

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Nov. 25

NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving break

Saturday, Nov. 26

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.

Sunday, Nov. 27

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

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

UMC: UM Student Day; Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 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.

Monday, Nov. 28

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, peas, Mandarin oranges, cookie.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

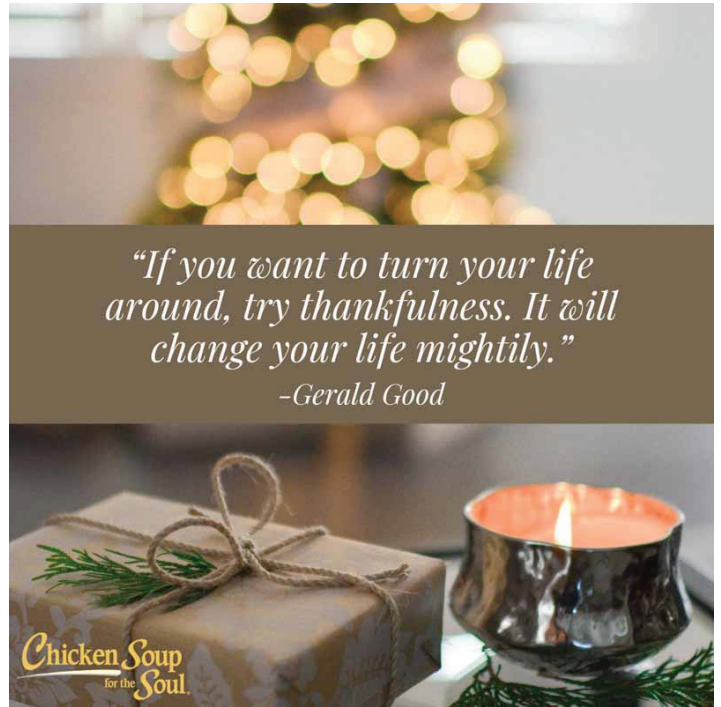
School Lunch: Pepperoni pizza, corn.

Noon: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck dinner.

Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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



Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Tuesday, Nov. 29

Senior Menu: Beef tips in gravy with noodles, lettuce salad with dressing, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Tacos, refried beans.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

James Valley Telco Open House in Groton, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

UMC: Bible Study, 10 a.m.; Conde Advent Bible Study.

JH GBB hosts Redfield (7th at 6:15 p.m. followed by 8th grade game)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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November Students of the Month

These students have been selected as "Student of the Month" for November 2022 for their grade in grades 6-12.

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.



Aspen Johnson
Senior



Emily Clark
Junior



Elizabeth Flihs
Sophomore



Jaedyn Penning
Freshman



Ashlynn Warrington
Eighth Grade



JoHanne Beauchamp
Seventh Grade



Wesley Borg
Sixth Grade

Nursing Home to Close in Elk Point

Funding Challenges Continue to Have Devastating Impact on Long Term Care

SIOUX FALLS, SD, -- Another South Dakota nursing home is closing its doors. Prairie Estates Care Center in Elk Point has announced its upcoming closure as of January 14, 2023. The closure is due to a combination of the ongoing underfunding of Medicaid, the current staffing crisis, and costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the addition of this closure, more than twelve percent of licensed nursing facilities in South Dakota will have closed their doors in the last five years. Other recent closures include centers in Armour, Salem, Lennox, Clear Lake, Ipswich, Custer, Hudson, Sioux Falls, Huron, Madison, Mobridge, Tripp, Bryant, and Rosholt.

"Unfortunately, nursing home closures are a story we have seen all too often. Between longstanding Medicaid underfunding, the ongoing staffing crisis, and costs from COVID, nursing homes are facing unprecedented pressures," said Mark B. Deak, Executive Director of the South Dakota Health Care Association (SDHCA). "When closures occur, South Dakota communities lose access to a vitally important service for the elderly and disabled."

South Dakota's Medicaid reimbursement rates are below those of all our neighboring states. A recent report indicated the statewide costs of unreimbursed care totaled \$62.5 million. A significant majority (55%) of the total resident population in nursing homes relies on Medicaid to pay for their care. In addition to the closures, this disparity fuels staffing challenges, including difficulty hiring caregivers and high turnover among nursing home staff.

While emergency support funds from federal and state sources have helped nursing homes keep their doors open through the worst of the pandemic, many long term care providers continue to face a tremendous fiscal crisis. Improving ongoing Medicaid reimbursement is the most important step that can be taken to stop the closure crisis.

"Our aging parents, grandparents, and other loved ones expect and deserve access to nursing care near their family and friends. Lawmakers must take action if we hope to prevent even more closures in the months and years to come," Deak said.



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Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

For the first time in their history, the Minnesota Vikings hosted a Thanksgiving game. In what was an extremely exciting game, the Vikings came from behind yet again to defeat the New England Patriots 33-26 and move to 9-2 on the season. The atmosphere in US Bank Stadium was probably the best it has been all year.

The "opening drive Vikings" once again found their stride Thanksgiving night as they sliced and diced the Patriots the whole way down the field. On 3rd and Goal, Kirk Cousins threw a strike to Justin Jefferson who pulled in the catch and got propelled into the endzone after a hard hit by a Patriots' defender. It was a historic game for Jefferson as he set the record for most receiving yards in the first three seasons of a player's career, a record previously held by Randy Moss who had 4,163 yards in his first three seasons. With six games remaining, Jefferson has a chance to be the first player ever to reach 5000 receiving yards in his first three seasons. Jefferson was a monster all game, coming up with clutch catch after clutch catch, and ultimately finishing with 139 yards receiving on nine catches and a touchdown.

The issue, however, with the Vikings was the defense. Coming into the game, the New England Patriots' offense had looked abysmal in past games. Mac Jones had looked so bad that many Patriots fans were demanding that he be replaced by backup, Bailey Zappe. Today was a different story as the Patriots' offense completely dominated the Vikings' defense. From consistent plays on the ground to wide-open wide receivers in the middle of the field, the Vikings' defense played softly for almost the entire game. However, when the game entered the fourth quarter, the Vikings' defense came up huge. They held the Patriots to 0 points and forced multiple three-and-outs when the Vikings needed it the most.

The most important plays of the game might have come on special teams for the Vikings. The first big play came on Kene Nwangwu's 97-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the second half when the Vikings were down 23-16. Nwangwu, who coming into the game had yet to score a touchdown on a kickoff this year, finally broke one today when the Vikings needed it most. The other big special teams' play came from Vikings' punter, Ryan Wright. Not only did Wright have multiple punts land inside the 20-yard line today, he also managed to force a critical "running into the kicker" penalty by the Patriots in the fourth quarter. The penalty would give the Vikings a much-needed first down on a drive that they would eventually score the game-winning touchdown on.

Looking forward, the Vikings now have a chance to clinch the NFC North next week if things can go their way. First, the Green Bay Packers will need to lose to the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday night this week. However, it may be beneficial for the Vikings' goal of getting home field advantage in the playoffs for the Packers to defeat the Eagles. Given how the Packers have played so far this year, it is safe to assume the former will occur. Next, the Vikings will need to defeat the Jets next Sunday. And lastly, the Detroit Lions need to lose to the Jacksonville Jaguars. If all those things go according to plan, the Vikings will be NFC North champions by Week 13 of the season. Skol!

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League

Team Standings: Chipmunks – 13, Cheetahs – 9, Shihtzus – 8, Foxes – 7, Jackelopes – 6, Coyotes – 5

Men's High Games: Mike Siegler – 235, Ron Belden – 200, Brad Waage – 198

Women's High Games: Alexa Schuring – 169, Sue Stanley – 165, Karen Spanier, Vicki Walter, Amanda Sperry – 151

Men's High Series: Mike Siegler – 593, Brad Larson – 556, Brad Waage – 543

Women's High Series: Alexa Schuring – 438, Vicki Walter – 411, Sue Stanley – 400

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*Olive Grove's
6th Annual*

*Christmas
Tour of Homes
& Holiday
Party*

**Charlie & Jenn Dirks
Tigh & Adrienne Fliehs
Tom & Barb Paepke
Wage Memorial Library & City Office**

**SATURDAY,
DEC. 3, 2022**

**TOUR OF
HOMES
4-7 P.M.**

**HOLIDAY
PARTY**

4-CLOSE

**Silent Basket Items
Bidding closes at 8:30 p.m.
Live Auction begins at 8:30 p.m.**

Coffee, Apple Cider and Goodies at the Club House

A variety of snacks served.

**\$15 tickets available at
Lori's Pharmacy, Groton
Groton Ford**

**Hair & Company, Aberdeen
Olive Grove Golf Clubhouse**

**Come on out for a fun evening!
Support your local golf course!**



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Biden's marijuana pardons are a seismic shift

Paul Armentano - NOVEMBER 25, 2022 4:30 AM

Fulfilling a high-profile campaign pledge, President Joe Biden recently announced that his office will be issuing pardons to several thousand Americans with federal convictions for marijuana possession offenses.

"There are thousands of people who have prior federal convictions for marijuana possession, who may be denied employment, housing, or educational opportunities as a result," the president said. "My action will help relieve the collateral consequences arising from these convictions."

But almost all marijuana-related arrests are for violations of state and local laws, not federal law.

As a result, White House officials have estimated that the president's directive will bring relief to an estimated 6,500 people — only a fraction of the nearly 29 million Americans who have been arrested for marijuana violations during the past several decades.

Nevertheless, Biden's actions mark a seismic shift in the way those inside the Beltway talk and think about cannabis.

Historically relegated as a fringe political issue, Biden's foray into the arena of marijuana reform legitimizes legalization as a subject worthy of consideration — and action — by those at the highest levels of government. Further, it is a recognition — by the president of the United States, no less — that America's nearly 100-year experiment with cannabis criminalization has been an abject failure.

Indeed, the administration's actions acknowledge that arresting and criminalizing those who possess and consume marijuana does more harm than good.

This acknowledgement thus begs the question: Why are states and cities continuing to prosecute hundreds of thousands of people every year for behavior that most Americans no longer believe ought to even be a crime?

It's a valid question. And it is one that leaders in Congress now need to answer.

By making the first move, the president has amplified the pressure on Congress — and Democratic leadership in particular — to respond.

According to polling data provided by Morning Consult, nearly half of registered voters — including majorities of younger voters and Democrats — believe that repealing federal marijuana prohibition ought to be a legislative priority for Congress. Nonetheless, for far too long, elected officials — and those in the Senate in particular — have provided little more than lip service.

Specifically, Senate Chuck Schumer pledged prior to the 2020 election, "If I become majority leader, I will put this on the floor and it's likely to pass." Yet in the nearly two years since then, no stand-alone marijuana legislation has made it through the Senate to the president's desk.

But that could all now change.

By getting out in front of this issue, President Biden is now receiving well deserved attention and accolades. His actions are not only good policy — they are good politics. Polling finds that a solid majority of Americans support the expungement of criminal records for those convicted of marijuana-related possession crimes.

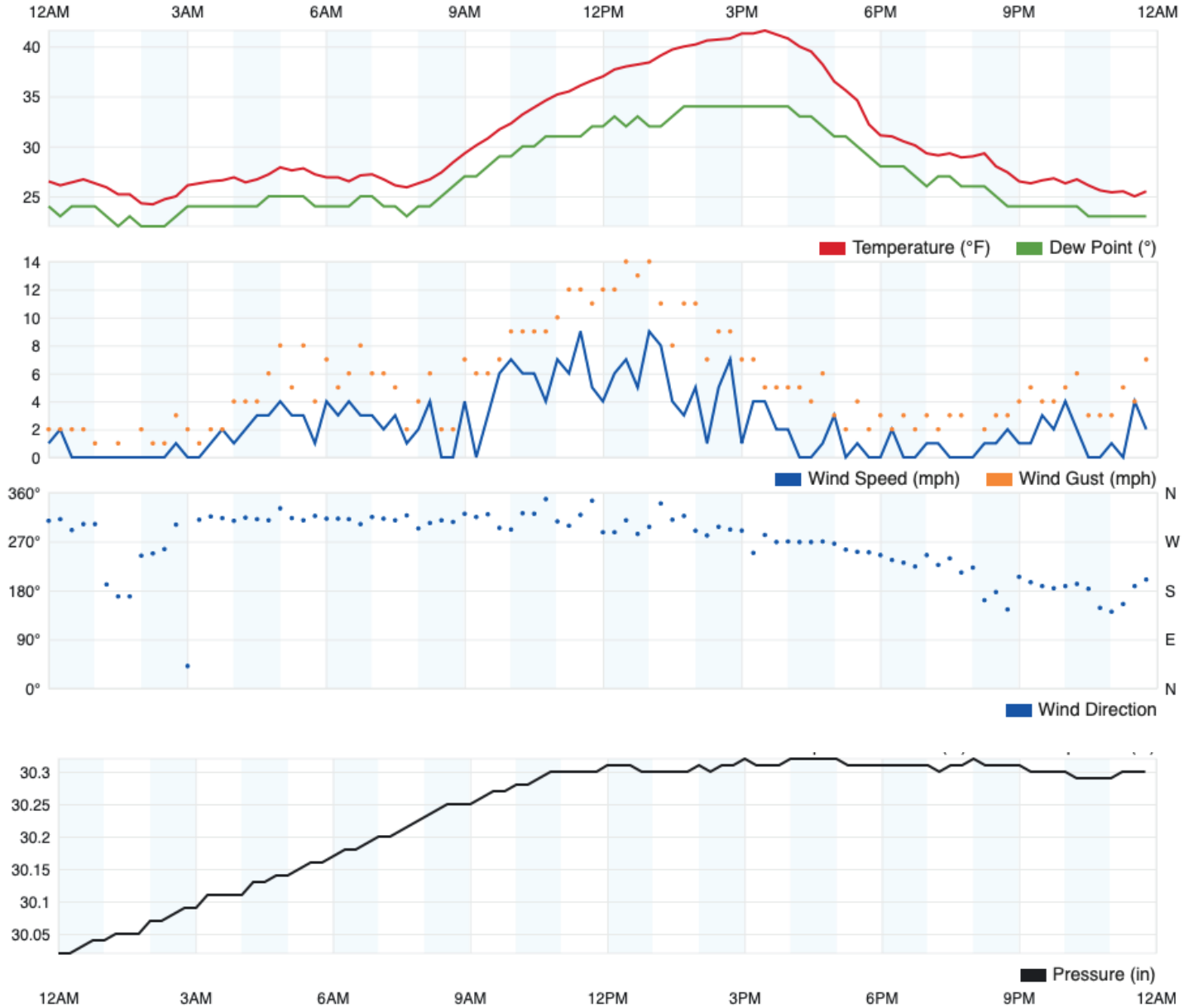
But ultimately the White House can't repeal or amend federal marijuana laws unilaterally. Like it or not, Congress must eventually weigh in on the issue by passing legislation.

President Biden has demonstrated that the time to do so is now. And most Americans agree.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy
High: 52 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 43 °F	Low: 19 °F	High: 37 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 37 °F

Check out these...
weather deals

Dry Weather!

-  **Today**
46 to 64°
warmest over central SD
-  **Saturday**
40s to 52°
-  **Sunday**
35 to 45°



Check out these weather deals: Dry weather will continue through the weekend and into Monday. Now is the time to enjoy the warmer air. Colder air will return by Tuesday, with highs in the 20s through the rest of the work week.

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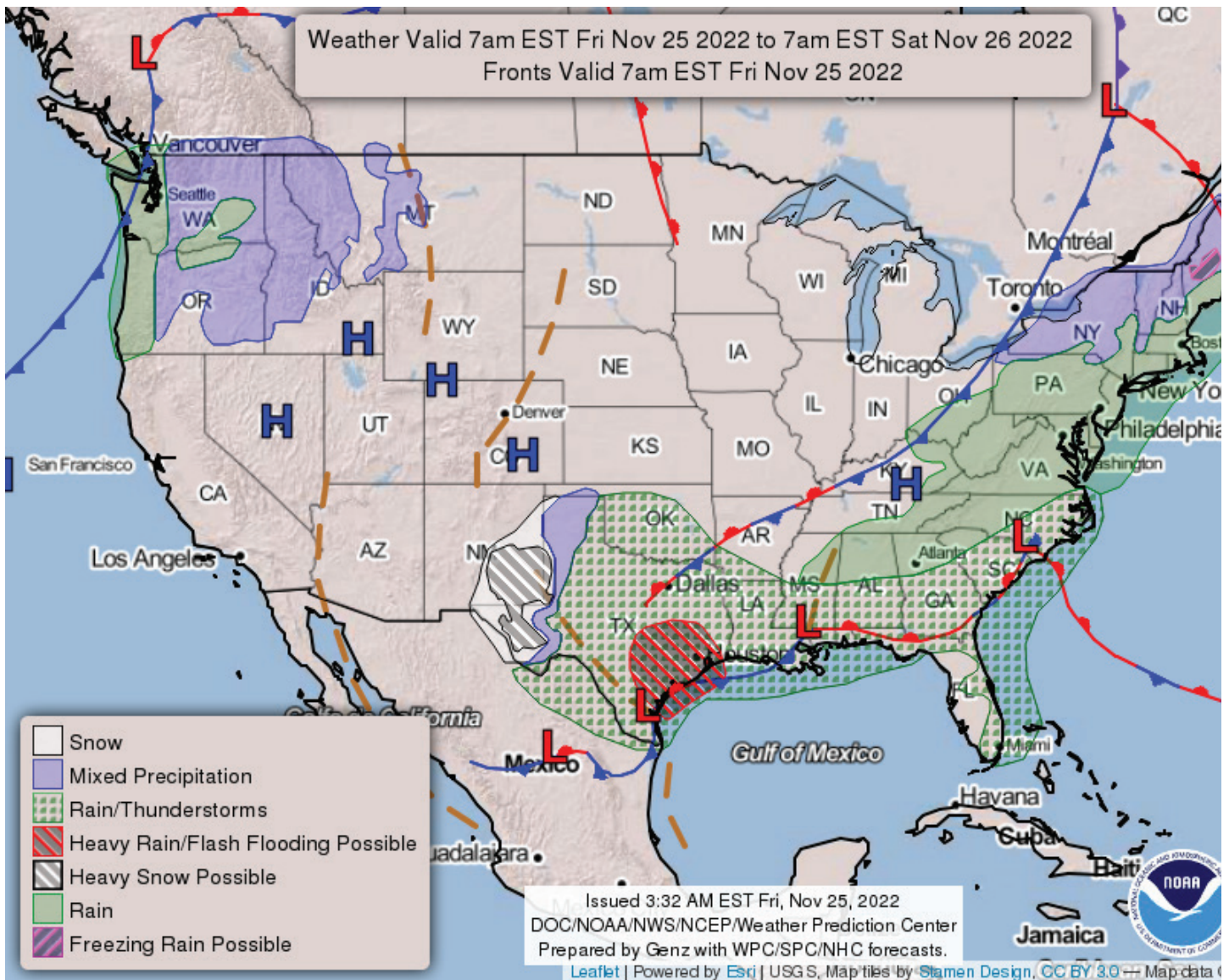
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 42 °F at 3:21 PM
Low Temp: 24 °F at 2:19 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 12:22 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 12 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 64 in 1960
Record Low: -22 in 1996
Average High: 38°F
Average Low: 15°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.64
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.11
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 4:55:41 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:27 AM



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Today in Weather History

November 25, 1896: A major blizzard occurred throughout South Dakota, beginning on the 25th and continuing until the 27th. The storm began in most locations as rain and sleet, which turned to snow, accompanied by strong northerly winds. The 26th was the peak of the storm, and the heaviest snow and strongest wind occurred throughout the north, northeast, west and southwest portions of the state. In eastern and southeastern South Dakota, sleet was extraordinarily heavy on the 26th. There were many reports received of large quantities of trees stripped of smaller branches and limbs due to the weight of the sleet. Across the state, telegraph lines were flattened in all directions, and the poles were broken off in many places. Although there was very little loss of livestock in areas with available shelter, there were heavy individual losses on the ranges of South Dakota. Several people also perished on the ranges west of the Missouri River when they became lost in the storm without livestock. Reports of snowfall totals from the storm are very limited but included 17 inches at Aberdeen and 12 inches at Mellette. This blizzard was the most prominent individual feature in a November that was overall frigid, with a state mean temperature of 16.5 degrees, which was 17.2 degrees below normal at the time. The month still stands as the coldest November on record in Aberdeen, with an average temperature nearly 7 degrees Fahrenheit colder than the next coldest November (1985). The lowest reported temperature during the month was -29 F at Webster. Aberdeen recorded a low of -25 F on the 29th with a high temperature of -8 F that same day. The month currently stands as the snowiest November on record and second snowiest overall month on record for Aberdeen, with 32.8 inches, behind 38.5 inches recorded in February 1915.

