

# Groton Daily Independent

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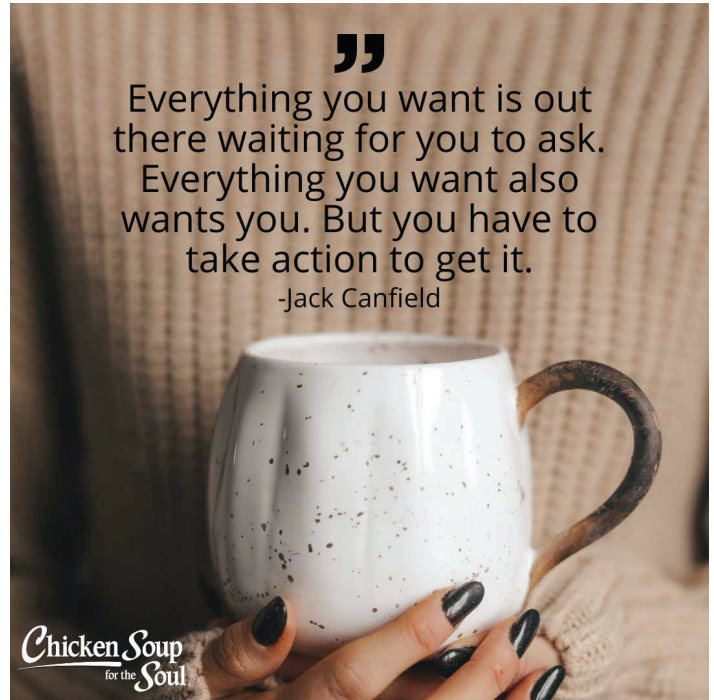
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## Death Notice: Allen McKiver

Allen "Al" McKiver, 79 of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton passed away November 11, 2022 at Sanford Aberdeen Medical Center. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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

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



## Groton Community Calendar

### Saturday, Nov. 12

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

Combined JH GBB game at Aberdeen Christian, 10 a.m.

### Sunday, Nov. 13

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship/Congregational Meeting, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

UMC: Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school and Christmas Program Practice, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Fall Dinner, 11:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

St. John's worship, 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Snow Queen Contest, 7 p.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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*We the People*

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



**By David Adler**

## Reversing Electoral College Vote?

**By David Adler**

Efforts by President Donald Trump and congressional republicans to subvert the clerk-like, ministerial and ceremonial counting of electoral votes on January 6, is a witches' brew for undermining the Constitution and American Democracy.

Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb), has justly characterized as a "dangerous ploy," the efforts of President Donald Trump and a handful of congressional republicans to overturn President-elect Joe Biden's electoral college victory. Trump's pitch to Vice-President Mike Pence to throw out the duly certified votes for President-elect Joe Biden, based on republicans' plans to object to counting those votes grounded on false and debunked claims of voter fraud, is "playing with fire." Sen. Sasse is correct: the plan is "designed to disenfranchise millions of Americans simply because they voted for someone in a different party." He is right to remind us that, "We ought to be better than that."

By constitutional design—Article II and the 12th Amendment--the certification proceedings on January 6 are designed to be ceremonial, with Vice-President Pence serving in his capacity as "president of the Senate," performing the perfunctory task of "counting" the results of the Electoral College. Both houses of Congress gather for a joint session. The vice president is instructed by the Constitution to open the ballot envelopes, hand them to "tellers," ask members of Congress if there are any objections to the results in any state, announce the votes on any objections and, finally, announce the result of the electoral college vote.

The vice-president's purely ministerial role, devoid of substantive powers to tamper with the results, was fortified by The Electoral Count Act of 1887, enacted to prevent a recurrence of the turmoil that surrounded the presidential election of 1876. This statute, part of the law of the land, denies to the vice president authority to ignore, discount or otherwise throw out the votes of a particular state. The statute directs the vice-president to open "all certificates and papers purporting to be" electoral votes.

This statute also imposes sharp constraints on congressional temptation to reverse the outcome of the Electoral College vote. An objection to the results of the vote in a particular state by a member of one of the chambers requires an objection to the same state by a member of the other chamber. Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) has stated that he will object to the results of the election in Pennsylvania. He will have the support of one or more republican members of the House, which will serve to trigger in each chamber of Congress a two-hour debate on whether the electors of Pennsylvania will be accepted by Congress.

There is virtually zero chance of that happening, simply because the law requires that rejection of the results in a particular state, in this instance, Pennsylvania, must win the support of a majority of members in both the House and the Senate. Control of the House by the Democratic Party precludes the chance that the electors from Pennsylvania will be rejected. It is also likely that the plan to overturn the election will be defeated by moderate members of the Senate who do not want their legacies sullied by participation in a scheme to deny the will of the voters.

President Trump and Rep. Louis Gohmert (R-Tx), assert that Vice-President Pence possesses the discretionary authority to ignore the Constitution and The Electoral Count Act by refusing to "accept" the electoral votes in swing states, which would deliver the presidential election to Trump. Neither Trump nor Gohmert cares much about the intentions of the founding fathers or the drafters of the governing statute, but Pence might. He might have the strength of character and the requisite integrity to obey the law of

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the land, as well as sufficient personal motive to protect his reputation.

President Trump's attempt to persuade Vice-President Pence to shirk his constitutional duty and to betray his oath of office is but the most recent of Trump's efforts to overturn the election results and cling to power. Some 50 state and federal courts have rejected Trump's lawsuits in rulings laced with sharp reminders that the president's lawyers failed to present evidence of voter fraud sufficient to alter the outcome of the 2020 election.

Trump's failure to win in the nation's courts was accompanied by failure to persuade state officials, including several republicans, to corrupt the Electoral College process. Now, the president, hoping to hold power and stay in office by illegitimate means, places his final hopes in the hands of the vice-president and congressional republicans whom, he prays, will abandon the Constitution and surrender the fundamental principle of American Democracy—the right of the people to choose their representatives.

This cynical, anti-democratic maneuver is not consistent with the electoral process, or the system, for which our forefathers fought the American Revolution. Nor is it in any way consistent with the hopes and dreams of Washington and Hamilton and Madison, and others who wrote the Constitution that exalts government of, by and for the people. Let us hope that January 6, 2021, is not a day that will live in infamy.

*David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota Newspaper Association and this newspaper.*

## GROTON'S EVENTS

**Nov. 11-13** Front Porch  
605 Christmas at the Barn  
10am-5pm each day

**Nov. 19** American  
Legion Post #39 Turkey  
Party 6:30pm

**Nov. 24** Community  
Thanksgiving at the  
Community Center  
11:30am-1pm

**Dec. 3** Holiday Tour of  
Homes & Silent Auction  
at Olive Grove Golf  
Course 4-7pm



**Dec. 10** Santa Claus  
Day at Professional  
Management Services  
9am-12pm



**Jan. 29, 2023** Groton  
Robotics Pancake Feed  
at the Community  
Center 10am-1pm



**Jan. 29, 2023** 85th Carnival of  
Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm

**GROTON**  
Chamber Of Commerce

120 N Main St., Groton, SD 57445

605-397-8422

GrotonChamber.com



## RSV infections spreading quickly and causing severe illness among children in South Dakota

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

An earlier-than-normal and more virulent strain of RSV infections in South Dakota is causing severe illness in young children, sparking concerns that pediatric intensive care units could become strained, especially if combined with a winter spike in influenza or COVID-19 cases.



**Kara Bruning**

RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) is a common, highly contagious infection for children under 2 years old that typically surges in January and February. Representatives of Avera and Sanford health systems say they started seeing increased RSV clinic visits and hospital admissions in late October and early November, with the most ill patients put on ventilators to assist breathing.

Nationally, nearly 20% of tests for RSV were positive for the week ending Oct. 29, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost twice as high as in early October. South Dakota's test positivity for the week ending Oct. 29 was listed as 12%, up from 5% at the start of October, the CDC said. That reported rate, however, "seems low" compared to what doctors are seeing in the state,

according to Kara Bruning, head of pediatrics at Avera McKennan in Sioux Falls.

"I can tell you clinically that it feels much higher than that," said Bruning. "Almost everyone that I've seen in the pediatric hospital right now has RSV. It's hitting hard this year. If influenza or COVID comes and becomes a higher percentage of admissions, we're going to have trouble in pediatrics."

Bruning said Avera's pediatric intensive care unit has been at or near capacity for several weeks and that staff is preparing to remain at those levels "for the near future." The pediatric ICU at Sanford is about 75% full, according to Sanford Children's Hospital vice president and medical officer Joe Segeleon, with the possibility of handling patient overflow in separate units if needed.

"In talking to our pediatric [specialists], they seem to think the virus is more virulent this year," said Sege-



**Nurses care for a patient in the Avera McKennan Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, where children with severe RSV infections are treated.** Photo: Courtesy of Avera Health

leon. "Pediatric hospitals every year experience a surge in RSV, but to their observations the kids are pretty sick this year."

RSV is spread through droplets released into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or by touching a contaminated surface; RSV can also be spread through direct contact with an infected person, according to the CDC.

An estimated 60,000-80,000 children under 5 years old are hospitalized nationally each year due to RSV infection, typically due to inflammation of the airways from mucus buildup or pneumonia-related infection of the lungs. Adults 65 and older and those with chronic heart or lung disease or weakened immune systems are also at risk of severe RSV infection.

The CDC recently issued an alert that "surveillance has shown an increase in RSV detections and RSV-associated emergency department visits and hospitalizations in multiple U.S. regions, with some regions nearing seasonal peak levels."

There is currently no vaccine for RSV, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Nov. 2 granted fast track designation to an intranasal RSV vaccine candidate developed by Codagenix, with a Phase 1 dose escalation study scheduled for early 2023.

The South Dakota Department of Health and state Epidemiologist Josh Clayton did not respond to multiple requests for information from News Watch regarding the state's response to rising RSV cases. Medical experts on the ground, meanwhile, are reacting with measured caution as they keep a close eye on the number of hospital admissions and ICU visits.

"Most cases of RSV are going to have a cough and runny nose and be fine," said Bruning. "A small percentage are going to be wheezing and require help such as nebulizers, and an even smaller percentage of them are going to be hospitalized. That being said, we are seeing very sick kids this year that are needing to be hospitalized and it's happening at an odd time and we're seeing high numbers of them. So that's where we are."

## 'He was really struggling'

Kim Stone noticed her 1-year-old son, Junior, coughing more than normal on the weekend of Oct. 8-9, but she wasn't overly concerned. When she woke him up for a nap that Monday, however, he seemed extra wheezy. Stone took him into a local clinic along with her 4-year-old daughter, Haven. Both children tested positive for RSV.

While Haven never developed more than a bad cough, Junior's symptoms grew worse. He was given steroids Oct. 11 when his breathing became more rapid, and by the next morning he was visibly short-winded, with a lot of retraction in his neck and rib cage.

"He was really struggling at that point," said Stone, 27, who lives in Madison and works at Little Explorers Childcare in Sioux Falls. She took him to the emergency room in Madison, where he was given an IV for dehydration and put on full oxygen because his levels were low.

"Thirty minutes after he was admitted to the Madison hospital, he had to be airlifted to Sanford Children's Hospital in Sioux Falls," Stone said. "He wasn't improving at all."

She made the drive with her husband, Josh, hearing the words "respiratory distress" and "viral pneumo-



**Kim Stone, a 27-year-old daycare instructor from Madison, S.D., is shown in separate images with her daughter Haven (left) and son Junior (right). Both children recently were infected with RSV.** Photo: Courtesy of Kim Stone

nia" in her head. "It was really scary," she said of the diagnoses she had heard from doctors, "but we knew he was in good hands."

Junior received full oxygen through a ventilator in Sioux Falls, plus an IV because he wouldn't eat or drink. By the third day, doctors had weaned him off the oxygen a bit, and he started playing with his toys on the floor and seeming more like himself. By the end of that day, he was released from the children's hospital and returned to Madison with his family.

Stone estimates that as many as five children (including Junior) from the Little Explorers Childcare facility where she works have been hospitalized this fall from RSV. Numerous others have tested positive and been kept home, a trend not uncommon during a community surge.

"Respiratory illnesses have a tendency to go through daycares," said Segeleon. "In children that are very young, less than four weeks of age, it may present as apnea, where they quit breathing. In kids a year old or younger, they can have a lower airway condition called bronchiolitis, which is inflammation and mucus plugging buildup in the very small airways. In older kids, it's frequently a cold, but if they have underlying conditions, it can be more serious."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be excluded from daycare or school if they have a temperature above 101 degrees or display signs and symptoms of illness such as sore throat, rash, vomiting or diarrhea. The association and CDC also stress good hand hygiene and urge parents to keep children up to date on recommended immunizations.

Stone said the staff at Little Explorers disinfects surfaces and toys throughout the day and tries to keep the children "out of each other's faces as much as possible." Any child with a temperature above 101 degrees is sent home for at least 24 hours.



**Joe Segeleon**

Junior is happy to be home, she said, but he needs to take two puffs of an inhaler twice a day to help with breathing, a routine that the 1-year-old hasn't responded to favorably.

"He doesn't like it much," Stone said. "But we're glad to have him back."

### **Immunity impacted by pandemic**

Last year, South Dakota experienced a summer spike in RSV, with cases peaking in July. Segeleon said most experts attributed that rarity to a disruption in the "cadence of infectious disease and viral exposures" due to societal changes made during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We went through a period where pediatric visits were dramatically decreased," said Segeleon, who specializes in pediatric critical care. "They decreased because schools were closed [in the spring of 2020] and we decreased the amount of socialization, including after-school activities and social programs."

Other COVID-19 precautions were also a factor in keeping overall infections low, he said.



**Pediatric nurse Abbie Wiesler prepares to care for a patient at the Avera McKennan Pediatric Intensive Care Unit in Sioux Falls.** Photo:

Courtesy of Avera Health

"We were also significantly more cognizant of things like hand hygiene and to some degree mask wearing. All those things reduced the infectious load and exposures in children and adults for a given period of time, and I don't know how long it will be until our cadence is back to normal."

While RSV test positivity rates were higher during the 2021 summer spike than this fall, Avera's Bruning said the surge "hit fast and was fairly mild and then it was gone." Health experts are exploring the possibility that pandemic-related disruptions may have impacted immune properties, making some children more susceptible to respiratory viruses and increasing the severity in some cases.

"We've had this whole cohort of young children who haven't had that usual constant exposure to viruses at day care or in preschool or out in the community," Vandana Madhavan, director of advanced pediatrics at Mass General Brigham in Boston, told NPR. "And so now they're getting exposed and it's hitting them really hard."

As for the current RSV wave, Bruning said it will depend how long it lasts and whether it remains highly virulent before health systems can assess the possibility of concurrent surges of RSV, flu and possibly COVID-19 and what that might mean for pediatric resources.

"I pray that it doesn't happen," she said.

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at SDNewsWatch.org.

## RSV -- WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Here is a brief overview of what parents and others should know about RSV, a virus infecting thousands of children across South Dakota and the U.S.

### **SYMPTOMS**

People infected with RSV usually show symptoms within 4 to 6 days after getting infected. Symptoms of RSV infection usually include

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

These symptoms usually appear in stages and not all at once. In very young infants with RSV, the only symptoms may be irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties.

### **PROVIDING CARE**

• Manage fever and pain with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (Never give aspirin to children.)

• Drink enough fluids. It is important for people with RSV infection to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).

• Talk to your healthcare provider before giving your child nonprescription cold medicines. Some medicines contain ingredients that are not good for children.

### **EXTREME CASES**

Healthy adults and infants infected with RSV do not usually need to be hospitalized. But some people with RSV infection, especially older adults and infants younger than 6 months of age, may need to be hospitalized if they are having trouble breathing or are dehydrated. In the most severe cases, a person may require additional oxygen, or IV fluids (if they can't eat or drink enough), or intubation (have a breathing tube inserted through the mouth and down to the airway) with mechanical ventilation (a machine to help a person breathe). In most of these cases, hospitalization only lasts a few days.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

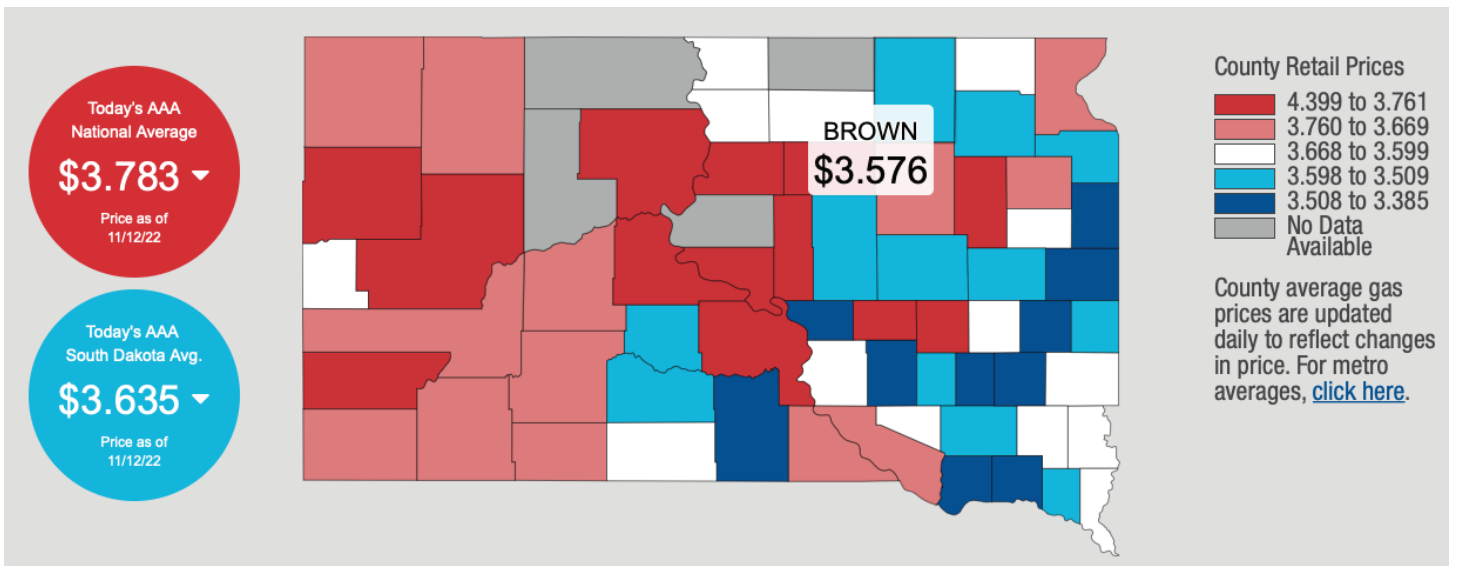
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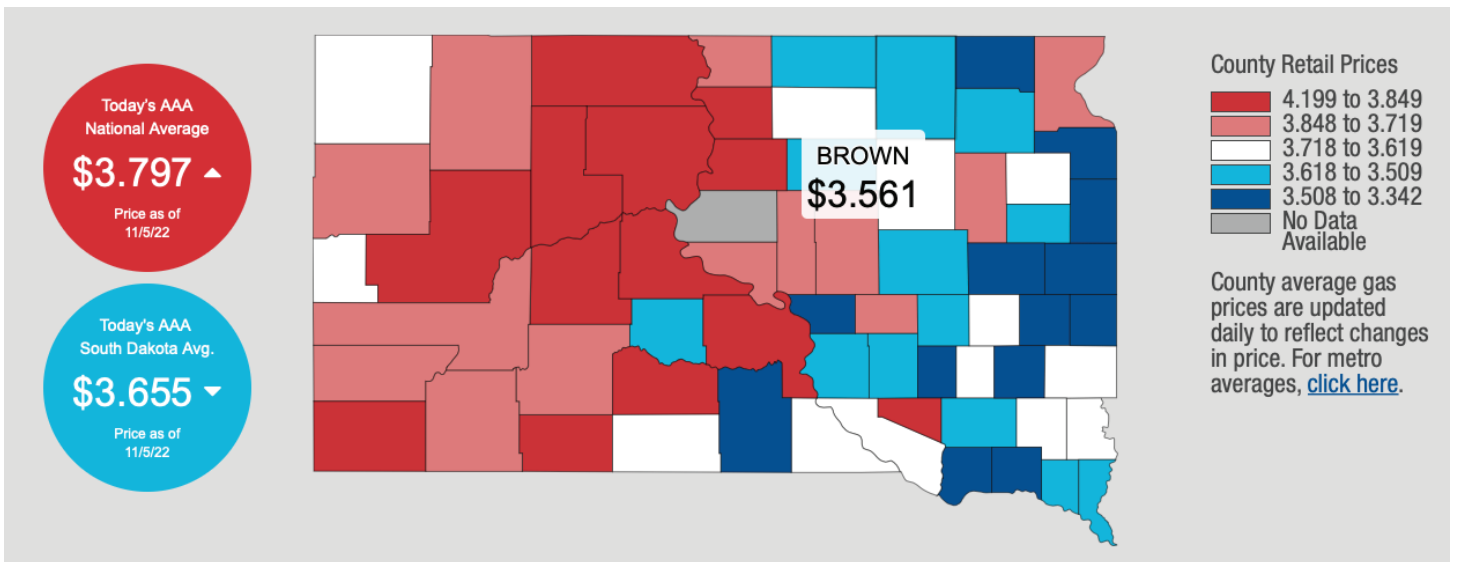
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.635	\$3.826	\$4.314	\$5.138
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.644	\$3.824	\$4.335	\$5.153
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.655	\$3.857	\$4.320	\$5.163
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.801	\$3.990	\$4.435	\$4.993
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.317	\$3.418	\$3.738	\$3.528

### This Week



### Last Week





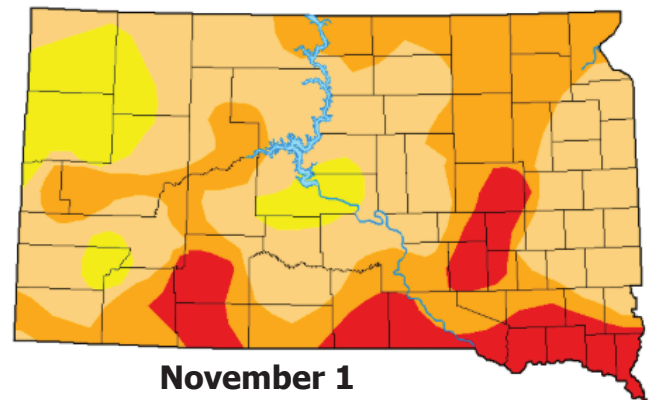
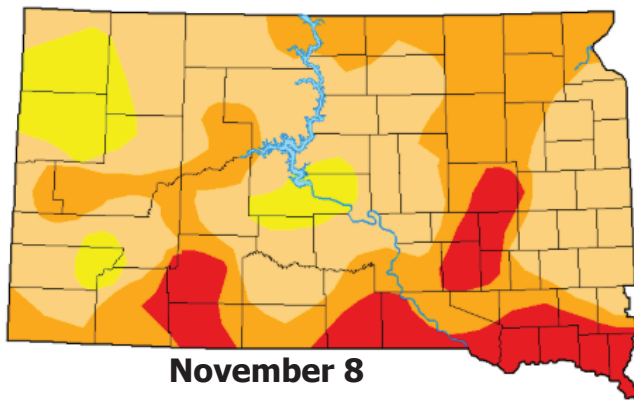
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## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



Much of the High Plains remained dry this week with only portions of southeast Nebraska and eastern Kansas recording above-normal precipitation. Temperatures were mostly above normal for the area, but western portions were normal to slightly below this week, with the warmest temperatures over eastern Kansas where departures were 6-9 degrees above normal. With the continued dryness, most of the changes were worsening drought intensities. As the autumn remained dry over much of Nebraska, expansions were made to extreme and exceptional drought in the northeast and western parts of the state. Western Kansas, eastern Colorado and eastern Wyoming also had expansions of severe, extreme and exceptional drought conditions. Much of eastern and central Kansas saw improvement from several inches of rain, which lead to the reduction of all drought intensities (including the extreme and exceptional areas in the southern portion of the state) and the removal of extreme drought in the northeast.

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## Northern State Drops 2022-23 Season Opener to Central Missouri

Moorhead, Minn. – Northern State Women’s Basketball Team started strong and jumped out to an early lead, but Central Missouri grabbed the momentum late in the first quarter to push themselves to a 75-57 season-opening victory. Rianna Fillipi and Kailee Oliverson combined for 27 of the 57 points for the Wolves, shooting 43.5 percent from the field.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 57, UCM 75

Records: NSU 0-1, UCM 1-0

Attendance: 120

### HOW IT HAPPENED

Kailee Oliverson put Northern State up 10-7 early in the first quarter, converting an and-one opportunity after a made layup

Central Missouri ended the quarter on a 16-6 run, shooting 7-15 during the final six-minute stretch of play and would carry that momentum into the second period

NSU held the Jennies scoreless the final 1:45 of the first half and scored the final four points of the second quarter with layups by Madelyn Bragg and Rianna Fillipi

After forcing only two UCM turnovers in the first half, the Wolves were able to force three in the first three minutes of the third quarter and held the Jennies scoreless the first 3:14 of the second half

A Fillipi 3-pointer with 8:16 left in the fourth quarter was able to cut the Central Missouri down to 14 points after five consecutive points by the Wolves

Northern State countered a 6-0 Jennie run with an 8-0 run of their own with back-to-back 3-pointers by Fillipi and Jordyn Hilgemann, followed by a layup by Brynn Alfson; the scoring run cut the lead to 12 points with 4:39 remaining in the game, which was the closest the Wolves had been since the 5:58 mark in the second quarter

Northern State recorded 4 blocks in the game, extending a streak of 35 consecutive games with a blocked shot that dates back to a January 30, 2021, game against Minnesota Duluth

Northern out-rebounded Central Missouri 46-45, the Wolves grabbed 20 offensive rebounds that led to 20 second chance points

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Rianna Fillipi: 16 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal

Kailee Oliverson: 11 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 block

### UP NEXT

Northern State will close out this weekend’s Central Region Conference Challenge facing another MIAA foe in Rogers State this afternoon. The Wolves and Hillcats are scheduled for a 5 p.m. tip-off at Nemzek Fieldhouse in Moorhead, Minnesota.

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## No. 1 Northwest Pulls Away in Tightly Contested Season Opener

St. Joseph, Mo. – The (RV) Northern State University men's basketball team battled with the defending National Champion Bearcats on Friday evening, taking the game down to the wire. The Wolves came within one of No. 1 Northwest Missouri State with under a minute to play, however the Bearcats buckled down and took advantage of late foul shots.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 78, NWMSU 81

Records: NSU 0-1, NWMSU 3-0

Attendance: 1500

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern trailed 35-31 at the half and out-scored Northwest 47-46 in the second
- The Wolves shot 51.0% from the floor, 46.2% from the 3-point line, and 73.7% from the foul line in the game
- They recorded a game high 19 assists, as well as 23 rebounds, four steals, and three blocks
- NSU hit a game high 12 from beyond the arc and scored 28 points in the paint, 18 points off the bench, 14 fast break points, and ten points off turnovers
- Both teams recorded five second chance points and the Wolves gave up 11 points off 12 turnovers
- Five Wolves scored in double figures in the game, led by Sam Masten with 21
- In addition, all double figure scorers shot 50.0% or better from the floor
- Josh Dilling led the team off the bench with 13 points and Augustin Reede scored all 12 of his points from beyond the arc

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sam Masten: 21 points, 55.6 FG%, 7 rebounds, 7 assists
- Jordan Belka: 13 points, 50.0 FG%, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 blocks
- Josh Dilling: 13 points, 55.6 FG%, 2 assists
- Augustin Reede: 12 points, 80.0 3FG%, 3 rebounds
- Trey Longstreet: 10 points, 66.7 FG%, 3 assists

### UP NEXT

Northern returns to action today versus the host Griffons. Tip-off is set for 6 p.m. against Missouri Western State University.

## Northern State Volleyball Falls to No. 3 Concordia-St. Paul in NSIC Quarterfinals

Aberdeen, S.D. – The 2022 season for the Northern State University volleyball team came to a close on Friday in the quarterfinal round of the NSIC Tournament. The Wolves fell to No. 3 Concordia-St. Paul in three sets.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 0, CSP 3

Records: NSU 18-11, CSP 25-4

Attendance: 388

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- The Wolves fell with set scores of 25-21, 25-17, and 25-23, battling in all three sets
- Northern tallied a match high 52 digs and added 37 kills, 33 assists, six blocks and five aces
- NSU held CSP to a .231 attack percentage, well below their season average of .307 heading into the match
- Sally Gaul led the team with a double-double of 11 kills and 11 digs, while Keri Walker notched a double-double of 26 assists and 12 digs
- Three Wolves recorded multiple blocks in the match, while four notched double figure digs

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sally Gaul: 11 kills, 11 digs, 3 blocks
- Kennedy Gravelle: 7 kills, .455 attack%, 4 blocks
- Taylor Buckley: 11 digs, 5 kills, 2 blocks
- Keri Walker: 26 assists, 12 digs
- Madison Langlie: 10 digs, 5 assists, 2 aces



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

**Western SD needs more water.**

### **Could a \$2B Missouri River pipeline be a solution?**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 4:01 PM**

The western side of Pennington County doesn't have enough water to last through an extended drought, according to a 2019 study by the South Dakota School of Mines.

The region, which includes Rapid City, relies on ground and surface water to supply its city populations, commercial districts and agricultural needs. But given the increase in population and water use, Pennington County and the majority of western South Dakota will soon need another source.



