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Chicken Soup
for the Soul



“Every child deserves a champion--an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can possibly be.”

RITA F. PIERSON

Groton Community Calendar

Saturday, Dec. 3

- North Area Honor Band at NSU
- Wrestling Tournament at Clark, 10 a.m.
- Junior High GBB Jamboree in Groton, 10 a.m.
(Schools Participating: Clark/Willow Lake, Enemy Swim Day School (K-8), Mobridge-Pollock Schools, Waubay-Summit, Groton Area)
- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Olive Grove Tour of Homes, 4 p.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 4

- Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.
- St. John's worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.; Zion's worship with communion, 11 a.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.
- United Methodist Worship with Communion (Conde, 8:30 a.m.; Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 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.
- Open Gym: Grade JK-8, 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Grades 6-12, 3:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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

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

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Three Wolves Grab Match Victories in Dual Loss to No. 11 Parkside

Kenosha, Wis. – The No. 20 Northern State University wrestling team fell to No. 11 Wisconsin Parkside on Friday evening in NSIC dual action. The Wolves won three matches in a dual that saw six decisions and four major decisions.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 10, UWP 24
Records: NSU 1-2 (0-1 NSIC) UWP 2-0 (1-0 NSIC)

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Wisconsin Parkside jumped out to a 10-0 lead through the first three weights, however No. 7 Wyatt Turnquist shut down the Rangers win streak

- The Wolves 149-pounder defeated Jalen Spuhler in an 8-4 decision where he tallied two take-downs, a reversal, an escape, and a riding time point

- UWP rallied at 157 and 165 pounds, notching decision wins from two of their ranked wrestlers in No. 10 Ben Durocher over Izaak Hunsley and No. 1 Shane Gantz over Chase Bloomquist

- Kelby Hawkins added the second decision win of the evening for the Wolves in the 174-pound bout, defeating Eric Bauer in a 5-2 match

- No. 4 Reece Worachek of Parkside took the 184-pound match via major decision and the Wolves trailed 20-6

- Northern's returning All-American, No. 3 Cole Huss made easy work of Crosby Schlosser, notching the lone extra point victory of the evening for NSU, a 14-3 major decision



*Olive Grove's
6th Annual*

*Christmas
Tour of Homes
& Holiday
Party*

**Charlie & Jenn Dirks
Tigh & Adrienne Flieds
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!**

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· Parkside sealed the match with their third and final major decision at 285 pounds by No. 12 Lloyd Reynolds

UP NEXT

Northern State will be back in action this morning from Kenosha competing at the Jim Koch Open. Wrestling kicks off at 9 a.m. on the campus of Wisconsin Parkside.

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MSRP
\$1,599*



3X 30" HD

Gear up for the worst of winter weather with the 3X 30" HD powered by a 420cc Cub Cadet OHV engine.

- ▶ Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel auger housing and side plates
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Clear it all with the strength of the 3X 26" Trac featuring a powerful 357cc Cub Cadet OHV engine.

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- ▶ 23" intake height
- ▶ Heated hand grips
- ▶ OVH crank chute control w/ high-arc steel chute
- ▶ LED light bar on auger housing plus dual LED in-dash headlights
- ▶ Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty**

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\$2,099*

* Indicates step-up feature

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† See owner's manual for warranty details and information. Certain restrictions apply.

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SSI: 50 YEARS OF FINANCIAL SECURITY

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program helps support many American families. As we celebrate 50 years of SSI, it is a great time to briefly share the history of SSI and information on how to apply.

On October 30, 1972, President Nixon signed SSI into law. In January 1974, we began paying SSI to people who met the eligibility requirements.

Fifty years later, SSI remains a lifeline program for millions of people and households with limited income and resources. SSI also helps children and adults under age 65 who have a disability or are blind and who have income and resources below specific financial limits. People age 65 and older without disabilities—who meet the financial qualifications—may also receive SSI payments.

You can let us know that you want to apply for SSI online at www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/start.html. This process only takes about five to ten minutes, and no documentation is required to start. We will need the following basic information about you or the person you're helping:

The name, date of birth, Social Security number, mailing address, and phone number of the person who is interested in applying for SSI. (Providing an email address is optional.)

If helping another person, we need your name and phone number. (Providing an email address is optional.)

Once you provide this information and answer a few questions, we will schedule an appointment to help you apply for SSI. We will send a confirmation with the appointment date and time by mail and email (if provided). In some cases, we may call you to schedule the appointment.

If you're unable to begin the process online, you may schedule an appointment by calling 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. local time, Monday through Friday. You may also contact your local Social Security office. You can find the phone number for your local office on our website.

Once your SSI application is submitted, you can check the status online by creating a personal my Social Security account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. SSI will continue to support families for many years to come.



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Holiday Stress Busters

By Bryan Golden

41% of those polled are stressed by the holidays. Fortunately, there are many ways to bust holiday stress. Set realistic goals. Your expectations should correspond to your circumstances, time, and money. Don't try to outdo family and friends. You don't have to impress anyone.

A wonderful holiday season doesn't have to be expensive. Set a manageable budget and stick to it. Determine before you go shopping how much you will spend on food and presents. Entertaining doesn't have to cost a lot. Sumptuous meals can be prepared without expensive ingredients. Use your imagination and creativity.

If there are lots of people on your gift list, contact them and agree to a maximum cost for each gift. They will probably appreciate a pre-set spending limit as much as you will. Consider making your own gifts, such as baked goods or crafts.

A variety of free or low-cost activities are available. Many communities provide holiday programs such as parades and winter carnivals. Informal gatherings with friends and family can be lots of fun without obligating anyone to host a big party.

Accept relatives and friends for who they are. Put aside differences; don't try to resolve them during gatherings. Bringing up past issues will not add to the seasonal joy.

Divorced parents need to be extra sensitive to their children's emotions. Make children's needs a priority and avoid using them as pawns. Children want to spend time with both of their parents so work together to facilitate reciprocal visitation.

If you are hosting a meal or party, ask each guest to bring a dish. Delegate responsibilities to your spouse and children. Everyone will feel included and no one has to carry the full load.

Don't snap at others. Have rules and guidelines for older children returning home for the holidays. Ask guests to supervise their children if they get too rambunctious.

Plan ahead for what you want to accomplish before the holiday rush starts. You can pace yourself if you have enough time. Spreading out activities leaves you calmer and more relaxed.

Prioritize what you want to accomplish. Organize your time to allow for the most important tasks. Say no to requests that don't fit your plans. Be flexible.

Make time for yourself. Maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

It's normal and ok to feel sad during the holidays. Life is unpredictable and brings many changes. Don't compare today with the good old days from your past. Take charge of your life. Don't act like a victim. Spend time with supportive and caring people. Help others by volunteering. Whenever you bring a smile to someone's face, you will feel better too.

Make realistic resolutions. Set goals you can accomplish. Don't abandon your resolutions after a few weeks. After the holidays, actively working towards your goals will keep you positive and focused on the good in life.

Bryan is the author of "Dare to Live Without Limits." Contact Bryan at Bryan@columnist.com or visit www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com Copyright 2022 Bryan Golden

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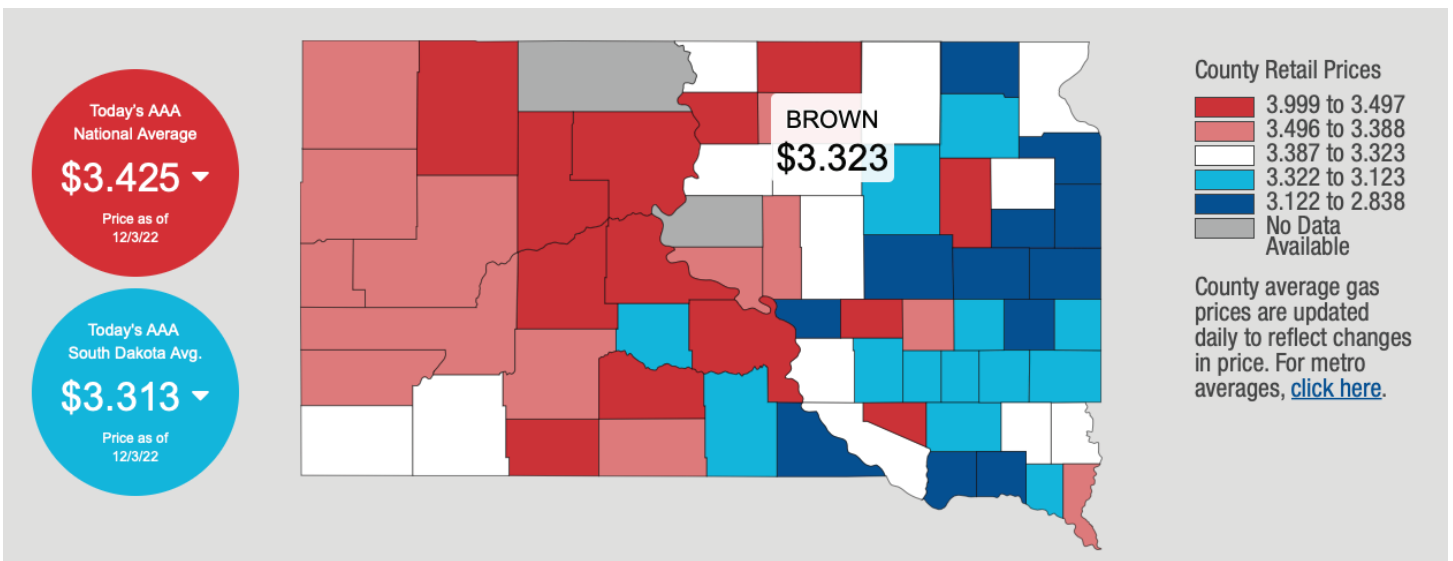
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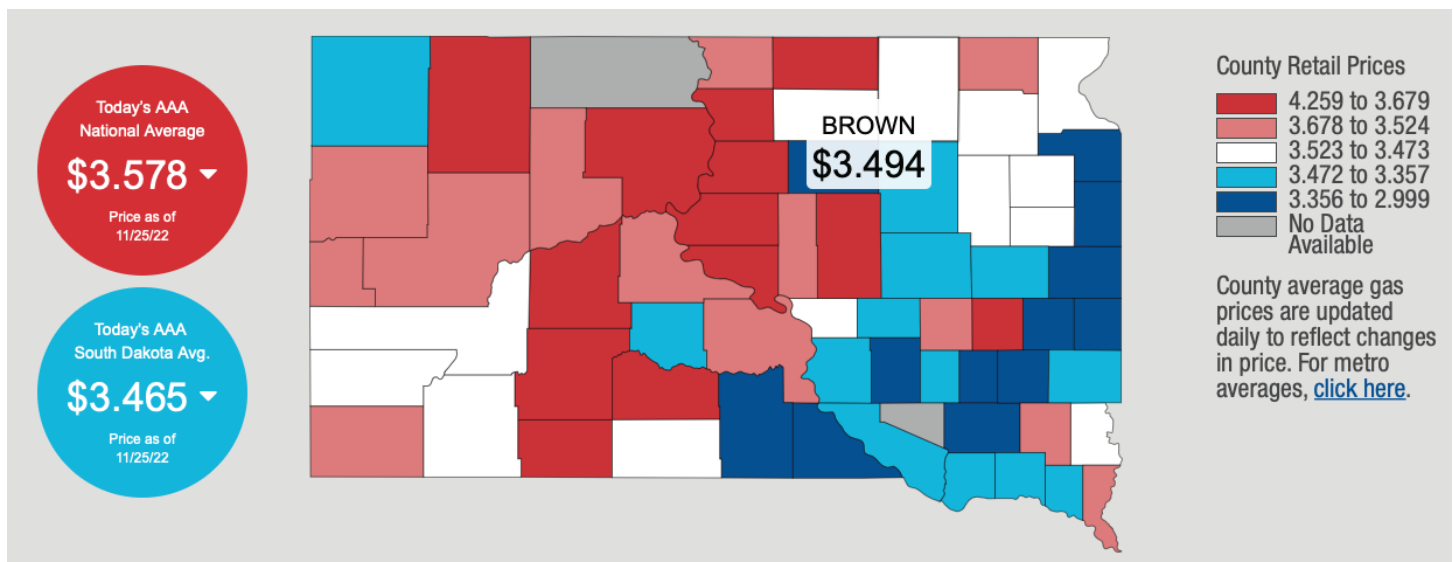
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.313	\$3.503	\$3.977	\$4.798
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.353	\$3.521	\$4.014	\$4.789
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.436	\$3.607	\$4.128	\$4.902
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.670	\$3.842	\$4.340	\$5.196
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.264	\$3.376	\$3.728	\$3.502

This Week



Last Week



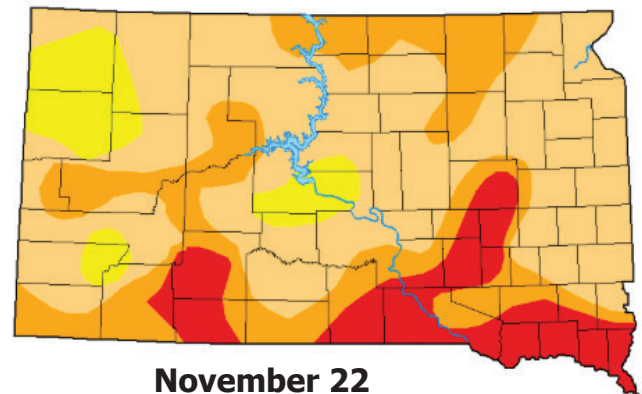
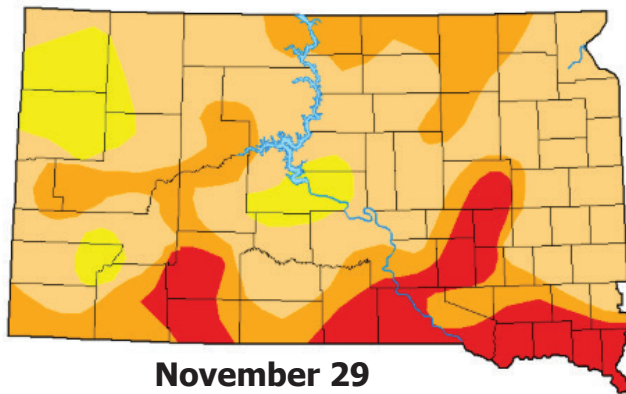
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



On this week's map, improvements were made on the map in the greater Denver-Boulder area of Colorado and in portions of eastern Wyoming in response to above-normal precipitation in the short-term. Elsewhere in the region, no changes were made on the map. For the week, average temperatures were well above normal across the Northern Plains with average temperatures ranging from 2 to 10+ deg F above normal. However, the warmer temperatures melted the portions of the snow in areas of North Dakota allowing for beneficial percolation of meltwater into the still-unfrozen soils. According to NOAA NCEI, the Great Plains Region saw its 9th warmest (+3.0-deg F anomaly) and 8th driest (-1.4-inch anomaly) September-October on record. Statewide, Wyoming experienced its 3rd warmest (+4.2-deg F anomaly) and Colorado its 8th warmest (+3.1 deg F anomaly) September-October period on record.

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#565 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I had a long break for Thanksgiving (which felt very good except for the foreboding feeling of news stacking up while I did other things), and so I have quite a lot for you today. I'll try to get into a better rhythm in the next few weeks. At the moment, we're not settling down, but we're also not seeing a big surge. It's probably too soon to know for sure just what the holiday weekend has produced, but so far, things don't look too bad. As of midday today, the seven-day new-case average is up to 45,219 from 41,530 just over a week ago. That is not great. The pandemic total is up to 98,521,273, which is also not great. Hospitalizations are at 32,445, also way up from 27,722 at the last Update. Add to that soaring influenza numbers and a stubborn RSV outbreak, and there's some pain out there. Deaths continue to be the one place we're making progress, down to a seven-day average of 262 from 294. I hope that trend continues. The pandemic total deaths count is now at 1,088,060.

I think the appropriate way to begin tonight's Update is to hark back to a year ago and my Update #490 posted November 28, 2021, wherein appeared the first mention of a new variant. Here's what I wrote:

"Unless you've been living under a rock, you're likely already aware of the big news from the past few days: On Thursday [which was Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 2021], South African health authorities announced the identification of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 that appears to have turned up within the past few weeks in Botswana and then in South Africa, a variant with an unusual number of mutations—as many as 50, several of which are quite concerning. Lawrence Young, virologist and professor of molecular oncology at the UK's Warwick Medical School, told CNN, 'It is the most heavily mutated version of the virus we have seen to date.' Many of these are mutations we've seen before in other variants, but we haven't ever seen all of them together in one virus. Then there are also some novel mutations, that is, ones we haven't seen before. Worse, it looks like 30 or so of these mutations are in the spike protein, the part of the virus that binds to host cells; and 10 of those are right in the receptor-binding domain (RBD), the actual binding site on that spike. That could be a problem because the spike proteins are the ones targeted by our immune system, which increases the probability of at least a partial immune escape. An additional concern is that the RBD is a location associated with transmissibility and several of the identified mutations are known to be associated with enhanced transmissibility. So the genetic picture gives us cause for concern.

"The variant has been assigned the PANGO number B.1.1.529. . . . The WHO assigns a Greek-letter name (like Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, etc.) only after a variant is determined to be potentially dangerous—which happened on Friday [November 26, 2021] for this one. It debuted as a Variant of Concern (VOC), skipping right over the Variant of Interest (VOI) classification, and has been named Omicron; I suspect we'll all have many opportunities to talk about it over the next few months."

I've been wrong a lot over the past two and a half years, but this is one place I was not wrong. We did have "cause for concern," and we have had myriad opportunities to talk about Omicron since it emerged one long year ago. On November 24, 2021, we passed 48 million reported cases; a year later we're over 98 million and still counting. Those ensuing 50 million cases (and countless millions more which were never reported) were virtually all Omicron. It's still the only game in town, and the count just keeps rising. Maybe it's a good thing that no entirely new variant has emerged in 12 months; maybe not so much when we look at the proliferation of subvariants in that time. It's hard to tell anymore what constitutes good news.

Omicron has now turned up hundreds of subvariants, each carrying additional resistance to our current immunity. We've talked about these various subvariants, notably XBB, BQ.1, and BQ.1.1. There is now

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also CH.1. We're pretty much agreed these all are the spawn of an infection in an immunocompromised patient somewhere along the way; most theories have it as an HIV patient. There is also some evidence an early permutation of the virus infected mice and evolved into Omicron in them, then spilled back into humans from there. Just a couple of mutations in the right places enable this virus to evade our antibodies and we've had more than a couple, so we will have a problem as things develop. As the mutations built up, we have been seeing that no single subvariant is gaining all of the new mutations; rather, convergent evolution is occurring whereby various versions of the virus evolve to develop the same kinds of mutations in similar locations along the viral genome and show the same kinds of resistance. In this landscape, it becomes more difficult to predict the immunological picture. We're now looking at more than 180 currently viable subvariants, each with its own different pattern of mutations that permit a competitive advantage against other subvariants.

Where we are now is that the once-dominant BA.5 is now representing only 19 percent of new cases whereas BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 represent 57 percent of them. We have 13 other subvariants accounting for the remaining 24 percent. We still have some reasonable antibody protection due to vaccination and/or prior infection; but our monoclonal antibody therapies are less and less effective. I expect the one remaining monoclonal to be deauthorized soon; it is already falling into disuse. Without funding, I do not think new monoclonals will become available soon enough to help. It costs tens of millions of dollars to develop one of these; and with the short period of usefulness (and sales), it just doesn't make sense to invest heavily in this kind of therapy. And the one long-term monoclonal therapy we have, Evusheld, is almost certain to become ineffective and be deauthorized in the very near future as well.

The good news is that the convergence we're seeing may enable us to predict future evolution of the virus and design better responses if funding is available. It remains to be seen whether there will be funding and whether we can come up with more broadly-targeted drugs.

Deaths are a third of what we were seeing last year at this time and more like one-eighth the February 2022 Omicron peak, and that's unequivocally good news; but we've lost 300,000 lives since then and we're still losing almost a September 11 death toll every week these days. That's not great news; in fact, I'm having trouble wrapping my head around numbers like that. We should also note that nearly 90 percent of Covid-19 deaths these days are in those 65 or older—highest that's been in the entire pandemic, including the early days when this virus was cutting a swath of death through nursing home populations. Note too that this age group represents only about 16 percent of the population, so this death rate is wildly out of proportion to the numbers of elderly. Much of this is consequent to our insistence on returning to "normal" life. Even the simple and non-life-altering step of masking in public spaces would provide a fair margin of safety around these vulnerable citizens, but we just don't want to do it. I think that means we have collectively deemed the deaths of an extra almost 300 people per day as acceptable losses as long as they're old. As one of those old people, I find this distressing.

Almost everyone I know has had Covid-19 at least once, and some of them have had it multiple times. The prevalence of infection in the population was brought home to me on a recent routine visit to my health care provider when the office nurse kept saying to me in an incredulous tone, "You haven't had Covid? Not even once? Really?? Are you sure?" I am, as sure as I can be, but I'm not at all sure how long that condition will persist. Looks to me like Covid is the new black.

Millions more in the US are suffering long-Covid or other long-term organ damage from their infections something we'll address in more detail later. At least hundreds of thousands of Americans whose immune systems are compromised are still stuck at home because no one's taking precautions and they are vulnerable despite vaccination; those are lives whose quality is seriously damaged even in the absence of infection, and no one who is not one of them seems to give a good goddamn. None of that is particularly

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good news.

Omicron is undoubtedly not our last variant. We can hope future mutation takes us in an Omicron-adjacent direction, one that is perhaps more transmissible but far less virulent; but we have no assurance of it: Something new could turn up any day. I do not know where we're going from here, but I am not yet prepared to declare this whole thing over, not by a long shot. I do know that without additional government funding we will soon have zero monoclonal antibodies effective as therapeutics and a basketful of trouble for some of our citizens.

The flu season is continuing at exceptionally high levels of disease and is intensifying; this is, so far, the worst flu season in ten years. Thirty-three (two-thirds of) states now report high or very high activity, and the death rate for pneumonia and influenza as well as Covid-19 is about 50 percent higher than usual for this point in the season. We're still early in the season, so there are most likely some bigger numbers down the road. For the record, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) has also been surging, but this one appears to be slowing again, which is something of a relief after a season which has already almost reached the total hospitalizations seen in the entire 2018-19 season. The latest CDC reports do not yet include data from the Thanksgiving holiday and its aftermath; that will be at least another week showing up. Most experts think this holiday season should be less problematic than last year's; we'll know for sure in a few more weeks when we get Christmas in the rear-view mirror.

There is one means for mitigating your risk of infection we haven't talked much about, largely because there isn't much you can do about it in many circumstances; that would be ventilation. There's a great deal of evidence increased ventilation reduces risk for all respiratory infections, not just Covid-19; and there has been a push for buildings to receive upgrades to their HVAC systems to promote better ventilation. Response to that push has been spotty. We've talked many times about the advantages of gathering outdoors or opening windows and doors when the weather is fit; but that's not really a good option in much of the US at this point in the year. For all of these reasons, it's easy to throw up your hands and give up on the whole thing. I would say not so fast.

Even though you can't do much about the ventilation systems in the places you visit, there is something you can do in this regard, and that is to look at air quality in the spaces you enter so that you can make informed decisions about whether or how long to remain. You can do this by carrying a portable carbon dioxide meter. Now carbon dioxide is not the same thing as virus, but when people breathe in a space, they exhale carbon dioxide into the air just as they exhale virus if they are infected. The more people are present in a given amount of space, the harder they're breathing, and the less air is exchanged with outside air, the higher the carbon dioxide level and virus concentration in a space will become. So if there's an infected person in a space—a probability that increases as the rate of infections in the community and/or the number of people present increases, carbon dioxide concentration is a pretty good proxy for risk of Covid-19 exposure risk. Meters are priced as low as \$40, and some of them are small enough to easily carry in a pocket or handbag and to use unobtrusively. If you can swing the cost, this may be a useful tool for you.

What are you looking for with such a meter? Outdoor spaces generally run around 400 parts of carbon dioxide per million parts of air (ppm) and well-ventilated indoor spaces run under 800 ppm; so what you're looking for is numbers in that 800 range. Jose-Luis Jimenez, professor of chemistry at the University of Colorado Boulder recommends opening windows or going outside when the meter reads above 1000 ppm, especially if you are going to be unmasked as you would be in a setting where you plan to consume food or beverages. You would want to monitor a space as the number of people in it changes. This isn't foolproof, but it is an excellent way to reduce risk; and in these days where we're sort of in the Wild West, risk reduction is frequently your only alternative to a hermit lifestyle.

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I've read a paper published a couple of months ago in the journal Nature Chemical Biology from a team at the Neurodegeneration New Medicines Center and Scripps Research. The team had earlier developed a drug in the aminoadamantane class, memantine, as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease. (This was an accident; the drug was originally being tested as an antiviral against flu virus when they noticed patients treated for flu had improvements in neurologic conditions after treatment and diverted to looking to use it in those neurology patients. Science can be messy like that.) Drugs in this class are largely nontoxic and alter ion channels in cell membranes influencing which substances can be transferred across the membrane; they incidentally also interfere with ion channels in viral envelopes to similar effect. Since SARS-CoV-2 accomplishes entry to host cells by fusion of its viral ion-channel E protein, viroporin, to ACE2 receptors on the host cell membrane and these folks had what's called a "library" of related aminoadamantane ion channel blockers they'd developed to play with, they "reasoned that using the E protein viroporin channel to target a molecular warhead to the ACE2 receptor to inhibit interaction with the spike protein could yield a novel mechanism for drug action to treat COVID-19."

So they went to work screening their library of compounds, testing them for effectiveness in interfering with ACE2, potential toxicity, levels achievable in tissue at safe doses, etc. And one promising prospect emerged, a nitrated version they're calling NMT5. It looked promising because it has the ability to attach to viral E protein, an ion-channel protein involved in host cell entry, and can chemically modify human ACE2, the site for that entry. As was reported in Scripps Research's newsletter, "The group realized this could turn the virus into a delivery vehicle for its own demise."

Now, one key to drug safety is how many non-targeted tissues it affects, how serious those effects are, and how long the effects last. To use an extreme example, hydrogen cyanide would be an effective treatment for viral infection because it kills infected host cells by shutting down their metabolism. Since viruses can't survive without a living host cell, problem solved. There are, however, some serious off-target effects because cyanide has the same effect on all of the cells in the entire host, and death is a highly durable state. A dead host isn't a source of infection, but he's also dead, which isn't exactly what we were looking for. Most drugs don't do that kind of damage, but they do have some off-target effects: For example, last time we talked, we discussed how antibiotics can cause problems when they interfere with your normal microbiomes. Drug therapy is always sort of a balancing act between benefits and unintended harms, which is why many drugs aren't available over the counter in this country; we've decided as a society that we should only let people with specialized expertise make them available as needed and only after careful consideration of that balancing act.

