a little more progress in this. I said to her, "My, you're as cool as a cucumber."

I thought I was making progress, but as soon as I said it, she looked at me and said, "So, you think I'm a cucumber?"

You try to get along, and sometimes it doesn't really get you too far ahead. I meant it in the best sense of the word, but she thought I was just joking. And here I thought she had high regards for a cucumber.

That proves that I'm not cool was a cucumber.

As I thought about this a wonderful passage of Scripture came to mind. "9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

I guess it's nice to know where you are in life And that you have a partner in life.

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What are some of the leading environmental podcasts out there these days?

-- Jane Mitchell, Boise, ID

Given the popularity of podcasts these days, it's no surprise that several have popped up on environmental topics. Whether you are interested in green tech, environmental justice or climate change, there's no doubt a podcast (or two) for you. Here is a rundown of some of the leading offerings.

Investigative journalist Amy Westervelt's podcast company, Critical Frequency, has launched some of the most engaging eco-podcasts out there today. One is *Inherited*, a reported, narrative podcast by, for and about youth climate activists. Each explores a different facet of what the next generation plans to do with the climate-compromised world it is inheriting. Another great listen from Critical Frequency is *Drilled*, a narrative, investigative climate accountability podcast reported, hosted and produced by Westervelt herself. The most downloaded climate podcast of all time, *Drilled*, tackles the fossil fuel industry's role in spreading climate denial. Lastly, the latest offering from Critical Frequency is *Damages*, a courtroom drama podcast that follows hundreds of climate lawsuits currently underway around the world in order to highlight activists' quest for justice in perhaps the largest crime against humanity of all time, human-induced climate change. The first season explores "rights-of-nature" laws, which bring Indigenous approaches to nature into Western judicial systems by giving ecosystems the same rights as individuals.

Sea Change Radio is another great source for long-form audio on green topics. This nationally syndicated radio show and podcast—with an archive of 700 shows spanning the last 16 years—focuses on the shift to environmental and economic sustainability. Veteran host Alex Wise interviews activists, entrepreneurs and policymakers to get the inside scoop on various climate and other initiatives in the U.S. and globally. If you're fascinated with the science of nature, the weekly Nature Podcast highlights research from a recent issue of the scientific journal *Nature*. Each weekly edition features interviews with the scientists behind some of the most striking environmental research currently underway, with topics ranging from astronomy to zoology.

Another great podcast for keeping your finger on the pulse of environmental activism is *How to Save the Planet*, a weekly podcast from leading non-profit Friends of the Earth that features stories from the front lines of the climate movement while explaining complex issues—environmental racism, eco-anxiety, fracking, etc.—in language anyone can understand. Yet another, *Sustainababble*, infuses coverage of climate and environment with humor thanks to the witty repartee of hosts Oliver Hayes and David Powell as they interview a wide range of experts to untangle confusing environmental concepts and highlight the greenwashing that pervades so much of the information sphere.

For those listeners with shorter attention spans, the Climate Connections Podcast might be just the ticket. This daily 90-second audio drop hosted by Anthony Leiserowitz, a human geographer at Yale University who studies public perceptions of climate change, details how the climate crisis is already shaping our lives and what we can do about it. The show aims to highlight positive solutions to reduce climate-related risks and wasteful energy practices.

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: [question@earthtalk.org](mailto:question@earthtalk.org).



**Investigative journalist Amy Westervelt's podcast company, Critical Frequency, has launched some of the most engaging environmental and climate podcasts out there today.**



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## South Dakota COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

877

Active Cases

8,465  
-6,150

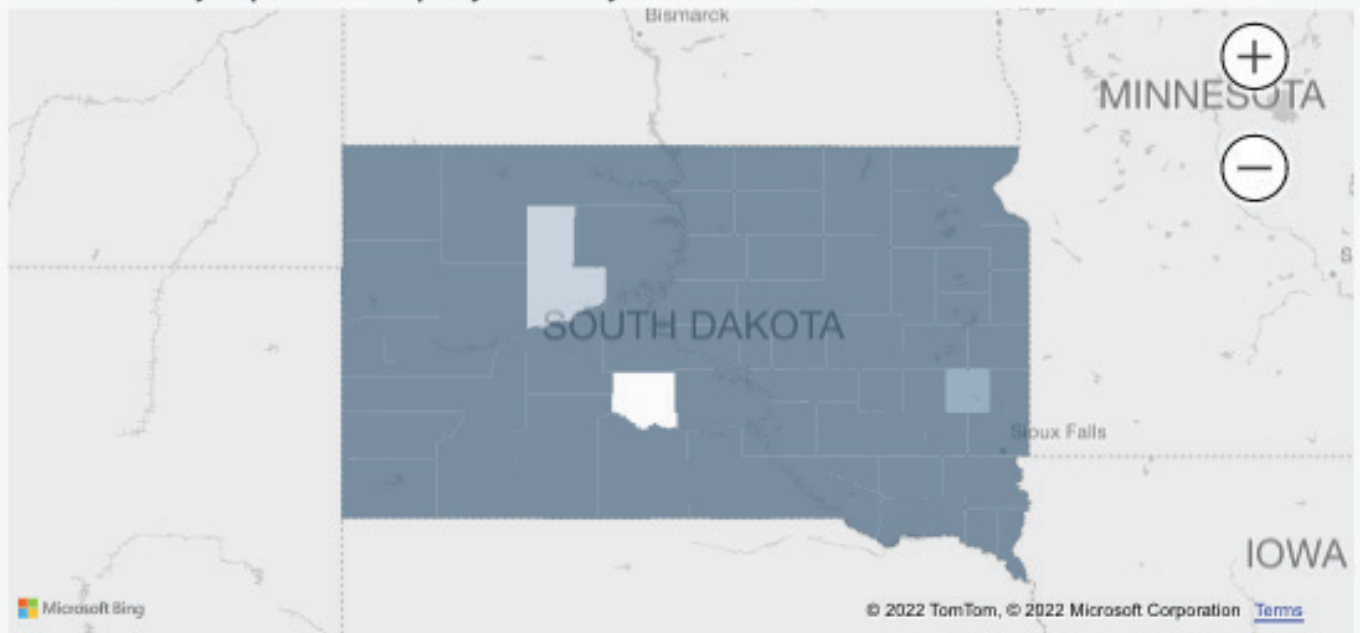
Recovered Cases

223,724

Currently Hospitalized

222

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

234,961

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

15.0%

2/10/2022 - 2/16/2022

Total Tests

2,073,716

Ever Hospitalized

10,505

Deaths Among Cases

2,772

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

259%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

423%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

118%

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## Brown County COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

9

Active Cases

477  
-354

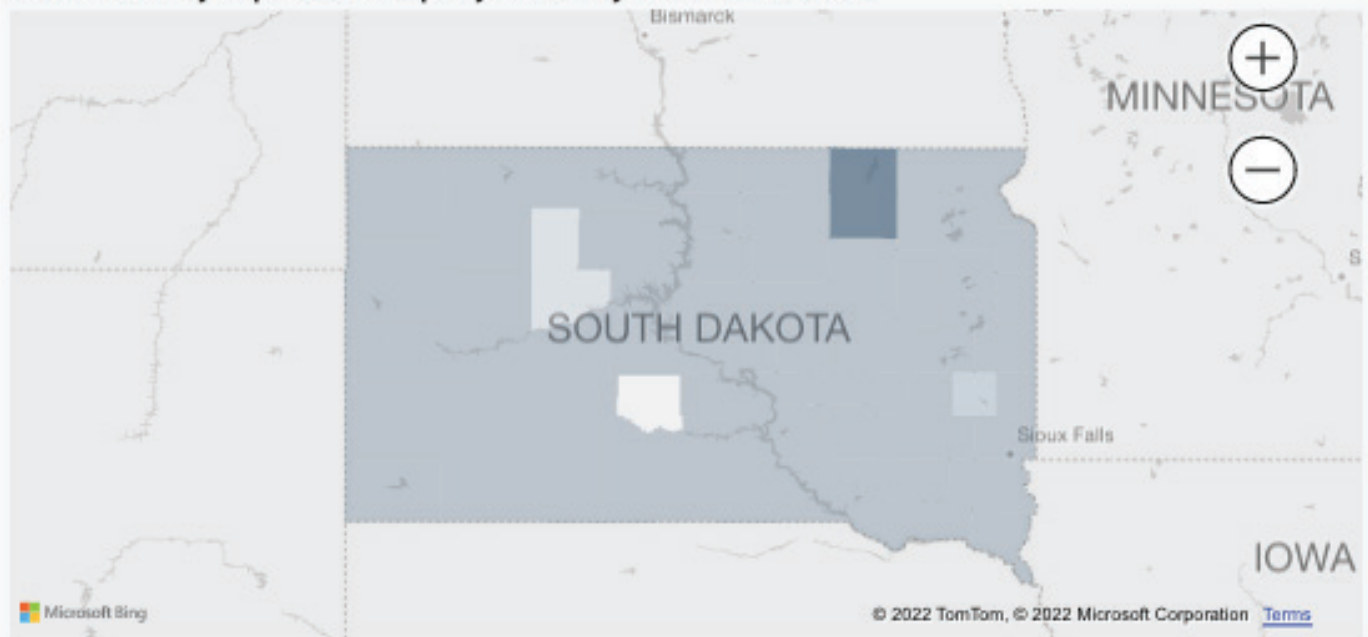
Recovered Cases

9,533

Currently Hospitalized

222

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread Low Moderate Substantial High

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

Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

10,125

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

20.0%

2/10/2022 - 2/16/2022

Total Tests

99,402

Ever Hospitalized

516

Deaths Among Cases

115

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

259%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

423%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

118%

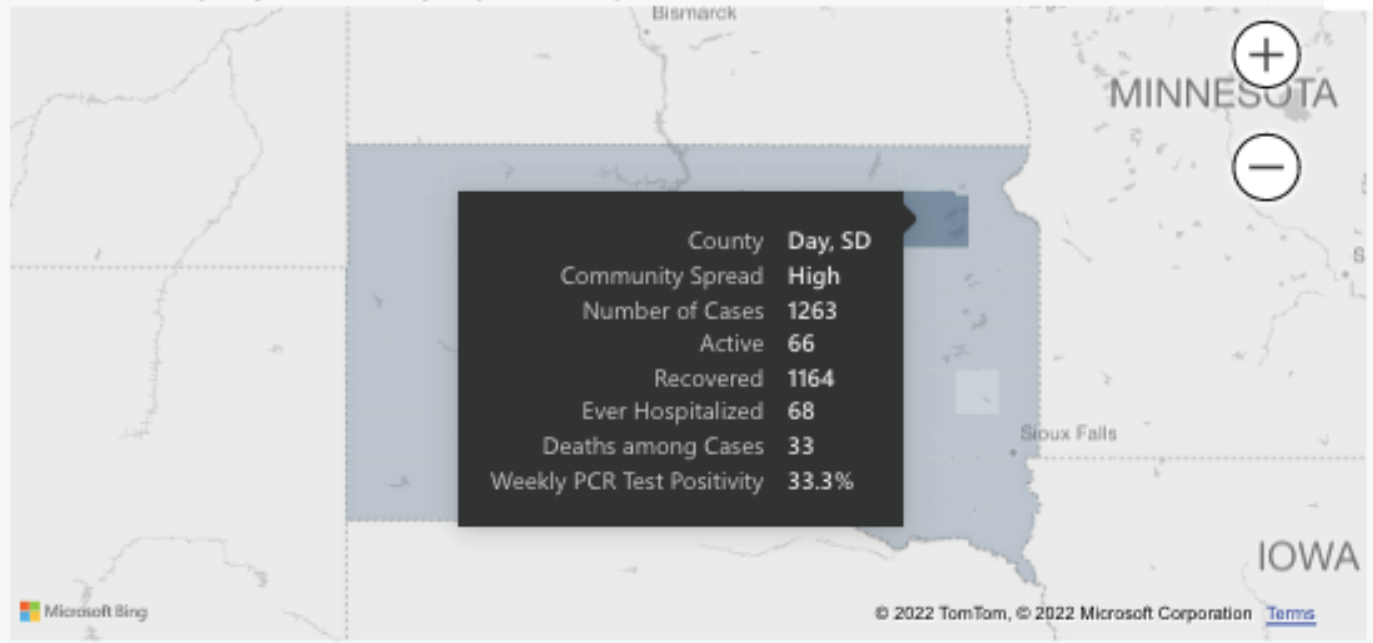
# Groton Daily Independent

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## Day County COVID-19 Report

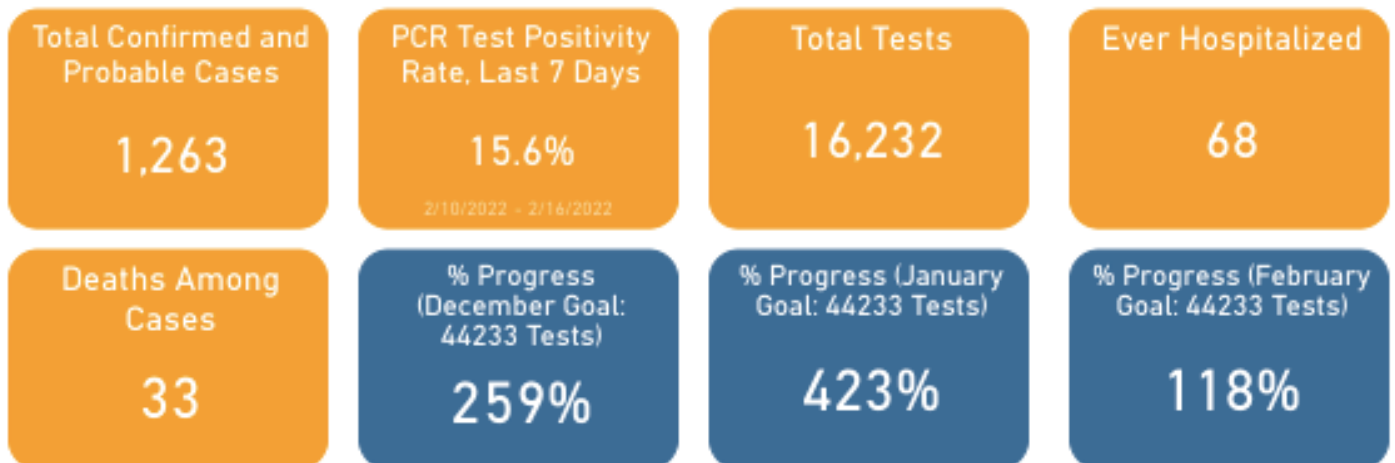


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: Low Moderate Substantial High

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



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## COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Currently Hospitalized	<b>-72</b>	222
Deaths Among Cases	<b>+42</b>	2772
Active Cases		8465
Ever Hospitalized		10505
Recovered Cases		223724
Total Cases		234961

## SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	124200	1261
Male	110761	1511

## VARIANT CASES OF COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Variant	# of Cases
Delta (B.1.617.2 & AY lineages)	1429
Omicron (B.1.1.529 & BA lineages)	562
Alpha (B.1.1.7)	176
Gamma (P.1)	4
Beta (B.1.351)	2

## AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	15646	2
10-19 years	28589	1
20-29 years	41294	12
30-39 years	40002	47
40-49 years	33008	78
50-59 years	30220	212
60-69 years	24838	445
70-79 years	12968	649
80+ years	8396	1326

## RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
Asian / Pacific Islander	3144	1%
Black	5732	2%
Hispanic	9974	4%
Native American	29670	13%
Other	2263	1%
Unknown	6001	3%
White	178177	76%

## Groton Area COVID-19 Report

Groton Area School District  
 Active COVID-19 Cases  
 Updated February 17, 2022; 10:01 AM

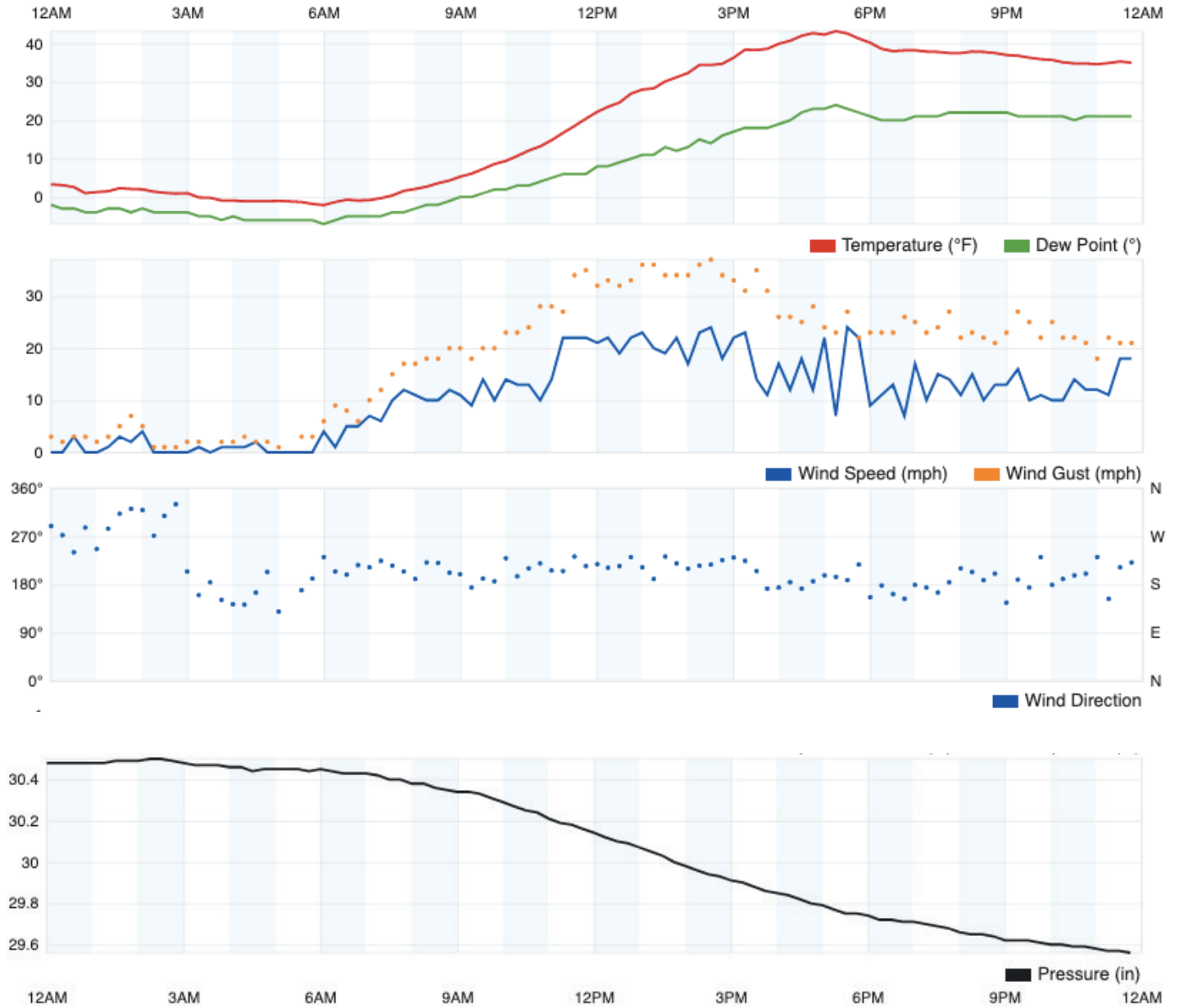
**Decrease of 1  
 since last week**

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

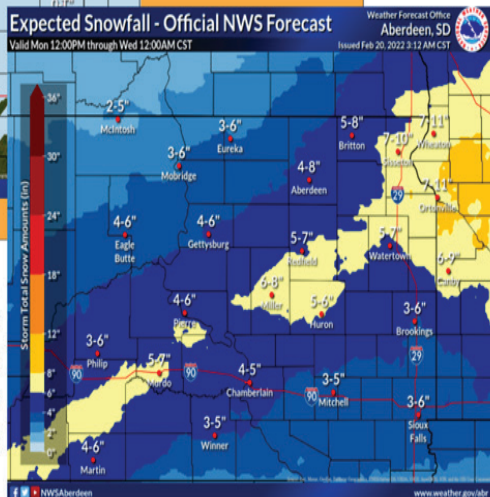
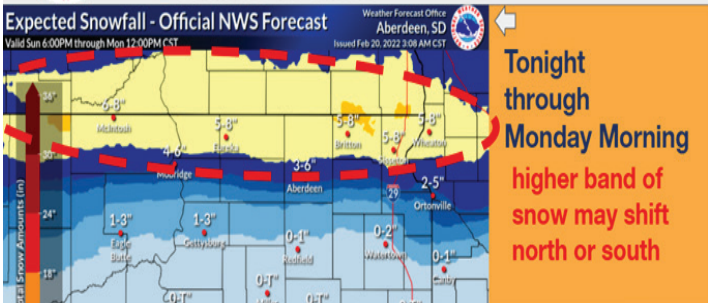
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Today	Winter Storm Watch			Tuesday
Today	Tonight	Washington's Birthday	Monday Night	Tuesday
				
Partly Sunny and Breezy	100%	90%	90%	70% → 40%
High: 35 °F ↓	Low: -1 °F	High: 1 °F	Low: -9 °F	High: -2 °F
	Snow and Blowing Snow	Snow and Blowing Snow	Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Snow Likely and Blowing Snow

## Snow Timing

February 20, 2022 4:19 AM

2 Rounds of Snow



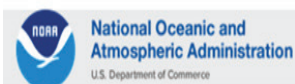
Additional Snow Monday Afternoon through Tuesday Evening

### Snow Timing

- Snow to move east across northern portions of South Dakota this evening and overnight.
- Snowfall coverage to expand across much of the area during the day Monday, but be much lighter.
- Another round of moderate snow will be possible Monday night (from southwest to northeast).
- Off and on snow to continue into Tuesday, ending west to east Tuesday afternoon and evening.