**Photo of the Missouri River in Chamberlain South Dakota** (John Hult/

South Dakota Searchlight)

One possible solution? Piping water from the Missouri River to supply 29,710

square miles of western South Dakota, an area roughly the size of West Virginia and Connecticut combined. Specifically, the pipeline would carry water to all western South Dakota counties except Harding, Corson, Dewey, Ziebach, Tripp and Gregory.

Such a pipeline can cost up to \$2 billion and likely take decades to accomplish, much like the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System in southeastern South Dakota. Lewis and Clark pipes water from the Missouri River to the Sioux Falls area and into southwestern Minnesota already. It will eventually pump water farther north in South Dakota and connect to communities in northwestern Iowa once completed. The project will benefit about 300,000 people and expand economic development opportunities for the region.

Given that western Pennington County has already exceeded its "dry budget," leaders hope to speed up the West River project to improve the state's drought resilience.

#### **Project 'in its infant stage'**

Price estimates for the western South Dakota pipeline range from around \$500 million to just under \$1.9 billion, depending on pipeline capacity and based on early estimates from the School of Mines, said Cheryl Chapman, executive director of the West Dakota Regional Water System (WDRWS), which is spearheading the pipeline project.

"We want to make sure no part of our state goes without the water resources it needs, especially if, as

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a region, western South Dakota falls into a drought," Chapman said. "It's good planning for the future, and it's a good contribution for the health and wellness of our state."

It will be years before the pipeline is built. The WDRWS is just a year old and the pipeline project is in its "infancy stage."

The nonprofit has received some funding for studies so far, including an \$8 million grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The South Dakota Legislature and Board of Water and Natural Resources awarded the ARPA funds in April for preliminary studies and engineering reports.

"When we talk about feasibility study, it ends up being a fairly detailed study of all the aspects of this project – not just where to line a pipe," Chapman said. "We want to really understand what our challenges are. Are there parts of western South Dakota that are more vulnerable than others? How does that look from a science perspective to make sure we fully understand what needs to happen under certain conditions of drought?"

The State Water Resources Management System (SWRMS) could put another \$1 million toward the project if passed by the Legislature. To earn that money, the WDRWS pipeline project must raise \$250,000, after which the SWRMS fund will match \$4 to every \$1 raised. So far they have raised \$183,500, including a \$100,000 contribution Rapid City councilors passed this week.

Rapid City will be the largest contributor for the SWRMS match, said Dale Tech, Rapid City director of public works and president of WDRWS.

"As we continue to grow, the city of Rapid City will likely use more water than anybody else," Tech said. "That's why the funding request is high. The city currently has a future use permit anyway, and this is an investment in developing their future use permit into actual water."

No matter what, the project will not be constructed without a "very large federal influx of money," Tech added.

## Need recognized long ago

While WDRWS formed a year ago, the project has been in the minds of western South Dakotans since the 1970s.

The Black Hills Conservancy subdistrict, made up of four Black Hills counties, received a future use permit for the project in the 1970s. The permit transferred hands over the years until the West Dakota Water Development District contracted the School of Mines study, checking to see if the permit was worth another renewal.

"That report came back and said, 'yes, you very much should renew the permit and you should get busy on actually building something,'" Chapman said. "The need for redundancy in water systems, in some cases better quality water, is very critical, especially if the region were to experience prolonged drought."

The water piped from the Missouri River will supply much of western South Dakota. Tech said it shouldn't make a difference for water levels in the river.

"Based on just the future use permits that exist, it's a very minor portion of the Missouri River water," Tech said. "The needs of western South Dakota won't mean a significant reduction in noticeable water in the river."

Water will likely have to be treated, Tech said, but that will be determined for sure through the engineering studies.

"I think with water issues in other parts of the county, especially headlines in the Southwest ..., are making people very aware of what the consequences can be if you're in a drought and what that means for water supplies," Chapman said. "People are very interested and they're glad that groups like ours are looking at ways to protect our water supplies for years to come."



## MAKENZIE HUBER

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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### Calls to 211 Helpline Center rising again after post-pandemic lull Lawmakers worry about program funding when federal money runs out

BY: JOHN HULT - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 3:54 PM

Mental health calls to South Dakota's 211 Helpline declined as the COVID-19 pandemic tapered off, but calls for all needs – especially for housing help – are on the rise again.

That was among the major takeaways from a Department of Social Services (DSS) presentation on the operations of the statewide assistance call center on Thursday in Pierre.

The rundown was presented to the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee, meeting for a pre-session roundup of reports from a range of state agencies.

Appropriators expressed appreciation for the program, but some concerns about ongoing funding needs, regional Helpline usage and post-referral follow-up with callers.



**A sigh outside the Sioux Falls, SD location of the Helpline Center, one of three call centers across the state that connects callers to a range of services.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

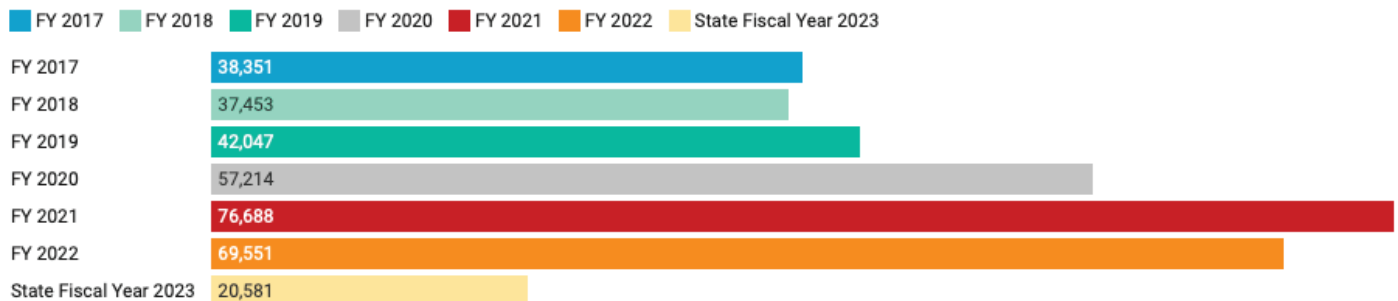
### Helpline state expansion began in pandemic

The Helpline Center's statewide service expansion and the state government funding partnership that came alongside it are both relatively recent developments for the nonprofit agency, which launched in 2001 in Sioux Falls. The 211 center had grown its footprint significantly by the time of that 2020 statewide expansion, with only rural areas remaining outside its service area.

The center works to connect callers with resources in their local area. Housing, food assistance and mental health referrals are heavily represented in the center's call type statistics, but callers and texters frequently ask about transportation options, as well. Seasonally, callers might reach out to ask for help

### Helpline call volume, by state fiscal year\*

Number of calls, texts and other contacts to 211 Helpline Center in South Dakota since 2017



\*state fiscal year runs August-July

Chart: John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight • Source: SD Department of Social Services • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

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shoveling snow or ask where a local leaf drop-off might be.

The state began to offer supplemental funding to the nonprofit in 2020. The state budgeted \$889,151 for the center in fiscal year 2023, which runs from August of 2022 through July of 2023. That's a jump of \$70,000 from its first fiscal year of state funding.

Contacts to the Helpline Center spiked during the pandemic, dropped slightly in fiscal year 2021, but haven't fallen back to 2019 levels. In fiscal year 2022, there were nearly 12,000 more calls than FY 2019.

The current trendline points to continued growth in usage, according to Tiffany Wolfgang, who leads behavioral health programs for the DSS.

"Right now we're projecting about a 7% growth in 211 calls for fiscal year 2023," Wolfgang told lawmakers.

Housing remains the largest area of need, growing 5% even as other call types slowed down during the last year and into the summer. Wolfgang cautioned lawmakers that callers frequently have multiple questions for operators, however.

"Somebody may call in wanting help meeting housing assistance, (but) they may need additional food assistance," she said.

Mental health calls fell as pandemic pressures eased, she said, but have ticked up again. The recently announced nationwide move to a 988 suicide prevention line also factors into the Helpline Center's work. Master's degree-level counselors at the center answer those calls.

The move to the shorter 988 number from the previous 1-800 number hotline, Wolfgang said, has resulted in an 87% increase in calls in South Dakota.

## Lawmakers question follow-up, future funding

Legislators on the joint committee had several questions for Wolfgang as they pondered the state's contributions to the center's budget.

Sen Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, for example, noted that 79% of calls originated in Minnehaha or Pennington counties, and said she hopes the program is able to connect to rural areas more often now that state funding is part of the operation.

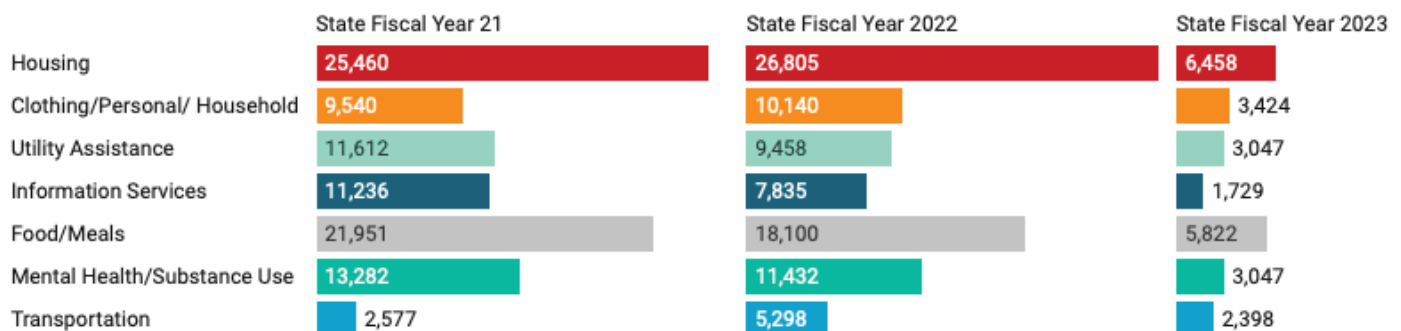
Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, brought up similar concerns.

"I want to know if the low numbers (outside Minnehaha and Pennington) are due to lack of knowledge, or there's just no need?" said Duba, who said she hopes to see a report on marketing efforts during future appropriations meetings.

## 211 Call Types by state fiscal year\*

A chart showing the major call types to South Dakota's 211 Helpline Center since its statewide launch.

■ Housing ■ Clothing/Personal/ Household ■ Utility Assistance ■ Information Services ■ Food/Meals ■ Mental Health/Substance Use ■ Transportation



\* state fiscal year runs August-July

Chart: John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight • Source: SD Department of Social Services • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper



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Other committee members had customer service questions. The center does follow-up calls on issues like substance abuse and mental health, Wolfgang said, but she said there isn't necessarily follow-up for every call type.

"I don't understand how we can determine if the 211 is actually doing what it needs to do if we don't know if (the resource agency) they're being referred to is actually making progress with the person who called in," said Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle.

Committee Chair Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, suggested that an audit of customer service contacts and follow-up would be helpful as appropriators.

"I can train my people all day long, but are they executing?" Karr said. "And one way to do it is to test that or audit it."

Karr also questioned the program's funding future, noting that the initial state funding originated with money from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

"Currently, we are funded (by ARPA) through the state fiscal year, and we are assessing what the options may be after that," Wolfgang said.

May wondered aloud if tribal governments could pitch in funding for the 988 portion of the work. Rep. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, said she is concerned that the 211 funding could become a burden for the state once the ARPA money dries up. She wanted to know if there are programs beyond 211 boosted by ARPA grants that could soon seek additional funding from appropriators.

"I thought we had the phone to South Dakota that one time funds would not be used for ongoing programs, or for dollars or one time funds, and this would appear to be an ongoing program," Howard said.

## Future of 211

Janet Kittams, director of the Helpline Center, said her organization has worked to connect with potential users in newly serviced areas through social media and outreach to service providers across the state.

The center has brochures, fridge magnets and other materials available to send to social service offices anywhere in the state.

"We always have our 211 promotional materials available," said Kittams, who was listening in to the appropriations meeting on Thursday. "Through our website, you can go and order materials and then we just deliver them or mail them. If people want to pick them up, they can, but we can mail them anywhere in the state."

As far as a high volume of calls in Minnehaha and Pennington counties, Kittams expects that to shift as residents statewide familiarize themselves with the center's operators.

"I would anticipate that we'll continue to see calls to 211 from other parts of South Dakota, which we do now," Kittams said. "But I think we'll see a greater percentage coming from the areas that are just learning about 211."

Sen. Jack Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls, told his fellow lawmakers during the meeting that the center plays an important role in responding to resident needs, particularly during natural disasters. His experience with 211, he said, suggests that the nonprofit's commitment to customer service is clear in communities that have relied on it for years.

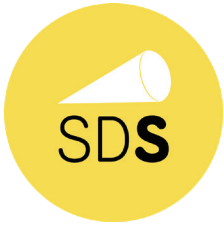
In some situations, Kolbeck said, 211 even serves as a connection between volunteers and those who need help.

"I'll tell you in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, after the tornadoes that went through the flooding that we had, I called the 211 number a couple of different times to ask if there was any assistance that needed to be done," Kolbeck said. "Within minutes I would get a call back, and they would give me a list of people that had called 211 and needed some assistance, not only maybe just clean up, but maybe even some assistance getting their front door of their house opened up ... (the residents) were very, very much appreciative of that."



**JOHN HULT** ✉️ 🐦

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux falls Argus Leader.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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### COMMENTARY

## South Dakota social studies standards are meaningful, challenging, empowering

Janet Finzen

As an experienced classroom educator, I am excited about the potential of South Dakota's proposed social studies standards. They provide a framework for students to gain critical knowledge, vocabulary, and understanding in key areas of history, government, geography, and economics.

A strong foundation in social studies is necessary to prepare productive citizens for the future. These standards are both meaningful and challenging and are grounded in democratic principles like civic participation, equality, and individual freedoms. It is important to note the proposed standards are guidelines for addressing what students should know by the end of each school year. These standards do not dictate the curriculum or how a teacher in each district will teach them.

Research shows that when children are challenged with rigorous academic tasks, the results are greater student achievement. The Depth of Knowledge found within these standards allows South Dakota educators the freedom and flexibility to plan their instruction to the rigor level of each standard. By identifying purposeful pedagogy and critical content, the proposed standards build sound foundational skills for children at an early age that will move with them through their K-12 experience and on to college.

These skills, beginning with our youngest learners, will enable students to participate effectively in an increasingly diverse world. I believe one spectacular aspect of the social studies curriculum is that it can be incorporated into many different subject areas. For example, social studies can easily be integrated into language arts. In my classroom, when choosing a book for reading aloud to students, I often think of social studies or when learning history, my students can be practicing their writing or technology skills.

Cross-curricular teaching not only saves time in an already busy teaching day but reveals to the students the interconnectedness of learning.

These standards were also written with parents in mind. There is a chronological ordering of the standards, which allows students and their parents the ability to see how and when events unfolded in history. The proposed standards spiral between grade levels building on prior knowledge. This fosters a continuum of learning that makes sense and is easily understood.

Another important element of the standards is they allow ample opportunities to include, like never before, South Dakota's rich Native American history. The Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings are referenced throughout the standards. South Dakota students will now learn about the great Chiefs of their state like Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Standing Bear, Crazy Horse, and Spotted Tail and their important contributions. The issue of Native American boarding schools which were, in many cases, a systematic attempt to erase Native American culture, is brought to light. Nothing is sugar coated.

Social studies matters and the democratic traditions of our country deserve a place in today's classrooms. The proposed standards may seem at first glance to be overly rigorous and time consuming, but complex social studies standards empower students to succeed in school and later in their careers and life. It is something I believe our students deserve. That is why I am excited to support the proposed standards.

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### Biden student debt relief plan thrown out by Texas judge; new applications halted

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 4:01 PM

WASHINGTON — Late Thursday a federal judge in Texas struck down the Biden administration's student debt relief plan, ruling that the program is unlawful, in a blow to 16 million student debt borrowers already approved for relief.

The U.S. Department of Education now is no longer accepting applications for the program, according to the student aid federal website.

"Courts have issued orders blocking our student debt relief program," according to the website. "As a result, at this time, we are not accepting applications. We are seeking to overturn those orders. If you've already applied, we'll hold your application."

In Fort Worth, U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, in his 26-page judgment called the program an "unconstitutional exercise of Congress's legislative power" and ruled in favor of two borrowers, backed by a conservative advocacy group, who brought the challenge.

The Department of Justice has already filed an appeal of the ruling, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

"The President and this Administration are determined to help working and middle-class Americans get back on their feet, while our opponents — backed by extreme Republican special interests — sued to block millions of Americans from getting much-needed relief," Jean-Pierre said.

She added that the Department of Education will continue to hold onto the information of student debt borrowers who applied for the program — about 26 million — so the department "can quickly process their relief once we prevail in court."

Of those 26 million borrowers who applied for the program that launched in October, 16 million have been approved, she said.

The debt relief program was initially halted by an appeals court in late October following an emergency request from six Republican-led states who argued that the president does not have the authority to wipe out debt, and it should be left to Congress to make that decision. The court is considering the request by the states for an injunction.

That lawsuit was filed on behalf of Republican Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, and by Republican attorneys



**U.S. President Joe Biden hands a pen to Brielle Robinson, daughter of the late Sgt. First Class Heath Robinson, after he signed The PACT Act in the East Room of the White House August 10, 2022 in Washington, DC.** (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

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general in Nebraska, Arkansas, Missouri, South Carolina and Kansas.

## Legal barrage

Since the White House's announcement of the program last month, there have been multiple challenges to it.

The plaintiffs in Thursday's case argued that the Biden administration did not follow the proper rule making procedure and was unlawful.

The conservative advocacy group that backed the plaintiffs is the Job Creators Network Foundation, which was founded by billionaire Bernie Marcus, who also co-founded Home Depot.

Elaine Parker, the president of Job Creators Network Foundation, said in a statement that Thursday's ruling "protects the rule of law which requires all Americans to have their voices heard by their federal government."

"This attempted illegal student loan bailout would have done nothing to address the root cause of unaffordable tuition: greedy and bloated colleges that raise tuition far more than inflation year after year while sitting on \$700 billion in endowments," Parker said. "We hope that the court's decision today will lay the groundwork for real solutions to the student loan crisis."

One of the two plaintiffs, Myra Brown, had a business loan forgiven through the Biden administration's Paycheck Protection Program. She owns the Texas business Desert Star Enterprises Inc, which was granted a \$48,000 loan, where \$47,996 was forgiven on April 27, 2022.

Under the Biden administration's plan, student loan borrowers can qualify for up to \$10,000 in loan forgiveness, while the recipients of Pell Grants can apply for up to \$20,000 in debt relief. The program is intended to assist borrowers who, in 2021, earned no more than \$125,000 per year, and couples who earned up to \$250,000 per year.

More than 43 million Americans have student loan debt, and the Federal Reserve estimates that the total U.S. student loan debt is more than \$1.76 trillion.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office in September found that as of June, the White House's debt forgiveness program would eliminate about \$430 billion of the \$1.6 trillion of student debt. The report in June preceded another increase in the total debt to \$1.76 trillion.

The Texas federal judge, Pittman, wrote in his opinion that "[w]hether the Program constitutes good public policy is not the role of this Court to determine."

He determined that the student loan debt forgiveness program was one of the "the largest exercises of legislative power without congressional authority in the history of the United States."

Pittman said that the HEROES Act did not grant the approval of the \$400 billion student loan forgiveness program. The Biden administration relied on the 2003 HEROES Act while enacting its debt relief program, because that law provides loan assistance to military personnel.

"In this country, we are not ruled by an all-powerful executive with a pen and a phone. Instead, we are ruled by a Constitution that provides for three distinct and independent branches of government," Pittman wrote.

## Legal standing questions

Another lawsuit filed against Biden's student loan forgiveness program has been dismissed due to lack of standing.

The Brown County Taxpayers Association, a Wisconsin organization that advocates for conservative economic policy on behalf of its members, brought an emergency request to block the program to Justice Amy Coney Barrett — who is assigned to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals — but was denied.

A federal district court in Missouri threw out the case by the six Republican-led states that argued the Biden administration violated the Administrative Procedure Act by not adhering to the proper rule making process.

U.S. District Judge Henry Autrey, an appointed judge of former President George W. Bush, of the Eastern District of Missouri issued a 19-page ruling that declared those states didn't have legal standing to sue the Biden administration over its student debt cancellation program, despite the "important and significant

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challenges" they have raised in the case.

In Autrey's decision, he seemed to agree with attorneys from the Biden administration that a potential loss of tax revenue in the future did not give the states enough standing to sue.

"It is hard to make a cake if you don't have a pan to put that cake in," Autrey said during oral arguments. "That pan is standing. It doesn't matter if you have all the ingredients."

But GOP states brought a successful emergency request to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, asking the federal appeals court to block the Biden administration's plan from rolling out until the court ruled on the emergency request from the GOP state's legal challenge.

Following the Texas judge's decision, the Student Borrower Protection Center, an advocacy group that focuses on relieving student debt, called on the Biden administration to extend the pause in student loan payments, which is set to end Jan. 1, 2023. The pause was set in place in early 2020 by the Trump administration due to the pandemic.

"The devastating result of this court's decision today is that tens of millions of student loan borrowers across the country now have their vital debt relief blocked as a result of this farcical and fabricated legal claim," SBPC deputy executive director and managing counsel Persis Yu said in a statement. "The Biden Administration cannot now resume payments. It must use all of its tools to fight to ensure that borrowers receive the debt relief they need."



**ARIANA FIGUEROA**  

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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### QUICK READS

#### **New lifetime pass for veterans provides free entrance to national parks and other public lands**

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 11:59 AM**

Starting today, on Veterans Day, military veterans and Gold Star families can get a free lifetime pass to the nation's 400 million acres of public lands, national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests.

Lifetime access for veterans was part of the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act, which passed in December 2021. The bill authorized free lifetime access to federal lands to veterans and Gold Star families.

"We have a sacred obligation to America's veterans," Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland said in a prepared statement. "This new lifetime pass is a small demonstration of our nation's gratitude and support for those who have selflessly served in the U.S. Armed Forces."

Each pass covers entrance fees for a driver and up to three adult passengers at national parks and national wildlife refuges, as well as standard amenity fees at national forests and grasslands.

To gain entry to a participating federal recreation area, veterans can present one of four forms of identification: A U.S. Department of Defense ID Card, Veteran Health ID, Veteran ID Card, or veteran's designation on a state-issued ID card.

Gold Star families can get more information, self-certify that they qualify and download a voucher by visiting the U.S. Geological Survey's website.

The Interior Department and other federal land agencies also offer fee-free entrance days for everyone throughout the year to mark certain days of celebration and commemoration, including the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., National Public Lands Day, and Veterans Day.

Federal recreational land management agencies offer additional lifetime passes, including a Senior Pass for U.S. citizens or permanent residents over age 62 and an Access Pass for U.S. citizens or permanent residents with a permanent disability. More information is available on NPS.gov.

#### **South Dakota DMV to delay vehicle title printing due to paper shortage**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 1:13 PM**

The South Dakota Department of Revenue's Motor Vehicle Division will not print paper titles, effective immediately, due to paper supply issues, according to a news release.

The department will not print paper titles until mid-February 2023, unless a person makes a request online that is approved by the department. Reasons for requesting a printed paper title include the titled owner moving out of the state or the vehicle ownership needing to be transferred.

While the shortage hasn't spelled trouble for dealerships or their customers yet, it could soon, said Troy Engels, general manager at Sharp Automotive.

The Watertown dealership runs through about 80 to 90 titles for used vehicles a month. By the time February 2023 rolls around, that's potentially affecting 270 transactions for Sharp Automotive alone.

"Dealerships are required to have a title or proof that the title is on the way to sell vehicles," Engels said. "That's where it's going to get hairy."

Used car dealerships will pay money for trade-ins, but they can't make money until they sell that vehicle. That requires a title in hand. New vehicles have a Manufacturer's Statement of Origin (MSO).

"It'll make it tough if someone sells a vehicle to us and we can't get a title," Engels said. "We'll have a lot of liquidity sitting on the lot that we just can't do anything with."

While the delay is during the winter, which has historically been a slow time of year for dealerships, businesses no longer experience a lull in customers. Engels said that online inventories keep business humming all year.

The paper used for titles has built in security features to prevent fraud. Oklahoma experienced a title paper shortage earlier in 2022, which created headaches for dealerships and customers.

"Like many other manufactured goods, the title stock supplier has suffered numerous unexpected supply chain delays which has delayed the shipment of title stock by months," the Oklahoma Tax Commission told a local news outlet. "Due to the unique security features within an Oklahoma title, it is difficult to source this specific type of secured paper from other manufacturers."

South Dakota titles are still being processed and individuals are able to check the status of their paperwork using their VIN online.

## **GFP Commission Chair Olson steps down, 8-person body now 6 Olson stepping down leaves two vacancies on the eight-person body**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 2:26 PM**

Russell Olson, chair of the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Commission, will step down from the body that helps oversee the department.

"As an avid outdoorsman, it has been a privilege to serve on the commission," Olson said. "I value my time served and am excited for the direction the agency is heading."

Olson said he grew too busy with life, his work as CEO of Heartland Energy, and the other boards he serves on.

There are now two vacancies on the eight-person body, whose members are appointed by the governor. Olson said he's confident in remaining commissioners – who he says are outdoors enthusiasts with a commitment to the state's hunting heritage.

"I hope part of my legacy of service is developing more opportunities for youth, from hunting to experiencing their first catch," Olson said. "I am incredibly proud of the increased access to hunting, habitat, and conservation as well as increased state park visits."

The commission's authority includes decisions on the dates of hunting seasons, license fees, hunting and angling rules, and other responsibilities for state parks.

Olson's term was scheduled to end on January 10, 2024.

Commissioner Doug Sharp created the first vacancy. Sharp was appointed by former Gov. Dennis Daugaard and reappointed by Gov. Kristi Noem, but resigned in May. Sharp said he'd grown too busy with his businesses.

State law says no more than four commissioners may be from the same political party, no less than four shall be farmers, and three must live west of the Missouri River while five must be from East River.

Both Olson's and Sharps' vacancies must be filled by East River Republicans.

Olson was a Republican member of the state legislature from 2008 to 2013. In 2013, he served as State Senate Majority Leader.

Some public land hunters and anglers feel underrepresented by the current Game, Fish and Parks Commission, and they hope to see a board member from a grassroots group – like the South Dakota Wildlife Federation or Black Hills Sportsmen Club – appointed to a vacant seat.

## White House grants \$1M to improve some South Dakota habitat, \$142M nationwide

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - NOVEMBER 11, 2022 12:25 PM

Two grants from the White House totaling just over \$1.1 million aim to improve some habitat in South Dakota.

The grants are two of 55 from the White House's America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC), a public-private partnership for habitat conservation. The 55 new grants total \$142 million nationwide.

Audubon Dakota is the recipient of a \$556,200 grant for South Dakota. The money will sustain two positions in the Great Plains: a range ecologist and a grassland technician. The two will help farmers and ranchers implement more sustainable grassland management practices – such as prairie restoration, prescribed burns, and regenerative agriculture.

Additionally, the Rosebud Economic Development Corporation was awarded a \$552,600 grant to fund "phase one" of the Wakpala Woicageyapi community project. That work includes an ecological assessment and trail system for the 600-acre site. The ultimate plan is to build affordable homes around a community garden and gathering place.

Other regional projects include \$443,600 for moose habitat restoration in northeastern Minnesota. And a \$5 million grant to restore wetlands and streams, remove invasive plants from habitats, and perform native prairie seeding in Nebraska.

South Dakota's neighbor to the west took in the most conservation cash.