I mention this because NMT5 has a most interesting profile in this regard. Turns out the drug attaches itself to a viral ion-channel protein, hitching a ride as the virus moves through the body; better yet, the protein to which it attaches is genetically very stable, so it is going to be pretty variant-proof. When the virus carrying NMT5 comes into proximity with ACE2 on a host cell, the hypothesized mechanism of action is that the NMT5 bound to the ion channel in the viral envelope transfers a nitro group (-ONO2) to ACE2 on the host cell in a process called nitrosylation. This transfer changes the shape of ACE2. Since binding of viral spike (S) protein to ACE2 is shape-dependent, this change means the virus is no longer able to bind and infect the cell. That is some high-level targeting: Host cells are affected only if and when the virus tries to enter, and the shift in nitrolylated ACE2 structure only lasts about 12 hours, so overall ACE2 function is disrupted only very temporarily. That's important when you're deliberately disrupting a normal cell protein; it's safe to presume those proteins are needed in the body for something, right? If we damage lots of them over the long term, there are likely to be knock-on effects we aren't going to like at all. That's one of the strengths here: When there's no viral threat, ACE2 functions as usual. This is quite remarkable.

The drug has been safety-tested in two animal species. It has been tested for efficacy so far in tissue

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cultures in the lab and in the Syrian hamster where it reduces infectivity of all mutations and variants tested (Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Omicron plus a bunch of isolated mutations known to be problematic). Against Omicron, the drug prevented 95 percent of viral binding. Administered orally to infected animals, it reduced viral titers in the lungs by 100-fold, virtually eliminated large hemorrhages in the lungs, and abated pro-inflammatory cytokine activation and its consequent inflammatory damage. The authors wrote, "Quantification of these results in an overall pathology score showed significant protection by NMT5. These findings benchmark favorably against our group's published studies on the same model using antibodies directed against spike protein." In other words, this works as well as neutralizing antibodies—only it has the added advantage that it's unaffected by mutation in the viral spike because it doesn't target the viral spike; it targets something else, that viral E protein ion channel and our ACE2. There's a long way to go here yet—no full-scale animal testing or clinical trials in humans have been conducted yet; but this has a great deal of promise.

I've read another paper reporting on a potential therapeutic, this one from a research team at Cornell University, the University of British Columbia, and Université de Sherbrooke (Québec) and published last spring in the journal *Nature*. This team has been developing compounds that block an enzyme essential to viral entry into host cells; it's called transmembrane protease serine 2 or TMPRSS2, and it cleaves the viral S protein, triggering fusion of a virus particle into the host cell membrane so it can get inside the cell. There is a lot of interest in so-called host-directed therapeutics, that is drugs that target host cells rather than targeting the virus directly, in the hope of limiting viral resistance to treatment. Because TMPRSS2 is a human enzyme, an inhibitor of its action isn't going to drive viral mutation toward drug resistance, and new variants are not likely to gain an advantage, which is the entire point of host-directed therapeutics. About a year ago, we briefly discussed another such effort with the drug nafomostat, also a TMPRSS2-inhibitor; I haven't seen a progress report on that one since January, so I'm not sure where things are with it. This time, however, we're evaluating a different compound.

This team took a look at its catalog of TMPRSS2 inhibitors and identified four that work at low concentration and don't hurt normal cells. Then they screened those for activity against SARS-CoV-2 infection and found that a compound they call N-0385 was able to reduce the amount of virus that gets into host cells irrespective of which variant of the virus they were working with. N-0385 can be administered nasally, which is a plus because it would be easy to administer as a nasal spray and local administration is likely to limit systemic side-effects. Tested in mice, daily treatment from one day before exposure to two days after resulted in zero deaths in 10 drug-treated and nine deaths in 10 placebo-treated control animals. Samples taken three days after exposure showed 97 percent lower viral titers in drug-treated than in control mice. We will note that they did not work with the Omicron variant, but it doesn't seem likely this will matter since N-0385's mechanism of action is not influenced by mutations in the viral spike; it is targeted at a host protein instead. The team is currently working with a company to produce the drug for human use so that clinical trials can commence. This one is far cheaper to make than monoclonals and such, so it might be a great tool if things work out.

I've read a paper in preprint, so not yet peer-reviewed, from a group of scientists at the National Institutes of Health, Montana State University, and the University of California, Los Angeles, who took a look at whether some part of the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 could be accounted for by greater stability of the virus in the environment. One reason a pathogen is easier to transmit may be that it remains infectious for longer between hosts; whether this is so for Omicron is what these folks set out to discover in a pretty straightforward series of experiments. They generated aerosols (tiny virus-containing droplets suspended in the air) in the lab using a nebulizer and maintained the aerosolized environment inside a device called a Goldberg drum, then sampled those aerosols over an eight-hour period. They also applied a solution containing a measured amount of virus to a polyethylene surface, then sampled that surface over the same time period. These experiments were run in triplicate

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using the initial ancestral strain and the Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Omicron variants. The findings for both sets of experiments (aerosol and surface stability) were similar: The earliest variants showed increasing stability, then turned around. So Alpha had a longer half-life than the ancestral strain, and Beta an even longer one; then Delta lasted about as long as the ancestral strain and Omicron had the shortest half-life of all. This means Omicron is able to retain its infectivity for a much shorter period of time than any other variants—it dies faster outside a host, and it is clear the increased transmissibility of Omicron relies not at all on that sort of stability. Other factors will account for it.

I've read a summary of studies on the prevalence of long-Covid or post-acute sequelae of Covid (PASC), that syndrome characterized by persistent symptoms long (up to years) after the acute phase of the infection has resolved. One of those was published a month ago in Nature Communications and came from a research group in Scotland at the University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, and the National Health Service. As part of the Covid in Scotland Study (CISS), they took a look at National Health Service records for close to 100,000 people, about a third of whom had had laboratory-confirmed infections. The greatest strength of this work is the huge number of participants, and another strength is that they had a control group so they could compare symptoms experienced between Covid patients and those in the general population who had never been infected. Interestingly, between 16 and 31 percent of the never-infected control group suffered some of the common symptoms of long-Covid; given that is similar to the rate of false negatives on the PCR test, it's likely most of those folks have long-Covid too. Findings were that six percent of cases had not recovered and 42 percent had only partial recovery 18 months after infection. That's scary when you superimpose those data on the kinds of case numbers we've had here in the US. They also found that asymptomatic infections are not likely to lead to long-Covid and that vaccination is somewhat protective against it—this by itself is a good reason to be vaccinated. Jill Pell, lead author and professor at the University of Glasgow, told the Washington Post, "There are lots of different impacts going beyond health to quality of life, employment, schooling, and the ability to look after yourself." That's a lot.

Then there was a report from the US Government Accountability Office which places estimates in this country between 7.7 and 23 million cases of long-Covid. A fair number of these people—GAO says a million of them at any one time—have symptoms severe enough to prevent them from working, and of course, long-term unemployment means many of these people no longer have health insurance. Without health insurance, almost none of us can afford to seek care for our symptoms, so we're unlikely to get any sort of medical help either, even if medicine had great solutions, which it does not at this time. Among those who can continue working, as many as 45 percent have had to reduce their hours at work, in some cases enough to lose health insurance coverage with the concomitant damage from that. Those with long-Covid report they have trouble caring for children, exercising, engaging in social activities, and doing tasks of living and chores around the house. The GAO estimates as many as 10 to 30 percent of Covid-19 patients may develop long-Covid, which would mean the earlier estimates are wildly off the mark and the problem may be far larger than we have begun to grasp.

Because we don't really understand what causes long-Covid and don't have a diagnostic test for it, policy around treatment and services to sufferers are complicated, to say the least. Symptoms vary so much from person to person that there is no set of symptoms useful as a guideline for diagnosis. They can include headache, cognitive impairment, stroke, cough, shortness of breath, loss of the sense of taste and/or smell, heart rhythm problems, fluctuating blood pressure, heart failure, easy bruising, rashes, acute kidney injury, kidney failure, and chronic fatigue—for starters. Most common symptoms in the Scottish study were breathlessness, palpitations, chest pain, and reduced mental acuity; and symptoms were worst in those who got sick enough to be hospitalized in the acute phase of infection—which is a hell of a lot of people. Most at risk are women, older people, and the economically disadvantaged, as well as those with pre-existing physical or mental health problems. So if we take the higher numbers in the hospitalized plus even a tiny percentage of mild or asymptomatic cases who go on to develop long-Covid in addition, we

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have a massive issue on our hands. Adding to all of this, there is a sub-cohort of about 11 percent who deteriorate with time instead of stabilizing or improving.

It helps that the Department of Health and Human Services has issued guidance which says that this is a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. That means patients who are diagnosed may qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance, but we all know it is notoriously difficult to qualify for that program, and the lack of a clear diagnostic tool is going to make this trickier than usual for long-Covid. There is a whole lot of research underway as well into treatments, but the fact is government funding for anything Covid-related is drying up fast, and there does not seem to be much will in Washington to extend any of the programs. As with so many people across the country, the pandemic is over in Washington. I think these folks are simply left hanging out to dry with no services, no help to get better, and little hope things will change.

I expect this issue is going to create an enormous burden on our society far into the future; the burden will be individual, medical, social, and economic. I do not see a great deal of evidence we have mustered a sufficient response, and that's a concern on a societal level, even if you just don't care about suffering in people who aren't you.

And this wraps things up for today. Until we have a clear direction for this pandemic in the future, please keep yourself safe. We'll talk again.

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COVID-19 Heat Map

by Marie Miller

We haven't done this for a while; I'm sort of wishing I hadn't done it today either. The map isn't looking good. Changes since last time are mostly for the worse.

First, the bright spots: Vermont, North Carolina, and South Carolina have moved down from orange to yellow. The Northern Mariana Islands and the US Virgin Islands have moved down from yellow to green, and those two territories report zero new cases over the past week.

Now, for the bad news--and there's plenty of it: Arizona, New Mexico, and New York are back into red. The following 11 states and territories moved from yellow to orange: Guam, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Nebraska, Texas, Iowa, Arkansas, and Alabama.

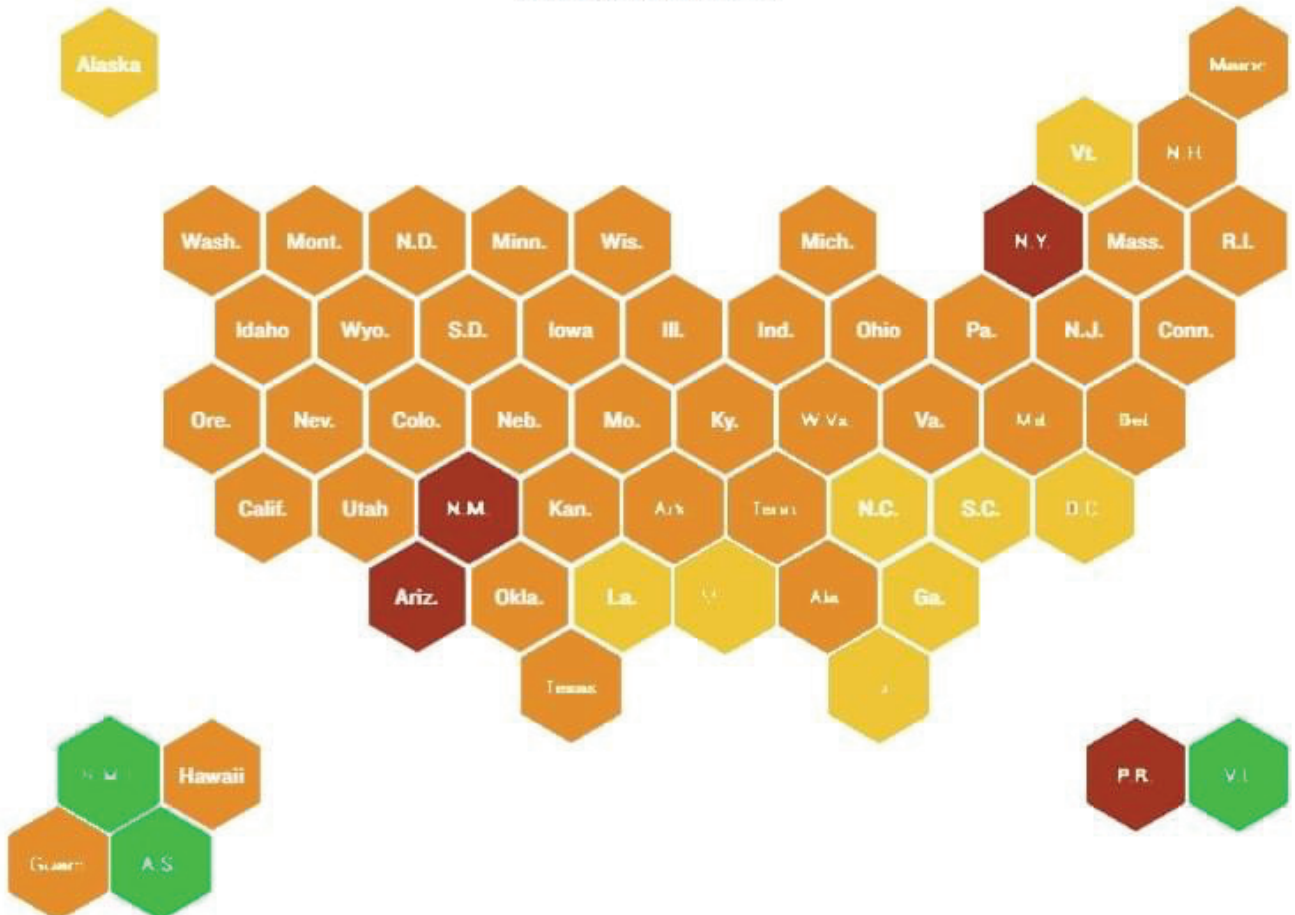
We went from 1 red, 35 orange, 19 yellow, and 1 green to 4 red, 40 orange, 9 yellow, and 3 green. Wrong direction.

Most of the trends I see are bad ones. Only 7 states and territories are decreasing by double-digit percentages with only 1 of those (VI) over 50%; another 5 are in single digits. On the other hand, I have 7 states and territories increasing by more than 50% in a week, 9 more increasing by between 25 and 50%, and 18 more in double digits. Yech! The country overall is showing 22% increase in new case reporting over the past week.

Buckle up.

The original template for this heat map is from NPR; I have modified it to show changes since NPR's last update. Red designates "unchecked spread," orange is "escalating spread," yellow is "potential spread," and green is "close to containment." (For the record, NMI is the Northern Mariana Islands, AS is American Samoa, and VI is the US Virgin Islands, all US territories.)

Data as of NOVEMBER 21





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota, Wyoming governors call for re-do of Black Hills forest data

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 2, 2022 5:10 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem has joined her counterpart in Wyoming to ask the U.S. Forest Service to redo forest condition reports that the governors call inadequate, as part of a long-running feud over current and future logging levels in the Black Hills.

Noem and Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon made the request in a letter to Forest Supervisor Jeff Tomac.

The governors contend that the loss of harvestable acres of timber over the past two decades found in a recently revised report on forest health may drive conclusions that "are not backed by scientific material."

The letter also raises concerns about "the apparent desire of the Forest Service to drastically reduce the timber program" in the forest. The Forest Service is in the midst of a multi-year process to revise the master plan that guides management decisions about the forest, including logging. In one of the initial phases of that process, the Forest Service recently published a collection of draft assessments.

"We request that the Forest Service produce another set of draft assessments with a public comment period, that those assessments include citations for factual statements, and that they contain discussion of why one authority was relied upon over another," the letter reads. "We look forward to meaningful participation in the Black Hills National Forest's Forest Plan Revision process."

One sawmill has closed in the Black Hills in the face of timber sales reductions. Timber sales in the forest for 2022 fell 20% from the previous year, hitting their lowest levels since 2003.

Noem and Gordon wrote that they'd like to see the Forest Service restart the forest-plan assessment and public-comment process to address their concerns over alleged inaccuracies.

"If the inaccuracies are not addressed, it will be difficult for our states to have confidence in the outcome of the Forest Plan Revision," they wrote.

The governors have no formal role in the management of the Black Hills National Forest, which is federal land under the control of the U.S. Forest Service and its parent agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The timber industry successfully pushed for changes to the General Technical Report (GTR-422) used to guide the revision process now being challenged by the governors. The timber group contended that the authors of the assessment had written it in a way that suggested a 50% loss in forest acres since 1999, despite their use of a smaller study area and a methodology that separated "suitable" acres from "unsuitable" ones.

The resulting changes clarified that the loss in harvest-suitable acres since 1999 is closer to 20%. The adjustment did not, however, alter the report's underlying conclusion: that a reduction in logging will be necessary to protect the long-term health of the forest after decades of disruptions from wildfires and mountain pine beetles.

Barnett resigns early, and Noem appoints Johnson as secretary of state

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 2, 2022 4:13 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem is appointing Monae Johnson as secretary of state, effective Monday.

Current Secretary of State Steve Barnett is resigning from the role ahead of the official end of his term on Jan. 2. He will take over as general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

Johnson beat Barnett for the Republican Party's nomination last summer at the party's state convention, and she won the general election in November.

"Monae Johnson has the confidence of the people of South Dakota," Noem said in a news release. "She was elected because of her promise to focus on election integrity, and I look forward to working with her on those efforts."

After serving the remaining month of Barnett's term, Johnson will begin her own four-year term.

"I am truly grateful to Governor Noem for the opportunity to finish the current term as secretary of state, and to the people of South Dakota for trusting me to serve in the role for the next four years," Johnson said in the news release.

Johnson campaigned as a candidate who would secure South Dakota's elections. She told South Dakota Searchlight she plans to do that by pushing for a post-election audit and suggesting auditors hand-count ballots. She also dodged questioning by the Searchlight and several other media outlets about her belief in the validity of the 2020 election.



JOSHUA HAIAR  

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Endangered designation raises further alarm about bats in Black Hills

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 2, 2022 2:45 PM

The federal government's designation of an endangered bat species hit home this week in the Black Hills, where the bats lurk in caves and abandoned mines.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the northern long-eared bat as an endangered species on Tuesday.

That announcement came as part of an effort to save the species from extinction by white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease.

Once a species becomes listed as threatened or endangered, it receives special protections by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act. This includes protection from harassment, hunting and trapping. The law also protects against interfering in breeding or degrading critical habitats.

Under the act, federal agencies must consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure projects they fund or authorize — such as timber harvests and prescribed fires — will not further jeopardize a listed species.

Brad Phillips, a Black Hills National Forest wildlife biologist, said the northern long-eared bat is one of 12 bat species in the state.

"They are a cave-roosting species in the wintertime," Phillips said. "They'll hibernate in caves and abandoned mines, and that is when they're susceptible to this cold-loving fungus referred to as 'white-nose syndrome.'"

First documented in the U.S. in 2006 and in South Dakota in 2018, the disease has killed millions of bats across North America. At some sites, 90 to 100 percent of bats have died.

The disease is named for the white spots that appear on infected bats. It attacks the skin of bats while they're hibernating. As it grows, the disease causes bats to become active and burn up the fat they need to survive the winter.

Several South Dakota bat species are affected by white-nose syndrome, Phillips said, with the hardest hit being the northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bat.

"We are seeing a lot fewer," Phillips said. "And while I can't always put my finger on white-nose as the source all the time, I have no doubt that it is playing a part."

Phillips said South Dakotans should care about the decline. Bats reportedly contribute about \$3.7 billion worth of natural insect control for farmers in the U.S. each year.

"So, just the fact that you don't have to spray as much insecticide around the country is one reason that we really should all care that we have bats in our ecosystem," Phillips said.

To avoid the possible spread of the disease by humans, Phillips said cave explorers should decontaminate gear before and after entering caves, and leave bats alone.

"Primarily the fungus is spread from bat to bat, but people can spread it," Phillips said. "We recommend that people do not go caving in the wintertime just out of respect, trying to not disturb these bats."

Phillips also said the public can help by not killing bats that nest in homes and not treating them as pests. He said there are a number of non-lethal ways to get rid of bats, including catch-and-release and non-lethal repellants.

The Fish and Wildlife Service said it will also work with wind energy companies to reduce the likelihood that bats will strike turbines. Operators can limit the danger by curtailing blade rotation during bats' migration season and when winds are low.

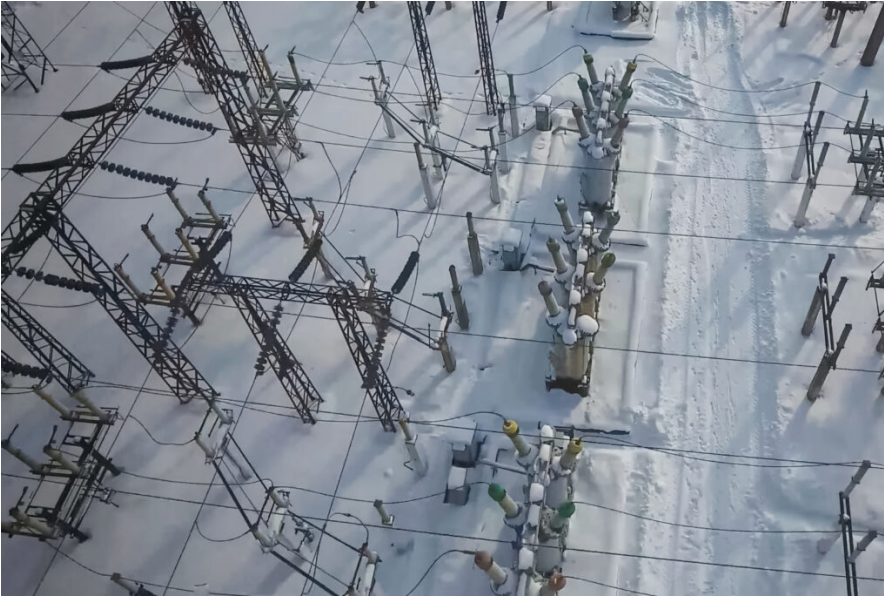


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Reliability watchdog warns of potential electric shortfalls this winter

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - DECEMBER 2, 2022 5:28 PM



The regulatory body that sets and enforces reliability standards in parts of the U.S. power system warns that if certain regions experience extreme weather this winter they may not have sufficient energy supplies. (Photo by iStock/

Getty Images Plus)

The nonprofit regulator charged with helping ensure the reliability of the North American electric grid is warning of potential electric supply shortfalls during severe weather this winter in several regions of the country.

Earlier this month, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, which sets and enforces reliability standards for the bulk power system in the U.S., Canada and part of Mexico, said New England and parts of the South and Midwest, are "at risk of having insufficient energy supplies during severe winter weather."

The organization pointed to fuel supply problems, potential shipping disruptions as the federal government works to avert a rail strike, limited natural gas infrastructure, fossil and nuclear plant retirements and high potential peak electric demand as contributing risk factors during sustained cold weather.

"While the grid has a sufficient supply of capacity resources under normal winter conditions, we are concerned that some areas are highly vulnerable to extreme and prolonged cold," said John Moura, NERC's director of reliability assessment and performance analysis, in a statement. "As a result, load-shedding may be required to maintain reliability."

(Load-shedding means intentionally interrupting the flow of electricity to customers to reduce the strain on the grid.)

Warnings of potential outages in the South

NERC's report says Texas, which largely operates its own electric grid, and much of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and the Carolinas, are all vulnerable to extreme cold because it could trigger power plant outages and big spikes in demand. In many parts of the South, electricity is the prime heating source and NERC says power generators and the fuel supply infrastructure that serves them "remain vulnerable without weatherization upgrades," despite improvements since Winter Storm Uri in 2021, which caused an estimated 246 deaths in Texas after the grid collapsed.

"While the risk of energy emergencies in the three areas hardest hit during that event has not been eliminated, enhancements to equipment freeze protection and cold weather preparations for both the gas and electric industries is a positive step," said Mark Olson, NERC's manager of reliability assessments.

Duke Energy, which has about 4.5 million electric customers in the Carolinas, said it is prepared for extreme weather with well-stocked coal inventories that exceed pre-winter goals.

"We are ready to meet the energy needs of our customers every day, regardless of the weather," said Bill Norton, a company spokesperson. "As we do before each winter, we have prepared for the possibility of extreme cold across our electric system."

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Norton also cited a power mix that includes renewables, nuclear, natural gas, coal and hydroelectric power, grid upgrades to serve a growing number of customers in North Carolina and plants that can run on more than one kind of fuel as key to guarding against outages caused by extreme weather.

MISO: Extreme cold weather would bring challenges

For the part of the grid overseen by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, an area that includes all or parts of 15 U.S. states (Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin) NERC worries that more than 4.2 gigawatts of nuclear and coal power plants have been retired. That's the rough equivalent of four large (1,000 megawatt) power plants.

"An extreme cold-weather event that extends deep into MISO's area could lead to high generator outages from inadequate weatherization in southern units and unavailability of fuel for natural-gas-fired generators," the report says.

MISO predicts its peak winter demand will be 102 gigawatts, with 113 gigawatts of electric generation available "under normal grid conditions," Brandon Morris, a spokesman, said in an email. The organization's all-time peak winter record for power demand was 109 gigawatts on Jan. 6, 2017. However, Morris said staff members from the organization noted in a winter readiness workshop last month that extreme cold weather, intense winter storms and/or fuel supply issues could create challenges for MISO and local utilities.

Power generators in MISO, however, have shown improvement in preparing their plants for extreme weather, according to a winterization survey the organization conducted, Morris said.

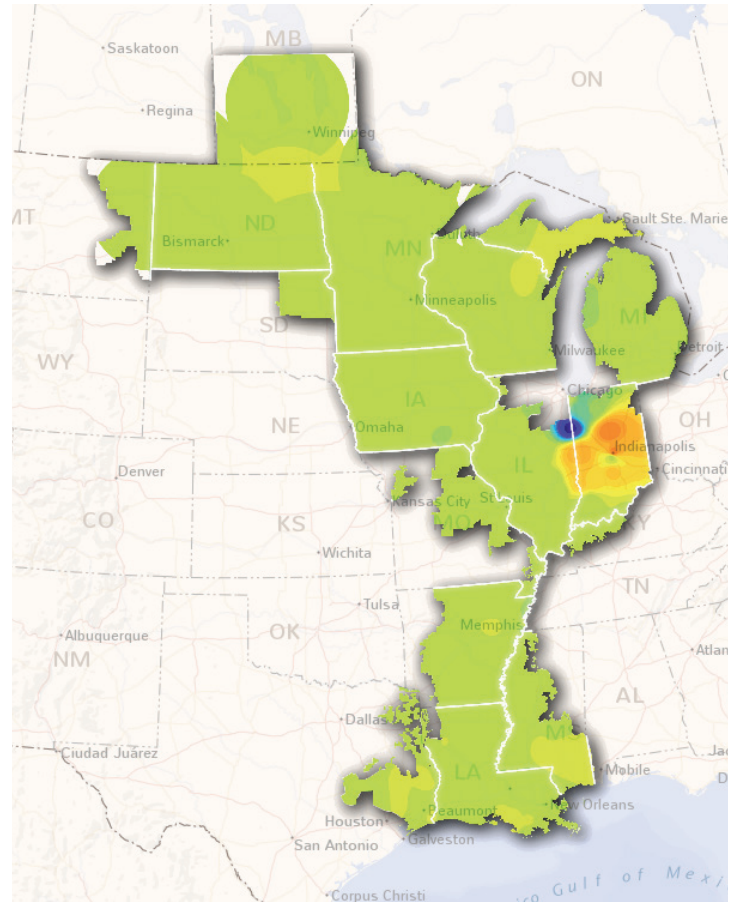
In New England concerns about fuel delivery

New England relies on liquefied natural gas imports and oil-fired generators to meet peak demand days, NERC said, which means fuel delivery constraints and limited inventory of liquid fuels, worsened by the Russian invasion of Ukraine could increase the chance that power plants might lack the fuel they need to run, resulting in potential energy shortages in extreme weather.