### Snow Location

- Location of the snow bands are very uncertain.
- Higher band of snow tonight may shift north or south!



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Snowfall forecast for tonight into Monday morning has shifted slightly to the north. While there will be a break in moderate snow Monday afternoon, another area of snow will be possible Monday evening into Tuesday. Stay weather aware if you have travel plans!

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## Expected Snowfall

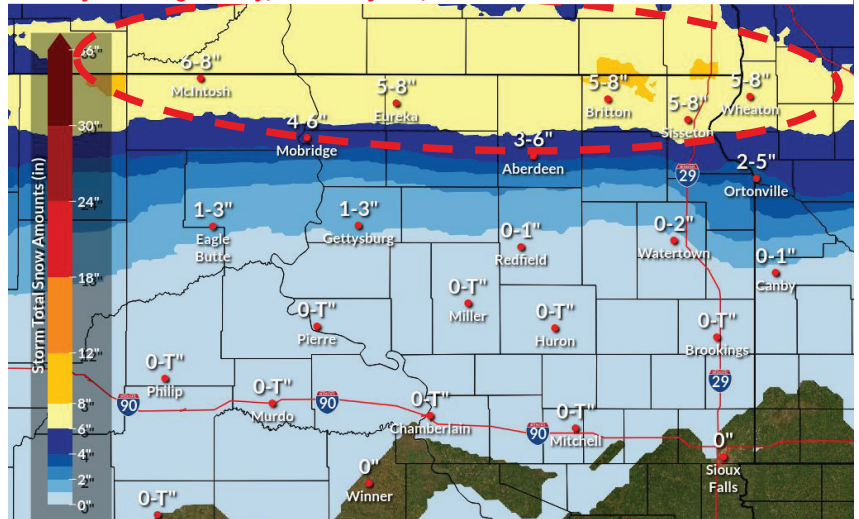
February 20, 2022  
4:46 AM

Tonight into Monday Morning (NOT STORM TOTAL)

### Overview

- The current forecast indicates that the highest opportunity for moderate to heavy snow tonight into Monday morning over northern South Dakota into west central Minnesota.
- **While this is the current expected location of the heavy snow band, it will likely shift north or south.**
- With banded snow events like this, the heaviest snow will usually occur in a narrower band than we're showing in the forecast.
- Additional light to occasionally moderate snowfall is possible Monday night into Tuesday morning.

**This is our current expectation of where the heavy snow band will occur tonight into Monday morning. It may, and likely will, shift north or south from this location.**



Forecast Snowfall Amounts (Tonight through Monday morning)



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

## The Challenges of "Banded Snowfall"

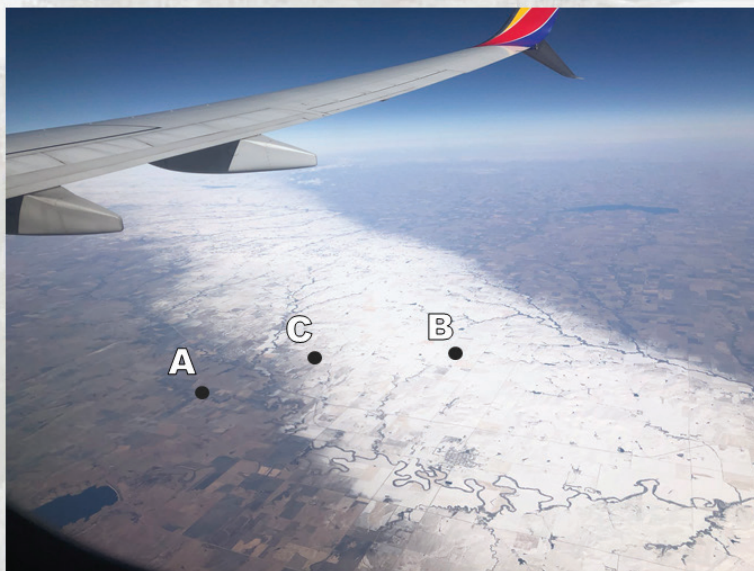
A Small Shift In Track Or Change In Location = Big Difference In Snow Totals

### What is Banded Snowfall:

- A narrow corridor of heavier snowfall within a broader area of light amounts
- Usually has very tight gradients in snow amounts on the edges of the heavier band
- Very difficult to forecast, especially more than 12-24 hours out from event

### What Should You Do:

Always monitor the latest forecast from a reliable source. Banded snow events often result in frequent and sometime drastic forecast changes.



**City A**  
Light Snow Totals  
(Less than 2")

**City B**  
Heavy Snow Totals  
(Greater than 6")

**City C**  
Moderate Snow Totals  
(2 to 6")

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Photo taken by Leigh Marts (via NWS Wichita, KS)

What is a snowfall band? Under certain conditions, usually south of the main jet stream with just a weak wave passing across the area, we can see instability develop in the mid levels of the atmosphere. This results in a line with enhanced snowfall rates. If the band is moving parallel to its orientation (similar to what we see coming up with a west to east band moving west to east) some areas will experience persistent heavy snow while locations to either side of the band see little if any. That's why, any little shift north or south with our current band, will result in dramatic consequences in snow amounts...like the image featured here. Likewise, if the band moves perpendicular to its orientation, that would be more like a squall, and while snowfall rates are intense, typically its much more brief which limits snow accumulations.



## Cold with Low Wind Chills

February 20, 2022  
4:23 AM

through the work week

Low Temperatures **-15 to -25 degrees**  
Tuesday Morning, Wednesday Morning, &  
Thursday Morning

### Hazardous to Dangerous Wind Chills Expected

	Minimum Wind Chill Forecast						
	2/21 Mon	2/22 Tue	2/23 Wed	2/24 Thu	2/25 Fri	2/26 Sat	2/27 Sun
Aberdeen	-28	-32	-34	-32	-36	-19	-15
Britton	-31	-35	-40	-35	-41	-23	-20
Eagle Butte	-33	-39	-39	-30	-32	-14	-12
Eureka	-33	-37	-40	-36	-37	-18	-17
Gettysburg	-32	-37	-40	-31	-35	-20	-14
Kennebec	-26	-33	-31	-25	-29	-13	-9
McIntosh	-37	-40	-44	-37	-37	-17	-16
Milbank	-17	-29	-32	-27	-32	-19	-14
Miller	-28	-34	-36	-29	-34	-17	-12
Mobridge	-29	-33	-32	-27	-25	-9	-8
Murdo	-28	-36	-36	-28	-30	-12	-7
Pierre	-24	-32	-29	-25	-29	-12	-8
Redfield	-28	-32	-36	-31	-36	-19	-15

### Min|Max Temperature Forecast

	2/21 Mon	2/22 Tue	2/23 Wed	2/24 Thu	2/25 Fri	2/26 Sat
	Aberdeen	-9   2	-20   -1	-20   -1	-20   2	-20   9
Britton	-11   0	-22   -4	-22   -3	-21   0	-21   4	-7   19
Eagle Butte	-13   0	-22   -4	-22   0	-16   4	-16   16	0   29
Eureka	-13   -2	-24   -4	-24   -3	-20   2	-20   11	-4   24
Gettysburg	-15   1	-24   -4	-24   -1	-20   3	-20   14	-5   27
Kennebec	-11   11	-19   1	-19   4	-17   9	-17   19	-4   33
McIntosh	-14   -4	-25   -4	-25   -1	-21   3	-17   14	-1   26
Milbank	-5   9	-14   1	-14   -1	-16   2	-16   8	-6   22
Miller	-12   6	-22   -1	-22   1	-20   4	-20   14	-4   28
Mobridge	-13   1	-22   0	-22   2	-16   7	-15   17	1   30
Murdo	-12   9	-19   -1	-19   3	-16   8	-16   19	-2   32
Pierre	-11   9	-19   1	-19   5	-17   10	-17   21	-1   34
Redfield	-11   5	-24   0	-24   -1	-22   3	-22   11	-7   26
Siouxton	-6   6	-14   1	-14   1	-15   1	-15   0	-4   22



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## Today in Weather History

February 20th, 1962: A round of heavy snow fell across the southeastern half of the state from the 20th through the 22nd, producing 10 inches. Snowfall amounts included 5 inches at Bryant, 6 inches at Kennebec, 7 inches at Redfield, Brookings, Mitchell, and Sioux Falls, 8 inches at Miller, and 10 inches at Huron. Snowfall amounts for the record-setting month of February 1962 ranged from 30 - 50 inches across much of the southeast part of the state.

February 20th, 1997: Warm weather resulted in snowmelt runoff and ice breakup on the Bad River. As a result, the Bad River went above flood stage from Capa to Fort Pierre late in the evening of the 20th. The flood stage at Fort Pierre is 21 feet, and the river rose to around 25 feet on the 21st. The Bad River went below flood stage during the afternoon of the 22nd. Lowlands near the river were flooded along with some county roads, with some of the roads damaged. Late in the evening of the 20th, the trailer court on the southern edge of Fort Pierre was evacuated, where they did some sandbagging. Also, on the west side of Fort Pierre, some roads were flooded.

February 20th, 2011: The snowfall/blizzard event on 20-21 February 2011 produced yet another round of impressive snowfall totals across central and northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Storm total snowfall amounts ranged from 8" to 12" with locally higher amounts of more than 18" reported in a few locations.

1912: A strong area of low pressure produced snow in Amarillo and high winds to Austin, Texas. In the warm sector of the low, severe storms developed and produced an estimated F3 tornado in Shreveport, Louisiana. The tornado killed nine people and injured 50 others. The tornado passed near Centenary College, where windows were damaged, and the grandstand at the ballpark was partially damaged. In addition, significant damage occurred in the Freewater section, where an estimated 75 to 100 houses were demolished.

1912: During the 20th and 21st, a severe snowstorm attended by high winds lasting from 34 to 30 hours swept over Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The amount of snow that fell in this storm was not only large, but it drifted severely. In many places, snowbanks 5 feet and higher were formed, railroad cuts were filled, highways in many places were impassable, electric service wires of all kinds were temporarily put out of commission, all trade and traffic generally demoralized. This snowstorm was part of a general disturbance that developed over the southwest on the 20th and moved northeastward over the Central and Eastern States, increasing in strength during the 21st and 22nd, and which proved to be one of the most severe and most extensive general disturbances that have passed over this section of the country for several years past. Besides the heavy snow in the northern part of the storm, heavy rains, gales, and destructive thunderstorms attended over most of the southern and eastern portions. Wind velocities of 50 to 75 miles per hour were reported at many places during the passage of this storm. Some wind blew steadily at high velocities for several hours.

1995: The temperature at the Civic Center in Los Angeles, California, soared to 95 degrees, the highest ever recorded at the location during February.

2004: A nor'easter brought heavy snow and strong winds to Nova Scotia and Prince Edwards Island from February 17th through 20th, 2004. The Maritimers called this storm White Juan, a hurricane disguised as a blizzard. Halifax, Yarmouth, and Charlottetown broke all-time 24-hour snowfall records, receiving about 3 feet of snow. The 34.8 inches of snow on February 19th nearly doubled its previous record for a single day for Halifax.

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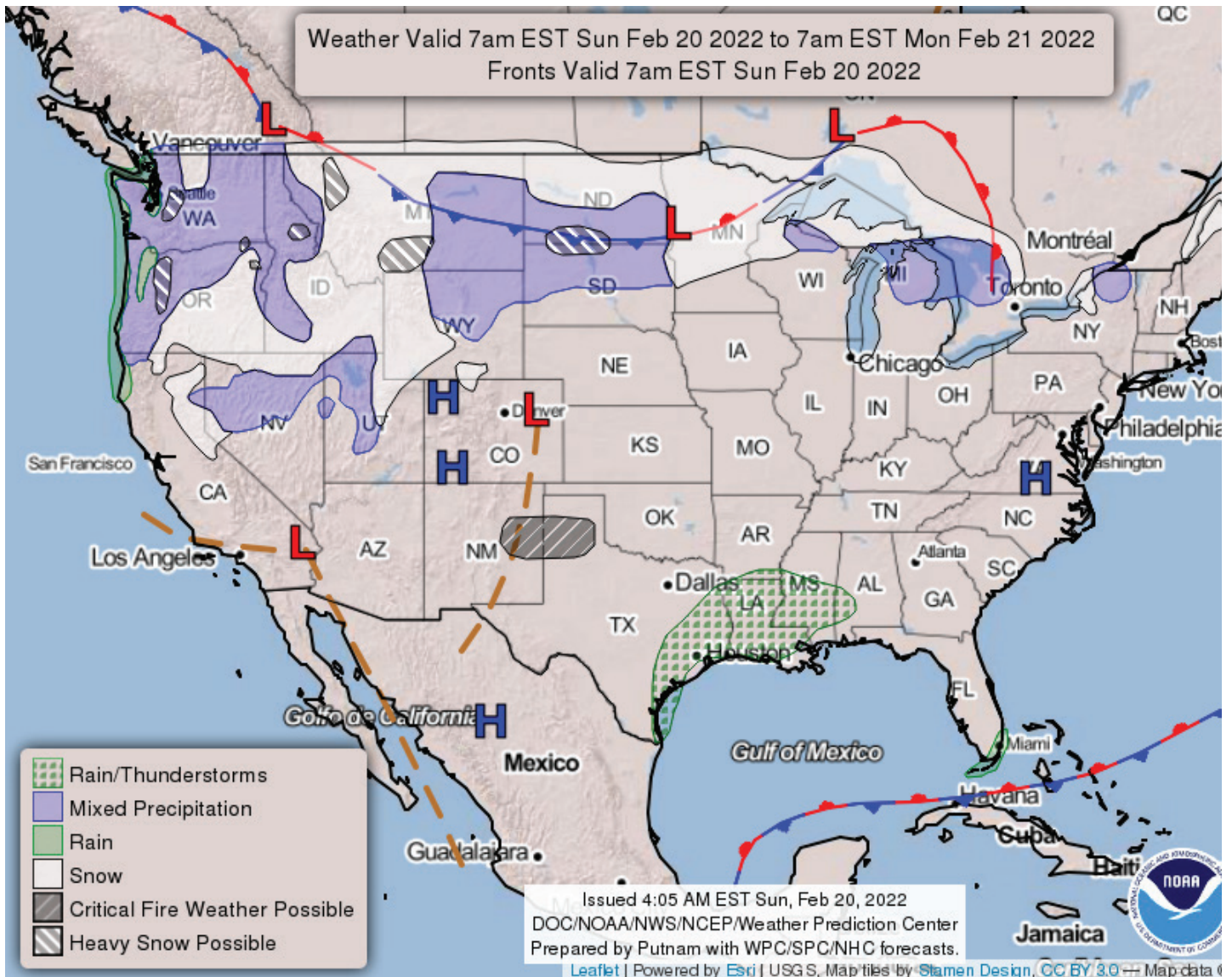
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 43 °F at 5:17 PM**  
**Low Temp: -2 °F at 5:59 AM**  
**Wind: 37 mph at 2:19 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 10 hours, 47 minutes  
Tomorrow will be 3 minutes longer than today in Groton

## Today's Info

Record High: 61 in 1930  
Record Low: -30 in 1918  
Average High: 30°F  
Average Low: 8°F  
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.42  
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.97  
Precip Year to Date: 0.59  
Sunset Tonight: 6:08:12 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22:16 AM



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## WHAT'S IN YOUR NAME?

One of the greatest musicians to ever lead any band was John Phillips Sousa. He followed the musical legacy of his father and achieved world acclaim as both a musician and writer of band music. Most people who have ever played in a band have played one of the many marches he wrote, many of them becoming favorites of people around the world. Eventually he became known as the "March King," and when his marches were played, people could identify him as the composer.

Names were once used to identify a person's place of origin or their vocation or occupation. They had a great deal of significance because they gave away so much information about a person. Today they have little significance and tell us little, if anything, important.

In the Bible, however, names and words have meaning and purpose and were selected very carefully. For example, when we read the different names that were given to God, we soon realize that they were given to Him as a way to describe or recognize what He was doing for His children or something that He wanted to do for His own.

A beautiful example of this is found in Psalm 119:55. One of His very own had a very particular need, and he needed help immediately! So, he prayed, "In the night, Lord, I remember Your name." When we read the word "night" in the Bible, it usually refers to a "time of distress." Not wanting to be overcome by defeat, he knew that his God was with him at that moment and that His power was available to keep him from defeat.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that Your presence and power are available in nights of distress or days of delight. Help us remember Your Name when we feel darkness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In the night, Lord, I remember Your name. Psalm 119:55

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## 2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,  
04/07/2022 Groton CDE  
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
04/09/2022 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)  
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start  
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon  
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)  
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion  
Baseball Tourney  
07/21/2022 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  
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament  
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  
09/11/2022 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)  
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm

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News from the  Associated Press

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-04-15-23-26

(one, four, fifteen, twenty-three, twenty-six)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

16-33-42-46-47, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 4

(sixteen, thirty-three, forty-two, forty-six, forty-seven; Star Ball: six; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$7.93 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$75 million

Powerball

03-10-15-33-42, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 2

(three, ten, fifteen, thirty-three, forty-two; Powerball: eleven; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$31 million

## Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 71, Brookings 43

Aberdeen Roncalli 47, Langford 44

Centerville 61, Corsica/Stickney 47

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 66, Pine Ridge 45

Freeman Academy 69, Burke 60

Lake Preston 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 41

Mitchell 65, Rapid City Central 42

Oelrichs 60, Edgemont 29

Rapid City Stevens 47, Huron 45

Red Cloud 66, Mobridge-Pollock 60

Sioux Falls Christian 60, Sioux Valley 59

Sioux Falls Washington 75, Sioux Falls Jefferson 68

St. Thomas More 69, Hill City 34

Waubay/Summit 63, Hankinson, N.D. 47

West Central 86, McCook Central/Montrose 42

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brookings 52, Aberdeen Central 51

Huron 60, Rapid City Stevens 57, OT

Sioux Falls Jefferson 34, Sioux Falls Lincoln 31

Sioux Falls Washington 68, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 43

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

Kamateros lifts South Dakota over W. Illinois 78-65

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VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Tasos Kamateros had a career-high 24 points shooting 6-for-9 from 3-point range and South Dakota topped Western Illinois 78-65 on Saturday.

Kruz Perrott-Hunt had 18 points for South Dakota (17-10, 10-6 Summit League), which earned its fourth straight victory. Mason Archambault added 12 points. Xavier Fuller had 10 points.

Trenton Massner had 18 points and eight rebounds for the Leathernecks (15-13, 6-10). Luka Barisic added 16 points. Colton Sandage had 15 points.

Leathernecks second-leading scorer Will Carius entered averaging 15 points per game but scored just three points in the loss.

The Coyotes improve to 2-0 against the Leathernecks this season. South Dakota defeated Western Illinois 75-72 on Jan. 24.

Scheierman leads S. Dakota St. past St. Thomas (Minn.) 79-60

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Baylor Scheierman had 23 points and 11 rebounds as South Dakota State extended its winning streak to 16 games, topping St. Thomas (Minnesota) 79-60 on Saturday.

Douglas Wilson had 16 points and eight rebounds for South Dakota State (25-4, 16-0 Summit League). Charlie Easley added 12 points. Matt Dentlinger had 10 points.

Riley Miller scored a season-high 27 points for the Tommies (8-19, 2-13), whose losing streak reached 12 games. Brooks Allen added seven rebounds. Parker Bjorklund had eight rebounds.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Tommies for the season. South Dakota State defeated St. Thomas (MN) 92-77 on Jan. 20.

Firefighter hurt in fall while battling blaze

RAPID VALLEY, S.D. (AP) — A firefighter has been injured fighting a blaze in frigid temperatures in Rapid Valley.

The Rapid City Journal reported Saturday that the volunteer fire department found a free-burning fire in the roof of an occupied home.

Firefighters managed to contain the blaze to the home and no residents were hurt. One firefighter suffered a fall and was transport to Rapid City Monument Hospital for evaluation.