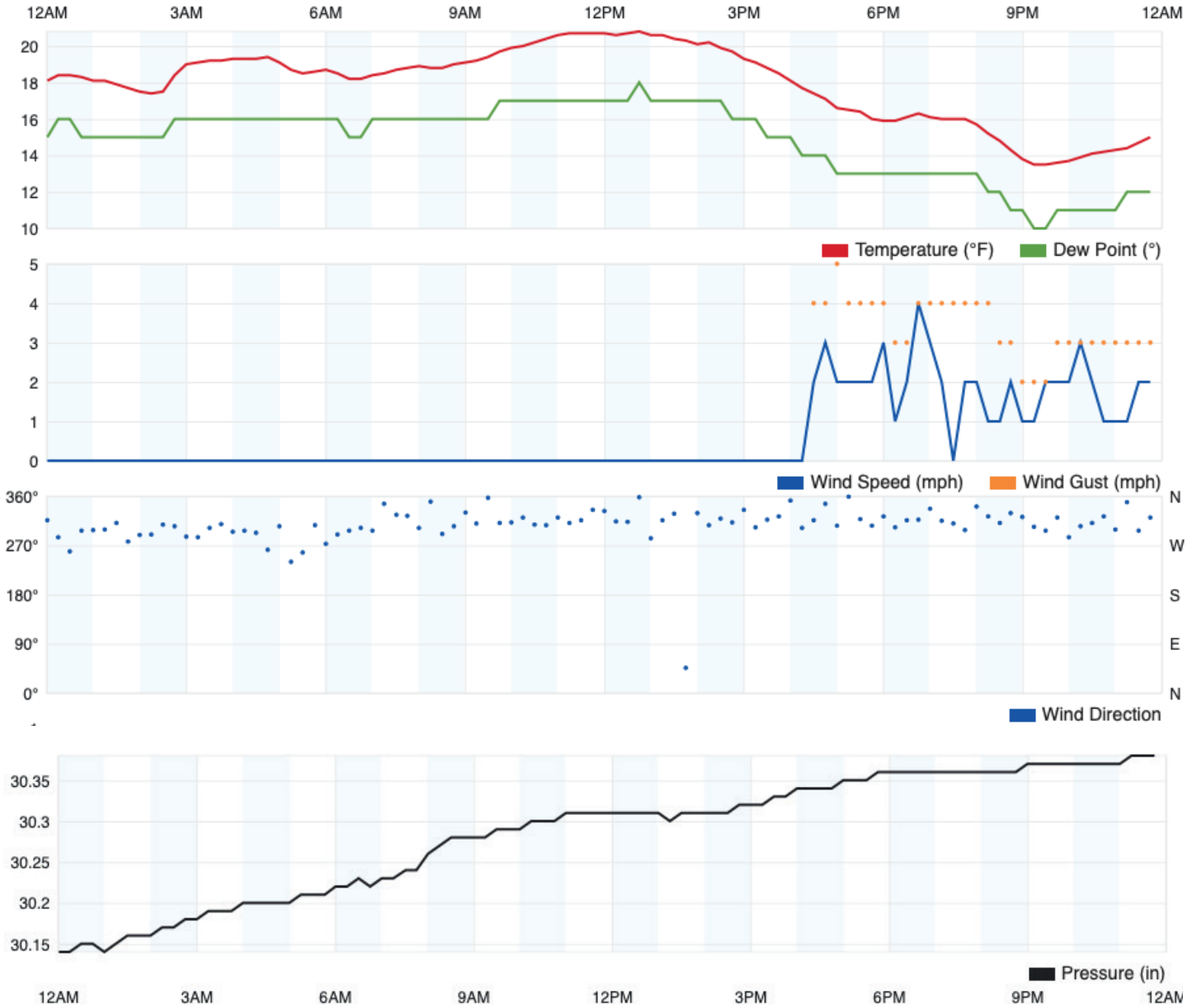
A Montana organization received a \$833,300 grant to fund a forest invasive species specialist position and another \$813,800 for tools to combat forest invasive species. Montana tribes will get nearly \$5 million for bison ecosystem resiliency projects, with the Blackfeet Nation receiving an additional \$1 million grant to implement a broader conservation strategy on the tribe's northwest Montana lands.



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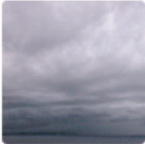






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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Chance Flurries	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow then Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy
High: 19 °F	Low: 1 °F	High: 25 °F	Low: 12 °F	High: 24 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 22 °F

## A Couple Snow Chances Sunday Through Tuesday...

## Cold Temperatures To Persist This Week

### The Chance Of Snow This Week

### 7 Day High Temperature Forecast

	Probability of Precipitation Forecast								Maximum Temperature Forecast												
	11/12		11/13		11/14		11/15		11/16		11/17		11/18		11/12	11/13	11/14	11/15	11/16	11/17	11/18
	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
<b>Aberdeen</b>	0	0	0	25	10	8	12	12	7	1	3	7	2	0	19	25	24	22	18	19	11
<b>Britton</b>	1	0	0	42	34	9	25	19	16	0	8	9	3	0	19	24	25	22	17	18	10
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	0	0	0	5	4	21	20	4	3	3	11	14	6	5	19	21	21	18	19	20	11
<b>Eureka</b>	0	0	0	19	11	17	14	10	2	2	5	11	4	0	16	20	20	19	17	17	9
<b>Gettysburg</b>	10	0	0	10	6	14	13	8	3	2	4	9	4	2	19	24	20	19	19	19	11
<b>Kennebec</b>	0	0	0	9	5	9	10	7	3	2	4	9	6	6	24	33	27	24	24	26	18
<b>McIntosh</b>	0	0	2	8	6	23	22	11	3	3	13	15	5	4	12	17	18	16	17	18	9
<b>Milbank</b>	1	0	0	42	48	12	22	29	23	1	8	6	2	0	24	26	28	26	20	20	13
<b>Miller</b>	0	0	0	13	6	7	7	8	6	2	3	7	3	3	23	30	26	24	21	22	14
<b>Mobridge</b>	10	0	0	11	7	19	15	8	3	3	7	11	4	2	19	25	23	23	23	25	16
<b>Murdo</b>	10	0	0	5	5	11	13	4	3	2	9	12	9	6	24	31	26	22	23	26	16
<b>Pierre</b>	0	0	0	6	4	13	13	4	3	4	8	10	6	4	24	32	27	24	24	26	17
<b>Redfield</b>	0	0	0	20	7	6	9	10	8	0	2	6	2	2	22	30	26	24	19	22	14
<b>Sisseton</b>	1	0	0	44	48	11	25	28	22	0	9	10	4	0	23	26	28	25	19	20	12
<b>Watertown</b>	0	0	0	36	28	8	14	20	15	0	5	5	2	0	24	26	27	24	19	19	11
<b>Webster</b>	0	0	0	31	22	6	15	16	13	0	5	5	2	0	19	25	24	22	16	17	9
<b>Wheaton</b>	0	0	0	35	48	12	28	30	23	0	9	6	3	0	23	26	28	26	19	18	12

NWS Aberdeen, SD  
Updated: 11/12/2022 3:41 AM CST

Some localities could see a light accumulation of snow by Sunday evening, especially out over the northeastern corner of South Dakota into western Minnesota. Off and on light snow chances continue into Tuesday before things dry out for a few days. The big story is potentially how cold it could be by the end of next week. The cold weather pattern persists.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 21 °F at 11:14 AM**

**Low Temp: 13 °F at 9:22 PM**

**Wind: 5 mph at 4:46 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 9 hours, 41 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 68 in 1905

Record Low: -14 in 1896

Average High: 44°F

Average Low: 21°F

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.36

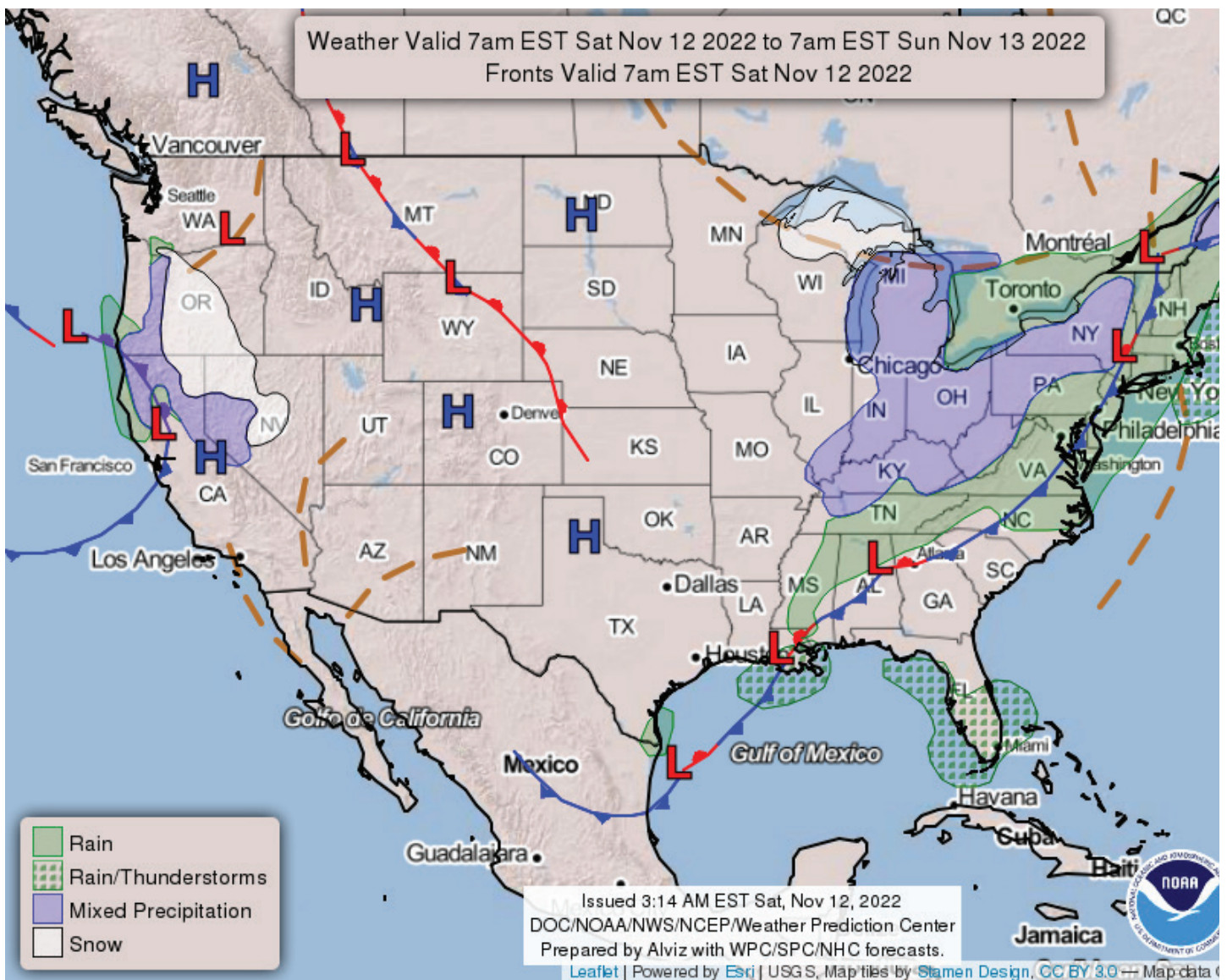
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 20.83

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 5:07:13 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:17 AM



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## Today in Weather History

November 12, 1993: A winter storm moved through the area on November 12th and 13th. A wintry mix of precipitation in the form of freezing rain, sleet, and snow began during the afternoon on the 12th in western portions of Minnesota, while heavy snow fell in a swath from southwest South Dakota through central and northeast parts of the state, with generally four to eight inches reported. Freezing rain also preceded the snow in south-central South Dakota. Significant accumulation of ice occurred within about a 70-mile wide area from west central Minnesota into the Arrowhead region. Up to five inches of snow fell on top of the ice, making travel extremely hazardous. In South Dakota, locally heavier snowfall amounts included 12 inches at Midland and 10 inches central Hughes County. Several schools and other community events were closed due to the ice and snow. In south central South Dakota, trees were damaged by heavy ice, some of which fell on power lines, causing an outage. Other snowfall amounts include; 8.0 inches in Blunt; 7.0 inches in Murdo and near Victor; and 6.0 inches near Onida, Faulkton, Highmore, and Leola.

November 12, 2003: High winds brought down a 70-foot gas station sign in Kennebec. The sign fell onto a shed, causing considerable damage to the shed. A 25-foot radio tower on the Kennebec courthouse was also knocked down by the winds.

1906 - The mercury soared to 106 degrees at Craftonville, CA, a November record for the U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1959 - Between Noon on the 11th and Noon on the 12th, a winter storm buried Helena, MT, under 21.5 inches of snow, which surpassed their previous 24 hour record by seven inches. (The Weather Channel)

1968 - A severe coastal storm produced high winds and record early snows from Georgia to Maine. Winds reached 90 mph in Massachusetts, and ten inches of snow blanketed interior Maine. (David Ludlum)

1970: The deadliest tropical cyclone ever recorded, and one of the deadliest natural disasters in modern times occurred on this day in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The Bhola Cyclone first formed over the Bay of Bengal on November 8 and traveled north. This cyclone reached peak intensity, Category 3, on the 11, and made landfall on the coast of East Pakistan the following afternoon. The Bhola Cyclone killed an estimated 500,000 people and caused nearly \$90 million in damage (1970 USD).

1974 - A great Alaska storm in the Bering Sea caused the worst coastal flooding of memory at Nome AK with a tide of 13.2 feet. The flooding caused 12 million dollars damage, however no lives are lost. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Heavy snow spread across much of New England. Totals in Massachusetts ranged up to 14 inches in Plymouth County. The seven inch total at the Logan Airport in Boston was their highest of record for so early in the season, and the 9.7 inch total at Providence RI was a record for November. Roads were clogged with traffic and made impassable as snowplow operators were caught unprepared for the early season snowstorm. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the afternoon and early evening hours. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Bovina MS. Morning thunderstorms drenched Atlanta TX with more than four inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thirty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 70s and 80s from the Southern and Central Plains to the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast Region. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Scottsbluff NE was a record for November, and highs of 76 degrees at Rapid City SD and 81 degrees at Chattanooga TN were the warmest of record for so late in the season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - Thunderstorms developed in southern California and produced torrential downpours across parts of the Los Angeles area. More than 5 inches of rain fell in just 2 hours in southern Los Angeles, producing severe urban flooding. Small hail also accompanied the storms, accumulating several inches deep in some areas of the city. Nearly 115,000 electrical customers lost power as the storms affected the area (Associated Press).

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### GUARDED BY GOD

There was a large stag - a red-coated deer - that roamed through the hills of Rome. No one ever came near it or tried to capture or kill it. Caesar protected it, and all were forbidden to disturb it. On its sides were the words, "Touch me not! I belong to Caesar." It was a sign of ownership, and no one dared to harm or hurt that animal.

There is a far more important statement about ownership in Psalm 105. It is a statement about those who belong to God: "Do not touch My anointed ones."

Sometimes the words of God are overlooked by the children of God. This verse is a good example of an "overlooked" rule by the Lord. Few of us will admit to having never spoken evil of a fellow Christian. But...

We often listen carefully while one "saint" criticizes or condemns another "saint." We carefully listen to every detail when a fellow church member ridicules or runs down the person who sits next to us during the worship service. We do not see "for whom Christ died" on the forehead of someone whose marriage is falling apart - so we anxiously listen to the sordid details of an unfaithful spouse. We blame others for "bad parenting skills" when their children become addicts rather than grieve with them over their loss. We carelessly pass on rumors about the honesty of someone who has more than we do. The tongue can easily become a weapon of wickedness and ultimately destroy "the Lord's anointed ones."

We must use our tongues to help and heal, not hurt or harm!

**Prayer: Father, may we turn deaf ears to words that harm others and speak kind words about Your anointed ones. Help us to show the value of Your "anointed ones". In Jesus' Name, Amen.**

**Scripture For Today: Do not touch my anointed ones. Psalm**



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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## 2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
07/27/2022: 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  
No Date Set: 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)  
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm  
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.  
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
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  
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest  
11/19/2022: 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  
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm  
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)  
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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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 Friday:

Mega Millions

01-05-17-37-70, Mega Ball: 22, Megaplier: 3

(one, five, seventeen, thirty-seven, seventy; Mega Ball: twenty-two; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$207,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 47,000,000

### Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

State Playoffs=

Class 9AA=

Championship=

Wall 34, Parkston 14

Class 11A=

Championship=

Dell Rapids 24, West Central 7

Class 11B=

Championship=

Elk Point-Jefferson 21, Winner 14

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

SDHSAA Playoff=

SoDak 16=

Class AA=

Pierre def. Brandon Valley, 25-18, 25-22, 25-19

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Spearfish, 25-9, 25-3, 25-11

Sioux Falls Washington def. Douglas, 25-14, 25-8, 25-10

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

### Selland, No. 23 South Dakota State women top Lehigh 91-73

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Myah Selland scored nine of 18 points in the pivotal second quarter and No. 23 South Dakota State rebounded from a season-opening loss to defeat Lehigh 91-73 on Friday night.

The game was even, except for the second quarter when the Jackrabbits (1-1) outscored the Mountain Hawks 29-14 by making 10 of 15 shots with three 3-pointers. Lehigh was 3 of 12 with a trey and trailed 49-32 at halftime.

Tori Nelson scored 16 points for South Dakota State and Ellie Colbeck and Kallie Theisen both added 12. Theisen and Selland both had eight rebounds as the Jackrabbits had a 43-27 advantage and were plus-10 on the offensive end.

Frannie Hottinger scored 25 points and Mackenzie Kramer had 21 for Lehigh (0-2), which was trailing by one near the middle of the second half when South Dakota State scored 12 straight. The Mountain Hawks



didn't have a field goal in the final 7 1/2 minutes of the second quarter, missing eight shots.

## State Supreme Court wins shaped by abortion, redistricting

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Republicans have claimed key victories in state Supreme Court races that will give them an advantage in major redistricting fights, while Democrats notched similarly significant wins with help from groups focused on defending abortion access.

The expensive fights over court control in several states in Tuesday's election highlight just how partisan the formerly low-key judicial races have become. Observers say they're a sign of what to expect as legal battles over abortion, voting rights and other issues are being fought at the state level.

"Nothing about this election suggests to me that we're going to see these races quiet down anytime soon," said Douglas Keith, counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school, which tracks spending in judicial races.

About \$97 million was spent on state Supreme Court elections during the 2019-2020 election cycle, according to the Brennan Center. Once this year's numbers are tallied, spending records are expected to be shattered in some of the 25 states that had races targeted by groups on the right and the left.

One of the biggest players was the Republican State Leadership Committee, which focused heavily on the court races in North Carolina and Ohio.

"Republican wins in the Tarheel State and Buckeye State ensure that the redistricting fights ahead in those states within the next decade are ruled on by strong conservatives who will follow the Constitution and don't believe it's their role to draw maps from the bench," said Dee Duncan, president of the committee's Judicial Fairness Initiative.

North Carolina's court flipped from a 4-3 Democrat majority to 5-2 Republican Tuesday night. The court in recent years has issued decisions favoring the Democratic majority in cases involving redistricting, criminal justice, education funding and voter ID laws.

At least \$15 million was spent on those races, with more than \$8 million from two super PACS — one on the left that focused primarily on abortion and one on the right that focused on crime. Despite the outside groups' involvement, candidates ran on a similar platform of keeping personal politics out of the courtroom.

"Now, we'll be watching to make sure that the justices sitting in those seats follow through on those promises," said Ann Webb, senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina.

In Ohio, Republicans maintained their 4-3 majority on the court, with two GOP justices fending off challenges and a sitting Republican winning her bid for chief justice. The state's GOP governor, Mike DeWine, will appoint a justice to fill the resulting vacancy.

The results may expand the conservative bent of the court even further, with cases regarding the state's six-week abortion ban and redistricting on the horizon. Republican Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, who did not seek reelection, has sided with court's three Democrats on high profile cases.

But Democratic groups working to protect abortion rights ramped up efforts to defend seats after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Roe v. Wade and saw victories in several other parts of the country.

In Illinois, which is surrounded by states with abortion bans that took effect after Roe was overturned, groups pushing to retain the state's Democrat court majority had warned a GOP takeover could result in similar threats to access.

"I don't think there's anyone who doesn't think abortion was the critical issue in these races," Terry Cosgrove, president and CEO of Personal PAC, an abortion rights group that spent nearly \$3 million supporting the Democrats in the races.

In Michigan, Democrats maintained their 4-3 majority on the Supreme Court after incumbent justices from opposing parties who had split on a key abortion ruling won reelection. Michigan's high court races are officially nonpartisan, though the state's political parties nominate candidates.

Democratic-backed Justice Richard Bernstein, who voted with the court's majority to put an abortion rights amendment on the ballot, won reelection along with Republican Justice Brian Zahra, who voted

against it. Voters approved the measure Tuesday.

"The Michigan Supreme Court election was critical especially since we didn't know what the status of (the abortion rights amendment) would be," said Ashlea Phenicie, communications director for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan, which spent nearly \$1 million on the races.

Kansas voters kept all six state Supreme Court justices who were on the ballot for separate yes-or-no votes on whether they remained on the bench another six years. The state's most influential anti-abortion group, Kansans for Life, pushed to remove five of them, largely over the court's 2019 decision declaring access to abortion a "fundamental" right under the Kansas Constitution.

Two of the six court members on the ballot were part of the 6-1 majority in that 2019 decision. Voters also retained the court's most conservative member, the only dissenter in the 2019 abortion decision.

Republican bids for court seats failed in even some of the most conservative parts of the country.

Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Michelle Keller defeated Joseph Fischer, a Republican lawmaker who sponsored the state's "trigger law" ending abortion following Roe's reversal. Fischer also was the lead sponsor of an anti-abortion constitutional amendment that voters rejected Tuesday.

Supreme Court Justice Robin Wynne in Arkansas, which has had some of the most contentious judicial races over the years, fended off a challenge from District Judge Chris Carnahan, a former executive director of the state Republican Party.

Arkansas' court seats are nonpartisan, but Carnahan had touted himself as a conservative and had the endorsement of the state GOP. A group formed by a Republican lawmaker ran TV ads calling Wynne, who served as a Democrat in the state Legislature in the 1980s, a liberal.

An unprecedented partisan pitch by Montana Republicans to install a party loyalist on that state's Supreme Court also fell short, with Justice Ingrid Gustafson defeating challenger James Brown, who had the backing of Gov. Greg Gianforte and other top Republicans. The unusually expensive campaign came as the court is preparing to hear challenges over Montana's abortion restrictions and voting access.

Gustafson called her win a sign that voters were more interested in experience than ideology.

"The people in Montana think our judiciary is doing a good job and it is a very, very small minority that has some sort of other agenda," she said.

## McMullin loss in Utah raises independent candidacy questions

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah Democrats' decision to back an independent rather than nominate a member of their own party to take on Republican Mike Lee transformed the state's U.S. Senate race from foregone conclusion to closely watched slugfest.

Independent Evan McMullin, an anti-Trump former Republican best known for his longshot 2016 presidential bid, attracted millions in outside spending in his campaign against Lee. He forced the second-term Republican to engage with voters more than in prior elections and emphasize an independent streak and willingness to buck leaders of his own party.

Ultimately, though, it wasn't even close. Lee is on his way to a double-digit win.

That's spurring a debate: Did Democrats' strategy create a blueprint to make Republicans campaign hard, compete for moderates and expend resources in future races? Or does the sizeable loss prove that Republicans' vice grip is impenetrable in the short term, no matter the strategy?

The answers could contain lessons for both red and blue states unaccustomed to competitive elections. Some Democrats say supporting McMullin was worth it — it shifted the political conversation, made the race competitive and forced Lee to spend almost double what he spent in his 2016 campaign. But other Democrats say the strategy hurt down-ballot candidates who didn't have a strong top-of-the-ticket contender to help boost them.

"Building my bench in that sense is going to be so much harder. How do I convince candidates, going forward, that the Democratic Party will support them?" said Katie Adams-Anderton, Democratic Party chair in Utah's second largest county.

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Utah is among the fastest growing states, and Democrats hope they will be able to compete as the electorate becomes younger and more urban. Yet Republicans currently hold both Senate seats and all four congressional seats, occupy every statewide office, and this week expanded their supermajorities in the Legislature.

Four years after running for U.S. Senate herself, Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson supported Democrats' decision to back McMullin. She credits it with making Lee sweat. Though McMullin lost, she said, coalescing behind an independent benefited voters by making the race competitive. She hopes putting Lee on his heels will influence how he governs and votes in the U.S. Senate.

"This was a unique moment, and I actually do think we've lost an opportunity by not electing Evan to help break up some of the hardened partisanship," she said, noting that whether backing an independent was a good strategy depended largely on circumstances.

Votes remain to be counted, but Lee is on track to defeat McMullin by double digits. That's a narrower margin than his 41 percentage-point victory in 2016 over grocery store clerk Misty Snow but wider than McMullin's team anticipated.

McMullin won 100,000 more votes than Utah Democrats' four congressional candidates did collectively, but preliminary results don't suggest his campaigning against the two-party system energized voters enough to substantially buoy turnout.

Independents have won Senate races in Vermont and Maine, yet in deeply red states like Utah, party politics remain entrenched and important to voters.

To put together a fragile coalition of Democrats, Republicans and independents, McMullin focused closely on threats to democracy. Rather than campaign on traditional midterm election issues, he attacked Lee's November 2020 text messages to Trump's White House chief of staff about ways to challenge President Joe Biden's victory.

Both Lee and Democrats skeptical of his candidacy criticized McMullin for being unclear on issues such as abortion or infrastructure spending.

"You say you want to put country over party. I respect that," Lee said at an October debate, addressing McMullin. "But parties are an important proxy for ideas. You see, because it's ideas more than parties that tell the people how you will vote."

Kael Weston, the Democrat Senate candidate who lost the party's backing when it lined up behind McMullin, acknowledged it would have been difficult for a Democrat to defeat Lee. But he said McMullin's focus came at the expense of local concerns, such as water or the closure of rural post offices. Focusing on those kinds of issues is the path to making elections competitive in red states, not becoming "Republican lite," he said.

Though outside spending from Democratic-donor funded PACs and conservative groups like Club for Growth reflect how the race was more competitive than usual, Weston said, McMullin's attempts to distance himself from Biden and Democrats hurt Democrats who were lower on the ballot.

"If all you see for three months is, Joe Biden is evil and Democrat is a four-letter word, that has an effect," he said, noting the anti-McMullin television ads might have hurt Democratic candidates for statehouse seats.

## Hundreds protest for climate action at UN summit

Associated Press undefined

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — Hundreds of activists called on industrialized nations to pay for the impact of climate change and to speed up the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy on Saturday in the largest protest yet at the U.N. climate summit in Egypt.

Protests have mostly been muted at the conference, known as COP27, which is taking place in the sea-side resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. Activists blamed high cost of travel, accommodation and restrictions in the isolated city for limiting numbers of demonstrators.

The protesters marched through the conference's 'Blue Zone,' which is considered a U.N. territory and ruled by international law. They chanted, sang, and danced in an area not far from where climate talks

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and negotiations are taking place. The protests came at the end of the first week of the two-week summit, when typically protest action at climate summits is at its biggest.

"Pay for loss and damage now," said Friday Nbani, a Nigerian environmental activist who was leading a group of African protesters. Many protesters, alongside several vulnerable countries, have called for 'loss and damage' payments, or financing to help pay for climate-related harms, to be central to negotiations. "Africa is crying, and its people are dying," Nbani said.

Protesters also called for drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions being pumped into the atmosphere. Emissions continue to rise but scientists say the amount of heat-trapping gases need to be almost halved by 2030 to meet the temperature-limiting goals of the Paris climate accord.

Activists chanted "keep it in the ground" in reference to their rejection of the continued extraction of fossil fuels.

On Friday, some activists heckled U.S. President Joe Biden's speech and raised an orange banner that read, "People vs. Fuels" before being removed. One of the activists, Jacob Johns, had his access to the conference revoked as a result.

"It's just a great way to silence Indigenous voices nationally and globally," said Johns, a member of the Akimelo'otham and Hopi nations in the United States.

The 39-year-old veteran activist said he went to the speech to protest the U.S.'s new program to encourage more corporate purchases of carbon offsets — a scheme for companies to get credits to pollute by contributing to the removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

And what really angered the veteran activist was that Biden mentioned Indigenous knowledge and efforts in his speech.

It was "just a really good big slap in the face to climate action," Johns said.

Saturday's rallies also focused on human and gender rights, with protesters saying both are linked to climate justice and called for an end to a crackdown on rights and environmental activists, especially in developing nations.

Activists called for the release of a jailed Egyptian pro-democracy activist, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, whose case grabbed international attention during the conference. His sister, Sanaa Seif, was in the conference campaigning for him to walk free.

"One day I hope my brother will be able to stand here with you and raise his voice, as he has always done for the repressed, the criminalized, the marginalized, and the ignored," said Asad Rehman, the executive director of War on Want, a London-based anti-poverty charity. He was reading Seif's remarks.

Abdel-Fattah's family said he has escalated his hunger strike and stopped drinking water to coincide with the start of the conference. Since then, they have been demanding word on his condition at the prison, and their concerns grew Thursday after authorities told them he was undergoing an undefined medical intervention and blocked a lawyer from seeing him.

## Ukrainian police, TV broadcasts return to long-occupied city

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

MYKOLAIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian police officers returned Saturday, along with TV and radio services, to the southern city of Kherson following the withdrawal of Russian troops, part of fast but cautious efforts to make the only regional capital captured by Russia livable after months of occupation. Yet one official still described the city as "a humanitarian catastrophe."

People across Ukraine awoke from a night of jubilant celebrating after the Kremlin announced its troops had withdrawn to the other side of the Dnieper River from Kherson. The Ukrainian military said it was overseeing "stabilization measures" around the city to make sure it was safe.

The Russian retreat represented a significant setback for the Kremlin some six weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed the Kherson region and three other provinces in southern and eastern Ukraine in breach of international law and declared them Russian territory.

The national police chief of Ukraine, Ihor Klymenko, said Saturday on Facebook that about 200 officers

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were at work in the city, setting up checkpoints and documenting evidence of possible war crimes. Police teams also were working to identify and neutralize unexploded ordnance and one sapper was wounded Saturday while demining an administrative building, Klymenko said.

Ukraine's communications watchdog said national TV and radio broadcasts had resumed in the city, and an adviser to Kherson's mayor said humanitarian aid and supplies had begun to arrive from the neighboring Mykolaiv region.

But the adviser, Roman Holovnya, described the situation in Kherson as "a humanitarian catastrophe." He said the remaining residents lacked water, medicine and food — and key basics like bread went unbaked because a lack of electricity.

"The occupiers and collaborators did everything possible so that those people who remained in the city suffered as much as possible over those days, weeks, months of waiting" for Ukraine's forces to arrive, Holovnya said. "Water supplies are practically nonexistent."

The chairman of Khersonoblenergo, the region's prewar power provider, said electricity was being returned "to every settlement in the Kherson region immediately after the liberation."

Despite the efforts to restore normal civilian life, Russian forces remain close by. The General Staff of Ukraine's armed forces said Saturday the Russians were fortifying their battle lines on the river's eastern bank after abandoning the capital. About 70% of the Kherson region remains under Russian control.