November 25, 1703: The greatest windstorm ever recorded in the southern part of Great Britain reaches its peak intensity which it maintains through November 27. Winds gust up to 120 mph, and 9,000 people perish in the mighty gale, most of them sailors of the British fleet. The storm continued through December 2nd. It was reported that 4,000 oaks died in the New Forest and an attempt to count the toll of trees in Kent gave up at 17,000. At sea, the Eddystone Lighthouse was washed away, killing six people. Daniel Defoe wrote a journal called *The Storm* (1704) about this event. The storm has been called the first substantial work of modern journalism.

1950: Called the "storm of the century" this storm impacted the eastern part of the US, killing hundreds and causing millions of dollars in damages. New York City recorded a 94 mph wind gust and Bear Mountain, just north of the city recorded a 140 mph gust. Record low temperatures were reported on the southern end of this storm in Tennessee and North Carolina. This storm was unique as Pittsburgh saw 30 inches of snow, while Buffalo saw 50 degrees with 50 mph wind gusts.

1970 - The temperature at Tallahassee, FL, dipped to 13 degrees, following a high of 40 degrees the previous day. The mercury then reached 67 degrees on the 26th, and highs were in the 70s the rest of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The Great Thanksgiving Weekend Blizzard hit Denver, CO. The storm produced 21.5 inches of snow in 37 hours, closing Stapleton Airport for 24 hours. The snow and wind closed interstate highways around Denver. Visibility at Limon CO was down to zero for 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An early morning thunderstorm in southeastern Texas produced high winds which rolled a mobile home east of Bay City killing two of the four occupants. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in central and eastern Texas, with nine inches reported at Huntsville, and 8.5 inches at Wimberly. Snow fell across northern and central Lower Michigan, with totals ranging up to nine inches at Cadillac. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma and northwest Texas during the day and into the night. Thunderstorms in Texas produced softball size hail at Alba, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Krum. Hail and high winds caused nearly five million dollars damage at Kaufman TX, and strong downburst winds derailed twenty-eight freight cars at Fruitvale TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE DANGER OF ANGER

Sin is not a behavior to belittle. When it no longer frightens us, we have lost contact with God. A small sin can lead to a large tragedy. All sin has consequences.

One day, while the children of Israel were on the path to the Promised Land, they came to a place that had no water. Rather than trusting their God who had always provided for their every need, they became frightened. And when fear takes over in anyone's life, faultfinding follows.

Our Psalmist gives us a vivid report of the consequences of their behavior: it "angered" Moses. So, the Lord told him to take his rod, gather the people together, speak to the rock in their presence, and it would give them all the water they needed.

But Moses did not speak to the rock. He struck it twice with his rod. Then, in anger, he spoke harshly to the people. Instead of doing what God asked him to do, he did what he wanted to do and then reacted in anger.

Notice that the word anger is only one letter short of danger - it lacks a "d." The result of his disobedience is seen in his anger. And there is always a great danger when we are disobedient to God. His disobedience led to anger - which led to sin. As a result, he lost the great honor and privilege of leading his people into the Promised Land.

How sad. How tragic. Moses did many great and glorious things. He had worked hard and done well. He was so close to reaching the goal God had given him. But he disobeyed God, lost control of his emotions, and had to pay the consequences. A moment of anger can destroy anyone.

Prayer: Lord, only You can give us victory over things that will so easily destroy us. Protect us from the danger of our anger and give us the personal strength to obey. May we follow Your advice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them. Psalm 106:32



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)
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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

After a year, omicron still driving COVID surges and worries

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

A year after omicron began its assault on humanity, the ever-morphing coronavirus mutant drove COVID-19 case counts higher in many places just as Americans gathered for Thanksgiving. It was a prelude to a wave that experts expect to soon wash over the U.S.

Phoenix-area emergency physician Dr. Nicholas Vasquez said his hospital admitted a growing number of chronically ill people and nursing home residents with severe COVID-19 this month.

"It's been quite a while since we needed to have COVID wards," he said. "It's making a clear comeback."

Nationally, new COVID cases averaged around 39,300 a day as of Tuesday — far lower than last winter but a vast undercount because of reduced testing and reporting. About 28,000 people with COVID were hospitalized daily and about 340 died.

Cases and deaths were up from two weeks earlier. Yet a fifth of the U.S. population hasn't been vaccinated, most Americans haven't gotten the latest boosters and many have stopped wearing masks.

Meanwhile, the virus keeps finding ways to avoid defeat.

The omicron variant arrived in the U.S. just after Thanksgiving last year and caused the pandemic's biggest wave of cases. Since then, it has spawned a large extended family of sub-variants, such as those most common in the U.S. now: BQ.1, BQ.1.1 and BA.5. They edged out competitors by getting better at evading immunity from vaccines and previous illness — and sickening millions.

Carey Johnson's family got hit twice. She came down with COVID-19 in January during the first omicron wave, suffering flu-like symptoms and terrible pain that kept her down for a week. Her son Fabian Swain, 16, suffered much milder symptoms in September when the BA.5 variant was dominant.

Fabian recovered quickly, but Johnson had a headache for weeks. Other problems lingered longer.

"I was like, 'I cannot get it together.' I could not get my thoughts together. I couldn't get my energy together" said Johnson, 42, of Germantown, Maryland. "And it went on for months like that."

HOT SPOTS EMERGE

Some communities are being particularly hard hit right now. Tracking by the Mayo Clinic shows cases trending up in states such as Florida, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico.

In Arizona's Navajo County, the average daily case rate is more than double the state average. Dr. James McAuley said 25 to 50 people a day are testing positive for the coronavirus at the Indian Health Service facility where he works. Before, they saw just a few cases daily.

McAuley, clinical director of the Whiteriver Indian Hospital, which serves the White Mountain Apache Tribe, said they are "essentially back to where we were with our last big peak" in February.

COVID-19 is part of a triple threat that also includes flu and the virus known as RSV.

Dr. Vincent Hsu, who oversees infection control for AdventHealth, said the system's pediatric hospital in Orlando is nearly full with kids sickened by these viruses. Dr. Greg Martin, past president of the Society of Critical Care Medicine, sees a similar trend elsewhere.

Pediatric hospitals' emergency departments and urgent care clinics are busier than ever, said Martin, who practices mostly at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. "This is a record compared to any month, any week, any day in the past," he said.

Looking to the future, experts see the seeds of a widespread U.S. wave. They point to what's happening internationally — a BA.5 surge in Japan, a combination of variants pushing up cases in South Korea, the start of a new wave in Norway.

Some experts said a U.S. wave could begin during the holidays as people gather indoors. Trevor Bedford, a biologist and genetics expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, said it could peak at around 150,000 new cases a day, about what the nation saw in July.

A new wave would be rough, said Dr. Mark Griffiths, medical director of the emergency department of

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Children's Health Care of Atlanta-Spalding Hospital. "So many systems are on the brink of just being totally overburdened that if we get another COVID surge on top of this, it's going to make some systems crack."

One bright spot? Deaths are likely to be much lower than earlier in the pandemic. About 1 in 2,000 infections lead to death now, compared with about 1 in 200 in the first half of 2020, Bedford said.

OMICRON'S YEARLONG REIGN

The same widespread immunity that reduced deaths also pushed the coronavirus to mutate. By the end of last year, many people had gotten infected, vaccinated or both. That "created the initial niche for omicron to spread," Bedford said, since the virus had significantly evolved in its ability to escape existing immunity.

Omicron thrived. Mara Aspinall, who teaches biomedical diagnostics at Arizona State University, noted that the first omicron strain represented 7.5% of circulating variants by mid-December and 80% just two weeks later. U.S. cases at one point soared to a million a day. Omicron generally caused less severe disease than previous variants, but hospitalizations and deaths shot up given the sheer numbers of infected people.

The giant wave ebbed by mid-April. The virus mutated quickly into a series of sub-variants adept at evading immunity. A recent study in the journal *Science Immunology* says this ability to escape antibodies is due to more than 30 changes in the spike protein studding the surface of the virus.

Omicron evolved so much in a year, Bedford said, it's now "a meaningless term."

That rapid mutation is likely to continue.

"There's much more pressure for the virus to diversify," said Shishi Luo, head of infectious diseases for Helix, a company that supplies viral sequencing information to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Doctors said the best protection against the bubbling stew of sub-variants remains vaccination. And officials said Americans who got the new combination booster targeting omicron and the original coronavirus are currently better protected than others against symptomatic infection.

Dr. Peter Hotez, co-director of the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children's Hospital, said getting the booster, if you're eligible, is "the most impactful thing you could do."

Doctors also urge people to continue testing, keep up preventive measures such as masking in crowds, and stay home when sick.

"COVID is still a very significant threat, especially to the most vulnerable," said Dr. Laolu Fayanju of Oak Street Health in Cleveland, which specializes in caring for older adults. "People have to continue to think about one another. We're not completely out of the woods on this yet."

Beijing on edge as city adds new quarantine centers

BEIJING (AP) — Residents of some parts of China's capital were emptying supermarket shelves and overwhelming delivery apps Friday as the city government ordered faster construction of COVID-19 quarantine centers and field hospitals.

Uncertainty and scattered, unconfirmed reports of lockdowns in at least some Beijing districts have fueled demand for food and other supplies, something not seen in the city for months.

Unusually large numbers of shoppers in the city's northern suburbs left shelves bare in markets, but customers were relatively few in the center of the city of 21 million, where supplies remained abundant.

Daily cases of COVID-19 across the country are hitting records, with 32,695 reported Friday. Of those, 1,860 were in Beijing, the majority of them asymptomatic.

Improvised quarantine centers and field hospitals hastily thrown up in gymnasiums, exhibition centers and other large, open indoor spaces have become notorious for overcrowding, poor sanitation, scarce food supplies and lights that stay on 24 hours.

Most residents of the city have already been advised not to leave their compounds, some of which are being fenced in. At entrances, workers clad head to toe in white hazmat suits stop unauthorized people and make sure residents show a recent negative COVID-19 test result on their cellphone health apps to gain entry.

Several university campuses have been closed off and students in lower grades have been shifted to

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online classes.

Meanwhile, some of Beijing's grocery delivery services have reached capacity.

An increase in demand combined with a worker shortage left some customers unable to book same-day delivery slots on Friday for food and supplies from popular online grocery services such as Alibaba's Freshippo and Meituan Maicai.

Online, some Chinese users said some delivery personnel were unable to work because their compounds were locked down. The reports could not be verified.

Alibaba did not immediately comment.

At a Friday afternoon news conference, city government spokesperson Xu Hejian said it was necessary "to strengthen the management and service guarantee" of quarantine centers and field hospitals where people who test positive for COVID-19 or have been in close contact with an infected person are taken by police.

Authorities must "further accelerate" their construction and "coordinate the allocation of space, facilities, materials, personnel and other resources," Xu said.

Officials have in recent days repeatedly insisted that China must stick with its hard-line "zero-COVID" policy that mandates lockdowns, mass testing and quarantines for anyone suspected of having come into contact with the virus. The policy is seen as taking a harsh toll on the economy and upending lives in many Chinese cities, leading the World Health Organization and others to call for a change in tack — calls the ruling Communist Party has angrily rejected.

While the number of cases and deaths in China is relatively low compared to the U.S. and other countries, the party remains committed to the strategy, which aims to isolate every case and eliminate the virus entirely. Most other governments have eased anti-virus controls and now rely on vaccinations and immunity from past infections to help prevent deaths and serious illness.

Harsher measures have been enacted in many other parts of China, despite the government urging more precise and targeted measures to reduce the social burden and economic costs. Local officials are under intense pressure to prevent outbreaks and often gravitate toward the most extreme measures.

Guangzhou suspended access Monday to its Baiyun district of 3.7 million residents, while residents of some areas of Shijiazhuang, a city of 11 million people southwest of Beijing, were told to stay home while mass testing is conducted.

A key issue is concern about public vulnerability to the virus. With few having caught COVID-19 or even having been exposed to the virus, only a small percentage are thought to have built up effective levels of virus-fighting antibodies.

China has an overall coronavirus vaccination rate of more than 92%, with most people having received at least one dose. But far fewer older Chinese — particularly those over age 80 — have gotten the shots and the earlier vaccination drive seems to have lost momentum.

Also Friday, Beijing cut the amount of reserves that banks are required to hold in a move that will help lenders comply with orders to defer repayments by companies that are struggling because of increasing anti-virus controls.

The amount of their deposits that banks are required to leave with the People's Bank of China will be cut by 0.25 percentage point to an average of 7.8%, the central bank announced. It didn't mention virus controls and said the cut would "consolidate the upward basis for economic stability."

Private economists and the International Monetary Fund have trimmed already low forecasts of China's annual economic growth as the government closes shops and offices and tightens controls on manufacturing.

Russia rains missiles on recaptured Ukrainian city

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Natalia Kristenko's dead body lay covered in a blanket in the doorway of her apartment building for hours overnight. City workers were at first too overwhelmed to retrieve her as they responded to a deadly barrage of attacks that shook Ukraine's southern city of Kherson.

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The 62-year-old had walked outside her home with her husband Thursday evening after drinking tea when the building was struck. Kristenko was killed instantly from a wound to the head. Her husband died hours later in the hospital from internal bleeding.

"Russians took the two most precious people from me," their bereft daughter, Lilia Kristenko, 38, said, clutching her cat inside her coat as she watched on in horror Friday as responders finally arrived to transport her mother to the morgue.

"They lived so well, they lived differently," she told The Associated Press. "But they died in one day."

A barrage of missiles struck the recently liberated city of Kherson for the second day Friday in a marked escalation of attacks since Russia withdrew from the city two weeks ago.

The city was shelled 17 times before midday Thursday, and strikes continued into the evening, killing at least four people and injuring 10, according to Kherson's military administration. Soldiers in the region had warned that Kherson would face intensified strikes as Russian troops dig in across the Dnieper River.

Scores of people were injured in the strikes that hit residential and commercial buildings, lighting some on fire, blowing ash into the air and littering the streets with shattered glass. The attacks wrought destruction on some residential neighborhoods not previously hit in the war that has just entered its tenth month.

After Kristenko's parents were hit, she tried to call an ambulance but there was no phone network, she said. Her 66-year-old father was clutching his stomach wound and screaming "it hurts so much I'm doing to die," she said. He eventually was taken by ambulance to the hospital but died during surgery.

On Friday morning people sifted through what little remained of their destroyed houses and shops. Containers of food lined the floor of a shattered meat store, while across the street customers lined up at a coffee shop where residents said four people died the night before.

"I don't even know what to say, it was unexpected," said Diana Samsonova, who works at the coffee shop, which remained open throughout Russia's occupation and has no plans to close despite the attacks.

The violence is compounding what's become a dire humanitarian crisis. As Russians retreated, they destroyed key infrastructure, leaving people with little water and electricity. People have become so desperate they're finding some salvation amid the wreckage.

Outside an apartment building that was badly damaged, residents filled buckets with water that pooled on the ground. Workers at the morgue used puddles to clean their bloody hands.

Valerii Parkhomenko had just parked his car and gone into a coffee shop when a rocket destroyed his vehicle.

"We were all crouching on the floor inside," he said, showing the ash on his hands. "I feel awful, my car is destroyed, I need this car for work to feed my family," he said.

Outside shelled apartment buildings residents picked up debris and frantically searched for relatives while paramedics helped the injured.

"I think it's so bad and I think all countries need to do something about this because it's not normal," said Ivan Mashkarynets, a man in his early 20s who was at home with his mother when the apartment block next to him was struck.

"There's no army, there's no soldiers. There are just people living here and they're (still) firing," he said.

The government has said it will help people evacuate if they want to, but many say they have no place to go.

"There is no work (elsewhere), there is no work here," said Ihor Novak as he stood on a street examining the aftermath of the shelling. "For now, the Ukrainian army is here and with them we hope it will be safer."

Europe scrambles to help Ukraine keep the heat and lights on

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — European officials are scrambling to help Ukraine stay warm and keep functioning through the bitter winter months, pledging Friday to send more support that will mitigate the Russian military's efforts to turn off the heat and lights.

Nine months after Russia invaded its neighbor, the Kremlin's forces have zeroed in on Ukraine's power

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grid and other critical civilian infrastructure in a bid to tighten the screw on Kyiv. Officials estimate that around 50% of Ukraine's energy facilities have been damaged in the recent strikes.

France is sending 100 high-powered generators to Ukraine to help people get through the coming months, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said Friday.

She said Russia is "weaponizing" winter and plunging Ukraine's civilian population into hardship.

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, arriving Friday in Kyiv for an unannounced visit, said a promised air-defense package, which Britain valued at 50 million pounds (\$60 million), would help Ukraine defend itself against Russia's bombardments.

"Words are not enough. Words won't keep the lights on this winter. Words won't defend against Russian missiles," Cleverly said in a tweet about the military aid.

The package includes radar and other technology to counter the Iran-supplied exploding drones that Russia has used against Ukrainian targets, especially the power grid. It comes on top of a delivery of more than 1,000 anti-air missiles that Britain announced earlier this month.

"As winter sets in, Russia is continuing to try and break Ukrainian resolve through its brutal attacks on civilians, hospitals and energy infrastructure," Cleverly said.

Russian officials have claimed they are hitting legitimate targets. But the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights on Friday expressed his shock at the depth of civilian suffering caused by the bombing, amid broader allegations of abuses.

"Millions are being plunged into extreme hardship and appalling conditions of life by these strikes," Volker Türk said in a statement Friday. "Taken as a whole, this raises serious problems under international humanitarian law, which requires a concrete and direct military advantage for each object attacked."

The U.N. humanitarian office also chimed in with its concerns. "Ukraine is turning increasingly cold without power, without steady water supply and without heating," Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the office, said Friday.

He said the global body and its partners were sending hundreds of generators to Ukraine to help the government there in its efforts to keep people warm and maintain essential services, such as health care. The World Health Organization said it is sending generators to hospitals.

Cleverly's visit came a day after European officials launched a scheme called "Generators of Hope," which calls on more than 200 cities across the continent to donate power generators and electricity transformers.

The generators are intended to help keep essential Ukrainian facilities running, providing power to hospitals, schools and water pumping stations, among other infrastructure.

Generators may provide only a tiny amount of the energy that Ukraine will need during the cold and dark winter months.

But the comfort and relief they provide is already evident, as winter begins in earnest and power outages occur regularly. The whine and rumble of generators is becoming commonplace, allowing stores that have them to stay open and Ukraine's ubiquitous coffee shops to keep serving hot drinks that maintain a semblance of normality.

Despite strong wind, rain, sub-zero temperatures at night, icing and broken power lines, more than 70% of Ukraine's electricity requirements were being met on Friday morning, the country's state power grid operator Ukrenergo said in a statement.

The electricity supply has been at least partially restored in all regions of Ukraine, and the country's energy grid was once again connected to that of the European Union, the head of the state power grid said on Friday.

Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, CEO of Ukrenergo, added that despite that progress, about half of Ukrainian residents continue to experience disruption. He added that all three of Ukraine's nuclear plants located in areas controlled by Kyiv have resumed operation.

"In one to two days, nuclear power plants will reach their normal scheduled capacity, and we expect that it will be possible to transfer our consumers to a planned shutdown (regime) instead of emergency (blackouts)," Kudrytskyi said on Ukrainian TV.