Firefighters battled darkness, snow-packed and icy roads, subfreezing temperatures, frozen hoses and a lack of an on-scene water supply. Crews had to haul water to the fire in trucks.

Flandreau: Tribal medical pot cards leading to arrests

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — An American Indian tribe in South Dakota says police are arresting people who buy medical marijuana at the tribe's dispensary.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe operates the only medical marijuana dispensary in the state. Tribal officials say more than 100 people who have been issued tribal medical marijuana identification cards have been arrested since the store opened in July. The tribe has issued about 8,000 cards to tribal members and people who aren't tribal members.

The Argus Leader reported Friday the state Department of Public Safety and the attorney general's office have taken the position that the cards aren't valid for people who aren't tribal members. Flandreau Police Chief Zach Weber said his department is following that directive and arresting people with cards if they're not tribal members.

"If they have a tribally-issued card and they are non-Native American, we seize the card and any of the marijuana products that they would have," Weber said.

The tribe is defending cardholders in court if they choose to fight their charges. The tribe's attorney general, Seth Pearman, told lawmakers this week that his office is currently involved in at least 10 active marijuana cases involving people who aren't tribal members.

"I don't think the state has the authority to revoke a license issued by another jurisdiction," he said.

The tribal medical marijuana program operates independently of the state's medical marijuana program. State health officials started issuing state medical cards last fall, though no state-licensed dispensaries,

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grow facilities or testing sites are operating.

Olympics Live: Closing ceremony for Beijing Games begins  
BEIJING (AP) — The Latest on the Beijing Winter Olympics:

The closing ceremony for the Beijing Games has begun, signaling the end to the second Olympics of the pandemic era.

There's a modest but enthusiastic crowd of invited guests shaking hand clappers and doing the wave at the Bird's Nest stadium.

Despite COVID concerns ahead of the Games, a strict system that basically turned the Olympics into a giant bubble kept coronavirus cases to a minimum. There have only been 463 positive tests among thousands of visitors inside the bubble since Jan. 23.

There was plenty of other drama among the athletes. A doping scandal involving a 15-year-old figure skater overshadowed the women's competition. U.S. skiing star Mikaela Shiffrin faltered and went home empty-ended. And American-born star Eileen Gu won three medals – for China.

Internationally, many critiqued them as the "authoritarian Olympics" and denounced the IOC for holding them in concert with a government accused of human rights violations. Several Western governments boycotted by not sending any official delegations, though they sent athletes. China denied such allegations, as it typically does.

South Korean Olympic officials say they still want to include North Korea in helping host the 2024 Winter Youth Olympics and the IOC is also interested in the project.

Korean Sport & Olympic Committee president Lee Kee Heung says the organization will offer North Korea the opportunity to hold the event together.

South Korea is hosting the next winter edition of the Youth Olympics in two years' time in Gangwon province. It will use some of the same venues as the 2018 Olympics, named for the town of Pyeongchang.

The 2018 Winter Games were held during a thaw in relations between the Korean neighbors, whose athletes entered the opening ceremony together and fielded a combined women's hockey team.

Diplomatic relations are currently tense and a North Korean missile test last month raised concern in Seoul and Washington, D.C.

Gangwon organizers have been in Beijing and Korean Olympic official Lee says: "The IOC has keen interest in this idea" of cooperating on hosting in 2024.

Hannes Bjorninen scored the go-ahead goal 31 seconds into the third period and Finland claimed its first Olympic men's hockey gold medal with a 2-1 win over the Russian Olympic Committee on the final day of the Beijing Games.

Ville Pokka also scored and Harri Sateri stopped 16 shots as Finland rallied from a 1-0 first-period deficit. The Finns' best finishes in 17 previous Olympic appearances were silver medals at the 1988 Calgary Games and 2006 Torino Games.

Mikhail Grigorenko scored for the favored Russian team, the defending champions, in the second consecutive tournament without NHL players. The Russians won 4-3 over Germany in overtime in the gold-medal final at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

Ivan Fedotov stopped 29 shots for the Russian Olympic Committee.

Finland completed the tournament with a 7-0 record.

Taiwan's premier wants a Taiwanese Olympic speedskater to be punished for wearing what appeared to be a suit from rival China's team during training.

Symbols of the two sides are especially sensitive at a time when China's ruling Communist Party, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, is trying to intimidate the island democracy by flying fighter jets and



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bombers nearby.

Huang Yu-ting, one of four Taiwanese athletes at the Winter Games, posted a video on her social media page Jan. 23 showing her training in what appeared to be a Chinese suit, the Central News Agency reported. It said Huang apologized and removed the video.

Premier Su Tseng-chang asked the Ministry of Education and the Sports Administration to investigate so Huang would "receive an adequate punishment," CNA reported, citing a Cabinet spokesperson, Lo Ping-cheng.

Taiwan's Sports Administration said Huang would face no penalty but should be "more aware of the sensitivity of cross-Taiwan Strait politics," according to CNA.

Cross-country skier Therese Johaug of Norway won the women's 30-kilometer mass start, her third gold at the Beijing Olympics.

Fighting fierce winds and brutal temperatures, she went out front early in the race and held on, finishing in 1 hour, 24 minutes and 54 seconds. Johaug also won the skiathlon and 10-kilometer classic race.

American Jessie Diggins kept a steady pace behind the Norwegian as gusts whipped across the tracks, battering the skiers. She crossed the finish line 1 minute and 43.3 seconds behind Johaug to win silver. She had already become the first American woman to win an individual cross-country medal when she took bronze in the sprint earlier in the Beijing Games.

Finland's Kerttu Niskanen won bronze 2 minutes and 33.3 second back.

Strong wind gusts sent snow squalls across the frozen tracks as the women skied four laps on a 7.5-kilometer (4.6-mile) course with buffs pulled up over their hats, tape across their faces and extra layers under their racing suits.

Francesco Friedrich and Germany have finished off an unforgettable show in sliding at the Beijing Olympics.

Friedrich won his second Olympic gold medal in Beijing and fourth of his career by driving to the win Sunday in the four-man event, the final sliding race of these games.

There were 10 sliding events in Beijing. Germany won gold in nine of them and took 16 medals overall. The rest of the world combined had 14 medals in sliding.

Johannes Lochner won silver for Germany on Sunday and Justin Kripps of Canada got the bronze. Hunter Church was 10th for the U.S. and Frank DelDuca tied for 13th.

Eve Muirhead led Britain to the Olympic women's curling gold medal — the first for the sport's homeland since 2002 — with a record-setting 10-3 victory over Japan.

One day after the British men took silver, losing to Sweden in the final, the women picked up two points in the first end and controlled the scoreboard from there. They essentially clinched it in the seventh after Japanese skip Satsuki Fujisawa failed to keep her last stone in the scoring area.

That left just one red Japanese rock and three yellow British ones in the house. Muirhead easily picked off the Japan's lone stone and scored four to take an 8-2 lead, bringing the biggest cheer yet from the British fans in the crowd.

Japan could only manage one point in the eighth. When Muirhead tallied two in the ninth, Fujisawa slid over to bump fists and concede. Another roar arose from the crowd, which included the men's silver medalists.

It was the most lopsided women's final in Olympic history.

It was the second straight medal for the Japanese team of Fujisawa, Chinami Yoshida, Yumi Suzuki and Yurika Yoshida, who took bronze in Pyeongchang. The Swedish women won bronze on Saturday night, beating Switzerland.

Mikaela Shiffrin and the American mixed ski team missed out on a medal by 0.42 seconds, losing in the bronze matchup in the final Alpine ski event of the Beijing Olympics.

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The top-ranked Austrians won gold in the Winter Games' second iteration of the mixed team parallel event, holding off Germany in the final.

The U.S. primarily used Shiffrin on the slower of the parallel courses, and she lost three of her four heats, including in the bronze matchup against Norway. Teammate River Radamus delivered the win the U.S. needed in the last heat to force a 2-2 tie, but he wasn't fast enough to tilt the tiebreaker — combined times of the fastest man and woman — to the Americans' favor.

Austria also tied in the final against the Germans, but Stefan Brennsteiner and Katharina Liensberger took their heats in a faster combined time than Lena Duerr and Alexander Schmid. Austria took silver in the event's debut at Pyeongchang four years ago.

Shiffrin, a two-time gold medalist, went 0 for 5 in her bid for an individual medal in Beijing. She only reached the finish line at two individual events, coming in ninth in the super-G and 18th in the downhill.

Queen Elizabeth II tests positive for COVID; mild symptoms

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday and is experiencing mild, cold-like symptoms, Buckingham Palace said.

The palace said the 95-year-old British monarch will continue with light duties at Windsor Castle over the coming week.

"She will continue to receive medical attention and will follow all the appropriate guidelines," the palace said in a statement.

The queen has received three jabs of coronavirus vaccine.

Both her eldest son Prince Charles and daughter-in-law Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall have also recently contracted COVID-19. Charles has since returned to work.

Britain's longest-reigning monarch, the queen reached the milestone of 70 years on the throne on Feb. 6.

Shelling in east Ukraine, Russia nuclear drill raise tension

By LORI HINNANT and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Hundreds of artillery shells exploded along the contact line between Ukrainian soldiers and Russia-backed separatists, and thousands of people evacuated eastern Ukraine, further increasing fears Sunday that the volatile region could spark a Russian invasion.

Western leaders warned that Russia was poised to attack its neighbor, which is surrounded on three sides by about 150,000 Russian soldiers, warplanes and equipment. Russia held nuclear drills Saturday and conducted conventional exercises in neighboring Belarus, and has ongoing naval drills off the coast in the Black Sea.

The United States and many European countries have alleged for months that Russia is trying to create pretexts to invade. They have threatened massive, immediate sanctions if it does.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to choose a place where the two leaders could meet to try to resolve the crisis. Russia has denied plans to invade.

"Ukraine will continue to follow only the diplomatic path for the sake of a peaceful settlement," Zelenskyy said Saturday at an international security conference in Munich, Germany. There was no immediate response from the Kremlin.

A top European Union official, Charles Michel, said Sunday that "the big question remains: does the Kremlin want dialogue?"

"We cannot forever offer an olive branch while Russia conducts missile tests and continues to amass troops," Michel, the president of the European Council, said at the Munich Security Conference. He said, "One thing is certain: if there is further military aggression, we will react with massive sanctions."

Separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine on Saturday ordered a full military mobilization and sent more civilians to Russia, which has issued about 700,000 passports to residents of the rebel-held territories. Claims that Russian citizens are being endangered might be used as justification for military action.

Officials in the separatist territories claimed Ukrainian forces launched several artillery attacks over the

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past day and that two civilians were killed in an unsuccessful assault on a village near the Russian border. U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris on Sunday emphasized the significance of the moment that Europe faces.

"We're talking about the potential for war in Europe," Harris said at the Munich Security Conference. "It's been over 70 years, and through those 70 years ... there has been peace and security."

Ukraine's leader criticized the U.S. and other Western nations for holding back on new sanctions for Russia. Zelenskyy, in comments before the conference, also questioned the West's refusal to allow Ukraine to join NATO immediately.

Putin has demanded that NATO not take Ukraine as a member. Harris stood by the U.S. decision to hold off on sanctions but said she wouldn't second guess Zelenskyy's "desires for his country."

In new signs of fears that a war could start within days, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine. German air carrier Lufthansa canceled flights to the capital, Kyiv, and to Odesa, a Black Sea port that could be a key target in an invasion.

NATO's liaison office in Kyiv said it was relocating staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv.

U.S. President Joe Biden said late Friday that based on the latest American intelligence, he was now "convinced" that Putin has decided to invade Ukraine in coming days and assault the capital.

A U.S. military official said an estimated 40% to 50% of those ground forces have moved into attack positions closer to the border. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments, said the change has been underway for about a week and does not necessarily mean Putin has settled on an invasion.

Lines of communication between Moscow and the West remain open: the American and Russian defense chiefs spoke Friday. French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with Putin on Sunday. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to meet next week.

Immediate worries focused on eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting the pro-Russia rebels since 2014 in a conflict that has killed some 14,000 people.

Ukraine and the separatist leaders traded accusations of escalation. Russia on Saturday said at least two shells fired from a government-held part of eastern Ukraine landed across the border, but Ukraine's foreign minister dismissed that claim as "a fake statement."

Top Ukrainian military officials came under a shelling attack during a tour of the front of the nearly eight-year separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine. The officials fled to a bomb shelter before hustling from the area, according to an Associated Press journalist who was on the tour.

The military on Sunday closed a key checkpoint leading to the separatist region after it came under repeated shelling.

Elsewhere on the front lines, Ukrainian soldiers said they were under orders not to return fire. Zahar Leshushun, peering into the distance with a periscope, had followed the news all day from a trench where he is posted near the town of Zolote.

"Right now, we don't respond to their fire because ..." the soldier started to explain before being interrupted by the sound of an incoming shell. "Oh! They are shooting at us now. They are aiming at the command post."

Sporadic violence has broken out for years along the line separating Ukrainian forces from the Russia-backed separatists, but the spike seen in recent days is orders of magnitude higher than anything recently recorded by international monitors: nearly 1,500 explosions recorded in 24 hours.

Denis Pushilin, the head of the pro-Russia separatist government in Ukraine's Donetsk region, cited an "immediate threat of aggression" from Ukrainian forces in his announcement of a call to arms. Ukrainian officials vehemently denied having plans to take rebel-controlled areas by force.

"I appeal to all the men in the republic who can hold weapons to defend their families, their children, wives, mothers," Pushilin said. "Together we will achieve the coveted victory that we all need."

A similar statement followed from his counterpart in the Luhansk region. On Friday, the rebels began evacuating civilians to Russia with an announcement that appeared to be part of their and Moscow's efforts to paint Ukraine as the aggressor.

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Metadata from two videos posted by the separatists announcing the evacuation of civilians to Russia show that the files were created two days ago, the AP confirmed. U.S. authorities have alleged that the Kremlin's effort to come up with an invasion pretext could include staged, prerecorded videos.

Ukraine's military said two of its soldiers died in firing from the separatist side on Saturday.

Authorities in Russia's Rostov region, which borders eastern Ukraine, declared a state of emergency because of the influx of evacuees. Media reports on Saturday described chaos at some of the camps assigned to accommodate them.

Putin ordered the Russian government to offer 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee, an amount equivalent to about half of an average monthly salary in eastern Ukraine.

The separatist regions of Ukraine, like much of the country's east, are majority Russian speaking. Putin on Tuesday repeated allegations of a "genocide" there in explaining the need to protect them.

One of the evacuees, a Donetsk resident who identified himself only as Vyacheslav, blamed Ukraine's government for his plight.

"Let them calm down," he said. "It's our fault we don't want to speak Ukrainian, is that it?"

UK: People with COVID in England won't need to self-isolate

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — People with COVID-19 won't be legally required to self-isolate in England starting in the coming week, the U.K. government has announced, as part of a plan for "living with COVID" that is also likely to see testing for the coronavirus scaled back.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said ending all of the legal restrictions brought in to curb the spread of the virus will let people in the U.K. "protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms." He is expected to lay out details of the plan in Parliament on Monday.

"I'm not saying that we should throw caution to the winds, but now is the moment for everybody to get their confidence back," Johnson told the BBC in an interview broadcast Sunday.

"We've reached a stage where we think you can shift the balance away from state mandation, away from banning certain courses of action, compelling certain courses of action, in favor of encouraging personal responsibility."

But some of the government's scientific advisers said it was a risky move that could bring a surge in infections and weaken the country's defenses against more virulent future strains.

Wes Streeting, health spokesman for the main opposition Labour Party, accused Johnson of "declaring victory before the war is over."

Johnson's Conservative government lifted most virus restrictions in January, scrapping vaccine passports for venues and ending mask mandates in most settings apart from hospitals in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which set their own public health rules, also have opened up, although more slowly.

A combination of high vaccination rates in the U.K. and the milder omicron variant means easing restrictions didn't lead to a surge in hospitalizations and deaths. Both are falling, though the U.K. still has Europe's highest coronavirus toll after Russia, with more than 160,000 recorded deaths.

In Britain, 85% of people age 12 and up have had two vaccine doses and almost two-thirds have had a third booster shot.

Now the Conservative government says it will remove "all remaining domestic COVID regulations that restrict public freedoms" as part of a "move away from government intervention to personal responsibility."

The legal requirement to isolate for at least five days after a positive COVID-19 test will be replaced with advisory measures, and the coronavirus will be treated more like the flu as it becomes endemic.

The new plan foresees vaccines and treatments keeping the virus in check, though the government said "surveillance systems and contingency measures will be retained" if needed.

"COVID will not suddenly disappear, and we need to learn to live with this virus and continue to protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms," Johnson said.

The announcement will please many Conservative Party lawmakers, who argue that the restrictions

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were inefficient and disproportionate. It could also shore up Johnson's position among party lawmakers, who have been mulling an attempt to oust him over scandals including lockdown-breaching government parties during the pandemic.

But scientists stressed that much remains unknown about the virus, and future variants that may be more severe than the currently dominant omicron strain.

The New and Emerging Virus Threats Advisory Group, which advises the government, said last week that the idea viruses become progressively milder "is a common misconception." It said the milder illness associated with omicron "is likely a chance event" and future variants could be more severe or evade current vaccines.

Epidemic modelers who advise the government also warned that "a sudden change, such as an end to testing and isolation, has the scope to lead to a return to rapid epidemic growth" if people throw caution to the wind.

Scientists also cautioned against scrapping free rapid coronavirus tests, which have been distributed by the millions during the pandemic. Health officials say the mass testing has played an important role in slowing the spread of the virus.

Scientists are also concerned the government might end the Infection Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, which is considered invaluable because it tests people whether or not they have symptoms.

"This is not the time to take risks," said Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, an umbrella group for state-funded health authorities in Britain. "We need to operate in an evidence-based and incremental way."

Survivor found in burning ferry off Greek island; 11 missing

By DEMETRIS NELLAS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — A survivor has been rescued Sunday morning from the stern of a still burning passenger ferry, Greece's coast guard said. There are 11 people still missing.

A coast guard spokesman told The Associated Press the man, a Belarussian, was found on the left rear side of the Euroferry Olympia in apparently good condition.

"The fact that this man succeeded, despite adverse conditions, to exit into the deck and alert the coast guard ... gives us hope that there may be other (survivors)," coast guard spokesman Nikos Alexiou told state broadcaster ERT.

The rescued survivor, a man in his 20s, is a driver of a truck with Lithuanian license plates. Other details about him weren't available at this time.

The survivor told his rescuers he had heard other voices below deck. Alexiou said his understanding was that he hadn't heard any just before making his way onto the deck, but added that "the situation is evolving." The survivor has been taken to a hospital to be examined as a precaution.

The Italian-owned ferry, which was carrying more than 290 passengers and crew, as well as 153 trucks and 32 cars, caught fire on Friday, three hours after it left the northwestern Greek port of Igoumenitsa, on the mainland, bound for Brindisi, Italy. The Greek coast guard and other boats evacuated about 280 people to the nearby island of Corfu. One of two passengers rescued Saturday wasn't on the ship's manifest and is, presumably, a migrant. The other person rescued Saturday, a 65-year-old Bulgarian truck driver, had respiratory problems and has been hooked to a ventilator in a Corfu hospital intensive care unit.

The ferry has been towed to the port of Kassiopi, in northeastern Corfu, by three tugboats, authorities said. Firefighters were still battling the blaze, which, although confined in certain spaces, reignites from time to time, and thick smoke is hanging over the ship.

The extreme temperatures in some parts of the ship have impeded the rescuers, made up of the Greek fire service's Disaster Management Unit and a team of rescuers from private operators, from searching the whole ship. The ferry is slightly listing from the tons of water poured into it, but authorities say it's not in danger of capsizing.

A Greek prosecutor on the island of Corfu has ordered an investigation into the cause of the fire. The

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Italy-based company that operates the ferry said the fire started in a hold where vehicles were parked. The ship's captain and two engineers were arrested Friday, but were released the same day, authorities said.

Passengers described a dramatic rescue situation.

"We heard the alarm. We thought it was some kind of drill. But we saw through the portholes that people were running," truck driver Dimitris Karaolanidis told the AP Saturday. "You can't think something at the time (other than) your family ... When I hit the deck, I saw smoke and children. Fortunately, they (the crew) acted quickly."

Officials said the people rescued included citizens of Albania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Italy, and Lithuania.

Farmer anger will test Modi as India's 'grain bowl' votes

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

FATEHGARH SAHIB, India (AP) — Amandeep Kaur Dholewal rose from a traditional Indian cot and began speaking to a small gathering of men and women who sat cross-legged in a park opposite a white-domed gurdwara, a place of worship for Sikhs.

The 37-year-old doctor was flanked by a dozen of supporters, mainly drawn from the protesters who last year hunkered on the edges of the Indian capital and demonstrated against farm laws pushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which they feared would decimate their income.

"We have already defeated Modi once. Let's defeat him again." Her voice bellowed from a loudspeaker attached to an auto rickshaw, displaying none of the flamboyance of a seasoned politician but drawing bursting applause from the audience.