Ukrainian officials from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on down have cautioned that while special military units had reached Kherson, a full deployment to reinforce the advance troops in the city still was underway. Ukraine's intelligence agency thought some Russian soldiers may have stayed behind, ditching their uniforms to avoid detection.

"Even when the city is not yet completely cleansed of the enemy's presence, the people of Kherson themselves are already removing Russian symbols and any traces of the occupiers' stay in Kherson from the streets and buildings," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address.

Zelenskyy said the first part of the stabilization work includes de-mining operations. He said the entry of "our defenders" — the soldiers — into Kherson would be followed by police, sappers, rescuers and energy workers, among others.

"Medicine, communications, social services are returning," he said. "Life is returning."

Photos on social media Saturday showed Ukrainian activists removing memorial plaques put up by the occupation authorities the Kremlin installed to run the Kherson region. A Telegram post on Yellow Ribbon, a self-described Ukrainian "public resistance" movement, showed two people in a park taking down plaques picturing Soviet-era military figures.

Moscow's announcement that Russian forces were withdrawing across the Dnieper River, which divides both the Kherson region and Ukraine, followed a stepped-up Ukrainian counteroffensive in the country's south. In the last two months, Ukraine's military claimed to have reclaimed dozens of towns and villages north of the city of Kherson, and the military said that's where stabilization activities were taking place.

Russian state news agency Tass quoted an official in Kherson's Kremlin-appointed administration on Saturday as saying that Henichesk, a city on the Azov Sea 200 kilometers southeast of Kherson, would now serve as the region's "temporary capital."

Ukrainian media derided the announcement, with the Ukrainska Pravda newspaper saying Russia "had made up a new capital" for the region.

Across much of Ukraine, moments of jubilation marked the exit of Russian forces, since a retreat from Kherson and other areas on the Dnieper's west bank would appear to shatter Russian hopes to press an offensive west to Mykolaiv and Odesa to cut off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea.

In Odesa, the Black Sea port, residents draped themselves in Ukraine's blue-and-yellow flags, shared Champagne and held up flag-colored cards with the word "Kherson" on them.

But like Zelenskyy, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba sought to temper the excitement.

"We are winning battles on the ground, but the war continues," he said from Cambodia, where he was attending a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Kuleba brought up the prospect of the Ukrainian army finding evidence of possible Russian war crimes

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in Kherson, just as it did after Russian pullbacks in the Kyiv and Kharkiv regions.

"Every time we liberate a piece of our territory, when we enter a city liberated from Russian army, we find torture rooms and mass graves with civilians tortured and murdered by Russian army in the course of the occupation," Ukraine's top diplomat said. "It's not easy to speak with people like this. But I said that every war ends with diplomacy and Russia has to approach talks in good faith."

U.S. assessments this week showed Russia's war in Ukraine may already have killed or wounded tens of thousands of civilians and hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

Elsewhere, Russia continued its grinding offensive in Ukraine's industrial east, targeting the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, the Ukrainian General Staff said.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko reported Saturday that two civilians were killed and four wounded over the last day as battles heated up around Bakhmut and Avdiivka, a small city that has remained in Ukrainian hands.

Russia's push to capture Bakhmut demonstrates the Kremlin's desire for visible gains following weeks of setbacks. It would also pave the way to move onto other Ukrainian strongholds in the heavily contested Donetsk region.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region west of Donetsk, Russia troops again shelled communities near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, the Ukrainian regional governor said.

## Ukraine FM: Moscow playing 'hunger games' with world

By DAVID RISING and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba pressed Southeast Asian countries for political and material support in his country's fight against Russia, while accusing Moscow on Saturday of playing "hunger games" with the world by holding up shipments of Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products.

Kuleba told reporters on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit that with a deal allowing Ukraine to export grain and fertilizer due to expire Nov. 19, the world needed to pressure Russia not to object to its extension, saying Ukrainian products were critical in Africa and Asia.

More than just continuing the deal, however, Kuleba accused Russian inspectors of "quiet sabotage," saying they were intentionally dragging their feet in allowing shipments through.

Not only does Russia have "to remain part of the initiative, it also has to instruct its inspectors to act in good faith and to avoid any measures, any steps, that create obstacles and hinder the export of Ukrainian agricultural goods to the global market," he said.

"Russia should — must — stop playing hunger games with the world."

Kuleba's country was invited to the ASEAN summit for the first time this year and signed a peace accord with the group of nations with a combined population of nearly 700 million people.

Many of the member nations have thus far been reserved in their stance toward the invasion, condemning the war but generally trying to avoid assigning blame. Eight of 10 ASEAN countries did vote in favor of the U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning Russian aggression, with Vietnam and Laos abstaining.

Kuleba said signing the accord with ASEAN was a strong message of support from the group, though added that "the litmus test is the ... voting in the U.N. General Assembly for resolutions related to Ukraine."

ASEAN is made up of Cambodia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei and Myanmar, though Myanmar's leaders are not being allowed to participate in the current meetings due to ongoing violence in the country and its lack of effort in implementing the group's peace plan following the 2021 military takeover.

Kuleba said he is using the opportunity of the Phnom Penh summit as "an Asian tour," meeting with ASEAN members and non-members like Australia to plead for more political support, material aid — like transformers and generators to repair those destroyed in the fighting — and improvements of food security and trade.

He spoke on the day U.S. President Joe Biden arrived at the talks, and met with Secretary of State

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Antony Blinken on the sidelines.

Blinken applauded Kuleba's efforts to keep drumming up assistance, assuring him that "support is strong around the world" for Ukraine.

Kuleba said it seemed "symbolic" that he had signed a strategic partnership with the U.S. exactly a year before the accord with ASEAN.

"This just demonstrates how far we have gone after consolidating our position as a country belonging to the West," Kuleba said, according to a copy of his remarks provided by the U.S. State Department.

In his earlier press conference, Kuleba said he had hoped to meet with China's foreign minister but was told he would not be present. Kuleba added that Ukraine was maintaining a dialogue with China to push Beijing to "use its leverage on Russia to make them stop the war."

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was also on hand at the ASEAN meetings, and Kuelba said if Lavrov asked to meet him, he would be willing to consider the request but accused Russia thus far of using talks as a "smokescreen for its continued aggression on the ground."

"Ukraine will prevail, it's only a matter of time and the price," he said. "And yes, some gains are being achieved militarily, but some gains of Ukraine will be achieved diplomatically."

But, he said, in any talks the "territorial integrity of Ukraine is not something that can be discussed."

In brief opening remarks as he sat down to meet with ASEAN leaders, Biden said he was ready to discuss with them "Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and our efforts to address the war's global impacts, including in Southeast Asia."

Earlier, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he had made clear to summit participants that it was important to establish the conditions for re-establishing dialogue between Ukraine and Russia, and "progressively to start looking into a future where peace will prevail."

"Not any kind of peace," Guterres said. "Peace based on the values of the U.N. Charter and peace based on international law."

In other comments, Guterres said the world had failed Myanmar, and expressed hope ASEAN would be able to pressure the member state to comply with its plan for peace over the next year.

ASEAN leaders agreed on a plan Friday that largely puts the onus on Indonesia, when it takes over the group's rotating chair in 2023, to develop measurable indicators and a timeline for Myanmar to implement the so-called five-point consensus for peace.

Indonesia has been one of the ASEAN countries most outspoken about the need to do more to address the situation in Myanmar, and Guterres told reporters he felt "the Indonesian government will be able to push forward the agenda in a positive way."

The ASEAN decision announced Friday includes asking the U.N. and other "external partners" for assistance in supporting the group's efforts. Guterres said he hoped the U.N. special envoy for Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, would cooperate closely with her ASEAN counterpart to bring about an end to the "dramatic violations of human rights" in the country.

"Everybody has failed in relation to Myanmar," Guterres said. "The international community as a whole has failed, and the U.N. is part of the international community."

ASEAN's peace plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue among all parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all sides.

Myanmar's military-led government initially agreed to the plan but has made little effort to implement it.

## **Biden pledges US will work with Southeast Asian nations**

By SEUNG MIN KIM and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — President Joe Biden promised Saturday that the United States would work with a strategically vital coalition of southeast Asian nations, telling leaders that "we're going to build a better future that we all want to see" in the region where U.S. rival China is also working to expand its influence.

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Citing the three Association of Southeast Asian Nations summits he's participated in as president, Biden said the 10-country bloc is "at the heart of my administration's Indo-Pacific strategy" and promised to collaborate to build a region that is "free and open, stable and prosperous, resilient and secure."

"I look forward to continuing our work together with ASEAN and with each one of you to deepen peace and prosperity throughout the region to resolve challenges from the South China Sea to Myanmar and to find innovative solutions to shared challenges," Biden said, citing climate and health security among areas of collaboration.

Biden's efforts at this year's ASEAN summit are meant to lay the groundwork for his highly anticipated meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping — the first face-to-face encounter of Biden's presidency with a leader whose nation the U.S. now considers its most potent economic and military rival.

Biden and Xi will meet on Monday at the Group of 20 summit that brings together leaders from the world's largest economies, which is held this year in Indonesia on the island of Bali.

Traveling to Phnom Penh earlier Saturday, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Biden will raise issues such as freedom of navigation and illegal and unregulated fishing by China with the ASEAN leaders — aimed at demonstrating U.S. assertiveness against Beijing.

Freedom of navigation refers to a dispute involving the South China Sea, where the United States says it can sail and fly wherever international law allows and China believes such missions are destabilizing. Sullivan said the U.S. has a key role to play as a stabilizing force in the region and in prevention of any one nation from engaging in "sustained intimidation and coercion that would be fundamentally adverse to the nations of ASEAN and other countries."

"There's a real demand signal for that," Sullivan told reporters aboard Air Force One on Saturday. Referring to the People's Republic of China, Sullivan continued: "I think the PRC may not love that fact, but they certainly acknowledge it and understand it."

One new initiative related to those efforts that Biden will discuss Saturday focuses on maritime awareness, specifically using radio frequencies from commercial satellites to better track dark shipping and illegal fishing, Sullivan said.

Biden's visit to Cambodia — the second ever by a U.S. president — continues his administration's push to demonstrate its investments in the south Pacific, which was highlighted earlier this year when the White House hosted an ASEAN summit in Washington, the first of its kind. He also tapped one of his senior aides, Yohannes Abraham, as the official envoy to ASEAN, another way the White House has highlighted that commitment.

ASEAN this year is elevating the U.S. to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" status — a largely symbolic enhancement of their relationship but one that puts Washington on the same level as China, which was granted the distinction last year.

Biden opened Saturday in Phnom Penh by meeting with Hun Sen, the prime minister of Cambodia, the host for the regional summit. He also participated in the traditional family photo with southeast Asian leaders — one that required a re-do as the gregarious Biden was too busy shaking hands with other heads of state — and later, will attend a gala dinner hosted by a parallel summit in Cambodia focusing on east Asia.

Another topic Biden focused on is Myanmar, where the military junta overthrew the ruling government in February 2021 and arrested its democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. As he met with Hun Sen, Biden stressed that the U.S. was committed to the return of democracy in Myanmar, which had steadily headed toward a democratic form of governance before the coup.

Biden also raised human rights concerns in Cambodia. In a statement after the meeting with Hun Sen, the White House said Biden urged the prime minister — an authoritarian ruler in a nominally democratic nation — to "reopen civic and political space" before its 2023 elections.

Biden, according to the White House, also pushed Hun Sen to release activists including Theary Seng, a Cambodian-American lawyer who was convicted of treason as the prime minister's long-running rule aimed to crack down on his opposition. The White House said Biden also raised concerns about activities at Ream Naval Base, whose expansion Cambodian officials have described as a collaborative effort



between it and China.

At the U.S.-ASEAN summit, there was an empty chair where a representative from Myanmar would have sat had its leaders not been barred from participating in official ASEAN meetings.

In his brief remarks Saturday, Biden mistakenly identified host nation Cambodia as "Colombia," a flub he also made on Thursday night as he was leaving the U.S.

Biden will participate in East Asia summit sessions on Sunday, including a three-way meeting with the leaders of South Korea and Japan, before leaving for the G-20 summit in Bali.

## **Brazil will be climate leader, says ex-minister Marina Silva**

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

SHARM el-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — Marina Silva, a former environmental minister and potential candidate for the job again, on Saturday brought a message to the U.N. climate summit: Brazil is back when it comes to protecting the Amazon rainforest, the largest in the world and crucial to limiting global warming.

The recent election of leftist President-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva represents a potentially huge shift in how Brazil manages the forest compared to current President Jair Bolsonaro. Da Silva was expected next week to attend the conference known as COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

Silva said the fact that da Silva was coming to the summit, months before he assumes power Jan. 1, was an indication of the commitment of his administration to protect forests and take a leadership role on combating climate change. Da Silva was expected to meet with several heads of delegations.

"Brazil will return to the protagonist role it previously had when it comes to climate, to biodiversity," said Silva, who spoke with reporters at the Brazilian Climate Hub.

Bolsonaro, who was elected in 2018, pushed development of the Amazon, both in his actions and rhetoric. Environmental agencies were weakened and he appointed forest managers from the agribusiness sector. The sector opposes the creation of protected areas such as Indigenous territories and pushes for the legalization of land robbing. The deforested area in Brazil's Amazon reached a 15-year high from August 2020 to July 2021, according to official figures. Satellite monitoring shows the trend this year is on track to surpass last year.

Upon winning the October elections, da Silva, president between 2003 and 2010, promised to overhaul Bolsonaro's policies and move toward completely stopping deforestation, referred to as "Deforestation Zero."

That will be a huge task. While much of the world celebrates policies that protect the rainforest in Brazil and other countries in South America, there are myriad forces pushing for development, including among many Amazon dwellers. And Da Silva, while much more focused on environmental protection compared to Bolsonaro, had a mixed record as president. Deforestation dropped dramatically during the decade after Da Silva took power, with Marina Silva as environment minister. But in his second term, Da Silva began catering to agribusiness interests, and in 2008 Marina Silva resigned.

In recent weeks, news reports in Brazil have focused on a possible alliance between Brazil, the Congo and Indonesia, home to the largest tropical forests in the world. Given the moniker "OPEC of the Forests," in reference to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the way they regulate oil production, the general idea would be for these three countries to coordinate their negotiating positions and practices on forest management and biodiversity protection. The proposal was initially floated during last year's climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, according to the reports.

When asked for details on any alliance, including whether it might be announced during the second week of the summit, Silva demurred, making clear that any such announcement wasn't hers to make.

"We don't want to be isolated in our protection of forests," she said more generally, adding that Brazil wanted forest management to be coordinated among "mega forest countries" but wouldn't try to impose its will.

Silva won a seat in Congress in October's elections. A former childhood rubber-tapper who worked closely with murdered environmentalist Chico Mendes, she has moral authority when it comes to environmental issues and is one of a handful of people talked about as a possible minister in da Silva's government.

While making clear she was not speaking for the president-elect, Silva shared details of what she thought would be part of the next administration. She said Brazil would not take the position that it "had to be paid" to protect its forests, a position that Bolsonaro's administration has taken.

Brazil would not undertake the kind of large energy projects that it did in the past under Da Silva's first terms, like a major hydropower dam, but instead would focus on a shift to renewable energies like solar. Along the same lines, she said there would be a push to transition state oil company Petrobras from a focus on oil to a focus on renewable energies.

"We need to use those (oil) resources, which are still needed, to do a transition to other forms of energy and not perpetuate the model" of a company focus on oil, she said.

Silva said Brazil would participate in carbon offsets markets, but that they needed to have "rigorous" oversight, something that arguably isn't the case currently. Such carbon credits allow companies and countries to offset some of their carbon emissions by paying for activities that capture carbon, like planting trees.

Silva also said she had proposed a government body to focus on climate change, which presumably would be in addition to the environmental ministry. She said the idea would be to have close regulation of climatic changes so things could be addressed in real time, such as greenhouse gas leaks, or weaknesses in climate policy. She made a comparison to the way that governments always keep a close watch on inflation.

"The idea is to avoid climate inflation," she said.

## **LGBTQ-friendly votes signal progressive shift for Methodists**

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

The United Methodist Church moved toward becoming more progressive and LGBTQ-affirming during U.S. regional meetings this month that included the election of its second openly gay bishop. Conservatives say the developments will only accelerate their exit from one of the nation's largest Protestant denominations.

Each of the UMC's five U.S. jurisdictions — meeting separately in early November — approved similarly worded measures aspiring to a future of church where "LGBTQIA+ people will be protected, affirmed, and empowered."

They also passed non-binding measures asking anyone to withdraw from leadership roles if they're planning to leave the denomination soon — a category that almost entirely includes conservatives moving toward the exits.

The denomination still officially bans same-sex marriage and the ordination of any "self-avowed, practicing homosexual," and only a legislative gathering called the General Conference can change that.

But this month's votes show growing momentum — at least in the American half of the global church — to defy these policies and seek to reverse them at the next legislative gathering in 2024.

Supporters and opponents of these measures drew from the same metaphor to say their church is either becoming more or less of a "big tent," as the United Methodists have long been described as a theologically diverse, mainstream denomination.

"It demonstrates that the big tent has collapsed," said the Rev. Jay Therrell, president of the conservative Wesleyan Covenant Association, which has been helping churches that want to leave the denomination.

"For years, bishops have told traditionalists that there is room for everyone in the United Methodist Church," he said. "Not one single traditionalist bishop was elected. Moreover, we now have the most progressive or liberal council of bishops in the history of Methodism, period."

But Jan Lawrence, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, which works toward inclusion of Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities, applauded the regional jurisdictions. She cited their LGBTQ-affirming votes and their expansion of the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of bishops.

Jurisdictions elected the church's first Native American and Filipino American bishops, with other landmark votes within specific regions, according to United Methodist News Service.

"It is a big tent church," Lawrence said. "One of the concerns that some folks expressed is that we don't have leadership in the church that reflects the diversity of the church. So this episcopal election doesn't

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fix that, but it's a step in the right direction."

Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth, elected in the Western Jurisdiction meeting, agreed. He is the first openly gay African-American man to be elected bishop. The vote comes six years after the Western Jurisdiction elected the denomination's first openly lesbian bishop, Karen Oliveto of the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area.

The LGBTQ-affirming resolutions point "to the alignment of the denomination more with the mainstream of our country," Bridgeforth said. "It can also help us begin to center our conversations where we have unity of purpose, rather than centering on divisions."

Bridgeforth will lead churches in the Greater Northwest Area, which includes churches in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and small parts of Montana and Canada. He said he has always worked across ideological lines in his administrative duties and would continue to do so.

"I have used our differences as an opportunity for us to come together," he said. "It creates more space for a different kind of conversation than, 'That's different, that's bad, we can't be together.'" If some churches under his jurisdiction do choose to leave the United Methodist Church, Bridgeforth said he would help them make that transition.

"I would not want anybody to be where they don't want to be," he said.

Progressive groups have said the church should be open to appointing bishops and other clergy, regardless of sexual orientation, who show they have the gifts for ministry and a commitment to serve the church.

Conservatives, however, say the church needs to abide by its own rules.

"I am sure Bishop Bridgeforth is a person of sacred worth, but he does not meet the qualifications to hold the office of elder, much less bishop, and should not have been elected," Therrell said.

At least 300 U.S. congregations have left the denomination this year, according to United Methodist News Service. Hundreds more are in the process of leaving, and Therrell predicted that number would be in the low thousands by the end of 2023. Overseas conferences in Bulgaria and Slovakia have ended their affiliation with the denomination, and churches in Africa are considering it, he said.

Many are bound for the newly formed conservative denomination, the Global Methodist Church.

The UMC is a worldwide denomination. American membership has declined to about 6.5 million, from a peak of 11 million in the 1960s. Overseas membership soared to match or exceed that of the U.S., fueled mostly by growth and mergers in Africa. Overseas delegates have historically allied with American conservatives to uphold the church's stances on sexuality.

Support for a compromise measure that would have amicably split the denomination, negotiated in 2020, fell apart after that year's legislative General Conference was postponed three times due to the pandemic. The next General Conference is now scheduled to begin in April 2024 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

A vote by a 2019 General Conference was the latest of several in recent decades that reinforced the church's ban on gay clergy and marriage. But that vote also prompted many local conferences to elect more liberal and centrist delegates, whose influence was felt in this month's regional votes.

## UN climate talks near halftime with key issues unresolved

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — As the U.N. climate talks in Egypt near the half-way point, negotiators are working hard to draft deals on a wide range of issues they'll put to ministers next week in the hope of getting a substantial result by the end.

The top U.S. negotiator indicated that a planned meeting Monday between U.S. President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping of China on the sideline of the Group of 20 meeting in Bali could also provide an important signal for the climate talks as they go in the home stretch.

The two-week meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh started with strong appeals from world leaders for greater efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and help poor nations cope with global warming.

Scientists say the amount of greenhouse gases being pumped into the atmosphere needs to be halved by 2030 to meet the goals of the Paris climate accord. The 2015 pact set a target of ideally limiting temperature rise to 1.5 Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) by the end of the century, but left it up to countries to decide

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how they want to do so.

With impacts from climate change already felt across the globe, particularly by the world's poorest, there has also been a push by campaigners and developing nations for rich polluters to stump up more cash. This would be used to help developing countries shift to clean energy and adapt to global warming; increasingly there are also calls for compensation to pay for climate-related losses.

Here is a look at the main issues on the table at the COP27 talks and how they might be reflected in a final agreement.

## KEEPING COOL

The hosts of last year's talks in Glasgow said they managed to "keep 1.5 alive," including by getting countries to endorse the target in the outcome document. But U.N. chief Antonio Guterres has warned that the temperature goal is on life support "and the machines are rattling." And campaigners were disappointed that the agenda this year doesn't explicitly cite the threshold after pushback from some major oil and gas exporting nations.

Egypt, which is chairing the talks, convened a three-hour meeting Saturday in which the issue was raised several times. "1.5 is a substantive issue," said Wael Aboulmagd, a senior Egyptian negotiator, adding that it was "not just China" which had raised questions about the language used to refer to the target. "I think we have some thoughts as to how to address the semantic aspect of that while ensuring that COP27 witnesses maximum possible advance on the cause of mitigation," he said.

## CUTTING EMISSIONS

Negotiators are trying to put together a mitigation work program that would capture the various measures countries have committed to reducing emissions, including for specific sectors such as energy and transport. Many of these pledges are not formally part of the U.N. process, meaning they cannot easily be scrutinized at the annual meeting. A proposed draft agreement circulated early Saturday had more than 200 square brackets, meaning large sections were still unresolved. Some countries want the plan to be valid only for one year, while others say a longer-term roadmap is needed. Expect fireworks in the days ahead.

## US-CHINA RELATIONS

While all countries are equal at the U.N. meeting, in practice little gets done without the approval of the world's two biggest emitters, China and the United States. Beijing canceled formal dialogue on climate following Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and relations have been frosty since. U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said Saturday that he had only held informal discussions with his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua lately. "I think we're both waiting to see how things go with the G-20 and hopefully we can return," he told reporters. Whether any formal meetings might resume in Sharm el-Sheikh was unclear, but Kerry said talks on the "existential issue" of climate change should involve all countries, "including including our friends, China."

## SHUNNING FOSSIL FUELS

Last year's meeting almost collapsed over a demand to explicitly state in the final agreement that coal should be phased out. In the end, countries agreed on several loopholes, and there are concerns among climate campaigners that negotiators from nations which are heavily dependent on fossil fuels for their energy needs or as revenue might try to roll back previous commitments.

## MONEY MATTERS

Rich countries have fallen short on a pledge to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 in climate finance for poor nations. This has opened up a rift of distrust that negotiators are hoping to close with fresh pledges. But needs are growing and a new, higher target needs to be set from 2025 onward.

## COMPENSATION

The subject of climate compensation was once considered taboo, due to concerns from rich countries that they might be on the hook for vast sums. But intense pressure from developing countries forced the issue of 'loss and damage' onto the formal agenda at the talks for the first time this year. Whether there will be a deal to promote further technical work or the creation of an actual fund remains to be seen.

John Kerry said the United States is hopeful of getting an agreement "before 2024" but suggested this

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might not come to pass in Egypt. "It could well happen in the next months," he said. "It could happen during this year. It may be an outcome at COP28" next year. But he made clear where the U.S. red line currently lies for Washington: "It's a well known fact that the United States and many other countries will not establish some ... legal structure that is a tied to compensation or liability. That's just not happening." That doesn't mean money won't flow, eventually. But it might be branded as aid, tied into existing funds and require contributions from all major emitters if it is to pass.

## MORE DONORS

One way to raise additional cash and resolve the thorny issue of polluter payment would be for those countries that have seen an economic boom in the past three decades to step up. The focus is chiefly on China, the world's biggest emitter, but others could be asked to open their purses too. Broadening the donor base isn't formally on the agenda but developed countries want reassurances about that in the final texts.

## CASH CONSTRAINTS

Countries such as Britain and Germany want all financial flows to align with the long-term goals of the Paris accord. Other nations object to such a rule, fearing they may have money withheld if they don't meet the strict targets. But there is chatter that the issue may get broader support next week if it helps unlock other areas of the negotiations.

## SIDE DEALS

Last year's meeting saw a raft of agreements signed which weren't formally part of the talks. Some have also been unveiled in Egypt, though hopes for a series of announcements on so-called Just Transition Partnerships — where developed countries help poorer nations wean themselves off fossil fuels — aren't likely to bear fruit until after COP27.

## HOPE TILL THE END

Jennifer Morgan, a former head of Greenpeace who recently became Germany's climate envoy, called the talks this year "challenging."

"But I can promise you we will be working until the very last second to ensure that we can reach an ambitious and equitable outcome," she said. "We are reaching for the stars while keeping our feet on the ground."

## Cortez Masto narrows in on Laxalt in Nevada Senate race

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — With control of the U.S. Senate on the line, Nevada's protracted ballot count ground through a fourth day Friday as election officials tallied thousands of votes ahead of a Saturday deadline to accept late-arriving mail-ins.

Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto was running barely behind Republican Adam Laxalt, but with the remaining tens of thousands of uncounted ballots mainly coming from the state's urban cores, her campaign expressed optimism she could overtake her challenger. Laxalt, meanwhile, has steadily predicted he'll stay in the lead as the count drags on.

"We are doing everything in our power to move ballots forward just as quickly as we can," Joe Gloria, the registrar in Clark County, which includes Las Vegas, said at a press conference Friday.

Gloria's office posted tabulations Friday evening for more than 27,000 ballots that put Cortez Masto within a few hundred votes of Laxalt, with an estimated 23,000 more votes in heavily Democratic Clark County yet to be tallied.

With the Senate evenly divided, Nevada is one of two undetermined races that will determine which party controls the chamber, after Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly won his bid for reelection in Arizona late Friday.

If Democrats win Nevada, they will have control even before a December runoff in Georgia between Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock and Republican Herschel Walker, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to break a tie. If Republicans win Nevada, control of the Senate will be decided in Georgia.

In another key race, Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak lost his reelection bid to his Republican challenger, sheriff Joe Lombardo, on Friday night.

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Nevada's count has taken several days partly because of the mail voting system created by the state Legislature in 2020 that requires counties to accept ballots postmarked by Election Day if they arrive up to four days later. Even after the counts are finished this weekend, voters have until the end of the day Monday to "cure" — or fix clerical problems with — their mail ballots, enabling those to be added into the final tally. Gloria said there are 9,600 ballots in the "cure" stage in Clark County, home to three-quarters of the state's population.

Nevada, a closely divided swing state, is one of the most racially diverse in the nation, a working class state whose residents have been especially hard hit by inflation and other economic turmoil

Roughly three-fourths of Nevada voters said the country is headed in the wrong direction, and about 5 in 10 called the economy the most important issue facing the country, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of 2,100 of the state's voters.

Voters viewed the economy negatively, with VoteCast finding nearly 8 in 10 saying economic conditions are either not so good or poor. Only about 2 in 10 called the economy excellent or good. And about a third of voters said their families are falling behind financially.

But that didn't necessarily translate into anger at President Joe Biden or his party. About half considered inflation the most important issue facing the U.S., but they were evenly split over whether they think higher prices are due to Biden's policies or factors outside his control.

Nevada is also a famously live-and-let-live state, and Cortez Masto and other Democrats made preserving abortion rights a centerpiece of their campaigns. According to VoteCast, 7 in 10 wanted the procedure kept legal in all or most cases.

Republicans, however, relentlessly hammered the economic argument, contending it was time for a leadership change. They also sought to capitalize on lingering frustrations about pandemic shutdowns that devastated Las Vegas' tourist-centric economy in 2020.

On Thursday morning, The Associated Press declared Republican Stavros Anthony the winner in the lieutenant governor race, while Republican Andy Mathews was elected state controller.

The state's lone Republican congressman, Mark Amodei, easily won reelection in his mostly rural district in northern Nevada. The state's three Las Vegas-area Democratic members of the House were also reelected.

## China tightens restrictions as rise in virus cases reported

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Everyone in a district of 1.8 million people in China's southern metropolis of Guangzhou was ordered to stay home for virus testing Saturday and a major city in the southwest closed schools as another rise in infections was reported.

Nationwide, a total of 11,773 infections were reported over the previous 24 hours, including 10,351 people with no symptoms. China's numbers are low, but the past week's increase is challenging a "zero-COVID" strategy that aims to isolate every infected person.