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Ukrainian authorities are opening thousands of so-called "points of invincibility" — heated and powered spaces offering hot meals, electricity and internet connections. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said late Thursday that almost 4,400 such spaces have opened across most of the country.

He scoffed at Moscow's attempts to intimidate Ukrainian civilians, saying that was the Russian military's only option after a string of battlefield setbacks. "Either energy terror, or artillery terror, or missile terror — that's all that Russia has dwindled to under its current leaders," Zelenskyy said.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian officials and energy workers continued their push to restore supplies after a nationwide barrage Wednesday left tens of millions without power and water.

Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko said Friday morning that heating was back on in a third of the capital's households, but that half of its population still lacked electricity.

Writing on Telegram, Klitschko added that authorities hoped to provide all consumers in Kyiv with electricity for a period of three hours on Friday, following a pre-set schedule.

As of Friday morning in Kharkiv, all residents of Ukraine's second-largest city had had their electricity supplies restored, but more than 100,000 in the outlying region continued to see interruptions, the regional governor said.

In the south, authorities in the city of Mykolayiv said that running water was set to start flowing again after supplies were cut off by Russian strikes on Thursday.

Midterms free of feared chaos as voting experts look to 2024

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Before Election Day, anxiety mounted over potential chaos at the polls.

Election officials warned about poll watchers who had been steeped in conspiracy theories falsely claiming that then-President Donald Trump did not actually lose the 2020 election. Democrats and voting rights groups worried about the effects of new election laws, in some Republican-controlled states, that President Joe Biden decried as "Jim Crow 2.0." Law enforcement agencies were monitoring possible threats at the polls.

Yet Election Day, and the weeks of early voting before it, went fairly smoothly. There were some reports of unruly poll watchers disrupting voting, but they were scattered. Groups of armed vigilantes began watching over a handful of ballot drop boxes in Arizona until a judge ordered them to stay far away to ensure they would not intimidate voters. And while it might take months to figure out their full impact, GOP-backed voting laws enacted after the 2020 election did not appear to cause major disruptions the way they did during the March primary in Texas.

"The entire ecosystem in a lot of ways has become more resilient in the aftermath of 2020," said Amber McReynolds, a former Denver elections director who advises a number of voting rights organizations. "There's been a lot of effort on ensuring things went well."

Even though some voting experts' worst fears didn't materialize, some voters still experienced the types of routine foul-ups that happen on a small scale in every election. Many of those fell disproportionately on Black and Hispanic voters.

"Things went better than expected," said Amir Badat of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "But we have to say that with a caveat: Our expectations are low."

Badat said his organization recorded long lines at various polling places from South Carolina to Texas.

There were particular problems in Harris County, Texas, which includes Houston. Shortages of paper ballots and at least one polling location opening late led to long lines and triggered an investigation of the predominantly Democratic county by the state's Republican authorities.

The investigation is partly a reflection of how certain voting snafus on Election Day are increasingly falling on Republican voters, who have been discouraged from using mailed ballots or using early in-person voting by Trump and his allies. But it's a very different problem from what Texas had during its March primary.

Then, a controversial new voting law that increased the requirements on mail ballots led to about 13% of all such ballots being rejected, much higher compared with other elections. It was an ominous sign for

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a wave of new laws, passed after Trump's loss to Biden and false claims about mail voting, but there have been no problems of that scale reported for the general election.

Texas changed the design of its mail ballots, which solved many of the problems voters had putting identifying information in the proper place. Other states that added regulations on voting didn't appear to have widespread problems, though voting rights groups and analysts say it will take weeks of combing through data to find out the laws' impacts.

The Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law is compiling data to determine whether new voting laws in states such as Georgia contributed to a drop in turnout among Black and Hispanic voters.

Preliminary figures show turnout was lower this year than in the last midterm election four years ago in Florida, Georgia, Iowa and Texas — four states that passed significant voting restrictions since the 2020 election — although there could be a number of reasons why.

"It's difficult to judge, empirically, the kind of effect these laws have on turnout because so many factors go into turnout," said Rick Hasen, an election law expert at the University of California, Los Angeles law school. "You also have plenty of exaggeration on the Democratic side that any kind of change in voting laws are going to cause some major effect on the election, which has been proven not to be the case."

In Georgia, for example, Republicans made it more complicated to apply for mailed ballots after the 2020 election — among other things, requiring voters to include their driver's license number or some other form of identification rather than a signature. That may be one reason why early in-person voting soared in popularity in the state this year, and turnout there dipped only slightly from 2018.

Jason Snead, executive director of the conservative Honest Elections Project, which advocates for tighter voting laws, said the fairly robust turnout in the midterm elections shows that fears of the new voting regulations were overblown.

"We are on the back end of an election that was supposed to be the end of democracy, and it very much was not," Snead said.

Poll watchers were a significant concern of voting rights groups and election officials heading into Election Day. The representatives of the two major political parties are a key part of any secure election process, credentialed observers who can object to perceived violations of rules.

But this year, groups aligned with conspiracy theorists who challenged Biden's 2020 victory recruited poll watchers heavily, and some states reported that aggressive volunteers caused disruptions during the primary. But there were fewer issues in November.

In North Carolina, where several counties had reported problems with poll watchers in the May primary, the state elections board reported 21 incidents of misbehavior at the polls in the general election, most during the early, in-person voting period and by members of campaigns rather than poll watchers. The observers were responsible for eight of the incidents.

Voting experts were pleasantly surprised there weren't more problems with poll watchers, marking the second general election in a row when a feared threat of aggressive Republican observers did not materialize.

"This seems to be an increase over 2020. Is it a small increase? Yes," said Michael McDonald, a political scientist at the University of Florida. "It's still a dry run for 2024, and we can't quite let down our guard."

One of the main organizers of the poll watcher effort was Cleta Mitchell, a veteran Republican election lawyer who joined Trump on a Jan. 2, 2020, call to Georgia's top election official when the president asked that the state "find" enough votes to declare him the winner. Mitchell then launched an organization to train volunteers who wanted to keep an eye on election officials, which was seen as the driver of the poll watcher surge.

Mitchell said the relatively quiet election is vindication that groups like hers were simply concerned with election integrity rather than causing disruptions.

"Every training conducted by those of us doing such training included instruction about behavior, and that they must be 'Peaceful, Lawful, Honest,'" Mitchell wrote in the conservative online publication *The Federalist*. "Yet, without evidence, the closer we got to Election Day, the more hysterical the headlines became,

warning of violence at the polls resulting from too many observers watching the process. It didn't happen."

Voting rights groups say they're relieved their fears didn't materialize, but they say threats to democracy remain on the horizon for 2024 — especially with Trump announcing that he's running again. Wendy Weiser, a voting and elections expert at the Brennan Center, agreed that things overall went smoother than expected.

"By and large, sabotage didn't happen," Weiser said. "I don't think that means we're in the clear."

Iran government supporters confront protesters at World Cup

By ISABEL DEBRE and CIARÁN FAHEY Associated Press

AL RAYYAN, Qatar (AP) — Tensions ran high at Iran's second match at the World Cup on Friday as fans supporting the Iranian government harassed those protesting against it and stadium security seized flags, T-shirts and other items expressing support for the protest movement that has gripped the Islamic Republic.

Some fans were stopped by stadium security from bringing in Persian pre-revolutionary flags to match against Wales at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Others carrying such flags had them ripped from their hands by pro-government Iran fans, who also shouted insults at fans wearing T-shirts with the slogan of the protest movement gripping the country, "Woman, Life, Freedom."

Unlike in their first match against England, the Iran players sang along to their national anthem before the match as some fans in the stadium wept, whistled and booed.

The national team has come under close scrutiny for any statements or gestures about the nationwide protests that have wracked Iran for weeks.

Shouting matches erupted in lines outside the stadium between fans screaming "Women, Life, Freedom" and others shouting back "The Islamic Republic!"

Small mobs of men surrounded three different women giving interviews about the protests to foreign media outside the stadium, disrupting broadcasts as they angrily chanted, "The Islamic Republic of Iran!" Many female fans appeared shaken as Iranian government supporters shouted at them in Farsi and filmed them close-up on their phones.

One 35-year-old woman named Maryam, who like other Iran fans declined to give her last name for fear of government reprisals, started to cry as shouting men blowing horns encircled her and filmed her face. She had the words "Woman Life Freedom" painted on her face.

"We want to raise awareness about his arrest and about the women's rights movement. Simple," said Maryam, who lives in London but is originally from Tehran. "I'm not here to fight with anyone, but people have been attacking me and calling me a terrorist. All I'm here to say is that football doesn't matter if people are getting killed in the streets."

Maryam and her friends had worn hats emblazoned with the name of an outspoken Iranian former soccer player Voria Ghafouri, who had criticized Iranian authorities and was arrested in Iran on Thursday on accusations of spreading propaganda against the government. She said Iranian government supporters had taken the hats from their heads.

Ghafouri, who is Kurdish, was a star member of Iran's 2018 World Cup team, but was surprisingly not named in the squad for this year in Qatar.

"It's obvious that the match had become very politicized this week. You can see people from the same country who hate each other," said Mustafa, a 40-year-old Iran fan who also declined to give his surname. "I think the arrest of Voria has also affected society in Iran a lot."

Furious protesters in Iran have been venting their anger over social and political repression and the state-mandated headscarf, or hijab, for women. The demonstrations, spurred by the Sept. 16 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of the country's morality police, have quickly grown into calls for the downfall of the Islamic Republic itself. At least 419 people have been killed since the protests erupted, according to monitoring group Human Rights Activists in Iran.

The turmoil has overshadowed the start of Iran's World Cup campaign. The opening match against England on Monday was the scene of protests as anti-government fans waved signs and chanted in the

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stands. Before that match, which Iran lost 6-2, its players remained silent as their national anthem played and didn't celebrate their two goals. On Friday they sang along to the anthem and celebrated wildly when they scored in the 2-0 win against Wales.

Ayeh Shams from the United States, who was at the game against Wales with her brother, said security guards confiscated her flag because it had the word "women" on it.

"We're first generation American. Our parents were born in Iran. We're just here to enjoy the games and give a platform for the Iranian people who are fighting against the Islamic regime," Shams said.

Zeinlabda Arwa, a security guard at the stadium, confirmed that authorities had been given orders to confiscate anything but the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Whether you're talking about Iran or Qatar or any country, you are only allowed to bring in the normal flag," she said.

An angry group of Iranian government supporters shouted at Elyas Doerr, a 16-year-old Iranian living in Arizona who was wearing the Persian flag as a cape, until he took it off and put it in his bag. "They're not liking that it's a political statement," he said, adding that other Iranian fans had approached him to say they appreciated the gesture.

Before Friday's match, Iranians chanted anti-government slogans from rooftops in Tehran. Scattered protests also erupted in Kurdish towns in the country's west and across the central city of Isfahan on Thursday.

Iranian state TV on Friday devoted its main news bulletin to Iranians' soccer prowess, wishing the national team luck against Wales and airing a montage of Iranian goals throughout history.

China sentences Chinese-Canadian star Kris Wu to 13 years

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese court on Friday sentenced Chinese-Canadian pop star Kris Wu to 13 years in prison on charges including rape.

Beijing's Chaoyang District Court said Wu was given 11 years and 6 months for a 2020 rape, and 1 year and 10 months for the "crime of assembling a crowd to engage in sexual promiscuity" in a 2018 event in which he and others allegedly assaulted two women they had gotten drunk.

The court said the three victims in the rape case had also been drunk and were unable to consent.

It said a combined 13-year sentence was agreed on and Wu would be immediately deported after serving his time.

"According to the facts ... the nature, circumstances and harmful consequences of the crime, the court made the above judgment," the court said in an online statement.

A Canadian diplomat was in court to hear the sentencing, it said.

Wu was also slapped with a fine of 600 million yuan (\$83.7 million) for evading taxes by massively underreporting his earnings from performances, advertisements and other sources of income.

The June trial of the 32-year-old former member of the South Korean group EXO was closed to the public to protect the victims' privacy.

Wu has been detained since August 2021 while police conducted an investigation in response to comments online that he "repeatedly lured young women" to have sex, according to a police statement at that time.

That year, a teenager accused him of having sex with her while she was drunk. Wu, known in Chinese as Wu Yifan, denied the accusation.

The teenager then said seven other women contacted her to say Wu seduced them with promises of jobs and other opportunities. She said some were under 18.

Rape is punishable by three to 10 years in prison, although exceptional cases can result in harsher sentences up to death. The second charge Wu faced is punishable by up to five years in prison.

Wu grew up in Guangzhou in China and in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Inflation hovers over shoppers heading into Black Friday

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By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Black Friday marks a return to familiar holiday shopping patterns, but inflation is weighing on consumers.

Elevated prices for food, rent, gasoline and other household costs have taken a toll on shoppers. As a result, many are reluctant to spend unless there is a big sale and are being more selective with what they will buy — in many cases, trading down to cheaper stuff and less expensive stores.

Shoppers are also dipping more into their savings, turning increasingly to “buy now, pay later” services like Afterpay that allow users to pay for items in installments, as well as running up their credit cards at a time when the Federal Reserve is hiking rates to cool the U.S. economy.

Such financial hardships could help drive shoppers to look for bargains.

Isela Dalencia, who was shopping for household essentials like detergent at a Walmart in Secaucus, New Jersey, earlier this week, said she's delaying buying holiday gifts until Cyber Monday — the Monday after Thanksgiving — when online sales rev up. Then, she will wait again until the week before Christmas to get the best deals, unlike last year when she started buying before Black Friday.

“I am shopping less,” Dalencia said, noting she will spend about \$700 for holiday gifts this year, one-third less than last year.

Katie Leach, a social worker in Manhattan, was also browsing the aisles at Walmart but said she will start holiday shopping during the first week of December as usual. This time, however, she'll be relying more on bargains, her credit card and “buy now, pay later” services to get her through the shopping season because of surging prices on food and other household expenses.

“The money is not going as far as last year,” Leach said.

This year's trends are a contrast from a year ago when consumers were buying early out of fear of not getting what they needed amid clogs in the supply network. Stores didn't have to discount much because they were struggling to bring in items.

But some pandemic habits are sticking around. Many retailers that closed stores on Thanksgiving Day and instead pushed discounts on their websites to thin out crowds at stores are still holding onto those strategies, despite a return to normalcy.

Major retailers including Walmart and Target are again closing their stores on Thanksgiving. And many moved away from doorbusters, the deeply marked down items offered for a limited time that drew crowds. Instead, the discounted items are available throughout the month, on Black Friday or the holiday weekend.

Against today's economic backdrop, the National Retail Federation — the largest retail trade group — expects holiday sales growth will slow to a range of 6% to 8%, from the blistering 13.5% growth of a year ago. However, these figures, which include online spending, aren't adjusted for inflation so real spending could even be down from a year ago.

Adobe Analytics expects online sales to be up 2.5% from Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, a slowdown from last year's 8.6% pace when shoppers were uncertain about returning to physical stores.

Analysts consider the five-day Black Friday weekend, which includes Cyber Monday, a key barometer of shoppers' willingness to spend, particularly this year. The two-month period between Thanksgiving and Christmas represents about 20% of the retail industry's annual sales.

Singing street marshals are Qatar World Cup's surprise stars

By LUJAIN JO Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — The World Cup 2010 in South Africa had Shakira. The 1998 tournament in France had Ricky Martin.

For many fans, the unofficial soundtrack of the World Cup in Qatar is fast becoming the incessant chanting of street marshals, better known as Last Mile Marshals.

Seated all over Doha on high chairs more commonly used by lifeguards at swimming pools, these migrant workers have become a staple of the Middle East's first World Cup.

They point visitors flooding into this Arabian Peninsula nation in the right direction on their search for

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public transportation. It's an important crowd control measure as some 1.2 million fans are expected to inundate Qatar, a country home to 3 million people.

The vast majority of the marshals come from Kenya and Ghana. They say they responded to job ads in August and September, ahead of the World Cup.

After a monotonous start, some marshals now sing or chant their instructions to fans. Bullhorns they carry blast out the recorded message again, and again, and again.

The instructions spark laughter among fans who often join in with the chants.

"Which way?" the fans chant.

"This way," ushers respond, pointing a giant foam finger toward a station on Doha's new massive underground metro built for the tournament.

The exchange then finds its rhythm and turns into almost a song: "Metro, metro, metro, this way, this way, this way."

Abubakar Abbas of Kenya says it all started as a way of easing boredom during his first days of work.

"The fans were just passing by without any engagement," Abbas told The Associated Press from his high chair outside the Souq Waqif metro station, "So I decided to come up with an idea where I can engage the fans and be interesting at the same time. That's how I came up with the idea and thank God it is trending now."

Qatar's World Cup has already produced memorable moments on the pitch, including Argentina's surprise defeat to Saudi Arabia and Germany's loss to Japan.

Outside the stadiums, the marshals trance-like chant is stuck in people's head.

"Even when I sleep at night, I hear 'metro, metro, metro' ringing in my head," he said.

UK voters warm to new leader Sunak, but not to his party

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Rishi Sunak has been Britain's prime minister for a month. In the tumultuous world of U.K. politics in 2022, that's an achievement.

Sunak, who took office a month ago Friday on Oct. 25, has steadied the nation after the brief term of predecessor Liz Truss. Britain's first prime minister of color, Sunak has stabilized the economy, reassured allies from Washington to Kyiv and even soothed the European Union after years of sparring between Britain and the bloc.

But Sunak's challenges are just beginning. He is facing a slowing economy, a cost-of-living crisis — and a governing Conservative Party that is fractious and increasingly unpopular after 12 years in power.

PARTIAL POPULARITY

Opinion polls have good news and bad news for Sunak. The public quite likes the 42-year-old former investment banker, but his party is another matter.

In a survey by pollster Ipsos, 47% of respondents said they liked the prime minister, while 41% disliked him.

"That's definitely better than Boris Johnson was getting earlier this year," said Gideon Skinner, Ipsos' head of political research. But he said Sunak's popularity "is not showing signs of rubbing off onto the Conservative Party brand."

In the same survey the Conservative Party was liked by just 26%, and disliked by 62% — the worst figures for the party in 15 years. The Ipsos phone survey of 1,004 adults is considered accurate to within plus or minus four percentage points.

Many voters welcome Sunak as a change from Truss and her predecessor Johnson, who quit in July after three scandal-plagued years in office. But the party has been in power since 2010, making it hard for Conservatives to avoid blame for the country's financial woes.

Lingering allegations of misconduct also are tarnishing its image. On Wednesday Sunak appointed a senior lawyer to investigate allegations of bullying against his deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab.

It's not impossible for the Conservatives to rebuild their popularity before the next election, due by the

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end of 2024. But it won't be easy. Current polls suggest the Labour Party would win handily.

AILING ECONOMY

At the height of the coronavirus pandemic Sunak, then Britain's treasury chief, gained popularity by spending billions to support shuttered businesses and pay the salaries of furloughed workers.

Now he has to deliver bitter medicine. Britain's economy is being weighed down by the pandemic, by Brexit and especially by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has driven global energy prices sky-high.

Millions of people in Britain have seen energy bills soar, though a government-imposed cap has prevented even higher prices. Pandemic-related backlogs and staff shortages have caused record waiting times for health care in Britain's National Health Service.

The situation was made worse by Truss' ill-advised September package of unfunded tax cuts, which torpedoed the U.K.'s reputation for economic prudence, weakened the pound, drove up the cost of borrowing and triggered emergency central bank intervention. Truss resigned last month after less than two months in the job.

"I fully appreciate how hard things are," Sunak said in his first address to the nation on Oct. 25, warning of "difficult decisions to come."

An emergency budget last week helped buoy the pound and calm markets — at the cost of 25 billion pounds (\$30 billion) in tax hikes and the prospect of public spending cuts down the road.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development forecast this week that the U.K. economy will shrink by 0.4% in 2023 and grow by just 0.2% in 2024, the worst outlook among Group of Seven industrialized countries.

WAR IN EUROPE

Boris Johnson's departure caused concern in Kyiv, where his staunch support for Ukraine's resistance to Russian invasion won admiration and respect.