Concerns about winter power in New England aren't new. In an August letter to U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm, Gordon van Welie, president and CEO of ISO New England, which is responsible for managing the flow of electricity for the six New England states, noted that concerns about energy challenges in the region go back a decade. He added that even as the states in the region push to decarbonize, it will rely on natural gas for the near future.

"During the coldest days of the year, New England does not have sufficient pipeline infrastructure to meet the region's demand for natural gas for both home heating and power generation," van Welie wrote, adding that the organization has developed a tool to forecast potential energy shortfalls 21 days out and got federal approval to keep a natural gas fired plant running with access to liquefied natural gas imports.

"Based on these actions, and the results of our winter assessment to date, the ISO expects to be able



MISO

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to operate the system reliably in a mild to moderate winter (using established operational procedures to manage capacity deficiencies)," he wrote. "However, concerns remain should the region experience an extreme winter."

The organization wants the federal government to heed requests made last summer by New England governors, including exploring suspension of the federal Jones Act, which prohibits foreign vessels from transporting goods (like liquified natural gas) between U.S. ports and developing a regional energy reserve for fuel oil in the area, among other asks.

NERC's recommendations

NERC made a broad series of recommendations to mitigate risks to the power grid from extreme weather. First, it said power generators should be preparing for winter conditions and communicating with grid operators. They also should ensure they have adequate fuel on hand and the organizations that monitor them should keep tabs on fuel supplies as well. But NERC also urged state regulators and policymakers to "preserve critical generation resources at risk of retirement prior to the winter season and support requests for environmental and transportation waivers."

Holly Bender, the Sierra Club's senior director of energy campaigns, called NERC's suggestion to suspend environmental rules to keep fossil plants running "the wrong strategy." Rather, Bender said the report makes the case that reliance on fossil fuels itself poses risks and she urged state regulators to instead push energy efficiency and weatherization programs that will cut power use. "Whether it's water shortages in the summer or frozen coal piles and short fuel supply in the winter, fossil fuels like coal and gas struggle through extreme weather," she said. "In addition to the public health, environmental, and climate impacts, fossil fuels are increasingly unreliable, contributing to energy insecurity and unpredictable price spikes that impact the most vulnerable members of our communities the most."



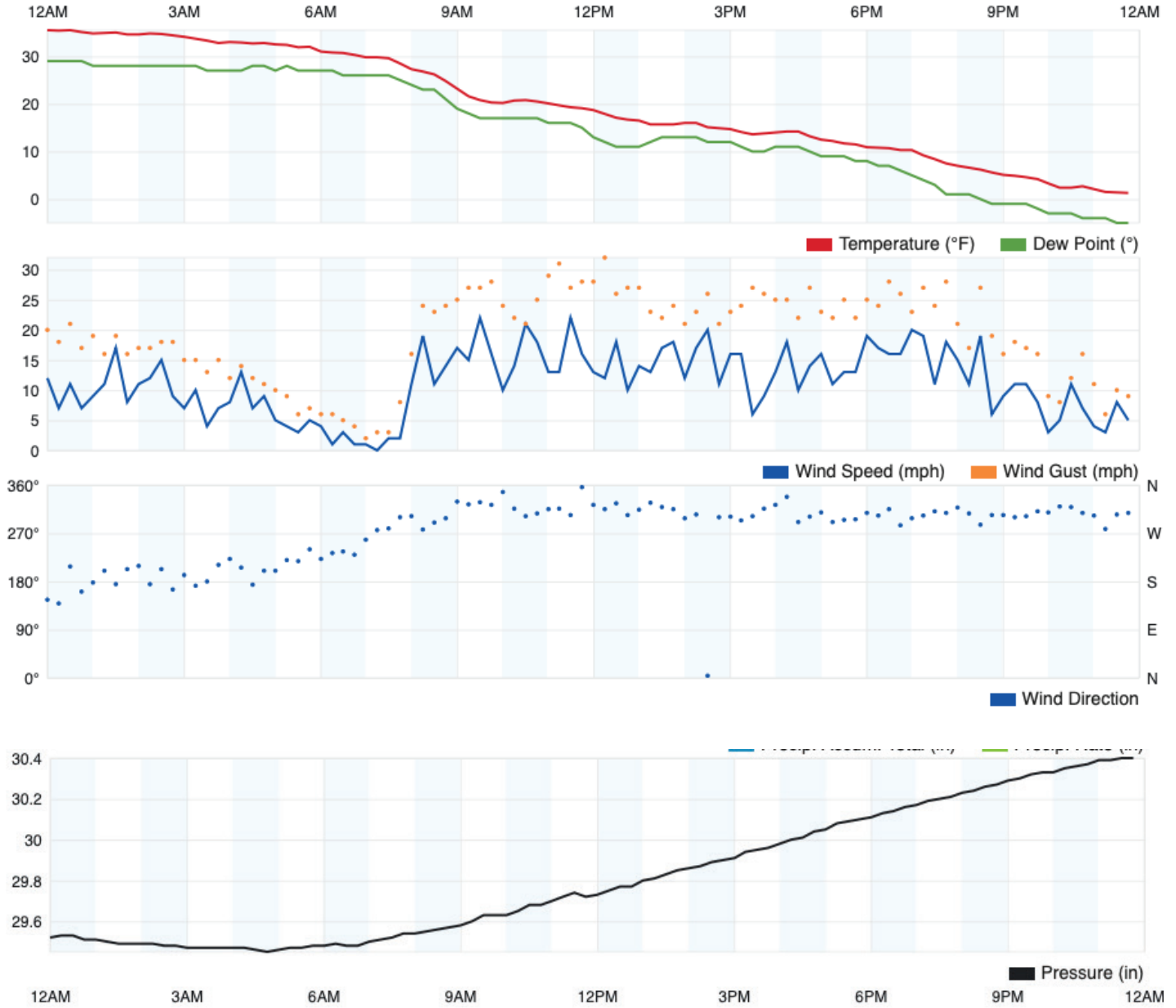
ROBERT ZULLO

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow
High: 25 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 36 °F	Low: 16 °F	High: 24 °F	Low: 5 °F	High: 26 °F

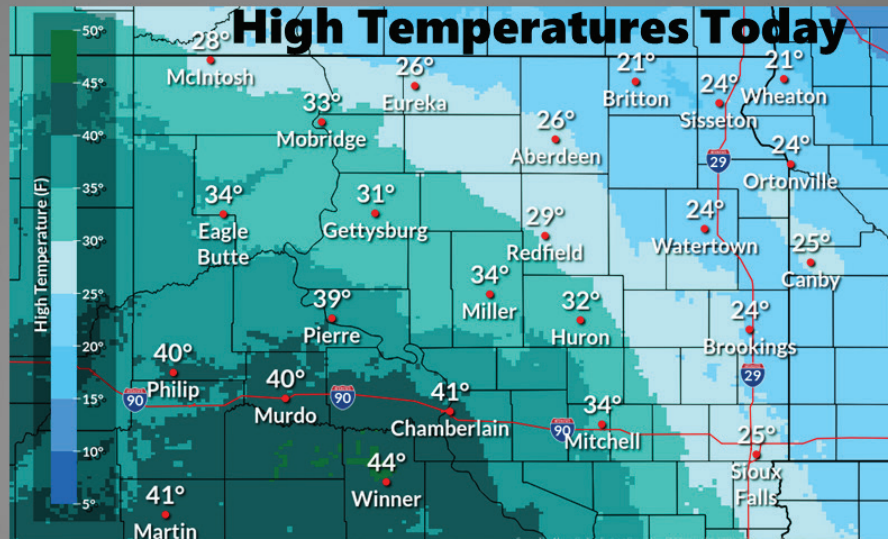


Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

Today
21 to 40°



warmest over south central South Dakota



Dry through Monday

Sunday
33 to 45°



Monday
20s



Dry weather will continue through Monday. Expect temperatures to range from the 30s to near 40 degrees across central South Dakota, to the low 20s over far northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Slightly warmer readings are anticipated Sunday.

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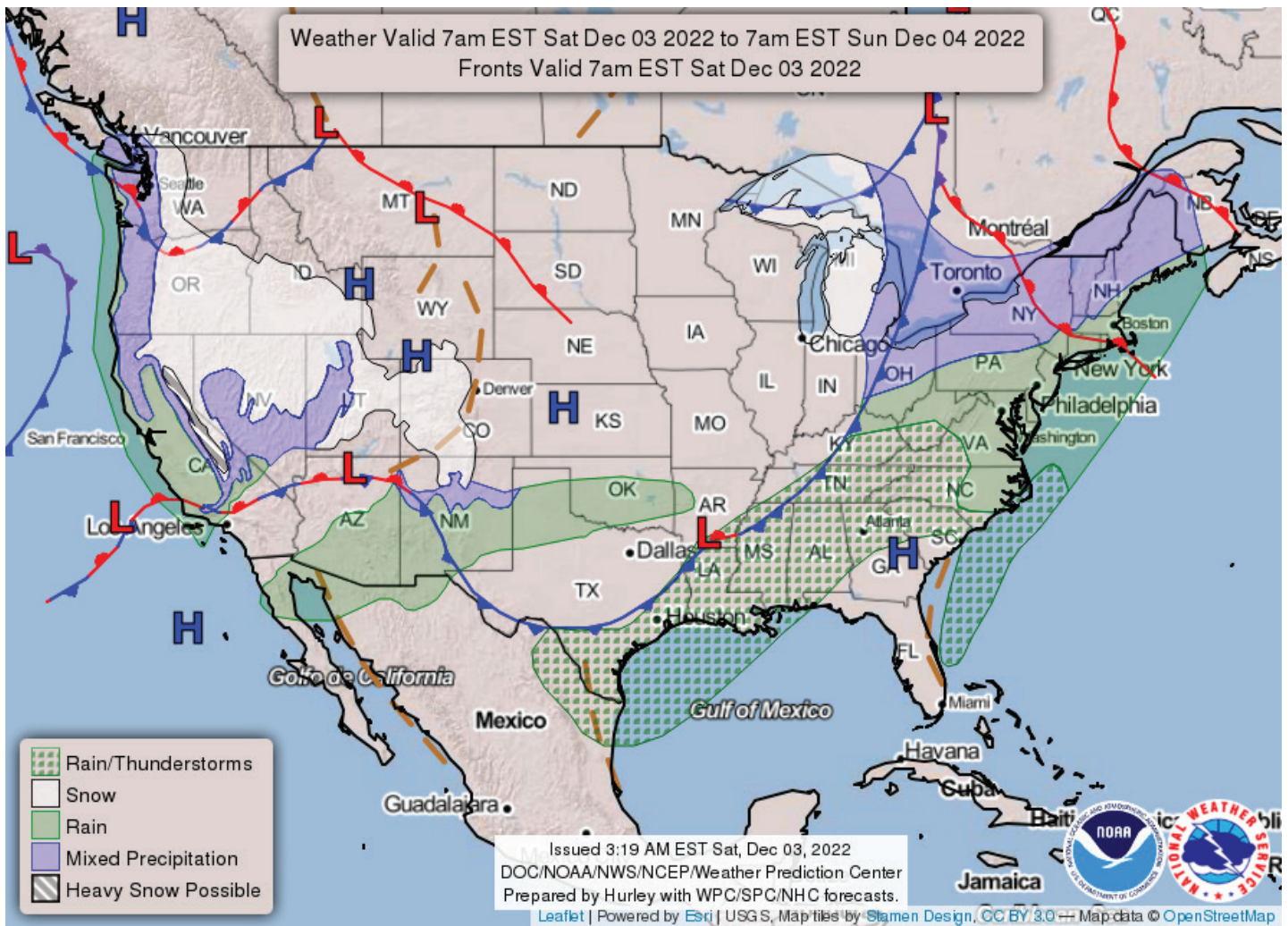
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 1 °F at 11:37 PM
Wind: 32 mph at 12:07 PM
Precip: : 0.00 (Maybe an inch of snow)

Day length: 8 hours, 59 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 63 in 1941
Record Low: -18 in 1905
Average High: 34°F
Average Low: 12°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.06
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.27
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 4:51:54 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:53:45 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 3, 1991: Strong northwesterly winds behind a departing surface low brought blizzard conditions and dangerously cold wind chill readings across west central and southwest Minnesota on the 3rd. A general 1 to 3-inch snowfall occurred across the area and combined with winds gusting to 50 mph at times to generate whiteout conditions from the morning into the evening. Air temperatures coupled with the strong wind to produce wind chill values ranging from 30 to 50 below zero. Some schools and businesses were closed during the morning as the storm intensified. Several car accidents and jackknifed tractor-semitrailers littered roadways. Many roads were closed at the height of the storm. Power outages occurred over a small portion of the area due to the strong winds downing ice-covered power lines.

December 3, 1838: Cleveland Abbe, an American meteorologist, and advocate of time zones was born on this day. He was trained as an astronomer and was appointed the director of the Cincinnati Observatory in 1868. He eventually turned to meteorology and inaugurated a public weather service that served as a model for today's National Weather Service.

1856 - A severe blizzard began to rage across Iowa and Kansas. It produced as much as 16 inches of snow in Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1926 - Yuma, AZ, was soaked with 1.10 inch of rain, and by the 10th of the month had received 4.43 inches, making it the wettest December of record. The average annual rainfall for Yuma is 3.38 inches. (3rd-10th) (The Weather Channel)

1983 - Birmingham, AL, was drenched with 9.22 inches of rain in 24 hours. The rains caused severe flash flooding which literally submerged traffic. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Stormy weather in the northwestern U.S. finally began to abate, but not before Gold Beach OR was drenched with 7.94 inches of rain in 24 hours. Low pressure spread snow from the Upper Mississippi Valley to the Central Appalachians. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Gale force winds ushered cold air into the northeastern U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 48 mph at Buffalo NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Heavy snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in northern New England. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 31 inches, at Limestone. Presque Isle ME reported a record 30 inches of snow in 24 hours, along with wind gusts to 46 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHAT GIFT?

Joyce fell behind in her Christmas shopping and suddenly realized that she had neglected to purchase cards for her friends. Hurriedly, she ran to the "surprise" section of a large greeting card store and purchased 100 cards with a beautiful scene of a family gathered in front of a glowing fireplace enjoying its warmth.

Returning home she hastily signed each of the cards without reading the message. Several days later she was sitting with her husband reviewing the guest list for a family dinner. She decided to show him the card she had sent to their friends.

After looking at the picture, she opened the card and read the verse to Jason, her husband: "This card is sent to you to say, A lovely gift is on the way!" Quite a surprise!

God gave us a "star" to alert us that His "lovely gift" would be discovered in a manger – His son. All of the books of the Bible describe the Gift that He promised to send, tell us the reason for His gift, and what we can enjoy now and in the life to come because of His gift.

But, as with every gift, there are two parts: one is the giver and the other is the receiver. An angel rejoiced and proclaimed: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." That is God the Giver, giving. And, John said, "As many as received Him...to them He gave life." But that is our choice: the receiver - to accept God's gift, His Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for the Gift of life You provided for each of us in Your Son. May we accept Your Gift in faith believing, that He came to save us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.



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

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2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest
11/19/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

01-21-36-46-52, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 3

(one, twenty-one, thirty-six, forty-six, fifty-two; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$354,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 81,000,000

No. 6 Baylor rallies past No. 14 Zags in 2021 title rematch

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — In a rematch of the 2021 national championship game, Adam Flagler hit a pair of 3s as No. 6 Baylor scored the final eight points to rally past No. 14 Gonzaga 64-63 Friday night.

Gonzaga's Rasir Bolton missed a wild, driving layup try at the buzzer.

Two seasons ago, Baylor beat the then-undefeated Zags 86-70 to win its first title. This time, the Bears didn't take the lead for good until Jalen Bridges made two free throws with 16 seconds left.

"Adam is a great leader, but no one knew he wasn't feeling well today," Baylor head coach Scott Drew said. "To be honest, some players wouldn't have played. He played through the pain and left it all out on the court. As a coach, I appreciate that."

The Bears (6-2) trailed 63-56 before Flagler hit a 3-pointer with 1:33 left. Flagler's 3 with just over a minute to play cut Baylor's deficit to 63-62.

After a Gonzaga shot clock violation, Flagler's 3-point attempt for the lead was off the mark, but Bridges was fouled by Drew Timme on the rebound attempt. Bridges hit two foul shots to put Baylor ahead.

The Zags (5-3) had a final chance when Bolton caught an inbounds pass near his own foul line with 4.6 seconds remaining. He drove the lane, but his off-balance shot went high off the glass and missed as the buzzer sounded.

"We took two balls down hill and tried to make plays at the rim. At that point in the game, those are tough," Gonzaga head coach Mark Few said. "It's very disappointing. They made plays, man."

Freshman Keyonte George had 18 points and seven rebounds for Baylor. Flagler had 11 points and Langston Love added 10.

"I trust my work. I was able to knock them down," George said. "My teammates believe in me each and every day. They give me that confidence in a big game to make big shots like that."

Malchi Smith scored 16 points for Gonzaga. Anton Watson added a double-double with 13 points and 13 rebounds. Timme had nine points.

Baylor led by as many as 12 in the first half before Gonzaga closed to five at the break.

Watson's basket put Gonzaga ahead 41-40. From there, the teams swapped leads over the next 13 minutes as the second half featured two ties and 14 lead changes.

A thunderous dunk from Smith gave Gonzaga its seven-point lead with under two minutes to go.

BIG PICTURE

Baylor: The win was a big rebound for Baylor after its 26-point loss to Marquette earlier in the week. The loss was the Bears' most lopsided since they fell to Kansas 82-56 in 2007

Gonzaga: After opening the season ranked No. 2 in the AP preseason poll, the Zags have now lost two of three.

STAR WATCH

Timme began the night leading the Bulldogs in scoring at 20 points per game. He was hampered by foul trouble against Baylor and got his first field goal with six minutes remaining. He fouled out with 16

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seconds to play.

REMATCH PLAYERS

Four players on the floor Friday night had significant minutes in the championship game two years ago including Flagler, Timme and Watson, along with Baylor's Flo Thamba.

UP NEXT

Baylor: The Bears return home to host Tarleton on Tuesday before playing Washington State on Sunday in Dallas for the Pac 12 Coast-to-Coast Challenge.

Gonzaga: The Bulldogs return to Spokane for three straight beginning Monday when they face Kent State for the first time in school history.

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Centerville 51, Hanson 42

Deubrook 49, Canistota 13

Freeman Academy/Marion 47, Colome 30

Garretson 63, Baltic 24

Oelrichs 60, Crazy Horse 27

Sioux Falls Lincoln 36, Yankton 22

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

Carry's 23 lead Kent State over South Dakota State 83-68

By The Associated Press undefined

KENT, Ohio (AP) — Sincere Carry had 23 points in Kent State's 83-68 win against South Dakota State on Friday night.

Carry was 10 of 16 shooting (3 for 5 from distance) for the Golden Flashes (6-2). Malique Jacobs added 13 points while going 4 of 11 and 5 of 6 from the free throw line, and he also had seven assists and five steals. Cli'Ron Hornbeak shot 4 of 5 from the field and 3 for 3 from the line to finish with 11 points, while adding 10 rebounds and three blocks.

Zeke Mayo led the Jackrabbits (3-5) in scoring, finishing with 12 points. Matthew Mors added 10 points for South Dakota State. In addition, William Kyle III finished with nine points and six rebounds.

OSHA probes worker's death at Sioux Falls packaging facility

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Occupational Safety and Health Administration confirmed Friday that it is investigating a death that occurred at a Sioux Falls packaging facility earlier this week.

OSHA spokesperson Scott Allen said investigators were speaking with employees and the owner of Bell Inc. to determine what happened in the Tuesday incident. The Argus Leader reports Allen was not able to disclose how the employee died or any identifying details.

Ben Arndt, the chief operating officer of Bell, released a statement saying the company was saddened by the loss of an employee.

"Bell Incorporated will also continue to cooperate with the authorities and investigators to better understand how this incident occurred. The safety and well-being of our employees remains our top priority," Arndt wrote.

OSHA has up to six months to investigate the death and determine if the company violated any safety standards.

Bell Inc.'s website says it is a Sioux Falls-based packaging company that specializes in food packaging, mail envelopes and consumer products.

South Dakota Gov. Noem appoints incoming secretary of state

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday appointed Monae Johnson, who won election for secretary of state in November, to fill the position for the next month following the early resignation of the current secretary of state.

Johnson was set to be sworn into office in early January, but Steve Barnett, who previously held the office, has resigned to take a job in the private sector, Noem's office said. Barnett had held the position of South Dakota's top election official since 2019, but was pushed from a reelection bid after Johnson won the Republican nomination at a party convention in June.

Johnson centered her campaign on what she called "election integrity" and criticized Barnett's recent efforts to allow voters to update their registration information, such as a change of address, online. She has repeatedly declined to say whether President Joe Biden was elected legitimately — an avoidance that gives room for former President Donald Trump's false claim that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

"She was elected because of her promise to focus on election integrity, and I look forward to working with her on those efforts," Noem said in a statement.

Johnson has also said she wants to ensure that Native American voters can easily register to vote and to make the state's campaign finance reporting system more accessible online. She also plans to push counties to canvas their vote tallies with hand counts — a process that could significantly slow local election officials' work and make it more cumbersome.

Johnson said she was looking forward to taking over the office early, saying that it would allow her to "immediately get to work for the citizens of South Dakota to finish up the year-end duties."

For many Hawaiians, lava flows are a time to honor, reflect

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — When Willette Kalaokahaku Akima-Akau looks out at the the lava flowing from Mauna Loa volcano and makes an offering of gin, tobacco and coins, she will be taking part in a tradition passed down from her grandfather and other Native Hawaiians as a way to honor both the natural and spiritual worlds.

Akima-Akau said she plans to take her grandchildren with her and together they will make their offerings and chant to Pele, the Hawaiian deity of volcanoes and fire, who her grandfather used to pay reverence to as a kupuna, a word that can mean ancestor.

"This is the time for our kupuna, for our people, and for our children to come and witness what is happening as history is being made every day," she said, adding that today's experiences will be added to the next generation's stories, songs, dances and chants.

For many Native Hawaiians, an eruption of a volcano like Mauna Loa has a deep yet very personal cultural significance. For many it can be an opportunity to feel a connection with creation itself through the way lava gives birth to new land, as well as a time to reflect on their own place in the world and the people who came before them.

"A volcanic eruption is a physical manifestation of so many natural and spiritual forces for Hawaiians," said Ilihia Gionson, a Hawaii Tourism Authority spokesperson who is Native Hawaiian and lives on the Big Island. "People who are unfamiliar with that should understand that it's a very personal, very significant thing."

To be sure, not all Native Hawaiians will feel the need to make a trek to see the lava, but among those who do, some may chant, some may pray to ancestors and some may honor the moment with hula, or dance.

"Some people may be moved to just kind of observe in silence, meditate, you know, commune with their higher power or their kupuna in their own ways," Gionson said.

Kainani Kahaunaele said as a Native Hawaiian, she feels moved to honor the moment and will take her children, nieces, nephews and close friends as close to the lava flow as possible. There they will chant to Pele.

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"Our hookupu will be our voice," she said, using the Hawaiian word for offering. "It's not for any kind of show. It's a connection that we're making to Pele, to the land, to Mauna Loa."

Many Hawaiians are practicing family traditions that have been passed down from elders.

Akima-Akau, who lives in Kawaihae on the west side of the Big Island, remembers hearing stories about how her grandfather would fly from Maui or Oahu whenever there was a Big Island lava flow to honor Pele.

"He would jump on a plane and come to Hawaii Island to give his hookupu," offerings of gin, silver dollars and tobacco, she said.

Her grandfather died before she was born, so she doesn't know exactly why he chose those items, but he wasn't alone. She said she grew up knowing others who offered the same items, so that is what her family will bring. She said the children will offer Pele a ti leaf lei.

Hawaiians have different relationships with the spirituality of lava, said Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner Kealoha Pisciotta. To Pisciotta, the lava "brings good mana" — which can mean supernatural or divine power — "and cleanses where it needs cleansing."

There are also different relationships and connections to Pele, who some refer to as a god or goddess. Pele has great significance in Hawaiian culture, representing all the phenomena related to volcanoes — the magma, steam, ash, acid rain.

"Her primary form is the lava, not necessarily that she is a female, human person. But the image of her function is creation, which happens to be a very feminine image," said Kekuhi Keali'ikanaka'ole, a cultural practitioner in Hilo.

Pisciotta calls her "Tutu Pele," using the word for grandparent, because deities "are more ancient than we are."

Manua Loa's spectacular show is drawing thousands of people seeking nighttime views of the lava flowing down the mountain's northeast flank, clogging the main east-west road on the island. Among them are those coming to pay their respects, leaving altars or shrines along the roadway.

The slow-moving lava flow was about 2.7 miles (4.3 kilometers) from the road Friday, U.S. Geological Survey scientists said.

Cultural practitioners like Pisciotta want lava gawkers to be mindful of those who are chanting, praying or gathering in ceremonies amid the eruption: "Give them some space and respect."

"If a person doing something wants to invite somebody to participate or watch, there will be an invitation," said Gionson, the tourism official. "And if not, respect that and keep a respectful distance."

So far, the tourism authority hasn't received any complaints about people getting in the way of cultural practices, he said, adding that the agency focuses on educating tourists in general about being respectful and behaving appropriately when visiting the islands.

Kahaunaele, who teaches Hawaiian language and music at the University of Hawaii's Hilo campus and planned to gather with her family on Thursday night, knows that visitors to the island might be curious when they see and hear her family chanting.

"Don't film us. Don't even ask for permission, just don't," she said. "That even goes for locals. Don't infringe upon anybody else's moment."

South Dakota man accused of threatening Gov. Noem, judge

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man is charged with threatening a state official and judge after he allegedly faxed a message to a local TV station saying he planned to kill Gov. Kristi Noem and allegedly emailed a threat to a judge.

Jason Shields was arrested in October shortly after the threats were made, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported. He is charged with a pair of felonies that each carry a maximum five-year prison sentence.

According to court documents, Shields sent a one-page fax to a TV station on Oct. 23 saying he and several others were planning to kill the Republican governor soon. Law enforcement arrested Shields that day. He later told law enforcement officers that he had acted alone, court documents say.

Shield also told officers that a day earlier he had emailed Magistrate Judge Donna Bucher that he wanted

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her killed because he felt she had made decisions that were not "appropriate or just," according to court documents.

Shields has not yet entered a plea. His attorney, Sandy Steffen, declined to comment on the charges.

Both the governor's security team and South Dakota's court system increased their security protocols after the threats.

Heading west: FCS top 2 seeds draw foes from the east

By HANK KURZ Jr. AP Sports Writer

The odds appear to be stacked against unseeded Delaware when the Blue Hens travel west to face top-seeded South Dakota State in the Championship Subdivision playoffs this weekend.

Just over 18 months ago, when the pandemic pushed the FCS season into the spring, Delaware made the same trip in the national semifinals and was beaten 33-3.

This time, the Blue Hens (8-4) have Ryan Carty on their sideline.

The first-year Delaware coach was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Sam Houston, which beat the Jackrabbits 23-21 to win the national championship in May 2021.

"Not anything that happened 18 months ago or a national championship in the spring or any of that stuff — It's not going to matter until we get out there and see how we perform and see how we rise to a challenge," Carty said this week. "Hopefully, attack."