The quarantine for travelers arriving in China is to be shortened to a minimum of five days from seven as part of changes in controls announced Friday to reduce their cost and disruption. But the ruling Communist Party said it would stick to "zero COVID" even as other countries ease travel and other curbs and try to shift to a long-term strategy of living with the virus.

A total of 3,775 infections were found in Guangzhou, a city of 13 million, including 2,996 in people who showed no symptoms, according to the National Health Commission. That was an increase from Friday's total of 3,030, including 2,461 without symptoms.

People in the Guangzhou's Haizhu district were told to visit the nearest testing station but otherwise stay home, the district government announced on its social media account. One member of each household was allowed out to buy food.

Also Saturday, health officials warned the decision to modify anti-virus controls didn't mean they were ending.

Under the changes, some foreign businesspeople and athletes visiting China would be allowed to move

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within a contained area without a quarantine period. Rules on who counts as a contact of infected people are to be more focused, reducing the number affected.

"This is not relaxation, nor 'lying flat,' but more accurate and scientific prevention and treatment," said the NHC deputy director, Lei Haichao. Lei said the goal is to "prevent the epidemic and minimize the impact on economic and social development."

Economists and public health experts say Beijing might be able to start winding down "zero COVID" in mid-2023 but needs to vaccinate tens of millions of elderly people before controls on foreign visitors coming into China end.

Nationwide, people who want to enter supermarkets and other public buildings are required to show negative results of a virus test taken as often as once a day. That allows authorities to spot infections in people with no symptoms.

Guangzhou, 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of Hong Kong, shut down schools and bus and subway service across much of the city as case numbers rose over the past week. Flights to the Chinese capital, Beijing, and other major cities have been canceled.

In the southwest, the industrial city of Chongqing closed schools in its Beibei district, which has 840,000 people. Residents were barred from leaving a series of apartment compounds in its Yubei district but the city gave no indication how many were affected.

Public frustration and complaints that some people are left without access to food or medicine have boiled over into protests and clashes with local officials in some areas.

Elsewhere, mass testing also was being carried out Saturday in eight districts with a total of 6.6 million people in the central city of Zhengzhou.

Access to an industrial zone of Zhengzhou that is home to the world's biggest iPhone factory was suspended last week following outbreaks. Apple Inc. warned deliveries of its new iPhone 14 model would be delayed.

Despite efforts to ease damage to the world's second-largest economy, forecasters say business and consumer activity is weakening after growth rebounded to 3.9% over a year earlier in the three months ending in September from the first half's 2.2%.

Economists have cut their forecast of China's annual economic growth to as low as 3%, which would be among the lowest in decades.

President Xi Jinping's government has refused to import foreign vaccines and defied requests to release more information about the source of the virus, which was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

## Twitter drama too much? Mastodon, others emerge as options

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Twitter has been a bit of a mess since billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk took the helm, cutting the company's workforce in half, upending the platform's verification system, sparring with users over jokes and acknowledging that "dumb things" might happen as he reshapes one of the world's most high-profile information ecosystems.

On Thursday, amid an exodus of senior executives responsible for data privacy, cybersecurity and complying with regulations, he warned the company's remaining employees that Twitter might not survive if it can't find a way to bring in at least half its revenue from subscriptions.

While it's not clear if the drama is causing many users to leave — in fact, having a front-row seat to the chaos may prove entertaining to some — lesser-known sites Mastodon and even Tumblr are emerging as new (or renewed) alternatives. Here's a look at some of them.

(Oh, and if you are leaving Twitter and want to preserve your tweet history, you can download it by going to your profile settings and clicking on "your account" then "download an archive of your data.")

### MASTODON

Named after an extinct mammal resembling an elephant, Mastodon has emerged as a frontrunner among

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those curious about life beyond the blue bird. It shares some similarities with Twitter, but there are some big differences — and not just that its version of tweets are officially called “toots.”

Mastodon is a decentralized social network. That means it’s not owned by a single company or billionaire. Rather, it’s made up of a network of servers, each run independently but able to connect so people on different servers can communicate. There are no ads as Mastodon is funded by donations, grants and other means.

Mastodon’s feed is chronological, unlike Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or Twitter, which all use algorithms to get people to spend as much time on a site as possible.

It can be a tad daunting to try to sign up to Mastodon. Because each server is run separately, you will need to first pick one you want to join, then go through the steps to create an account and agree with the server’s rules. There are general and interest- and location-based ones, but in the end it won’t really matter. Once you’re in, the feed is reminiscent of Twitter. You can write (up to 500 characters), post photos or videos, and follow accounts as well as see a general public feed.

“We present a vision of social media that cannot be bought and owned by any billionaire, and strive to create a more resilient global platform without profit incentives,” Mastodon’s website says.

Currently, the site has more than 1 million users, nearly half of whom signed up after Musk took over Twitter on Oct. 27, according to founder Eugen Rochko.

Another option, Counter Social, also runs an ad-free, chronological social platform that’s funded by users. To prevent foreign influence operations, Counter Social says it blocks access to Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan and Syria. It boasts of offering one-click translation into over 80 languages. It has over 63 million monthly users, according to its website.

## CLUBHOUSE

Remember Clubhouse, back when we were all under lockdown and couldn’t talk in person? It’s the buzzy audio-only app that got somewhat overshadowed by copycat Twitter Spaces, which also lets people talk to each other (think conference call, podcast or “audio chat”) about topics of interest.

Once you join, Clubhouse lets you start or listen into conversations on a host of topics, from tech to pro sports, parenting, Black literature and so on. There are no posts, photos or videos — only people’s profile pictures and their voices. Conversations can be intimate, like a phone call, or might include thousands of people listening to a talk by boldface names, like a conference or stage interview.

## SUBSTACK and MEDIUM

For longer reads, newsletters, and general information absorption, these sites are perhaps closest to the blog era of the early 2000s. You can read both without signing up or paying, but some writers, creators and podcasters create premium content for paying subscribers.

## TUMBLR

Tumblr, which was all but left for dead, appears to be enjoying somewhat of a resurgence. The words/photos/art/video site is known for its devoted fan base and has been home to angry posts from celebrities like Taylor Swift. It angered many users in 2018 when it banned porn and “adult content,” which made up a big part of its highly visual and meme-friendly online presence and led to a large drop in its user base.

Onboarding is simple, and for those who miss the early years of social media, there’s a decidedly retro, comforting feel to the site.

## T2 or TBD?

Gabor Cselle, a veteran of Google who worked at Twitter from 2014 to 2016, is determined to create a better Twitter. For now, he’s calling it T2 and says the Web domain name he purchased for it — t2.social — cost \$7.16. T2, which may or may not be its final name, is currently accepting signups for its waitlist, but the site is clearly not yet functioning.

“I think Twitter always had a problem in figuring out what to do and how to decide on what to do. And that was always kind of in the back of my mind,” Cselle told The Associated Press. “On Monday, I decided to just go for it. I didn’t see anyone else really doing it.”

Twitter-style text and TikTok-style videos are one idea. Cselle says for this to work, the text really has to be “amped up” so it’s not drowned out by the videos.



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"My bet is that it's going to be easier and more efficient to build a better Twitter or public square now than fix the legacy problems at Twitter," Cselle added.

Cselle, of course, is not the only one jumping to the opportunity. Project Mushroom, for instance, plans a "safe place on the internet — a community-led open-source home for creators seeking justice on an overheating planet" and says it has received 25,000 early signups to its yet-to-launch platform.

"My sense is that things are going to further fragment into more ideological platforms and some will die and then we'll see some new consolidation emerge over the next couple of years," said Jennifer Stromer-Galley, a professor at Syracuse University who studies social media.

## NEWS SITES

One of Twitter's most valuable features has been the way it allows people to find information within seconds. Was that just an earthquake? Twitter will tell you. Or at least it did.

While there is no perfect replacement for Twitter, staying up to date with local, national and international news is easier than ever. Apple and Google both offer news services that aggregate articles from a broad range of publication (Apple offers a premium subscription service that gets you access to more articles, while Google shows free stories first.) There's also Flipboard, which works kind of like a personal magazine curated to your interests.

Of course, subscribing to individual publications (or downloading a free news app such as the AP's AP News) is also an option.

Yes, you might have to pay for some of them and no, you won't get a blue check mark with your subscription.

## **In dry, unreliable weather, Indian farmers restore arid land**

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

ANANTAPUR, India (AP) — Ramesh Hanumaiya digs a few inches into his field with his hand and examines the soil. There is movement in the thick, brown earth: Tiny earthworms being disturbed from their homestead.

A handful of dirt filled with earthworms might not seem like much, but it's the result of seven years' work. "This soil used to be as hard as a brick," said 37-year-old Ramesh. "It's now like a sponge. The soil is rich with the nutrients and life that's needed for my crops to grow on time and in a healthy way."

Like Ramesh thousands of other farmers in Anantapur, a district in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, have taken to what's known as regenerative agricultural practices. Techniques like using natural fertilizers and planting crops alongside trees and other plants have been successful at combating desertification, the process of once-fertile ground turning into dust. Climate change is exacerbating the loss of arable land as temperatures rise and rainfall becomes more irregular.

Described by the United Nations' desertification agency as one of the greatest threats to human society, it's estimated that over 40% of the world's land is already degraded. Around 1.9 billion hectares of land, more than twice the size of the United States, and roughly 1.5 billion people globally are affected in some way by desertification, according to U.N. estimates.

"It was always a dry region but we knew when it will rain and people used to farm accordingly," said 69-year-old Malla Reddy, who runs a non-profit that encourages natural farming practices in the region. "Now what's happening is that the rainfall can happen at any season, farmers are unable to predict this and many a time lose their crops."

Hotter temperatures also mean water is evaporating quicker, leaving less in the ground for thirsty crops.

Reddy's non-profit works with over 60,000 farmers across 300,000 acres of land in the district, supporting individual farmers to restore unproductive land across the entire region.

Most Indian farmers rely on rainfed agriculture, with about 70 million hectares — about half of all farmed land in India — dependent on downpours. These lands are also the ones most subject to poor agricultural methods, such as excessive use of chemical fertilizers, over tilling and monocropping, the practice of planting just a single crop each year, experts say.

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Reddy, the director of Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre, and the farmers his organization supports use methods known as natural farming and agroforestry to avoid spoiling the land. Natural farming replaces all chemical fertilizers and pesticides with organic matter such as cow dung, cow urine and jaggery, a type of solid dark sugar made from sugarcane, to boost soil nutrient levels. Agroforestry involves planting woody perennials, trees, shrubs and palms alongside agricultural crops.

And while most other farmers in the region either grow groundnuts or paddy using chemical fertilizers, natural farmers grow a variety of crops. Multi-cropping ensures that soil nutrients are periodically restored, as opposed to distinct seeding in harvesting seasons, Reddy said.

For other farmers in the area, much of the land is becoming unusable for cultivation because of the extensive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and weedicides.

"Every week there are many trucks with speakers cruising through our villages, asking farmers to buy this pesticide or that weicide. Their marketing is incredible and farmers get fooled," says E.B. Manohar, a 26-year-old natural farmer in the village of Khairevu, also in Anantapur district.

Manohar quit his job as a mechanical engineer in Bengaluru, sometimes called "India's Silicon Valley," to take up natural farming in his home town. On his farm he grows tomatoes, chilies and cabbage, among other crops and vegetables.

"I have also started supplying natural fertilizer and weicide to other farmers in my village," Manohar said. "Since they have seen that my investment is low and my returns are good, more and more people are getting interested in trying this out."

But for efforts like Manohar's and Reddy's to make a national impact, experts say these initiatives need to be rolled out on a wider scale.

"Desertification is among the biggest challenges facing India," said N.H. Ravindranath, who helped author several U.N. climate reports and has researched desertification in the country for the last two decades. He said that although the land restoration work in Anantapur is commendable, scaling up is the real challenge.

"We need serious financing for climate adaptation and government policies that encourage restoration. These are the only things that will make this impact on scale," he added. Money for adapting to harsher weather conditions has long been discussed at U.N. climate conferences like COP27, as the effects of climate change make it harder for many to sustain their livelihoods. Some funding for vulnerable nations has been promised but much of it hasn't been fulfilled.

Around 70% of all land in the world is already converted by humans from its natural state for food production and other purposes and around one in five of those converted hectares are already degraded, said Barron Joseph Orr, lead scientist at United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

"We've lost productivity in those lands, so we're undercutting what we've converted. So we've got a big problem here," Orr said. "We need to incentivize sustainable land management for small farmers and herders. In our conventional form of farming, we're dependent on chemical fertilizers, which works, but it basically short circuits the natural processes in the soil" which stops it from regenerating, making it unusable in the long run.

Orr added that land restoration can prevent planet-warming gases from escaping degraded ground and going into the atmosphere.

Back in Anantapur, Ajantha Reddy, a 28-year-old natural farmer tends to his sweet lime crops. Sweet limes require farmers to wait for many years before they can see any return on their labor and investment. Reddy is not worried, though.

"The trees have grown in 17 months as much as I would have expected them to grow in four years," he said as he trimmed his fruit crops. Reddy quit his job as a software engineer in Bengaluru during the COVID-19 pandemic and returned to his village in Anantapur to farm.

For Reddy, the satisfaction of seeing his crops and his home town thrive are a big enough incentive to continue natural farming practices for the foreseeable future.

"I have no intention of going back to Bangalore. When I came home during the pandemic, I thought, 'why should I go and work for someone else? I have land to cultivate and I could give livelihood to a few

people," he said. "That thought made up my mind."

## Computer chip ban signals new era as Biden and Xi meet

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration's move to block exports of advanced computer chips to China is signaling a new phase in relations between the globe's two largest economies — one in which trade matters less than an increasingly heated competition to be the world's leading technological and military power.

The aggressive move, announced last month, will help set the tone for President Joe Biden's upcoming meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Asia. It's evidence of Biden's determination to "manage" the U.S. competition with China, whose officials were quick to condemn the export ban.

After more than two decades in which the focus was on expansion of trade and global growth, both countries are openly prioritizing their national interests as the world economy struggles with high inflation and the risk of recessions. The U.S. and China have each identified the development and production of computer chips as vital for economic growth and their own security interests.

"We're going to do whatever it takes to protect Americans from the threat of China," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in an interview. "China is crystal clear. They will use this technology for surveillance. They will use this technology for cyber attacks. They will use this technology to, in any number of ways, harm us and our allies, or our ability to protect ourselves."

Xi responded to the export ban in his statement at last month's congress of the Chinese Communist Party, where he secured a third term as the country's leader. He pledged that China would move more aggressively to become self-reliant in producing semiconductors and other technologies.

"In order to enhance China's innovation capacity, we will move faster to launch a number of major national projects that are of strategic, big-picture and long-term importance," Xi said.

The Chinese government has named the development of advanced computer chips that could handle everything from artificial intelligence to hypersonic missiles as one of its top priorities. To bridge the gap until it can get there, China has been relying on imports of advanced chips and manufacturing equipment from the U.S., which imposed a series of export controls last month that block sending to China the world's most advanced chips, factory equipment and industry experts tied to America.

The U.S. and its allies famously deployed export controls against Russia after the February invasion of Ukraine, making it harder for Russian forces to be resupplied with weapons, ammunition, tanks and aircraft. As a result of those constraints, Russia has relied on drones from Iran and the U.S. has accused North Korea of supplying them with artillery.

The U.S. had until recently operated from the premise that strong trade relationships would bring countries closer together in ways that made the world safer and wealthier, a post-Cold War order. Global supply chains were supposed to lower costs, boost profits and enable democratic values to seep into the terrain of oligarchies, dictatorships and autocracies.

But after a global pandemic, the war in Ukraine and China's own ambitions, the Biden administration and many European and Asian allies have chosen to prioritize national security and industrial strategies. Both the U.S. and European Union have provided tens of billions of dollars in incentives to spur more domestic production of computer chips.

In a speech last month at IBM, Biden said China specifically lobbied against a law that provides \$52 billion to produce and develop advanced semiconductors in the U.S., an incentive package that has been followed by a string of announcements by Intel, Micron, Wolfspeed and others about the construction of computer chip plants in the U.S..

He said that some of the GOP lawmakers who opposed the measure had bought into the arguments made by China.

"The Communist Party of China was lobbying in the United States Congress against passing this legisla-

tion," Biden said. "And unfortunately, some of our friends on the other team bought it."

Donald Trump had fiery rhetoric on China during his presidency, imposing tariffs that the Biden administration has yet to lift. But by any qualitative measure, the export bans on computer chips are much tougher than anything imposed by Trump, said Gregory Allen, a senior fellow in the strategic technologies program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Allen said the Trump-era tariffs were large in terms of dollars, but they had almost no effect on the balance of trade. Nor were the import taxes strategic. The export controls imposed by the Biden administration would be a setback for Chinese technology that is already decades behind the U.S.

"We have essentially committed ourselves to saying: China you will not achieve your number one goal," Allen said.

The era of China, Russia and other competitors having relatively unfettered access to U.S. and European markets appears to be ending, said Christopher Miller, a Tufts University professor and author of the book, "Chip Wars."

"The risks posed by these countries has grown, so Western leaders have reconsidered the wisdom of giving adversaries open access to their markets," Miller said.

Instead of trying to work together as a single global economy, new alliances are being formed such as the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.) and existing partnerships such as NATO are being expanded. Economic integration among these partners has become essential, as the U.S. export controls on advanced chips need support from other producers in Japan and the Netherlands.

"All the great powers are restructuring international economic relations in ways they hope will improve their geopolitical position," Miller said. "Semiconductors are just one of many arenas in which trade, tech, and capital flows are being re-politicized due to great power rivalry."

## What US election results mean for the future of Ukraine aid

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If Republicans win the House, where does that leave Ukraine?

It's a question that is top of mind in Washington as the GOP draws closer to winning the majority in the U.S. House. Some fear the end of Democratic control in Congress — and the empowerment of "America First" conservatives — could ultimately result in the curtailment of American assistance as Ukraine battles Russia's invasion.

Recent comments from Kevin McCarthy, who is in line for speaker if Republicans win the House, exacerbated those fears. He warned that Republicans wouldn't support writing a "blank check" for Ukraine if they captured the majority.

But the hard-line rhetoric isn't the end of the story. While Republican control of the House is likely to make sending tranches of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine more difficult, support for the country runs deep in both parties.

Here is a look at the factors at play:

### WHAT THE U.S. HAS GIVEN SO FAR

Since the Russian invasion began in February, Congress has approved tens of billions in emergency security and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine. The Biden administration has also shipped billions worth of weapons and equipment from military inventories.

In September, lawmakers approved about \$12.3 billion in Ukraine-related aid as part of a bill that finances the federal government through Dec. 16. The money included assistance for the Ukrainian military as well as money to help the country's government provide basic services to its citizens.

That comes on top of more than \$50 billion provided in two previous bills.

### STRONG BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

All along, financial support for Ukraine has garnered strong bipartisan support. In the Senate, GOP leader

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Mitch McConnell and Richard Shelby, the lead Republican on the powerful Appropriations Committee, were early and consistent voices in favor of Ukraine aid.

In recent days, other Republicans including Sens. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Rick Scott of Florida have insisted in interviews that their party's support for the Ukrainians is resolute.

"I think we have to continue to do everything we can to support Ukraine, who wants to defend their freedom and stop Russia from continuing to expand," Scott said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio and Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware also made a bipartisan show of support by visiting Ukraine just days before the election.

"I am confident that bipartisan robust American support for the fight of the Ukrainian people will continue in Congress," Coons said. "The United States has long been a nation that fights for freedom, and this is the most important fight for freedom in the world today."

The picture is similar in the House, where Ukrainian aid enjoys majority support. Even a letter published last month by the liberal flank of the party, asking the Biden administration to pursue diplomatic talks with Russia over the war, was quickly retracted after an outpouring of criticism from both parties.

President Joe Biden also attempted to ease concerns in a post-election briefing Wednesday, expressing hope that he would be able to continue his "bipartisan approach" to supporting Ukraine. He said he intends to invite congressional leaders from both parties to the White House later this month for a discussion about how to "advance the economic and national security priorities of the United States."

## GROWING FAR-RIGHT OPPOSITION

Yet support for Ukraine is far from universal in the Republican Party.

Some lawmakers on the right, particularly those aligned with Donald Trump's "America First" philosophy of foreign policy, say the United States cannot afford to give billions to Ukraine at a time of record-high inflation at home.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a member of the ultra-conservative Freedom Caucus, told a rally of Trump supporters in Iowa last week that, "under Republicans, not another penny will go to Ukraine." In Ohio, Republican JD Vance, who just won the state's Senate race, campaigned on ending financial support for the country, saying Congress has "got to stop the money spigot to Ukraine eventually."

McCarthy seemed to be giving a nod to the Ukraine skeptics with his comments before the election.

"I think people are gonna be sitting in a recession and they're not going to write a blank check to Ukraine," McCarthy said in the pre-election interview. "They just won't do it. ... It's not a free blank check."

McCarthy later walked back those comments, telling CNN that he's very supportive of Ukraine but thinks there should be "accountability going forward."

Biden stressed that his administration has not granted every request from the Ukrainians, including their demand for a no-fly zone that would risk pulling America into the war.

"We've not given Ukraine a blank check," Biden said. "There's a lot of things that Ukraine wants we didn't — we didn't do."

## FUTURE OF AID

Despite the escalating opposition from the right, there is little risk of Congress ending America's financial and military support for Ukraine anytime soon.

Majorities in the House and Senate back the alliance with Ukraine, saying the cost is worth paying to defend a democratic ally and resist Russian expansion.

And most Americans who voted in the midterms were firmly behind the military and financial support for Ukraine, according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 94,000 voters. About 4 in 10 said it was about right and 3 in 10 said it should be more active, while only about 3 in 10 wanted the U.S. to provide less to Ukraine.

Yet it's clear that a Republican takeover of the House would make passing additional aid for Ukraine harder. McCarthy is likely to be under intense pressure from the right to take a hard line with the Biden administration, making it more difficult for him to work with Democrats.

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With that reality in mind, lawmakers from both sides of the aisle are eyeing the lame-duck session after the election as an opportunity to lock in billions of dollars in additional military assistance for Ukraine. That aid could be passed in an end-of-year government funding bill and ensure American support for months to come.

## VIEW FROM ABROAD

Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials are monitoring the midterm election results closely. One official on Wednesday acknowledged having stayed awake the night before, hitting refresh again and again on his phone to track the results.

But the country's defense minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, said Wednesday that he did not anticipate American support would erode.

"I have repeatedly met with representatives of the Senate and Congress, and each time the delegations were bipartisan," Resnikov said at a news conference. "I clearly understand that the support of the United States will remain bipartisan and bicameral, too."

Yulia Svyrydenko, Ukraine's trade and economic development minister, said Thursday that regardless of U.S. support, the country is intensifying efforts to run leaner on spending, even as Ukrainians fight for what they see as an "existential war."

Svyrydenko said that while there had been no pressure from American officials for Ukraine to cut its need for foreign help, Ukrainian leaders know they have to do more to stabilize the economy itself even as they battle Russian forces.

Ukraine's emphasis at the war's outset had been rapidly marshaling military aid from its allies, "but we understand that one day we should rely very well on ourselves again," she said.

## Alec Baldwin sues to 'clear his name' in movie set killing

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Saying he wants to clear his name, Alec Baldwin on Friday sued people involved in handling and supplying the loaded gun that he was using when it fired, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins during a 2021 filming accident in New Mexico.

Baldwin filed a cross-complaint in Superior Court in Los Angeles alleging negligence against some of the people sued by a script supervisor, Mamie Mitchell. Among other things, it seeks a share of any damages that Mitchell may win from the people Baldwin names and asks that they pay for any damages assessed against him.

Mitchell was standing behind Hutchins, who died shortly after being wounded during setup for a scene in the western movie "Rust" at a film set ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe on Oct. 21, 2021.

Mitchell sued Baldwin, who was a producer on the film, the production company and many others involved for assault and negligence.

In his cross-complaint, Baldwin says that while working on camera angles with Hutchins during rehearsal for a scene, he pointed the gun in her direction and pulled back and released the hammer of the gun, which discharged.

The shot fatally wounded Hutchins and wounded director Joel Souza in the shoulder.

The actor said neither he nor Hutchins knew the weapon contained a live round.

"This tragedy occurred on a movie set — not a gun range, not a battlefield, not a location where even a remote possibility should exist that a gun would contain live ammunition," the lawsuit said.

Baldwin has maintained he was told the gun was safe and that he did not pull the trigger. But a recent FBI forensic report found the weapon could not have fired unless the trigger was pulled.

"More than anyone else on that set, Baldwin has been wrongfully viewed as the perpetrator of this tragedy. By these cross-claims, Baldwin seeks to clear his name," the actor's lawsuit says.

Baldwin's cross-complaint says he has lost opportunities and been fired from jobs because of the shooting and also "has suffered physically and emotionally from the grief caused by these events."

New Mexico's Office of the Medical Investigator determined the shooting was an accident. However,

prosecutors are reviewing the shooting to determine whether criminal charges should be filed.

In April, New Mexico's Occupational Health and Safety Bureau imposed the maximum fine of \$137,000 against Rust Movie Productions and distributed a scathing narrative of safety failures, including testimony that production managers took limited or no action to address two misfires of blank ammunition on set prior to the fatal shooting.

The company is challenging the fine.

Baldwin's lawsuit alleges negligence by armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed; prop master Sarah Zachry; first assistant director and safety coordinator David Halls, who handed Baldwin the gun; ammunition supplier Seth Kenney and his company, PDQ Arm & Prop, which also supplied prop weapons for the production.

All have previously denied responsibility for the fatal shooting.

In October, Hutchins' family announced they had agreed to settle another lawsuit against the actor and the movie's producers, and producers said they aimed to restart the project in January.

A lawyer for Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, Jason Bowles said he was reviewing Baldwin's lawsuit. Attorneys for other defendants did not immediately respond to requests for comment, the New York Times reported.

A phone message left by The Associated Press seeking comment from Bowles wasn't immediately returned Friday night.

## Kelly win in Arizona puts Dems 1 seat from Senate control

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly won his bid for reelection Friday in the crucial swing state of Arizona, defeating Republican venture capitalist Blake Masters to put his party one victory away from clinching control of the chamber for the next two years of Joe Biden's presidency.

With Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote, Democrats can retain control of the Senate by winning either the Nevada race, which remains too early to call, or next month's runoff in Georgia. Republicans now must win both those races to take the majority.

The Arizona race is one of a handful of contests that Republicans targeted in their bid to take control of the 50-50 Senate. It was a test of the inroads that Kelly and other Democrats have made in a state once reliably dominated by the GOP. Kelly's victory suggests Democratic success in Arizona was not an aberration during Donald Trump's presidency.

The closely watched race for governor between Democrat Katie Hobbs and Republican Kari Lake was too early to call Friday night. In the secretary of state's race, Democrat Adrian Fontes defeated Republican Mark Finchem, a top 2020 election denier.

Kelly, a former NASA astronaut who's flown in space four times, is married to former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords, who inspired the nation with her recovery from a gunshot wound to the head during an assassination attempt in 2011 that killed six people and injured 13. Kelly and Giffords went on to co-found a gun safety advocacy group.

Kelly and Giffords were at an Elton John concert in Phoenix on Friday night when The Associated Press called the race, campaign spokesperson Sarah Guggenheimer said. Maricopa County reported a large batch of results that increased Kelly's lead and made clear Masters could not make up the difference with the remaining ballots.

"It's been one of the great honors of my life to serve as Arizona's Senator," Kelly said in a statement. "I'm humbled by the trust our state has placed in me to continue this work."

Kelly's victory in a 2020 special election spurred by the death of Republican Sen. John McCain gave Democrats both of Arizona's Senate seats for the first time in 70 years. The shift was propelled by the state's fast-changing demographics and the unpopularity of Trump.

Kelly's 2022 campaign largely focused on his support for abortion rights, protecting Social Security, lowering drug prices and ensuring a stable water supply in the midst of a drought, which has curtailed Arizona's cut of Colorado River water.

With President Joe Biden struggling with low approval ratings, Kelly distanced himself from the president, particularly on border security, and played down his Democratic affiliation amid angst about the state of

the economy.

He also styled himself as an independent willing to buck his party, in the style of McCain.

Masters, an acolyte of billionaire tech investor Peter Thiel, tried to penetrate Kelly's independent image, aligning him with Biden's failure to secure the U.S.-Mexico border and tamp down on rampant inflation.

Masters endeared himself to many GOP primary voters with his penchant for provocation and contrarian thinking. He called for privatizing Social Security, took a hard-line stance against abortion and promoted a racist theory popular with white nationalists that Democrats are seeking to use immigration to replace white people in America.

But after emerging bruised from a contentious primary, Masters struggled to raise money and was put on the defense over his controversial positions.

He earned Trump's endorsement after claiming "Trump won in 2020," but under pressure during a debate last month, he acknowledged he hasn't seen evidence the election was rigged. He later doubled down on the false claim that Trump won.

After the primary, he scrubbed some of his more controversial positions from his website, but it wasn't enough for the moderate swing voters who decided the election.

## China's Xi, out of COVID bubble, faces changed world at G-20

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — After a lengthy absence from major international gatherings, Chinese leader Xi Jinping is leaving his country's COVID-19 bubble and venturing abroad next week into a dramatically changed world marked by rising confrontation.

Xi will attend the G-20 meeting of industrial and emerging market nations in Indonesia followed by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Thailand. He will meet individually with other leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday in their first in-person talks since Biden took office in January 2021.