The scene underscored the changing electoral landscape in India's Punjab state, where more than 21 million voters cast ballots on Sunday in polls that are seen as a barometer of Modi and his party's popularity ahead of general elections in 2024. The polls will indicate whether riding the crest of the yearlong protests that forced Modi to make a rare retreat and repel the farm laws could be enough to prevent his party from making inroads in a state considered the "grain bowl" of India.

Political newbies like Dholewal are pinning their hopes on this very formula. They are vying to convert the farmers' anger into votes, arguing that a new party is the only path to change.

"People are asking me, 'Why are you late? We were waiting for you,'" said Dholewal, who ran a medical camp at one of the protest sites last year. She is now a candidate for Sanyukt Samaj Morcha, a newly minted political party that includes some of the farm unions that organized the protests.

"People know their rights now," she said.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party rammed the farm laws through Parliament without consultation in September 2020, using its executive powers. His administration billed them as necessary reforms, but farmers feared the laws signaled the government was moving away from a system in which they sold their harvest only in government-sanctioned marketplaces. They worried this would leave them poorer and at the mercy of private corporations.

The laws triggered a year of protests as farmers — most of them Sikhs from Punjab state — camped on the outskirts of New Delhi through a harsh winter and devastating coronavirus surge. Modi withdrew the laws in November, just three months ahead of the crucial polls in Punjab and four other states. The election results will be announced on March 10.

Modi's BJP has a relatively small footprint in Punjab but hopes to form a government there with a regional ally and strengthen its fledgling voter base among farmers, one of the largest voting blocs in India. Punjab, where people are deeply proud of their state's religious syncretism, also represents a test for his party's Hindu nationalist reach, which has flourished in most of northern India since 2014.

Meanwhile, the BJP is running its campaign by trying to frame the incumbent Congress party state government as corrupt. It is also making grand promises to create more jobs, provide farm subsidies and free electricity for farmers, and eradicate the drug menace that has ailed the state for years.

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The anger against the government, however, runs deep.

More than 700 farmers died during the protests as they weathered brutal cold, record rains and sweltering heat, according to Samyukt Kisan Morcha, or the United Farmers Front, the umbrella group of farm unions that organized the agitation. Dozens also died by suicide.

But in December last year, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told Parliament that his government had no record of the farmers' deaths. This caused widespread outrage among the families of the deceased, many of whom are small or landless farmers who constitute the lowest rung of India's agricultural community.

"Where did those 700-750 farmers go then? The Modi government is responsible for their deaths," said Amarjeet Singh, choking back tears in his family home in Kaler Ghuman village, some 40 kilometers (24 miles) from Amritsar, the state's capital.

Singh's father, Sudagar Singh, died on a sweltering September afternoon from cardiac arrest, according to his death certificate. At the time of his death, he was accompanied by his friend Charan Singh, the village head, who said the 72-year-old collapsed while returning home after spending weeks at the protests.

"Even though we won in the end, those laws only brought misery to our lives. Do you think we would forget that?" said Singh, pointing to a framed portrait of his friend.

Scarred by the death, Sudagar Singh's younger brother fell into depression, the family said. He stopped eating and working on his farm. Three months later, he too died.

In some cases, the Punjab government has announced jobs and funds for the families of the deceased, but farmers say the elections are an opportunity to turn their anger into meaningful change.

"That's why you don't see flags of any political party flying atop our homes," said Singh, the village head. "We don't trust them anymore."

Among those seeking to consolidate their political dominance through the election is the Aam Aadmi Party, which was formed in 2013 to eliminate corruption and has since ruled Delhi for two consecutive terms.

Its campaign plan in Punjab, however, is not limited to just the farmers' anger. The party hopes to ride on reemerged fault lines that were blurred during the demonstrations.

At its peak, the protest drew support from Punjab's rural and urban populations. Now, those protests find very little resonance among city voters who say the farmers' issues should take a backseat since the laws have been withdrawn.

"The youth want education, health, employment and an end to corruption. That's what people want. They want a change," said Avinash Jolly, a businessman.

On a recent afternoon, Harbhajan Singh, one of the Aam Aadmi Party's candidates, stopped near a public park and talked to supporters about chipping away at the entrenched political system. A band of young men followed him on motorbikes waving flags brandishing the party symbol — a broom to sweep out corruption.

To resounding applause, he ended his speech with a call to the crowd: "Will you teach a lesson to those leaders who have ruined this sacred land and humiliated our farmers?"

The young men, in unison, chanted "Yes!"

After Beijing bubble bursts, can the IOC save the Olympics?

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Before he got out of town, the great Canadian snowboarder Mark McMorris called the Beijing Games a version of "sports prison." He was joking — sort of — but his vision wasn't that far off.

The cordoned-off Olympic bubble that folds up when the closing ceremony ends Sunday has produced its usual collage of amazing athletes doing great things. This 17-day journey, however, has been witnessed through a sealed-off looking glass — a lens warped and sterilized by Beijing's organizing committee with underwriting from the Chinese government.

The ultimate sponsor: the International Olympic Committee, which has been under fire for producing Games that, to many, have felt soulless while also being tainted by scandal and political posturing.

"I think that sometimes it doesn't seem like their heart is in the right place," the outspoken freestyle

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skier Gus Kenworthy said. "It feels like it's a greed game. I mean, the Olympics are so incredible. But it's a TV show."

As the IOC pulls up stakes from Beijing, it has 29 months to hit the reset button and hope for a different, COVID-free and much better vibe when the Summer Games go to Paris.

The lingering question is whether, even in a more-welcoming, democratic locale, the Olympic overseers can repair their reputations to the point that people — most notably, the dwindling TV audience and the increasingly alienated throng of athletes — start to enjoy this enterprise again.

Some images they'll have to work to forget:

—Tennis player Peng Shuai and IOC President Thomas Bach hanging out together to watch freeskier Eileen Gu's first gold medal.

—The thousands of testers, cloaked head to toe in personal protective gear, shoving swabs down athletes' throats day after day for their mandatory COVID-19 screenings.

—A sobbing Belgian skeleton racer, Kim Meylemans, going to social media to beg for release from quarantine.

—And, of course, the Russian doping scandal, all perturbingly encapsulated by the image of 15-year-old figure skater Kamila Valieva crying after her disastrous long program while her coach asked: "Why did you stop fighting?"

"For all the wrong reasons," said Syracuse pop culture professor Robert Thompson, Valieva's performance last Thursday made for riveting television.

"Surprising, weird and hyper-dramatic," Thompson said. "Yet today, I searched the hallways in vain to find anyone who had seen it, or even heard tell of it. I've been paying close attention to the Olympics for 40 years, and never have I seen one surrounded by so much silence, so little buzz."

Through last Tuesday, the Nielsen Company said prime-time viewership on NBC ( which pays the lion's share of the bills for these Games ) and its streaming service, Peacock, was down 42 percent from a 2018 Games that didn't do all that well, either.

The simplest explanation is to point toward the ever-increasing menu of viewing options and the time difference; this was the third straight Winter Games held in Asia.

That the IOC had to turn to authoritarian Russia, then China, for two of its last three Winter Olympics speaks to a larger problem that underscores how much less people care. Cities willing to foot the bill for the Games, then share the heat with the IOC over a years-long buildup, are harder to find these days.

With only one other choice for 2022 — Kazakhstan — the IOC decision to hand over one of its crown jewels to China came with compromises.

Beijing's organizing committee, and, in conjunction, the Chinese government, took extreme measures to keep the COVID-19 virus, which originated inside its borders two years ago, from spreading. It also made subtle but persistent suggestions that speaking out about any issue that makes for bad headlines in China — human rights, Uyghurs, Taiwan, Hong Kong, pollution — were not welcome.

Athletes were gently reminded that the IOC's much-discussed and somewhat-liberalized Olympic demonstration rules were secondary to China's own laws and customs, which do not encourage dissent. The penalty for violating? Nobody was sure. But these Games brought with them the looming threat of a positive test, maybe from out of the blue, that could end an athlete's chance for glory before it even began.

Many countries advised their athletes to leave their cell phones at home, afraid of government cyber-hacks and information harvesting.

"How does an environment where you know you're being surveilled bring commonality?" asked Rob Koehler, of the advocacy group Global Athlete. "There's no joy in any of that."

There were some beautiful moments, too, along with some others that brought out the raw emotion in a way that only the Olympics can.

Shaun White's farewell to snowboarding after five Olympics touched hearts. Mikaela Shiffrin's willingness to unflinchingly face her setbacks was a reminder that there's more to be gained from these games than trips to the medals stand.



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China's favorite story might have come from Gu. The 18-year-old freeskier made history by becoming the first winter action-sports athlete to win three medals in the same Olympics — two golds and a silver.

The fact that Gu is American and chose to compete for her mother's homeland of China, however, made it clear that, her good intentions aside, there is no taking politics out of these Games.

When Bach brought the Chinese tennis champion Peng, whose safety has been in question for months, to the venue for Gu's first contest, cynics ripped the IOC for using the teenager's golden moment to help whitewash the perceived sins of its hosts.

At its core, the Olympics are supposed to be a celebration of sports where the world comes together for two weeks to forget its problems. They are not supposed to dabble in politics.

In many eyes, any remnants of that worldview disintegrated on Day 1, when Russian President Vladimir Putin, his country actively amassing troops along the Ukrainian border, joined Bach and China's president, Xi Jinping, at the opening ceremony.

The facade crumbled and jumbled further when Bach denounced Russia — "It was chilling to see" Valieva berated by her coach, he said — then a Kremlin spokesman denounced Bach.

In the end, no athlete's plight told the story of the Beijing Games more viscerally than that of the 15-year-old skater.

When the litany of Russian doping scandals started unfurling, shortly after the end of the 2014 Sochi Games, the IOC had the advantage of the knowing that the reports, the meetings, the terrible headlines and the chaos would largely take place outside of the Games themselves and out of the general public's view.

The Valieva case can be fairly viewed as a byproduct of all the half-measures taken to sanction the Russians. But her drama played out while the party was in full swing;. It clouded virtually every aspect of a Games that already had issues.

"We are dissatisfied because what we love about sport is the authentic pioneering struggle to redefine the possible, or to compete head to head, pouring every measure of devotion into the effort," Max Cobb, an outspoken leader in U.S. Olympic circles, wrote in an essay this weekend.

"It's a great mix of awe and honest effort that inspires," Cobb wrote, "except when it isn't."

Pompeii: Rebirth of Italy's dead city that nearly died again

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

POMPEII, Italy (AP) — In a few horrible hours, Pompeii was turned from a vibrant city into an ash-embalmed wasteland, smothered by a furious volcanic eruption in A.D. 79.

Then in this century, the excavated Roman city appeared alarmingly close to a second death, assailed by decades of neglect, mismanagement and scant systematic maintenance of the heavily visited ruins. The 2010 collapse of a hall where gladiators trained nearly cost Pompeii its coveted UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

But these days, Pompeii is experiencing the makings of a rebirth.

Excavations undertaken as part of engineering stabilization strategies to prevent new collapses are yielding a raft of revelations about the everyday lives of Pompeii's residents, as the lens of social class analysis is increasingly applied to new discoveries.

Under the archaeological park's new German-born director, innovative technology is helping restore some of Pompeii's nearly obliterated glories and limit the effects of a new threat — climate change.

Gabriel Zuchtriegel, an archaeologist appointed director general 10 months ago, likens Pompeii's rapid deterioration, starting in the 1970s, to "an airplane going down to the ground and really risking breaking" apart.

The Great Pompeii Project, an infusion of about 105 million euros (\$120 million) in European Union funds — on condition it be spent promptly and effectively by 2016 — helped spare the ruins from further degradation.

"It was all spent and spent well," Zuchtriegel said in an interview on a terrace with Pompeii's open-air

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Great Theater as a backdrop.

But with future conservation problems inevitable for building remains first excavated 250 years ago, new technology is crucial "in this kind of battle against time," the 41-year-old told The Associated Press.

Climate extremes, including increasingly intensive rainfall and spells of baking heat, could threaten Pompeii. "Some conditions are changing and we can already measure this," said Zuchtriegel.

Relying on human eyes to discern signs of climate-caused deterioration on mosaic floors and frescoed walls in about 10,000 excavated rooms of villas, workshops and humble homes would be impossible. So, artificial intelligence and drones will provide data and images in real time.

Experts will be alerted to "take a closer look and eventually intervene before things happen, before we get back to this situation where buildings are collapsing," Zuchtriegel said.

Since last year, AI and robots are tackling what otherwise would be impossible tasks — reassembling frescoes that have crumbled into the tiniest of fragments. Among the goals is reconstructing the frescoed ceiling of the House of the Painters at Work, shattered by Allied bombing during World War II.

Robots will also help repair fresco damage in the Schola Armaturarum — the gladiators' barracks — once symbolizing Pompeii's modern-day deterioration and now celebrated as evidence of its revival. The weight of tons of unexcavated sections of the city pressing against excavated ruins, combined with rainfall accumulation and poor drainage, prompted the structure's collapse.

Seventeen of Pompeii's 66 hectares (42 of 163 acres) remain unexcavated, buried deep under lava stone. A long-running debate revolves on whether they should stay there.

At the start of the 19th century, the approach was "let's ... excavate all of Pompeii," Zuchtriegel said.

But in the decades before the Great Pompeii Project, "there was something like a moratorium — because we have so many problems we won't excavate any more," Zuchtriegel said. "And it was almost like, psychologically speaking, a depression."

His Italian predecessor, Massimo Osanna, took a different approach: targeted digs during stabilization measures aimed at preventing further collapses.

"But it was a different kind of excavation. It was part of a larger approach where we have the combination of protection, research and accessibility," Zuchtriegel said.

After the gladiator hall's collapse, engineers and landscapers created gradual slopes out of the land fronting excavated ruins with netting keeping the newly-shaped "hillsides" from crumbling.

Near the end of Via del Vesuvio, one of Pompeii's stone-paved streets, work in 2018 revealed an upscale domus, or home, with a bedroom wall decorated with a small, sensual fresco depicting the Roman god Jupiter disguised as a swan and impregnating Leda, the mythical queen of Sparta and mother of Helen of Troy.

But if visitors stand on tiptoe to look past the marvelous fresco over the home's jagged walls, they'll see how the back rooms remain embedded under the newly "stabilized" unexcavated edge of Pompeii.

Nearby is the most crowd-pleasing discovery to emerge from the shoring-up project — a corner "thermopolium" with a countertop setup similar to the familiar salad-and-soup bar arrangements of our times.

This fast-food locale is the only one discovered with frescoes in vivid hues of mustard-yellow and the omnipresent Pompeii red decorating the counter's base — apparently advertising the chef's specialties and including a bawdy graffito. Judging by the organic remains found in containers, the menu featured concoctions with ingredients like fish, snails and goat meat.

Quick street meals were likely a mainstay of the vast majority of Pompeians not affluent enough to have kitchens.

Archaeologists have been increasingly using social-class and gender analyses to help interpret the past.

When they explored an ancient villa on Pompeii's outskirts, a 16-square-meter (172-square-foot) room emerged. It had doubled as the villa's storeroom and the sleeping quarters for a family of enslaved people. Crammed into the room were three beds, fashioned from cord and wood. Judging by the dimensions, a shorter bed was that of a child.

When the discovery was announced last year, Zuchtriegel described it as a "window on the precarious

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reality of people who rarely appeared in historical sources" about Pompeii.

This winter, an afternoon guided tour is offered at sites not otherwise open to the public. One such offering is the House of the Little Pig. On a wall of a tiny kitchen is a whimsical painted design of a pig's head with a prominent snout.

The park's ambitions stretch further: Nearby Naples and its sprawling suburbs ringing Vesuvius suffer from organized crime and high youth unemployment, which drives many young people to emigrate.

So the archaeological park is bringing together students from the area's more elite institutions and from working class neighborhoods who attend trade schools to perform a classical Greek play at the Great Theater.

"We ... can try to contribute to a change," Zuchriegel said.

There are also plans to create public strolling grounds in an unexcavated section of ancient Pompeii which, until recently, had been used as an illegal dump and even a marijuana farm.

Beijing's Olympics close, ending safe but odd global moment

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — A pile of figure-skating rubble created by Russian misbehavior. A new Chinese champion — from California. An ace American skier who faltered and went home empty-handed. The end of the Olympic line for the world's most renowned snowboarder. All inside an anti-COVID "closed loop" enforced by China's authoritarian government.

The terrarium of a Winter Games that has been Beijing 2022 wound to its end Sunday, capping an unprecedented Asian Olympic trifecta and sending the planet's most global sporting event off to the West for the foreseeable future, with no chance of returning to this corner of the world until at least 2030.

It was weird. It was messy and, at the same time, somehow sterile. It was controlled and calibrated in ways only Xi Jinping's China could pull off. And it was sequestered in a "bubble" that kept participants and the city around them — and, by extension, the sporadically watching world — at arm's length.

By many mechanical measures, these Games were a success. They were, in fact, quite safe — albeit in the carefully modulated, dress-up-for-company way that authoritarian governments always do best. The local volunteers, as is usually the case, were delightful, helpful and engaging.

"The Chinese people embraced these Games. Even in the closed loop, we could make this experience of excitement, of warmth, of hospitality and of friendliness," International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said Friday.

There was snow — most of it fake, some of it real. The venues — many of them, like the Bird's Nest and the Aquatic Center, harvested from the 2008 edition of the Beijing Olympics — performed to expectations. One new locale, Big Air Shougang, carved from a repurposed steel mill, was an appealingly edgy mashup of winter wonderland and rust-belt industrial landscape.

TV ratings were down, but streaming viewership was up: By Saturday, NBC had streamed 3.5 billion minutes from Beijing, compared to 2.2 billion in South Korea in 2018.

There were no major unexpected logistical problems, only the ones created deliberately to stem the spread of COVID in the country where the coronavirus first emerged more than two years ago.

And stemmed it seemed to be. As of Saturday, the segregated system that effectively turned Beijing into two cities — one sequestered, one proceeding very much as normal — had produced only 463 positive tests among thousands of visitors entering the bubble since Jan. 23. Not surprisingly, the state-controlled media loved this.

"The success in insulating the event from the virus and keeping disruption to sports events to a minimum also reflected the effectiveness and flexibility of China's overall zero-COVID policies," the pro-government Global Times newspaper said, citing epidemiologists who say "the COVID-19 prevention experience accumulated from this Olympics can also inspire Chinese cities to adjust their policies."

Look deeper, though, and a different story emerges about these Games.

Internationally, many critiqued them as the "authoritarian Olympics" and denounced the IOC for holding them in concert with a government accused of gross human rights violations against ethnic Uyghurs and

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Tibetans in its far west and harsh policies against Hong Kong democracy activists off its southeastern coast. Several Western governments boycotted by not sending any official delegations, though they sent athletes.

For its part, China denied such allegations, as it typically does, and featured a Uyghur as part of its slate of Olympic torch-carriers for the opening ceremony Feb. 4.

And then, of course, there were the Russians. And doping. Again.

The 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva tested positive for using a banned heart medication. The result wasn't announced by anti-doping officials until after she'd won gold as part of the team competition, even though the sample was taken weeks earlier.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport cleared her to compete in the individual discipline, ruling that as a minor she had protected status. But Valieva, although heavily favored to win, fell several times during her free skate routine, landing her fourth place and prompting a cold reception from her embattled coach, Eteri Tutberidze.

"Rather than giving her comfort, rather than to try to help her, you could feel this chilling atmosphere, this distance," Bach said the next day, proclaiming his outrage.

Valieva's Russian teammates took gold and silver, but on a night of drama that seemed destined to define these 2022 Games, even the winners were in tears. The affair produced one possible legacy for Beijing: Valieva's ordeal has inspired talk of raising the minimum age for Olympic skaters from 15 to 17 or 18.

American skier Mikaela Shiffrin also came to Beijing with high expectations, only to see them dashed when she failed to finish three races. Her American teammates didn't do much better. She left without any medal at all. In an image to remember, the TV cameras captured Shiffrin sitting dejectedly on the snow, head in hands, for several minutes.

The 2022 Games were controversial from the moment the IOC awarded them to Beijing, the frequently snowless capital of a country without much of a winter sports tradition. Almaty, Kazakhstan, was the only other city in play after four other bids were withdrawn due to lack of local support or high cost.

Geopolitical tensions also shadowed these Games, with Russia's buildup of troops along its border with Ukraine spurring fears of war in Europe even as the "Olympic Truce" supposedly kicked in.

The unease didn't stop Russian President Vladimir Putin from showing up at the opening ceremony after meeting privately with Xi. He waved from a luxury box to Russian athletes unable to compete under their nation's flag as part of sanctions imposed for a massive state-sponsored doping operation uncovered after the 2014 Sochi Games that Putin hosted.

China swelled with pride, and its social media swelled with comments, as Eileen Gu, an America-born freestyle skier who chose to compete for China, her mother's native country, became an international superstar. Her three medals -- two gold, one silver -- set a new record for her sport, and adulation for Gu literally broke the Chinese internet at one point, briefly crashing the servers of Sina Weibo, the massive Twitter-like network.