Carty does have one thing no South Dakota State player has ever been able to claim: The former quarterback won a national championship with Delaware as a player in 2003.

The Blue Hens advanced with a 56-17 victory against Saint Francis (Pa.) with Nolan Henderson throwing for four touchdowns and running for another, but they will be hard-pressed to match those numbers against the nation's No. 2 overall defense (255 yards per game), the No. 3 scoring defense (15.5 ppg) and the top rushing defense (71.4 ypg).

The Jackrabbits (10-1) haven't played since Nov. 12, and coach John Stiegelmeier used the break to practice sparingly for two weeks and send his team home for Thanksgiving.

"Legs are back. I think the biggest thing was not to practice football but to get away from football," he said. "... So in my mind, the spirit, the energy, the bounce in your step is as important as your bench press and 40 times. So I feel good about that."

The Jackrabbits have been ranked No. 1 for several weeks and are making their 11th consecutive post-season appearance. The top perch may have been heady stuff for a bit, the coach said, "but now we kind of settled in feeling like it's a worthy ranking and it's a worthy seed. So I think, again, we've got a really mature football team, so that helps."

ALSO HEADING WEST

Richmond, like Delaware, is one of five teams from the Colonial Athletic Association that made the playoffs, and opened with a 41-0 victory over Davidson.

Their reward? A trip west to face second-seeded Sacramento State (11-0), the first team since Montana in 2006 to go 8-0 in the Big Sky Conference in back-to-back seasons. The Big Sky was also the only other league to get five teams in the playoff field.

The Hornets will pose ample challenges, Spiders coach Russ Huesman said, but the one that seemed to catch his eye most was running back Cameron Skattebo, the Big Sky's offensive MVP whose 1,251 rushing yards include just seven yards in losses.

"He's the best we'll play this year here and he's tremendous, powerful, tremendous balance. He had a run against Eastern Washington that was probably the most incredible run that I've seen on film this year for sure and in a long, long time," Huesman said.

Richmond quarterback Reece Udinski also heads into the matchup with sterling numbers, including a 75% completions rate, 3,398 yards, 28 touchdowns and four interceptions.

The Hornets have never won the national title; Richmond won it in 2008.

WHERE'S THE DEFENSE?

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An average of 69 points were scored in the eight first-round games, including New Hampshire's 52-42 win against Fordham, Gardner-Webb's 52-41 win against Eastern Kentucky and Southeast Louisiana's 45-42 victory against Idaho.

The numbers surprised Stiegelmeier.

"If you're going to get to Frisco, you're not going to just outscore people. You got to play some good defense," he said.

LET'S DO IT AGAIN

Besides Delaware and Richmond, former champions still in the field include defending champion North Dakota State, winner of nine of the last 11 titles, Furman (1988) and Montana (1995, 2001).

HE SAID IT

"If I wasn't coaching I'd be out shooting pheasants in this weather." — Stiegelmeier, explaining that deer and pheasant season in South Dakota could lead to a smaller crowd at Saturday's game.

EPA seeks to mandate more use of ethanol and other biofuels

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed increasing the amount of ethanol and other biofuels that must be blended into the nation's fuel supplies over the next three years, a move welcomed by renewable fuel and farm groups but condemned by environmentalists and oil industry groups.

"This proposal supports low-carbon renewable fuels and seeks public input on ways to strengthen the program," EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan said in a statement. "With this proposal, EPA seeks to provide consumers with more options while diversifying our nation's energy mix."

The proposal also includes new incentives to encourage the use of biogas from farms and landfills, and renewable biomass such as wood, to generate electricity to charge electric vehicles. It's the first time the EPA has set biofuel targets on its own instead of using numbers from Congress. The agency opened a public comment period and will hold a hearing in January.

The goal of the existing Renewable Fuel Standard is to reduce carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, expand the country's fuel supply, strengthen energy security and reduce fuel prices for consumers. Ethanol is a key part of the economy in many Midwest states, consuming about 40% of the nation's corn supply.

But environmentalists argue that it's a net ecological and climate detriment because growing all that corn fosters unsustainable farming practices, while the oil industry says ethanol mandates constrain free market forces and limit consumer choice, and that higher blends can damage older vehicles.

Geoff Cooper, president and CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association, told reporters on a conference call that the EPA's plan creates a "clear pathway for sustainable growth for our industry when it comes to the production and use of low-carbon fuels like ethanol." He said it also bolsters the industry's push for year-round sales of gasoline with a 15% ethanol blend, as well as sales of the 85% ethanol blend E85.

"As the administration is working to address climate change, we've long known that biofuels will play an important role in reducing greenhouse gases while having the added benefit of providing expanded opportunities for farmers," National Farmers Union President Rob Larew said in a statement.

But environmental groups said the plan offers false solutions to climate change.

"This is a toxic plan directly at odds with the Biden Administration's commitment to Environmental Justice," Sarah Lutz, climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said in a statement. "Charging electric vehicles with forests and factory farms should be a non-starter."

Geoff Moody, senior vice president of the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers said the Renewable Fuel Standard was meant to be a liquid fuels program, not an electric vehicle program. He urged the EPA to go back as it develops the final rule and reject "yet another massive regulatory subsidy for electric vehicle manufacturers."

The EPA proposes to set the total target for all kinds of renewable fuels at 20.82 billion gallons for 2023,

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including 15 billion gallons from corn ethanol. The target would grow to 22.68 billion gallons for 2025, including 15.25 billion gallons of corn ethanol. The plan also calls for growth in cellulosic biofuels — which are made from fibrous plant materials — biomass-based diesel and other advanced biofuels.

Republican U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, of Iowa, the country's top corn and ethanol producing state, said in a statement that the EPA should have gone further to require even more use of advanced biofuels to move freight, which he said would help lower prices for consumer goods.

Cooper said there's probably no way to meet the proposed higher targets without more use of E15 and E85 instead of the conventional 10% ethanol mix. That makes it important to eliminate regulations that block summertime sales of E15, he said.

So, he predicted, the EPA's proposal should bolster prospects for legislation introduced this week by Democratic U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota, and GOP Sen. Deb Fischer, of Nebraska, to allow year-round sales of E15 nationwide. E15 sales are usually prohibited between June 1 and Sept. 15 because of concerns that it adds to smog in high temperatures.

Eight Midwest governors asked the EPA in April to allow year-round sales of E15 in their states. But Cooper said the new bill would provide a "nationwide fix" that even the American Petroleum Institute considers preferable to the current patchwork of temporary waivers and ad hoc solutions.

Defeated election conspiracists seek to lead Michigan GOP

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press/Report for America

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The Republicans who lost their races for Michigan's top three statewide offices after promoting falsehoods about the 2020 presidential election are not planning to go quietly.

Two of the candidates who denied President Joe Biden's victory in the state have announced plans to run for the position that leads the state GOP, while the third has said she is considering a challenge for the top post.

That is raising concerns within the party after it suffered a drubbing in Michigan, a perennial political battleground that is poised to play a pivotal role in the 2024 presidential race. Their attempts to gain control of the party apparatus also show how far-right conservatives are trying to maintain their grip on the party's grassroots at a time the GOP nationally is wrestling with its direction after lackluster midterm results.

Kristina Karamo, a community college professor who lost her race for secretary of state after mounting a campaign filled with election conspiracies, used the same kind of charged language she had throughout her campaign in announcing her intention to run for Michigan party chair.

In a statement posted this week to social media, she said the state Republican Party had begun operating as "mini-gangs instead of soldiers fighting for freedom," and that the state was on "the precipice of tyranny, which voting alone will not be able to overcome."

Instead of being afraid of attacks, she wrote, "we must strike fear in the heart of the enemy at the gate."

The race for Michigan GOP chair, which will be decided at a February party convention, comes after Democrats took control of all levels of power for the first time since the 1980s. Democrats won control of both houses of the Legislature and defeated Republicans by significant margins for governor, attorney general and secretary of state.

Many state and national Republicans have expressed concern that similar defeats could become commonplace without a course correction within the state Republican Party.

"It's hard to think of a state where Republicans lost more than in Michigan," said Stu Sandler, a national Republican consultant. The state party wasn't the traditional partner it had been in the past, he said, in part due to a chair he described as not very active.

"The chair could be very important, particularly, because they have no statewide elected official or prominent Republican as a voice, and that's something that chair could be under the right circumstances," Sandler said.

In addition to Karamo, attorney general candidate Matthew DePerno has announced he will seek the position. Republican Tudor Dixon, who lost the governor's race by 11 percentage points to Democratic

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Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, said she also is considering running.

All three candidates were endorsed by former President Donald Trump and echoed his false claims of a stolen election — although Dixon pivoted away from her earlier statements after she won the Republican primary for governor.

“This race is unique because it’s the fruition of a very long battle between grassroots elements and the so-called establishment,” said John Sellek, a Republican consultant in Michigan. “For the first time, this race is a choice between multiple MAGA candidates, meaning the grassroots may have finally taken over.”

A state party memo written days after the Nov. 8 election, and shared on social media by Dixon, blamed the grassroots takeover for the Republicans’ midterm losses. Michigan GOP chief of staff Paul Cordes wrote that the party struggled due to a lack of “high quality, substantive candidates and well-funded campaigns.”

“Over the course of this cycle, the Michigan Republican Party operated within the political reality that President Trump was popular amongst our grassroots and a motivating factor for his supporters, but provided challenges on a statewide ballot, especially with independents and women in the midterm election,” Cordes wrote.

The memo also pointed to an abortion rights ballot proposal, which passed overwhelmingly, as one reason for the Democrats’ sweep. Candidates in the state also ran in new districts drawn by an independent citizens commission that had been created previously by votes, instead of the heavily gerrymandered districts that had been drawn by Republican lawmakers.

Dixon said in response that the memo was a “perfect example of what is wrong” with the party and that there is “an issue of leadership.”

Current chair Ron Weiser has said he will not seek reelection, while co-chair Meshawn Maddock has not announced whether she will run. Michigan Republican Party spokesperson Gustavo Portela said the party would have no further comment about the chair competition.

Similar to party conventions last spring, where delegates nominated DePerno and Karamo, the chair position will be chosen by county precinct delegates during the Feb. 18 convention. Jason Roe, a GOP consultant and county delegate, expects the delegates attending the convention to once again be grassroots activists that favor Trump-backed candidates.

“There is no way on God’s earth that the donors of the state would entrust a DePerno or Karamo with the resources needed to regain power,” said Roe. “There will have to be something done outside the traditional structure.”

With over two months remaining before the convention, some in the party still hope a candidate will emerge that can unite both the grassroots and establishment sides of the party.

Former U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, who served as an ambassador to the Netherlands from 2018 to 2021, said during a recent interview that he’s considering running. State Sen. Tom Barrett, who lost the 7th Congressional District race to Democrat Elissa Slotkin, also has been pushed by Republicans to seek the position, according to spokesman Jason Roe.

DePerno said he believes he can unite both sides of the party. In an interview Friday, he said the party needs to be rebuilt to “bring together the grassroots activists with the legacy donor class.”

“The legacy donors, although they didn’t want to publicly support candidates that they thought were associated with Donald Trump, they did support me at least through third party PACs,” DePerno said.

The former tax lawyer rose to prominence in the party by pushing Trump’s lies of a stolen election in the state following the 2020 presidential election. A special prosecutor is currently reviewing whether to criminally charge DePerno and others for attempting to gain access to voting machines after that election.

Lavora Barnes, chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, said the “biggest gift the Republicans can continue to give us” is infighting within the state party and nominating candidates who are “crazy and right of crazy.”

“Looking at this group of folks who are interested in running for chair, I think we might see a little bit of the same in terms of the kind of candidates that these folks would support,” Barnes said. “And I think that will help us hold the legislature going forward.”

Built to disappear: World Cup stadium 974

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Of the seven stadiums Qatar built for the World Cup, one will disappear after the tournament.

That's what the games' organizers have said about Stadium 974 in Doha — a port-side structure with more than 40,000 seats partially built from recycled shipping containers and steel.

Qatar says the stadium will be fully dismantled after the World Cup and could be shipped to countries that need the infrastructure. Outside experts have praised the design, but say more needs to be known about what happens to the stadium after the event.

"Designing for disassembly is one of the main principles of sustainable building," said Karim Elgendy, an associate fellow at the London-based Chatham House think tank who previously worked as a climate consultant for the World Cup.

"It allows for the natural restoration of a building site or its reuse for another function," he said, adding that a number of factors need to be considered "before we call a building sustainable."

Buildings are responsible for nearly 40% of the world's energy-related carbon emissions. Of that, about 10% comes from "embodied" carbon or the greenhouse gas emissions related to the construction, maintenance and demolition of buildings.

Qatar has faced international criticism for its treatment of low-paid migrant workers who built over \$200 billion worth of stadiums, metro lines and other infrastructure for the World Cup. Qatar says the criticism ignores labor reforms enacted in recent years.

Stadium 974, named after Qatar's international dialing code and the number of containers used to build the stadium, is the only venue that Qatar constructed for the World Cup that isn't air-conditioned. During a match Friday in which Switzerland defeated Serbia, the air was noticeably more humid and hot than in other venues.

The stadium is hosting only evening matches, when temperatures are cooler.

Fenwick Iribarren Architects, which designed Stadium 974 and two other World Cup stadiums, says the idea was to avoid building a "white elephant," a stadium that is left unused or underused after the tournament ends, as happened following previous World Cups in South Africa, Brazil and Russia.

Qatar says it has developed plans for the other six stadiums after the games are over. Many will have a number of seats removed.

The multi-colored shipping containers are used as building blocks for Stadium 974 and also to house facilities such as restrooms in the interior of the structure. Like giant Lego blocks, the bright red, yellow and blue corrugated steel boxes appear suspended between layers of steel. The design gives the stadium an industrial feel.

Qatar has not detailed where the dismantled stadium will go after the tournament or even when it will be taken down. Organizers have said the stadium could be repurposed to build a venue of the same size elsewhere or multiple smaller stadiums.

Where its components go matters because of the emissions implicated by shipping them thousands of kilometers away.

Carbon Market Watch, an environmental watchdog group that investigated Qatar's World Cup sustainability plans, said whether Stadium 974 has a lower carbon footprint than a permanent one comes down to "how many times, and how far, the stadium is transported and reassembled."

FIFA and Qatar acknowledge that in a report estimating the stadium's emissions. If the stadium is reused only once, they estimate its emissions would be lower than a permanent one as long as it is shipped fewer than 7,000 kilometers (about 4,350 miles) away.

If it's repurposed more than once, it could be shipped farther and still be less polluting than a permanent venue, they said, because of how energy-intensive building multiple new stadiums is.

Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the organizing committee for the World Cup, did not respond to a request for more information about plans after the tournament.

The report also didn't factor in operational emissions — or those produced from running a building — once the stadium is repurposed because standards vary in different countries, FIFA and Qatar said.

"The energy required for dismantling and shipping the building components will obviously need to be estimated," Elgendy said, "but it is unlikely to outweigh the carbon embodied in the building materials."

For now, the stadium's design isn't lost on spectators. On any game night, fans entering and leaving the stadium take selfies against its modern, industrial facade. The temporary stadium is hosting seven games in total — with the final one on Monday between Brazil and South Korea.

Jhonarel Miñoza, a 42-year-old Qatari resident originally from the Philippines, said she and her sister wanted to see a game in each of the seven stadiums.

Miñoza, an administrative officer who has lived in Qatar for five years, said she had heard about Stadium 974's unconventional design before the game she attended on Friday.

"I was really eager to know how they built it," Miñoza said. "When I came inside here, I was just checking how they did that."

Beijing, Shenzhen scrap COVID-19 tests for public transport

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities on Saturday announced a further easing of COVID-19 curbs with major cities such as Shenzhen and Beijing no longer requiring negative tests to take public transport.

The slight relaxation of testing requirements comes even as daily virus infections reach near-record highs, and follows weekend protests across the country by residents frustrated by the rigid enforcement of anti-virus restrictions that are now entering their fourth year, even as the rest of the world has opened up.

The southern technological manufacturing center of Shenzhen said Saturday that commuters no longer need to show a negative COVID-19 test result to use public transport or when entering pharmacies, parks and tourist attractions.

Meanwhile, the capital Beijing said Friday that negative test results are also no longer required for public transport from Monday. However, a negative result obtained within the past 48 hours is still required to enter venues like shopping malls, which have gradually reopened with many restaurants and eateries providing takeout services.

The requirement has led to complaints from some Beijing residents that even though the city has shut many testing stations, most public venues still require COVID-19 tests.

The government reported 33,018 domestic infections in the past 24 hours, including 29,085 with no symptoms.

As the rest of the world has learned to live with the virus, China remains the only major nation still sticking to a "zero-COVID" strategy which aims to isolate every infected person. The policy, which has been in place since the pandemic started, led to snap lockdowns and mass testing across the country.

China still imposes mandatory quarantine for incoming travelers even as its infection numbers are low compared to its 1.4 billion population.

The recent demonstrations, the largest and most widely spread in decades, erupted Nov. 25 after a fire in an apartment building in the northwestern city of Urumqi killed at least 10 people.

That set off angry questions online about whether firefighters or victims trying to escape were blocked by locked doors or other anti-virus controls. Authorities denied that, but the deaths became a focus of public frustration.

The country saw several days of protests across cities including Shanghai and Beijing, with protesters demanding an easing of COVID-19 curbs. Some demanded Chinese President Xi Jinping step down, an extraordinary show of public dissent in a society over which the ruling Communist Party exercises near total control.

Xi's government has promised to reduce the cost and disruption of controls but says it will stick with "zero COVID." Health experts and economists expect it to stay in place at least until mid-2023 and possibly into 2024 while millions of older people are vaccinated in preparation for lifting controls that keep most visitors out of China.

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While the government has conceded some mistakes, blamed mainly on overzealous officials, criticism of government policies can result in punishment. Former NBA star Jeremy Lin, who plays for a Chinese team, was recently fined 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) for criticizing conditions in team quarantine facilities, according to local media reports.

On Friday, World Health Organization emergencies director Dr. Michael Ryan said that the U.N. agency was "pleased" to see China loosening some of its coronavirus restrictions, saying "it's really important that governments listen to their people when the people are in pain."

At Shanghai vigil, bold shout for change preceded crackdown

By DAKE KANG and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

SHANGHAI (AP) — The mourners in Shanghai lit candles and placed flowers. Someone scrawled "Urumqi, 11.24, Rest in Peace" in red on cardboard — referring to the deadly apartment fire in China's western city of Urumqi that sparked anger over perceptions the country's strict COVID-19 measures played a role in the disaster.

What started as a small vigil last weekend by fewer than a dozen people grew into a rowdy crowd of hundreds hours later. One woman defiantly shouted for Chinese leader Xi Jinping to resign, emboldening others. Then, before dawn, police swept in and broke up the gathering and prevented more from happening.

The Nov. 26 protest in Shanghai wasn't the first or the largest. But it was notable for the bold calls for change in China's leadership — the most public defiance of the ruling Communist Party in decades.

Nationalist bloggers swiftly blamed foreign "black hands," and the government vowed to crack down on "hostile forces." But the protest emerged spontaneously, according to 11 participants and witnesses interviewed by The Associated Press. It was the first political demonstration for nearly all of them, and they spoke on condition of not being fully identified for fear of police harassment.

Three grinding years of lockdowns under China's "zero-COVID" policy, along with Xi's erasure of civil liberties, made the country ripe for such an outburst in a way that nobody expected — not the authorities, the police or protesters themselves.

The vigil on the evening of Saturday, Nov. 26, took place in Shanghai's French Concession, a trendy district filled with boutique Art Deco cafes, vintage shops and historic Tudor mansions. Among the first there were local artists and musicians, according to two friends of early participants.

One bustling boulevard is named after Urumqi — the city in the far-northwestern Xinjiang region where the Nov. 24 fire killed at least 10. Many criticized government COVID-19 restrictions for preventing victims from fleeing, a charge the authorities denied.

Anger soon flared on Chinese social media. Millions of online posts blamed virus control barricades for delaying rescuers, and Urumqi residents hit the streets to protest their months-long lockdown.

Resistance to the policy had been building for weeks. In central Henan province, workers walked out of an iPhone factory when told they'd be locked in as part of virus controls. In cosmopolitan Guangzhou, residents brawled with police enforcing lockdowns.

Earlier that day, from Chengdu in the south to Harbin in the north, university students confined to campuses for months lit candles, sprayed graffiti and took selfies while holding signs mourning the Urumqi dead.

Road signs on Shanghai's Urumqi Middle Road were surrounded by candles, signs and flowers. Dozens had gathered by 10:30 p.m., according to friends of participants.

Then patrons spilled out of a nearby bar after a World Cup match between South Korea and Uruguay, according to a friend of an early participant. Many joined the vigil, taking photos and sharing them online.

At 11:21 p.m., a popular Twitter account tracking dissent in China posted images of the vigils, drawing the attention of many who had been scrolling anguished posts on the Urumqi fire.

That the blaze resonated in Shanghai was no coincidence, participants said. Many of the city's apartment buildings were sealed-off during a lockdown in April and May, sparking fire safety fears and leaving many seething.

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"People could not only empathize with the people in Urumqi, they realized that this could also be them," said Dali Yang, a China expert at the University of Chicago.

A person who identified himself only by his French name Zoel said he attended to pay his respects after seeing a photo on the Chinese messenger app WeChat. When he got there past midnight, he found sizable crowds — and police. People had gathered at two spots, laying flowers and lighting candles.

"It was very peaceful," Zoel said.

Police soon surrounded the candles, keeping anyone from getting closer.

At one display, a student argued with an officer, according to video sent to AP.

"You're a government worker. You have a future, but do we?" the student shouted. His face then scrunched up and his voice became a whimper: "Do we have a future? Do we?"

Someone distributed sheets of blank paper for people to hold — a symbol of the all-encompassing censorship under Xi.

The mood shifted. New arrivals yelled at the quiet crowd: "Why are you wearing a mask? Take off your mask!"

"They were very extreme," Zoel said. Until then, he said, it was mostly friendly conversation and greetings, or discussions of the World Cup.

Then came shouted slogans: "Freedom of speech!" "Long live the people!" and "Apologize!"

Shortly after 2 a.m., a female voice rang out: "Xi Jinping, step down!"

Heads turned in shock.

Her boldness shattered perhaps the biggest political taboo in China. Xi, the country's most authoritarian leader since Mao Zedong, has purged the press, tightened censorship and built a digital surveillance apparatus to exert control.

A protester who identified himself only as Marco called the remark "unimaginable." Speaking Xi's name strikes fear, he said, because the leader is "an untouchable taboo in many people's hearts."

Then another voice chimed in — this time a man's, loud and clear. A hundred or more roared in response.

"Once one person opens their mouth, everyone else dares to speak," said a protester who initially kept quiet. After hearing people say, "Xi Jinping, step down," he felt braver and pushed things further by cursing him. Others shouted slurs.

Many blamed Xi, who personally led the way on pandemic policies, for China's harsh approach.

But fearful of a crackdown, some in the crowd left, including Marco. "There were more and more police," he said. "I was a coward."

Shortly after 3 a.m., police swung into action.

The clearance operation began when officers in black arrived, moving between the two vigils and cutting the crowd in two, according to two protesters.

Police lined up in formation, locked arms by the dozen and marched toward protesters to push them off Urumqi road, demonstrators said.

Some officers charged, seizing individuals and sending others fleeing. Video seen by AP showed police pushing and tackling protesters. Two witnesses said police also used pepper spray.

By 7 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 27, all protesters were cleared away, according to one who stayed until the end.

A few hours later, however, hundreds returned. Many were newcomers, electrified by images from the night before.

Individuals wandering onto Urumqi Middle Road were pounced on by police and detained. Still, people stayed.

About 3 p.m., a man with a bouquet asked an officer, "I'm holding flowers, is that a crime?" He shouted: "We Chinese need to be a little braver!"

He was seized by police and shoved into a car, according to a witness and images of the incident.

Police cordoned off the vigil site. Tensions between officers and protesters grew.

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Some chanted slogans for freedom or against virus restrictions. Others were more sarcastic, shouting, "Serve the people!" — mocking a well-worn Communist motto — according to one protester.

"Do you understand the symbolism of what you're holding?" one officer told a girl raising a piece of paper. "Don't be used or incited by others!"

Police in neon green vests hurried people along, picking off individuals at times. Officers entered restaurants and ordered diners to leave in the middle of meals.

"Police violence!" protesters shouted. Others cursed officers as "dogs."

By around 6 p.m., curious crowds and protesters numbered in the thousands.

Waves of detentions began. Officers charged and arrested people at random, beating or kicking some whom they grabbed, witnesses said. The crowd was packed so tightly that some feared a stampede.

Those detained were forced onto a bus. As it drove away, an AP journalist saw crowds cheering those detained: "Don't give in to these thugs!"

As dusk fell, the crowds thinned.

At around 10:30 p.m. Sunday, about 30 officers in black charged people at an Urumqi Middle Road intersection, sending them fleeing. An AP journalist and others were tackled and hit repeatedly on their heads by police using their hands.

The journalist and four others were put in a police van and taken to a station in northern Shanghai. When one female detainee said she had only been walking on the road, an officer told her: "Shut up."

At the station, the journalist saw 16 other detainees, mostly in their 20s. Some were injured, including a man with bloodied jeans and a gash above an eye.

Police confiscated phones and demanded passwords. Detainees were taken to interrogation rooms, locked to metal chairs and questioned individually.

When police learned the journalist's identity, he was released after two hours, without questioning or being pressed for his phone's password.

In a separate incident, police also beat and detained a BBC journalist. The Shanghai police did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

A detainee who identified herself to a reporter only by the Japanese name Kasugawa said she was detained for over 24 hours after an officer saw her taking photos.

She was fingerprinted, photographed and had her iris scanned, and was made to sign printouts of her phone chats after surrendering her password. Upon her release, police returned her phone and warned her not to protest again.

Kasugawa has stayed home since then, fearful of police. But she said the protests gave her hope.

"I didn't have any expectations for this country," she said. "Every time I think about that day, I really just want to cry."

Rail workers say deal won't resolve quality-of-life concerns

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — When BNSF railroad conductor Justin Schaaf needed to take time off from work this summer, he had to make a choice: go to the dentist to get a cavity in his molar filled or attend a party for his son's 7th birthday.

He chose his son.

"Ultimately I decided to take the day off for my kid's birthday party," Schaaf said. "Then when I am finally able to get into the dentist four, five, six months later, the tooth is too bad to repair at that point, so I have to get the tooth pulled out."

Those are the kind of tradeoffs that railroad workers worry they might still have to make after Congress voted this week to impose a contract on them to avoid the economic disaster that would accompany a railroad strike. Workers and their unions say the deal didn't do enough to address their quality-of-life concerns and didn't add any sick days.

President Joe Biden signed a bill Friday to block a strike and force workers to accept the agreements

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union leaders made in September, even though four of the 12 unions — which include a majority of rail workers — voted to reject them. Business groups had been urging Biden to intervene for weeks.

For Schaaf, he's not sure if the new contract will make it any easier to find another day off sometime next year to pay to have a fake tooth implanted in his mouth.

"If I had the option of taking a sick day ... I would have never been in that situation," he said from his home in Glasgow, Montana.

Schaaf said it was discouraging, but not surprising, to see Congress step in to settle the contract dispute ahead of next Friday's strike deadline. Lawmakers have made a habit of stepping in to impose contracts when railroads and their unions reach the brink of a strike — 18 times since the passage of the 1926 Railway Labor Act, by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's count — because of the potential economic consequences.