The Chinese leader has relied mainly on speeches by video to deliver China's message at the U.N. and other forums since 2020. The period has seen a sharp deterioration in China's relations with the West over the COVID-19 pandemic, a crackdown on civil rights in Hong Kong, military threats against Taiwan and Beijing's tacit support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

More broadly, China and the West are moving farther apart. The U.S. and Europe are looking at China more critically, with Germany blocking investment in its companies, while China's leaders have shown a determination to go their own route.

Bruce Dickson, a Chinese politics expert at George Washington University, described a "growing fear, concern and anxiety that China doesn't want to be a partner with other countries. It wants to push its own agenda regardless of the opposition to it."

More moderate voices in both Beijing and Washington advocating better relations are being pushed to the side. "It's really an effort of who can come up with the toughest policy to resist China's efforts," Dickson said.

After a state visit to neighboring Myanmar in January 2020, Xi stayed in mainland China for more than two years.

He emerged first on a brief visit to Hong Kong for the 25th anniversary of its return from British rule on July 1 and a short trip to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in September for a regional summit.

Xiong Zhiyong, an international relations professor at China Foreign Affairs University, expects Chinese leaders will make more trips abroad as the pandemic eases globally.

"The current international situation is overly complex and national leaders need to have an opportunity for discussion," he said. "Online exchanges are not enough. Meetings among leaders are important and irreplaceable."

Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Beijing to meet Xi earlier this month. But under China's "zero-COVID" policy, it remains difficult to travel into China, while domestic travel is restricted wherever a serious outbreak occurs.

Besides Biden, other leaders Xi will meet on this trip include Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Thai



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Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha, French President Emmanuel Macron, Senegalese President Macky Sall and Argentine President Alberto Fernández.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Friday that he would ask Xi to lift billions of dollars in trade barriers if they meet, while Biden said earlier this week he plans to discuss growing U.S.-China tensions over trade, the self-ruled island of Taiwan and China's relationship with Russia.

China has not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and accused the U.S. and NATO of forcing Russia's hand. It also fired missiles over Taiwan and appeared to rehearse a military blockade of the island after U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August.

China also cut off talks with the U.S. on a raft of issues following Pelosi's trip including climate, an area where cooperation between the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases is crucial to efforts being discussed at ongoing U.N. climate talks in Egypt to limit the impact of climate change.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Friday that "the U.S. needs to work together with China to properly manage differences, advance mutually beneficial cooperation, avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation and bring China-U.S. relations back to the right track of sound and steady development."

Xi is making this trip after having consolidated his hold on power in China last month at a major meeting of the long-ruling Communist Party. He was given a third five-year term as leader and the top party bodies were packed with his loyalists, signaling his approach to foreign and domestic policy will continue.

China's doubling of its defense budget over the past two decades and militarization of islands in the South China Sea have raised questions about its stated policy of a "peaceful rise." Southeast Asian neighbors have had to tread a thin line between maintaining relations with the U.S. and incurring China's wrath.

At the APEC meeting in Thailand, Xi will deliver a speech on China's proposals to deepen Asia-Pacific cooperation and promote regional and global economic growth, Zhao said.

He is also expected to tout his Global Development Initiative, a rebranding of his signature "Belt and Road Initiative," which has been criticized for saddling poor countries with massive debts and giving China potential control over crucial ports and other infrastructure from Southeast Asia to Europe.

Though Xi has all but eliminated domestic political challenges, he faces rising threats on the economic front.

China's growth has slumped under the pressure of strict anti-virus campaigns that have disrupted trade, travel and supply chains, along with a crackdown on massive debt in the real estate industry, which has been a driver of growth.

Dickson said the Xi-Biden meeting at the G-20 could help cool tensions. But, he added, "I've got to say right now that it's hard to see any willingness coming from either country to try and stabilize things and keep the downward spiral from continuing."

## Trump files lawsuit to avoid Jan. 6 committee subpoena

By JILL COLVIN, FARNOUSH AMIRI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump is suing the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol to avoid cooperating with a subpoena requiring him to testify.

The suit filed Friday evening contends that, while former presidents have voluntarily agreed to provide testimony or documents in response to congressional subpoenas in the past, "no president or former president has ever been compelled to do so."

"Long-held precedent and practice maintain that separation of powers prohibits Congress from compelling a President to testify before it," Trump attorney David A. Warrington said in a statement announcing Trump's intentions.

Warrington said Trump had engaged with the committee "in a good faith effort to resolve these concerns consistent with Executive Branch prerogatives and separation of powers," but said the panel "insists on pursuing a political path, leaving President Trump with no choice but to involve the third branch, the judicial branch, in this dispute between the executive and legislative branches."

The committee declined to comment on the filing, which comes days before the the deadline set by the

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committee for Trump to begin cooperating. But the suit likely dooms the prospect of Trump ever having to testify, given that the committee is expected to disband at the end of the legislative session in January.

It also comes just days before Trump is expected to formally launch a third campaign for president at his Mar-Lago club.

The committee had voted to subpoena Trump during its final televised hearing before the midterm elections and formally did so last month, demanding testimony from the former president either at the Capitol or by videoconference by mid-November, and continuing for multiple days if necessary.

The letter also outlined a sweeping request for documents, including personal communications between Trump and members of Congress as well as extremist groups. Trump's response to that request was due last week, but the nine-member panel extended its deadline to this week.

In his suit, Trump's attorneys attack the subpoena as overly broad and frame it as an infringement of his First Amendment rights. They also argue other sources besides Trump could provide the same information the committee wants from him.

The panel — comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans — issued a statement last week saying it was in communication with Trump's attorneys.

The committee's decision to subpoena Trump in late October was a major escalation in its investigation, a step lawmakers said was necessary because, members allege, the former president was the "central player" in a multi-part effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

"I think that he has a legal obligation to testify but that doesn't always carry weight with Donald Trump," committee vice chair Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., said during an event last week.

In addition to demanding that Trump testify, the committee also made 19 requests for documents and communication — including for any messages Trump sent on the encrypted messaging app Signal or by "any other means" to members of Congress and others about the stunning events of the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack.

The scope of the committee's request was expansive — pursuing documents from Sept. 1, 2020, two months before the election, to the present on the president's communications with the groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys — as the panel looks to compile a historical record of the run-up to the Capitol attack, the event itself and the aftermath.

Trump's lawsuit was filed in the Southern District of Florida, where other Trump lawyers successfully sued to secure a special master who has been tasked with conducting an independent review of records seized by the FBI during an Aug. 8 search of Mar-a-Lago.

## AP sources: US border agency leader is being forced out

By MIKE BALSAMO, COLLEEN LONG and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of U.S. Customs and Border Protection is being forced out of his job leading the nation's largest law enforcement agency as agents encounter record numbers of migrants entering the U.S. from Mexico, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Chris Magnus was told to resign or be fired less than a year after he was confirmed as the Biden administration's choice to lead the agency, according to two people who were briefed on the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. He is refusing to step down.

Magnus's removal is part of a larger shakeup expected at Homeland Security as it struggles to manage migrants coming from a wider range of countries, including Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. This comes as Republicans are likely to take control of the House in January and are expected to launch investigations into the border.

Migrants were stopped 2.38 million times at the Mexican border in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, up 37% from the year before. The annual total surpassed 2 million for the first time in August and is more than twice the highest level during Donald Trump's presidency, in 2019.

Brandon Judd, the president of the National Border Patrol Council, confirmed that Magnus was being pushed out.

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The Los Angeles Times was first to report on the ultimatum. In a statement to the newspaper, Magnus said he was asked by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to step down or be fired. He said he wouldn't step down and defended his record.

Neither Customs and Border Protection nor the Homeland Security Department responded to requests for comment. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said she'd seen the reports but had no comment.

Flows across the border have been extraordinarily high by any measure. The numbers reflect deteriorating economic and political conditions in more countries, the relative strength of the U.S. economy and uneven enforcement of asylum restrictions. Trump-era asylum restrictions carry no legal consequences for crossing the border illegally, encouraging repeat attempts.

The Biden administration agreed with Western hemisphere leaders in June to work together more on hosting migrants who flee their countries. Last month, Mexico began taking back Venezuelans who entered the U.S. illegally but measures so far have failed to produce major change.

"There have always been periods of migrant surges into this country for different reasons, at different times," Magnus told The Associated Press last year. "But I don't think anybody disputes that the numbers are high right now and that we have to work as many different strategies as possible to deal with those high numbers."

Despite decades in law enforcement, Magnus was an outsider. As the police chief in Tucson, Arizona, he rejected federal grants to collaborate on border security with the agency he now leads and kept a distance from Border Patrol leaders in a region where thousands of agents are assigned.

Magnus rankled some rank-and-file agents — and delighted agency critics — with his announcement in May that he was revisiting guidelines for agents to pursue vehicles after a spate of fatal collisions.

In July, Magnus released an investigation that said Border Patrol agents on horseback engaged in "unnecessary use of force" against Haitians at a massive camp in Del Rio, Texas, in September 2021. The investigation also found the agents did not use their reins to whip the Haitians.

The National Border Patrol Council, the agents' union, has been more muted in its criticism of Magnus than of Mayorkas. But Judd, the union president, said he welcomed Magnus' departure.

"I think it's a good thing," Judd said. "He was just working on policies that were just going to incentivize more criminal activity. The vehicle-pursuit policy, had he implemented that, all it would have done is increase criminal activity."

The Senate confirmed Magnus' nomination in December by a 50-47 vote. Another critical Homeland Security agency — Immigration and Customs Enforcement — has been without a Senate-confirmed leader for years.

Magnus, 62, was born and raised in Lansing, Michigan, where he served stints as an emergency dispatcher, paramedic, sheriff's deputy and police captain. He was police chief in Fargo, North Dakota, and Richmond, California, before he took the job in Tucson in January 2016.

In Tucson, Magnus created a program to steer people away from drugs, worked with nonprofits helping homeless people and overhauled the department's use-of-force policy. He openly criticized Trump policies for making migrants more reluctant to share information about crimes with police.

Roy Villareal, chief of the Border Patrol's Tucson sector from early 2019 until late 2020, said he sought an introductory meeting with Magnus, who was then Tucson's police chief, but that he never heard back, calling their lack of interaction "a telling sign."

## **EXPLAINER: Where does the student loan debt plan stand?**

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

President Joe Biden's plan to provide millions of borrowers with up to \$20,000 apiece in federal student-loan forgiveness has been blocked by a second federal court, leaving millions of borrowers to wonder if they'll get debt relief at all.

On Thursday, U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman ruled that the program usurped Congress' power to make

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laws. The administration immediately filed a notice to appeal.

It's not the only challenge the plan faces. Last month, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis put loan forgiveness on temporary hold while it considers a challenge from six Republican-led states.

The fate of the plan will likely eventually end up in the Supreme Court, meaning a final decision is a ways off.

Here's where things stand:

## HOW THE FORGIVENESS PLAN WORKS

The debt forgiveness plan announced in August would cancel \$10,000 in student loan debt for those making less than \$125,000 or households with less than \$250,000 in income. Pell Grant recipients, who typically demonstrate more financial need, would get an additional \$10,000 in debt forgiven.

College students qualify if their loans were disbursed before July 1. The plan makes 43 million borrowers eligible for some debt forgiveness, with 20 million who could get their debt erased entirely, according to the administration.

The Congressional Budget Office has said the program will cost about \$400 billion over the next three decades.

The White House said 26 million people have applied for debt relief, and 16 million people had already had their relief approved.

## THE TEXAS CASE

Pittman — an appointee of former President Donald Trump based in Fort Worth, Texas — made it clear that he felt Biden overstepped his authority. He said the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003, commonly known as the HEROES Act, did not provide the authorization for the loan forgiveness program.

The law allows the secretary of education to waive or modify terms of federal student loans in times of war or national emergency. The administration said the COVID-19 pandemic created a national emergency.

But Pittman said such a massive program required clear congressional authorization.

## THE PLAN FACES MANY OTHER LEGAL CHALLENGES

In September, the Republican-led states of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas and South Carolina filed suit to halt the program, arguing that the pandemic no longer qualifies as a national emergency. Justice Department attorney Brian Netter disagreed, telling U.S. District Judge Henry Autrey in October that student loan defaults have skyrocketed over the past 2 1/2 years.

Autrey ruled on Oct. 20 that the states lacked standing, allowing the forgiveness plan to proceed. But the 8th Circuit temporarily halted it the next day while it considers a permanent block. That decision is still pending.

The White House encouraged borrowers to continue applying for relief, saying the court order did not prevent applications or the review of applications.

The plan has faced other legal challenges. In October, Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett rejected an appeal from a Wisconsin taxpayers group. A federal judge had earlier dismissed the group's lawsuit, finding they didn't have the legal right, or standing, to bring the case.

## THE TEXAS RULING WAS A BIGGER BLOW TO THE PLAN

Pittman's decision strikes down the underlying legal argument used to justify Biden's plan. Previously, the White House has been able to dodge legal attacks made in lawsuits by tweaking details of the program.

One lawsuit argued that the automatic debt cancellation would leave borrowers paying heavier taxes in states that impose a tax on canceled debt. The administration responded by allowing borrowers to opt out. Another suit alleged that Biden's plan would hurt financial institutions that earn revenue on certain kinds of federal student loans. The White House responded by carving those loans out of the plan.

The new ruling, however, argues that the HEROES Act does not grant authority for mass debt cancellation. The law grants the Education Department wide flexibility during national emergencies, but the judge ruled that it's unclear whether debt cancellation was a necessary response to COVID-19, noting that Biden recently declared the pandemic over.

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## SUPREME COURT-BOUND?

The legal situation is complicated because of the numerous lawsuits. It's likely that the Texas case and the lawsuit filed by the six states will be appealed to the Supreme Court. Before it reaches that level, the 5th and 8th Circuit appeals courts — both dominated by conservative judges — will rule separately in each case.

The case before the 8th Circuit could end up in the Supreme Court soon, since the six Republican-led states have asked the appeals court to keep the program on hold while the case plays out. If the appeals court grants that request, the administration will likely ask the Supreme Court to intervene. The states also could go to the high court if their request is denied.

Likewise, the administration has signaled it will appeal the Texas ruling. If the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is asked to block Pittman's ruling pending appeal, the losing side could then turn to the Supreme Court.

In either case, appellate courts would not issue a final ruling on the validity of the program, but on whether it can go forward while challenges proceed.

At the same time, emergency orders can signal how courts will ultimately decide a case. In January, the Supreme Court consolidated challenges to the administration's authority to impose a vaccine-or-testing requirement on the nation's large employers. A few days after hearing arguments, the court split 6-3 to block the requirement, saying the challengers were likely to prevail in the end. A separate vaccine mandate for most health care workers was allowed to proceed when the court concluded that a challenge to it was likely to fail.

## COMMON SEARCH: 'IS STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS CANCELED?'

Borrowers are confused about whether their debt will be canceled, or if they'll have to resume making payments on Jan. 1, when a pause prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic is set to expire.

After the Texas ruling, many hit the internet, asking Google: "Is student loan forgiveness canceled?" Overall search traffic for "student loan forgiveness" quadrupled Thursday night and had increased nearly tenfold by Friday morning, according to Google Trends data.

Some borrowers said they were skeptical they would ever see the relief, anyway. Brenna Zimmerman, who graduated from Kansas State University in 2021 with about \$30,000 in debt, called the debt forgiveness "a little bit too good to be true." And even though the program would benefit her, Zimmerman, 24, now a graphics coordinator at a packaging company, wonders if it's a good idea.

"I think I'd be a fool not to apply," she said, adding, "I don't think it's necessarily fair, especially to people who chose not to go to school."

Lauren Pete, a 20-year-old junior at Louisiana State University, has \$10,000 in student debt and is hoping to go to graduate school. She called the benefits of the loan forgiveness program "a dream come true" that would ease the financial burden for her and for her parents, who didn't go to college and worked hard to help her with tuition.

"All I want to do is make them proud and make this process much easier for them, especially because I have a younger brother who's going to be starting (college) next fall," Pete said.

When 25-year-old Hofstra University graduate Sarah Puckett heard about the plan, she couldn't believe she might have some of her \$26,000 debt forgiven.

"I was frantically calling my dad, frantically saying, what does this mean?" Puckett, now a TV producer for a true crime network, said. "Is this real? I feel like they're going to take it away from us. I don't believe it."

Now, she worries that it really was too good to be true.

"I'm so excited to have applied, but you know, I'm not going to take it to the bank until I see that it's actually happened," Puckett said.

Frederick Bell, 30, of New Orleans, has \$23,000 in student loan debt and was hopeful to be excused of all but \$3,000 of that amount. The 2014 graduate of the University of Washington said being free from debt would allow him to consider furthering his education or buying a house.

"This (Texas) ruling definitely kind of like burst a lot of people's dreams when it came to the financial

freedom after this relief," Bell said.

## Veterans 'best of America,' VP Harris says in laying wreath

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under gray clouds and pouring rain at Arlington National Cemetery, Vice President Kamala Harris told the nation's veterans Friday their work makes America stronger, as the administration announced new support for children who live with wounded service members.

"Every day, through your life's work and your example, you make America stronger," she told the crowd. "On Veterans Day, we come together to express our profound gratitude for all you have done and you continue to do."

"Veterans represent the best of America," she said.

The initiative, known as the Hidden Helpers Coalition, helps young people who act as caregivers and was announced by first lady Jill Biden, who hosted a breakfast for veterans on Friday before she, Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff came to the annual ceremony at the Virginia cemetery.

With President Joe Biden in Egypt for a United Nations conference on climate, it was Harris who placed the wreath in a somber ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which is dedicated to deceased service members whose remains have not been identified. She arranged it carefully, fussing a bit with the ribbons to move them back in place after they were blown askew by the wind and rain.

Harris said the nation owes soldiers a great debt, and that the Biden administration was working to deliver on help with housing, health care and jobs. She noted Jill Biden's work with the families of veterans, saying "while our veterans wore the uniform, they're not the only ones who have served."

"As Americans, we have a sacred obligation to take care of our veterans and our military families," she said. "Fulfilling that obligation means making sure veterans can access the support and resources they need to thrive."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, himself a veteran, joined.

This is the first Veterans Day since Biden signed legislation expanding health care for service members who were exposed to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan or to chemicals that were used in previous conflicts.

The legislation, known as the PACT Act, was a priority for Biden. His eldest son, Beau Biden, died of brain cancer in 2015, several years after he was exposed to a burn pit during military service in Iraq.

From Egypt, Biden acknowledged the sacrifices of America's veterans there.

"This day is a day of commemoration at home in the United States. It's Veterans Day," he said. "America's veterans and their families, survivors and caregivers are the very spine and soul of the United States. And on this special day, on every day, I honor all those who sacrifice to our nation, like my son."

More than 137,000 claims involving toxic exposure have been filed, the Biden administration says. The Department of Veterans Affairs also began asking veterans about possible toxic exposure earlier this week in an attempt to identify any health complications.

The Democratic president also released a video message before he left Thursday night for Egypt. He also has stops in Cambodia and Indonesia before he returns for his granddaughter's wedding at the White House on Nov. 19.

## Kevin Costner: Returning 'Yellowstone' is a hit on own terms

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While a healthy slice of America awaited Sunday's return of the hit series "Yellowstone," star Kevin Costner was in Moab, Utah, scouting locations for yet another Western epic, "Horizon."

Costner's 60-some film credits, among them "Field of Dreams," "The Bodyguard," "JFK" and "Bull Durham," are an eclectic mix of dramas, baseball-centric tales and the occasional comedy. But the West's history and land have proven his creative bedrock.

His breakout role came in 1985's "Silverado," followed by starring roles in "Dances with Wolves," his

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Oscar-winning directorial debut; "Wyatt Earp," and "Open Range," which he also directed. He's donning the actor-director Stetson again for "Horizon," planned as a four-film saga about pre- and post-Civil War western migration.

The Paramount Network's contemporary "Yellowstone," created by Taylor Sheridan ("Hell or High Water"), already has generated a successful prequel, "1883." A second, "1923" (formerly titled "1932"), with Harrison Ford and Helen Mirren as its headliners, is set for a Dec. 18 release.

In its fifth season, "Yellowstone" opens with Costner's Montana rancher John Dutton awaiting the outcome of his reluctant run for governor -- a big-swing effort to shield his family's vast land and business against challenges from developers and empowered Native Americans.

Dutton's populist-style campaign promised to safeguard Montana values, or likely those that dovetail with the interests he's gone to extremes to protect. Would Costner himself consider seeking office? "No, I don't think so," he said.

In an interview with The Associated Press, he discussed why "Yellowstone" has gained a following, the series' portrayal of Native Americans, and his long-held regard for the Western genre done right. Remarks have been edited for brevity and clarity.

AP: When you joined Taylor Sheridan on the drama series, what made you think it could work?

KEVIN COSTNER: I thought it had a chance to be relevant, in that this work is still going on in America and most people kind of take it for granted how stuff ends up at their dinner table. We intuitively know, and we don't really know. The show is able to highlight at times the beauty of ranching, and it certainly talks about how difficult it is. We're set in one of the most beautiful places in the world, and I think the idea of mountains and rivers captured people's imagination. But it's a working ranch. It's how it's still done. I think it spoke well of that, with its kind of heightened sense of drama.

AP: While John Dutton says he's no politician, he's seeking power and there's more than a suggestion he intends to use it for his own ends. How do you see the character?

KEVIN COSTNER: He's not naive. He's no politician in the sense that he wants to collaborate. I think he's capable of hearing the best idea, but he's not looking for middle ground. It's not how he's conducted his life. What's maybe good for his ranch might be good for all the rest of the ranches in Montana as well — the preservation of a way of life, less expansion. His ranch is highlighted, he says it out loud. But I think he sees this working for other ranchers.

AP: 'Yellowstone' prominently includes Native Americans, as did 'Dances with Wolves.' How do you view the series approach to the characters?

KEVIN COSTNER: I think they show it's all complicated. For them, everything has been stripped away, and they've had this little niche called gambling and even that's being nibbled at, being pawed over. Anytime there's money, there's going to be disputes no matter what culture you're dealing with. So you see power plays inside the Native American community. You see ambition, you see selfishness. It's really normal behavior. We might flinch at it, we might be embarrassed by it, but it exists on all levels. The political machinations of what happens on the rez (reservation) are equal to what happens on our national stage. There's bitterness, there's resentment. There's good ideas, there's bad ideas. So who gets left in the lurch? Generally speaking, it's the people.

AP: The series received a Screen Actors Guild nomination for best ensemble drama but has been largely overlooked by the Emmys. Could that reflect a bias against Westerns?

KEVIN COSTNER: I'm not sure, because we're a very verbal show. We're not reduced to 'yep' and 'nope.' It's very literate in its expression. You can be minimized, you can be marginalized, you can be ignored. But we've been able to create a show that didn't start out being popular but did it on its own terms.

AP: You've said that watching the 1962 movie 'How the West Was Won' as a youngster made you a fan of the Western. What chord did it strike and why does the genre continue to resonate with you?

KEVIN COSTNER: When it's done well, you realize how vulnerable (people) were. We see freeways and cities now, but if you roll back about 120 years, you were out here by yourself. How you made it or

didn't would depend sometimes on your decisions and most of the time on just luck. There was no law, there was no army, we were taking away land from people that have lived there for thousands of years. I think to myself, 'My God, what made people keep coming West?' They sometimes didn't share the same language, they were from different countries in Europe. When I see it in its rawest form, I'm inspired by it, I'm in awe of it. I realize that what made people cross the country was nothing but hope of something better than where they came from.

## Wall Street rallies for best week since June on rate hopes

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street piled more gains Friday onto its mammoth rally from a day earlier to close out its best week since the summer.

The S&P 500 rose 0.9% a day after soaring 5.5% for its best day in more than two years. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 32 points to its surge of more than 1,200 from a day earlier, while the Nasdaq composite jumped 1.9%.

Markets got a boost after China relaxed some of its strict anti-COVID measures, which have been hurting the world's second-largest economy. Hopes for more growth from China helped not only stocks but also oil prices to rise, with U.S. crude gaining 2.9% to \$88.96 per barrel.

The main reason for this week's euphoria in markets was a report on Thursday showing inflation in the United States slowed by more than expected last month. That raised hopes the worst of inflation may have passed and the Federal Reserve can be less aggressive about raising interest rates to get it under control, though analysts cautioned high inflation could be slow to fall and some called Wall Street's big rally overdone.

What the Fed does with rates is crucial for Wall Street because hikes slow the economy and can cause a recession, all while dragging down on stock prices. They've been the main reason for markets' struggles this year.

Perhaps just as important as how bad inflation is at the moment is how high U.S. households see it being in future years. That's because too-high expectations can trigger a vicious cycle where people accelerate purchases and make other moves that inflame inflation further.

The Fed has said preventing such a doom loop is one of the reasons it's moved so aggressively on rate hikes. Inflation expectations are currently high relative to history, but a preliminary report on Friday suggested they're not moving very much.

The median expectation for inflation in the coming year among households rose to 5.1% from 5% a month earlier, according to a survey by the University of Michigan. Expectations for long-run inflation, meanwhile, ticked up to 3%. But that's still within the same 2.9% to 3.1% range where they've been for 15 of the last 16 months.

High inflation helped knock down the survey's reading for overall consumer sentiment by more than economists expected.

"The consumer is laser-focused on inflation and they're feeling it every day," said Brian Price, head of investment management at Commonwealth Financial Network. "I wouldn't expect that we see any upside with regard to consumer sentiment until inflation comes under control."

The Fed has already lifted its key overnight interest rate to a range of 3.75% to 4%, up from basically zero in March. The likely scenario is still for it to hike further into next year, and then to hold rates at that high level for some time.

The hope for markets is that a softening in inflation could mean the Fed will hold the line at a lower, less painful level for investors than it would have otherwise.

"They've been pretty clear all along they were going to front-load the interest rate increases," Price said. "They need some time to evaluate the data over the next few months."

Traders are increasingly betting the federal funds rate could top out around a range of 4.75% to 5% by early next year, according to CME Group. A week ago, they saw a higher ultimate rate as more likely, with



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a sizable chunk expecting something like 5.25% to 5.50%.

Bond markets were closed for trading in observance of Veterans Day. On Thursday, yields plunged as investors pared back their expectations for how aggressively the Fed will raise rates.

The S&P 500 rose 36.56 points to 3,992.93, and its 5.9% gain for the week was its third in the last four and its biggest since June. The Dow rose 32.49, or 0.1%, to 33,747.86, and the Nasdaq climbed 209.18, or 1.9%, to 11,323.33. Both also notched hefty gains for the week.

The market has routinely reacted with exaggerated swings following each month's inflation data report, according to Jonathan Golub, chief U.S. equity strategist at Credit Suisse. And while Thursday's report "was clearly a big positive, the market's response appears out of sync with the size of the surprise."

Companies that do a lot of business in China and around the region were particularly strong Friday following the relaxation of anti-COVID restrictions. Wynn Resorts rose 8.3%, and Las Vegas Sands gained 5.5%.

Tapestry rose 8.7% and Ralph Lauren rose 9.4% to also help lead the S&P 500 higher. Both companies reported stronger profits for the latest quarter than expected.

On the losing end were health care companies. Elevance Health dropped 5.8%, and Cigna fell 6%.

In the crypto market, meanwhile, prices sank again amid the industry's latest crisis of confidence. One of the bigger trading platforms, FTX, filed for bankruptcy protection after its users began scrambling to pull out their money on fears about its financial strength and after a bigger rival nixed a deal to buy the troubled company.

The exchange and its founder are under investigation by the Department of Justice and Securities and Exchange Commission, and rivals have said FTX's failure could dent confidence in the broader industry.

Bitcoin fell below \$16,800, down 6% from a day earlier, according to CoinDesk. It set its record of nearly \$69,000 almost exactly a year ago, and it was above \$21,000 a week ago.

## Zelenskyy says Ukrainian special military units in Kherson

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

MYKOLAIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's president said Friday that special military units have entered Kherson, a major regional capital that Russian forces had captured early in the war. Residents took to the streets to celebrate Russia's withdrawal, the latest pullback by Moscow as it faces intense resistance.

In a video address hours after Russia said it had completed withdrawing troops from the strategically key city, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said: "As of now, our defenders are approaching the city. In quite a bit, we are going to enter. But special units are already in the city."

Russia relinquished its final foothold in the major city, one of the first to be captured in the invasion that began Feb. 24. The withdrawal could act as a springboard for further advances into occupied territory.

Russia's Defense Ministry said its troops finished withdrawing from the western bank of the river that divides Ukraine's Kherson region at 5 a.m. The area they left included the city of Kherson, the only provincial capital Russia had captured during its nearly nine-month invasion of Ukraine.

Videos and photos on social media showed residents jubilantly taking to the streets, waving Ukrainian flags and chanting in celebration. A Ukrainian flag flew over a monument in a central Kherson square for the first time since the city was seized in early March. Some footage showed crowds cheering men in military uniform and tossing one man wearing combat fatigues up in the air. Other videos showed villagers embracing troops en route to the city.

Ukrainian officials have not yet confirmed the city was in Ukrainian hands.

Zelenskyy said Russian forces placed mines in the city and that after troops enter they will be followed by sappers, rescue workers and energy personnel. Despite the daunting tasks ahead, "Medicine, communications, social services are returning. ... Life is returning," he said.

Ukrainian intelligence urged Russian soldiers who might still be in the city to surrender in anticipation of Ukrainian forces arriving. "Your command left you to the mercy of fate," it said in a statement.

A Ukrainian regional official, Serhii Khlan, disputed the Russian Defense Ministry's claim that its 30,000 retreating troops took all 5,000 pieces of equipment with them, saying "a lot" of hardware got left behind.