And Chinese snowboarder Su Yiming, a former child actor, won over the home crowd with a dominant gold medal big air performance.

Other moments to remember from Beijing 2022:

— With a nearly perfect free skate and a record-setting short program, the 22-year-old figure skater Nathan Chen became the first American gold medalist in his sport since 2010.

— Snowboarding's best known rider, Shaun White, called it a career after finishing fourth in the halfpipe in his fifth Olympics, passing the torch to athletes like Su and the halfpipe gold medalist, Japan's Ayumu Hirano. "I woke up this morning and I just felt this peacefulness. It was amazing to know I have so much ahead of me," White said afterward.

— American boarder and social media figure Chloe Kim won the gold in halfpipe for the second time, adding to her 2018 medal from Pyeongchang.

— Norway, a country whose total population of 5 million is less than one half of one percent of the host country's, led the medal count, as it often does. Russia was second, followed by Germany, Canada and

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the United States.

These third straight Games in Asia, after Pyeongchang in 2018 and the delayed Tokyo Summer Games six months ago, were also the second pandemic Games. And the 16,000 athletes and other international visitors who spent the entire time segregated from the host city behind tall chain-link fences couldn't help but see the countless signs trumpeting unremitting iterations of the Olympic slogan: "Together for a Shared Future."

But for much of these austere and distant Games, wintry not only in their weather but in their tenor itself, a post-pandemic shared future — the hug-and-harmony variety that the Olympics builds its entire multinational brand around — seemed all but out of reach.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy calls on Putin to meet as tensions soar

By JIM HEINTZ, DASHA LITVINOVA and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, facing a sharp spike in violence in and around territory held by Russia-backed rebels and increasingly dire warnings that Russia plans to invade, on Saturday called for Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet him and seek resolution to the crisis.

"I don't know what the president of the Russian Federation wants, so I am proposing a meeting," Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference, where he also met with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Zelenskyy said Russia could pick the location for the talks.

"Ukraine will continue to follow only the diplomatic path for the sake of a peaceful settlement."

There was no immediate response from the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy spoke hours after separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine ordered a full military mobilization on Saturday while Western leaders made increasingly dire warnings that a Russian invasion of its neighbor appeared imminent.

In new signs of fears that a war could start within days, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine. German air carrier Lufthansa canceled flights to the capital, Kyiv, and to Odessa, a Black Sea port that could be a key target in an invasion.

NATO's liaison office in Kyiv said it was relocating staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv. Meanwhile, top Ukrainian military officials came under a shelling attack during a tour of the front of the nearly eight-year separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The officials fled to a bomb shelter before hustling from the area, according to an Associated Press journalist who was on the tour.

Violence in eastern Ukraine has spiked in recent days as Ukraine and the two regions held by the rebels each accused the other of escalation. Russia on Saturday said at least two shells fired from a government-held part of eastern Ukraine landed across the border, but Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba dismissed that claim as "a fake statement."

Sporadic violence has broken out for years along the line separating Ukrainian forces from the Russia-backed rebels, but the recent shelling and bombing spike could set off a full-scale war.

The United States and many European countries have alleged for months that Russia, which has moved about 150,000 troops near the Ukrainian border, is trying to create pretexts to invade.

"They are uncoiling and are now poised to strike," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday during a visit to Lithuania.

Harris opened her meeting with Zelenskyy by saying the world was at "a decisive moment in history."

Earlier Saturday, Denis Pushilin, the head of the pro-Russia separatist government in Ukraine's Donetsk region, cited an "immediate threat of aggression" from Ukrainian forces in his announcement. Ukrainian officials vehemently denied having plans to take rebel-controlled areas by force.

"I appeal to all the men in the republic who can hold weapons to defend their families, their children, wives, mothers," Pushilin said. "Together we will achieve the coveted victory that we all need."

A similar statement followed from his counterpart in the Luhansk region. On Friday, the rebels began evacuating civilians to Russia with an announcement that appeared to be part of their and Moscow's ef-

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ports to paint Ukraine as the aggressor.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the evacuation orders could be a tactic to provide the spark for a broader attack.

"To say it very clearly, Ukraine did not give any grounds for the evacuation that was ordered yesterday," she said. "Those are the facts on the ground. We must not allow supposed reasons for war to be constructed out of hot air."

U.S. President Joe Biden said late Friday that based on the latest American intelligence, he was now "convinced" that Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to invade Ukraine and assault the capital.

"As of this moment, I'm convinced he's made the decision," Biden said. "We have reason to believe that." He reiterated that the assault could occur in the "coming days."

Biden was briefed on Harris' meetings in Munich and has been getting regular updates on the Ukraine situation, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement Saturday. Biden will discuss Ukraine during a meeting with his National Security Council on Sunday, she said.

Meanwhile, Russia conducted massive nuclear drills on Saturday. The Kremlin said Putin, who pledged to protect Russia's national interests against what it sees as encroaching Western threats, was watching the drills together with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko from the situation room.

Notably, the planned exercise involves the Crimea-based Black Sea Fleet. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after seizing it from Ukraine in 2014. .

Underscoring the West's concerns of an imminent invasion, a U.S. defense official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border have moved into attack positions closer to the border.

The shift has been underway for about a week, other officials have said, and does not necessarily mean Putin has decided to begin an invasion. The defense official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

The official also said the number of Russian ground units known as battalion tactical groups in the border area had grown to as many as 125, up from 83 two weeks ago. Each group has 750 to 1,000 soldiers.

Lines of communication between Moscow and the West remain open: the American and Russian defense chiefs spoke Friday. French President Emmanuel Macron scheduled a phone call with Putin on Sunday. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to meet next week.

Immediate worries focused on eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting the pro-Russia rebels since 2014 in a conflict that has killed some 14,000 people. Violations of a 2015 ceasefire agreement, including shelling and shooting along the line of contact, have been common.

A car bomb exploded in the center of the rebel-controlled city of Donetsk on Friday. Adding to the tensions, two explosions shook the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk early Saturday. No injuries were reported in the incidents.

Ukraine's military said two of its soldiers died in firing from the rebel side on Saturday.

By Saturday morning, the separatists in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which form Ukraine's industrial heartland known as the Donbas, said that thousands of residents of the rebel-controlled areas had been evacuated to Russia.

Russia has issued about 700,000 passports to residents of the rebel-held territories. Claims that Russian citizens are being endangered might be used as justification for military action.

Pushilin, the head of the Donetsk rebel government, alleged in a video statement that Ukraine was going to order an imminent offensive in the area.

Metadata from two videos posted by the separatists announcing the evacuation show that the files were created two days ago, the AP confirmed. U.S. authorities have alleged that the Kremlin's effort to come up with an invasion pretext could include staged, prerecorded videos.

Authorities in Russia's Rostov region, which borders eastern Ukraine, declared a state of emergency because of the influx of evacuees. Media reports on Saturday described chaos at some of the camps assigned to accommodate the people from eastern Ukraine. The reports said there were long lines of buses and hundreds of people waiting in the cold for hours on end to be housed without access to food

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or bathroom facilities.

Putin ordered the Russian government to offer 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee, an amount equivalent to about half of an average monthly salary in eastern Ukraine.

Canada's protests settle down, but could echo in politics

By ROB GILLIES and TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Most of the streets around the Canadian Parliament are quiet now. The Ottawa protesters who vowed never to give up are largely gone, chased away by policemen in riot gear. The relentless blare of truckers' horns has gone silent.

But the trucker protest, which grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts and shut down key parts of the capital city for weeks, could echo for years in Canadian politics and perhaps south of the border.

The protest, which was first aimed at a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers but also encompassed fury over the range of COVID-19 restrictions and hatred of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, reflected the spread of disinformation in Canada and simmering populist and right-wing anger.

"I think we've started something here," said Mark Sutor, a 33-year-old protester from Hamilton, Ontario, speaking as police retook control of the streets around Parliament. Protesters had essentially occupied those streets for more than three weeks, embarrassing Trudeau and energizing Canada's far right. Sutor believes the protests will divide the country, something he welcomes.

"This is going to be a very big division in our country," he said. "I don't believe this is the end."

While most analysts doubt the protests will mark a historic watershed in Canadian politics, it has shaken both of Canada's two major parties.

"The protest has given both the Liberals and the Conservatives a black eye," said Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto. Trudeau's Liberals look bad for allowing protesters to foment weeks of chaos in the capital city, he said, while the Conservatives look bad for championing protesters, many of them from the farthest fringes of the right.

The conservatives "have to be careful not to alienate more moderate voters, who are generally not sympathetic to the protesters or right-wing populism more generally," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada's reputation for civility, inspired convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands and interrupted trade, causing economic damage on both sides of the border. Hundreds of trucks eventually occupied the streets around Parliament, a display that was part protest and part carnival.

Authorities moved quickly to reopen the border posts, but police in Ottawa did little but issue warnings until the past couple days, even as hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters clogged the streets of the city and besieged Parliament Hill.

Truckers ignored warnings that they were risking arrest and could have their rigs seized and bank accounts frozen under the new emergency powers invoked by Trudeau. The truckers, parked on the streets in and around Parliament, blared their horns in defiance of a court injunction against honking, issued after residents said the constant noise was making the neighborhood unlivable.

"It's high time that these illegal and dangerous activities stop," Trudeau declared in Parliament a few days ago, speaking just a few hundred meters from the protests.

On Friday, authorities launched the largest police operation in Canadian history, arresting a string of Ottawa protesters and increasing that pressure on Saturday. Eventually, police arrested at least 170 people and towed away dozens of vehicles. Many protesters retreated as the pressure increased.

The Ottawa protests - the movement's last major stronghold - appeared to be largely over by Saturday evening, though some protesters warned they were only regrouping.

As it did in the United States, COVID-19 quickly became a political issue in Canada.

Coronavirus health restrictions became a political cudgel for Canada's far right, which accused Trudeau of authoritarianism. But while the restrictions clearly benefitted the far-right People's Party of Canada,

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things are more complicated in the Conservative Party.

Only recently have some Conservative leaders fully embraced the pushback against vaccine mandates and coronavirus restrictions.

Even so, the protests may open the door to the sort of populism that former President Donald Trump used to vault himself into the White House.

Pierre Poilievre, who is running to become the next leader of the Conservative party, has cheered on the protesters, gambling that voters will back him. But it remains unclear whether that will get him to the top of the party, or whether it would help or hurt him if there is a showdown between him and Trudeau or the next Liberal party leader.

"Poilievre is clearly playing by the populist playbook right now," said Béland. "If he becomes Conservative leader, the party might effectively shift towards Trump-style populism. However, it's unclear whether enough Canadians support this vision to make it appealing beyond the party's base."

The protests have been cheered on in the U.S. by Fox News personalities and conservatives like Trump. Millions of dollars in donations have flowed across the border to the protesters.

About 44 percent of the nearly \$10 million in contributions to support the protesters originated from U.S. donors, according to an Associated Press analysis of leaked donor files. Prominent Republican politicians have praised the protesters.

But experts say the U.S. support of the Canadian protesters is really aimed at energizing conservative politics in the U.S., where midterm elections are looming.

And some in the United States have pushed back.

"When I say democracy is fragile I mean it," Bruce Heyman, a U.S. ambassador to Canada during the Obama Administration. "Stand up for our friend Canada and let your voice be heard."

Meanwhile, though the situation in Ottawa appeared to be ending, there were new signs the protests had not died out entirely.

The Canadian border agency warned late Saturday afternoon that operations at a key truck crossing from western Canada into the United States had been slowed by protesters, advising travelers to find a different route.

Figure skating age debate also exposes body image challenges

By SALLY HO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Some figure skaters are hoping an Olympic doping scandal that is fueling a push to raise the minimum age of competitors will also focus attention on what they see as the sport's most pressing issue: body image, body shaming and disordered eating.

The sport is under scrutiny after 15-year-old Kamila Valieva of the Russian Olympic Committee tested positive for a banned heart medication, then failed to medal in an event for which she was the overwhelming favorite.

Valieva's ordeal has led some skating officials to propose raising the minimum age for elite figure skating competitions from 15 to 17, ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy.

The age question is inseparable from the sport's struggles with eating disorders and body image. Younger, less developed skaters are doing things on the ice that more mature women's bodies can't, notably the quadruple jumps performed in Beijing by Valieva and other teen skaters working with her embattled coach, Eteri Tutberidze.

"We see girls who are really young and thin and who do really well in our sport," said Josefin Taljegård, a 26-year-old Swedish figure skater who competed in the women's individual event in Beijing. "Maybe that's why they're so skinny — because they're still children."

That puts pressure on older skaters to keep pace.

"It usually is not like 'Oh you have to look this kind of way' but sometimes one can hear 'Oh if you were skinnier, you would jump higher or rotate faster,'" Taljegård said.

While the Valieva case has focused the world's attention on doping, skaters say body image issues are



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far more pervasive in the sport. The 2014 class of Olympic skaters is proof.

Yulia Lipnitskaya was Russia's golden girl at the Sochi Games when she was 15, before becoming a cautionary tale of chronic anorexia when she retired because of her struggles with the disorder.

American Gracie Gold's well-known story of overcoming anxiety and an eating disorder to continue competing has been an inspiration for many skaters.

U.S. ice dancer Kaitlin Hawayek, 25, said she had an eating disorder for several years. Not enough has been done to educate young skaters to see "their body is great exactly the way it is," she said.

Hawayek feels fortunate to have the support of her coaching staff, nutritionist and trainers on the U.S. team. "I've really been able to see a new mindset that has allowed me to embrace my body," she said.

U.S. figure skater Alysa Liu, who is just 16, said she found a way to cope with negative comments about her body, but it took time for her to truly understand the dynamic she was being caught up in. The American prodigy placed in the top 10 for the women's individual event this week.

"I dealt with a lot of negativity, like two years ago," Liu said of the many critics who have commented on her very public growth spurt. "At one point, I was like, why are they literally coming for a 14 year old? That's so weird. They're just kind of creepy for that. Why are they looking at a minor's body that way? It's just a little weird and kind of wrong, obviously."

U.S. pairs skater Ashley Cain-Gribble believes a higher age limit would be helpful for the sport she nearly left due to body shaming over her strength and height. The 26-year-old is 5-foot-6, making her significantly taller than many of her peers.

"Give skaters a chance to allow their body to develop naturally," Cain-Gribble said. "I know that I didn't really come into my own body until many later years."

Elizabeth Daniels, a psychology professor at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs who studies body image in sports, is skeptical that an age change alone could address this issue.

The larger cultural problem, Daniels said, is that artistic sports like figure skating, gymnastics and even diving are judged subjectively.

Half of a skating score is based on how judges view the performance — music, costume, flow and the overall feel. A more concise metric could perhaps help change the culture of dieting and diuretics in skating.

"They're being judged on how they execute a skill, but also how they look while they're doing it," Daniels said. "When you have a sport like that, and you are judged in this artistic way, the question becomes 'Does my body conform?' That, I think, increases the potential for eating disorders."

Skater or not, body dissatisfaction can generally be seen in girls as young as 5, peak during adolescence and remain constant throughout a woman's 20s.

Sports like figure skating cater to body types that are small and light yet fit and muscular, said Luke Corey, a sports medicine dietitian at the Mayo Clinic.

Four minutes of intense exertion is extremely difficult for even the best athletes in the world, so it's no surprise that skaters may go to extremes if they think it can help their performance.

"We're not supposed to see pain and vulnerability and all that, so it's hard to understand," Corey said. "We want bigger, better but at what cost?"

Valieva's case shows that the youngest skaters may be especially vulnerable to such pressures from adults pushing a win-at-all-costs approach, Cain-Gribble said. Raising the minimum age would help.

"You need to be at an age where you're able to make decisions and think on your own and be accountable and be able to know what is right and what is wrong," she said, "and not just be relying on those people that are in charge of you."

Canadian police appear to end protesters' siege of Ottawa

By ROB GILLIES and ROBERT BUMSTED Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Hundreds of police in riot gear swept through Canada's capital Saturday, re-taking control of the streets around the Parliament buildings and appearing to end the siege of Ottawa after three weeks of protests.

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Protesters, angry over the country's COVID-19 restrictions and with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, retreated from the largest police operation in the country's history, with police arresting or driving out demonstrators and towing away their trucks.

In Ottawa, Interim Police Chief Steve Bell said that some smaller protests continued but "this unlawful occupation is over. We will continue with our mission until it is complete."

While some protesters vowed to stay on Ottawa's streets, one organizer told reporters they had "decided to peacefully withdraw."

"We will simply regroup as a grassroots movement," Tom Marazzo said at a press conference.

Police had been brought in from across the country to help in the clearance operation, Bell said, adding that 170 people were arrested Friday and Saturday and multiple investigations had been launched because of weapons seizures.

"We're not going anywhere until you have your streets back," he said at a press conference, vowing to go after protesters who don't disperse with "financial sanctions and criminal charges."

By early Saturday afternoon, protesters were gone from the street in front of Parliament Hill, the collection of government offices that includes the Parliament buildings, which had the heart of the protests. It had been occupied by protesters and their trucks since late last month, turning into a carnival on weekends.

"They are trying to push us all away," said one protester, Jeremy Glass of Shelburne, Ontario, as authorities forced the crowds to move further from the Parliament buildings. "The main camp is seized now. We're no longer in possession of it."

Police said protesters remained "aggressive and assaultive" and that pepper spray had been used to protect officers. Authorities also said children had been brought right to the police lines, saying it was "putting the children at risk."

Canadian authorities also announced they had used emergency powers to seize 76 bank accounts connected to protesters, totaling roughly \$3.2 million (\$2.5 million U.S.).

On Saturday, they also closed a bridge into the nation's capital from Quebec to prevent a renewed influx of protesters.

Around midday, protest organizers said they had ordered truckers to move away from Parliament Hill, decrying the police's actions as "abuses of power."

"To move the trucks will require time," organizers said in a statement. "We hope that (police) will show judicious restraint."

Earlier, Ottawa police addressed the protesters in a tweet: "We told you to leave. We gave you time to leave. We were slow and methodical, yet you were assaultive and aggressive with officers and the horses. Based on your behavior, we are responding by including helmets and batons for our safety."

Police said one protester launched a gas canister and was arrested as police advanced.

Earlier, Bell said most of the arrests were for mischief charges and that no protesters had been hurt. One officer had a minor injury, he said.

Those arrested included four protest leaders. One received bail while the others remained jailed.

Tow truck operators wearing neon-green ski masks, with their companies' decals taped over on their trucks to conceal their identities, arrived under police escort and started removing hundreds of big rigs, campers and other vehicles parked shoulder to shoulder near Parliament. Police smashed through the door of at least one camper Friday before hauling it away.

The crackdown on the self-styled Freedom Convoy began Friday morning, when hundreds of police, some in riot gear and some carrying automatic weapons, descended into the protest zone and began leading demonstrators away in handcuffs through the snowy streets as holdout truckers blared their horns.

The capital and its paralyzed streets represented the movement's last major stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that shut down border crossings into the U.S. and created one of the most serious tests yet for Trudeau. They also shook Canada's reputation for civility, with some blaming America's influence.

The Freedom Convoy demonstrations initially focused on Canada's vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broad attack on COVID-19 precautions and Trudeau's government.

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Ottawa residents complained of being harassed and intimidated by the truckers and obtained a court injunction to stop their incessant honking.

Trudeau portrayed the protesters as members of a "fringe" element. Canadians have largely embraced the country's COVID-19 restrictions, with the vast majority vaccinated, including an estimated 90% of the nation's truckers. Some of the vaccine and mask mandates imposed by the provinces are already falling away rapidly.

The biggest border blockade, at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, disrupted the flow of auto parts between the two countries and forced the industry to curtail production. Authorities lifted the siege last weekend after arresting dozens of protesters.

But even as things were growing calmer in Ottawa, the Canadian border agency warned that operations at a key truck crossing from western Canada into the United States had been slowed by protesters, advising travelers to find a different route. The crossing near the town of Surrey remained open, officials said, but further details were not available.

The protests have been cheered on and received donations from conservatives in the U.S.

Flores hired to Steelers staff; lawsuit against NFL proceeds

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Brian Flores is back in the NFL.

The Pittsburgh Steelers hired the former Miami Dolphins coach on Saturday to serve as a senior defensive assistant. Flores will specialize in working with Pittsburgh's linebackers, a group that includes NFL Defensive Player of the Year T.J. Watt.

The hiring comes less than three weeks after Flores, who is Black, sued the NFL and three teams over alleged racist hiring practices following his dismissal by Miami. Flores led the Dolphins to consecutive winning seasons before he was fired in January.

Though he has returned to coaching in the league, Flores will not abandon the lawsuit.

"While coach Flores is now focused on his new position, he will continue with his race discrimination class action so that real change can be made in the NFL," attorneys Douglas Wigdor and John Elefterakis said in a statement Saturday.