Many businesses rely on railroads to deliver raw materials and ship their final products, so a rail strike would send a catastrophic ripple through the economy. Passenger railroads also would be disrupted because so many use tracks owned by the freight railroads.

The five-year deals that rail workers wound up with include 24% raises and \$5,000 in bonuses. But concerns about the lack of paid sick time and the demanding schedules that unions say make it hard for workers to ever take a day off dominated the contract talks. The rail unions say they weren't able to get more concessions out of the railroads because the big companies knew Congress would intervene.

The railroads refused to add paid sick days to the deal at the end of three years of negotiations because they didn't want to pay much more than a special board of arbitrators appointed by Biden recommended this summer. Plus, the railroads say the unions have agreed over the years to forego paid sick leave in favor of higher wages and strong short-term disability benefits that kick in after as little as four days.

The railroads agreed to offer three unpaid days for engineers and conductors to tend to medical needs as long as they are scheduled at least 30 days in advance. They also promised to negotiate further to improve the way regular days off are scheduled to help workers better know when they will be off.

But to retired engineer Jeff Kurtz, there is still a lot of work to be done to restore the quality of life he enjoyed before he left the railroad eight years ago. He doubts rail workers today would be able to get time off for key family events on short notice the way he did when he found out his son was getting his doctorate right before Christmas in 2009.

"You hear when you hire out on the railroad you're going to miss some things. But you're not supposed to miss everything," said Kurtz, who remains active even in retirement with the Railroad Workers United coalition that includes workers from every union. "You shouldn't miss your kids growing up. You shouldn't miss the seminal moments in your family's life."

Over the past six years, the major railroads have eliminated nearly one-third of their jobs as they overhauled operations, making the work more demanding for those who remain.

The unions say they won't stop fighting for more paid sick leave, but now they may have to wait for negotiations on the next contract beginning in 2025.

The head of the Association of American Railroads trade group, Ian Jefferies, acknowledged "there is more to be done to further address our employees' work-life balance concerns" but he said the compromise deals that Congress voted to impose should help make schedules more predictable while delivering the biggest raises rail workers have seen in more than four decades.

Molten lava on Hawaii's Big Island could block main highway

By AUDREY McAVOY and HAVEN DALEY Associated Press

HILO, Hawaii (AP) — Many people on the Big Island of Hawaii are bracing for major upheaval if lava from Mauna Loa volcano slides across a key highway and blocks the quickest route connecting two sides of the island.

The molten rock could make the road impassable and force drivers to find alternate coastal routes in the north and south. That could add hours to commute times, doctor's visits and freight truck deliveries.

"I am very nervous about it being cut off," said Frank Manley, a licensed practical nurse whose com-

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mute is already an hour and 45 minutes each way from his home in Hilo to a Kaiser Permanente clinic in Kailua-Kona.

If the highway closes, he anticipates driving two-and-a-half to three hours in each direction. Manley fears he might lose pay if an accident or other traffic disruption along an alternate route delays his arrival.

The lava is oozing slowly at a rate that might reach the road next week. But its path is unpredictable and could change course, or the flow could stop completely and spare the highway.

The slow-moving flow was coursing about 2.7 miles (4.3 kilometers) from the road Friday, U.S. Geological Survey scientists reported.

There are more affordable housing options on the island's east side, home to the county seat, Hilo. But many jobs at beach resorts, in construction and other industries are readily available on the west side, where Kailua-Kona is located. Saddle Road, also known as Route 200 or Daniel K. Inouye Highway, connects the two communities.

The state Department of Transportation took steps Thursday to remove potential traffic obstacles on the northern coastal route by reopening a lane across Nanue Bridge that was closed for repairs.

Hilo also is one of the island's major harbors, where a wide variety of goods arrive by ship before proceeding across the island by truck.

Hawaii County Councilor Susan "Sue" L. K. Lee Loy, who represents Hilo and parts of Puna, said she's concerned about big rigs traveling across aging coastal bridges.

"It's going to take a lot to rethink how we move about on Hawaii Island," she said.

Manley said he would have to get up at 3 a.m. to reach work by 8 a.m. If he left at 5 p.m., he wouldn't get home until 8 p.m. "That drastically reduces my amount of time that I would be able to spend with my family," he said.

Tanya Harrison of Hilo said she would need a full day off work to travel to her doctor in Kona.

There are more than 200,000 Big Island residents. Amidst throngs of tourists, delivery trucks and commuters forced to reroute, Harrison said she couldn't imagine the congestion.

"It might even be quicker just to fly to Honolulu," she said of the hour flight. "There's no line at the Hilo airport. Fly over, see the doctor, come back would actually be quicker than driving."

Outrigger Kona Resort & Spa plans to provide rooms at a Kailua-Kona hotel so its dozen or so Hilo-based employees can avoid the long commute five days per week.

A shutdown could also affect major astronomy research at the summit of Mauna Kea, a 13,803-foot (4,207-meter) peak next to Mauna Loa that is home to some of the world's most advanced telescopes.

The road heading to Mauna Kea's summit is midway between Hilo and Kona. If lava crosses Saddle Road on either side of Mauna Kea Access Road, many telescope workers would be forced to take long, circuitous routes.

Rich Matsuda, associate director for external relations at W.M. Keck Observatory, said telescopes may need to adjust staff schedules and house workers at a facility partway up the mountain for a while so they don't have to commute.

There's also a chance the lava flow may head directly across the lower part of Mauna Kea Access Road, which could block workers from reaching the summit. Matsuda hopes they'll be able to use gravel or other bypass routes if that happens.

The telescopes previously have shut down for multi-day or weeklong winter storms. "So we're prepared to do that if we have to," Matsuda said.

Hilo resident Hayley Hina Barcia worries about the difficulty of reaching west-side surf spots and relatives in different parts of the island.

"A lot of my family is on the Puna side and we have other family in Kona," Barcia said. "We use this road to see each other, especially with the holidays coming up, to spend time, so we're looking to have to go several hours longer to go the south way or taking the north road."

Geologists with the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said if Mauna Loa follows historical patterns, they expect the eruption, which began Sunday night, to continue for one to two weeks.

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Since then, traffic has clogged the road as people try to glimpse the lava. A handful of resulting accidents included a two-vehicle crash that sent two people to the hospital with "not serious injuries," Hawaii Police Department spokesperson Denise Laitinen said.

U.S. Rep. Ed Case and U.S. Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele sent a letter to President Joe Biden saying Hawaii County would need "immediate help" to keep island communities safe if lava flow blocks the highway. The two Hawaii Democrats noted that restricted access could hinder emergency services because one of the island's primary hospitals is on the east side.

EXPLAINER: Can Ukraine pay for war without wrecking economy?

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Even as Ukraine celebrates recent battlefield victories, its government faces a looming challenge on the financial front: how to pay the enormous cost of the war effort without triggering out-of-control price spikes for ordinary people or piling up debt that could hamper postwar reconstruction.

The struggle is finding loans or donations to cover a massive budget deficit for next year — and do it without using central bank bailouts that risk wrecking Ukraine's currency, the hryvnia.

Economists working with the government say that if Ukraine can shore up its finances through the end of next year, it is Russia that could find itself in financial trouble if a proposed oil price cap by the U.S., European Union and allies saps Moscow's earnings.

Here are key facts about Ukraine's economic battle against Russia:

HOW HAS UKRAINE BEEN PAYING FOR ITS DEFENSE SO FAR?

In the first days of Russia's invasion, the Ukrainian government turned to foreign help that came at irregular intervals. When it didn't have enough, the central bank bought government bonds using newly printed money. The alternative would have been to stop paying people's pensions and state salaries.

Economists say printing money — while a badly needed stop-gap measure at the time — risks letting inflation get out of control and collapsing the value of the country's currency if it continues.

Ukraine has painful memories of hyperinflation from the early 1990s, economist Nataliia Shapoval said. As a child, she watched her parents use large bundles of bills for everyday purchases as the currency lost value day by day, before being replaced by today's hryvnia.

"Ukraine has been through this, so we know what inflation that is out of control looks like, and we don't want this again," said Shapoval, vice president for policy research at the Kyiv School of Economics. "The government and the central bank are already on the slippery slope by printing so much."

Price stability and the ability to pay pensions have enormous impact on ordinary people and society at a time when Russia is trying to demoralize the population by knocking out power and water heading into winter.

With inflation already high at 27%, price hikes have made it hard for lower-income people to afford food.

Bread that used to cost the equivalent of 50 U.S. cents has doubled, said Halyna Morozova, a resident of Kherson, a recently liberated southern city.

"It is very depressing, and we are nervous. We were living on old stocks (of food), but now the light is turned off, the refrigerator doesn't work and we have to throw away the food," the 80-year-old said recently.

She said the Russians kept paying her Ukrainian pension in rubles but since they started to withdraw in October, she has received nothing. She's counting on the government to return any pension money that was lost, she said.

Tetiana Vainshtein, also in Kherson, says natural gas is too expensive to keep her home heated. "I am cold. I like warmth, and I'm terribly cold," the 68-year-old said.

Bank closures during the Russian occupation kept her from getting her pension cash, forcing her to carefully ration every hryvnia for food, she said.

HOW MUCH SUPPORT DOES UKRAINE NEED?

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Ukraine needs \$38 billion in outright aid from Western allies like the

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U.S and 27-nation EU, plus \$17 billion for a reconstruction fund for war damage.

Economists associated with the Kyiv School of Economics say a lower overall total of \$50 billion from donors would be enough to get Ukraine through the year.

Defense spending is six times higher in the 2023 budget recently passed by the Ukrainian parliament compared to last year. Military and security spending will total 43% of the budget, or an enormous 18.2% of annual economic output.

The 2.6 trillion hryvnia budget has a yawning 1.3 trillion hryvnia deficit, meaning the government needs to find \$3 billion to \$5 billion a month to cover the gap. Recent attacks on energy infrastructure since the budget passed will only increase the financing need because repairs can't wait for postwar reconstruction and will hit this year's budget.

HOW COULD FINANCES AFFECT THE OUTCOME OF THE WAR?

Despite Western sanctions, Russia's economy has fared better than Ukraine's because high oil and natural gas prices have bolstered the Kremlin's budget.

Plans by the EU and allies in the Group of Seven democracies to place a price cap on Russian oil sales aim to change that.

The Kyiv school economists say "by the middle of next year, we believe that the economic situation will shift strongly in Ukraine's favor, making strong partner support particularly important over the period until that point."

HOW MUCH FINANCING DOES UKRAINE HAVE ALREADY?

The U.S. has been the leading donor, giving \$15.2 billion in financial assistance and \$52 billion in overall aid, including humanitarian and military assistance, through Oct. 3, according to the latest available data compiled by the Ukraine Support Tracker at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

EU institutions and member countries have committed \$29.2 billion, though "many of their pledges are arriving in Ukraine with long delays," said Christoph Trebesch, who heads the tracker team.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, has proposed 18 billion euros in no-interest, long-term loans for next year, which still need approval from member governments. The U.S. will likely contribute more as well.

Ukraine, however, is appealing for grants over loans. If all the financing comes as loans, debt would rise to over 100% of annual economic output from around 83% now and 69% before the war. That burden could hold back spending on the war recovery.

The \$85 billion in total global assistance to Ukraine, according to the Ukraine Support Tracker, is less than 15% of the support European governments have pledged to shield consumers from high energy costs resulting from Russia's natural gas cutbacks.

To get loans, the commission proposed requiring Ukraine to improve its record on corruption. Since 2014, Ukraine has raised its score on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index from 26 to 32 out of 100 — not great, but improving.

U.S. officials have praised Ukraine's online procurement platform for introducing transparency in government contracts — one big source of corrupt dealings and collusion — and saving \$6 billion.

The prospect of EU membership also gives Ukraine incentive to clean up corruption.

COULD THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND HELP?

The IMF has given Ukraine \$1.4 billion in emergency aid and \$1.3 billion to cushion the shock from lost food exports.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told The Associated Press that the Washington-based fund is working on more assistance in cooperation with the Group of 7 wealthy democracies, chaired this year by Germany.

"We are on the way to come up with a sound and sizable program for Ukraine," she said, "with the support specifically of the G-7 and the German leadership."

However, for a larger loan program of \$15 billion to \$20 billion, it goes against IMF practices to lend money where the debts are not sustainable, and the war raises questions about that. The organization has been reluctant to lend to countries that don't control their territory, a condition Ukraine does not yet meet.

The IMF “would have to seriously twist its existing framework or change it to provide substantial sums,” said Adnan Mazarei, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former deputy director of the IMF’s Middle East and Central Asia department.

As a prelude to a possible assistance package, the IMF is holding a four-month period of consultation and enhanced monitoring of Ukrainian economic policies to help Kyiv establish a track record of good practice. That could build confidence for other donors to step in.

Seoul arrests ex-top security official over border killing

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea’s former national security director was arrested Saturday over a suspected cover-up surrounding North Korea’s killing of a South Korean fisheries official near the rivals’ sea boundary in 2020.

Suh Hoon’s arrest early Saturday came as President Yoon Suk Yeol’s conservative government investigates his liberal predecessor’s handling of that killing and another border incident the same year, cases that prompted criticism Seoul was desperately trying to appease the North to improve relations.

Former President Moon Jae-in, who staked his single-term on inter-Korean rapprochement before leaving office in May, has reacted angrily to the investigation into Suh’s actions. Moon issued a statement this week accusing Yoon’s government of raising groundless allegations and politicizing sensitive security matters.

Judge Kim Jeong-min of the Seoul Central District Court granted prosecutor’s request to arrest Suh over concerns that he may attempt to destroy evidence, the court said in a statement. Suh didn’t answer reporters’ questions about the allegations on Friday as he appeared at the court for a review over the prosecution’s warrant request.

A previous inquiry by South Korea’s Board of Audit and Inspection concluded that officials from Moon’s government made no meaningful attempt to rescue Lee Dae-jun after learning that the 47-year-old fisheries official was drifting in waters near the Koreas’ western sea boundary in September 2020.

After confirming that Lee had been fatally shot by North Korean troops, officials publicly played up the possibility that he had tried to defect to North Korea, citing his gambling debts and family issues, while withholding evidence suggesting he had no such intention, the audit board said in an October report.

Suh also served as Moon’s spy chief before being appointed as national security director two months before the killing. He faces suspicions that he used a Cabinet meeting to instruct officials to delete intelligence records related to the incident while the government crafted a public explanation of Lee’s death.

Suh is also suspected of ordering the Defense Ministry, National Intelligence Service, and the Coast Guard to portray Lee as trying to defect in their reports on his killing.

Critics say the Moon government went out of its way to paint Lee as unsympathetic as it tried to appease a nuclear-armed rival with a brutal human rights record.

In June, the Defense Ministry and coast guard reversed the Moon government’s description of the incident, saying there was no evidence that Lee had tried to defect.

Moon’s Democratic Party issued a statement criticizing Suh’s arrest, saying suspicions he might destroy evidence were unreasonable since “all the materials are in the hands of the Yoon Suk Yeol government.”

“The Defense Ministry, Coast Guard, National Intelligence Service and other security-related agencies have made a judgment on the Western Sea incident based on an analysis of information and circumstances,” the party said in a statement. It called the investigation a type of political vendetta.

Yoon’s government is separately investigating the 2019 forced repatriation of two North Korean fishermen, despite their reported wish to resettle in South Korea.

In July, the National Intelligence Service filed charges against Suh and his spy chief successor Park Jie-won for alleged abuse of power, destruction of public records and falsification of documents regarding the two cases.

The agency accused Park, who served as its director until May, of ordering the destruction of intelligence reports on Lee’s death. It accused Suh of forcibly closing an investigation into the circumstances

surrounding the 2019 repatriation of the two North Korean fishermen captured in South Korean waters. Critics say Moon's government never provided a clear explanation of why it sent the two escapees back to the North to face possible execution. Moon's officials described the men as criminals who confessed to murder and questioned the sincerity of their wish to defect.

Dozens of international organizations, including Human Rights Watch, issued a joint statement accusing Moon's government of failing to provide due process or to "protect anyone who would be at substantial risk of torture or other serious human rights violations after repatriation."

Moon left office with little to show for his engagement efforts with the North and the investigations into the two incidents have further tarnished his legacy.

Moon met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un three times in 2018 and lobbied hard to set up Kim's meetings with former U.S. President Donald Trump as part of efforts to defuse the nuclear standoff and improve inter-Korean ties.

But the diplomacy never recovered from the failure of the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019 in Vietnam. Talks collapsed when the sides could not agree on exchanging an end to crippling U.S.-led sanctions against North Korea for steps by the North to wind down its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Both sides see high stakes in gay rights Supreme Court case

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is being warned about the potentially dire consequences of a case next week involving a Christian graphic artist who objects to designing wedding websites for same-sex couples.

Rule for the designer and the justices will expose not only same-sex couples but also Black people, immigrants, Jews, Muslims and others to discrimination, liberal groups say.

Rule against her and the justices will force artists — from painters and photographers to writers and musicians — to do work that is against their faith, conservative groups argue.

Both sides have described for the court what lawyers sometimes call "a parade of horrors" that could result if the ruling doesn't go their way.

The case marks the second time in five years that the Supreme Court has confronted the issue of a business owner who says their religion prevents them from creating works for a gay wedding. This time, most experts expect that the court now dominated 6-3 by conservatives and particularly sympathetic to religious plaintiffs will side with Lorie Smith, the Denver-area designer in the case.

But the American Civil Liberties Union, in a brief filed with the court, was among those that called Smith's argument "carte blanche to discriminate whenever a business's product or service could be characterized as 'expressive,'" a category of businesses that could range from "luggage to linens to landscaping." Those businesses, they said, could announce, "We Do Not Serve Blacks, Gays, or Muslims."

Smith's attorneys at the Arizona-based Alliance Defending Freedom say that's not true. "I think it's disingenuous and false to say that a win for Lorie in this case would take us back to those times where people ... were denied access to essential goods and services based on who they were," said ADF attorney Kellie Fiedorek, adding, "A win for Lorie here would never permit such conduct, like some of the hypotheticals that they're raising."

Smith's case follows that of Colorado baker Jack Phillips, who objected to creating a wedding cake for a gay couple. The couple sued, but the case ended with a limited decision. Phillips' lawyer, Kristen Waggoner, is back before the high court Monday arguing for Smith.

Smith wants to begin offering wedding websites, but she says her Christian faith prevents her from creating websites celebrating same-sex marriages. That could get her in trouble with state law. Colorado, like most other states, has a public accommodation law that says if Smith offers wedding websites to the public, she must provide them to all customers. Businesses that violate the law can be fined, among other things.

Smith, for her part, says Colorado's law violates the Constitution's First Amendment by forcing her to express a message with which she disagrees.

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Among Smith's other opponents are the Biden administration and 20 mostly Democratic-leaning states including California, New York and Pennsylvania. The states told the court in one of 75 legal briefs filed by outside groups in the case that accepting Smith's arguments would allow for widespread discrimination.

"A bakery whose owner opposed mixed-race relationships could refuse to bake wedding cakes for interracial couples," the states said. A "real estate agency whose owner opposed racial integration could refuse to represent Black couples seeking to purchase a home in a predominantly white neighborhood; or a portrait studio whose proprietor opposes interracial adoption could refuse to take pictures of white parents with their Black adopted children."

Those race-based examples could get particular attention on a court with two Black justices, Clarence Thomas and Ketanji Brown Jackson, who are married to white spouses and another justice, Amy Coney Barrett, who has two adopted children who are Black. But the states gave an example involving a person's national origin too. "A tattoo studio could ink American flag tattoos on customers born in the United States while refusing to sell identical tattoos to immigrants," they said.

Brianne Gorod of the Constitutional Accountability Center, representing a group of law professors, hypothesized other examples of what could happen if Smith succeeds at the high court.

"A web designer could refuse to create a web page celebrating a female CEO's retirement — violating Colorado's prohibition on sex discrimination — if he believed all women have a duty to stay home and raise children. Similarly, a furniture-maker — who considers his furniture pieces to be artistically expressive — could refuse to serve an interracial couple if he believed that interracial couples should not share a home together. Or an architect could refuse to design a home for an interfaith couple," she told the court.

Smith's supporters, however, among them 20 mostly Republican-leaning states, say ruling against her has negative consequences, too. A lawyer for the CatholicVote.org education fund told the court that if the lower court ruling stands and Smith loses, "a Jewish choreographer will have to stage a dramatic Easter performance, a Catholic singer will be required to perform at a marriage of two divorcees, and a Muslim who operates an advertising agency will be unable to refuse to create a campaign for a liquor company."

The Jewish Coalition for Religious Liberty put it differently, telling the court that a Jewish baker could have to fulfill the request of a Neo-Nazi who wants a cake saying "Happy November 9th!" — a reference to Kristallnacht, the night in 1938 when Nazis burned synagogues and vandalized Jewish businesses throughout Germany and Austria.

Alan B. Morrison, a constitutional law expert at Georgetown University, underscored that Smith doesn't currently do wedding websites, making the case particularly speculative and, he says, problematic. Still, Morrison chuckled at some of the hypothetical scenarios both sides came up with, suggesting they are "a bit overblown."

The examples, he said, are "the kind of thing a law professor would think of."

Pentagon debuts its new stealth bomber, the B-21 Raider

By TARA COPP Associated Press

PALMDALE, Calif. (AP) — America's newest nuclear stealth bomber made its debut Friday after years of secret development and as part of the Pentagon's answer to rising concerns over a future conflict with China.

The B-21 Raider is the first new American bomber aircraft in more than 30 years. Almost every aspect of the program is classified.

As evening fell over the Air Force's Plant 42 in Palmdale, the public got its first glimpse of the Raider in a tightly controlled ceremony. It started with a flyover of the three bombers still in service: the B-52 Stratofortress, the B-1 Lancer and the B-2 Spirit. Then the hangar doors slowly opened and the B-21 was towed partially out of the building.

"This isn't just another airplane," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said. "It's the embodiment of America's determination to defend the republic that we all love."

The B-21 is part of the Pentagon's efforts to modernize all three legs of its nuclear triad, which includes

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silo-launched nuclear ballistic missiles and submarine-launched warheads, as it shifts from the counterterrorism campaigns of recent decades to meet China's rapid military modernization.

China is on track to have 1,500 nuclear weapons by 2035, and its gains in hypersonics, cyber warfare and space capabilities present "the most consequential and systemic challenge to U.S. national security and the free and open international system," the Pentagon said this week in its annual China report.

"We needed a new bomber for the 21st Century that would allow us to take on much more complicated threats, like the threats that we fear we would one day face from China, Russia," said Deborah Lee James, the Air Force secretary when the Raider contract was announced in 2015.

While the Raider may resemble the B-2, once you get inside, the similarities stop, said Kathy Warden, chief executive of Northrop Grumman Corp., which is building the bomber.

"The way it operates internally is extremely advanced compared to the B-2, because the technology has evolved so much in terms of the computing capability that we can now embed in the software of the B-21," Warden said.

Other changes include advanced materials used in coatings to make the bomber harder to detect, Austin said.

"Fifty years of advances in low-observable technology have gone into this aircraft," Austin said. "Even the most sophisticated air defense systems will struggle to detect a B-21 in the sky."

Other advances likely include new ways to control electronic emissions, so the bomber could spoof adversary radars and disguise itself as another object, and use of new propulsion technologies, several defense analysts said.

"It is incredibly low observability," Warden said. "You'll hear it, but you really won't see it."

Six Raiders are in production. The Air Force plans to build 100 that can deploy either nuclear weapons or conventional bombs and can be used with or without a human crew. Both the Air Force and Northrop also point to the Raider's relatively quick development: The bomber went from contract award to debut in seven years. Other new fighter and ship programs have taken decades.

The cost of the bombers is unknown. The Air Force previously put the price at an average cost of \$550 million each in 2010 dollars — roughly \$753 million today — but it's unclear how much is actually being spent. The total will depend on how many bombers the Pentagon buys.

"We will soon fly this aircraft, test it, and then move it into production. And we will build the bomber force in numbers suited to the strategic environment ahead," Austin said.

The undisclosed cost troubles government watchdogs.

"It might be a big challenge for us to do our normal analysis of a major program like this," said Dan Grazier, a senior defense policy fellow at the Project on Government Oversight. "It's easy to say that the B-21 is still on schedule before it actually flies. Because it's only when one of these programs goes into the actual testing phase when real problems are discovered." That, he said, is when schedules start to slip and costs rise.

The B-2 was also envisioned to be a fleet of more than 100 aircraft, but the Air Force built only 21, due to cost overruns and a changed security environment after the Soviet Union fell. Fewer than that are ready to fly on any given day due to the significant maintenance needs of the aging bomber.

The B-21 Raider, which takes its name from the 1942 Doolittle Raid over Tokyo, will be slightly smaller than the B-2 to increase its range, Warden said. It won't make its first flight until 2023. However, Warden said Northrop Grumman has used advanced computing to test the bomber's performance using a digital twin, a virtual replica of the one unveiled Friday.

Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota will house the bomber's first training program and squadron, though the bombers are also expected to be stationed at bases in Texas and Missouri.

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, a Republican of South Dakota, led the state's bid to host the bomber program. In a statement, he called it "the most advanced weapon system ever developed by our country to defend ourselves and our allies."

Northrop Grumman has also incorporated maintenance lessons learned from the B-2, Warden said.

In October 2001, B-2 pilots set a record when they flew 44 hours straight to drop the first bombs in

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Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks. The B-2 often does long round-trip missions because there are few hangars globally that can accommodate its wingspan, which limits where it can land for maintenance. The hangars also must be air-conditioned because the Spirit's windows don't open and hot climates can cook cockpit electronics.

The new Raider will also get new hangars to accommodate its size and complexity, Warden said.

However, with the Raider's extended range, "it won't need to be based in-theater," Austin said. "It won't need logistical support to hold any target at risk."

A final noticeable difference was in the debut itself. While both went public in Palmdale, the B-2 was rolled outdoors in 1988 amid much public fanfare. Given advances in surveillance satellites and cameras, the Raider was just partially exposed, keeping its sensitive propulsion systems and sensors under the hangar and protected from overhead eyes.

"The magic of the platform," Warden said, "is what you don't see."

Uvalde shooting victims seek \$27B, class action in lawsuit

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Victims of the Uvalde school shooting that left 21 people dead have filed a lawsuit against local and state police, the city and other school and law enforcement officials seeking \$27 billion due to delays in confronting the attacker, court documents show.

The lawsuit, which was filed in federal court in Austin on Tuesday, says officials failed to follow active shooter protocol when they waited more than an hour to confront the attacker inside a fourth-grade classroom.

It seeks class action status and damages for survivors of the May 24 shooting who have sustained "emotional or psychological damages as a result of the defendants' conduct and omissions on that date."

Among those who filed the lawsuit are school staff and representatives of minors who were present at Robb Elementary when a gunman stormed the campus, killing 19 children and two teachers in the deadliest school shooting in the U.S. in nearly a decade.

Instead of following previous training to stop an active shooter "the conduct of the three hundred and seventy-six (376) law enforcement officials who were on hand for the exhaustively torturous seventy-seven minutes of law enforcement indecision, dysfunction, and harm, fell exceedingly short of their duty bound standards," the lawsuit claims.

City of Uvalde officials said they had not been served the paperwork as of Friday and did not comment on pending litigation.