Britain has given Ukraine 2.3 billion pounds (\$2.8 billion) in military aid since the start of the war, more than any country except the United States, and has lobbied allies to do more to help Kyiv.

Sunak traveled to Kyiv last week to reassure President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that Britain's policy would not change under his leadership. "I am proud of how the U.K. stood with you from the very beginning," Sunak told Zelenskyy. "And I am here today to say the United Kingdom will continue to stand with Ukraine."

London is keeping up its flow of support, announcing in the past week that it will deliver anti-aircraft guns, anti-drone technology and three Sea King helicopters to Ukraine.

But while support for Ukraine is secure, defense spending could face a squeeze. Sunak has dropped a commitment made by Truss to increase defense spending to 3% of gross domestic product by 2030.

BREXIT HEADACHES

Britain's relations with its closest neighbors and biggest trading partners have been tense since it left the now 27-nation European Union in 2020. Johnson and Truss both seemed to delight in riling the bloc to placate the powerful euroskeptic wing of the Conservative Party.

Sunak has been more emollient, making warm calls to European leaders in the days after taking office. Achieving concrete change is more difficult, given the power that ardent Brexiteers hold within the Conservatives.

Britain's departure from the EU in 2020 brought customs checks and other barriers for businesses trading with the bloc, sparked a political crisis in Northern Ireland and ended the free flow of EU nationals into Britain to fill vacant jobs.

Britain could ease trade friction if it agreed to align with EU rules in some areas, such as veterinary or food standards. But after reports that the government was seeking closer ties riled euroskeptics, Sunak said this week that he would not accept "alignment with EU laws."

David Henig, a trade expert at the European Centre for International Political Economy, said that backlash "has revealed just how deep the Europe problem is for Rishi Sunak and for the Conservative Party."

He said Sunak is a long-time Brexit supporter, but also a pragmatist who "just wants a relationship that works — and it quite clearly doesn't at the moment."

"I think the problem is that he has no great fresh ideas as to how to make that work, and a lot of internal opposition," Henig said. ____

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Japan investigators raid Dentsu in widening Olympic probe

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese prosecutors raided the headquarters of major advertising company Dentsu on Friday, as the investigation into corruption related to the Tokyo Olympics widened.

Major local TV broadcasters showed Tokyo District Prosecutors and Japan Fair Trade Commission officials entering Dentsu headquarters.

Dentsu dominates event organizing, marketing and public relations in Japan. It helped land the 2020 Games for Tokyo, and then lined up record domestic sponsorships.

Haruyuki Takahashi, a former executive at Dentsu, has been arrested four times in recent months on charges of receiving bribes from various companies that became sponsors for the Games.

The latest investigation centers around bid-rigging for companies to be picked to work on test events, according to Japanese media reports. The test events started in 2018, spanning various sports including sailing and weightlifting, to prepare for the Olympics. Being chosen for test events is critical to being picked for actual Olympic venues.

The money that exchanged hands for the bid-rigging totaled 500 million yen (\$3.6 million), involving nine companies and one organization, according to the newspaper Nihon Keizai Shimbun and other reports.

The companies involved in the earlier sponsorship scandal include Aoki Holdings, a clothing company that dressed Japan's Olympic team, and Sun Arrow, which produced the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic mascots named Miraitowa and Someity.

Takahashi, in custody since August, had tremendous influence over running the Olympics. The bribes he is alleged to have taken total more than 190 million yen (\$1.4 million).

"We continue to fully cooperate with this investigation," Dentsu's corporate communications office said in a statement.

Cerespo, an event company that Japanese reports said also was raided on suspicion of involvement in bid-rigging, did not have an immediate comment.

Tokyo prosecutors do not comment on such daily news developments. But Deputy Chief Prosecutor Hiroshi Morimoto told reporters recently that the investigation was continuing on the Olympics.

Speculation has been growing the burgeoning scandal may tarnish Japan's bid for the 2030 Winter Games. The 2020 Games were postponed for a year because of the coronavirus pandemic. The International Olympic Committee has said it's watching Japan's investigation, stressing it had "every interest in the full clarification of this case."

EXPLAINER: How could allies help Netanyahu beat charges?

By ELEANOR H. REICH Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to return to office, from where he could try to make his yearslong legal troubles disappear through new legislation advanced by his far-right and ultra-Orthodox allies. Critics say such a legal crusade is an assault on Israel's democracy.

Netanyahu, 73, who is on trial for corruption, will likely be buoyed by a loyal and comfortable governing majority that could grant him a lifeline from conviction.

Defenders of the justice system say the proposed changes would allow legislators to abuse their authority and disrupt the tenuous balance of powers that keeps them in check.

"It brings us to a situation where our entire democracy boils down to elections, but once you are elected you can do whatever you want," said Amir Fuchs, senior researcher at Jerusalem's Israel Democracy Institute think tank. "It is not a normal situation in any democracy."

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Israel's right wing has for years sought to change the justice system, portraying it as an interventionist and left-leaning roadblock to its legislative agenda. The makeup of the expected coalition now clears a path for such changes.

Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three scandals involving wealthy associates and powerful media moguls. He denies wrongdoing and has portrayed himself as a victim of a witch hunt by law enforcement and the justice system.

Netanyahu's political rivals say such allegations of purportedly politicized prosecutors and judges are part of a campaign to erode the public's faith in the legal system and ultimately weaken it.

Netanyahu has claimed that proposed legal changes would not impact the outcome of his trial. While on trial, he is bound by a conflict of interest arrangement limiting his dealings with the justice system, although it is unclear if that will be enforced.

Here's a look at the legal maneuvers that could help Netanyahu:

THE OVERRIDE CLAUSE

The most contentious change would target Israel's Supreme Court in what critics say is a direct blow to Israel's democracy.

Netanyahu's partners say the Supreme Court steps in far too often to throw out right-leaning laws. They say voters choose their lawmakers to create legislation and having the Supreme Court challenge those laws is an affront to the people's choice.

Israel has no constitution, relying instead on a set of "basic laws" that enshrine rights and freedoms. The courts are tasked with verifying that legislation measures up to those laws. The Supreme Court is seen as the final recourse for minorities and other groups challenging legislation they perceive as discriminatory.

The override clause, expected to be among the coalition's first steps, would allow the government to treat some decisions by the Supreme Court as nonbinding. Under the proposal, still being negotiated, the coalition could override rulings with any majority, giving the governing bloc overwhelming power to disturb Israel's system of checks and balances.

Yaniv Roznai, a law professor at Reichman University near Tel Aviv, said that once the override clause is passed, the government could approve other changes in the law that could clear Netanyahu.

THE "FRENCH LAW"

Netanyahu's allies plan to craft a law that would postpone the prosecution of a sitting prime minister for alleged crimes until he leaves office. It's dubbed the "French law" because in France, sitting presidents are immune from prosecution.

Sitting Israeli prime ministers can be prosecuted. But unlike in France, Israeli leaders have no term limits, meaning the shield of immunity could possibly last for years. Netanyahu is Israel's longest-serving leader, having ruled for 15 years and he has no plans to retire.

Under the plan, a prime minister could be prosecuted for some crimes, but it excludes corruption charges. Fuchs, the researcher, said that makes the law appear tailor-made for Netanyahu.

CHANGING THE PENAL CODE

Netanyahu's allies have pledged to remove from the penal code the very charge Netanyahu is accused of in three cases: fraud and breach of trust.

They say the crime is poorly defined, giving the court too much discretion when deciding on a conviction. They say it places lawmakers overly at risk for unjustified prosecution.

Critics say erasing the charge would remove a safeguard against corruption. They argue that targeting the very charge Netanyahu is accused of could erode the rule of law, opening the door to further changes to the legal code to rescue other lawmakers.

Yoav Sapir, a former Israeli chief public defender, said cancelling an offense has a retroactive effect. That could lead to charges in all three of Netanyahu's cases being dropped and having two out of three cases thrown out entirely.

RECONFIGURING THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Today, Israel's attorney general consults with the government on the legal viability of legislation and represents it in court, while also being tasked with protecting the public interest from any harm posed by

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government authorities. The attorney general is nominated by the government and must be cleared by a professional committee made up of former justice officials and others.

Netanyahu's allies want to split the post of attorney general into three separate jobs, while making at least two of the positions political appointments.

The current attorney general, Gali Baharav-Miara, was nominated by the outgoing government and she appears to have backed her predecessor's decision to indict Netanyahu. And while firing her is complicated and has bad optics, splitting the position would keep her in her post until the end of her term in 2028 while shifting some of her responsibilities to a political appointee who could decide to halt the trial.

OUTSIZED LEVERAGE

Netanyahu's legal woes give outsized leverage to his prospective coalition partners, who have been driving a hard bargain in tougher than expected talks now underway to form a government.

His allies are asking for influential portfolios, such as defense, finance and public security. They also want to grant legal immunity to soldiers operating against Palestinians, allow gender segregation in certain public spaces and increase government stipends for tens of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews who instead of working study Jewish texts.

Ultra-Orthodox and far-right parties could hold the key to Netanyahu's legal salvation, granting them great power in deciding the next government's agenda and shaping Israel's future.

World Cup Viewer's Guide: US seeks repeat of 1950 upset

By JENNA FRYER AP National Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — The first time the United States faced England at the World Cup, the hastily assembled American squad was a ragtag group that included a mailman, a grave digger, a dishwasher and a school teacher.

Few of the players had ever met before they headed to Brazil in 1950 to face powerhouse England, and the 1-0 upset victory by the United States is often likened to the 1980 "Miracle on Ice" win over the Soviet Union at the Lake Placid Olympics as being among the biggest moments in American sports history.

The disparity between the two national soccer teams isn't nearly as wide 72 years later as England and the United States get set to play Friday in Group B. In fact, United States midfielder Tyler Adams said he's more frightened of spiders than he is of facing England.

The Americans are the underdogs following their 1-1 draw with Wales, while England is coming off a 6-2 opening win over Iran.

"England are still a big team at the end of the day, but the intimidation factor? I wouldn't say there's many things out there that intimidate me, other than spiders," said Adams, who plays for Premier League club Leeds.

"It's fine for me, but obviously I've got to play against all those big players, so I've done it before. But we also want to show what we're capable of and that U.S. soccer is developing and growing in the right way."

But that 1950 victory for the Americans was a rare win against England, which has won eight of its 11 meetings against the United States. The upside? None of those victories were World Cup matches and the second meeting between the teams on soccer's biggest stage ended in a 1-1 draw in 2010.

United States midfielder Christian Pulisic doesn't want to hear about stats, rankings or predictions. The Americans failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup and, following the opening draw, are tied with Wales with one point each in the fight to advance to the knockout stage.

England leads the group with three points. A win or draw on Friday would put the Americans in decent position to be one of the two teams to advance.

"We don't look at the odds and we're not at the World Cup just to make up the numbers," Pulisic said. "We go, we give it everything in every game we play, we make America proud. Wherever that takes us we have to wait and see."

INJURY CONCERNS

A win for England would put the Three Lions into the round of the 16 with one game still to play, but

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coach Gareth Southgate has cautioned against complacency after the opening rout of Iran.

England captain Harry Kane, the top scorer at the 2018 World Cup, injured his ankle against Iran and defender Harry Maguire left the game in the 70th minute with blurred vision. Kane trained with the team in recent days and is expected to play Friday, while Maguire indicated he'll play in what will be his 50th appearance for the national team.

Southgate told his team it needs to be even better against the United States than it was against Iran, and he thought the two late goals conceded proved England got sloppy at the end of that game.

"They're a top nation with a lot of top players who have played in the Premier League and who we've come up against," England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford said. "But it's about us as a squad being 100%. It's about us taking the result from Iran and going into the U.S. game positive."

BACK ON THE FIELD

Qatar returns to competition after becoming the first host nation in World Cup history to drop its first match, a 1-0 loss to Ecuador on the opening night of the tournament.

Qatar gets another chance for a victory against Senegal, which also lost its opener.

"There is a lot of room for improvement. Maybe the responsibility and nerves got the best of us," Qatar coach Felix Sanchez said. "We didn't start well. It was a terrible start."

Senegal is without Sadio Mane, the Bayern Munich forward who was ruled out of the tournament with a leg injury. Midfielder Cheikhou Kouyate is also expected to miss Friday's game with a hamstring injury.

Without Mane at the World Cup, Senegal lost to the Netherlands 2-0 and coach Aliou Cissé is demanding more from forwards Ismaila Sarr and Krépin Diatta.

"We needed to be more effective. Ismaila and Krepin are responsible there, but of course, the absence of Mane is a problem for us," Cisse said. "Our attackers are good and we know what they are capable of. We need to work on it, with Ismaila and the others. We expect a lot from him and Krepin."

WALES-IRAN

Gareth Bale scored a late goal from a penalty kick to help Wales draw with the United States in its opening match and was thrilled to be given the starring role in his World Cup debut.

The 33-year-old Bale, who plays for the Los Angeles Galaxy in the MLS, had zero hesitation when called on to take the penalty.

"It was always going to be me. No doubts," Bale said. "I feel like I had to step up and I was happy to do so."

The Asian team will be missing goalkeeper Ali Beiranvand, who is out with an injury. He was cleared to continue by Iran's medical staff after a collision with a teammate in the opening game but later collapsed on the field and was taken to a local hospital. Hossein Hosseini, the backup, should be tested by Bale.

Iran, which qualified for the last two World Cups, has never ever advanced to the knockout round.

NETHERLANDS-ECUADOR

Ecuador and the Netherlands both won their opening matches and their game Friday will pit striker Enner Valencia against forward Memphis Depay.

Valencia scored both of Ecuador's goals in the 2-0 win over Qatar before leaving with a sore knee but is set to play Friday.

"Enner will play against the Netherlands, there is no doubt about that," Ecuador coach Gustavo Alfaro said.

Depay returned from a hamstring injury to lead the Netherlands in its 2-0 win over Senegal. He came off the bench in that game but wants to start against Ecuador.

"He is a player who can make the difference," Netherlands coach Louis Van Gaal said. "He will want to play, but I have to assess his form."

A win for either team would likely guarantee advancement out of Group A. ____

AP World Cup coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/world-cup> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Witness: Walmart shooter seemed to target certain people

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

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CHESAPEAKE, Va. (AP) — The Walmart supervisor who shot and killed six co-workers in Virginia seemed to target people and fired at some victims after they were already hit and appeared to be dead, said a witness who was present when the shooting started.

Jessica Wilczewski said workers were gathered in a store break room to begin their overnight shift late Tuesday when team leader Andre Bing entered and opened fire with a handgun. While another witness has described Bing as shooting wildly, Wilczewski said she observed him target certain people.

"The way he was acting — he was going hunting," Wilczewski told The Associated Press on Thursday. "The way he was looking at people's faces and the way he did what he did, he was picking people out."

She said she observed him shoot at people who were already on the ground.

"What I do know is that he made sure who he wanted dead, was dead," she said. "He went back and shot dead bodies that were already dead. To make sure."

Wilczewski said she had only worked at the store for five days and didn't know with whom Bing got along or had problems. She said being a new employee may have been the reason she was spared.

She said that after the shooting started, a co-worker sitting next to her pulled her under the table to hide. She said that at one point, Bing told her to get out from under the table. But when he saw who she was, he told her, "Jessie, go home." She said she slowly got up and then ran out of the store.

Police are trying to determine a motive, while former coworkers are struggling to make sense of the rampage in Chesapeake, a city of about 250,000 people near Virginia's coast.

Some who worked with Bing, 31, said he had a reputation for being an aggressive, if not hostile, supervisor, who once admitted to having "anger issues." But he also could make people laugh and seemed to be dealing with the typical stresses at work that many people endure.

"I don't think he had many people to fall back on in his personal life," said Nathan Sinclair, who worked at the Walmart for nearly a year before leaving earlier this month.

During chats among coworkers, "We would be like 'work is consuming my life.' And (Bing) would be like, 'Yeah, I don't have a social life anyway,'" Sinclair recalled Thursday.

Sinclair said he and Bing did not get along. Bing was known for being "verbally hostile" to employees and wasn't particularly well-liked, Sinclair said. But there were times when Bing was made fun of and not necessarily treated fairly.

"There's no telling what he could have been thinking. ... You never know if somebody really doesn't have any kind of support group," Sinclair said.

On balance, Bing seemed pretty normal to Janice Strausburg, who knew him from working at Walmart for 13 years before leaving in June.

Bing could be "grumpy" but could also be "placid," she said. He made people laugh and told Strausburg he liked dance. When she invited him to church, he declined but mentioned that his mother had been a preacher.

Strausburg thought Bing's grumpiness was due to the stresses that come with any job. He also once told her that he had "had anger issues" and complained he was going to "get the managers in trouble."

She never expected this.

"I think he had mental issues," Strausburg said Thursday. "What else could it be?"

Tuesday night's violence in Chesapeake was the nation's second high-profile mass shooting in four days. Bing was dead when officers reached the store in the state's second-largest city. Authorities said he apparently shot himself.

Police have identified the victims as Brian Pendleton, 38; Kellie Pyle, 52; Lorenzo Gamble, 43; and Randy Blevins, 70, who were all from Chesapeake; and Tyneka Johnson, 22, of nearby Portsmouth. The dead also included a 16-year-old boy whose name was withheld because of his age, police said.

A Walmart spokesperson confirmed in an email that all of the victims worked for the company.

Krystal Kawabata, a spokesperson for the FBI's field office in Norfolk, Virginia, confirmed the agency is assisting police with the investigation but directed all inquiries to the Chesapeake Police Department, the lead investigative agency.

Another Walmart employee, Briana Tyler, has said Bing appeared to fire at random.

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"He was just shooting all throughout the room. It didn't matter who he hit," Tyler told the AP Wednesday. Six people also were wounded in the shooting, which happened just after 10 p.m. as shoppers were stocking up ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Police said they believe about 50 people were in the store at the time.

Bing was identified as an overnight team leader who had been a Walmart employee since 2010. Police said he had one handgun and several magazines of ammunition.

Tyler said the overnight stocking team of 15 to 20 people had just gathered in the break room to go over the morning plan. Another team leader had begun speaking when Bing entered the room and opened fire, Tyler and Wiczewski said.

Tyler, who started working at Walmart two months ago and had worked with Bing just a night earlier, said she never had a negative encounter with him, but others told her he was "the manager to look out for." She said Bing had a history of writing up people for no reason.

The attack was the second major shooting in Virginia this month. Three University of Virginia football players were fatally shot on a bus Nov. 13 as they returned from a field trip. Two other students were wounded.

The Walmart shooting also comes days after a person opened fire at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado — killing five and wounding 17. Tuesday night's shooting brought back memories of another attack at a Walmart in 2019, when a gunman killed 23 at a store in El Paso, Texas.

Wiczewski, who survived Tuesday's shooting in Virginia, said she tried but could not bring herself to visit a memorial in the store's parking lot Wednesday.

"I wrote a letter and I wanted to put it out there," she said. "I wrote to the ones I watched die. And I said that I'm sorry I wasn't louder. I'm sorry you couldn't feel my touch. But you weren't alone."

Owner of gay club: Shooting comes amid a new 'type of hate'

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — The co-owner of the Colorado Springs gay nightclub where a shooter turned a drag queen's birthday celebration into a massacre said he thinks the shooting that killed five people and injured 17 others is a reflection of anti-LGBTQ sentiment that has evolved from prejudice to incitement.

Nic Grzecka's voice was tinged with exhaustion as he spoke with The Associated Press on Wednesday night in some of his first comments since Saturday night's attack at Club Q, a venue Grzecka helped build into an enclave that sustained the LGBTQ community in conservative-leaning Colorado Springs.

Authorities haven't said why the suspect opened fire at the club before being subdued by patrons, but they are facing hate crime charges. The suspect, Anderson Lee Aldrich, 22, has not entered a plea or spoken about the incident.

Grzecka said he believes the targeting of a drag queen event is connected to the art form being cast in a false light in recent months by right-wing activists and politicians who complain about the "sexualization" or "grooming" of children.