Flores joins a restructured defensive staff in Pittsburgh after longtime coordinator Keith Butler retired. Teryl Austin was promoted to take Butler's place earlier this month.

"I am excited about Brian Flores joining our coaching staff given his history of developing and teaching defensive players during his time in the NFL," Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said in a statement. "Brian's resume speaks for itself, and I look forward to him adding his expertise to help our team."

Tomlin is the NFL's longest-tenured Black head coach and one of three Black men to lead teams last season. The other two, Flores and Houston's David Culley, were fired. Houston subsequently hired Lovie Smith, who is Black, and Miami hired Mike McDaniels, who is biracial.

"The Steelers organization is FIRST CLASS," veteran Pittsburgh cornerback Joe Haden, who will become a free agent in March, tweeted after Flores' hiring was announced.

Flores' lawsuit alleges the league has discriminated against him and other Black coaches for racial reasons, denying them positions as head coaches, offensive and defensive coordinators and quarterbacks coaches, as well as general managers. Flores also claims Miami offered him \$100,000 per loss during his first season with the team in 2019 in an effort to receive a top draft pick.

The NFL has maintained the lawsuit is "without merit," although commissioner Roger Goodell said before the Super Bowl that "all of the allegations, whether they were based on racism or discrimination or the integrity of our game, all of those to me were very disturbing."

The lawsuit has also sparked the league to review the "Rooney Rule," a policy named after former Steelers owner Dan Rooney. Introduced in 2003, the policy has expanded to require NFL teams to interview multiple minority candidates for high-profile job vacancies, including head coach and general manager.

Current Steelers president Art Rooney II acknowledged recently the league has "not seen progress in the ranks of head coaches," although he pointed out strides in the hiring of women and minorities in vari-

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ous leadership roles.

Flores' lawsuit specifically names Austin as an example of a coach affected by racism in hiring. Austin, who is Black, told The Associated Press he is 0 for 11 when interviewing for head coaching jobs during his nearly 20 years in the NFL.

Now Flores will work under Austin as they try to help Pittsburgh's defense bounce back from a subpar 2022. The Steelers made the playoffs at 9-7-1 but finished 20th in points allowed and 24th in yards allowed, the unit's worst season in more than 30 years.

Flores won four Super Bowl rings as part of the New England Patriots' coaching staff from 2004-18. He spent his final season with New England as the linebackers coach and defensive play-caller as the Patriots shut down the Los Angeles Rams to win the franchise's sixth Super Bowl.

Prosecutor ran on changing Austin before police indictments

By ACACIA CORONADO, PAUL J. WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Jose Garza ran for district attorney in Austin on promises to hold police accountable in Texas' capital city. He got off to a fast start, charging at least seven officers during his first year on the job, including one charged with murder twice.

But no cases have reached deeper into the police department than the indictments Thursday of 19 officers on felony charges over tactics used during the 2020 racial injustice protests.

"Nineteen is, whew, I don't know any place else that's done that," said Margaret Moore, Garza's predecessor as the district attorney of Travis County.

The indictments widened the rift in the the booming city between Austin police and Garza, a Democrat whose 2020 campaign was backed by liberal allies including U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and promised crack-downs on misconduct by law enforcement.

By late Friday, all of the newly charged officers had been placed on administrative leave, said Saul Gray, a department spokesman.

Garza said the indictments were not politically driven and that "our community is safer when our community trusts law enforcement." Community activists who have long criticized the city's handling of the protests, which included officers firing beanbag rounds into the crowd, called the indictments overdue and said Garza deserves credit.

But even allies on Friday were frustrated by the lack of details, which Garza has said he is unable to release yet. Garza announced during a news conference Thursday that grand jury indictments were expected, but he gave no specifics. And more than 24 hours later, the officers' names and the reasons they were charged hadn't been publicly released.

Texas law requires that an indictment remain secret until an officer has been arrested. Criminal justice experts also expressed skepticism about the large number of indictments in one case and whether it would result in convictions.

Officer Justin Berry, a Republican candidate for a state House seat, said in a statement Saturday that he is one of those charged. He blasted Garza for trying to influence voters with what he called a witch-hunt.

"This case is beyond preposterous," Berry said. "He demonizes police, he puts no value on keeping people safe, and he harms our communities."

Berry said an internal police investigation into the incident cleared all the officers and that there is no question they will be acquitted.

Mayor Steve Adler said there had been pressure on the city to change police culture and that he supports Garza. But he said he wants details about the indictments to be made public soon as possible.

"It is a large number and I'm anxious for the public and for everyone to learn what it is that gave rise to that," he said.

Garza's office declined an interview request Friday and said it was still unable to release details.

Several people with knowledge of the indictments told The Associated Press that the charges include aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were

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not authorized to discuss the case publicly.

Aggravated assault charges, when committed by a public servant, could carry a sentence of up to life in prison.

Police Chief Joseph Chacon expressed disappointment over the charges and the head of the police union, Ken Casaday, blasted Garza, saying he was trying "to fulfill a campaign promise" to indict officers. Garza brushed off that criticism and emphasized that his office also prosecuted 33 non-officers who were involved in the 2020 protests.

Garza easily defeated Moore, a one-term incumbent, in a 2020 victory that he credited to outrage over the justice system in Texas' most liberal city. He had been the head of a labor group, the Workers Defense Project, and hadn't previously held public office.

Garza was among a handful of progressive prosecutors who won office that year, when the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others sparked a national outcry over law enforcement's treatment of Black people.

"There's literally been no accountability for the officers that seriously injured dozens of people during the protest," said Chris Harris, policy director of the Austin Justice Coalition. "So this is something that needed to happen. And so we're glad that Jose Garza is here and did something."

It is by far the most indictments of officers from a single U.S. police department over tactics law enforcement used during the 2020 protests. Two Dallas officers face charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and official oppression, and a New York police officer was charged with assault after shoving a woman to the ground. But despite widespread claims of heavy-handed or even illegal police tactics, few cities pursued charges.

Former U.S. attorney Joe Brown, who also spent two decades as a Republican district attorney in North Texas, said convicting a police officer is always difficult and that Texas juries tend to give officers the benefit of the doubt.

"This is really unprecedented, to my knowledge," Brown said. "To allege that there was criminal intent by that many police officers, who were operating in a chaotic and unpredictable environment and assumedly pursuant to policy and how they had been trained, is really remarkable."

Chacon stressed that his command staff had prepared officers to face hundreds of people when thousands actually showed up to protests that he said were at times "riotous and violent." The 1,640-officer Austin department serves a population of 960,000 people.

David Crump, a professor at the University of Houston Law Center and former prosecutor, also said it is rare to see more than one officer indicted together.

While stressing that the evidence needs to be seen, Crump drew a parallel between the charges in Austin and those brought against Baltimore police in the 2015 death of Freddie Gray. In that case, a recently elected Maryland prosecutor facing intense public pressure charged six officers. After three trials, she won zero convictions.

"It just looks like an iffy sort of indictment that could go either way," Crump said.

EU chief: Russia could be cut off from markets, tech goods

By KARL RITTER and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

MUNICH (AP) — Moscow would have its access to financial markets and high-tech goods limited under Western sanctions being prepared in case Russia attacks Ukraine, a top European Union official said Saturday.

The comments from Ursula von der Leyen, head of the EU's Executive Commission, came as tensions over Russia's intentions toward Ukraine intensified. U.S. President Joe Biden said Friday he was convinced that Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to invade the neighboring country.

"The Kremlin's dangerous thinking, which comes straight out of a dark past, may cost Russia a prosperous future," von der Leyen said during the annual Munich Security Conference, where U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris also spoke.

Von der Leyen said the EU's executive arm has developed a "robust and comprehensive package" of

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possible financial sanctions against Russia with the U.S., U.K. and Canada.

"In case that Russia strikes, we will limit the access to financial markets for the Russian economy and (impose) export controls that will stop the possibility for Russia to modernize and diversify its economy," she added. "And we have a lot of high-tech goods where we have a global dominance, and that are absolutely necessary for Russia and cannot be replaced easily."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the U.K. was coordinating its sanctions closely with the EU.

"If Russia invades its neighbor, we will sanction Russian individuals and companies of strategic importance to the Russian state and we will make it impossible for them to raise finance on the London capital markets," he said in Munich. Johnson added that authorities would look for "the ultimate beneficiaries" of Russian-owned companies and entities.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that, during a meeting Tuesday with Putin, he "made clear that any further violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine will have high costs for Russia, politically, economically and geo-strategically."

Western leaders so far have not specified what precise Russian action would trigger sanctions. A French official who wasn't authorized to be publicly named and spoke on condition of anonymity after Biden conferred with several counterparts on Friday said they were talking about an invasion of territory currently under the control of the government in Kyiv.

"It is in the event of an invasion of this territory that ... the massive sanctions that we are talking about would be triggered," the official said.

Parts of eastern Ukraine are under the control of pro-Russia separatists who have been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014, the year Russia that annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, asked what Russian actions would trigger sanctions, didn't offer any details after a meeting in Munich with her counterparts from the Group of Seven industrial powers and Ukraine.

"A breach of Ukraine's integrity and sovereignty is a breach of Ukraine's integrity and sovereignty," Baerbock said. "You can't say that one geographical part is a bit more Ukraine and another is a bit less Ukraine."

She said Western officials have made clear that an actual invasion isn't the only possible scenario but "are prepared for every situation." Using a chess analogy, the German minister said: "If you present your next five moves in public, you won't be particularly successful."

In Munich with other members of the U.S. Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said sanctions might include the SWIFT banking system, which could cut Russia off from most international financial transactions.

"That's still a matter of negotiation," Pelosi said.

Kicking Russia out of SWIFT would also hurt other economies, including those of the U.S. and key ally Germany.

Asked whether Congress, which is in recess next week, would come back early if Russia invades Ukraine, Pelosi said "the president has the authority to implement those sanctions without the Congress."

Regardless of what actions Russia takes, Pelosi said there's a price to pay for what Putin has done already. "You can't bully the world and take a walk and you're off the hook," she said.

Actor Lindsey Pearlman found dead after going missing in LA

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Actor Lindsey Erin Pearlman, who had roles in "General Hospital," "American Housewife" and other shows, was found dead days after she was reported missing in Los Angeles, authorities said.

Investigators had sought the public's help in finding Pearlman, 43, who was last seen around noon last Sunday, ABC 7 reported.

Her body was found Friday morning when officers responded to a call for a death investigation in a residential neighborhood of Hollywood, the Los Angeles Police Department said.

The LA County coroner's office later determined the deceased individual was Pearlman, according to the news station.

The cause of death and the circumstances of her disappearance are under investigation.

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Pearlman had roles on the TV version of "The Purge" and "Chicago Justice," according to a biography on her personal website. She also had extensive experience in theater in Chicago, her hometown.

Last Afghan refugees leave NJ base after chaotic evacuation

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last of thousands of Afghan refugees who awaited resettlement at eight U.S. military installations departed Saturday from a base in New Jersey, completing a journey that started with the chaotic evacuation from Kabul in August.

With assistance from refugee resettlement organizations, Afghans evacuated after their country fell to the Taliban have been gradually leaving the military bases in recent months and starting new lives in communities throughout the United States.

The U.S. admitted 76,000 Afghans as part of Operation Allies Welcome, the largest resettlement of refugees in the country in decades.

"It's a really important milestone in Operation Allies Welcome but I want to stress that this mission isn't over," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of nine national resettlement organizations that were part of the effort.

Afghans still in their country but facing danger under Taliban rule as well as those who have made it to the United States will still need assistance, Vignarajah said.

"Successful resettlement and integration won't happen in just a matter of days or weeks," she said. "Our new Afghan neighbors are going to need our support and friendship for months and years to come because the challenges they face won't disappear overnight."

The U.S. plans to admit thousands of Afghan refugees over the next year but they will arrive in smaller groups and will be housed in a facility at a location yet to be determined, the Department of Homeland Security said.

Housing facilities for refugees at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in central New Jersey will remain open in the interim, the agency said. The base held the largest number of Afghans, reaching a peak of 14,500. The next largest was at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, where the last group departed this past week.

Afghans underwent immigration processing and health screening while they waited at the bases, often for months, until the strained refugee organizations could place them in communities. The government set up schools for the children who made up about 40 percent of the refugees at the New Jersey base.

Resettlement organizations and Homeland Security, the lead federal agency in the effort, had set a goal of having everyone off the bases by Feb. 15. It was a challenge because of the scarcity of affordable housing, cutbacks to refugee programs under President Donald Trump and the sheer number of refugees.

Most of the refugees have settled in established Afghan communities in northern Virginia and the surrounding Washington area, as well as Northern California and Texas.

States where between 1,000 and 3,000 have settled include Arizona, New York, Florida, Georgia, Colorado, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, according to State Department data obtained by The Associated Press.

DHS has previously said about 40 percent of the Afghans will qualify for the special immigrant visa for people who worked as military interpreters or for the U.S. government in some other capacity during America's longest war.

Most of the rest, however, do not yet have permanent legal residency in the U.S. because they did not come under a refugee program but were admitted under a type of emergency federal authorization known as humanitarian parole.

Advocates for the refugees, including a number of prominent veterans groups, are pressing Congress to provide permanent residency with an "Afghan adjustment act," similar to what has been done in the past for Cubans and Iraqis.

Modeling agent close to Epstein found dead in French jail

By ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

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PARIS (AP) — A modeling agent who was close to disgraced U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein was found dead Saturday in his French jail cell, where he was being held in an investigation into the rape and sex trafficking of minors, according to the Paris prosecutor's office.

Paris police are investigating Jean-Luc Brunel's death at the historic La Sante prison in Paris, the prosecutor's office said.

Victims of his alleged abuse described shock and dismay that the 75-year-old, a well-known model scout in the 1980s and 1990s who ran different agencies in Paris and New York, will never face trial. They called his death as a double blow after Epstein killed himself in 2019 in a Manhattan jail while awaiting sex-trafficking charges.

Brunel's lawyers suggested Saturday that he, too, killed himself. In a statement, they described his "distress" at his incarceration and his repeated requests for a provisional release from the prison.

"Jean-Luc Brunel never stopped declaring his innocence," they said. "His decision was not guided by guilt, but by a deep sentiment of injustice."

The lawyers would not further comment on what happened, and it was unclear whether the jail had suicide prevention measures in place.

Brunel was detained at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport in 2020 as part of a broad French probe unleashed by the U.S. sex-trafficking charges against Epstein. A frequent companion of Epstein, Brunel was considered central to the French investigation into alleged sexual exploitation of women and girls by the U.S. financier and his circle. Epstein traveled often to France and had apartments in Paris.

One of Epstein's main accusers, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, has alleged that Brunel procured women, some of them minors, for sex with Epstein and other wealthy people, luring them with promises of modeling work.

Multiple women who identified themselves as victims have spoken to police since the French probe began in 2019, and at times expressed frustration with the slow pace of the investigation.

One of them, Thysia Huisman, said Saturday that the news of Brunel's death sent her into "shock."

"It makes me angry, because I've been fighting for years," Huisman, a Dutch former model who told police she was drugged and raped by Brunel as a teen, told The Associated Press. "For me, the end of this was to be in court. And now that whole ending — which would help form closure — is taken away from me."

A lawyer representing Huisman and other victims, Anne-Claire Le Jeune, said other women involved in the case feel the same.

"Great disappointment, great frustration that (the victims) won't get justice," she told The AP.

She expressed doubt that the investigation would lead to a trial, because Brunel was so central to the case. She also voiced concerns that Brunel's death means his accusers won't get any official recognition of their status as victims.

"To rebuild yourself (after abuse), that is one of the essential steps," Huisman said.

She expressed hope that Brunel's death won't discourage women from continuing to speak out about abuse. The investigation, along with a growing reckoning about sexual misconduct in France, has "freed up women to talk about it," she said. "It's a difficult step that requires a lot of courage and strength."

Brunel was named in U.S. court filings, too. The spokesperson for the prosecutors who charged Epstein in New York declined comment on Brunel's death.

For Giuffre and other victims, the news of Brunel's death was "devastating," according a statement from her lawyer, Sigrid McCawley.

Giuffre herself tweeted: "The suicide of Jean-Luc Brunel, who abused me and countless girls and young women, ends another chapter. I'm disappointed that I wasn't able to face him in a final trial to hold him accountable, but gratified that I was able to testify in person last year to keep him in prison."

McCawley said Brunel's death did not end the search for justice.

"For the women who have stood up and called for accountability from law enforcement around the world, it is not how these men died, but how they lived, and the damage they caused to so many. The fight to seek truth and justice goes on," McCawley said.

Britain's Prince Andrew recently agreed to settle a case in which Giuffre accused him of sexual abuse



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when she was 17. Guiffre says she was supplied to Andrew by Epstein, charges that Andrew denies. The settlement, in which Andrew agreed to make a substantial donation to Giuffre's charity, avoids a trial.

Western Europe cleans up after storm leaves at least 12 dead

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Crews cleared fallen trees and worked to restore power to about 400,000 people in Britain as Western Europe cleaned up Saturday after one of the most damaging storms in years.

At least 12 people were killed, many by falling trees, in Ireland, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Named Storm Eunice by the British and Irish weather services, and Storm Zeynep in Germany, Friday's storm was the second to hit the region in a week.

Winds toppled the spire of a church in Wells, southwest England, ripped off parts of the domed roof of London's O2 Arena and left a trail of felled trees and damaged buildings across several countries.

A gust of 122 miles an hour (196 kilometers an hour) was provisionally recorded Friday on the Isle of Wight. If confirmed, it would be the highest ever in England. Hurricane-force winds begin at 74 mph.

The Met Office weather service said more strong winds would hit the southern coasts of England and Wales on Saturday, with the potential for further damage, while snow and ice could cause disruption further north.

The U.K.'s National Rail association said "routes across most of Great Britain" remained affected by the weather on Saturday morning, with disruptions to continue throughout the day.

Transport in Germany also remained severely disrupted, with railway operator Deutsche Bahn saying no long-distance trains would operate north of Dortmund, Hannover and Berlin until at least 6 p.m.

The storm left at least three people dead in Germany, including a man who fell as he was trying to repair a damaged roof and a driver whose car crashed into a tree that had fallen across a road.

In the northwestern city of Bremen, a 55-meter (180-foot) crane fell onto an unfinished office building.

A cleanup also was underway in the Netherlands, where four people died as Eunice tore across the country on Friday.

Train services, halted during the storm, remained disrupted with the company responsible for rail infrastructure saying that it was working hard to repair "extensive" damage to tracks and overhead power lines.

Engineers were expected to assess damage to the roof of a stadium in The Hague where professional soccer team ADO The Hague plays its home matches after parts of the structure were blown loose.

Across the country, teams were shifting fallen trees and beginning to repair roofs damaged by the storm.

Panel denies US skaters' appeal to get Olympic silver medals

By EDDIE PELLIS and GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writers

BEIJING (AP) — Arbitrators have rejected a last-ditch request by American figure skaters to have their silver medals awarded before the end of the Olympics.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said early Sunday in Beijing that it dismissed the appeal by the nine skaters, who finished second in the team event marred by a doping positive from 15-year-old Russian Kamila Valieva.

It did not elaborate on its decision, and said it would release details in upcoming days. The panel, with arbitrators from Denmark, France and China, met for 2 1/2 hours Saturday evening.

In an earlier decision, CAS had allowed Valieva to compete in the women's event after her doping positive went public following the Russians' victory in the team event. The International Olympic Committee responded by saying that no medals would be awarded in any event in which Valieva finished in the top three.

Losing the case means the U.S. skaters will receive their medals months, maybe even years, from now, after Valieva's case winds its way through hearings and appeals. She led the Russians to a convincing victory in the team event. If that result is overturned, the U.S. would get gold medals.

The skaters had argued, without success, that they should at least receive the silvers before Sunday

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night's closing ceremony. In a letter sent to IOC President Thomas Bach that was obtained by The Associated Press, the skaters' attorney argued that the IOC's "own rules mandate that a victory ceremony to present medals to the athletes shall follow the conclusion of each sports event."

"We're disappointed in the decision. It's unfortunate that these deserving athletes will leave Beijing without their medals," said Ramsey Baker, executive director of US Figure Skating. "We are proud of the historic accomplishments of our team and we look forward to joining them, their families and friends, and the entire United States in celebrating their achievements from these Olympic Games."

A few hours before the decision, the U.S. team of Alexa Knierim and Brandon Frazier finished sixth in the pairs event. They are among the skaters who would receive the medals from the team event. After they skated Saturday, Frazier said "they should have a ceremony for the clean athletes that delivered. They deserve that."

In the letter to Bach, attorney Paul Greene wrote "a dignified medal ceremony from our clients' vantage point is one in the Medals Plaza as originally planned and afforded to all other medalists."

Instead, the skaters could end up with Olympic torches. In a meeting with the skaters earlier this week, Bach offered the torches as keepsakes while the doping case plays out. He later said at a news conference that they were not meant to replace the medals.