The Texas Department of Public Safety and the Uvalde Consolidated School District did not respond to requests for comment.

A group of the survivors also sued Daniel Defense, the company that made the gun used by the shooter, and the store where he bought the gun. That separate lawsuit seeks \$6 billion in damages.

Daniel Defense, based in Black Creek, Georgia, did not respond to a request for comment. In a congressional hearing over the summer, CEO Marty Daniels called the Uvalde shooting and others like it "deeply disturbing" but separated the weapons themselves from the violence, saying America's mass shootings are local problems to be solved locally.

Earlier this week, the mother of a child killed in the shooting filed another federal lawsuit against many of the same people and entities.

Two officers have been fired because of their actions at the scene and others have resigned or been placed on leave. In October, Col. Steve McCraw, the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, acknowledged mistakes by officers when confronted for the first time by families of the Uvalde victims over false and shifting accounts from law enforcement and lack of transparency in the available information. But McCraw defended his agency, saying they "did not fail" Uvalde.

Nevada toad in geothermal power fight gets endangered status

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

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RENO, Nev. (AP) — A tiny Nevada toad at the center of a legal battle over a geothermal power project has officially been declared an endangered species, after U.S. wildlife officials temporarily listed it on a rarely used emergency basis last spring.

“This ruling makes final the listing of the Dixie Valley toad, “ the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said in a formal rule published Friday in the Federal Register.

The spectacled, quarter-sized amphibian “is currently at risk of extinction throughout its range primarily due to the approval and commencement of geothermal development,” the service said.

Other threats to the toad include groundwater pumping, agriculture, climate change, disease and predation from bullfrogs.

The temporary listing in April marked only the second time in 20 years the agency had taken such emergency action.

Environmentalists who first petitioned for the listing in 2017 filed a lawsuit in January to block construction of the geothermal power plant on the edge of the wetlands where the toad lives about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of Reno — the only place it’s known to exist on earth.

“We’re pleased that the Biden administration is taking this essential step to prevent the extinction of an irreplaceable piece of Nevada’s special biodiversity,” said Patrick Donnelly, Great Basin regional director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

The center and a tribe fighting the project say pumping hot water from beneath the earth’s surface to generate carbon-free power would adversely affect levels and temperatures of surface water critical to the toad’s survival and sacred to the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe.

The Fish and Wildlife Service cited those concerns in the final listing rule.

“The best available information indicates that a complete reduction in spring flow and significant reduction of water temperature are plausible outcomes of the geothermal project, and these conditions could result in the species no longer persisting,” the agency said.

“Because the species occurs in only one spring system and has not experienced habitat changes of the magnitude or pace projected, it may have low potential to adapt to a fast-changing environment,” it said. “We find that threatened species status is not appropriate because the threat of extinction is imminent.”

Officials for the Reno-based developer, Ormat Technology, said the service’s decision was “not unexpected” given the emergency listing in April. In recent months, the company has been working with the agency and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to modify the project to increase mitigation for the toad and reduce any threat to its survival.

The lawsuit over the original plan to build two power plants capable of producing 60MW of electricity is currently before U.S. District Judge Robert Jones in Reno. It’s already has made one trip to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which refused in August to grant a temporary injunction blocking construction of the power plant the bureau approved in December 2021.

But just hours after that ruling, Ormat announced it had agreed to temporarily suspend all work on the project until next year. Then in late October, the bureau and Ormat asked the judge to put the case on hold while Ormat submitted a new plan to build just one geothermal plant, at least for now, that would produce only 12MW of power.

Ormat Vice President Paul Thomsen said in an email to The Associated Press on Thursday that the company disagrees with the wildlife service’s “characterization of the potential impacts” of its project as a basis for the listing decision. He said it doesn’t change the ongoing coordination and consultation already under way to minimize and mitigate any of those impacts “regardless of its status under the Endangered Species Act.”

“Following the emergency listing decision, BLM began consultation with the FWS, and Ormat has sought approval of a smaller project authorization that would provide additional assurances that the species will not be jeopardized by geothermal development,” he said.

“As a zero-emissions, renewable energy facility, the project will further the Biden administration’s clean energy initiatives and support the fight against climate change,” Thomsen said.

Donnelly agreed renewable energy is "essential to combating the climate emergency."

"But it can't come at the cost of extinction," he said.

The last time endangered species protection first was initiated on an emergency basis was in 2011, when the Obama administration took action on the Miami blue butterfly in southern Florida. Before that, an emergency listing was granted for the California tiger salamander under the Bush administration in 2002.

Other species listed as endangered on an emergency basis over the years include the California bighorn sheep in the Sierra Nevada in 1999, Steller sea lions in 1990, and the Sacramento River winter migration run of chinook salmon and Mojave desert tortoise, both in 1989.

Macron hits New Orleans' French Quarter, meets with Musk

By SARA CLINE and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron arrived Friday in Louisiana, the American state most closely aligned historically with his country, to celebrate their longstanding cultural ties and discuss energy policy and climate change.

Macron met with political leaders and strolled through New Orleans' historic French Quarter, the heart of the city, stopping to talk and shake hands with bystanders. He paused next to a street brass band and nodded and clapped as they played "When the Saints Go Marching In."

Macron also said he met with billionaire Elon Musk for what he called a "clear and honest discussion" about Twitter, days after a top European Union official warned the social media platform's new owner that the company must do more to protect users from harmful content.

The visit is the first by a French president since Valéry Giscard d'Estaing traveled to Lafayette and New Orleans in 1976. The only other French president to visit Louisiana was Charles de Gaulle in 1960.

Macron's itinerary started at Jackson Square. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell walked him to the Historic New Orleans Collection where Macron discussed climate change impacts with Gov. John Bel Edwards. The French president also met with energy company representatives.

"This state visit enables us to put France, and with France Europe, at the heart of the American agenda. That's a good thing," Macron told journalists in French, according to a translation from pool reporters.

Macron told Edwards he was overcome by the reception in the city.

"What I think this signifies is a special relationship we have with France. It is historical and cultural," Edwards said.

Edwards, a Democrat, has been outspoken about the perils of climate change in a state where tens of thousands of jobs are tied to the oil and gas industry. This makes the stop to New Orleans "very emblematic" of climate-related efforts, French officials said.

During a brief meeting in the presence of Macron, the governor and the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Catherine Colonna, signed a memorandum of understanding "to further expand and enhance the strong cultural connections between France and Louisiana in the areas of the economy, clean energy and the environment," Edwards' office said.

"Like me, President Macron believes that climate change is real," Edwards said.

The governor's office said the agreement formally creates a Louisiana-based position for a French technical expert on the transition to clean energy.

During Macron's visit to Washington on Thursday, he and President Joe Biden released a joint statement expressing "their deep concern regarding the growing impact of climate change and nature loss" and said they "intend to continue to galvanize domestic and global action to address it."

On Friday evening Macron posted a photo on Twitter of his encounter with Musk, the two men sitting across from each other at a table in an empty room. He said he and the Tesla CEO discussed "future green industrial projects," and also the social media platform.

"Transparent user policies, significant reinforcement of content moderation and protection of freedom of speech: efforts have to be made by Twitter to comply with European regulations," the president said in one of a series of tweets.

Earlier this week Thierry Breton, the EU's commissioner for digital policy, told Musk that Twitter will have

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to significantly increase efforts to comply with new rules known as the Digital Services Act that take effect next year, or potentially face hefty fines or even a ban in the continental bloc.

Louisiana is named for Louis XIV, the famous Sun King who ruled France for 72 years starting in 1643. New Orleans is where the Louisiana Purchase was finalized. The deal transferred the Louisiana Territory, which encompassed much of what is today the central United States, from France to the U.S. in 1803.

Macron's New Orleans visit included a stop with first lady Brigitte Macron at the Cabildo, where ceremonies marking the land transfer were held.

Macron was also scheduled to visit the New Orleans Museum of Art and dine downtown before departing.

Holding the U.S. and French flags, Christiane Geisler, who was born in France and moved to Louisiana six years ago, was one of the spectators who stood in the streets hoping to see the president Friday. She was thrilled that she got to shake Macron's hand and have a brief conversation with him in French.

"For me, when I moved here, it had a good feeling of French," Geisler said.

The French Quarter, 13 blocks long and roughly six wide, was first settled in the 1700s and was later ravaged twice by fire. It best known as a tourist spot and commercial district where a reimagined French Market, fine restaurants, antique shops and art galleries coexist alongside T-shirt shops, strip joints and bars blasting live music by cover bands.

To boost Georgia's Warnock, Biden goes to ... Massachusetts

By ZEKE MILLER, BILL BARROW and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — President Joe Biden hit the phones with fellow Democrats Friday for Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock's runoff election. He fetched hot coffee for volunteers, too, and thanked them for their work. But this busy phone bank was nowhere near Georgia.

Days before Georgia polls close on Tuesday, Biden still has no plans to visit Warnock's state. Instead, the president aimed on Friday to help Democrats land their 51st Senate seat from afar as he stopped by a union hall and headlined a fundraiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which has spent millions of dollars to boost Warnock's campaign against Republican challenger Herschel Walker.

It was the culmination of Biden's support-from-a-distance strategy that he employed throughout the midterm elections and that his aides credit with helping his party beat expectations in key races.

"This race in Georgia ... it's really, really critical," Biden told members of the the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers who were poring over voting lists. "This is a guy who needs our help."

The trip north to help a candidate in the South had even Biden a little mixed up, at least in his comments.

"I'm going to Georgia today," he declared Friday morning, before quickly catching himself to say that he was headed north to do "a major fundraiser up in Boston today for our next and continued Senate candidate and senator."

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., attended the phone bank and said she told Warnock that she'd do a fundraiser in her home state for him. "What you're going to get is the best part - labor is going to be making calls for you in Georgia."

Aides said the Boston trip was requested by Warnock's campaign and Biden obliged, reflecting his promise to go wherever Democratic candidates wanted him in 2022.

"The president is willing to help Senator Warnock any way he can, however the senator wants him to get involved," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said this week. As often as not, that also meant not going where he was not wanted.

Ahead of the Nov. 8 midterms, Biden avoided wading into key Senate races in states such as Georgia, Arizona and New Hampshire, where his approval ratings have trailed below his numbers nationally.

A 50-year veteran of Washington, Biden recognized that statewide candidates especially would seek to stake out distinct identities to face voters frustrated by politics in the capital city, his aides said. Meanwhile, he proved to be an in-person boon to the candidacy of Sen.-elect John Fetterman in Pennsylvania, and his video appearances with more than a dozen House candidates helped Democrats keep Republicans to the narrowest of majorities in that chamber in the upcoming Congress.

While he wasn't in many states in person, White House aides said, Biden was talking about the issues

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that were relevant in those races from afar — from bringing down health care costs to combating efforts to undermine election results.

“It didn’t matter where the president went; his message very much resonated,” Jean-Pierre said, adding that Biden talked about the Democrats’ legislative achievements. “And that worked. Right? That worked.”

Warnock, throughout his campaign, actually has distanced himself from Biden. That’s a stark contrast to the runoff campaign after the 2020 election when Biden, as president-elect, came to the state with the Senate balance at stake and told Georgia voters they’d determine the success of his administration and agenda.

Biden told the Boston phone bank workers that an oft-repeated GOP criticism during the 2022 election was that Warnock voted with him 98% of the time. “I wouldn’t tell ‘em that on the phone,” Biden quipped.

Warnock aides have said that he knew from the time of his January 2021 runoff victory that he’d win reelection in a midterm only by attracting votes from some Georgians inclined to back Republicans — and that was before generationally high inflation soared and Biden’s approval ratings tanked.

With Biden’s popularity having sagged in Georgia, Warnock framed himself as a bipartisan deal maker in Washington. In his campaign speeches he mentions Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Marco Rubio of Florida and various measures he’s co-sponsored with those Republican colleagues more than he mentions Biden or Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. And when he does mention Biden, it’s to tell voters how much he pressured the president to follow through on his promise to ease student loan burdens.

Warnock has consistently avoided answering whether he believes Biden should run again in 2024 and whether he’d support the president if he does seek a second term.

Even as the senator welcomed former President Barack Obama to Georgia for a second time this campaign cycle on Thursday, Warnock’s campaign this week deferred questions about Biden’s fundraiser to the Democrats’ Senate campaign arm.

Thus far, Warnock’s approach has paid off. He was the lone Georgia Democrat who survived to a state-wide runoff, as Walker trailed all of his fellow Republicans, most notably drawing 200,000 fewer votes than Gov. Brian Kemp, who cruised to reelection.

Warnock consistently ran ahead of Biden’s 2020 percentages in urban and suburban counties and some rural areas, as well.

While Democrats have already locked in control of the Senate for another two years, thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris’ tie-breaking vote, a true majority of 51 seats would speed up the confirmation process for Biden’s nominees and provide a cushion for the president.

Late Friday, at a private home in tony Beacon Hill, Biden spoke to Democratic donors about how monumental that 51st vote would be should Warnock win, particularly on big-ticket legislation that has sometimes buckled when a single senator backs away.

“We can’t have this hanging out on a thread, every single vote we have,” he said.

Man arrested in fatal shooting of Migos rapper Takeoff

By LEKAN OYEKANMI and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A 33-year-old man was arrested on a murder charge in the shooting of rapper Takeoff, who police on Friday said was an “innocent bystander” when he was struck by gunfire outside a Houston bowling alley.

Patrick Xavier Clark was taken into custody peacefully Thursday night, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said. Clark’s arrest came one day after another man was charged in connection with the Nov. 1 shooting, which authorities said followed a dispute over a dice game and wounded two other people.

Clark was being held in jail Friday awaiting a bond hearing. Court records do not list an attorney who could speak for him, but indicate he was arrested as he was preparing to leave the country for Mexico.

Born Kirsnick Khari Ball, Takeoff was the youngest member of Migos, the Grammy-nominated rap trio from suburban Atlanta that also featured his uncle Quavo and cousin Offset.

The 28-year-old musician was shot outside the downtown bowling alley at around 2:30 a.m., when police

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said a dispute erupted as more than 30 people were leaving a private party there. Police previously said another man and a woman suffered non-life-threatening gunshot injuries, and that at least two people opened fired.

Police Sgt. Michael Burrow said during a Friday news conference that the gunfire followed a disagreement over a "lucrative" game of dice, but that Takeoff was not involved and was "an innocent bystander." Finner said police do not know whether Clark was invited to the party or if he knew Takeoff.

Every person on the scene left without talking to police, Burrow said. Some of those people have since been located by the authorities, who have also worked to piece together events with ballistics, video and audio recordings, according to Burrow. He said investigators are still trying to track down witnesses.

"We will be looking to find you," he said. "It will be easier if you come find us."

On Wednesday, authorities announced the arrest of Cameron Joshua in connection to the shooting. Joshua was charged with illegally having a gun at the time Takeoff was shot, but prosecutors said the 22-year-old is not believed to have fired the weapon. Christopher Downey, Joshua's attorney, told reporters that he has not seen anything to suggest that his client was involved in Takeoff's killing.

Burrow said that investigators believe it was Clark's gunfire that killed the rapper.

Prosecutors on Friday asked a court to set Clark's bond at \$1 million, arguing he is a flight risk. After Takeoff's shooting, Clark applied for an expedited passport by submitting the itinerary for an "imminent" flight to Mexico, according to court records. They say he was arrested the day he received the passport and was in possession of a "large amount" of cash.

Fans and other performers, including Drake and Justin Bieber, celebrated Takeoff's musical legacy in a memorial service last month in Atlanta.

Migos' record label, Quality Control, mourned Takeoff's death in a statement posted on Instagram that attributed it to "senseless violence."

Migos first broke through with the massive hit "Versace" in 2013. They had four Top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, though Takeoff was not on their multi-week No. 1 hit "Bad and Boujee," featuring Lil Uzi Vert. They put out a trilogy of albums called "Culture," "Culture II" and "Culture III," with the first two hitting No. 1 on the Billboard 200 album chart.

Takeoff never released a solo record, but in the weeks before his death he and Quavo put out "Only Built for Infinity Links." Takeoff hoped the joint album would build respect for his lyrical abilities, telling the "Drink Champs" podcast, "It's time to give me my flowers."

As Clark's arrest was announced Friday, Takeoff's voice could again be heard, featured on "Feel The Fiyaaaah" alongside A\$AP Rocky on Metro Boomin's album released that day, "Heroes and Villains."

He sang, "It's quiet right now in the streets."

Cameroon is first African team to beat Brazil at World Cup

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — Cameroon coach Rigobert Song came full circle on a memorable and bittersweet night for African soccer.

Jerome Ngom Mbekeli, the only member of Cameroon's team who plays for a Cameroonian club, made an inspiring run and cross to set up Vincent Aboubakar's header and stoppage-time winner in a 1-0 victory to make the Indomitable Lions the first African nation to beat Brazil at a World Cup.

Despite the victory on Friday, Cameroon finished third in its group and was eliminated.

The 24-year-old Ngom Mbekeli was Cameroon's final substitution, coming on four minutes from time. Song credited his own former coach, Henri Michel, for giving him an opportunity in 1994 when he played for local club Tonnerre Yaoundé as he was making his World Cup debut.

"You need to trust youth," Song said through a translator. "Henri Michel gave me an opportunity. He saw the potential in me. Now I'm the coach and I see potential in my young players.

"I knew (Ngom Mbekeli) was a good, quality player. He just needed an opportunity to show that. Hopefully his performance can motivate other local players."

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Goalkeeper Devis Epassy — thrust into action after usual starter Andre Onana was sent home for disciplinary reasons after a dispute with Song before Cameroon's previous game — earned player of the match honors for a series of difficult saves.

"No one knew me — even in Cameroon — until I started playing for the national team a year ago," Epassy said through a translator. "We can be proud of what we've done tonight. We showed that we can also be a top team."

Both Epassy and Aboubakar play for clubs in Saudi Arabia.

With eight goals in seven games, the 22-year-old Aboubakar was the top scorer at the African Cup of Nations in January.

Song and Samuel Eto'o, Cameroon's soccer federation president, are instilling a strict discipline policy modeled after the European clubs that they once played for — Song as a reliable defender and Eto'o as a standout striker.

"That's where we let ourselves down in the past," Song said. "Perhaps we didn't do everything right, so we're focusing on discipline.

"The team always needs to take precedent over individuals. When you play for the national team you need to do what's expected of you."

While Brazil had already advanced and used mostly reserves, Cameroon still became the first team to beat the five-time champion in the World Cup group stage since Norway did it at the 1998 tournament in France — ending an unbeaten run of 17 group matches.

"We realize now that we could have done better," Song said. "But we're a young team and today we've seen a young team getting stronger and stronger, and they should be congratulated on their performance.

"It's a real shame that we have to go home now," Song added. "But we are going to keep working and keep improving."

Jury begins deliberations in Harvey Weinstein rape trial

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jurors began deliberating Friday in the Los Angeles rape and sexual assault trial of Harvey Weinstein, after a final push from the prosecution.

"You have irrefutable, overwhelming evidence of the nature of this man, and what he did to these women," Deputy District Attorney Paul Thompson told the jurors in his rebuttal to the closing argument delivered by the defense a day earlier.

Thompson urged them to find the 70-year-old former movie mogul guilty of the two rape counts and five sexual assault counts he's charged with.

The charges involve accusations from four women spanning from 2005 to 2013. The jury heard from 49 witnesses in more than four weeks of testimony.

In his closing, Weinstein's defense attorney Alan Jackson emphasized the absence of physical evidence of the assaults, none of which were reported to authorities until years later. He told jurors two of the accusers were clearly lying, and the other two had reframed "transactional" and "100% consensual" sexual acts with Weinstein as assaults after he became a magnet for the #MeToo movement in 2017.

"Regret is not rape," Jackson said.

In his rebuttal, Thompson guided jurors back through the evidence for each woman. He said the defense failed to show that any of the women had gained anything "transactional" from Weinstein, or that they had anything to gain by lying.

"Where is the evidence that there is any motivation," Thompson said, "other than to get justice for being sexually assaulted?"

Superior Court Judge Lisa Lench gave the jurors final instructions then gave them the case. They had just a few hours to deliberate on Friday afternoon before a weekend break.

Weinstein is already serving a 23-year sentence for a conviction in New York and could be sentenced to more than 60 years in prison in California if convicted on all counts.

EXPLAINER: What do we know about the Colorado bomb threat?

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — More than a year before police say Anderson Lee Aldrich killed five people and wounded 17 others at a gay night club in Colorado Springs, Aldrich was arrested on allegations of making a bomb threat that led to the evacuation of about 10 homes.

Aldrich, who uses the pronoun they and is nonbinary according to their attorneys, threatened to harm their own family with a homemade bomb, ammunition and multiple weapons, authorities said at the time. They were booked into jail on suspicion of felony menacing and kidnapping, but the case was later sealed and it's unclear what became of the charges. There are no public indications that the case led to a conviction.

Officials refuse to speak about what happened, citing the sealing law, which was passed three years ago to help prevent people from having their lives ruined if cases are dismissed and never prosecuted. It was passed as part of a nationwide movement aimed at addressing the "collateral consequences" from people's run-ins with law enforcement that often make it difficult for them to get jobs or housing.

Amid a flurry of questions about the incident after Aldrich was identified as the suspect in the Nov. 19 shooting at Club Q, District Attorney Michael Allen said during a Nov. 21 news conference that he "hoped at some point in the near future" to share more about the incident, raising expectations that he wanted the information to be made public.

But 11 days later, Allen still hasn't shed light on the incident and the documents remain sealed despite a petition to make them public submitted by a coalition of media organizations including The Associated Press.

Here is a closer look at what is known about the incident, the records and what is being done to make them public as a grieving community clamors for more information.

WHY ARE THE CASE DOCUMENTS SEALED?

There had been ways to seal criminal records in Colorado for decades, but in 2019, state lawmakers changed the law to allow records to be automatically sealed when a case is dropped and defendants aren't prosecuted. Before that law was passed, anyone seeking to seal their records would've had to petition the court in what was an opaque process that was difficult for many to navigate, said one of the sponsors, Democratic state Rep. Mike Weissman.

Weissman said he thinks Colorado's law strikes the right balance with a mechanism to ask for documents to be unsealed, but that speeding up the process for unsealing cases that draw intense public interest could be a possible improvement.

Law enforcement agencies are still able to access sealed records, though they are limited in what they can share publicly. The law prevents authorities from even acknowledging the existence of such sealed cases when someone from the public asks about them. Allen has cited the 2019 law in his refusal to discuss what happened.

CAN SEALED RECORDS BE MADE PUBLIC?

Yes, but it isn't easy. Colorado law allows anyone to ask a court to unseal a record if they believe the benefit outweighs the defendant's right to privacy. But that can only be done if someone has reason to believe a record may exist, since court officials can't disclose such information to the public.

The process happens behind closed doors with no docket to follow. It isn't even known which judge is considering the request. All of that makes it impossible to know when a decision could come.

David Loy, legal director at the First Amendment Coalition, said it seems troubling that the public is unable to follow the petition request to unseal the documents.

"It's sort of a black box as to who the judge is, we don't normally have secret judges, we don't normally have secret courts, for very important reasons," he said.

Getting access to records is important for learning the details of cases and whether the justice system worked as it should have, including whether a red flag order should have been pursued to remove any

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firearms, said Jeff Roberts, who heads the Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition, "You don't truly know the circumstances until you can see what law enforcement authorities wrote about what happened," he said.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE BOMB THREAT INCIDENT?

Most of what is known about the June 18, 2021, incident in Colorado Springs comes from a news release put out that night by the El Paso County Sheriff's Office.

In it, the office said that a woman calling from the street where Aldrich's grandparents lived reported that "her son" was threatening to harm her with a homemade bomb, multiple weapons and ammunition. Aldrich was later found at home about a mile (1.6 kilometers) away, on the block where his mother lived. The release noted that no explosives were found, but it didn't mention if any other weapons were found.

Ring doorbell video obtained by the AP shows Aldrich arriving at their mother's front door with a big black bag, telling her the police were nearby and adding, "This is where I stand. Today I die."

Two squad cars and what appears to be a bomb squad vehicle later pull up to the house, and a barefooted Aldrich emerges with hands up.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER ALDRICH'S 2021 ARREST?

It's not clear, because case records are sealed. What is known is that in August, Aldrich told a reporter for The Gazette in Colorado Springs that they had spent two months in jail after the 2021 arrest, though it is unknown if that is true. The reporter called Aldrich in response to a voicemail Aldrich had left with the newspaper asking that its previous story about the bomb threat be removed or updated, asserting that the case had been dropped.

SHOULD COLORADO'S RED FLAG LAW BEEN USED?

That is difficult to say, largely because of the lack of public details about what happened after Aldrich's arrest and what other evidence authorities might have gathered. And it isn't clear when Aldrich acquired the semi-automatic rifle and handgun investigators recovered at the scene of last month's shooting.

The law allows a law enforcement agency or household member ask a court to order someone to surrender their firearms if they pose a significant risk to themselves or others.

Had a red flag order been issued against Aldrich, any firearms they had at the time would have been taken away and they would have been prevented from buying additional weapons from a gun dealer required to perform a background check.

G-7 joins EU on \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil

By RAF CASERT, FATIMA HUSSEIN and DAVID MCHUGH Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Group of Seven nations and Australia joined the European Union on Friday in adopting a \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil, a key step as Western sanctions aim to reorder the global oil market to prevent price spikes and starve President Vladimir Putin of funding for his war in Ukraine.

Europe needed to set the discounted price that other nations will pay by Monday, when an EU embargo on Russian oil shipped by sea and a ban on insurance for those supplies take effect. The price cap, which was led by the G-7 wealthy democracies, aims to prevent a sudden loss of Russian oil to the world that could lead to a new surge in energy prices and further fuel inflation.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement that the agreement will help restrict Putin's "primary source of revenue for his illegal war in Ukraine while simultaneously preserving the stability of global energy supplies."

The agreement comes after a last-minute flurry of negotiations. Poland long held up an EU agreement, seeking to set the cap as low as possible. Following more than 24 hours of deliberations, when other EU nations had signaled they would back the deal, Warsaw finally relented late Friday.

A joint G-7 coalition statement released Friday states that the group is "prepared to review and adjust

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the maximum price as appropriate," taking into account market developments and potential impacts on coalition members and low and middle-income countries.

"Crippling Russia's energy revenues is at the core of stopping Russia's war machine," Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said, adding that she was happy the cap was pushed down a few extra dollars from earlier proposals. She said every dollar the cap was reduced amounted to \$2 billion less for Russia's war chest.

"It is no secret that we wanted the price to be lower," Kallas added, highlighting the differences within the EU. "A price between 30-40 dollars is what would substantially hurt Russia. However, this is the best compromise we could get."

The \$60 figure sets the cap near the current price of Russia's crude, which recently fell below \$60 a barrel. Some criticize that as not low enough to cut into one of Russia's main sources of income. It is still a big discount to international benchmark Brent, which slid to \$85.48 a barrel Friday, but could be high enough for Moscow to keep selling even while rejecting the idea of a cap.

There is a big risk to the global oil market of losing large amounts of crude from the world's No. 2 producer. It could drive up gasoline prices for drivers worldwide, which has stirred political turmoil for U.S. President Joe Biden and leaders in other nations. Europe is already mired in an energy crisis, with governments facing protests over the soaring cost of living, while developing nations are even more vulnerable to shifts in energy costs.