Even though general acceptance of the LGBTQ community has grown, this new dynamic has fostered a dangerous climate, he said.

"It's different to walk down the street holding my boyfriend's hand and getting spit at (as opposed to) a politician relating a drag queen to a groomer of their children," Grzecka said. "I would rather be spit on in the street than the hate get as bad as where we are today."

Earlier this year, Florida's Republican-dominated legislature passed a bill barring teachers from discussing gender identity or sexual orientation with younger students. A month later, references to "pedophiles" and "grooming" in relation to LGBTQ people rose 400%, according to a Human Rights Campaign report.

"Lying about our community, and making them into something they are not, creates a different type of hate," Grzecka said.

Grzecka, who started mopping floors and bartending at Club Q in 2003 a year after it opened, said he

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hopes to channel his grief and anger into rebuilding the support system for Colorado Springs' LGBTQ community that only Club Q had provided.

City and state officials have offered support and President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden reached out to Grzecka and co-owner Matthew Haynes on Thursday to offer condolences and reiterate their support for the community, as well as their commitment to fighting back against hate and gun violence.

Club Q opened after the only other gay bar in Colorado Springs at that time shuttered, Grzecka said, describing that era as an evolution of gay bars.

Decades ago, dingy, hole-in-the-wall venues were meant largely for finding a hookup or date. But once the internet offered anonymous ways to find love online, the bars transitioned into well-lit, clean, non-smoking spaces to hang out with friends and Club Q was at the vanguard of that transition, Grzecka said.

Once he became co-owner in 2014, Grzecka helped mold Club Q into not merely a nightlife venue but a community center — a platform to create a "chosen family" for LGBTQ people, especially for those estranged from their birth family. Drag queen bingo nights, "Friendsgiving" and Christmas dinners and birthday celebrations became staples of Club Q which was open 365 days a year.

In the aftermath of the shooting, Grzecka and other community leaders hope to fill the gaping hole left by the desecration of Club Q.

"When that system goes away, you realize how much more the bar was really providing," said Justin Burns, an organizer with Pikes Peak Pride. "Those that may or may not have been a part of the Club Q family, where do they go?"

Burns said the shooting pulled back a curtain on a broader lack of resources for LGBTQ adults in Colorado Springs. Burns, Grzecka and others are working with national organizations to do an assessment of the community's needs as they develop a blueprint to offer a robust support network.

Grzecka is looking to rebuild the "loving culture" and necessary support to "make sure that this tragedy is turned into the best thing it can be for the city."

That started on Thursday night, when Club Q's 10th anniversary Friendsgiving was held at the non-denominational Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church. Survivors, community members, friends and family shared donated meals under strings of lights near rainbow balloon towers.

Organized by the LGBTQ group United Court of Pikes Peak Empire, the dinner's bright atmosphere felt resilient. People smiled, squeezed each other in hugs and told stories from the podium about those who lost their lives.

"Everybody needs community," Grzecka said.

Earlier that day at the memorial, a trickle of people walked slowly along the wall of flowers and vigil candles that had burnt out.

"I hope you dance," someone wrote to victim Ashley Paugh on one of five white crosses fixed with wooden hearts inscribed with the names of those who had died and bearing notes scribbled by mourners.

On a concrete barrier a message was scrawled, "Please hear our calls. Protect us, our home."

Bombed, not beaten: Ukraine's capital flips to survival mode

By JOHN LEICESTER, HANNA ARHIROVA and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Residents of Ukraine's bombed capital clutched empty bottles in search of water and crowded into cafés for power and warmth Thursday, switching defiantly into survival mode after new Russian missile strikes a day earlier plunged the city and much of the country into the dark.

In scenes hard to believe in a sophisticated city of 3 million, some Kyiv residents resorted to collecting rainwater from drainpipes, as repair teams labored to reconnect supplies.

Friends and family members exchanged messages to find out who had electricity and water back. Some had one but not the other. The previous day's aerial onslaught on Ukraine's power grid left many with neither.

Cafés in Kyiv that by some small miracle had both quickly became oases of comfort on Thursday.

Oleksiy Rashchupkin, a 39-year-old investment banker, awoke to find that water had been reconnected

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to his third-floor flat but power had not. His freezer thawed in the blackout, leaving a puddle on his floor.

So he hopped into a cab and crossed the Dnieper River from left bank to right, to a café that he'd noticed had stayed open after previous Russian strikes. Sure enough, it was serving hot drinks, hot food and the music and Wi-Fi were on.

"I'm here because there is heating, coffee and light," he said. "Here is life."

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said about 70% of the Ukrainian capital was still without power on Thursday morning.

As Kyiv and other cities picked themselves up, Kherson on Thursday came under its heaviest bombardment since Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city two weeks ago. The barrage of missiles killed four people outside a coffee shop and a woman was also killed next to her house, witnesses said, speaking to Associated Press reporters.

In Kyiv, where cold rain fell on the remnants of previous snowfalls, the mood was grim but steely. The winter promises to be a long one. But Ukrainians say that if Russian President Vladimir Putin's intention is to break them, he should think again.

"Nobody will compromise their will and principles just for electricity," said Alina Dubeiko, 34. She, too, sought out the comfort of another, equally crowded, warm and lit café. Without electricity, heating and water at home, she was determined to keep up her work routine. Adapting to life shorn of its usual comforts, Dubeiko said she uses two glasses of water to wash, then catches her hair in a ponytail and is ready for her working day.

She said she'd rather be without power than live with the Russian invasion, which crossed the nine-month mark on Thursday.

"Without light or you? Without you," she said, echoing remarks President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made when Russia on Oct. 10 unleashed the first of what has now become a series of aerial attacks on key Ukrainian infrastructure.

Western leaders denounced the bombing campaign. "Strikes against civilian infrastructures are war crimes," French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov acknowledged Thursday that it targeted Ukrainian energy facilities. But he said they were linked to Ukraine's military command and control system and that the aim was to disrupt flows of Ukrainian troops, weapons and ammunition to front lines. Authorities for Kyiv and the wider Kyiv region reported a total of 7 people killed and dozens of wounded.

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said: "We are conducting strikes against infrastructure in response to the unbridled flow of weapons to Ukraine and the reckless appeals of Kyiv to defeat Russia."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also sought to shift blame for civilian hardship on Ukraine's government.

"Ukraine's leadership has every opportunity to bring the situation back to normal, has every opportunity to resolve the situation in such a way as to meet the demands of the Russian side and, accordingly, end all possible suffering of the civilian population," Peskov said.

In Kyiv, people lined up at public water points to fill plastic bottles. In a strange new war-time first for her, 31-year-old Health Department employee Kateryna Luchkina resorted to collecting rainwater from a drainpipe, so she could at least wash her hands at work, which had no water. She filled two plastic bottles, waiting patiently in the rain until they had water to the brim. A colleague followed behind her, doing the same.

"We Ukrainians are so resourceful, we will think of something. We do not lose our spirit," Luchkina said. "We work, live in the rhythm of survival or something, as much as possible. We do not lose hope that everything will be fine."

The city mayor said on Telegram that power engineers "are doing their best" to restore electricity. Water repair teams were making progress, too. In the early afternoon, Klitschko announced that water supplies had been restored across the capital, with the caveat that "some consumers may still experience low water pressure."

Power, heat and water were gradually coming back elsewhere, too. In Ukraine's southeastern Dnipro-

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petrovsk region, the governor announced that 3,000 miners trapped underground because of power blackouts had been rescued. Regional authorities posted messages on social media updating people on the progress of repairs but also saying they needed time.

Mindful of the hardships — both now and ahead, as winter progresses — authorities are opening thousands of so-called “points of invincibility” — heated and powered spaces offering hot meals, electricity and internet connections. More than 3,700 were open across the country of Thursday morning, said a senior official in the presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko.

In Kherson, hospitals without power and water are also contending with the gruesome after-effects of intensifying Russian strikes. They hit residential and commercial buildings Thursday, setting some ablaze, blowing ash skyward and shattering glass across streets. Paramedics helped the injured.

Olena Zhura was carrying bread to her neighbors when a strike that destroyed half of her house wounded her husband, Victor. He writhed in pain as paramedics carried him away.

“I was shocked,” she said, welling with tears. “Then I heard (him) shouting: ‘Save me, save me.’”

Biden brings Thanksgiving pies to Nantucket first responders

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NANTUCKET, Mass. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Thursday delivered at least half a dozen pumpkin pies to Massachusetts firefighters during a Thanksgiving Day show of appreciation and his toddler grandson walked away with a red fire hat topping his blond curls.

“Oh wow,” Biden was heard to say upon seeing Beau Biden, who is nearly 3, emerge from the headquarters building wearing the hat. The president was with the firefighters who had lined up outside the building to welcome him.

Biden had expressed appreciation for firefighters and other emergency personnel earlier in the day when he and his wife, Jill, spoke by telephone to the hosts of NBC’s broadcast of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York.

“I want to say thanks to the firefighters and police officers, first responders. They never take a break,” he said during the call. The Bidens spoke later Thursday with units from each of the six branches of the U.S. military, stationed in Europe, at sea, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, the White House said.

“We remember them every single day,” he said during the broadcast. “God bless our troops.”

Jill Biden appeared to try to get her grandson to talk to the firefighters, but Beau would not look up. She was overheard saying she did not know why he was being so quiet.

During a brief conversation with reporters, Biden said he hopes the upcoming Republican-controlled House will continue U.S. aid to Ukraine. He also said his team is involved in negotiations to avoid a freight rail strike in early December that could further disrupt the economy.

After the visit, Biden returned to the Nantucket home where he is taking in the holiday with family, including son Hunter and his wife, Melissa — who are Beau’s parents — and daughter Ashley.

The family’s Thanksgiving menu included thyme-roasted turkey, stuffing and sherry gravy, seared scallops, three kinds of pie and the president’s favorite ice cream, chocolate chip.

They are camping out at a sprawling waterfront compound along Nantucket Harbor owned by David Rubenstein, co-founder of the Carlyle Group, a private equity firm. Biden celebrated Thanksgiving at the home in 2021.

The Bidens have a more than 40-year tradition of spending Thanksgiving on the Massachusetts island.

Neymar injured, Richarlison scores for Brazil at World Cup

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — With Neymar limping off the field with an ankle injury, Richarlison came through for the “Seleção.”

A spectacular acrobatic kick followed an easy tap-in from close range as Richarlison scored both goals

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in Brazil's 2-0 victory over Serbia on Thursday at the World Cup.

After the match, the Tottenham striker learned of the extent of Neymar's injury.

"The most important thing for us it to have him at 100% for the next match," said Richarlison, whose first goal came after a buildup started by Neymar. "When I get to the hotel I'm going to go and see how he is doing."

Brazil team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar said Neymar sprained his right ankle. He declined to speculate on whether he would be available to play in the team's next match against Switzerland on Monday.

"We put ice on it while he was on the bench and then in physiotherapy," Lasmar said. "There is no test scheduled for now but we will schedule it if needed. He will be under observation. We will know more tomorrow."

Neymar was also injured at the 2014 World Cup. Playing at home in Brazil, his tournament ended with a back injury in the quarterfinals against Colombia when he had to be taken off the field on a stretcher. Brazil ended up losing to Germany 7-1 in the semifinals.

Neymar was fouled nine times in the match against Serbia, four more than any other player so far at this year's World Cup. But while taking care of Neymar, the opposing defense couldn't stop Richarlison.

He had his back to the goal when he used one touch to get the ball up in the air near the penalty spot, then spun around and leapt off the ground before knocking the ball into the net with his right foot in the 73rd minute.

"My childhood dream has come true," said Richarlison, who is playing in his first World Cup. "We knew it was going to be difficult to get past them. I'm used to playing against defensive teams like this in England. I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that I had and I did."

Brazil had struggled to get past the Serbian defense until Richarlison scored from close range in the 62nd. Vinícius Júnior assisted on both goals.

Neymar, seeking his first major title with Brazil, stayed at 75 goals for the national team, two shy of Pelé's scoring record.

He was tackled hard a few times and sprained his right ankle in the second half. He was crying on the bench after being substituted in the 79th and was limping as he left the stadium.

Brazil coach Tite started with an attack-minded squad that included four forwards — Neymar, Vinícius Júnior, Raphinha and Richarlison. Attacking midfielder Lucas Paquetá played alongside Casemiro, the lone defensive midfielder.

But Serbia had several players back and was able to keep Brazil from creating many significant opportunities. Neymar tried to control the pace but struggled to get free. He, Vinícius Júnior and Raphinha all squandered chances early on.

Brazil's best chance before Richarlison's opening goal had been a low long-range shot by Alex Sandro that hit the post in the 60th. Neymar had his best opportunities with a free kick in the 50th and a shot from near the penalty spot in the 55th.

Serbia had its own injury issues for the match.

"We have three key players who are injured — it's too much for us," Serbia coach Dragan Stojković said. "We are not Brazil with 200 million people. We are a very small country."

The 30-year-old Neymar arrived to his third World Cup as Brazil's main attraction. He helped the "Seleção" win the 2013 Confederations Cup and its first Olympic gold medal at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, but has yet to win a major title with the national team.

Brazil, trying to win its first World Cup in two decades, is unbeaten in its last 20 opening games, with 17 victories. It has finished first in its group in the last 10 World Cups.

Witness: Walmart shooter seemed to target certain people

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

CHESAPEAKE, Va. (AP) — The Walmart supervisor who shot and killed six co-workers in Virginia seemed to target people and fired at some victims after they were already hit and appeared to be dead, said a

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witness who was present when the shooting started.

Jessica Wilczewski said that workers were gathered in a store break room to begin their overnight shift late Tuesday when team leader Andre Bing entered and opened fire with a handgun. While another witness has described Bing as shooting wildly, Wilczewski said that she observed him target certain people.

"The way he was acting — he was going hunting," Wilczewski told The Associated Press on Thursday. "The way he was looking at people's faces and the way he did what he did, he was picking people out."

She said that she observed him shoot at people who were already on the ground.

"What I do know is that he made sure who he wanted dead, was dead," she said. "He went back and shot dead bodies that were already dead. To make sure."

Wilczewski said she had only worked at the store for five days and didn't know who Bing got along with or had problems with. She said the fact that she was a new employee may have been why he spared her.

She said that after the shooting started, a co-worker sitting next to her pulled her under the table to hide. She said that at one point, Bing told her to get out from under the table. But when he saw who she was, he told her, "Jessie, go home." She said she slowly got up and then ran out of the store.

Meanwhile, police are trying to determine a motive, while former coworkers are struggling to make sense of the rampage in Chesapeake, a city of about 250,000 people near Virginia's coast.

Some who worked with Bing said he had a reputation for being an aggressive, if not hostile supervisor, who once admitted to having "anger issues." But he also could make people laugh and seemed to be dealing with the typical stresses at work that many people endure.

"I don't think he had many people to fall back on in his personal life," said Nathan Sinclair, who worked at the Walmart for nearly a year before leaving earlier this month.

During chats among coworkers, "We would be like 'work is consuming my life.' And (Bing) would be like, 'Yeah, I don't have a social life anyway,'" Sinclair recalled Thursday.

Sinclair said he and Bing did not get along. Bing was known for being "verbally hostile" to employees and wasn't particularly well-liked, Sinclair said. But there were times when Bing was made fun of and not necessarily treated fairly.

"There's no telling what he could have been thinking ... You never know if somebody really doesn't have any kind of support group," Sinclair said.

On balance, Bing seemed pretty normal to Janice Strausburg, who knew him from working at Walmart for 13 years before leaving in June.

Bing could be "grumpy" but he could also be "placid," she said. He made people laugh and told Strausburg he liked dance. When she invited him to church, he declined but mentioned that his mother had been a preacher.

Strausburg thought Bing's grumpiness was due to the stresses that come with any job. He also once told her that he had "had anger issues" and complained that he was going to "get the managers in trouble."

She never expected this.

"I think he had mental issues," Strausburg said Thursday. "What else could it be?"

Tuesday night's violence in Chesapeake was the nation's second high-profile mass shooting in four days. Bing was dead when officers reached the store in the state's second-largest city. Authorities said he apparently shot himself.

Police have identified the victims as Brian Pendleton, 38; Kellie Pyle, 52; Lorenzo Gamble, 43; and Randy Blevins, 70, who were all from Chesapeake; and Tyneka Johnson, 22, of nearby Portsmouth. They said the dead also included a 16-year-old boy whose name was being withheld because of his age.

A Walmart spokesperson confirmed in an email that all of the victims worked for the company.

Krystal Kawabata, a spokesperson for the FBI's field office in Norfolk, Virginia, confirmed that the agency is assisting police with the investigation but she directed all inquiries to the Chesapeake Police Department, the lead investigative agency.

Another Walmart employee, Briana Tyler, has said that Bing appeared to fire at random.

"He was just shooting all throughout the room. It didn't matter who he hit," Briana Tyler, a Walmart

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employee, told the AP Wednesday.

Six people were also wounded in the shooting, which happened just after 10 p.m. as shoppers were stocking up ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Police said they believe about 50 people were in the store at the time.

Bing, 31, was identified as an overnight team leader who had been a Walmart employee since 2010. Police said he had one handgun and several magazines of ammunition.

Tyler said the overnight stocking team of 15 to 20 people had just gathered in the break room to go over the morning plan. Another team leader had begun speaking when Bing entered the room and opened fire, Tyler and Wiczewski both said.

Tyler, who started working at Walmart two months ago and had worked with Bing just a night earlier, said she never had a negative encounter with him, but others told her he was "the manager to look out for." She said Bing had a history of writing people up for no reason.

The attack was the second major shooting in Virginia this month. Three University of Virginia football players were fatally shot on a bus Nov. 13 as they returned from a field trip. Two other students were wounded.

The Walmart shooting also comes days after a person opened fire at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado — killing five and wounding 17. Tuesday night's shooting brought back memories of another attack at a Walmart in 2019, when a gunman killed 23 at a store in El Paso, Texas.

Wiczewski, who survived Tuesday's shooting in Virginia, said she tried but could not bring herself to visit a memorial in the store's parking lot on Wednesday.

"I wrote a letter and I wanted to put it out there," she said. "I wrote to the ones I watched die. And I said that I'm sorry I wasn't louder. I'm sorry you couldn't feel my touch. But you weren't alone."

Musk says granting 'amnesty' to suspended Twitter accounts

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — New Twitter owner Elon Musk said Thursday that he is granting "amnesty" for suspended accounts, which online safety experts predict will spur a rise in harassment, hate speech and misinformation.

The billionaire's announcement came after he asked in a poll posted to his timeline to vote on reinstatements for accounts that have not "broken the law or engaged in egregious spam." The yes vote was 72%.

"The people have spoken. Amnesty begins next week. Vox Populi, Vox Dei," Musk tweeted using a Latin phrase meaning "the voice of the people, the voice of God."

Musk used the same Latin phrase after posting a similar poll last weekend before reinstating the account of former President Donald Trump, which Twitter had banned for encouraging the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection. Trump has said he won't return to Twitter but has not deleted his account.

Such online polls are anything but scientific and can easily be influenced by bots.

In the month since Musk took over Twitter, groups that monitor the platform for racist, anti-Semitic and other toxic speech say it's been on the rise on the world's de facto public square. That has included a surge in racist abuse of World Cup soccer players that Twitter is allegedly failing to act on.

The uptick in harmful content is in large part due to the disorder following Musk's decision to lay off half the company's 7,500-person workforce, fire top executives, and then institute a series of ultimatums that prompted hundreds more to quit. Also let go were an untold number of contractors responsible for content moderation. Among those resigning over a lack of faith in Musk's willingness to keep Twitter from devolving into a chaos of uncontrolled speech were Twitter's head of trust and safety, Yoel Roth.

Major advertisers have also abandoned the platform.

On Oct. 28, the day after he took control, Musk tweeted that no suspended accounts would be reinstated until Twitter formed a "content moderation council" with diverse viewpoints that would consider the cases.

On Tuesday, he said he was reneging on that promise because he'd agreed to at the insistence of "a large coalition of political-social activists groups" who later "broke the deal" by urging that advertisers at least temporarily stop giving Twitter their business.