Valieva might never get anything. She finished fourth in the women's event — crying as she left the ice, then criticized by her coach after a mistake-filled long program.

After her test became public, Russia's anti-doping agency at first put her on provisional suspension, then lifted the suspension. That triggered the IOC and World Anti-Doping Agency to lead an appeal to CAS, which acted swiftly and said Valieva could still compete. This time, CAS ruled in favor of the IOC.

Neither decision, however, resolves the larger question about the result from the team competition.

Because she is 15, Valieva is considered a "protected person" under anti-doping rules, and is not expected to receive a harsh penalty. Her coaches and doctors are being investigated by Russian and world anti-doping authorities.

## Wright family, activists see injustice in Potter's sentence

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The issue of race was barely brought up during the trial of Kim Potter, a former suburban Minneapolis police officer who was convicted of manslaughter for killing Daunte Wright after she said she confused her handgun for her Taser.

But Wright's family members and many activists say the killing of the 20-year-old Black motorist has always been about race, from the moment officers decided to pull him over, to the moment a judge gave Potter a two-year sentence, which family members decried as giving more consideration to the white defendant than the Black victim.

"What we see today is the legal system in America in Black and white," Ben Crump, an attorney for Wright's family, said after Friday's sentencing.

Wright was killed on April 11 after Brooklyn Center officers pulled him over for having expired license tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror, violations that civil rights activists say are used as a pretext to stop Black motorists.

Officers discovered Wright had a warrant for a weapons possession charge and they tried to arrest him but he pulled away. Video shows Potter, who is white, shouted several times that she would use her Taser on Wright, but she had her gun in her hand and fired once into his chest.

Many felt the traffic stop was the result of racial profiling and shouldn't have happened. The shooting, which occurred as Derek Chauvin was on trial in Minneapolis on murder charges in George Floyd's killing, sparked several days of demonstrations outside the Brooklyn Center police station marked by tear gas and clashes between protesters and police.

Family members and activists applauded in December when a mostly white jury convicted Potter of both first- and second-degree manslaughter. This week, they felt as if justice was yanked away when Judge

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Regina Chu gave Potter two years, well below the presumptive sentence of just over seven years she had faced under state guidelines.

"The judge overstepped her bounds and undermined any legitimacy from the judicial process that happened in this case," said Nekima Levy Armstrong, a civil rights attorney and activist. She said the sentence "again underscores why many Black people have a distrust of the justice system at all levels."

Levy Armstrong said the sentence essentially rolled back the jury's decision to find Potter accountable and that Chu's demeanor and comments during the sentencing stoked distrust and showed how Black people are viewed in the justice system primarily as defendants rather than victims.

"The judge made Kimberly Potter look like the victim," she said.

Chu called it "one of the saddest cases" she's seen.

"On the one hand," the judge said, "a young man was killed and on the other, a respected 26-year veteran police officer made a tragic error by pulling her handgun instead of her Taser."

Chu said "the evidence is undisputed" that Potter didn't intend to use her firearm, which made the case less serious than other recent killings by police officers. She asked those who disagree to try to empathize with Potter, and appeared to choke up and wipe away a tear when she said Potter didn't mean to hurt anyone.

Ayesha Bell Hardaway, associate professor of law and co-director of the Social Justice Institute at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, said the level of kindness Chu showed Potter was remarkable.

"If it's not about race, certainly she made a point to make it clear she has a high regard for public service that police officers give in our society," Hardaway said. She said white people have long been held in higher regard in the judicial system and "we saw those realities playing out as the judge was delivering her sentence."

Hardaway also said the judge's words — and the fact that she got emotional as she was announcing the sentence — "from a professional standpoint is something you would not want to see."

Levy Armstrong said Chu showed a lack of empathy for the Wright family, especially when encouraging those listening to walk in Potter's shoes. And she said one of the main reasons Chu cited for going below the state guidelines — saying this case is not as serious as some other high-profile police killings because it was a mistake — was "disingenuous and irresponsible, not to mention insensitive."

Johnathon McClellan, president of the Minnesota Justice Coalition, attacked the sentence as unfair, especially compared to what he said were the "many Black, brown and poor people" sent to jail to be made examples of. He was especially rankled that Chu had pleaded for empathy by invoking a quote from Barack Obama "as if that will make you and others sleep better at night."

Rachel Moran, a law professor at the University of St. Thomas, said she can understand why the judge believes two years was appropriate; Potter is not at risk of reoffending, she will serve about 16 months of her sentence in prison and the shooting was deemed a mistake.

But Moran said the public is used to seeing high prison sentences and not used to a judge showing mercy.

"Where it becomes so painful is that that mercy is not frequently shown to many other people," Moran said. When you think about people who get more prison time for drug offenses, "it's really hard to swallow two years for someone who killed someone."

"I think the sentence could be right, and it still could feel horrifyingly unjust to people who are active in the community and have seen the pain and trauma of higher prison sentences" for offenses that have caused less harm, Moran said.

Family members and activists pointed to the case of Mohamed Noor, a Somali American who was a Minneapolis police officer when he killed a white woman, Justine Ruszczyk Damond, in 2017. Noor was sentenced to more prison time than Potter, on a lesser charge of second-degree manslaughter.

Moran said the sentences were decided by different judges who thought in different ways, and there can be justifications for both outcomes. But the conduct was similar, and the reality is the Black officer received a harsher sentence.

Delores Jones-Brown, who teaches at Howard University in Washington and at Randolph-Macon College

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in Ashland, Virginia, said the judge clearly accepted Potter's claim that shooting Wright was a mistake.

"There's something about being a 26-year veteran and shooting a young man in the chest with your firearm and claiming that you thought you were using your Taser that doesn't quite sit well with me," Jones-Brown said.

She said she's disturbed that the media accepted Potter's narrative as the accurate version of what happened "and clearly that narrative is the one that ruled the day in the sentencing."

Dems, GOP set inflation, COVID mandates as election themes

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats and Republicans each want to flash election-year signals that they are riding to the rescue of families struggling with rising costs and the 2-year-old coronavirus pandemic.

Not surprisingly, the parties differ over how to do that. And in comments and votes in the Senate last week, each side fleshed out themes it will use to stir up support in this fall's voting for control of Congress.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., talked about inflation, bashing President Joe Biden and Democrats for policies like curbing drilling on federal lands that he said were stifling domestic energy production and driving up gasoline prices. But he also raised culture war issues that have flared in the nation's schools, including mask mandates and social justice instruction that conservatives find objectionable.

Republicans "are standing up for science, for common sense and for the children's best interests," McConnell said. "The party of parents has your back," he added, a remark that conjured angry mothers and fathers at school board meetings that the GOP hopes to harness.

"Two years of needless school closures and unscientific forced child masking are two years too many," he said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats will focus on pushing "solutions that will lower costs and leave more money in people's pockets." Chiding Republicans, he said, "Complaining about the problem doesn't make inflation better, proposing solutions does."

Schumer said Democrats are considering legislation to reduce costs for child care, food, prescription drugs and semiconductors, the vital computer part now facing supply-chain shortages. "We're still going to move forward" even if GOP opposition would doom a proposal, Schumer said, suggesting that unsuccessful Senate votes would produce political value for Democrats.

The economy and pandemic could look different by the time ballots are cast in November. A threatened Russian invasion of Ukraine and its repercussions could upend things.

But for now, Schumer's party is clearly on the defensive.

They have controlled the White House and Congress as inflation has risen to 7.5% annually, the highest in four decades. Regular gasoline, a benchmark people can easily see and feel, cost an average \$3.53 per gallon nationally last week, up from \$2.58 a year ago, AAA said.

Even communities in Democratic-led states like New York and California are easing mask mandates as people increasingly bristle at those and other restrictions that have reshaped life with COVID-19.

In addition, Democrats' 50-50 Senate control, thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote, is in danger. Each party has at least four seats in play in November, but Biden's negative approval ratings further burden Democrats, who are facing the long history of midterm election losses by the party holding the White House.

Schumer acknowledged that Democrats are "not going to agree on everything" they want to pursue. Notably, he said Democrats have yet to unite behind a proposal to suspend the 18.4 cents per gallon federal gasoline tax through this year.

Sponsors said that bill would bring "much needed economic relief to families." Based on government estimates on typical driving and vehicles' gas mileage, an average driver would save around \$100 for the entire year.

McConnell mocked it as a "bold, creative plan" that would do little for voters while reducing federal money for road projects. He made clear he would oppose it, ensuring it will go nowhere.

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That proposal's sponsors include Democrats' four most endangered incumbents facing reelection: Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona, Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, Raphael Warnock of Georgia and Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada.

"It's a desperate cry for help," No. 2 Senate GOP leader John Thune of South Dakota said of Democrats' gas tax plan. He said it shows they "realize they're on the wrong side of the energy issue, the wrong side of the inflation issue."

Schumer said Democrats would pursue a bill setting a price cap of \$35 monthly for insulin, the diabetes drug that can cost hundreds of dollars higher. It will be offered by Warnock.

The insulin proposal has been part of the party's stalled package of environment and social safety net spending. That measure has gotten little traction with a public confused about its potential benefits to their lives. Democrats have spent less time lately talking publicly about it, though closed-door bargaining continues.

Schumer also set a late February vote on legislation explicitly inscribing abortion rights into law. Opposition from Republicans and perhaps some Democrats mean it is certain to fail. But the vote could help mobilize abortion-rights voters in a year when the Supreme Court could strike down the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that declared the procedure constitutionally protected.

Still, it's Republicans who are going further to train voters' attention on social issues.

McConnell brought up reliable GOP favorites such as accusing Democrats of being soft on crime and "pandering to woke mobs" while leaving blameless victims of violence at risk. But Republicans are also latching onto fresher, COVID-19 era concerns.

When the Senate gave final approval Thursday to a bill averting an imminent government shutdown, Republicans forced votes on proposals ending federal COVID-19 vaccine mandates and vaccine requirements for students imposed by school districts.

Both were narrowly defeated, with every Democrat opposing each amendment. Democrats noted that vaccines, masks and testing have been documented to save lives, with Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., comparing GOP opposition to those steps to "blaming the rescue crew for a shipwreck."

Still, the public and politicians of both parties are exhibiting growing impatience with pandemic restrictions. And as the omicron wave recedes nationally, Republicans warned that continued resistance to relaxing those curbs would hurt Democrats.

"Parents are frustrated by that," Thune of school masking mandates. "And I think Democrats are starting to hear that. So I think the politics of all these mandates is starting to change."

Unraveling the biology of a mysterious condition: stuttering

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Holly Nover grew up trying to hide her stutter.

"I was very self conscious," said the 40-year-old St. Johns, Florida mom, whose 10-year-old son Colton also has a speech impediment. "So I developed habits to switch my words so it wouldn't be noticed."

For centuries, people have feared being judged for stuttering, a condition often misunderstood as a psychological problem caused by things like bad parenting or emotional trauma. But research presented at a science conference on Saturday explores its biological underpinnings: genetics and brain differences.

"By understanding the biology, we're going to decrease the stigma. We're going to increase the acceptance," one of the speakers, Dr. Gerald Maguire, said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. He's a California psychiatrist who is involved in testing potential medications for stuttering based on the science.

Globally, 70 million people stutter, including President Joe Biden, who has spoken publicly about being mocked by classmates and a nun in Catholic school for his speech impediment. He said overcoming it was one of the hardest things he's ever done.

After a campaign event in 2020, his struggle came to the fore when he met a New Hampshire teen who also stuttered. Brayden Harrington said after his dad told him about Biden, he wanted to introduce himself and shake hands. They wound up talking for an hour.

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Living with a stutter hasn't been easy, Brayden said, recalling a particularly difficult moment years ago when he got caught on words reciting the Gettysburg address in class, then went home and cried.

"I want to carry on what Joe Biden said to me," he said. "That this does not define you and that you can be much more than you see yourself as."

## WHY DO PEOPLE STUTTER?

Stuttering has been documented as far back as ancient China, Greece and Rome. But no one really had any idea what caused it until modern genetic science and brain imaging began providing clues.

Researchers identified the first genes strongly linked to stuttering more than a decade ago. Imaging studies peered into the brains of adults and older children, and in the last few years, University of Delaware speech disorder researcher Ho Ming Chow started looking at 3- to 5-year-olds. That's around the age many kids begin stuttering, with about 80% outgrowing it.

Chow said the imaging shows slight brain differences in young children who keep stuttering, compared with those who recover and those who never stuttered. He discussed his research Saturday at the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference.

For example, Chow and his colleagues found genetic mutations related to stuttering are associated with structural abnormalities in the corpus callosum, a bundle of fibers that connects the two hemispheres of the brain and ensures they can communicate; and the thalamus, a relay station that sorts sensory information to other parts of the brain. Past research has also linked stuttering to the basal ganglia, brain structures involved in the coordination of movement.

"We know stuttering has a really strong genetic component," Chow said. Though several genes may be involved and the exact genetic causes may vary by child, "they probably affect the brain in a similar way."

Chow's colleague Evan Usler stutters, and he likened it to "yips," or involuntary wrist spasms, during golf. He said the latest evidence shows it's a disorder of the cognitive control over speech.

Still, many people incorrectly believe people stutter because they are nervous, shy or suffered childhood adversity – and if they just tried harder, they could stop.

"We have a long way to go" to change such beliefs, said University of Maryland researcher Nan Bernstein Ratner. "There's still a lot of mythology out there."

## MOVING AHEAD, WITH ACCEPTANCE

Speech therapy is the mainstay of stuttering treatment. But the medicines currently being tested could be approved for stuttering in the next few years, first for adults and later for kids, said Maguire, who has stuttered since childhood.

Studies have suggested that stuttering may be related to excess levels of a chemical messenger in the brain called dopamine, and some turn down dopamine activity or block its action in a particular way.

Nover, a speech pathologist active in the National Stuttering Association, said many people will surely be interested in trying stuttering medications – although not her. She is happy with her life as it is and has accepted her stuttering, she said. If Colton were struggling and wanted to try medication as a teen, however, she'd be open to the idea.

Brayden, now 14, wouldn't be.

Taking medicine is "just taking away a part of you...taking away part of your personality," he said.

Without his stutter, he said, he wouldn't have set his sights on being a speech and language pathologist when he grows up. He wouldn't have written a children's book to inspire others. And he wouldn't have overcome the challenges that made him brave.

## EXPLAINER: Why half of Guantanamo's prisoners could get out

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has been quietly laying the groundwork to release prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay detention center and at least move closer to being able to shut it down. A review board that includes military and intelligence officials has now determined more than half of the 39 men held indefinitely without charge at the U.S. base in Cuba can now be safely released to their

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homelands or sent to another country. Decisions about several of these prisoners, including some denied under previous reviews, have come in recent weeks as the administration faced criticism from human rights groups for not doing more to close Guantanamo, releasing only a single prisoner over the past year.

Where things stand:

IS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ABOUT TO EMPTY GUANTANAMO?

No. With the most recent decisions, there are now 20 prisoners deemed eligible for release or transfer and one due to soon complete a sentence after being convicted by military commission in a plea deal. Much still must happen, such as in some cases finding countries willing to accept prisoners and impose security controls on them. But some could start to leave in the coming weeks and months.

DOES THIS MEAN THE UNITED STATES IS CLOSER TO SHUTTERING GUANTANAMO?

In theory, yes. But even if the U.S. releases all 20, what to do with the rest? There are 10 still facing trial by military commission. They include five charged with planning and aiding the Sept. 11 attacks. The death penalty case has been bogged down in pretrial litigation for years and there still is no start date. One potential solution would be plea bargains to end all pending cases, but that leaves open the question of where they would serve out any sentences.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The U.S. opened the detention center under President George W. Bush in January 2002 after the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan. It was intended to hold and interrogate prisoners suspected of having links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. About 780 men have passed through Guantanamo, which hit a peak of about 680 in 2003. Bush's defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, famously referred to the men held there as "the worst of the worst," but many were low-level militants, some had no connection to terrorism at all and few would ever be charged with a crime.

As reports of torture and abuse emerged, the detention center became a lightning rod for international criticism from American allies and a propaganda bonanza for enemies. Bush released 532 prisoners but left it to his successor to figure out what to do with the rest.

President Barack Obama pledged to close Guantanamo upon taking office. But members of Congress resisted the idea of transferring prisoners to the United States, even to face trial in federal court. The Obama administration created the Periodic Review Board to evaluate prisoners and determine if they could be released without posing a threat to national security. Under Obama, 197 prisoners left Guantanamo.

Under President Donald Trump, a single prisoner was released as part of a plea bargain, bringing the total to 40. President Joe Biden has said little about Guantanamo, which has largely fallen out of the political spotlight. So far, just one prisoner has been released under his administration.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN RECENT WEEKS?

In January, human rights groups were marking the 20th anniversary of the opening of Guantanamo and bemoaning what they saw as a lack of progress on closure. Since then, there's been some behind-the-scenes activity with the board, which was never popular with detainee advocates but has been one of the few paths out of confinement. When Biden came into office, there were five cleared detainees; four were holdovers from the Obama administration and one was approved under Trump. Under Biden, 15 have been cleared so far, including more than half a dozen in recent weeks.

This is what the administration considers a "deliberate and thorough process focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and closing of the Guantanamo facility," according to said Pentagon deputy press secretary J. Todd Breasseale.

Among the factors they consider, Breasseale said, are the age and health of the detainees. They have included Mohammed al-Qahtani, a mentally ill Saudi who authorities said intended to be one of the 9/11 hijackers but was prevented from entering the U.S. by a suspicious Customs officer at the airport in Orlando, Florida. A Bush legal official concluded al-Qahtani had been tortured at Guantanamo and an effort to try him by military commission was scrapped.

Also cleared under Biden was Saifullah Paracha, a Pakistani with various medical ailments who, at 74, is the oldest prisoner at Guantanamo.

The review board for this first time has cleared one of the "high-value detainees," designated as such

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because they were held in the clandestine CIA prisons known as black sites.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION?

Some Republicans in Congress have expressed outrage at the al-Qahtani decision. Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, called it "an appalling capitulation to the far left." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is critical of the policy more broadly of seeking to close Guantanamo, which he recently defended as "a highly secure, humane and entirely legal place to detain terrorists." Under the law, Congress must be notified in advance of any pending transfers or releases but is largely powerless to stop it from occurring.

Among detainee advocates, there is a wait-and-see attitude. They welcome the board's decisions but want to see if the administration follows through with releases. Wells Dixon, an attorney for the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, is waiting to see what happens with his client, Majid Khan, the prisoner who has reached a plea bargain and has nearly completed his sentence. "It's a positive thing for these men to be cleared," Dixon said. "But it's not meaningful progress toward closure unless there are transfers."

Olympics Live: US skaters lose appeal to get silver medals  
BEIJING (AP) — The Latest on the Beijing Winter Olympics:

Arbitrators have rejected a last-ditch request by American figure skaters to have their silver medals awarded before the end of the Olympics.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said in Beijing that it dismissed the appeal by the nine skaters, who finished second in the team event that was marred by a doping positive by Russia's 15-year-old Kamila Valieva.

In an earlier decision, CAS had allowed Valieva to compete in the women's event after her doping positive went public. The International Olympic Committee responded by saying that no medals would be awarded in any event where she finished in the top three.

Slovakia has won its first Olympic hockey medal in the nation's history.

Slovakia defeated Sweden 4-0 to win the bronze medal in men's hockey at the Beijing Winter Games.

Juraj Slafkovsky scored two goals for Slovakia. Slafkovsky at 17 is the youngest player in the tournament and leads all scorers with seven goals.

Slovakia is coached by Canada-born Craig Ramsay. Ramsay played 14 NHL seasons and was an assistant in the league for two decades.

Finland plays the Russians for gold on Sunday.

Sweden defeated Switzerland 9-7 to win the bronze medal in women's curling.

It was the fifth straight Olympic medal for the Swedes. They won gold in 2018, 2010 and 2006 and silver in 2014. Switzerland has not medaled since finishing second at the Turin Games in 2006.

Sweden's bid for another gold ended with a loss to Britain in the semifinals. Britain faces Japan for the gold.

Laura Nolte and Mariama Jamanka added to Germany's record haul of Olympic sliding medals.

And U.S. bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor extended her medal record.

The German sliding domination of the Beijing Games continued Saturday night. Nolte drove to gold and Jamanka won the silver in the women's bobsled competition.

Germany is now up to eight gold medals in nine sliding events in Beijing. That's more than any nation has ever won in sliding at any Olympics.

Meyers Taylor, in possibly her last race, grabbed the bronze for the fifth medal of her Olympic career.

That's more than any Black athlete in Winter Olympic history. It's also the most by any women's bobsledder



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at the Olympics and two more than any other Olympic bobsledder, male or female, has won for the U.S.

China's Sui Wenjing and Han Cong captured the Olympic gold medal that eluded them by a razor-thin margin four years ago, this time winning the pairs figure skating program by nearly as narrow an edge at the Beijing Games.