But the West has faced increasing pressure to target one of Russia's main moneymakers — oil — to slash the funds flowing into Putin's war chest and hurt Russia's economy as the war in Ukraine drags into a ninth month. The costs of oil and natural gas spiked after demand rebounded from the pandemic and then the invasion of Ukraine unsettled energy markets, feeding Russia's coffers.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Friday that "the cap itself will have the desired effect on limiting Mr. Putin's ability to profit off of oil sales and limit his ability to continue to use that money to fund his war machine."

More uncertainty is ahead, however. COVID-19 restrictions in China and a slowing global economy could mean less thirst for oil. That is what OPEC and allied oil-producing countries, including Russia, pointed to in cutting back supplies to the world in October. The OPEC+ alliance is scheduled to meet again Sunday.

That competes with the EU embargo that could take more oil supplies off the market, raising fears of a supply squeeze and higher prices. Russia exports roughly 5 million barrels of oil a day.

Putin has said he would not sell oil under a price cap and would retaliate against nations that implement the measure. However, Russia has already rerouted much of its supply to India, China and other Asian countries at discounted prices because Western customers have avoided it even before the EU embargo.

Most insurers are located in the EU or the United Kingdom and could be required to participate in the price cap.

Russia also could sell oil off the books by using "dark fleet" tankers with obscure ownership. Oil could be transferred from one ship to another and mixed with oil of similar quality to disguise its origin.

Even under those circumstances, the cap would make it "more costly, time-consuming and cumbersome" for Russia to sell oil around the restrictions, said Maria Shagina, a sanctions expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Berlin.

Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance in Washington, said the price cap should have been implemented when oil was hovering around \$120 per barrel this summer.

"Since then, obviously oil prices have fallen and global recession is a real thing," he said. "The reality is that it is unlikely to be binding given where oil prices are now."

European leaders touted their work on the price cap, a brainchild of Yellen.

"The EU agreement on an oil price cap, coordinated with G7 and others, will reduce Russia's revenues significantly," said Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, the EU's executive arm. "It will help us stabilize global energy prices, benefiting emerging economies around the world."

Brazil wins group despite 1-0 loss to Cameroon at World Cup

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — Vincent Aboubakar's powerful header was historic for Cameroon and Africa at the World Cup.

The stoppage-time goal didn't help Cameroon reach the round of 16 despite the team's 1-0 win over Brazil's reserves on Friday. But it handed the five-time champions their first group-stage loss in 24 years, and gave Africa its first win against the Selecao at the tournament.

Aboubakar was sent off after a second booking for taking off his shirt during his celebration, leading him to miss the final minutes of his team's big victory.

"I didn't even realize that this was such a historic victory," Cameroon coach Rigobert Song said. "We are one of the African countries that played the most World Cups, and now we've beaten Brazil."

Brazil had won its previous seven matches against African opponents at the World Cup.

"We can be proud of what we've done tonight," Cameroon goalkeeper Devis Epassy said. "We worked very hard. Unfortunately, though, we didn't qualify, and that's why we are not too happy."

Brazil, which had already reached the knockout stage after victories over Serbia and Switzerland, still finished first in Group H. It ended with six points, the same as Switzerland, but the South Americans had a better goal difference. Cameroon ended with four points and Serbia had one.

"The loss doesn't eliminate us, but we have to learn from it," midfielder Fabinho said. "The objective was to finish first in the group and we did."

Brazil will face South Korea in the round of 16, while the Swiss will play against Portugal.

It was the 11th straight time Brazil won its World Cup group. It had won 17 straight group games since a 2-1 loss to Norway in 1998 in France. It had lost only one of its last 29 group matches at the tournament.

Cameroon hadn't won any of its last nine World Cup matches, with eight losses and a draw — against Ireland in its opening game at the 2002 tournament.

Coach Tite rested nearly all of his regular starters and made 10 changes from the win against Switzerland on Monday.

Brazil was still without the injured Neymar, but the star forward was at Lusail Stadium to watch the match with his teammates.

Both teams created some good scoring chances, but couldn't capitalize on them until Aboubakar's winner off a right-flank cross by Jerome Ngom Mbekeli, who had entered the match in the 86th minute.

The Cameroon captain threw his shirt to the ground near the corner flag and waited for his teammates as they rushed toward him. He then left the field after the referee showed him the red card.

Brazil finally conceded an attempt on target after not having done so in the first two matches.

Cameroon, which opened with a 1-0 loss to Switzerland, had endured a small crisis after its 3-3 draw with Serbia, with goalkeeper Andre Onana being sent home for disciplinary reasons after a dispute with coach Song.

ALVES' RECORD

With his start Friday, the 39-year-old Dani Alves became the oldest Brazilian to play at a World Cup, ahead of 38-year-old central defender Thiago Silva, Brazil's captain in Qatar. Alves' last game at a World Cup had been in the round of 16 of the 2014 tournament in Brazil.

NEYMAR THE STAR

Neymar joined his teammates at the stadium for the first time since injuring his right ankle in Brazil's opener against Switzerland.

He wasn't limping as he got off the team's bus and even played with the ball as his teammates warmed up. The crowd cheered loudly when the stadium's big screen showed him singing the national anthem before the match. He later sat in the stands behind the bench, with fans trying to get close and take photos of him.

REMEMBERING PELÉ

Brazilian fans showed their support for soccer great Pelé, who is hospitalized in Sao Paulo with a respi-

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ratory infection.

They displayed a banner with the image of Pelé holding a soccer ball behind one of the goals, and opened a large flag with an image of the Brazil great and the words: "Pelé. Get well soon." One fan in the stands held up a jersey with a photo of Pelé on it.

BRAZIL INJURIES

Brazil left back Alex Telles, who was replacing injured regular starter Alex Sandro, had to be replaced with a right knee injury, as did Gabriel Jesus. Both will undergo tests Saturday.

Dems move to make South Carolina, not Iowa, 1st voting state

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats voted Friday to remove Iowa as the leadoff state on the presidential nominating calendar and replace it with South Carolina starting in 2024, a dramatic shakeup championed by President Joe Biden to better reflect the party's deeply diverse electorate.

The Democratic National Committee's rule-making arm made the move to strip Iowa from the position it has held for five decades after technical meltdowns sparked chaos and marred results of the state's 2020 caucus. The change also comes after a long push by some of the party's top leaders to start choosing a president in states that are less white, especially given the importance of Black voters as Democrats' most loyal electoral base.

Discussion on prioritizing diversity drew such impassioned reaction at the committee gathering in Washington that DNC chair Jaime Harrison wiped away tears as committee member Donna Brazile suggested that Democrats had spent years failing to fight for Black voters: "Do you know what it's like to live on a dirt road? Do you know what it's like to try to find running water that is clean?"

"Do you know what it's like to wait and see if the storm is going to pass you by and your roof is still intact?" Brazile asked. "That's what this is about."

The committee approved moving South Carolina's primary to Feb. 3 and having Nevada and New Hampshire vote three days later. Georgia would go the following week and Michigan two weeks after that.

The move marks a dramatic shift from the current calendar, which has had Iowa holding the first-in-the-nation caucuses since 1972, followed by New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary since 1920. Nevada and South Carolina have gone next since the 2008 presidential election, when Democrats last did a major overhaul of their primary calendar.

The changes will still have to be approved by the full DNC in a vote likely early next year, but it will almost certainly follow the rule-making committee's lead.

The revamped schedule could largely be moot for 2024 if Biden opts to seek a second term, but may remake Democratic presidential cycles after that. The president has said for months that he intends to run again, and White House aides have begun making staffing discussions for his likely reelection campaign, even though no final decision has been made.

The DNC also plans to revisit the primary calendar again before 2028 — meaning more changes could be coming before then.

Biden wrote in a letter to rules committee members on Thursday that the party should scrap "restrictive" caucuses altogether because their rules on in-person participation can sometimes exclude working-class and other voters. He also told party leaders privately that he'd like to see South Carolina go first to better ensure that voters of color aren't marginalized as Democrats choose a presidential nominee.

Four of the five states now poised to start the party's primary are presidential battlegrounds, meaning the eventual Democratic winner would be able to lay groundwork in important general election locales. That's especially true for Michigan and Georgia, which both voted for Donald Trump in 2016 before flipping to Biden in 2020. The exception is South Carolina, which hasn't gone Democratic in a presidential race since 1976.

The first five voting states would be positioned to cast ballots before Super Tuesday, the day when much of the rest of the country holds primaries. That gives the early states outsized influence since White House

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hopefuls struggling to raise money or gain political traction often drop out before visiting much of the rest of the country.

Scott Brennan, a rules committee member from Iowa, said "small, rural states" like his "must have a voice in the presidential nominating process."

"Democrats cannot forget about entire groups of voters in the heart of the Midwest without doing significant damage to the party in newer generations," Brennan said.

The Republican National Committee has already decided to keep Iowa's caucus as the first contest in its 2024 presidential primary, ensuring that GOP White House hopefuls — which include Trump — have continued to frequently campaign there.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, South Carolina's lone congressional Democrat and one of Biden's top supporters in Congress, said the president called him Thursday to inform him of his push to move his state up.

"I didn't ask to be first," Clyburn said. "It was his idea to be first."

Clyburn's endorsement of Biden in 2020 boosted the candidate's flagging presidential campaign just ahead of South Carolina's primary, which he won big. That helped Biden shake off early losses in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada and eventually take the White House.

"He knows what South Carolina did for him, and he's demonstrated that time and time again, by giving respect to South Carolina," Clyburn said.

Still, the vote by the rules committee has faced serious pushback, with some states vowing to ignore the changes altogether. That's despite the panel approving language saying states could lose all of their delegates to the party's national convention if they attempt to violate new rules.

Iowa and New Hampshire have said laws in their states mandate them going before others, and they intend to abide by those, not DNC decrees. Only committee members from Iowa and New Hampshire objected to the proposal that passed Friday, with everyone else supporting it.

Nevada, with its heavily Hispanic population, initially balked at sharing the second-place slot with New Hampshire, a state 2,500 miles away. Nevada committee member Artie Blanco's voice cracked as she argued against the change.

"If we want to build a strong relationship with Latinos," Blanco said, "then Nevada must stand alone on a date and not have to share that date."

After more discussion, Blanco said later that she would support the new calendar. It was "not ideal" for her state to go the same day as another, she said, but "we accept what the will of the president is."

Harrison said the new slate of five early voting states will need to show they are working toward moving their primaries to those dates by early next year or risk losing their place. Some state legislatures set primary dates; others have their secretaries of state or the directors of their state parties do it.

The DNC chair choked up after the vote as he talked about South Carolina once having been the site of the first attack of the Civil War and now being in line to lead off his party's primary.

"This proposal reflects the best of our party as a whole, and it will continue to make our party and our country stronger," Harrison said.

Amazon loses 10% of its vegetation in nearly four decades

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The Amazon region has lost 10% of its native vegetation, mostly tropical rainforest, in almost four decades, an area roughly the size of Texas, a new report says.

From 1985 to 2021, the deforested area surged from 490,000 square kilometers (190,000 square miles) to 1,250,000 square kilometers (482,000 square miles), unprecedented destruction in the Amazon, according to the Amazon Network of Georeferenced Socio-Environmental Information, or Raisg.

The numbers are calculated from an annual satellite monitoring since 1985 from Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana. The report is a collaboration between Raisg and MapBiomias, a network of Brazilian nonprofits, universities and technology startups.

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"The losses have been enormous, virtually irreversible and with no expectation of a turnaround," said a statement Friday by Raisg, a consortium of civil society organizations from the region's countries. "The data signals a yellow light and gives a sense of urgency to the need for a coordinated, decisive and compelling international action."

Brazil, which holds about two-thirds of the Amazon, also leads the destruction. In almost four decades, 19% of its rainforest has been destroyed, due mainly to cattle ranching expansion supported by the opening of roads. The country accounted for 84% of all forest destruction in the period.

Almost half of Brazil's carbon emissions comes from deforestation. The destruction is so vast that the eastern Amazon has ceased to be a carbon sink, or absorber, for the Earth and has become a carbon source, according to a study published in 2021 in the journal Nature.

As of 2021, the Amazon had 74% of its area covered by tropical rainforests and 9% of other natural vegetation types. The region, with 8.5 million square kilometers, holds a population of 47 million people, according to Raisg estimates.

"At least some 75 billion metric tons of carbon are stored across the Amazon," Woods Hole Research Center researcher Wayne Walker said during a press conference Friday in Lima, Peru. "If all that carbon ended up immediately in the atmosphere, that would be about seven times global annual emissions."

Flu season worsens as 44 states report high activity

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. flu season keeps getting worse.

Health officials said Friday that 7.5% of outpatient medical visits last week were due to flu-like illnesses. That's as high as the peak of the 2017-18 flu season and higher than any season since.

The annual winter flu season usually doesn't get going until December or January, but this one began early and has been complicated by the simultaneous spread of other viruses.

The measure of traffic in doctor's offices is based on reports of symptoms like coughs and sore throats, not on lab-confirmed diagnoses. So it may include other respiratory illnesses.

That makes it hard to compare to flu seasons from before the COVID-19 pandemic. Other years also didn't have this year's unusually strong wave of RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, a common cause of cold-like symptoms that can be serious for infants and the elderly.

Meanwhile, 44 states reported high or very high flu activity last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday.

That may not bode well for the near future. It's likely there was more spread of respiratory viruses during Thanksgiving gatherings and at crowded airports, experts say.

The dominant flu strain so far is the kind typically associated with higher rates of hospitalizations and deaths, particularly in people 65 and older.

The CDC estimates there have been at least 78,000 hospitalizations and 4,500 deaths from flu so far this season. The deaths include at least 14 children.

Flu shots are recommended for nearly all Americans who are at least 6 months old or older.

World Cup Viewer's Guide: Americans face the Netherlands

By JENNA FRYER AP National Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Christian Pulisic became an American star with the winning goal — and the injury he got while scoring it — that lifted the United States into the round of 16 at the World Cup.

He injured his pelvic bone, Pulisic insisted, when he collided with Iran's goalkeeper on the goal that sent him to the hospital as the United States won 1-0 and advanced in soccer's biggest tournament.

Pulisic was cleared to play Saturday, when the Americans face the Netherlands in the knockout round.

Everybody expected him to be on the field even before doctors gave him the medical go-ahead on Friday.

"I will do everything in my power to work with this medical team and make sure that I can play," Pulisic said of his intention to be on the field.

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The United States is trying to get to the quarterfinals for the first time since 2002 and continue to delight the American audience, which has tuned into the first three matches in record numbers.

A win against the Netherlands might be enough to convince fans back at home that the United States can, indeed, compete on the biggest stage in soccer.

"The support from the U.S. has been a bit surreal," captain Tyler Adams said. "My dad's a teacher at school, and they were all watching during their classes, the game and supporting me. And I was getting videos from the family, all the watch parties in my town and whatnot.

"It's really, really cool to see how much just a tournament can change that perspective on people supporting soccer."

The United States is winless in its last 11 World Cup games against European teams, a streak that includes five losses and six draws. On Saturday, the Americans face a Dutch squad that, like several other World Cup teams at this tournament, is battling the flu. The bug ran through the U.S. squad last week.

Netherlands coach Louis van Gaal gave his team the day off on Thursday instead of running a typical 11-on-11 match.

"I gave them a day of rest," Van Gaal said Friday. "With this group, they communicate that to me. I listen to my players."

He declined to elaborate on how many players are affected, but by abandoning the typical training schedule Van Gaal created speculation that at least six players are ill.

"We are not going to elaborate on that," he said. "But if it goes around in the group, it is worrying."

Frenkie de Jong has said a scratchy throat disrupted his ability to communicate during a victory over Qatar, and Marten de Roon told reporters he had a cold earlier this week.

Netherlands midfielder Cody Gakpo is trying to become the first player from his country to score in four straight World Cup matches, and the Dutch team is on an 18-game winning streak that the United States is determined to snap.

"We felt a responsibility to use this World Cup to create momentum in the United States for soccer," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "And that's why we want to keep going and we want to keep doing well and make the country proud."

AUSTRALIA-ARGENTINA

Lionel Messi goes into yet another match that could be his last on the World Cup stage.

"No one expects us to win," Australia forward Mathew Leckie said. "So let's shock the world."

Argentina was shocked by Saudi Arabia in its opening match and had to beat Poland earlier this week to ensure that Messi could continue in his fifth World Cup. One of the greatest players of all-time has never won this tournament, and this one in Qatar is expected to be his last.

Argentina turned a corner with wins over Mexico and Poland and emerged as the winner of Group C to face Australia, ranked 38th in the world. Australia is in the knockout round for only the second time, its previous trip a 1-0 loss to Italy in 2006.

Argentina won't take Australia for granted, even though it has five wins, one draw and one loss in eight meetings dating to 1988. This is the first match between the two teams since 2007.

"We know, at the moment, everything is very difficult," Messi said. "All the opponents are complicated. We know it as well as anyone."

Prosecutor: Evidence shows Trump 'explicitly' OK'd tax fraud

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In the end, it wasn't a last-minute smoking gun but a prosecutor insisting that evidence shows Donald Trump was aware of a scheme that his Trump Organization's executives hatched to avoid paying personal income taxes on millions of dollars worth of company-paid perks.

After telling jurors on Thursday that Trump "knew exactly what was going on" with the scheme, Assistant Manhattan District Attorney Joshua Steinglass followed up by citing trial evidence and testimony that he said made clear "Mr. Trump is explicitly sanctioning tax fraud."

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Steinglass, speaking on the last day before deliberations at the Trump Organization's criminal tax fraud, showed jurors a lease Trump signed for one executive's Manhattan apartment and a memo the former president initialed authorizing a pay cut for another executive who got perks.

He also cited Weisselberg's claim, during his three days of testimony, that he told Trump he would pay him back after Trump agreed to cover his grandchildren's hefty private school tuition cost. Weisselberg then adjusted his payroll records to cut his pre-tax salary by the cost of the tuition.

"I mention this all to show that this whole narrative that Mr. Trump was blissfully ignorant is just not real," Steinglass said.

Trump himself is not on trial, as Steinglass reminded jurors, but Judge Juan Manuel Merchan gave him the green light to talk about Trump's possible awareness of the scheme after the company's lawyers, in their summations, claimed that Trump knew nothing about it.

Trump has denied knowing that Weisselberg and other executives were dodging taxes, writing on his Truth Social platform this week: "There was no gain for 'Trump,' and we had no knowledge of it."

After Steinglass finished Friday, Trump Organization lawyer Michael van der Veen asked Merchan to declare a mistrial, arguing that the prosecutor had irreparably harmed the defense by effectively portraying Trump as a co-conspirator in the tax fraud scheme.

"I don't believe it's necessary to declare a mistrial. That's not really even a thought," Merchan said, agreeing to instead caution jurors about Steinglass' remarks.

But Steinglass' sudden focus on Trump's knowledge of the scheme, right as the Trump company's trial was ambling to a conclusion, begged the question: Why wasn't he charged, too?

The Manhattan district attorney's office declined comment, citing the ongoing trial. District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who inherited the case when he took office in January, has said that an investigation of Trump is "active and ongoing," and that no decision has been made on whether to charge him.

The Trump Organization, the entity through which Trump manages his golf courses, hotels and other ventures, is charged with helping some top executives avoid paying income taxes on non-monetary compensation. The company's case is the only trial to arise from the Manhattan district attorney's office's three-year investigation of Trump and his business practices.

Prosecutors argue that the company is liable because Weisselberg and an underling he worked with on the scheme, controller Jeffrey McConney, were "high managerial" agents entrusted to act on behalf of the company and its various entities. If convicted, the company could be fined more than \$1 million.

The defense has alleged that Weisselberg came up with the tax dodge scheme on his own, without Trump or the Trump family knowing, and that the company didn't benefit from his actions.

"We are here today for one reason and one reason only: the greed of Allen Weisselberg," Trump Organization lawyer Susan Necheles said Thursday.

Weisselberg testified that Trump didn't know, but that the Trump Organization did derive some benefit because it didn't have to pay him as much in actual salary. Van der Veen peppered his summation Thursday with the defense's mantra: "Weisselberg did it for Weisselberg."

"Their entire theory of the case is a fraud," Steinglass said Friday morning before the jury entered the courtroom, as company lawyers were seeking to temper his rhetoric.

One company-paid Manhattan apartment even went to Weisselberg's son, Barry, ostensibly so he could respond quickly to emergencies at the Central Park ice rink the company managed.

"This is all part of the Trump executive compensation package: free cars for you, free cars for your wife, free apartments for you, free apartments for your kids," Steinglass said. Barry Weisselberg, he quipped, "wasn't living on a Zamboni in Wollman Rink. He was living in an apartment on Central Park South."

At the outset of the trial, Merchan cautioned the defense and prosecution to avoid talking about Trump so as to not give jurors the impression that longtime real estate honcho was, or should have been, sitting at the defense table.

But the judge noted Friday that the tenor of the trial changed after defense lawyers and prosecutors frequently mentioned Trump during arguments and testimony, even though he did not testify and did not attend the trial.

Steinglass, wrapping his summation, told jurors that Trump was "the elephant that's not in the room."

Distaste for Walker provides tailwind for Warnock in Georgia

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

MORROW, Ga. (AP) — It might go without saying that Democrats generally vote against Republicans. But in Georgia's U.S. Senate runoff, it can hardly be overstated how much Democratic voters — and others — are driven by not wanting Republican challenger Herschel Walker to be their U.S. senator.

Ask Raphael Warnock's voters what they think about the election, and it's often criticism of Walker that first comes tumbling out.

"You've got a very ignorant, ignorant, ignorant fellow that's running in Herschel Walker," said Dennis Paris, an entertainer who lives in the Atlanta suburb of Jonesboro and voted for Warnock this week in Morrow. "I can't see going through another thing like we had with an ignorant Trump making decisions for us, not caring about the people."

Even many Georgia Republicans who are voting for Walker, the former University of Georgia and pro football star, say they're not so much motivated by liking him as by disliking President Joe Biden's administration and Warnock's support for Biden's policies.

Tuesday's runoff is far from settled. Warnock led Walker in the general election on Nov. 8 but came up short of a majority, necessitating another round of voting under state law.

Warnock and fellow Democrat Jon Ossoff won Senate seats in January 2021 following a runoff, giving their party razor-thin control of the Senate. But runoffs in Georgia historically have favored Republicans, in part because turnout has tended to fall sharply.

A heavy election day turnout by GOP voters could still push Walker to victory. After all, Republicans won every other statewide Georgia race last month.

However, distaste for Walker appears to be buoying Democratic enthusiasm. Some party leaders had feared their voters wouldn't be motivated to turn out again for Warnock after the Democrats secured two more years of Senate control with victories in other states.

A strong early voting turnout has eased those worries. Through Thursday, nearly 1.5 million people had cast ballots early in Georgia, including several record-setting single days.

According to state voting data compiled by Ryan Anderson, an independent analyst in Atlanta, three of the state's five Democratic-held congressional districts had already seen advance turnout through Thursday of at least 61% of the total early vote for the November election, None of Georgia's nine Republican-held congressional districts had eclipsed that mark.

Some Walker voters are uneasy about him, too. Tom Glass, a software engineer who voted for Walker on Thursday in Marietta, said he reluctantly chose the Republican.

He backs Walker, he said, because he wants change in Washington, but he acknowledged, "I know all of the stuff that is said about him, and a good bit of it is actually true."

Glass said he thinks the election matters less because Democrats already control the Senate, but he chose Walker anyway. "Is he the answer? No, but I don't think Warnock is the answer."

John McCombs of Riverdale said he voted for Walker simply because "I feel the nation is heading in the wrong direction."

"I hope he can stop some of the policies that have taken our nation down the wrong path," the information technology worker said, citing particular concern over "spending money we don't have."

In speeches and ads, Warnock and other Democrats have been playing up their portrait of a badly unqualified Walker who could disgrace their state.

"How embarrassed would you be if Herschel Walker was your senator?" asks one flyer mailed to homes this week by the Democratic Party of Georgia.

One Warnock television ad shows voters reacting with puzzlement and disgust to Walker remarks, including a Nov. 16 speech that included a tangent where Walker sought to relate the plot of the vampire movie "Fright Night" to his campaign.

He suggested that if voters only had faith, they could defeat Warnock by relying on greater patriotism

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and unity that ignores racial division.

But that message got buried by Democratic mockery slamming Walker as unserious, including by former President Barack Obama Thursday in a rally with Warnock in Atlanta.

"Since the last time I was here, Mr. Walker has been talking about issues that are of great importance to the people of Georgia — like whether it's better to be a vampire or a werewolf," Obama said. "This is a debate I must confess I once had myself — when I was seven. Then I grew up."

Democratic voters frequently say they believe Walker is in over his head, lured into the race by former President Donald Trump or other Republicans who are relying on Walker's football celebrity to snag a Senate seat for the GOP.

"I just feel like he's a pawn, like they said 'Let's get Herschel in so we can get the seat,'" said Sherri Gates of Morrow. "I just don't feel like he is qualified."

Gates describes herself as a firm Democrat who supports Warnock, pastor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s former Atlanta church, because "for one thing, he's a decent human being."

"I do not want Herschel to represent me and my state," she said. "He seems to have a hard time expressing himself. He just doesn't appear to be a good representative of anybody, maybe even himself."

Walker argues that it's Warnock who doesn't know what he's doing by backing Biden so much.

Warnock says, "Come on. Georgia is better than Herschel Walker!"

Robert Downey Jr. on one last film with his dad, 'Sr.'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Robert Downey Jr. set out to make an objective portrait, a tribute to his father, the underground filmmaking maverick Robert Downey Sr. His dad had other plans.

"The key point in this is when he goes, 'OK, I think we should split into two camps: The (expletive) movie and the one I'm gonna make,'" recalls Downey Jr., laughing. "I just go, 'Man, hats off to you, Pops.'"

"Sr.," directed by Chris Smith, is a work of father-son harmony more than might be suggested by Downey Sr.'s typically brusque assertion of filmmaking independence. It's a kind of home movie, mostly made by Downey Jr. but with his father's own insertions peppered throughout. It's a son's loving reckoning with his iconoclast father, a freewheeling cult filmmaker whose experimental films gave Downey Jr. his entry into moviemaking and whose outsized personality did much to inform his son, for better and worse. As Downey Jr. puts it, "My dad and I are pretty flawed dudes."

"It was a way to put something between us in our own relationship and closure. I didn't know that it would be the quickest way to the heart of things," Downey Jr. said in a recent interview by phone from Los Angeles alongside his wife and producing partner Susan Downey. "It's like a little string you pull at, you know. And it winds up pulling you into a rabbit hole that I kind of needed to go down in order to process and ingest the totality of our relationship."

Downey Sr. died last year at the age of 85 after having Parkinson's. That's part of the film; Downey Sr. wanted it to be. "Sr.," which debuts Monday on Netflix, was made with the intention of capturing his last days: a last stab at gaining some understanding of him, wrestling with their shared demons and, once again, making a movie together. Some 50 years ago, Downey Jr. made his debut in his father's antic 1970 dog pound comedy, "Pound," at the age of 5.

"I have pretty good recall for the entirety of this incarnation, for better or worse," says Downey Jr., 57. "Those films and projects, I have very clear memories of that. I can still see the Mounds bar that was being handed to me. It was my first prop I ever had to deal with."