A day earlier, Twitter reinstated the personal account of far-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, which was

banned in January for violating the platform's COVID misinformation policies.

Musk, meanwhile, has been getting increasingly chummy on Twitter with right-wing figures. Before this month's U.S. midterm elections he urged "independent-minded" people to vote Republican.

A report from the European Union published Thursday said Twitter took longer to review hateful content and removed less of it this year compared with 2021. The report was based on data collected over the spring — before Musk acquired Twitter — as part of an annual evaluation of online platforms' compliance with the bloc's code of conduct on disinformation. It found that Twitter assessed just over half of the notifications it received about illegal hate speech within 24 hours, down from 82% in 2021.

Ronaldo makes World Cup history, Portugal beats Ghana 3-2

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Cristiano Ronaldo closed his eyes, took in a deep breath and then made World Cup history.

The Portugal striker became the first male player to score at five World Cups with his 65th-minute penalty in a 3-2 win over Ghana on Thursday.

Days after his contract was terminated at Manchester United following a tell-all interview, he let his soccer do the talking at the start of likely his final World Cup.

"This was a beautiful moment," Ronaldo said. "The world record, the only player to score in five World Cups, makes me very proud."

Wheeling away after the ball struck the back of the net to give Portugal a 1-0 lead, a smiling Ronaldo performed his usual leap and swivel in the air — the crowd roared his trademark "SI-UUU" as he did the pirouette — before getting mobbed by teammates.

He has now scored in every World Cup since his first in 2006, when a penalty against Iran started his run of goals in the tournament that's now up to eight in 18 matches. He has a men's record 118 international goals.

"I think Cristiano is a phenomenon, a legend," Portugal coach Fernando Santos said. "In 50 years, we will continue to talk about him."

His latest scoring record adds to the luster of a resume that should ensure Ronaldo receives plenty of offers from new clubs after splitting with United on Tuesday. That came after he gave an unauthorized interview to Piers Morgan criticizing the manager, owners and his teammates at the English club.

His fraught buildup to the tournament didn't appear to affect Ronaldo against Ghana, even though he wasted two clear-cut chances in the first half.

"It was a week that finished this chapter (with United)," Ronaldo said. "It is closed and now I want to start with the good foot forward. We started, we won, I want to help my team and all the rest does not matter."

Ronaldo ended the match with his head in his hands in pure relief after Ghana almost snatched a draw in the ninth minute of stoppage time thanks to a piece of ingenuity.

In the last action of the game, Ghana striker Inaki Williams hid behind Diogo Costa as the Portugal goalkeeper rolled the ball on the ground and prepared to clear it. Williams dispossessed Costa and, despite slipping, managed to poke the ball toward goal.

Portugal defender Danilo raced back and cleared the ball away from near the line as Ronaldo, who was sitting in the dugout after being substituted, watched in disbelief.

All the goals came in a wild final half-hour, with Andre Ayew equalizing for Ghana eight minutes after Ronaldo converted his penalty after tumbling under a challenge by Mohammed Salisu.

Ghana coach Otto Addo called the penalty "a special gift from the referee."

Joao Felix regained the lead for Portugal in the 78th minute following a through-ball by Bruno Fernandes, who then set up Rafael Leao to add a third. Osman Bukari reduced Ghana's deficit in the 89th, celebrating in comical fashion by performing Ronaldo's "SI-UUU" twirl.

AFRICA'S STRUGGLES

None of the five African teams at the World Cup won their first match in the group stage. Ghana lost,

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like Senegal and Cameroon, while Tunisia and Morocco drew their games. "They didn't win but I saw they can compete with the opponent," Addo said. "I hope we can improve."

WILLIAMS BROTHERS

Inaki Williams made his first competitive start for Ghana, a day after his brother, Nico, came on as a substitute for Spain in a 7-0 win over Costa Rica. Inaki Williams switched allegiance this year from Spain to Ghana, which is the country where his parents were born and left decades ago while his mother was pregnant with him.

UP NEXT

Portugal plays Uruguay on Monday. Ghana faces South Korea on the same day.

High-flying balloon characters star in Thanksgiving parade

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Throngs of spectators lined the streets of New York on Thursday as colorful, high-flying balloons helped usher in the holiday season during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The annual tradition, which dates back nearly a century, packed streets as a procession of giant inflatables and floats streamed for more than 40 blocks from Central Park to Herald Square.

Children balanced atop metal barricades and hung from scaffolding to watch the balloons amid mostly sunny skies and a slight breeze.

"Blue, Blue. There's Blue," yelled Divyam Kumar, 6, as his father helped balance him and his 4-year-old brother Aanu Aryan on a metal rail.

The youngster was referring to the star of the animated show "Blue's Clues" — not to be confused with the international cartoon sensation Bluey, an Australian cattle pup making her parade debut.

Bluey's balloon towered as tall as a four-story building and stretched as wide as seven taxi cabs.

Stuart, the one-eyed Minion, was also there to thrill the crowd.

But it was Snoopy that especially caught the eye of Brenner Chenenko, 8, even more so than the more contemporary pups.

"It's one of the classics," said the youngster from Rochester, New York, who lined the parade route with his father Nate and grandfather John Wopperer.

It was the first time the father and son had seen the parade in person. Wopperer last saw a parade live three years ago, before the pandemic sidelined the event for a year.

Snoopy, dressed as an astronaut, was followed by another old-time favorite, Papa Smurf.

This year's parade featured 16 giant balloons, 28 floats, 40 novelty and heritage inflatables, 12 marching bands, 10 performance groups, 700 clowns and one Santa Claus.

The procession of characters were joined by singer Paula Abdul, in her first parade appearance; indie pop band Fitz and the Tantrums; boy band Big Time Rush; "Blue's Clues & You!" host Josh Dela Cruz; singer Gloria Estefan; gospel singer Kirk Franklin; actor Mario Lopez; reggae star Ziggy Marley; and Miss America 2022 Emma Broyles.

Singers Joss Stone, Jordin Sparks and Betty Who were also part of the festivities, as were the stars of Peacock's "Pitch Perfect: Bumper in Berlin" — Adam Devine, Sarah Hyland and Flula Borg. Jimmy Fallon & The Roots were on a float celebrating Central Park.

President Biden and Jill Biden called into the parade, as he did last year. Biden thanked firefighters, police officers and first responders, saying, "They never take a break."

They thanked the troops and Biden said he would be reaching out to speak to some today.

Asked about their plans for the day in Nantucket, Massachusetts, the Bidens said it would involve family, and some time spent locally, thanking first responders.

In Plymouth, Massachusetts, the English settlement founded by the Pilgrims who arrived on the Mayflower, two annual events were being held to embrace "all aspects" of the holiday, town officials said.

Costumed participants were re-enacting their annual Thanksgiving Day "Pilgrim Progress" procession, representing the 51 survivors of that first brutal winter of 1621 — although Thursday's crew had better

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conditions, with sunny skies and temperatures in the 40s.

There also was a "National Day of Mourning" honoring indigenous ancestors and protesting against racism and oppression. "We are not vanquishing, We are not conquered, We are as strong as ever," a sign behind the speakers read.

World Cup fans put off by prices, beer limits commute by air

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Travel at this World Cup was supposed to be easy in the tiny host nation of Qatar, after fans had to take long flights between cities at the last three tournaments.

The eight stadiums in Qatar are in or near the capital, so fans don't have to go too far to get to matches — in theory. The country billed its World Cup as environmentally sustainable in part because of how compact it is, but the reality is quite different.

Tens of thousands of foreign fans are turning to shuttle flights between Doha and neighboring Dubai for a number of reasons — high hotel prices, a scarcity of accommodation and alcohol limits.

It might sound extreme, expensive and environmentally questionable, but the daily flights have become a popular choice as fans opt to sleep somewhere other than Qatar.

Dubai, the freewheeling commercial capital of the United Arab Emirates, is the region's top destination outside Doha. State airlines like FlyDubai, the emirate's budget carrier, are marshaling resources, operating 10 times the number of usual flights to Doha.

Neighboring Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia also have organized air shuttles to cash in on the World Cup tourism boom. Every few minutes, a Boeing or Airbus rumbles overhead Doha's old airport.

The concept of air shuttles isn't new to the Gulf, where many who live and work in ultraconservative Saudi Arabia or dry Kuwait hop over to Dubai for the weekend to drink freely and have fun in the glittering metropolis.

Unlike fans who had to take long-distance flights at the World Cups in South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014) and Russia (2018), the Dubai-Doha route is shorter in most cases.

But short flights, often defined as trips shorter than 500 kilometers (311 miles), are more polluting than long ones per person for every kilometer traveled because of how much fuel is used for take off and landing.

More than a dozen World Cup fans interviewed Thursday who chose to stay in neighboring countries said it came down to cost. Many couldn't find an affordable place to sleep in Doha, or any place at all. As hotel prices soared in the months leading up to the tournament, frugal fans scrambled for spots in Qatar's far-flung fan villages filled with canvas tents or shipping containers.

"We wanted to stay for five days in Doha. But it was too expensive. We didn't want those weird fan zones," said Ana Santos, a Brazilian fan arriving at Doha's airport on Thursday with her husband.

"In Dubai, we found a fancy hotel for not too much money. ... The flights are so crowded so we're not the only ones."

After eight years of lying idle, Doha's former airport is back to life as thousands of shuttle flight passengers squeeze through its halls. On Thursday, Qataris in traditional dress passed out juicy dates and Arabic coffee to arriving fans who cheered and snapped photos while draped in their national flags.

Other fans on shuttle flights were turned off by Qatar's alcohol restrictions. The city's few hotels are almost the only places allowed to serve alcohol, after a last-minute ban on beer in stadiums. Doha's sole liquor store is open only to Qatari residents with an official permit.

Meanwhile Dubai's pulsing nightclubs, pubs, bars and other tourist spots are awash with spirits — and at lower prices than in Doha, where a single beer goes for \$14 at the official fan festival. Even in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates' more conservative capital, tourists can buy alcohol at liquor stores without a license.

"We want to have a Dubai experience. That's more interesting for us," said Bernard Boateng Duah, a doctor from western Ghana who bought an all-inclusive Dubai hotel package that gives him match-day flights, as well as unlimited food and alcohol. "We wanted more freedom."

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Many fans described the shuttles as a fairly seamless process — arriving at the Dubai airport less than an hour before takeoff, zipping through lines without luggage and flying for about 50 minutes before landing in Doha just in time for their game.

But others found it stressful and draining.

“These are long days. It’s exhausting,” said Steven Carroll, a lab technician from Wales, whose flight back to Dubai was delayed an hour, returning him to his Dubai hotel worn-out at 4.a.m after a 24-hour day.

“The problem is you have to arrive in Qatar a good while before the match and you have to allow even more time to go through the airport.”

Fernando Moya, a 65-year-old Ecuador fan from New York, said he regretted flying in from Abu Dhabi. A technical problem with his friends’ Hayya cards, which act as Qatar entry visas, stranded his companions in the UAE capital.

Moya spent his Thursday speaking to customer service in the Doha airport and shelled out nearly \$2,000 to fly them over on a new flight.

“The logistics of this whole system are very complicated for people,” he said.

The airport on Thursday was teeming with fans from Saudi Arabia, whose citizens have bought more World Cup tickets than any other nationality after Qatar and the United States. The Saudi team’s shock victory over Argentina this week stoked even more excitement.

Riyadh, an aspiring tourism destination, has sought to benefit from the regional boost, offering those with Hayya cards two-month visas to the kingdom. Saudi student Nawaf Mohammed said World Cup fever in Riyadh is palpable, with more Westerners visible in the capital’s airport and carnivals.

The prospect of shuttle flights from the UAE or Saudi Arabia would have been unthinkable mere years ago. In 2017, the two Gulf Arab states, along with Bahrain and Egypt, imposed a boycott on energy-rich Qatar, cutting off trade and travel links over the emirate’s support for political Islam and ties with Iran. Qatar refused to back down and the embargo ended last year.

Even so, tensions linger. Bahrain, just a 45-minute flight from Doha, continues to squabble over politics and maritime borders with Qatar. Fans sleeping in the island kingdom enjoy no such easy flights.

Eyad Mohammed, who chose to stay at a beach in Bahrain, had a layover in eastern Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

“This region is not always convenient,” he said.

Iranian soccer player arrested amid World Cup scrutiny

By The Associated Press undefined

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran arrested a prominent former member of its national soccer team on Thursday over his criticism of the government as authorities grapple with nationwide protests that have cast a shadow over its competition at the World Cup.

The semiofficial Fars and Tasnim news agencies reported that Voria Ghafouri was arrested for “insulting the national soccer team and propagandizing against the government.”

Ghafouri, who was not chosen to go to the World Cup, has been an outspoken critic of Iranian authorities throughout his career. He objected to a longstanding ban on women spectators at men’s soccer matches as well as Iran’s confrontational foreign policy, which has led to crippling Western sanctions.

More recently, he expressed sympathy for the family of a 22-year-old woman whose death while in the custody of Iran’s morality police ignited the latest protests. In recent days he also called for an end to a violent crackdown on protests in Iran’s western Kurdistan region.

The reports of his arrest came ahead of Friday’s World Cup match between Iran and Wales. At Iran’s opening match, a 6-2 loss to England, the members of the Iranian national team declined to sing along to their national anthem and some fans expressed support for the protests.

The protests were ignited by the Sept. 16 death of Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish woman arrested by the morality police in the capital, Tehran. They rapidly escalated into nationwide demonstrations calling for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. The western Kurdish region of the country, where both Amini and

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Ghafouri are from, has been the epicenter of the protests. Shops were closed in the region on Thursday following calls for a general strike.

Iranian officials have not said whether Ghafouri's activism was a factor in not choosing him for the national team. He plays for the Khuzestan Foolad team in the southwestern city of Ahvaz. The club's chairman, Hamidreza Garshasbi, resigned later on Thursday, the semiofficial ILNA news agency reported, without elaborating.

The protests show no sign of waning, and mark one of the biggest challenges to Iran's ruling clerics since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought them to power. Rights groups say security forces have used unleashed live ammunition and bird shot on the protesters, as well as beating and arresting them, with much of the violence captured on video.

At least 442 protesters have been killed and more than 18,000 detained since the start of the unrest, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that has been monitoring the protests.

The U.N. Human Rights Council voted Thursday to condemn the crackdown and to create an independent fact-finding mission to investigate alleged abuses, particularly those committed against women and children.

Authorities have blamed the unrest on hostile foreign powers, without providing evidence, and say separatists and other armed groups have attacked security forces. Human Rights Activists in Iran says at least 57 security personnel have been killed, while state media have reported a higher toll.

The protesters say they are fed up after decades of social and political repression, including a strict dress code imposed on women. Young women have played a leading role in the protests, stripping off the mandatory Islamic headscarf to express their rejection of clerical rule.

Some Iranians are actively rooting against their own team at the World Cup, associating it with rulers they view as violent and corrupt. Others insist the national team, which includes players who have spoken out on social media in solidarity with the protests, represents the country's people.

The team's star forward, Sardar Azmoun, who has been vocal about the protests online, was on the bench during the opening match. In addition to Ghafouri, two other former soccer stars have been arrested for expressing support for the protests.

Other Iranian athletes have also been drawn into the struggle.

Iranian rock climber Elnaz Rekabi competed without wearing the mandatory headscarf at an international competition in South Korea in October, a move widely seen as expressing support for the protests. She received a hero's welcome from protesters upon returning to Iran, even as she told state media the move was "unintentional" in an interview that may have been given under duress.

Earlier this month, Iran's football federation threatened to punish players on its beach soccer team after it defeated Brazil at an international competition in Dubai. One of the players had celebrated after scoring a goal by mimicking a female protester cutting off her hair.

Walmart shooting raises need for violence prevention at work

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — The mass shooting Wednesday at a Walmart in Virginia was only the latest example of a workplace shooting perpetrated by an employee.

But while many companies provide active shooter training, experts say there is much less focus on how to prevent workplace violence, particularly how to identify and address worrisome behavior among employees.

Workers far too often don't know how to recognize warning signs, and even more crucially don't know how to report suspicious behavior or feel empowered to do so, according to workplace safety and human resources experts.

"We have built an industry around how to lock bad guys out. We have heavily invested in physical security measure like metal detectors, cameras and armed security guards," said James Densley, professor of criminal justice at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota, and co-founder of the nonprofit and nonpartisan research group The Violence Project. But too often in workplace shootings, he said, "this is someone who already has access to the building."

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The Walmart shooting in particular raised questions of whether employees feel empowered to speak up because it was a team leader who carried out the shooting.

Identified by Walmart as 31-year-old Andre Bing, he opened fire on fellow employees in the break room of the Chesapeake store, killing six people and leaving six others wounded. Police said he then apparently killed himself.

Employee Briana Tyler, who survived the shooting, said Bing appeared not to be aiming at anyone in particular. Tyler, who started at Walmart two months ago, said she never had a negative encounter with Bing, but others told her that he was "the manager to look out for." She said Bing had a history of writing people up for no reason.

Walmart launched a computer-based active shooter training in 2015, which focused on three pillars: avoid the danger, keep your distance and lastly, defend. Then, in 2019 after a mass shooting at an El Paso, Texas, store in which an outside gunman killed 22 people, Walmart addressed the threat to the public by discontinuing sales of certain kinds of ammunition and asked that customers no longer openly carry firearms in its stores. It now sells only hunting rifles and related ammunition.

Walmart didn't specifically respond on Wednesday to questions seeking more detail about its training and protocols to protect its own employees. The company only said that it routinely reviews its training policies and will continue to do so.

Densley said that employers need to create open channels for workers to voice concerns about employees' behavior, including confidential hotlines. He noted that too often attention is focused on the "red flags" and workers should be looking for the "yellow flags" — subtle changes in behavior, like increased anger or not showing up for work. Densley said managers need to work with those individuals to get them counseling and do regular check-ins.

In fact, the Department of Homeland Security's active shooting manual states that human resources officials have a responsibility to "create a system for reporting signs of potential violence behavior." It also encourages employees to report concerning behavior such as increased absenteeism and repeated violation of company policies.

But many employers may not have such prevention policies in place, said Liz Peterson, Quality Manager at the Society for Human Resource Management, an organization of more than 300,000 human resources professionals.

She noted that in a 2019 SHRM survey of its members, 55% of HR professionals said they didn't know if their organizations had policies to prevent workplace violence, and another 9% said they lacked such programs. That was in contrast to the 57% of HR managers who said they did have training on how to respond to violence.

A recent federal government report examining workplace violence over three decades found that workplace homicides have risen in recent years, although they remain sharply down from a peak in the mid-1990s.

Between 2014 and 2019, workplace homicides nationwide increased by 11% from 409 to 454. That was still down 58% from a peak of 1,080 in 1994, according to the report, which was released in July by the Departments of Labor, Justice and Health and Human Services. The report found that workplace homicide trends largely mirrored homicide trends nationwide.

But the country's spike in mass public shootings is raising awareness among employers of the need to address mental health in the workplace and prevent violence — and of the liabilities employers can face if they ignore warning signs, Peterson said.

In one high-profile example, the family of a victim filed a wrongful death lawsuit earlier this year against the Northern California Transportation agency, alleging it failed to address the history of threatening behavior of an employee who shot and killed nine co-workers at a light railyard in San Jose in 2021.

The transportation agency released more than 200 pages of emails and other documents showing the shooter, Samuel James Cassidy, had been the subject of four investigations into workplace conduct, and one worker had worried that Cassidy could "go postal." That expression stems from one of the deadliest workplace shooting in U.S. history, when a postal worker shot and killed 14 workers in Edmond, Oklahoma,

in 1986.

"Workplace violence is a situation that you never think is going to happen to your organization until it does, and unfortunately, it's important to prepare for them because they are becoming more commonplace," Peterson said.

Next act for Palin unclear after Alaska House losses

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Republican Sarah Palin re-emerged in Alaska politics over a decade after resigning as governor with hopes of winning the state's U.S. House seat. She had a lot going for her: unbeatable name recognition, the backing of former President Donald Trump in a state he carried twice, an unrivaled ability to attract national media attention.