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The final Russian withdrawal came six weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed the Kherson region and three other Ukrainian provinces, vowing they would remain Russian forever. Moscow's forces still control about 70% of the Kherson region.

In Kyiv, celebrations on the capital's main square continued into the night, with people popping open wine bottles and shouting "Glory to Ukraine." Some expressed surprise at the speed of events.

"I thought the Russian army would defend and there'd be a kind of siege like in Mariupol," the eastern port devastated in weeks of battle, said Andrey Trach, a resident of Odessa who works in Kyiv. "It's a very significant day for Ukraine because it shows the entire world that Ukraine can and definitely will defend every square kilometer and inch of territory."

French President Emmanuel Macron sent tweets in French and Ukrainian saluting Ukraine's recapture of Kherson, calling it "an important step toward the full restoration of its sovereign rights."

The Kremlin remained defiant Friday, insisting the withdrawal in no way represented an embarrassment for Putin. Moscow continues to view the entire Kherson region as part of Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He added that the Kremlin doesn't regret holding festivities to celebrate the annexation of occupied or partially occupied regions of Ukraine, deferring all questions about the Kherson withdrawal to the Defense Ministry.

Putin has so far been silent about Kherson, despite making several public appearances since the withdrawal was announced.

Shortly before the Russian announcement, Zelenskyy's office described the situation in the province as "difficult." It reported Russian shelling of villages and towns Ukrainian forces reclaimed in recent weeks during their counteroffensive in the Kherson region.

The General Staff of Ukraine's army said the Russian forces left looted homes, damaged power lines and mined roads in their wake. Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak had predicted the departing Russians would seek to turn Kherson into a "city of death" and would continue to shell it after relocating across the Dnieper River.

Some quarters of the Ukrainian government barely disguised their glee at the pace of the Russian withdrawal.

"The Russian army leaves the battlefields in a triathlon mode: steeplechase, broad jumping, swimming," Andriy Yermak, a senior presidential adviser, tweeted. Social media videos showed villagers hugging Ukrainian troops.

Recapturing Kherson city could provide Ukraine a strong position from which to expand its southern counteroffensive to other Russian-occupied areas, potentially including Crimea, which Moscow seized in 2014.

From its forces' new positions on the eastern bank, however, the Kremlin could try to escalate the war, which U.S. assessments showed may already have killed or wounded tens of thousands of civilians and hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

Gen. Ben Hodges, former commanding general of U.S. Army forces in Europe, described the Russian retreat as a "colossal failure" and said he expects Ukrainian commanders will keep pressure on Russia's depleted forces ahead of a possible future push for Crimea next year.

"It's too early to be planning the victory parade, for sure. But I would expect by the end of this year — so in the next, let's say, eight weeks — the Ukrainians are going to be in place to start setting the conditions for the decisive phase of this campaign, which is the liberation of Crimea, which I think will happen by the summer," he said in a telephone interview.

Meanwhile, a Russian S-300 missile strike overnight killed seven people in Mykolaiv, about 68 kilometers (42 miles) from Kherson's regional capital, Zelenskyy's office said. Rescue crews sifted through the rubble of a five-story residential building in search of survivors.

Standing in front of what used to be his family's apartment, Roman Mamontov awaited news about his missing mother.

The 16-year-old said he found "nothing there" when he opened the door to look for his mother after the

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missile struck. Friday was her 34th birthday.

"My mind was blank at that moment. I thought it could not be true," he said. "The cake she prepared for the celebration is still there."

Zelenskyy called the missile strike "the terrorist state's cynical response to our successes at the front."

"Russia does not give up its despicable tactics. And we will not give up our struggle. The occupiers will be held to account for every crime against Ukraine and Ukrainians," Zelenskyy said.

The Russian Defense Ministry didn't acknowledge striking a residential building in Mykolaiv, saying only that an ammunition depot was destroyed "in the area of the city."

Mykolaiv mayor Oleksandr Sienkevych told the AP that Russia could step up its shelling of his city. "The more success the Ukrainian army has, Russia lowers its bar of terrorism," he said.

Sienkevych said that S-300 missiles launched from the Kherson region can reach Mykolaiv within one minute. Some 149 civilians have been killed and 700 people seriously wounded in the city since the invasion began.

The president's office said Russian drones, rockets and heavy artillery strikes across eight regions killed at least 14 civilians between Thursday morning and Friday morning.

Also Friday, Zelenskyy's deputy chief of staff, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, said construction has begun on a barrier of concrete posts topped with barbed wire along the border with Belarus. Russia used Belarus as a staging area for troops and weapons when it invaded Ukraine and concerns persist that Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko may send troops to Ukraine.

## Twitter Blue signups unavailable after raft of fake accounts

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

Twitter's relaunched premium service — which grants blue-check "verification" labels to anyone willing to pay \$8 a month — was unavailable Friday after the social media platform was flooded by a wave of imposter accounts it itself had approved.

It's the latest whiplash-inducing change to the service where uncertainty has become the norm since billionaire Elon Musk took control two weeks ago. Prior to that, the blue check was granted to government entities, corporations, celebrities and journalists verified by the platform — precisely to prevent impersonation. Now, anyone can get one as long as they have a phone, a credit card and \$8 a month.

An impostor account posing as pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly & Co. and registered under the revamped Twitter Blue system tweeted that insulin was free, forcing the Indianapolis company to post an apology. Nintendo, Lockheed Martin, Musk's own companies Tesla and SpaceX were also impersonated, as well as the accounts of various professional sports and political figures.

For advertisers who have put their business with Twitter on hold, the fake accounts could be the last straw: Musk's rocky run atop the platform — laying off half its workforce and triggering high-profile departures — has raised questions about its survivability.

The impostors can cause big problems, even if they're taken down quickly.

They have created "overwhelming reputational risk for placing advertising investments on the platform," said Lou Paskalis, longtime marketing and media executive and former Bank of America head of global media. Adding that with the fake "verified" brand accounts, "a picture emerges of a platform in disarray that no media professional would risk their career by continuing to make advertising investments on, and no governance apparatus or senior executive would condone if they did."

Adding to the confusion, Twitter now has two categories of "blue checks," and they look identical. One includes the accounts verified before Musk took helm. It notes that "This account is verified because it's notable in government, news, entertainment, or another designated category." The other notes that the account subscribes to Twitter Blue.

But as of midday Friday, Twitter Blue was not available for subscription.

On Thursday, Musk tweeted that "too many corrupt legacy Blue 'verification' checkmarks exist, so no choice but to remove legacy Blue in coming months."

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An email sent to Twitter's press address went unanswered. The company's communications department was gutted in the layoffs and Twitter has not responded to queries from The Associated Press since Oct. 27 when Musk took the helm.

Thursday night, Twitter also once again began adding gray "official" labels to some prominent accounts. It had rolled out the labels earlier this week, only to kill them a few hours later.

They returned Thursday night, at least for some accounts — including Twitter's own, as well as big companies like Amazon, Nike and Coca-Cola, before many vanished again.

Celebrities also did not appear to be getting the "official" label.

Twitter is heavily dependent on ads and about 90% of its revenue comes from advertisers. But each change that Musk is rolling out — or rolling back — makes the site less appealing for big brands.

"It has become chaos," said Richard Levick, CEO of public relations firm Levick. "Who buys into chaos?"

A bigger issue for Musk might be the risk to his reputation as a model tech executive, since the rollout of different types of verifications and other changes have been botched, Levick added.

"It's another example something not very well thought out, and that's what happens when you rush," Levick said. "Musk has been known as a trusted visionary and magician — he can't lose that moniker and that's what's at risk right now," Levick said.

Twitter is a small part of total ad spending for the biggest companies that advertise on the platform. Google, Amazon and Meta account for about 75% of digital ads globally, with all other platforms combined making up the other 25%. Twitter accounts for about 0.9% of global digital ad spending, according to Insider Intelligence.

"For most marketers on budgets, Twitter has always been that thing that is potentially too big to totally ignore but not quite big enough to care about," said Mark DiMassimo, creative chief of marketing agency DiGo.

"None of this is a forever moral or ethical stand on the point of advertisers," he added. "If Musk proves to be a civilizing force in the long run advertisers will come back — if Twitter is still there. It's a 'for now' decision — why be there now?"

## Kevin Conroy, a defining voice of Batman, dies at 66

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kevin Conroy, the prolific voice actor whose gravely delivery on "Batman: The Animated Series" was for many Batman fans the definitive sound of the Caped Crusader, has died at 66.

Conroy died Thursday after a battle with cancer, series producer Warner Bros. announced Friday.

Conroy was the voice of Batman on the acclaimed animated series that ran from 1992-1996, often acting opposite Mark Hamill's Joker. Conroy continued on as the almost exclusive animated voice of Batman, including some 15 films, 400 episodes of television and two dozen video games, including the "Batman: Arkham" and "Injustice" franchises.

In the eight-decade history of Batman, no one played the Dark Knight more.

"For several generations, he has been the definitive Batman," Hamill in a statement. "It was one of those perfect scenarios where they got the exact right guy for the right part, and the world was better for it."

"He will always be my Batman," Hamill said.

Conroy's popularity with fans made him a sought-after personality on the convention circuit. In the often tumultuous world of DC Comics, Conroy was a mainstay and widely beloved. In a statement, Warner Bros. Animation said Conroy's performance "will forever stand among the greatest portrayals of the Dark Knight in any medium."

"Kevin brought a light with him everywhere, whether in the recording booth giving it his all or feeding first-responders during 9/11 or making sure every fan who ever waited for him had a moment with their Batman," said Paul Dini, producer of the animated show. "A hero in every sense of the word."

Born in Westbury, New York, and raised in Westport, Connecticut, Conroy started out as well-trained theater actor. He attended Juilliard and roomed with Robin Williams. After graduating, he toured with John Houseman's acting group, the Acting Company. He performed in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the

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Public Theater and in "Eastern Standard" on Broadway. At the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California, he performed in "Hamlet."

The 1980s production of "Eastern Standard," in which Conroy played a TV producer secretly living with AIDS, had particular meaning to him. Conroy, who was gay, said at the time he was regularly attending funerals for friends who died of AIDS. He poured out his anguish nightly on stage.

In 1980, Conroy moved to Los Angeles, began acting in soap operas and booked appearances on TV series including "Cheers," "Tour of Duty" and "Murphy Brown." In 1991, when casting director Andrea Romano was scouting her lead actor for "Batman: The Animated Series," she went through hundreds of auditions before Conroy came in. He was there on a friend's recommendation — and cast immediately.

Conroy began the role without any background in comics and as a novice in voice acting. His Batman was husky, brooding and dark. His Bruce Wayne was light and dashing. His inspiration for the contrasting voices, he said, came from the 1930s film, "The Scarlet Pimpernel," about an English aristocrat who leads a double life.

"It's so much fun as an actor to sink your teeth into," Conroy told The New York Times in 2016. "Calling it animation doesn't do it justice. It's more like mythology."

As Conroy's performance evolved over the years, it sometimes connected to his own life. Conroy described his own father as an alcoholic and said his family disintegrated while he was in high school. He channeled those emotions into the 1993 animated film "Mask of the Phantasm," which revolved around Bruce Wayne's unsettled issues with his parents.

"Andrea came in after the recording and grabbed me in a hug," Conroy told The Hollywood Reporter in 2018. "Andrea said, 'I don't know where you went, but it was a beautiful performance.' She knew I was drawing on something."

Conroy is survived by his husband, Vaughn C. Williams, sister Trisha Conroy and brother Tom Conroy.

In "Finding Batman," released earlier this year, Conroy penned a comic about his unlikely journey with the character and as a gay man in Hollywood.

"I've often marveled as how appropriate it was that I should land this role," he wrote. "As a gay boy growing up in the 1950s and '60s in a devoutly Catholic family, I'd grown adept at concealing parts of myself."

The voice that emerged from Conroy for Batman, he said, was one he didn't recognize — a voice that "seemed to roar from 30 years of frustration, confusion, denial, love, yearning."

"I felt Batman rising from deep within."

## **GOP's Stefanik backs Trump '24 as other Republicans decline**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — No. 3 House Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik is endorsing Donald Trump for president in 2024, becoming the highest-ranking congressional leader Friday to publicly back the former president, even as he's being widely blamed by other Republicans for failures in the midterm elections.

Stefanik, of New York, has been mentioned as a possible vice presidential contender on an emerging Trump ticket. The former president has promised a Tuesday event at his private Mar-a-Lago club that is widely expected to be an announcement of his intentions to run again for the White House.

"It's very clear President Trump is the leader of the Republican party," Stefanik said in a statement.

"I am proud to endorse Donald J. Trump for President in 2024," she said. "It is time for Republicans to unite around the most popular Republican in America, who has a proven track record of conservative governance."

But Stefanik is an outlier among leading Republicans who are mostly reluctant to see Trump jump in the presidential race as his MAGA-styled candidates — MAGA is shorthand for Trump's 2016 "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan — are being blamed for the GOP's setbacks in the midterms.

Republicans had been expecting a midterm "red wave" that would give them big wins in races for governors, Congress and beyond this week in a rebuff of President Joe Biden and the Democratic agenda.

Instead, Republicans made only modest gains in the House and lost a crucial Senate seat in Pennsylvania

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when Democrat John Fetterman defeated Trump-backed celebrity doctor Mehmet Oz.

With votes still being counted as of midday Friday, control of the House and Senate remained too early to call.

Other Republicans are calling for the party to move on from the Trump era.

Stefanik easily won her own reelection to another two-year term from New York, and is expected to cruise to her spot as chair of the House Republican Conference in Tuesday's internal party elections. If Republicans win the majority, hers would become the 4th ranking leadership position.

She launched her career as a more moderate conservative voice and as one of the youngest members of the House, is seen as a rising star in Trump's orbit. She has not tamped down talk of a potential vice presidential nod.

Stefanik and Trump remain close and work together, according to a person familiar with the situation and granted anonymity to discuss it. She helped raise money and backing for several newly elected members of Congress.

## Gallagher, watermelon smashing comedian, dies at 76

NEW YORK (AP) — Gallagher, the long-haired, smash-'em-up comedian who left a trail of laughter, anger and shattered watermelons over a decadeslong career, has died at age 76.

Craig Marquardo, in a statement identifying himself as Gallagher's "longtime former manager," said that he died Friday at his home in Palm Springs, California, after a brief illness. Gallagher had numerous heart attacks over the years, including one right before a scheduled show in Texas in 2012.

With a beret on his head and a few simple props, from a can of oil to a bull whip, the man born Leo Anthony Gallagher Jr. built a nationwide following in the 1970s and '80s, appearing on the "Tonight" show with Johnny Carson and starring in numerous Showtime specials. His act included observational humor ("What about Easter? Whose idea was it to give eggs to an animal that hops"), political commentary ("They don't call a tax a tax. They call it a revenue enhancer"), invented sports (synchronized Ping-Pong) and his trademark Sledge-O-Matic destruction.

"Ladies and gentlemen! I did not come here tonight just to make you laugh. I came here to sell you something, and I want you to pay particular attention!" he would call out in his best rapid-fire impersonation of a late-night television pitchman. "The amazing Master Tool Corporation, a subsidiary of Fly-By-Night Industries, has entrusted who? Me! To show you! The handiest and the dandiest kitchen tool you've ever seen."

Sledgehammer in hand, he would then apply his full muscle to apples, grapes, lettuce and other produce, most famously the inevitable watermelon, with audience members in front showered in food bits.

Gallagher was a Fort Bragg, North Carolina, native who started out in 1960 as road manager for the comedian/musician Jim Stafford and soon began performing himself, honing his act at the Comedy Store and other clubs. He was not the only funnyman in the family: His younger brother Ron became a comedian, received Leo's initial blessing and looked and acted enough like his better-known sibling that some audiences were unsure who they had come to see. Leo Gallagher eventually secured a court injunction barring his brother from using his routines.

The elder Gallagher became increasingly controversial in recent years, chastised for racist and homophobic remarks. Gallagher even cut short an interview in 2011 with Marc Maron after the WTF podcast host confronted him about his statements.

"I'm the problem?!" Gallagher said at one point. "Do you think when I'm dead, gays will finally have an opportunity in America? Have I really been holding them down?"

In 2003, Gallagher was among more than 100 candidates running in the recall election for California governor, won by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Over the past decade, Gallagher appeared in a Geico commercial and in the movie "The Book Of Daniel."

## Many vets are landing jobs, but the transition can be tough

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Phillip Slaughter left the Army after 18 years and found a job similar to one he had in uniform: behind the wheel of a truck. Instead of towing food and bullets through war zones, he hauled packages for FedEx.

It wasn't what he wanted to do. The work aggravated his post-traumatic stress disorder. It would be three years and several jobs before he landed his ideal position as a sourcing recruiter for a tech company.

"I think it's the first job that I've worked 10 consecutive months without quitting," said Slaughter, 41, who lives in Clarksville, Tennessee.

Slaughter is a U.S. military veteran who found a job he loves at a time when the nation is experiencing some of its lowest monthly veteran unemployment on record. But the rate — 2.7% in October — can mask the difficulty of a transition that sometimes takes years of working unfulfilling jobs, while forging a new identity and a new purpose beyond serving one's country.

"Even though (veteran unemployment) is low, I'm interested to see a survey on how many people are happy in the position they're in," said Slaughter, who also runs his own consulting firm for fellow vets.

Veterans account for about 7% of the civilian population, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Their jobless rate can help gauge the nation's efforts to assist former service members, experts say. It can also reflect on the military and how it prepares departing personnel. High veteran unemployment is not good for recruiting.

For this Veterans Day, a handful of former service members talked about their experiences looking for work at a time when the veteran jobless rate is so low. For some, it was easy — but others have struggled.

Pierson Gest, a former Army infantryman, landed his first post-military job in August as a hydropower system designer in California.

Gest joined up during the Great Recession, knowing he'd eventually go to school on the GI Bill. Starting college in 2017 was tough at first as he developed study habits. But he got the hang of it, earning his engineering degree in June.

"I was lucky enough to negotiate a six-figure salary," said Gest, 37, who lives outside San Francisco. "And I definitely used and leveraged my experience in the Army to negotiate that wage on top of my college degree."

Across the country in Florida, Thomas Holmes is still searching for his ideal job.

Holmes, 46, left the Air Force in 2012 after 17 years, during which he maintained parachute systems for various types of aircraft, from F-15 fighter jets to U-2 spy planes.

He said the one full-time job he's worked, in the billing and claims department of a warehouse office, was toxic. He quit after about 18 months.

Holmes used the GI Bill to earn three degrees, including a master's in sports management. He found part-time work in the industry, but rising gas prices and the lure of more consistent hours prompted him to work at a nearby UPS store.

"I've applied for many jobs — county jobs, state jobs, all sorts of things," said Holmes, who lives outside Tampa. "And then all I get is: 'Well, thanks for your service.'"

Jayla Hair's transition from Navy to civilian paralegal wasn't easy, despite a bachelor's degree in the field and skills that would seem transferable.

Hair, 30, said she applied to about 300 jobs over eight months. After seeking help from a Navy program and friends, Hair overhauled her resume and job interviews eventually came her way. But potential employers cited her lack of experience with state laws and civilian courts.

Hair took temporary jobs in the legal field and recently landed a full-time position as a paralegal for a Fortune 500 company in the Chicago area.

"Just having my military experience was not enough," said Hair, who plans to pursue a law degree in the future. "If it wasn't for me having these temporary jobs to build my civilian resume, I don't know where I'd be right now."

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Hair landed her job at a time when veteran unemployment has been mostly dropping. The annual veteran jobless rate fell steadily from 8.7% in 2010 to 3.1% in 2019, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Last year, after a spike fueled by the coronavirus pandemic, the annual rate was 4.4%. But the seasonally adjusted monthly percentage in March was 2.4, hailed by President Joe Biden as tied for the lowest rate on record. August also hit that mark.

The tight labor market and demand for workers after the coronavirus pandemic is likely one factor for the low veteran jobless rates, said Jeffrey B. Wenger, a senior policy researcher at the Rand Corp. But so are significant efforts in recent years by the U.S. military, Department of Veterans Affairs and veteran service organizations to provide assistance to outgoing service members.

Training such as resume-writing is now mandatory and American companies have launched initiatives to hire hundreds of thousands of vets.

Many of those undertakings grew from the Great Recession and the abundance of stressed-out service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, which "brought the veteran employment crisis to a head," Wenger said.

"And over the last 10 to 15 years, people have been putting in more and more resources and have become more and more dedicated to fixing that problem," Wenger said.

Among them is Transition Overwatch, a firm that runs career apprenticeship programs across the country. CEO Sean Ofeldt said the company zeroes in on what active service members want to do as civilians, not what they're doing or the skills they've learned in the military.

"A lot of military members don't want to keep doing what they did," said Ofeldt, a former Navy SEAL. "We train them up while they're still on active duty and then launch them into an actual career with all the support they need for that first 12 months."

But the formula for supporting veterans has to encompass more than just employment. It needs to focus on social challenges as well, said Karl Hamner, a University of Alabama education professor.

Veterans can feel isolated after losing their tribe of fellow service members. Hamner said new data indicates that loss can be especially acute for women because they formed strong bonds with one another as they navigated a male-dominated military.

In a soon-to-be released national survey of 4,700 female veterans conducted by Hamner and his colleagues, 70% said adjusting to civilian life was difficult; 71% said they needed more time to figure out what they wanted to do.

"They had to prove themselves in a valued, highly regarded profession," Hamner said. "And now they're back to trying to figure out what it means to be a civilian woman and deal with all the standard discriminatory stuff."

## Colorado voters decriminalize psychedelic mushrooms

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Colorado voters have passed a ballot initiative to decriminalize psychedelic mushrooms for people 21 and older and to create state-regulated "healing centers" where participants can experience the drug under supervision.

Colorado becomes the second state, after Oregon, to vote to establish a regulated system for substances like psilocybin and psilocin, the hallucinogens found in some mushrooms. The initiative, which would take effect in 2024, also will allow an advisory board to add other plant-based psychedelic drugs to the program in 2026.

Supporters argued that the state's current approach to mental health has failed and that naturally occurring psychedelics, which have been used for hundreds of years, can treat depression, PTSD, anxiety, addiction and other conditions. They also said jailing people for the non-violent offense of using naturally occurring substances costs taxpayers money.

Natural Medicine Colorado, the group that promoted the measure, called its passage "a truly historic moment."



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"Colorado voters saw the benefit of regulated access to natural medicines, including psilocybin, so people with PTSD, terminal illness, depression, anxiety and other mental health issues can heal," the group said in a prepared statement.

But critics warned that the Food and Drug Administration has not approved the substances as medicine. They also argued that allowing "healing centers" to operate, and allowing private personal use of the drugs, would jeopardize public safety and send the wrong message to kids and adults alike that the substances are healthy.

"This opens a very large national conversation about the role of the FDA in determining medicines in this country," said Luke Niforatos, the head of the opposition ballot committee, Protect Colorado's Kids. "Because now, for the second time in a row, we've had states put medicine to a ballot vote and circumvent science and the FDA."

Niforatos said his group is calling on the FDA, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Attorney for Colorado to step in because the drugs are still federally illegal.

"Are we going to dispense with the FDA — the only institution in charge of protecting patient health and safety — and just say that we're OK with statewide, nationwide experiments on whatever startup comes up with for a drug?" he asked.

The ballot initiative's passage comes a decade after Colorado voted to legalize recreational marijuana, after initially allowing its use for medical reasons, which led to a multibillion-dollar industry with hundreds of dispensaries popping up across the state.

Critics of the latest ballot initiative say the same deep-pocketed players who have pushed for legalizing recreational marijuana in various states are using a similar playbook to create a commercial market, and eventually recreational dispensaries, for dangerous substances.

Voters in this week's midterm elections approved recreational marijuana in Maryland and Missouri but rejected it in two other states, signaling support gradually growing for legalization even in conservative parts of the country.

The results mean that 21 states have approved marijuana's recreational use.

Under Colorado's latest measure, the psychedelics that would be decriminalized are listed as schedule 1 controlled substances under state and federal law and are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use with a high potential for abuse.

Even so, the FDA has designated psilocybin a "breakthrough therapy" to treat major depressive disorder. The designation can expedite research, development and review of a drug if it might offer substantial improvements over existing treatments.

Colorado's ballot initiative would allow those 21 and older to grow, possess and share the psychedelic substances but not sell them for personal use. It also would allow people who have been convicted of offenses involving the substances to have their criminal records sealed.

Those who want to use mushrooms would not need approval from a doctor. In addition to being able to grow and use their own mushrooms, those who want to try the therapy could do so through the newly formed "healing centers," which would be allowed to supply clients with mushrooms but not sell them. Instead, clients would pay for the services of the "facilitator" at the center.

Proponents have repeatedly stressed that the measure does not allow dispensaries like those selling recreational and medical marijuana.

In 2020, Oregon became the first state in the nation to legalize the therapeutic, supervised use of psilocybin after 56% of voters approved Ballot Measure 109. But unlike the Colorado measure, Oregon allows counties to opt out of the program if their constituents vote to do so.

In Colorado, counties and municipalities would be able to regulate healing centers but not ban them.

Oregon's initiative is expected to take effect at the beginning of next year.

Washington, D.C., and Denver have partially decriminalized psychedelic mushrooms by requiring law enforcement officers to treat them as their lowest priority.

## Deuxmoi, Instagram's Gossip Girl, talks new novel 'Anon Pls'

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

These days, people hungry for a status update on Kim Kardashian and Pete Davidson or Shawn Mendes' Starbucks order are skipping old standbys like TMZ and People and instead turning to Deuxmoi.

The Instagram account boasting 1.7 million followers is run by an anonymous woman living in New York who solicits and shares unconfirmed tips. The pseudonymous Deuxmoi's skyrocketing popularity has led to a weekly podcast devoted to celebrity topics du jour, merchandise, sponsorship deals and, now, a novel published this week that's being developed into an HBO Max series.

Co-authored with Jessica Goodman, "Anon Pls." (William Morrow), is based on Deuxmoi's own origin story: Unsatisfied with her day job, she began an account for fun and it turned into a lucrative career. The title is a cheeky play on the reader tips that beg for anonymity while sharing everything from the scandalous to the mundane.

"The story is relatable," Deuxmoi said during a recent video interview with her camera off. "It could happen to anybody who just happens to fall into something that becomes a phenomenon."

Deuxmoi talked to The Associated Press about maintaining her anonymity, who she won't post about and the account's future. Answers have been condensed for brevity.

AP: First, is it stressful knowing there are people actively trying to figure out who you are?

DEUXMOI: It was stressful in the beginning. Now it's not. It was when I had my (day) job because I literally would go into work every day as the (follower) count got bigger and bigger and was like, "Is my boss going to come up to me and say, 'Is this you?'" I was very paranoid about that because I was spending so much time on the account.

Now, I've said this a bunch, I'm not hiding. I'm just trying to build a brand. And the brand is not based on a person or an influencer. It's based on the content and it's based on the audience and it's based on the community that's been built, so I don't want the focus to be on me. That's why I really have no intention of being like, "This is who I am."

AP: You have built a brand. You have merch!

DEUXMOI: When I first launched my merch, I was looking at the Shopify numbers and you can get a live view of who's shopping on your account. I saw how many people were on the website and — I could get emotional talking about it right now — I literally started bawling. I was very unhappy in my old career. I was in a depression. When the opportunity to monetize came about, it was honestly an out for me because I was so miserable doing what I was doing before.

AP: Have you splurged on anything with the money you've made?

DEUXMOI: I've definitely bought some jewelry. Not (too) expensive. This could go away tomorrow. ... But I also don't want to drain my bank account of all the money that I've saved from doing this. I haven't taken a vacation yet and I would really like to do that. I would love to take a great vacation somewhere and relax and not look at my phone for like five days. I don't know if that's possible.

AP: Are there any celebrities you won't post about?

DEUXMOI: There's four. Two I've publicly said — Hailey Bieber and Kacey Musgraves — who have posted passive aggressive things about my account. It doesn't seem like they enjoy being posted about so I'm not going to torture them. I still get submissions of sightings but I don't post them. Another person, I talk about in my book but I don't name. And the fourth celebrity — whom I'd rather keep private — just came to me and said they felt really uncomfortable being posted about and they were so cool about it. I also try not to post about anyone underage.

AP: On Sundays, you share submissions from followers who have spotted celebrities in various places but always after the fact. Why?

DEUXMOI: Sightings are not posted in real time. ... I'm not trying to be Gawker Stalker. I'm not trying to promote stalking celebrities. I want to make this very clear: My followers do not stalk celebrities. They just happen to be in the same place at the same time as a celebrity. Also, Gawker was not my inspiration. It was honestly "Gossip Girl," like, "Spotted: on the steps of the Met." That was the inspiration.

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AP: Do you feel like you have any competition?

DEUXMOI: No, because I'm not looking at what everyone else is doing. I'm worried about myself. I really am trying to create a new media. I really am trying to present information in a way that no one really has done before. My sources aren't publicists. They're real people who've encountered celebrities. They're the waiters, the waitresses. They're the people who work at hotels. They're the stylist's assistants.

By using those people as my source you get a better and a more real account of what's going on. Also, not everything has to be salacious. Celebrity gossip can be fun. It could be about coffee orders. It could be about skincare. It could be about hotel riders.

AP: Your co-author helped you with the book, but do you ever step away from Instagram?