The two-time world champions, buoyed by the support of a carefully selected crowd of Chinese supporters, scored a world-record 239.88 points to edge Russia's Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov by 63-hundredths of a point.

Sui and Han had to settle for silver in Pyeongchang by 43-hundredths of a point.

Tarasova and Morozov were joined on the podium by Russian teammates Anastasia Mishina and Aleskandr Galliamov, the reigning world champions, who scored 237.71 points to earn the bronze medal.

China gets its ninth gold medal at these Games, nearly double its previous Winter Games best of five.

The 30-kilometer women's cross country ski race set for Sunday at the Beijing Olympics will start two-and-a-half hours earlier than originally scheduled due to harsh weather conditions

Strong winds are in the forecast for a second day.

The men's 50-kilometer race on Saturday was shortened to 30 kilometers as temperatures dropped and winds blasted the ski trails.

The women's distance of 30K will remain the same. The race was supposed to start at 2:30 p.m. but will start at 11 a.m. instead.

Members of the U.S. men's hockey team were involved in a noisy late-night party at the Olympic Village that has prompted a conversation between the U.S Olympic and Paralympic Committee and USA Hockey.

The USOPC confirmed to The Associated Press that a noise complaint was reported. No property damage was involved, and no one was kicked out.

It was not at all like the 1998 Nagano Olympics when U.S. players from the NHL caused \$3,000 in damage by trashing apartments and throwing chairs and a fire extinguisher through windows to a courtyard below.

"We hold Team USA athletes to very high standards of personal conduct," the USOPC said in a statement sent to The AP. "We have spoken to USA Hockey leadership, affirmed those expectations and can confirm that athletes will remain in the village until their scheduled departures."

Sweden's Niklas Edin has claimed the only major title missing from a career in which he's established himself as the most decorated skip in curling history.

Four years after losing in the Pyeongchang final to American upstart John Shuster, Edin led Sweden to the gold medal on Saturday, beating Britain 5-4 in the first extra-end men's final in Olympic history.

With the medal podium already set up, and Canada standing by to collect the bronze it won Friday by ending the Americans' repeat hopes, Edin took advantage of the last-rock advantage in the first tiebreaker end and put his penultimate stone into the center of the target area.

When British skip Bruce Mouat failed to knock it out on a ricochet, the Swedes had clinched it. They paused — it's not polite to celebrate an opponent's miss — and then let out a yell.

Their alternate and coaching staff hurried down to the ice to join the celebration.

The organizers of the Beijing Olympics say no new positive COVID tests were reported in the Olympic bubble on Friday.

Since January 23, 265 people have tested positive on arrival at the airport and another 171 have tested positive in the Olympic bubble, for a total of 436 positive cases.

The bubble allows Olympics participants to skip quarantine when they arrive in China, but it means their movements have been severely restricted. Everyone is tested daily for the virus, and anyone who tests positive is quickly isolated to prevent the virus from spreading. Everyone is required to wear N95 face masks except athletes while they're competing.

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Of those who tested positive in the bubble, 68 were athletes or coaches and 103 were other people working at the Games. More than 1.7 million daily tests were administered to people in the bubble.

Irene Schouten of the Netherlands has won her third gold medal of the Beijing Olympics, outspeeding Canada's Ivanie Blondin to win the women's mass start.

In the final speedskating event of the Winter Games, Schouten established herself as the biggest star at the Ice Ribbon with a furious push to line to beat Blondin by 0.06 seconds.

Schouten let out a scream as she crossed the line, adding to her gold medals in the 3,000 and 5,000 meters. In a nifty bookend, she won the first and last speedskating events in Beijing.

Blondin settled for the silver, while the bronze went to Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida.

It was a frustrating final day at the oval for the U.S. team, which just missed a medal in both races. Mia Manganello Kilburg settled for fourth in the women's event to match the finish of the top American in the men's event, Joey Mantia, who was edged out for a medal in a photo finish.

The Netherlands again topped the speedskating medal table, finishing with six golds and 12 medals overall. The United States finished with three medals, their best showing since 2010.

Attorneys for the U.S. figure skaters who won silver in the team event have notified the International Olympic Committee that they have filed an appeal to have the medals awarded before the end of the Beijing Games, The Associated Press has learned.

The medal ceremony has been delayed because of the controversy surrounding Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva, who helped Russia win gold in the team event. She failed a pre-Olympics drug test, but the result wasn't revealed until after the team competition.

AP obtained a copy of a letter sent to IOC president Thomas Bach Saturday in which attorneys said they would ask the Court of Arbitration for Sport for a ruling before Sunday's closing ceremony.

Bart Swings of Belgium has captured the gold medal in the final men's speedskating event of the Beijing Olympics, the mass start.

Swings improved on the silver medal he won in the frenetic event at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games. South Korea grabbed the other medals, with Chung Jae Won taking the silver and defending Olympic champion Lee Seung Hoon settling for bronze this time.

Three-time world champion Joey Mantia of the United States just missed out on a medal. He posted the same time as Lee, but the replay showed the tip of the South Korean's skate crossed the line just ahead of Mantia's blade.

The women's mass start will close out speedskating at the Ice Ribbon.

Alexander Bolshunov has sprinted to his third Olympic gold medal, winning a 30-kilometer mass start cross-country ski race that was rescheduled and shortened because of strong wind and frigid temperatures.

The Russian was part of a five-man breakaway in the final kilometer. He pushed ahead on the final climb into the stadium, taking the title in 1 hour, 11 minutes, 32.7 seconds.

Russian teammate Ivan Yakimushkin crossed the line 5.5 seconds behind for silver, and Simen Hegstad Krueger of Norway took bronze, 7 seconds behind.

Bolshunov also won gold in the skiathlon and the relay at the Beijing Games. He took silver in the 15-kilometer classic ski race and bronze in the team sprint.

World Cup leader Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo fell off the back of the lead group about 33 minutes into the race and took his bib off and walked off the tracks with about 7.9 kilometers to go.

The International Olympic Committee member who oversaw Beijing Winter Games preparations since 2015 has been put back on its executive board.

Juan Antonio Samaranch, whose father of the same name was IOC president from 1980-2001, was voted into the only open vice president slot. There are four vice presidents. The younger Samaranch was previously a vice president from 2016 to 2020.

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It puts him into position for an expected run at the IOC presidency in 2025. Current IOC rules require Thomas Bach to stand aside after 12 years as president.

Samaranch replaces Yu Zaiqing of China, who had to step down after completing the maximum two consecutive four-year terms.

Samaranch's return to the 15-member board was approved by the full membership meeting in Beijing ahead of Sunday's closing ceremony. The voting was 72 for and four against. Nine members abstained.

Defending Olympic champion Nana Takagi has crashed out of the mass start semifinals, the second time the Japanese speedskater has fallen while leading a race in Beijing.

Takagi stumbled and her left hand touched the rinkside padding before she slid on her side into the outer padding.

Takagi lost her balance while leading the team pursuit and crashed in the last corner, which cost the Japanese women a gold medal.

Ivanie Blondin, who led Canada to a gold medal in team pursuit, won her semifinal. Francesca Lollobrigida of Italy, silver medalist in the 3,000, won the other semi.

Also advancing to the final was Claudia Pechstein of Germany. The nine-time Olympic medalist turns 50 on Tuesday.

Americans Mia Manganello Kilburg and Olympic rookie Giorgia Birkeland also moved on.

There were three falls in the first semi, including Marijke Groenewoud of the Netherlands. She went down in a corner with four laps to go, but got up and finished fifth to qualify for the final.

Irene Schouten of the Netherlands, winner of the 3,000, also made the 16-woman final.

Defending champion Lee Seung Hoon of South Korea has qualified for the final of men's mass start speedskating.

Lee won the event that made its debut four years ago in his home country.

Also moving on to the final are 2018 silver medalist Bart Swings of Belgium, three-time world champion Joey Mantia of the United States, and 2020 world champion Jorrit Bergsma of the Netherlands.

Sven Kramer of the Netherlands qualified for the last Olympic final of his career. The 35-year-old skater who is a nine-time medalist finished seventh in the semifinals.

Chinese organizers say a total of 97,000 spectators have attended medal events at the Beijing Olympics. That's less than two-thirds of the 150,000 predicted on the eve of the Olympics more than two weeks ago. The games close Sunday.

The number was revealed at an IOC meeting by the executive vice president of the local organizing committee, Zhang Jiandong.

Venues in Beijing and Zhangjiakou could have invited spectators to attend but fans were not allowed at Alpine skiing and sliding sports in Yanqing.

Plans to sell tickets to international visitors were scrapped last year because of the coronavirus pandemic and the block was extended to residents of China in January.

Spectators were to be invited from international communities living in mainland China, members of diplomatic missions and marketing partners.

The men's 50-kilometer cross-country ski race at the Olympics has been delayed and the length reduced to 30 kilometers because of the weather.

The International Ski Federation said the decision was made "in regards to the athletes safety to reduce the time of exposure of athletes in extreme conditions."

The wind has blasted the Zhangjiakou National Cross Country Center all morning, sending plumes of snow into the air.

The temperature is hovering around minus 18 degrees C (0 degrees F).

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The 50-kilometer race can take up to two hours to complete, leaving athletes exposed and susceptible to frostbite. The racers will ski a 7.1-kilometer course four times, instead of the originally planned six laps on an 8.3-kilometer course.

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics has been pushed back a day because of strong winds. The mixed team parallel event was rescheduled from Saturday to Sunday, the last day of the Winter Games. It will start at 9 a.m. Beijing time.

It was supposed to start Saturday morning and was delayed twice because of gusts of up to about 40 mph (65 kph) before it was scrapped for the day.

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics will not be held as planned because of strong winds. A decision has not yet been made about whether to reschedule the event.

The team event was supposed to be held Saturday, but wind gusts at up to about 40 mph (65 kph) led to the announcement of two one-hour delays. The Winter Games end Sunday.

Organizers eventually said the race would not be held Saturday.

A meeting was being held "to discuss the potential rescheduling of the event."

Nico Porteous of New Zealand overcame the swirling wind to win the Olympic ski halfpipe final on a day when many skiers couldn't land their best tricks due to the strong gusts.

Porteous scored a 93 in his opening run on a bitterly cold and breezy morning in the last event at the Genting Snow Park. His score held up in tough conditions where skiers struggled to link big air and spins.

Two-time Olympic champion David Wise took home the silver with his first-run score of 90.75. The 31-year-old Wise was the only winner the men's event had ever known. He took the title at its Olympic debut in 2014 and again in 2018. Alex Ferreira of the United States threw down a strong first run, twirling his right ski pole at the bottom in elation, to end up with the bronze.

The last competitor to go, Aaron Blunck, crashed into the wall of the halfpipe while trying to land a trick in the gusty conditions. He stayed down for a moment before sitting up.

Wind gusts of up to about 40 mph (65 kph) are pushing back the start of the last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics.

The start of the team event has been delayed twice Saturday for a total of two hours and now will not begin before noon local time.

The blue and red gate flags are whipping in the wind along the race course known as "Ice River" at the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing zone.

Nico Porteous of New Zealand grabbed the lead after the first run in the men's ski halfpipe final on a challenging day to throw tricks due to swirling wind.

Porteous scored a 93 thanks to back-to-back double cork 1620s. Two-time defending Olympic champion David Wise sits in second place with a score of 90.75 after the first of three runs. Many of the competitors struggled with wind gusts, including Brendan MacKay of Canada who appeared to be blown off line by the wind.

Top qualifier Aaron Blunck called the gusty conditions "gnarly." Although listed at 13 mph, the wind appears to be swirling in and through the halfpipe. The wind chill hovered around minus 26 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 degrees Celsius.)

The last Alpine skiing race of the Beijing Olympics is being delayed because of strong wind.

The start of the team event has been pushed back an hour to 11 a.m. local time on Saturday -- which is when it originally was scheduled to begin before a forecast of windy conditions prompted organizers to try to get going at 10 a.m.

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Gusts of about 25 mph (40 kph) are kicking up snow near the bottom of the race course known as "Ice River" at the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing zone.

The temperature is zero degrees Fahrenheit (minus 18 Celsius) and feels like minus 8 Fahrenheit (minus 22 Celsius).

Mikaela Shiffrin is on the roster for the United States, which faces Slovakia in the opening round. Other first-round matchups are Switzerland vs. China, Italy vs. Russia, Norway vs. Poland, France vs. Czech Republic, Germany vs. Sweden, and Slovenia vs. Canada.

Top-ranked Austria received a first-round bye because there are only 15 nations in the 16-spot bracket.

Sui, Han earn Olympic gold at last in pairs figure skating

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Sui Wenjing and Han Cong exploded from their seats in the kiss-and-cry area, and a small and carefully chosen crowd of Chinese fans in the stands did the same, the moment their scores were read in the pairs event at the Beijing Olympics.

Four years after a crushing disappointment at the Pyeongchang Games, when they lost the gold medal by the thinnest of margins, Sui and Han had flipped the script: They were the ones walking away as champions by a razor-thin margin.

Sui and Han scored a world-record 239.88 points with a flawless free skate set to a rendition of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," beating Russian rivals Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov by just 63 hundredths of a point.

"We went through a lot, from being not expected (to do well) at the very beginning," said Sui, who along with Han missed out on gold by 43 hundredths of a point in Pyeongchang. "So today, we have really put out our best on the rink."

The difference in gold may have come down to Sui and Han opening with a quad twist, a high-scoring element that made up for a sloppy triple salchow and kept them from losing their lead of 16 hundredths of a point after the short program.

"We just did what we did before. It wasn't particularly difficult. We just skated our program as we trained," Morozov said. "We didn't feel much stress. We feel like we skated as one, so it went pretty smooth for us."

Tarasova and Morozov, coached in part by the polarizing Eteri Tutberidze, finished with 239.25 points to claim the silver medal while teammates Anastasia Mishina and Aleksandr Galliamov, the reigning world champions, scored 237.71 to earn the bronze medal and cap a strong — and controversial — Winter Games for the Russians.

"When we skated the program and all the elements went well," Mishina said, "there was this familiar feeling that if we do everything — if we do well — we are going to win. Here, we understood that maybe it will not work this way, and we were just happy with the fact that we managed to do everything well."

The Russian team won two of the five figure skating gold medals and six medals in all, though the total could change in the future because the nation also dominated the Olympic news cycle with another doping scandal.

One of the gold medals currently belongs to Kamila Valieva and her teammates, who handily won the team event to start the Beijing program. But that medal was being withheld after a positive pre-Olympic drug test from Valieva, who finished fourth in the women's event, came to light during the first week of the Winter Games.

The International Olympic Committee has refused to award the medals, worried that a full doping investigation could result in their eventual redistribution. The U.S. team lost an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport early Sunday to overturn the IOC's decision and force a medal ceremony before Sunday's closing ceremony; the Americans took silver and Japan earned bronze in the event.

That meant the American pair of Alexa Knierim and Brandon Frazier, and Japanese rivals Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara, performed their free skates Saturday still unsure of when they would receive their team medals.

It didn't look as if they were too worried about it.

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Miura and Kihara were nearly flawless in their free skate to "Woman" by Shawn Phillips, leaping from ninth after their short program and briefly into first place. Knierim and Frazier made only one mistake, on their triple salchows, and a season-best 138.45 for their short program briefly sent them into the lead.

It wasn't enough for either team to land on the podium, but it was an uplifting way to finish the Olympics. "It's crazy. It's nuts," Frazier said. "It was a true dream come true — it was our true selves out there. We didn't let our nerves get the best of us. Made one technical error on the jump on my part. Everything else we did was solid."

Income-tax phaseout up for debate in long-poor Mississippi

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi is accustomed to being first in worsts: It's one of the poorest, unhealthiest states in the nation, with public schools that are chronically underfunded. Some Republican leaders say a good way to boost the state's fortunes would be to phase out its income tax.

"There is no downside to putting money back into the pockets of Mississippians," said Republican House Speaker Philip Gunn, one of the main sponsors of a tax cut bill advancing in the Legislature.

Opponents say erasing the income tax is a terrible idea because it would mean even less money for schools, health care, roads and other services, especially hurting poor and working-class residents. The Mississippi income tax accounts for 34% of state revenue. Wealthy people would see the biggest financial boost from eliminating the income tax, because they're the ones paying the most now.

Democratic state Sen. Hob Bryan said people don't choose where to live because of tax policy but because of family ties and quality of life. He said people live in high-tax New York, for example, because the city offers opportunities.

"The notion that if the people in Manhattan only found out that Mississippi did not have an income tax, they'd all ... get on a bus to Mississippi and move down here — it's just laughable on its face," Bryan said.

Mississippi's population has dwindled in the past decade, even as other Sun Belt states are bustling with new residents. Tax-cut proposals are a direct effort to compete with states that don't tax earnings, including Texas, Florida and Tennessee — places to which many young Mississippians are moving for fatter paychecks.

Married couple Les and Amanda Jordan live near the south Mississippi town of Summit. He's a retired public school administrator and she's a retired nurse practitioner. Both worked for the state. Amanda Jordan said tax rates could influence young people's decisions about where to live. The couple has a grandson in Texas, one of the states without an income tax.

Les Jordan said he's torn.

"On first hearing about it — oh, great, we'd have more money," he said. "On the other hand, we're such a poor state. How would it affect those who are less fortunate?"

A single person with no dependents in Mississippi currently pays no tax on the first \$12,300 of income, and because of tax cuts approved years ago the tax-free amount will increase to \$13,300 after this year. The state has a 4% tax on the next \$5,000 of income and a 5% tax on all income above that.

Nine states don't have an income tax and one more, New Hampshire, only taxes interest and dividends, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Opponents of repealing the Mississippi income tax point to Republican-led Kansas, which enacted big tax cuts in 2012 and 2013 but repealed many of them in 2017 after large and persistent budget shortfalls.

Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves is wholeheartedly behind the income-tax elimination.

"We can throw out the welcome mat for the dreamers and the visionaries," Reeves said. "We can have more money circulating in our economy. And it can lead to more wealth for all Mississippians."

Republicans control the Mississippi House and Senate by wide margins, but the income tax elimination is not guaranteed. A proposal died in 2021 because of Senate leaders' concerns that it would undermine funding for schools and other services.

"People expect us to educate our children. That's the future of Mississippi," said Republican Lt. Gov.

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Delbert Hosemann, who presides over the Senate, where he and other leaders are proposing a separate plan that would reduce the income tax but not eliminate it.

The House and Senate are both proposing a reduction in Mississippi's 7% sales tax on groceries. The House would increase the sales tax on most items other than groceries, from 7% to 8.5%, while the Senate would not change the rate.

Increasing the sales tax would have a disproportionately larger impact on people with modest incomes. The poorest residents would see no gain from eliminating the income tax because they are not paying it now.

According to the Mississippi Department of Revenue, people with incomes of at least \$100,000 a year make up 14% of those who pay state income tax, and their payments bring in 56% of the income tax revenue. The department says people with incomes below \$30,000 make up 49% of those who pay Mississippi income tax, and their payments bring in 5% of the income tax revenue.

Mississippi is burdened by a history of racism that still shows up in disparities between thriving and struggling school districts. Legislators consistently shortchange the state's school funding formula by hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

LaShauna Fortenberry, a former public school teacher, said eliminating the state income tax and increasing the sales tax are bad ideas.

Fortenberry, who is Black, said schools already have aging buildings and textbooks. She said a brother who is 18 years younger than her is using one of the very same textbooks she had. How does she know? Her signature appears inside it.

Fortenberry now works for an agency that provides in-home care for older people in Columbia, Mississippi. She said when she taught from 2005 to 2013, she routinely used her own money to buy classroom supplies "trying to make sure that the kids had everything that they needed to be able to learn." She said teachers still do that.

"We need more money, if anything, in the schools," Fortenberry said.

Grover Norquist is president of Americans For Tax Reform, a Washington-based group that labels many taxes as "socialist." He said states that reduce tax rates are enjoying economic growth.

"Pretty soon, nobody is going to be more than a hop, skip and a jump away from a no-income-tax state," Norquist told Mississippi lawmakers at a hearing. "The question for Mississippi and for all the other states is: Are you going to be an early adapter or are you going to be there afterward, catching up?"

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Feb. 20, the 51st day of 2022. There are 314 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth as he flew aboard Project Mercury's Friendship 7 spacecraft, which circled the globe three times in a flight lasting 4 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds before splashing down safely in the Atlantic Ocean 800 miles southeast of Bermuda.

On this date:

In 1792, President George Washington signed an act creating the United States Post Office Department.

In 1862, William Wallace Lincoln, the 11-year-old son of President Abraham Lincoln and first lady Mary Todd Lincoln, died at the White House, apparently of typhoid fever.

In 1905, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, upheld, 7-2, compulsory vaccination laws intended to protect the public's health.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an immigration act which excluded "idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, epileptics, insane persons" from being admitted to the United States.

In 1933, Congress proposed the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to repeal Prohibition.

In 1938, Anthony Eden resigned as British foreign secretary following Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's decision to negotiate with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.