But she struggled to catch fire with voters, some of whom were put off by her 2009 resignation, and ran what critics saw as a lackluster campaign against a Republican endorsed by state party leaders and a breakout Democrat who pitched herself as a regular Alaskan and ran on a platform of "fish, family and freedom."

Palin lost two elections for the House seat Republican Don Young held for 49 years before his death in March — an August special ballot to determine who would serve the remainder of his term and the Nov. 8 general election for a full two-year term. Results of the Nov. 8 election were announced Wednesday. Both ranked-choice votes were won by Democrat Mary Peltola, who is Yup'ik and with her win in the special election became the first Alaska Native to serve in Congress.

Peltola, a former state lawmaker, avoided the sniping between Palin and Republican Nick Begich, who cast the former governor as a quitter and self-promoter. Palin suggested that Begich, who entered the race last fall, months before Palin, and is from a family of prominent Democrats, was a "plant" siphoning votes from her. The two nonetheless encouraged a "rank the red" strategy ahead of this month's election in hopes of recapturing the seat for the GOP. The general election also included a Libertarian who lagged far behind.

Jim Lottsfeldt, a political consultant affiliated with a super PAC that supported Peltola, said the elections to many looked like "easy layups" for Republicans.

Palin, the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee, could have "run away" with them but didn't seem focused, he said. He cited as missteps Palin's trips outside Alaska, including one to New York days before the general election, and "goofy" events at home, including one put on by a political action committee that was sparsely attended and featured a James Brown tribute performer.

With the losses, Lottsfeldt said, the one-time conservative sensation becomes "sort of old news."

Republican strategist Brad Todd said Palin "had a lot of the characteristics that President Trump had before President Trump came along. And now there are plenty of imitators of President Trump." He said that poses a challenge for someone like Palin, who has "a lot more company in her lane than she had 12, 14 years ago."

"One challenge, and President Trump will have this challenge as well, is if you're going to be the sort of like mercenary sent to fight big battles, you need to win," Todd said.

But he said the "anti-elite vernacular" common in the Republican party comes naturally to Palin, and two election losses won't "stop her from being a very powerful surrogate for some people if she wants to."

Palin has pledged support since the election for an effort aimed at repealing a system approved by Alaska voters in 2020 that replaced party primaries with open primaries and instituted ranked-choice voting in general elections. This year's elections were the first held under the system, which Palin began railing against before the first votes were cast.

Art Mathias, a leader of the repeal effort, said Palin has a "huge audience" and will be "invaluable" in efforts to advance it.

Palin told reporters on Election Day she wasn't sure what she would be doing in two years if she lost but said "my heart is in service to Alaskans." She also said she wanted to talk with members of Congress

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about what she could do, even outside elected office, "to help ensure that Americans can trust what's going on in government."

The comments were similar to those she made in 2009 when she resigned as governor. Palin attributed her decision to step down to public records requests and ethics complaints that she said had become distractions.

Palin, a former mayor of her hometown Wasilla, made a splash in conservative politics after bursting onto the national stage in 2008 with her folksy demeanor and zingy one-liners. She wrote books, hit the speaking circuit, appeared on reality television programs, spent time as a Fox News contributor and formed a political action committee that has since disbanded.

While she largely stayed out of Alaska politics after leaving the governor's office, Palin was an early supporter of Trump's 2016 run and made headlines this year with an unsuccessful lawsuit against The New York Times.

In a June interview she bristled at critics suggestions she had left Alaska behind, saying she lives in the state, has raised her kids here and is "so Alaskan" she had recently hit a moose while driving.

Palin has been making videos through Cameo, a site where people can pay for personalized messages from celebrities. Hers are advertised at \$199.

Palin revived her 2008 mantra, "Drill, baby, drill," during the House race in calling for more oil production, and while she and Peltola were friendly, Palin argued the ranked voting system had "produced the travesty of sending a Democrat to Congress to represent Alaska, one of the reddest states in the country."

Andrew Halcro, a former Republican state lawmaker who ran for governor against Palin and was among the 48 candidates in the House special primary in June, said he doesn't think Palin "really understood and recognized the high percentage of voters who just don't like her." Palin didn't take steps to win them over or to attract Begich supporters, he added.

Begich was the second candidate eliminated in the general election after the Libertarian. When Begich's 64,392 votes were transferred in the ranked choice voting tabulation process, just over 43,000 went to Palin but about 21,500 of his voters didn't pick a second choice or gave their vote to Peltola, who defeated Palin with 55% of the vote.

But Halcro said he doesn't see Palin disappearing from the stage.

"My question is, when have people like Palin or Trump ever walked away after they've lost? ... They've just ratcheted up their rhetoric," he said.

Twitter, others slip on removing hate speech, EU review says

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Twitter took longer to review hateful content and removed less of it in 2022 compared with the previous year, according to European Union data released Thursday.

The EU figures were published as part of an annual evaluation of online platforms' compliance with the 27-nation bloc's code of conduct on disinformation.

Twitter wasn't alone — most other tech companies signed up to the voluntary code also scored worse. But the figures could foreshadow trouble for Twitter in complying with the EU's tough new online rules after owner Elon Musk fired many of the platform's 7,500 full-time workers and an untold number of contractors responsible for content moderation and other crucial tasks.

The EU report, carried out over six weeks in the spring, found Twitter assessed just over half of the notifications it received about illegal hate speech within 24 hours, down from 82% in 2021.

In comparison, the amount of flagged material Facebook reviewed within 24 hours fell to 64%, Instagram slipped to 56.9% and YouTube dipped to 83.3%. TikTok came in at 92%, the only company to improve.

The amount of hate speech Twitter removed after it was flagged up slipped to 45.4% from 49.8% the year before. TikTok's removal rate fell by a quarter to 60%, while Facebook and Instagram only saw minor declines. Only YouTube's takedown rate increased, surging to 90%.

"It's worrying to see a downward trend in reviewing notifications related to illegal hate speech by social

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media platforms," European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova tweeted. "Online hate speech is a scourge of a digital age and platforms need to live up to their commitments."

Twitter didn't respond to a request for comment. Emails to several staff on the company's European communications team bounced back as undeliverable.

Musk's \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter last month fanned widespread concern that purveyors of lies and misinformation would be allowed to flourish on the site. The billionaire Tesla CEO, who has frequently expressed his belief that Twitter had become too restrictive, has been reinstating suspended accounts, including former President Donald Trump's.

Twitter faces more scrutiny in Europe by the middle of next year, when new EU rules aimed at protecting internet users' online safety will start applying to the biggest online platforms. Violations could result in huge fines of up to 6% of a company's annual global revenue.

France's online regulator Arcom said it received a reply from Twitter after writing to the company earlier this week to say it was concerned about the effect that staff departures would have on Twitter's "ability maintain a safe environment for its users."

Arcom also asked the company to confirm it can meet its "legal obligations" in fighting online hate speech and that it is committed to implementing the new EU online rules. Arcom said it received a response from Twitter and that it will "study their response," without giving more details.

Tech companies that signed up to the EU's disinformation code agree to commit to measures aimed at reducing disinformation and file regular reports on whether they're living up to their promises, though there's little in the way of punishment.

Ronaldo becomes 1st male player to score at 5 World Cups

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Cristiano Ronaldo became the first male player to score at five World Cups with a goal for Portugal against Ghana on Thursday.

The 37-year-old striker converted a penalty in the 65th minute to give Portugal a 1-0 lead.

He has now scored in every World Cup since his first in 2006, when he converted a penalty against Iran in the group stage.

Ronaldo scored one goal at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, another at the 2014 tournament in Brazil, and four in Russia in 2018.

Ronaldo extended his men's record tally of international goals to 118.

Brazil forward Marta has scored in five Women's World Cups.

Eccentric art flourishes along outskirts of Buenos Aires

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Why build a rooftop water tank in the shape of a Teletubby? Or go to the effort of installing a replica of the Eiffel Tower atop a semi-abandoned building?

It's often difficult to explain the proliferation of unusual artwork dotting the vast urban belt of some 11 million people outside Argentina's capital of Buenos Aires.

In this immense swath of tree-lined neighborhoods co-existing with areas of chaos — apparently built with little if any urban planning — many residents have erected grandiose, eyebrow-raising surprises.

The creators are usually construction workers or shop owners, although some artists are seeking to leave their signature in their neighborhood.

Pedro Flores defines the outskirts of Buenos Aires as a "post-apocalyptic paradise" close to the capital's center. He and two friends run an Instagram account, "The Walking Conurban," a play on the words "conurbano bonaerense," as the roughly 40 municipalities are known in Spanish.

The page publishes images daily of these suburbs, often tinged with a bit of magical realism: a dinosaur on the dirt streets of a poor neighborhood; two Minions dolls greeting people from a home; a Statue of Liberty in the middle of a pasture.

Here are some of the works The Associated Press visited.

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THE EIFFEL TOWER

On a rooftop at the corner of a street in the town of La Tablada stands a replica of the Eiffel Tower. Miguel Muñoz, 58, proudly explains how his father, a blacksmith, built it out of leftover iron with the guidance of brochures from the French embassy.

"He gave it to me on my birthday, that's why I don't sell it," Muñoz said.

The tower is a symbol in the neighborhood. "I took it down once to paint it and the neighbors went crazy thinking someone had stolen it," Muñoz said.

THE KETTLE

On the terrace of a two-story house stands a large water tank in the shape of a kettle, like the ones used by Argentines to make their beloved tea-like infusions known as mate. It was built in 1957 by Italian immigrant Victorio Smerilli and some relatives.

"They decided to do it as a replica of the 'Victor' kettle they sold in a store located downstairs in this same house," said Gustavo Smerilli, the immigrant's grandson.

Adriana Paoli runs an art workshop in the building and she is pushing a project to restore the kettle.

"If I say, 'I have my workshop in the kettle,' everyone knows the place," she said.

STATUE OF LIBERTY

In the municipality of General Rodríguez, behind a humble house, a replica of a Statue of Liberty rises above a field where horses and cows graze.

The 15-meter- (49-foot-) high structure is a leftover from the "Liberty Motocross" circuit operated there years ago, the caretaker of the property, Pablo Sebastián, said.

GORILLA OF THE BOAT HOUSE

Sitting peacefully on a rock, next to a door of a boat-shaped house in the town of San Miguel, the gorilla Pepe drinks from a mate gourd. The creator of the house and the gorilla statue is sculptor and painter Héctor Duarte, who died in 2020.

Duarte's family has received offers to buy the cement sculpture, but they refuse to sell.

BUSTS OF EVITA AND JUAN PERÓN

In the patio of the same house where Pepe the gorilla presides, Duarte's busts of Juan Domingo Perón, three-time president of Argentina, and his wife, Eva María Duarte, can be seen embracing.

Duarte's family lends the sculptures out for official ceremonies.

MONTE GRANDE WATER TANK

The enormous water tank in Monte Grande's main plaza became a work of art in 2020 when, at the municipality's request, artist Leandro García Pimentel painted a mural on it depicting fire, earth, air and water.

The water tank has become a meeting point and public ceremonies, and newlyweds pose in front of it for photos.

DINOSAUR

On a street in front of bricklayer Daniel Niz's house, in the poor Sol de Oro neighborhood in Ezeiza, a dinosaur greets visitors.

"My son wanted a rubber (dinosaur) and it was expensive, so I decided to make this out of recycled things and materials," Niz said.

He previously had the dinosaur on a patio inside his house but he decided to put it outside so people could take photos of the 1.2-ton structure.

HAND OF GOD WATER TANK

A water tank made to look like a large hand holding a soccer ball stands on the roof of a house in the La Cumbre neighborhood on the outskirts of La Plata, recalling the famous goal Diego Maradona scored with his hand against England in the 1986 World Cup.

It was designed by a deceased mason who was well known to locals.

COLOSSEUM, TOWER OF PISA and ARCH OF TRIUMPH

Replicas of these European masterworks in the municipality of Ituzaingó were carried out by artist and architect Rubén Díaz, who is considered a "generator of fantasies." Díaz's goal is in part to let his neighbors "travel" to places they would normally never see.

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The Colosseum, which is 200 square meters (2,153 square feet) and 8 meters (26 feet) high, recreates the Roman amphitheater.

The Argentine version of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris is 11 meters (36 feet) high and has the late comedian Carlitos Balá immortalized on one side.

Meanwhile, the Leaning Tower of Pisa is located in the front garden of a private property. Díaz has proposed building the Great Wall of China in 2023.

HOMER'S GRILL

Homer Simpson, the father from the TV series "The Simpsons," smiles and holds up his thumb from atop the aluminum roof of a restaurant in the town of Ciudadela. On the front of the restaurant, which serves cuts of grilled meat, is the silhouette of Maradona running with a ball.

TELETUBBY WATER TANK

Po, the red Teletubby with the circular antenna, smiles as she surveys a long and busy highway. But Po isn't just there for decoration — she is the lid of a building's water tank in the town of Ciudadela.

Ignacio Castro, who rents the apartment just below the tank, said that when he was about to move in he found the head of the character of the famous children's show in the kitchen. He gave it to his uncle but the owner of the building demanded it be returned.

FIGURES OF IMMIGRANTS

Also in Ciudadela, some 20 human-scale figures appear in a row in the entrance garden to the home of Antonio Ierace, an Italian immigrant who arrived in Argentina in 1949 and worked as a bricklayer.

As a hobby, he designed statues dedicated to migrants, including a man carrying two suitcases, and homages to workers such as hairdressers and blacksmiths.

HOUSE WITH THE TRANSFORMERS

In the town of Adrogué, gardener Juan Acosta cuts the grass in his yard where there are six robots that resemble Transformers from the 1980s U.S. television program. Passersby can see the Transformers from the sidewalk.

"Curious people take photos daily," Acosta said of the robots made from recycled materials.

EU nations fail to close rift on gas prices as cold sets in

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — On winter's doorstep, European Union nations again failed to bridge bitter disagreements over a natural gas price cap Thursday as they struggle to effectively shield 450 million citizens from massive increases in their utility bills.

An emergency meeting of energy ministers only showed how the energy crisis tied to Russia's war in Ukraine has divided the 27-nation bloc into almost irreconcilable blocs.

"The discussion was quite heated, and you all know that there are very divergent views," said Czech Industry Minister Jozef Síkela, who chaired the meeting where ministers could not agree on when and how a price cap on gas purchases should kick in.

A massive August spike in natural gas prices stunned all but the wealthiest in Europe, forcing the bloc to look for a cap to contain volatile prices that are fueling inflation.

But the EU is deadlocked between nations demanding cheaper gas to ease household bills — including Greece, Spain, Belgium, France and Poland — and those like Germany and the Netherlands insisting supplies are at risk if a cap stops EU countries from buying gas above a certain price.

A solution was nowhere near the horizon — to the frustration of many.

"It's already minus 10 (Celsius) in Poland," said the nation's energy minister, Anna Moskwa. "It's winter now."

The inability to find a compromise on the price cap also held up plans for joint gas purchases and a solidarity mechanism to help the neediest member states because the measures would be agreed on as a package.

Another emergency energy meeting was set for Dec. 13.

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"The differences are really still major," said Dutch Energy Minister Rob Jetten. "It means there is an awful amount of work ahead over the next two weeks."

Natural gas and electricity prices have soared as Moscow slashed gas supplies to Europe used for heating, electricity and industrial processes. European officials have accused Russia of energy warfare to punish EU countries for supporting Ukraine.

So finding a deal is not only about providing warmth to citizens but also about showing a united front to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Talks have dragged on for months, and even if a summit of EU leaders proclaimed some sort of breakthrough last month, nothing has been visible on the ground. Nations had been waiting for a proposal from the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, to set a threshold for a price cap, and when it came Tuesday, there was dismay and accusations it could never work.

The commission set a threshold for a "safety price ceiling" to kick in if prices exceed 275 euros per megawatt hour for two weeks and if they are 58 euros higher than the price for liquefied natural gas on world markets.

In political language, it means that such a system might not even have averted hikes as high as in August.

"Setting a ceiling at 275 euros is not actually a ceiling," said Greek Energy Minister Konstantinos Skrekas, who called for a cap that could go as low as 150 euros.

"We are losing valuable time without results," he added.

In comparison, the price stood at 123 euros per megawatt-hour on Europe's TTF benchmark Thursday. Because prices have fallen since the summertime peaks, diplomats have said the urgency has abated somewhat, even though it could pick up quickly again if the weather is colder than normal and supplies get tight.

"We want to be well-prepared for next year, too, and that requires a forceful joint approach; and fortunately, we have a few weeks left to get a deal on this," Jetten said.

Some 15 nations are united around the view a lower cap should be set, but Germany and the Netherlands lead another group wanting to ensure that gas supply ships would not bypass Europe because they could get better prices elsewhere.

"Security of supply is paramount. Europe still has to be an attractive gas market," Estonian Economy Minister Riina Sikkut said.

As a result of trade disruptions tied to Russia's war in Ukraine, EU nations have reduced the overall share of Russian natural gas imports to the EU from 40% before the invasion to around 7%. And gas storage is as good as full, far exceeding targets.

The EU has relied on increased imports of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, including from the United States, to help address the fall in Russian supplies.

Foxconn apologizes for pay dispute at China factory

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writers

BEIJING (AP) — The company that assembles Apple Inc.'s iPhones apologized Thursday for a pay dispute that triggered employee protests at a factory where anti-virus controls have slowed production.

Employees complained Foxconn Technology Group changed the terms of wages offered to attract them to the factory in the central city of Zhengzhou. Foxconn is trying to rebuild the workforce after employees walked out last month over complaints about unsafe conditions.

Videos on social media showed police in white protective suits kicking and clubbing workers during the protest that erupted Tuesday and lasted into the next day.

Foxconn, the biggest contract assembler of smartphones and other electronics for Apple and other global brands, blamed a "technical error" in the process of adding new employees and said they would be paid what they were promised.

"We apologize for an input error in the computer system and guarantee that the actual pay is the same as agreed and the official recruitment posters," said a company statement. It promised to "try its best to

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actively solve the concerns and reasonable demands of employees.”

Late Wednesday, Apple said it had people on the ground at Foxconn’s Zhengzhou facility.

“We are reviewing the situation and working closely with Foxconn to ensure their employees’ concerns are addressed,” the company based in Cupertino, California, said.

The dispute comes as the ruling Communist Party tries to contain a surge in coronavirus cases without shutting down factories, as it did in 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Its tactics include “closed-loop management,” or having employees live at their workplaces without outside contact.

Authorities promised last month to reduce economic disruption by cutting quarantine times and making other changes to China’s “zero-COVID” strategy, which aims to isolate every case. Despite that, the infection surge has prompted authorities to suspend access to neighborhoods and factories and to close office buildings, shops and restaurants in parts of many cities.

On Thursday, people in eight districts of Zhengzhou with a total of 6.6 million residents were told to stay home for five days. Daily mass testing was ordered for a “war of annihilation” against the virus.

Apple earlier warned iPhone 14 deliveries would be delayed after employees walked out of the Zhengzhou factory and access to the industrial zone around the facility was suspended following outbreaks.

To attract new workers, Foxconn offered 25,000 yuan (\$3,500) for two months of work, according to employees, or almost 50% more than news reports say its highest wages usually are.

Employees complained that after they arrived, they were told they had to work an additional two months at lower pay to receive the higher wage, according to an employee, Li Sanshan.

Foxconn offered up to 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) to new hires who choose to leave, the finance news outlet Cailianshe reported, citing unidentified recruiting agents.

Foxconn’s statement Thursday said employees who leave will receive unspecified “care subsidies” but gave no details. It promised “comprehensive support” for those who stay.

The protests in Zhengzhou come amid public frustration over restrictions that have confined millions of people to their homes. Videos on social media show residents in some areas tearing down barricades set up to enforce neighborhood closures.

Foxconn, headquartered in New Taipei City, Taiwan, earlier denied what it said were comments online that employees with the virus lived in factory dormitories.