DEUXMOI: It's always on my mind. I'm always checking it. I'll never relax. I'm not trying to stay this like, "Woe, is me, like, feel bad for me." It's just the reality of the situation. Entertainment news or news in general never sleeps. There's always something happening. I never shut off and I never am relaxed.

AP: And do you have any help?

DEUXMOI: I'm the only one who's posting and answering (direct messages). ... And also I started answering all my DMs because I knew what it felt like to message somebody with a platform and not get a response. If you're in my inbox, I'll read your message, I'll give you an emoji, I'll tap it with a heart to let you know that I've seen it.

AP: What do your parents think of all this?

DEUXMOI: I blocked my mom from the account because she really wasn't enjoying it. Early on she would call me and be like, "This isn't very nice," you know, not that it was mean, but just the fact that I was like talking about somebody, a celebrity. She didn't like it. So I blocked her, and my dad doesn't have an Instagram account. I think they're proud of me. They see how hard I work because I'm always busy.

AP: Do you have a finsta ("fake Instagram," or separate account)?

DEUXMOI: Yes. I don't post anything private on it, I just use it to stalk (laughs).

AP: Where else do you see the account going?

DEUXMOI: People have wanted to start offshoot accounts, like, "Can I start a Deuxmoi Brazil? Can I start a Deuxmoi Broadway? Can I start a Deuxmoi Sports?" ... I don't have the bandwidth to do that myself but I would love to give people accounts that are specific to their interests.

## After quiet days, handful of protests at UN climate summit

By SAM MAGDY and WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — After days with almost no demonstrations, there were several small protests at this year's UN climate conference calling Friday for the developed world to fight global warming more fairly and effectively.

Demonstrators called for rich nations to compensate developing countries for climate change, demanded that a pipeline project in Congo be scrapped and complained about a lack of political will to sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the main cause of climate change.

U.S. President Joe Biden arrived in Egypt Friday to meet with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and then address delegates of other nations.

"I am standing shoulder to shoulder with my sisters and my brothers from Mother Africa," said Imam Saffet Catovic of the Islamic Society of North America. "It's time for the global north to pay for their responsibility."

Lucky Abeng, a Nigerian activist from the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance, said the group would continue to pressure world leaders to do more and "will not be intimidated."

Often a large presence at climate negotiations, protests had been mostly muted this year, a sharp contrast to previous climate conferences that featured large demonstrations. Activists blamed the high costs of travel and accommodation in this resort town. There were also concerns that the Egyptian government could crack down despite promising to allow protests in a designated venue. Street protests are virtually banned in Egypt. And activists also increasingly doubt demonstrations' usefulness.

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Sharm el-Sheikh has been for decades the government's favorite spot for conferences and high-level summits because it is so easy to control. The city is isolated in the desert near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. It's a six-hour drive from the capital, Cairo. Drivers must pass through a closely guarded tunnel under the Suez Canal, then numerous checkpoints along the highway.

Friday's protests, like others in recent days, took place inside and around the main conference center. Other Conference of Party meetings have seen raucous protests around various parts of host cities.

"We need countries like the United States to be a climate leader, to stand with the people, to stand with the planet, to stand with the coming generations," said Vanessa Nakate, a climate activist from Uganda and a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. "So my message to President Biden: will you show us the money? Will you stand with the most vulnerable communities?"

In one protest, dozens of medical workers from various countries laid down to perform what they called a "die-in," and performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation to show the urgency of addressing climate-change impacts. The activists called for a treaty to phase out fossil fuel.

"That's the first stage on this emergency. And in the longer run, the long-term therapy is climate justice and systemic change," said Bea Franziska Albermann, a Swiss physician and climate activist.

Some activists briefly interrupted President Joe Biden's speech at the COP27 on Friday with shouts. They raised an orange banner with a slogan that read: "People vs. Fuels" and the protest ended peacefully.

Other protests featured signs with messages and chants like, "Pay up for loss and damage!" and "People vs. Fossil Fuels!"

"The main oil producers are here in this summit," said Philbert Aganyo of Kenya, protesting a large pipeline in the Congo. "Why are we inviting polluters to conversations of an issue they caused?"

"We are aware that a just energy transition won't happen overnight and that is why we are appealing for a systematic scale-down of the use of fossil fuels," he said.

The pipeline, owned by Total Energies, China National Offshore Oil Corporation and the Ugandan and Tanzanian governments, runs from Hoima district in Uganda to Tanga Port in Tanzania. It's criticized by international environmental groups and communities along the proposed route.

The pipeline represents "1443 kilometers (897 miles) of pollution, pain and misery," said Philbert Aganyo, from Green Faith in Kenya.

In the first week of the two-week summit, several world leaders called for developed nations to spend much more to help developing countries confront the impacts of climate change and finance a transition to renewable energies. There have also been calls for drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, which continue to rise. Beyond leaders and negotiators, the summit includes scientists, academics, journalists and representatives from companies ranging from those developing low-carbon projects to traditional oil and gas firms.

Global Witness, Corporate Accountability and Corporate Europe Observatory said that they have counted 636 people linked to fossil fuel companies on the meeting's provisional list of participants, an increase of more than 25% compared to the 503 fossil fuel lobbyists counted at last year's climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland.

"Tobacco lobbyists wouldn't be welcome at health conferences, arms dealers can't promote their trade at peace conventions," the groups said. "Those perpetuating the world's fossil-fuel addiction should not be allowed through the doors of a climate conference."

Friday has a day for climate protests worldwide since Swedish activist Greta Thunberg launched the Fridays for Future movement in 2018. There were climate demonstrations in several countries, including South Africa, Italy and Sweden, on Friday.

Like most Fridays, Greta Thunberg rode a bike outside her country's parliament. Thunberg didn't plan to attend this year's conference but said activists' presence was important, .

"If we don't have the public pressure from the outside that we need, the COPS as they are now are not going to lead to anything big," she said.

**Midterms reinforce Christian voter trends on abortion, GOP**

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By DAVID CRARY, PETER SMITH and NUHA DOLBY Associated Press

In the midterm elections, evangelical Christians across the nation reconfirmed their allegiance to conservative candidates and causes, while Catholic voters once again showed how closely divided they are -- even on abortion.

On a successful, high-profile ballot measure in the battleground state of Michigan, proposing to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution, Catholic voters split about evenly, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of more than 94,000 voters across the country.

In Kentucky, a reliably Republican state, voters rejected a GOP-backed ballot measure aimed at denying any state constitutional protections for abortion. Among those voting No were 60% of Catholic voters, according to VoteCast.

In contrast, about two-thirds of white evangelical voters in both Kentucky and Michigan voted against protecting abortion access.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, said rejection of that measure in his state was an "unmitigated disaster."

He was less surprised by abortion-rights amendments passing in more liberal Vermont and California and centrist Michigan. But the Kentucky vote was the "hardest loss" and followed a similar vote in August in another red state, Kansas.

Mohler said it's important for abortion opponents to be willing to enact their views into policy.

Voters "who voted for pro-life candidates turned around and voted against a pro-life constitutional amendment," Mohler lamented.

On the opposite side of the fight, Catholics for Choice president Jamie Manson said abortion access protections are popular.

"In red states and blue states, with religious voters and secular voters, wherever abortion was on the ballot, abortion rights disproportionately won," she said in a statement.

John Fea, a professor of American history at Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, said the Kentucky vote signaled that many Americans seem to want the status quo provided under the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. It legalized abortion nationwide — with some limits — until it was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in June.

"Most of the country wants some restrictions on abortion, but they don't want bans," Fea said. "The Christian right, despite the fact that they got what they wanted with the overturning of Roe, is not getting the extent of the victory they had hoped."

Only about one in 10 voters nationwide and across most states say abortion should be illegal in all cases, according to AP VoteCast. Even among white evangelical voters, while most say abortion should generally be illegal, only about two in 10 say abortion should be illegal in all cases.

Despite setbacks on the ballot measures, abortion opponents took heart from some other election results. Michael New, who teaches social research at The Catholic University of America, cited the comfortable re-election victories for GOP Govs. Greg Abbott in Texas, Brian Kemp in Georgia, Ron DeSantis in Florida and Mike DeWine in Ohio.

"All these governors signed strong pro-life laws and did not hide from the abortion issue," New said.

According to VoteCast, about 4 in 10 Catholics voting in the midterm elections identified as Democrats; about half as Republicans. A breakdown of some high-profile races for governor and for U.S. Senate illustrated how these voters are very much a swing constituency.

In Wisconsin, Catholic voters slightly favored Republicans in those two races.

In Pennsylvania, Catholics were slightly more likely to have voted for the Republican loser in the Senate race, Mehmet Oz, but more likely to vote for the Democratic winner in the governor's race, Josh Shapiro. Oz is Muslim and Shapiro is Jewish.

In Arizona, Catholic voters were evenly divided between the Democratic and Republican candidates for governor, while about 60% backed Democrat Mark Kelly, seeking re-election to the Senate. The tight races in Arizona remain uncalled by The Associated Press.

In each of those three states, roughly two-thirds or more of white evangelical Christian voters backed

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the GOP candidates.

Another notable factor in these results: large majorities of voters who describe themselves as nonreligious voted for the Democrats and supported abortion rights in their decisions on the Michigan and Kentucky ballot measures.

While it remains uncertain which party will control Congress, John Fea and other scholars said the election was a setback for at least some Christian nationalist candidates on the Republican side – those who fuse Christian and American identity, symbols and mission.

While some candidates associated with the view succeeded – such as U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican re-elected in her overwhelmingly red Georgia district – those facing a more mixed electorate struggled.

Republican Doug Mastriano -- whose campaign rallies were infused with Christian music and symbols though he has rejected the "Christian nationalist" label -- lost decisively in the race for governor in Pennsylvania. Republican U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert, also associated with the movement, faced a tighter-than-expected race for re-election in Colorado.

Fea said Mastriano may have alienated people with his Christian nationalism but also with other factors, such as his efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

"I think it's a vote against an extreme brand of Christian nationalism, combined with election denying," said Fea, author of "Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump."

Mastriano won about 6 in 10 of the votes of his fellow evangelical Christians, according to VoteCast, but that seemed to slightly lag behind the two-thirds who backed Mehmet Oz.

Overall, among voters nationwide, about 4 in 10 say they attend religious services at least monthly; about a third say they never attend. About a fifth say they go once a week or more.

Democrats largely attend religious services less frequently – about 7 in 10 go less than monthly. Among Republicans, 46% attend at least monthly, while 54% go less often.

## Famed painting 'The Scream' targeted by climate activists

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Norwegian police said two climate activists tried in vain Friday to glue themselves to Edvard Munch's 1893 masterpiece "The Scream" at an Oslo museum and no harm was reported to the painting of a waif-like figure appearing to scream.

Police said they were alerted by the National Museum of Norway and had three people under their "control." A third person filmed the pair that tried to affix to the painting, Norwegian news agency NTB said.

The museum said that the room where the glass-protected painting is exhibited "was emptied of the public and closed," and will reopen as soon as possible. The rest of museum remained open.

Police said there was glue residue on the glass mount.

A video of the incident showed museum guards holding two activists, with one shouting "I scream for people dying." Another shouted "I scream when lawmakers ignore science" as someone shielded "The Scream."

Environmental activists from the Norwegian organization "Stopp oljeletinga" — Norwegian for Stop Oil Exploration — were behind the stunt, saying they "wanted to pressure lawmakers into stopping oil exploration." Norway is a major producer of offshore oil and gas.

It was the latest episode in which climate activists have targeted famous paintings in European museums.

"We are campaigning against 'Scream' because it is perhaps Norway's most famous painting," Astrid Rem, a spokesperson for the Norwegian group, told The Associated Press. "There have been lots of similar actions around Europe. They have managed something that no other action has managed: achieve an extremely large amount of coverage and press."

Two Belgian activists who targeted Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" in a Dutch museum in October were sentenced to two months in prison. The painting wasn't damaged and was returned to its wall a day later.

Earlier this month, climate protesters threw mashed potatoes at a Claude Monet painting in a German

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museum and a similar protest happened in London, where protesters threw soup over Vincent van Gogh's "Sunflowers" at the National Gallery. In both those cases, the paintings also weren't damaged.

## **NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week**

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

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Arizona officials correct false claims about ballot issues

**CLAIM:** When ballots were rejected by tabulators at some voting locations across Maricopa County on Election Day, an alternate solution for voters to drop ballots in a secure drop box onsite resulted in the ballots getting shredded, thrown in the trash, or marked for Democrats.

**THE FACTS:** Ballots submitted in this way were counted just as absentee ballots or mail-in ballots are, according to county officials. They weren't discarded or altered. When a printing problem caused tabulators to reject ballots in at least 70 of 223 polling sites in Arizona's largest county on Tuesday, county officials offered a few alternate solutions. Voters could wait and try another machine, cancel their vote and go to another vote center, or drop their ballot in a secure drop box referred to as "door 3" or "box 3." Some social media user falsely claimed that using this drop box would allow county officials to rig those votes by manually changing them or discarding them. However, county elections department spokesperson Megan Gilbertson explained that ballots placed in these drop boxes were machine-counted at the central tabulation center in downtown Phoenix, just as all mail-in and absentee ballots are. At the end of the voting day, a bipartisan team collected all the voted ballots from voting centers, sealed them and transported them by truck to the tabulation center for counting. This is the same process used for early voting and is the same methodology used on Election Day by most counties, including Pima County and Yavapai County, Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer said in a statement Tuesday.

— Associated Press writers Josh Kelety in Phoenix and Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

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Clip shows poll worker in Wisconsin, not 'cheating' in Philadelphia

**CLAIM:** Video shows masked man at polling site "cheating" in front of cameras in Philadelphia.

**THE FACTS:** The video shows a poll worker in Madison, Wisconsin, on Tuesday. He was initialing ballots to be handed out to voters, a standard procedure mandated by state law, according to the county clerk. Social media users on Election Day distorted a clip of the Madison poll worker doing his job to falsely claim it showed election fraud in Philadelphia. The video, which aired on Fox News on Tuesday, shows a man wearing a cloth face mask flipping through ballots and writing on them. "Masked man cheating in front of the cameras on the mainstream media," read a widely shared tweet with the video. But the original footage shows the video was filmed in Madison, not Pennsylvania. Immediately before Fox News showed the clip in Madison, the network showed the exterior of Philadelphia's East Passyunk Community Center with a graphic labeling that location. The broadcast then showed the clip of the poll worker and changed the location in the label to Madison. Social media versions of the video cropped out the location. A reverse-image search of the building's interior revealed that the clip was filmed at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, which served as a polling location for Tuesday's election. Scott McDonell, the Dane County clerk, said the man is a poll worker, and the video shows him initialing ballots before they were handed out to voters. He was also circling the ward in which the ballots were issued. It's part of the process of preparing the ballots for voters, McDonell said. Another poll worker also initialed the ballots before they were handed to voters. "You need to have those signatures to show that two people saw the blank ballot and handed it to the voter," McDonell said. "This is a standard operating procedure. It's done in public so that anyone can watch it. It's mandated by state law. It's a check and balance on the system." Barry Burden, a University of Wisconsin-Madison political science professor and the director of the Elections Research

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Project, agreed that the video showed standard procedures for poll workers in Madison. Wisconsin election law explains that at polling places with paper ballots, two inspectors "shall write their initials on the back of each ballot and deliver to each elector as he or she enters the voting booth." Philadelphia's city commissioner on Twitter debunked the false claims that the video showed a polling site in his city. Nick Custodio, deputy commissioner with Philadelphia's elections board, told the AP that Philadelphia does not use paper voting booths such as those shown in the video, and that the "I voted" stickers in the video also do not match those used in Philadelphia.

— Associated Press writers Arijeta Lajka and Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report with additional reporting from Amy Forliti in Minneapolis and Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia.

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No voters turned away over Detroit absentee ballot glitch

CLAIM: Voters in Detroit were prevented from casting ballots on Election Day after officials mistakenly said they'd already voted by absentee ballot.

THE FACTS: No eligible voters were prevented from casting a ballot at Detroit polling locations that experienced the data glitch on Tuesday morning, state and city officials confirmed. As voters nationwide went to the polls, there was heightened focus on voting problems and irregularities. One of the places election watchers sounded the alarm early on was the battleground state of Michigan. "People are showing up to vote in Detroit only to be told that they already voted via absentee ballots and are being turned away," wrote one Twitter user. "Citizens are being told they voted already absentee," wrote Kristina Karamo, a Republican candidate for Michigan secretary of state, in widely shared posts on Twitter and Facebook. Former President Donald Trump also amplified the claims on Truth Social. But state and city officials said the issue stemmed from an election software problem and was quickly resolved without anyone being disenfranchised. Corwin Smidt, a political science professor at Michigan State University in East Lansing, said the situation demonstrated the voting system worked properly. "It certainly slowed down voting there, but the reasons for the slowdown were that the system caught an error, and that error was then fixed," he wrote in an email. Liette Gidlow, a history professor at Wayne State University in Detroit who focuses on U.S. politics and voting rights, agreed. "Minor technical glitches are not unusual in any precinct because administering elections is a complex business," she wrote in an email. Detroit's elections department said the problem was caused by computer software used by election workers to check in voters as they entered the polling location. The agency said the program wrongly flagged some residents as having requested an absentee ballot, which would make them ineligible to cast a ballot in-person. Matthew Friedman, a department spokesperson, said the issue was resolved within an hour and all eligible residents were able to vote. Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, whose office assisted the city in addressing the issue, also stressed that no voters were disenfranchised. "In all circumstances, eligible voters were able to vote," the office said in a statement. The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, which observed the voting process, said it spoke with multiple city election officials and was satisfied with the response. Spokespersons for Trump and Karamo did not respond to messages seeking comment.

— Associated Press writer Philip Marcelo in New York contributed this report.

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CLAIM: A Pennsylvania judge ruled that ballots received up until Nov. 14 will count in the 2022 midterm elections.

THE FACTS: Pennsylvania ballots, including mail-in and absentee ballots, must be received by county election offices by 8 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 8, to be counted, according to the state's Department of State. As voters went to the polls on Tuesday, misleading information about Pennsylvania's vote-counting deadlines gained traction. "This just in: Pennsylvania Judge allows ballots to count that are received up until November 14th," read one post. "This is unconstitutional." The message, shared in several Instagram posts, is a screenshot of a tweet that was later deleted. The Twitter user who first posted it acknowledged in a follow-up that the information was incorrect. Existing law requires that Pennsylvania voters' ballots be received by county election workers by Nov. 8, the Department of State explains. Unlike some other states, Pennsylvania allots no extra time for mail-in ballots — what counts is the day the ballot actually



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made it to election officials, not when the ballot was postmarked. The Twitter user who first made the claim said in a follow-up post that the court case he was referring to was a recent decision by a Pennsylvania Common Pleas Court. However, the case in question has nothing to do with ballot submission deadlines. It concerned the cross-checking procedure that Pennsylvania uses to prevent duplicate votes from being counted, according to Kevin Feeley, spokesperson for the Philadelphia City Commissioners, which oversees elections in the city. The city had sought to delay that process until after the initial ballot count, in an effort to get ballots counted more quickly. He said that no duplicate votes had been found in the last three elections. The court granted the city the right to delay the reconciliation process, but the judge in the case was "highly critical" of the idea, Feeley said. So the City Commission opted Tuesday to revert to doing reconciliation as usual. Feeley confirmed that the case did not mean voting can occur through Nov. 14.

— Associated Press writer Graph Massara in San Francisco contributed this report with additional reporting from Melissa Goldin in New York.

Large numbers of mailed ballots not evidence of election fraud

CLAIM: A candidate winning an election with a majority of mailed ballots is proof of fraud.

THE FACTS: There is no evidence that mail-in voting has historically caused widespread voter fraud, and fraud related to mail-in voting is exceedingly rare, the AP has reported. Some on social media have posited that if a candidate who receives a significant chunk of their votes through mail-in voting wins, their victory is inherently fraudulent. An Instagram post features results reporting that incumbent Kelly Skidmore, a Democrat, beat Dorcas Hernandez, a Republican, in the race for state representative in Florida's 92nd House District. It shows Skidmore with 57.51% of the vote, including 31,405 mailed ballots, and Hernandez with 42.9% and 10,297 mailed ballots. "This is what textbook election theft via vote by mail ballot looks like," the post states. The numbers in the Instagram post are from the state's unofficial results, as published online by county boards of elections. However, the fact that some candidates are reported as having won after receiving a majority of mailed ballots does not prove election fraud. Claims that mail-in voting has caused widespread voter fraud in the past are unsubstantiated, according to reporting by the AP. After reviewing every potential case of voter fraud in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, the AP found far too few to affect the outcome of the 2020 election. Additionally, an AP survey of state election officials across the U.S. found that the expanded use of drop boxes during the 2020 race did not lead to cases of fraud that could have impacted the results. Different states have different ballot verification protocols, but all states vet mailed and absentee ballots. Every state requires voters to sign their ballots. Some have additional precautions, like having bipartisan teams compare the signature on the ballot with one on file, requiring the signature on the ballot to be notarized or requiring a witness to sign the ballot. Other forms of verification can include requiring proof of voter registration, a copy of an ID, a driver's license number or a Social Security number. Ballot security features and ballot sorting at election offices would help weed out any counterfeits. There are harsh penalties for voter fraud by mailed ballot, such as a fine, prison time or both.

## EXPLAINER: How important is a Russian retreat from Kherson?

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian officials said Friday that Ukrainian flags were appearing "en masse and all over the place," in the wake of Russia's retreat from the southern region of Kherson, one of the four regions in Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed in September.

The months-long Ukrainian offensive to recapture the city of Kherson, the only provincial capital that has been under Russian control since the early days of the invasion, is coming to a head. The fall of the city would deal another humiliation to Moscow after a string of battlefield defeats and other setbacks.

Here's a look at what is happening and why Kherson is such an important city for both sides.

WHY IS THE CITY SUCH A PRIZE?

Kherson, which had a prewar population of 280,000, is the only regional capital to be captured by Rus-

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sian forces. The city and surrounding areas fell into Moscow's hands in the opening days of the war as Russian troops quickly pushed their attack north from the Crimean Peninsula — the region illegally annexed by the Kremlin in 2014.

Its loss was a major blow to Ukraine because of its location on the Dnieper River near the mouth of the Black Sea, and its role as a major industrial center. Ukrainian resistance fighters have challenged Russian troops for control of the city ever since, with acts of sabotage and assassinations of Moscow-appointed officials.

Kherson also sits at a point where Ukraine can cut off fresh water from the Dnieper to Crimea. Kyiv blocked those vital supplies after the Crimean Peninsula's annexation, and Putin mentioned the need to restore them as one reason behind his decision to invade Ukraine.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

In the last 24 hours, Ukrainian troops have made gains northwest, west and northeast of the city of Kherson, advancing up to 7 kilometers (4 miles) in some areas, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"Russians have moved to positions they hope will be easier to defend. Ukraine will have to decide whether, when, and how to keep pushing," said Olga Oliker, director for Europe and Central Asia at the International Crisis Group. "But Ukraine seems on the verge of taking back ... and this is very good news for Mykolaiv, which Russia will now have a much harder time bombarding. It is a serious Ukrainian advance."

## WHAT HAVE THE UKRAINIAN TROOPS FOUND?

Kherson's Ukrainian-appointed regional official, Serhii Khlan said as Russia pulled its troops from the western bank of the river that divides the region, they have left wreckage in their wake, destroying key infrastructure, including power facilities and bridges.

"It will all have to be reconstructed," he said Friday at a video briefing. "While fleeing, they were blowing up everything, everything that could deter the (Ukrainian) advance."

Khlan advised civilians to stay home and said the humanitarian situation was really complicated, with power supplies cut off and very limited communications.

## WHAT DOES THE KREMLIN SAY?

The Kremlin remained defiant Friday, insisting that battlefield developments in the Kherson region in no way represented an embarrassment for Putin.

Fearing such a major Ukrainian counterattack, the Kremlin-installed regional administration in Kherson reportedly relocated at least 70,000 residents earlier this month.

## WHAT WOULD LOSING KHERSON MEAN FOR RUSSIA?

A retreat from Kherson and other areas on the Dnieper's west bank would shatter Russian hopes to press an offensive west to Mykolaiv and Odesa to cut off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea. Moscow had also hoped to build a land corridor to the separatist Transnistria region of Moldova, home to a major Russian military base.

"The loss of Kherson will turn all those southern dreams by the Kremlin into dust," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov. "Kherson is a key to the entire southern region, which would allow Ukraine to target key supply routes for the Russian forces. Russians will try to retain control of it using all means."

## WHAT WOULD RECAPTURING KHERSON MEAN FOR UKRAINE?

For Ukraine, capturing Kherson would set the stage for reclaiming the Russia-occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region and other areas in the south, and eventually pushing back into Crimea.

Reclaiming control of Kherson would also mean that Kyiv could again cut off water to Crimea.

"After the deoccupation of Kherson, the Russians will again have problems with fresh water in Crimea," Zhdanov added.

## WHAT WILL CHINA THINK?

Volodymyr Fesenko, head of the Kyiv-based Penta Center independent think tank, noted that controlling the Kherson region and other southern areas was a major prize for Russia and their loss would have painful consequences for Putin at home and abroad.

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"If the Russians leave Kherson, the Kremlin will face another wave of fierce criticism of the military command and the authorities in general from ultra-patriotic circles," Fesenko said, adding that the fall of the city would further demoralize Russia's armed forces and possibly fuel opposition to the mobilization effort.

He also said China and India would see the fall of Kherson as a sign of Kremlin weakness.

"Putin will face reputational losses not only inside the country, but also in the eyes of China, and that could be particularly dangerous for the Kremlin," Fesenko said.

## Today in History: November 12, Stalin takes control

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Nov. 12, the 316th day of 2022. There are 49 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 12, 1927, Josef Stalin became the undisputed ruler of the Soviet Union as Leon Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party.

On this date:

In 1920, baseball got its first "czar" as Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis was elected commissioner of the American and National Leagues.

In 1936, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge opened as President Franklin D. Roosevelt pressed a telegraph key in Washington, D.C., giving the green light to traffic.

In 1942, the World War II naval Battle of Guadalcanal began. (The Allies ended up winning a major victory over Japanese forces.)

In 1948, former Japanese premier Hideki Tojo and several other World War II Japanese leaders were sentenced to death by a war crimes tribunal.

In 1970, the Bhola cyclone struck East Pakistan; it's believed that as many as a half million people were killed.

In 1975, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas retired because of failing health, ending a record 36-year term.

In 1982, Yuri V. Andropov (ahn-DROH'-pawf) was elected to succeed the late Leonid I. Brezhnev as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee.

In 1996, a Saudi Boeing 747 jetliner collided shortly after takeoff from New Delhi, India, with a Kazak Ilyushin (il-YOO'-shin)-76 cargo plane, killing 349 people.

In 2001, American Airlines Flight 587, an Airbus A300 headed to the Dominican Republic, crashed after takeoff from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, killing all 260 people on board and five people on the ground.

In 2009, Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan (nih-DAHL' mah-LEEK' hah-SAHN') was charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder in the Fort Hood, Texas, shooting rampage. (Hasan was later convicted and sentenced to death; no execution date has been set.)

In 2019, Venice saw its worst flooding in more than 50 years, with the water reaching 6.14 feet above average sea level; damage was estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

In 2020, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a broad coalition of top government and industry officials, rejected President Donald Trump's claims of election fraud, saying that the election was "the most secure in American history" and that there was "no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes or was in any way compromised."

Ten years ago: The United States was re-elected to another three-year term on the U.N. Human Rights Council in the only contested election for the organization's top human rights body.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump said he believed U.S. intelligence agencies, which concluded that Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, but that he also believed that Russia's Vladimir Putin felt that Russia did not interfere. Trump exchanged taunts with North Korea's leader, tweeting, "Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me 'old,' when I would NEVER call him 'short and fat?'"

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One year ago: Steve Bannon, a longtime ally to former President Donald Trump, was indicted on two counts of criminal contempt of Congress after he defied a subpoena from the House committee investigating the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. (Bannon would be convicted and sentenced to four months in prison.) The government directed nursing homes to open their doors wide to visitors, easing many remaining pandemic restrictions while urging residents, families and facility staff to keep their guard up against coronavirus outbreaks. A judge in Los Angeles ended the conservatorship that had controlled the life and money of pop star Britney Spears for nearly 14 years.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Brian Hyland is 79. Actor-playwright Wallace Shawn is 79. Rock musician Booker T. Jones (Booker T. & the MGs) is 78. Sportscaster Al Michaels is 78. Singer-songwriter Neil Young is 77. Rock musician Donald "Buck Dharma" Roeser (Blue Oyster Cult) is 75. Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., is 73. Country/gospel singer Barbara Fairchild is 72. Actor Megan Mullally is 64. Actor Vincent Irizarry is 63. Olympic gold medal gymnast Nadia Comaneci (koh-muh-NEECH') is 61. Rock musician David Ellefson is 58. Retired MLB All-Star Sammy Sosa is 54. Figure skater Tonya Harding is 52. Actor Rebecca Wisocky is 51. Actor Radha Mitchell is 49. Actor Lourdes Benedicto is 48. Actor Tamala Jones is 48. Singer Tevin Campbell is 46. Actor Ashley Williams is 44. Actor Cote de Pablo is 43. Actor Ryan Gosling is 42. Contemporary Christian musician Chris Huffman is 42. Actor Anne Hathaway is 40. Pop singer Omarion is 38. NBA All-Star Russell Westbrook is 34. Folk-rock musician Griffin Goldsmith (Dawes) is 32. Actor Macey Cruthird is 30.