Holiday shopping kicks off with inflation dampening spirits

By ANNE D’INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — While Black Friday will mark a return to familiar holiday shopping patterns, uncertainty still remains.

The U.S. job market remains strong, consumer spending is resilient and inflation has been slowing. But elevated prices for food, rent, gasoline and other household costs have taken a toll on shoppers.

As a result, many are reluctant to spend unless there is a big sale and are being more selective with what they will buy — in many cases, trading down to cheaper stuff and less expensive stores.

Shoppers are also dipping more into their savings, turning increasingly to “buy now, pay later” services like Afterpay that allow users to pay for items in installments, as well as running up their credit cards at a time when the Federal Reserve is hiking rates to cool the U.S. economy.

Such financial hardships could help drive shoppers to look for bargains.

Isela Dalencia, who was shopping for household essentials like detergent at a Walmart in Secaucus, New Jersey, earlier this week, said she’s delaying buying holiday gifts until Cyber Monday — the Monday after Thanksgiving — when online sales rev up. Then, she will wait again until the week before Christmas to get the best deals, unlike last year when she started buying before Black Friday.

“I am shopping less,” Dalencia said, noting she will spend about \$700 for holiday gifts this year, one-third less than last year.

Katie Leach, a social worker in Manhattan, was also browsing the aisles at Walmart but said she will start holiday shopping during the first week of December as usual. This time, however, she’ll be relying more on bargains, her credit card and “buy now, pay later” services to get her through the shopping season

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because of surging prices on food and other household expenses.

"The money is not going as far as last year," Leach said.

This year's trends are a contrast from a year ago when consumers were buying early out of fear of not getting what they needed amid clogs in the supply network. Stores didn't have to discount much because they were struggling to bring in items.

But some pandemic habits are sticking around. Many retailers that closed stores on Thanksgiving Day and instead pushed discounts on their websites to thin out crowds at stores are still holding onto those strategies, despite a return to normalcy.

Major retailers including Walmart and Target are again closing their stores on Thanksgiving. And many moved away from doorbusters, the deeply marked down items offered for a limited time that drew crowds. Instead, the discounted items are available throughout the month, on Black Friday or the holiday weekend.

Against today's economic backdrop, the National Retail Federation — the largest retail trade group — expects holiday sales growth will slow to a range of 6% to 8%, from the blistering 13.5% growth of a year ago. However, these figures, which include online spending, aren't adjusted for inflation so real spending could even be down from a year ago.

Adobe Analytics expects online sales to be up 2.5% from Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, a slowdown from last year's 8.6% pace when shoppers were uncertain about returning to physical stores.

Analysts consider the five-day Black Friday weekend, which includes Cyber Monday, a key barometer of shoppers' willingness to spend, particularly this year. The two-month period between Thanksgiving and Christmas represents about 20% of the retail industry's annual sales.

While Black Friday still has a strong place in the U.S. among shoppers, it has lost stature over the last decade as stores opened on Thanksgiving and shopping shifted to Amazon and other online retailers. Stores have further diluted the day's status by promoting Black Friday sales throughout the month. This year, stores began sales earlier than last year to get shoppers to spread out their buying.

Plenty of shoppers like Lolita Cordero from Brooklyn, New York, are sitting out Black Friday.

"I'm shopping early, trying to get things on sale, discount, or clearance — and I use coupons," Cordero said. "I never did Black Friday. I hear it's a mess, and people get hurt."

Still, some experts believe Black Friday will again be the busiest shopping day this year, according to Sensormatic, which tracks customer traffic. Consumers are also back to shopping at physical stores amid easing worries about COVID-19. In fact, more stores opened than closed in the U.S. last year for the first time since 2016 — and that gap is only widening this year, according to Coresight Research, a retail advisory and research firm.

US aid to Ukraine puts pressure on Pentagon's arms stockpile

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The intense firefight over Ukraine has the Pentagon rethinking its weapons stockpiles. If another major war broke out today, would the United States have enough ammunition to fight?

It's a question confronting Pentagon planners, not only as they aim to supply Ukraine for a war with Russia that could stretch years longer, but also as they look ahead to a potential conflict with China.

Russia is firing as many as 20,000 rounds a day, ranging from bullets for automatic rifles to truck-sized cruise missiles. Ukraine is answering with as many as 7,000 rounds a day, firing 155 mm howitzer rounds, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and now NASAMS air defense munitions, and thousands of rounds of small arms fire.

Much of Ukraine's firepower is being supplied through U.S. government-funded weapons that are pushed almost weekly to the front lines. On Wednesday, the Biden administration announced an additional round of aid that will provide 20 million more rounds of small arms ammunition to Kyiv.

"We've not been in a position where we've got only a few days of some critical munition left," Pentagon comptroller Michael McCord told reporters this month. "But we are now supporting a partner who is."

U.S. defense production lines are not scaled to supply a major land war, and some, like for the Stinger,

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were previously shut down.

That's putting pressure on U.S. reserves and has officials asking whether U.S. weapons stockpiles are big enough. Would the U.S. be ready to respond to a major conflict today, for example if China invaded Taiwan?

"What would happen if something blew up in Indo-Pacom? Not five years from now, not 10 years from now, what if it happened next week?" Bill LaPlante, the Pentagon's top weapons buyer, said, referring to the military's Indo-Pacific Command. He spoke at a defense acquisitions conference this month at George Mason University in Virginia.

"What do we have in any degree of quantity? That will actually be effective? Those are the questions we're asking right this minute," he said.

The Army uses many of the same munitions that have proven most critical in Ukraine, including High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, known as HIMARS, Stinger missiles and 155 mm howitzer rounds, and is now reviewing its stockpile requirements, Doug Bush, the Army's assistant secretary for acquisition, told reporters Monday.

"They're seeing what Ukraine is using, what we can produce and how fast we can ramp up, all of which are factors you would work into, 'OK, how (big) does your pre-war stockpile need to be?" Bush said. "The slower you ramp up, the bigger the pile needs to be at the start."

The military aid packages the U.S. sends either pull inventory from stockpiles or fund contracts with industry to step up production. At least \$19 billion in military aid has been committed to date, including 924,000 artillery rounds for 155mm howitzers, more than 8,500 Javelin anti-tank systems, 1,600 Stinger anti-aircraft systems and hundreds of vehicles and drones. It's also provided advanced air defense systems and 38 HIMARS, although the Pentagon does not disclose how many rounds of ammunition it sends with the rocket systems.

The infusion of weapons is raising questions on Capitol Hill.

This month, the administration asked Congress to provide \$37 billion more in military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the post-election legislative session, and to approve it before Republicans take control of the House in January. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, who is seeking to become speaker, has warned that Republicans would not support writing a "blank check" for Ukraine.

Even with fresh money, stockpiles cannot be quickly replenished. Several of the systems proving most vital in Ukraine had their production lines shut down years ago. Keeping a production line open is expensive, and the Army had other spending priorities.

The Pentagon awarded Raytheon a \$624 million contract for 1,300 new Stinger missiles in May, but the company said it will not be able to increase production until next year due to parts shortages.

"The Stinger line was shut down in 2008," LaPlante said. "Really, who did that? We all did it. You did it. We did it," he said, referring to Congress and the Pentagon's decision not to fund continued production of the Army's anti-aircraft munition, which can be launched by a soldier or mounted to a platform or truck.

Based on an analysis of past Army budget documents, Center for Strategic and International Studies senior adviser Mark Cancian estimates that the 1,600 Stinger systems the U.S. has provided to Ukraine represent about one-quarter of its total arsenal.

The HIMARS system, which Ukraine has used so effectively in its counteroffensive, faces some of the same challenges, LaPlante said.

"The thing now that is saving Ukraine, and that everybody around the world wants, we stopped production of it," he said.

HIMARS production was shut down by the Army from about 2014 to 2018, LaPlante said. The Army is now trying to ramp up production to build up to eight a month, or 96 a year, Bush said.

HIMARS effectiveness in Ukraine has increased interest elsewhere, too. Poland, Lithuania and Taiwan have put in orders, even as the U.S. works to rush more to Ukraine. If the conflict drags on and more HIMARS ammunition is prioritized for Ukraine, that could potentially limit U.S. troops' access to the rounds for live-fire training.

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The Pentagon this month announced a \$14.4 million contract to speed production of new HIMARS to replenish its stocks.

"This conflict has revealed that munitions production in the United States and with our allies is likely insufficient for major land wars," said Ryan Brobst, an analyst at the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

The U.S. also recently announced it would be supplying Ukraine with four Avenger air defense systems, portable launchers that can be mounted on tracked or wheeled vehicles, to provide another shorter-range option against the Iranian drones being used by Russia's forces. But the Avenger systems rely on Stinger missiles, too.

Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said stockpile concerns were taken into account.

"We wouldn't have provided these Stinger missiles if we didn't feel that we could," Singh said at a recent Pentagon briefing.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict catches up with Qatar World Cup

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — It was uncharted territory for the Israeli journalist. Wandering through the rustic outdoor marketplace in Doha before the start of the World Cup, he zeroed in on a Qatari man in his traditional headdress and white flowing robe and asked for an interview.

"Which channel?" the Qatari asked. The journalist replied he was from Kan, Israel's public broadcaster.

The Qatari was stunned. "Where?"

"Israel," the journalist repeated. A split-second later, the interview was over.

The exchange ricocheted around social media, reflecting the latest political flash point at the first World Cup in the Arab world — never mind that neither Israeli nor Palestinian national teams are competing in the tournament.

Controversy has followed Israelis and Palestinians pouring into Doha, revealing just how entrenched and emotive their violent century-old conflict remains, including Israel's open-ended occupation of lands Palestinians want for a future state.

Palestinians shared footage of the Doha encounter between the Qatari man and the Israeli journalist, along with other clips of Palestinians and Qataris angrily confronting Israeli reporters live on TV. They viewed it as proof that although Qatar has permitted Israelis to fly directly to Doha and receive consular support for the first time in history, the conservative Muslim emirate has no intention of cozying up to Israel.

Israel's Channel 13 sports reporter, Tal Shorrer, said he has been shoved, insulted and accosted by Palestinians and other Arab fans during his live reports from the tournament.

"You are killing babies!" a few Arab fans yelled as they rammed into him during a broadcast this week.

Qatari media meanwhile has published some such videos with the caption: "No to normalization." Officials in Qatar, with their history of public support to Palestinians, have insisted the temporary opening to Israelis was purely to comply with FIFA hosting requirements — not a step to normalizing ties like neighboring Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates did in 2020. Qatar has warned a spike in violence in the occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip would derail the arrangement.

Nonetheless, thousands of Israeli soccer fans are expected to descend on Doha for the World Cup, diplomats say, including some on 10 direct flights planned over the next month.

Many Israeli fans marvel over the intriguing novelty of being in a country that has no diplomatic relations with Israel. Security-minded citizens remark how safe they feel.

"My friends and family thought it could be dangerous but it's fine," said Eli Agami, an aviation executive who lives near Tel Aviv. "I don't go around telling people but I think no one cares if you're Israeli or you're Jewish. Everyone just cares about the game."

Six Israeli diplomats have set up shop at a travel agency office in Doha, ready to respond to crises large and small. To limit potential problems, the Foreign Ministry has launched a campaign urging Israelis to lie low.

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"We want to avoid any friction with other fans and local authorities," said Alon Lavie, a member of the delegation, citing legions of fans from Iran, Saudi Arabia and other countries either hostile or frosty toward Israel now flooding Qatar. "We want to remind (Israelis) ... you don't need to shove your fingers in other people's eyes."

Israelis have made themselves at home among Doha's glittering skyscrapers. Qatar's first kosher kitchen set up near the airport, supplying hotels and fan zones with the classic eggy Jewish challah bread and olive and hummus sandwiches. They plan to cook other food for the Jewish Sabbath that starts Friday at sundown, with all ingredients conforming to kosher dietary laws.

"We have received many, many questions and requests," said Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, who oversees the effort.

Israel's main channels have been allowed to broadcast from Doha, providing Israeli viewers with continuous coverage of the matches. But unlike other major foreign networks centrally located in downtown Doha, the Israelis roam around without a formal studio.

Shorrer said that while interactions with Qatari officials had been perfectly pleasant, the streets were a different story. He said he advises Israeli fans to hide their Jewish kippas and ditch their Stars of David so as not to provoke hostility. When a cellphone salesman noticed his friend's settings in Hebrew, he exploded with anger, screaming at the Israeli to get out of Doha.

"I was so excited to come in with an Israeli passport, thinking it was going to be something positive," he said. "It's sad, it's unpleasant. People were cursing and threatening us."

Palestinian fans from across the Arab world — including descendants of those who fled or were forced from their homes in the 1948 war over Israel's creation — traipsed through the streets of Doha this week draped in Palestinian flags. Some also sported Palestinian armbands.

A group of young Palestinians who live in Doha chanted, "Free Palestine!" while marching through Doha's historic Souq Waqif market on Sunday.

"We want everyone to know about the occupation and what people experience in Palestine so that more people support us," said 26-year-old marcher Sarah Shadid.

She laughed awkwardly when asked about the influx of Israeli fans.

"I'm a little bit upset," she said, adding she was sure their presence was not Qatar's choice. Doha mediates between Israel and the Hamas militant group and sends cash for the salaries of civil servants in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

When FIFA announced the unprecedented direct flights from Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv to Doha, Qatari authorities promised the travel arrangement also would apply to Palestinians in both the occupied West Bank and Gaza, which has been under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade for 15 years, ever since Hamas seized control there.

But five days into the tournament, it remained unclear how officials would carry out that promise.

A senior Israeli diplomat, Lior Haiat, said all Palestinian fans seeking to fly out of Israel's airport must get Israeli security approval to leave and return — an often-grueling and unpredictable process. "It takes a while," he acknowledged.

Imad Qaraqra, spokesman of the Palestinian General Authority for Civil Affairs, said he hadn't heard of any Palestinians requesting Israeli permission to leave from Ben Gurion. Palestinians from the West Bank traveled to Qatar this week from Jordan's airport, while Palestinians in Gaza exited into Egypt through the enclave's Rafah border crossing.

Palestinian fans who made the long journey said they felt their attendance at the world's biggest sporting event served a political purpose.

"I am here as a reminder that in 2022, our land is still occupied," said Moawya Maher, a 31-year-old businessman from Hebron, a particularly tense West Bank city. He was dancing at a concert at the FIFA Fan Festival, wearing a Palestinian flag as a cape. "I suppose it's a miserable situation. But I'm also proud."

Russian Duma gives LGBTQ 'propaganda' bill final approval

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MOSCOW (AP) — Russian lawmakers on Thursday gave their final approval to a bill that significantly expands restrictions on activities seen as promoting gay rights in the country, another step in a years-long crackdown on the country's embattled LGBTQ community.

The new bill expands a ban on what authorities call "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" to minors, established by legislation dubbed the "gay propaganda" law. It was adopted by the Kremlin in 2013 in an effort to promote "traditional values" in Russia.

This year, the lawmakers moved to ban spreading such information to people aged 18 and older.

The bill was approved in the third and final reading on Thursday by the State Duma, the lower house of parliament. It will go next to the upper house, the Federation Council, and then to President Vladimir Putin, whose signature will give it legal force.

The new bill outlaws all advertising, media and online resources books, films and theater productions deemed to contain such "propaganda," a concept loosely defined in the bill. The 2013 ban was often enacted against any depictions of same-sex unions and used as a tool to crack down on LGBTQ rights groups and activists.

Violations are punishable by fines. If committed by non-residents, they can lead to their expulsion from Russia. The fines range from 100,000 to 2 million rubles (\$1,660-\$33,000). For some violations, foreigners could face 15 days' detention prior to expulsion.

The bill does not make violations a criminal offense. Russian law stipulates that the criminal code can be amended only through an independent bill. Some lawmakers have suggested they favor such a measure.

Russia explicitly outlawed same-sex marriages in 2020 by adopting amendments to the country's Constitution that, among other things, stipulated that the "institution of marriage is a union between a man and a woman."

Today in History: November 25, Fidel Castro dies at 90

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Nov. 25, the 329th day of 2022. There are 36 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 25, 2016, Fidel Castro, who led his rebels to victorious revolution in 1959, embraced Soviet-style communism and defied the power of 10 U.S. presidents during his half-century of rule in Cuba, died at age 90.

On this date:

In 1783, the British evacuated New York during the Revolutionary War.

In 1914, baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio was born in Martinez, California.

In 1915, a new version of the Ku Klux Klan, targeting blacks, Jews, Catholics and immigrants, was founded by William Joseph Simmons.

In 1947, movie studio executives meeting in New York agreed to blacklist the "Hollywood Ten" who'd been cited for contempt of Congress the day before.

In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a slight stroke.

In 1961, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Enterprise, was commissioned.

In 1963, the body of President John F. Kennedy was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery; his widow, Jacqueline, lighted an "eternal flame" at the gravesite.

In 1986, the Iran-Contra affair erupted as President Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Edwin Meese revealed that profits from secret arms sales to Iran had been diverted to Nicaraguan rebels.

In 1999, Elian Gonzalez, a 5-year-old Cuban boy, was rescued by a pair of sport fishermen off the coast of Florida, setting off an international custody battle.

In 2001, as the war in Afghanistan entered its eighth week, CIA officer Johnny "Mike" Spann was killed during a prison uprising in Mazar-e-Sharif, becoming America's first combat casualty of the conflict.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security,

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and appointed Tom Ridge to be its head.

In 2009, Toyota said it would replace the gas pedals on 4 million vehicles in the United States because the pedals could get stuck in the floor mats and cause sudden acceleration.

Ten years ago: Rioters stormed a Muslim Brotherhood headquarters building in northern Egypt on the third day of street battles following a power grab by President Mohammed Morsi. YouTube announced that "Gangnam Style" by South Korean rapper PSY had become the site's most viewed video to that time, with more than 805 million viewings.

Five years ago: On what was designated as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, President Emmanuel Macron launched an initiative to combat violence and harassment against women in France and change what he described as France's sexist culture. A volcano on the Indonesian island of Bali rumbled to life, temporarily disrupting some international flights to the popular tourist destination. Veteran Hollywood actor Rance Howard, the father of director Ron Howard, died at the age of 89.

One year ago: France launched a plan to give COVID-19 booster shots to all adults. A methane explosion in a coal mine in Siberia quickly filled the mine with toxic smoke; authorities said 46 miners and five rescuers were killed. Giant balloons once again wafted through miles of Manhattan as the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade returned in full, a year after being crimped by the coronavirus pandemic. Italy's government said National Geographic magazine's famed green-eyed "Afghan Girl," Sharbat Gulla, had arrived in Italy as part of the West's evacuation of Afghans following the Taliban takeover of the country.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kathryn Crosby is 89. Actor Christopher Riordan is 85. Pro Football Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs is 82. Singer Bob Lind is 80. Author, actor and economist Ben Stein is 78. Actor John Larroquette is 75. Actor Tracey Walter is 75. Movie director Jonathan Kaplan is 75. Author Charlaine Harris is 71. Retired MLB All-Star Bucky Dent is 71. Dance judge Bruno Tonioli (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 67. Singer Amy Grant is 62. Former NFL quarterback Bernie Kosar is 59. Rock musician Eric Grossman (K's Choice) is 58. Rock musician Scott Mercado is 58. Rock singer-musician Tim Armstrong is 57. Actor Steve Harris is 57. Actor Billy Burke is 56. Singer Stacy Lattisaw is 56. Rock musician Rodney Sheppard (Sugar Ray) is 56. Rapper-producer Erick Sermon is 54. Actor Jill Hennessy is 53. Actor Christina Applegate is 51. Actor Eddie Steeples is 49. Actor Kristian Nairn is 47. Former NFL quarterback Donovan McNabb is 46. Actor Jill Flint is 45. Actor Jerry Ferrara is 43. Actor Joel Kinnaman is 43. Actor Valerie Azlynn is 42. Former first daughter Barbara Pierce Bush is 41. Former first daughter Jenna Bush Hager is 41. Actor Katie Cassidy is 36. Actor Stephanie Hsu is 32. Contemporary Christian singer Jamie Grace is 31.