Years before he was the Oscar-nominated actor of "Chaplin" or the star of "Iron Man," Downey Jr. was, as he says in the film, "just Bob Downey's kid for a long time." Absurdist, spontaneous films like 1971's "Putney Swope" and 1972's "Greaser's Palace" made the elder Downey a pivotal countercultural provocateur who defined himself outside of the mainstream.

In "Sr.," Downey Jr.'s reverence for his father is easy to see, as is their mutual affection for one another. But that doesn't mean the old man was always easy on his famous son. Every film Downey Jr. ever made,

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he wondered: "What will Sr. think?" Every 15 years or so would he get a thumb's up.

"I hate to say it, but he was a bit of a snob. Susan and I did a couple Sherlock movies. He was like, 'Cute.' I did a bunch of the Marvel stuff and he goes, 'Uh uh. Yeah, bomb, bomb. Jokes. Funny robots. I get it.' I went, 'Hm. Wow. OK,'" Downey Jr. says. "I remember that he thought 'Less Than Zero' was good. He thought 'Chaplin' was too episodic. And he really liked that German song I sang when I was 15."

Again taking his father's direction, Downey Jr. sings that song, with panache, in the film. Though it's easy, as a viewer, to see how much alike they are, Downey Jr. is more hesitant to define what he inherited from his dad.

"I did not get his wildly optimistic ongoing super-curiosity," he says. "I would never necessarily marvel at the fact that a duck had baby ducks and those ducks got big."

Susan Downey disagrees. "You absolutely have your observation of the world. You're hyper-aware of what's going on around you and comment on it, much as Sr. did," she says. "And I think you deal with anything uncomfortable through humor. This is a secret power that you guys have. There's wonderful things that come with that, and then there's probably avoidance patterns that are kept up because of that."

On those '70s films, Downey Sr.'s cocaine use was rampant, an environment that surely had an influence on Downey Jr.'s own struggles later with drug addiction. It's a point that Downey Jr. raises in the film: "We would be remiss not to discuss its effect on me," Downey Jr. tells his father. He replies: "I would sure love to miss that discussion."

But "Sr." is in many ways a portrait of how both Downeys recovered, stabilized and found peace through family. Downey Jr. ascribes a metamorphosis in his father to his second wife, Laura Ernst, who died in 1994, and his third wife, Rosemary Rogers.

"I can relate to that, too, up until this current administration, the never-ending Susan Downey empire," says Downey Jr. "I just have a lot more gratitude."

When Downey Sr.'s health waned, they moved the film's editing suite into his bedroom. Susan Downey, too, lost her father, in 2020, to Parkinson's. "He was a saint compared to us Downey boys," Downey Jr. says. Movies were how they connected. The last film Downey Jr. and his father watched together was the music biopic satire "Walk Hard." They laughed their heads off.

Since premiering "Sr." at the Telluride Film Festival, Downey Jr. has noticed how the film becomes a projection of others' experiences losing a parent. Toward the end of the film, Downey Jr. goes into his father's room, with the camera trailing, to find some final answers. "I was going to get to the bottom of it for once and all," he says. Like most sons seeking such definitude, Downey Jr. came out, he felt, emptyhanded.

But in "Sr.," the two films each are making ultimately seamlessly meld into one, suggesting a deeper understanding between Jr. and Sr. than either might have readily admitted. There are also ongoing discoveries.

After such an unconventional indoctrination to cinema as a kid, Downey Jr.'s genuine, live-wire performances surely owe something to the frenetic energy he had known on his father's sets. "I think I had the advantage of it already feeling natural before I came into that quote-unquote industrialized version of entertainment," Downey Jr. says.

He often found with other directors something just as comfortable and rewarding. He calls Richard Attenborough ("Chaplin") "a super wise loving grandfather." Jon Favreau ("Iron Man") was "like a brother." Movies were and still are, Susan Downey says, "the family business."

"It's very odd, too, because we're doing this film with Director Park (Chan-wook) now called 'The Sympathizer' where I'm doing a lot of different characters. It's not experimental at all. It's very well-fleshed out. But it's kind of reminding me of the Sr. experience," says Downey Jr. "You get dressed up, you try a character and we're going to film it."

Stuck by that fresh realization, Downey Jr. exclaims: "We're finally figuring everything out in real time! Live from the Gestalt Therapy Epicenter of Southern California!"

Then he sighs. "So I'm still working for Dad."

Snowden receives Russian passport, takes citizenship oath

MOSCOW (AP) — Former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, who fled prosecution after revealing highly classified surveillance programs, has received a Russian passport and taken the citizenship oath, Russian news agencies quoted his lawyer as saying Friday.

Lawyer Anatoly Kucherena was reported as saying that Snowden got the passport and took the oath on Thursday, about three months after Russian President Vladimir Putin granted him citizenship.

The reports did not specify whether Snowden has renounced his U.S. citizenship. The United States revoked his passport in 2013, leading to Snowden being stranded in a Moscow airport for weeks after arriving from Hong Kong, aiming to reach Ecuador.

Russia eventually granted him permanent residency. He married American Lindsay Mills in 2017 and the couple has two children.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price said Friday that the U.S. was aware of reports Snowden had finalized his Russian citizenship but could not confirm them, and referred questions about his status to the Russian government. However, Price said the Biden administration would not be surprised if the reports were correct.

"Mr. Snowden has long signaled his allegiance to Russia, this step would only formalize that," Price told reporters.

Snowden leaked documents on the National Security Agency's collection of data passing through the infrastructure of U.S. phone and internet companies. He also released details about the classified U.S. intelligence budget and the extent of American surveillance on foreign officials, including the leaders of U.S.-allied countries.

Snowden says he made the disclosures because he believed the U.S. intelligence community had gone too far and infringed on civil liberties.

EXPLAINER: 5 key takeaways from the November jobs report

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For nearly nine months, the Federal Reserve has relentlessly raised interest rates to try to slow the U.S. job market and bring inflation under control.

And for just as long, the job market hasn't seemed to get the message.

The November employment report the government issued Friday was no exception. Employers added 263,000 jobs — a substantial gain that was far above economists' expectations. Wages rose robustly, too, further intensifying the inflationary pressures the Fed has been struggling to contain.

And the unemployment rate remained at 3.7%, barely above the half-century low of 3.5%.

Friday's hiring data left economists scratching their heads over the job market's resilience and the continuing need of many employers for more workers.

"The Fed is tightening monetary policy, but somebody forgot to tell the labor market," said Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch Ratings.

The Fed's inflation challenge began after the economy roared back from the pandemic recession two years ago, causing vast shortages of goods and sending prices soaring. After assuming — falsely — for months that high inflation would prove short-lived, the Fed finally began raising its key short-term rate in March this year.

Since then, its rate hikes have been recurrent and aggressive. The Fed has raised its benchmark rate six times, including four straight increases of three-quarters of a point — far larger than the usual quarter-point hikes. Later this month, it's expected to raise its key rate by an additional half-point.

Because the Fed's rate affects borrowing rates across the economy, its hikes have had the effect of making loans much costlier for consumers and businesses. The idea is that individuals and companies would then cut back on borrowing and spending, and employers would slow their hiring.

But the economy — and especially the job market — have proved surprisingly durable in the face of the Fed's anti-inflation campaign, a fact underscored by Friday's strong jobs numbers.

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The central bank's goal is to achieve 2% annual inflation. It has a long way to go, to say the least: The most recent inflation report showed consumer prices up 7.7% from a year earlier.

Here are five takeaways from the November jobs report:

TOO HOT FOR THE FED

Last year, the economy added a record 6.7 million jobs, and it tacked on an average of 457,000 a month more from January through July this year. Since then, hiring has cooled, to a monthly average of 277,000 from August through November. Yet it's still running way too hot for the Fed's inflation fighters and is consistently beating forecasters' expectations.

With nearly two job openings for every unemployed American, companies are struggling to find workers and retain the ones they have. A tight job market tends to keep upward pressure on wages and to feed into inflation.

"This is another solid report that shows just how difficult it is going to be for the Fed to get inflation back to target," economists Thomas Simons and Aneta Markowska of the investment banking firm Jefferies wrote in a research note Friday.

RISING WAGES

Average hourly earnings rose 0.6% from October to November — the strongest month-to-month gain since January. And measured over the past 12 months, average pay was up a more-than-expected 5.1%, "We had been hoping to see a clear softening," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Hourly pay gains were especially strong in November for workers in retail, transportation and warehousing and "information," a category that includes some technology jobs.

"Wage growth is likely to continue to remain elevated until we see a meaningful normalization in labor demand," said Thomas Feltmate, senior economist at TD Economics.

HELP WANTED: RESTAURANTS AND BARS

Restaurants and bars added 62,000 jobs last month. The healthcare industry took on a net 45,000 new workers in November. That sector has been adding 47,000 jobs a month this year, up from an average of just 9,000 a month in 2021.

Factories added 14,000 jobs in November. That gain occurred even though an index issued by the Institute for Supply Management showed that U.S. manufacturing activity fell last month for the first time since May 2020, when the economy was reeling from the COVID-10 outbreak.

Last month, the economy also added 20,000 construction workers. But in a sign that higher interest rates are squeezing the housing market, the number of employees at homebuilding companies actually fell in November by 2,600.

MISSING WORKERS

The number of people who either have a job or are looking for one — the total labor force — declined by 186,000 in November. It was the third straight monthly drop.

The figure remains slightly below where it stood in February 2020, just before COVID slammed into the U.S. economy. The proportion of the adult population in the labor force — the participation rate — amounted to 62.1% last month, well below the pre-pandemic 63.4%.

The shortfall in available workers has been caused by a combination of early retirements, reduced immigration, COVID-19 deaths and a shortage of affordable child care. The shortage represents a setback in the fight against inflation: If employers had more workers to choose from, they would be under less pressure to bid up wages and thereby contribute to inflation pressures.

TWO SURVEYS, TWO STORIES

Friday's report sent some mixed signals about the level of employment in the United States.

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The Labor Department's survey of businesses delivered the headline number of 263,000 added jobs. But the department also surveyed households, and they told a different story: The number of people who said they had a job fell by 138,000 in November after having dropped by 328,000 in October.

The survey of businesses, called the "establishment survey," tracks how many jobs are added across the economy. The separate survey of households is used to calculate the unemployment rate.

The two surveys sometimes tell different tales, as they did in October and November, though the disparities tend to even out over time.

For its establishment survey, the department asks mostly large companies and government agencies how many people they had on their payrolls.

For its household survey, it asks households whether the adults living there have a job. Those who don't have a job but are looking for one are counted as unemployed. Those who aren't working but aren't seeking work are not counted as unemployed.

Unlike the establishment survey, the household survey counts farm workers, the self-employed and people who work for new companies. It also does a better job of capturing small-business hiring.

But the results of the household survey are likely less precise. The government surveys just 60,000 households. By contrast, it surveys 131,000 businesses and government agencies for the establishment survey.

Biden sees economy avoiding recession, but risks remain

By JOSH BOAK and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden assured Americans on Friday that the U.S. economy is chugging along in the holiday season, but the very strength of a new jobs report showed that high inflation remains a recession threat.

At the White House, the president signed an emergency bill to avert a rail strike that he said could have caused 765,000 job losses in two weeks and plunged the country into a painful downturn. But many voters and economists still fear that a recession is nigh and the price of reducing high prices will be layoffs.

Biden pointed to the addition of 263,000 jobs in November — with the unemployment rate holding steady at 3.7% — as proof that his policies have bulked up the economy. He suggested that the major recession risk was the freight rail strike, a problem the country avoided by having Congress impose an agreement that raises pay but fails to provide the additional paid sick leave that workers demanded.

"Things are moving — they're moving in the right direction," Biden said. "As we go into the holiday season, here's what this all means: The Americans are working, the economy is growing."

White House officials do see reason for optimism. Gasoline prices are averaging \$3.45 a gallon, down sharply from a June peak, according to AAA. The economy is expanding after shrinking in size during the first half of the year. And since July, workers' average hourly earnings have been rising faster than consumer prices.

But inflation can be a game of whack-a-mole, and Friday's employment report suggested that wage growth actually could be part of the problem.

Inflation has been something of a moving target during Biden's presidency. Supply chain challenges and shortages pushed up prices as the country started to recover from the pandemic in 2021. Higher oil and food costs drove up inflation after Russia invaded Ukraine in February. And the jobs report showed that wage growth accelerated sharply, which could fuel inflation going forward.

The Federal Reserve is attempting to reduce inflation by raising its benchmark interest rates. That action reduces economic activity in order to bring down prices.

On Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell suggested the U.S. central bank might not have to raise rates as aggressively to return inflation to the 2% annual target. That comment caused the stock market to rise, only for the optimism to fizzle out on Friday as the new and revised wage data indicated the Fed might need to do more to cool the economy.

"With these revisions, the pace of wage growth is more consistent with 5% inflation than with 2% infla-

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tion," said Harvard University professor Jason Furman, formerly the top economist in the Obama White House. "In this sense it may take a larger adjustment in labor markets than previously hoped to bring inflation down."

The president's key message is that his policies have helped to avoid catastrophes such as a recession caused by a rail strike. The bill he signed Friday binds rail companies and workers to a proposed settlement that was reached between the railroads and union leaders in September but rejected by the workers of some unions.

"The bill I'm about to sign ends a difficult rail dispute and helps our nation avoid what without a doubt would have been an economic catastrophe at a very bad time in the calendar," said Biden. He said his team helped negotiate a "good product, but we still have more work to do in my view."

Members of four of the 12 unions involved had rejected the proposed contract as lacking sufficient paid sick leave, setting up the possibility of a strike beginning Dec. 9. Biden acknowledged the shortcoming and said he would continue to push for that benefit for every U.S. worker.

"I've supported paid sick leave for a long time," said the president, a staunch labor union supporter. "I'm going to continue that fight until we succeed."

He said that Republican lawmakers blocked the inclusion of seven days of paid sick leave in the agreement, and it's unclear how he would get backing for expanding family leave to all workers with the GOP winning the House majority in November's elections.

Republican leaders have tapped into deep doubts about the U.S. economy with party officials noting that higher prices have caused Americans' savings rate to hit the lowest level in 17 years. About three-quarters of voters last month called economic conditions "poor" or "not so good," according to AP VoteCast.

Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, the ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, called the jobs report a "nightmare before Christmas."

"The White House is absolutely clueless about the very real labor shortage still hurting Main Street businesses and driving prices higher," Brady said. "And for many workers, they are struggling with real wage losses and real pay cuts, making sticker shock a big part of this year's holiday gift shopping experience."

Although Biden has said the economy is heading in the right direction, the employment report indicates that it's on a "more muddled path" in which it's unclear whether a downturn and eventual job losses can be averted, said Daniel Zhao, lead economist at Glassdoor, an employment website.

The mixed signals come in part because the employment report comes from two surveys. The survey of employer payrolls shows how many jobs were added, while a separate survey of households determines the unemployment rate.

The two surveys have diverged with the household numbers indicating the economy has actually lost jobs over the past two months, contradicting the gains seen in the establishments survey.

Zhao said the economy doesn't look as though it is about to tip into recession, but the risk is that when job figures are revised next year policymakers could learn in hindsight that the U.S. was shedding jobs as the Fed continued to raise rates.

"These surveys are out of sync at a critical turning point in the economy," he said.

Julia Reichert, Oscar-winning documentarian, dies at 76

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Julia Reichert, the Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker behind "American Factory" whose films explored themes of race, class and gender, often in the Midwest, has died. She was 76.

She died Thursday night in Ohio from cancer, her family said Friday through a representative. She was diagnosed with stage four urothelial cancer in April 2018.

Often called the "godmother of American independent documentaries," Reichert told the stories of ordinary Americans, from autoworkers dealing with both plant closures (2009's "The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant") and foreign investors (2019's "American Factory"), to members of the American Communist Party (1983's "Seeing Red") to female labor activists in the 1930s (1976's "Union Maids").

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In her 50 years of filmmaking, Reichert won two Primetime Emmy Awards and was nominated for four Oscars, winning one with her partner Steven Bognar for "American Factory" in 2020. She quoted "The Communist Manifesto" in her speech, saying "things will get better when workers of the world unite."

She was also nominated for two Peabody Awards.

Veteran film producer Ira Deutchman wrote on Twitter that she was one of "the kindest, most generous people I've ever had the pleasure to work with."

"Her spirit was so indomitable that somehow I thought she would eventually triumph over her illness," he added. "I will miss her so much."

"RBG" director Julie Cohen tweeted that she was "reflecting on the life of a woman who made an enormous contribution to the world of documentary. And the world generally."

Born in 1946 in Princeton, New Jersey, and raised in Bordentown and Long Beach Island with her three brothers, Reichert started finding her voice as a filmmaker at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, beginning her long residency in the state.

Her first film, "Growing Up Female" was a 49-minute student film made for \$2,000 with then-partner Jim Klein that looked at the lives of six women, ages 4 through 35, and their socialization.

When they couldn't find distribution, they founded their own company, New Day Films, which is still active to this day. In 2011, "Growing Up Female" was added to the Library of Congress's National Film Registry and is considered the first feature documentary of the modern women's liberation movement.

"I came of age in the '60s. Millions of us saw racism, saw U.S. domination around the world. Imperialism. Saw huge inequalities class wise. We said the system's not working and we became, in some broad sense, revolutionaries," Reichert told the radio station WYSO last year. "Not that we wanted to attack the White House but we really wanted to change society."

She and Bognar worked for eight years to make the 225-minute-long, Primetime Emmy Award-winning "A Lion in the House," which looked at five families dealing with childhood cancer in Ohio.

"American Factory" put Reichert and Bognar in a different kind of spotlight when Barack and Michelle Obama took interest in their film about an Ohio auto glass factory that had been purchased by a Chinese investor. It became the first project the Obamas backed with their production company Higher Ground.

"One of the many things I love about this film ... is that you let people tell their own story," the former first lady said in 2019. "'American Factory' doesn't come in with a perspective. It's not an editorial. I mean, you truly let people speak for themselves, and that is a powerful thing that you don't always see happen."

More recently Reichert and Bognar directed "9to5: The Story of a Movement," about an organization that is trying to improve working conditions and maintain rights for women and families, and "Dave Chappelle: Live in Real Life," following the comedian's Yellow Springs shows in 2020 during the pandemic.

Throughout her career, Reichert made sure to pass on her wisdom to others, teaching film at Wright State University from 1985 through 2016 and writing a book about self-distribution called "Doing It Yourself."

Reichert had been diagnosed with stage 4 non-Hodgkin lymphoma in January 2006, while preparing to go to Sundance with "A Lion in the House," but went into remission later that year.

The urothelial cancer, she knew, was incurable. In 2020, she told NPR's Terry Gross that now that she was coming to the end of her life, she was focusing on things she hadn't been able to do enough while making films, like spending time with her daughter and grandchildren.

Reichert is survived by Bognar, her daughter Lela Klein Holt and two grandchildren.

Indian coal magnate Gautam Adani steps up green investments

By KRUTIKA PATHI and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Asia's richest man, Gautam Adani, made his vast fortune betting on coal as an energy hungry India grew swiftly after liberalizing its economy in the 1990s.

He's now set his sights on becoming the world's biggest renewable energy player, by 2030, by promising to align his investments with the government's own priorities.

As India grapples with climate change, the Adani Group, whose operations also span ports, power, farming and defense manufacturing, announced in September plans to invest \$70 billion in solar, wind and

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other green energy projects over the next decade.

Adani, 60, has profited since fellow Gujarati Narendra Modi, India's most influential prime minister in decades, took office in 2014.

The college drop out from a middle-class family fits the government's need for "national champions," both to meet domestic goals and as private sector partners in strategic projects outside India, said Mihir Sharma, an economist at the Observer Research Foundation, a New Delhi-based think tank.

"It isn't that government policies are shaped by the Adani Group so much as the Adani Group is a willing and able partner in what the government decides are its priorities," Sharma said.

Since Modi became prime minister, having at times campaigned using a private jet owned by the tycoon, Adani's net worth has shot up nearly 2,000% to \$125 billion, according to Bloomberg's Billionaire Index. He surpassed Amazon boss Jeff Bezos to briefly become the world's second richest man in September after a surge in the value of his seven listed entities.

Adani's businesses have won multibillion dollar contracts to build ports, highways and power plants. The industrialist's ambitions include developing drones and ammunition, key to the government's goal of boosting military-related exports to \$5 billion while slashing costs for expensive imports.

Adani has also invested in agriculture, a huge priority for Modi given the importance of the farm vote.

One of eight children in a middle-class family in Ahmedabad, in Modi's west Indian home state of Gujarat, Adani began his career trading diamonds in the financial hub of Mumbai.

He returned home to join his brother in importing plastics before establishing Adani Enterprises in the 1980s, trading in everything from shoes to buckets. His career has known ups and downs: he was kidnapped for ransom in 1988 and survived 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai by hiding in the basement of a hotel militants were holding under siege.

Though his wealth was built from coal mining and other heavy industries, early on Adani recognized the promise of renewable energy, said Tim Buckley, director of Australia-based Climate Energy Finance, who has been tracking investments in renewables in Asia for decades.

Adani has capitalized on Indian government incentives promoting self reliance and achieving net zero by 2070, recently receiving nearly \$90 million in government subsidies to produce solar modules.

"I don't think Gautam Adani really thinks about climate science — but what he does do is understand the geopolitical and economic interests of India and he positions himself to solve that problem for his own and India's benefit," Buckley said.

"He wants to be up there with Bill Gates, with Elon Musk. The only way he can do that is by being a credible global billionaire, rather than the biggest fish in the Indian market. Adani Green is what he will want to be his legacy," he added.

Adani's green energy push isn't limited to India. He recently announced plans to build a 10 gigawatt clean energy project in Morocco that will help meet Europe's energy needs.

Still, he has not yet abandoned his fossil fuel roots.

In December 2021, the Adani Group began exporting coal from Australia's Carmichael mine after years of disputes with environmental groups. The project 300 kilometers (185 miles) west of the Queensland coast includes a rail line for shipping coal from the Galilee Basin to countries in Asia, including India.

Energy-hungry Bangladesh will soon start receiving a share of its electricity from an Adani coal-fired plant under construction in eastern India.

Adani recently announced plans to invest more than \$4 billion in a petrochemicals complex that will include an ethane cracker and a plant that will convert natural gas into plastics.

Critics say such projects run counter to Adani's green energy zeal. The company says such a mix is inevitable given the need to meet soaring demand while India makes a transition to a cleaner future.

"While we are fully committed to clean energy, existential demands dictate that we have to stay the course with traditional fuel sources until reliable alternatives are in place," the company said in a statement. It said use of fossil fuels will be phased out, and "that is why it is our long-term vision to remain focused on clean, reliable, affordable energy."

In Adani, India has a rival for some of China's big business empires.

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Last year, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones inked a deal with Sri Lanka to develop and run a terminal in Colombo Port, the country's busiest and largest port. That was a triumph for New Delhi's push for influence in the island nation, where China has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure, including taking over Hambantota, a port in southern Sri Lanka that has struggled to generate profits.

Earlier this year, Adani Ports gained a 70% stake in Israel's Haifa Port, near Haifa Bay Port, which is managed by China's Shanghai International Port Group. The group committed to investing in projects in Tanzania after a Chinese-managed port deal, part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, ran into difficulties.

Stretching to expand internationally, the group has had to address concerns over rising debt levels. Adani Enterprises, the group's main listed company, has announced it will seek shareholder approval for a share offering to raise more than \$2 billion.

Adani's bid to take over NDTV, a leading Indian broadcaster, has raised concern he might, given his close ties with Modi, move to stifle the network's often critical stance toward the government.

Adani did not agree to requests for an interview. The company sent written comments to questions through a company spokesperson that defended the Adani Group's strong track record in winning government contracts and pursuing opportunities both inside and outside India.

"Strategic priorities, both domestic and foreign of any country, may be instrumental in creating business opportunities," it said. "If it is attractive enough, we are willing to invest, cutting across geographies and sectors."

RN Bhaskar, a journalist who wrote a biography on Adani, says it was natural for the tycoon to tie his fortunes with those of Modi and his party as they rose to power, just as he earlier was friendly with the rival Congress Party, which governed Gujarat state when many of his early projects began.

"A key element to Adani's success has been his ability to manage relationships. He's close to every politician that is in power," Bhaskar said.

"In India, big business works only through alignment with the government — India is in the same phase as the robber barons and Rothschilds of the 19th Century. If tomorrow, an opposition party took over, Adani would be close to them too."

Feral hog control: 8 years, some progress, \$2.5B damage/year

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Eight years into a U.S. program to control damage from feral pigs, the invasive animals with big appetites and snouts that uproot anything that smells good are still a multibillion-dollar plague on farmers, wildlife and the environment.

These prolific hogs gone wild have been wiped out in 11 of the 41 states where they were reported in 2014 or 2015, and there are fewer in parts of the other 30.

But despite more than \$100 million in federal money, an estimated 6 million to 9 million feral swine still ravage the landscape nationwide. They tear up planted fields, wallowing out huge bare depressions. They out-eat deer and turkeys — and also eat turkey eggs and even fawns. They carry parasites and disease and pollute streams and rivers with their feces.

Total U.S. damages are estimated at a minimum \$2.5 billion a year.

Adam McLendon, whose family farms about 8,000 acres (3,200 hectares) of peanuts, corn and cotton in several counties in southwestern Georgia, estimates feral pigs have cost them more than \$100,000 a year for the past 15 years.

That's about what one of Mississippi's two levee boards pays each year to trap and kill feral hogs and to repair damage from their rooting, commissioner Hank Burdine estimated. "That is nominal compared to what we would have if we didn't take care of it and had a flood," he added.

Near the Red River in north Texas, hogs are so hard on corn that Layne Chapman and his neighbors no longer even try to grow it.

"I can remember the first day someone called me and said, 'You've got a pig in your wheat field,' and I said, 'No we don't have pigs.' That was in 2006," Chapman said. He stopped planting corn in 2016.

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The animals root out rows of freshly planted peanuts and corn, leaving huge ruts that must be smoothed before the field can be replanted -- weeks after the best planting time. Hogs return to cornfields when the crop is ripening, trampling stalks, taking bites out of ears and wallowing to cool their sweatless bodies.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Feral Swine Damage Management Program has received \$31.5 million since it began in 2014.

McLendon and Chapman, who continues to grow cotton and wheat and to raise cattle on about 8,000 acres (3,200 hectares) in Vernon, Texas, have both benefited from pilot eradication projects under \$75 million allocated separately by Congress in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Research also continues on ways to poison feral hogs without killing other animals, said Michael Marlow, assistant manager of the USDA program. The poison, sodium nitrite, is a preservative in bacon but keeps the blood of live pigs from carrying oxygen.

Trials this coming winter and spring will test whether birds can be kept away from dropped bait by using a less crumbly formulation, along with grates to keep crumbs out of reach and air-powered "scarymen" like air dancers used for store advertising, Marlow said.

But for now, two major control methods are aerial shooting and remote-controlled traps that send cell-phone pictures when a hog sounder is inside.

Some states have legalized night hunting for feral swine. Derek Chisum, who grows peanuts, cotton and wheat in Hydro, Oklahoma, figures he has killed 120 to 150 a year since Oklahoma did so three years ago.

Since 2014, Idaho, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Maine, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Washington, Wisconsin and Vermont have killed their small populations of feral pigs, though the program is still keeping a wary eye out in the last six states.

The worst-hit states — California, Oklahoma, Texas and Florida, where a runway collision with a pair of wild pigs totaled an F-16 fighter jet in 1988 — are still at the program's highest level, with more than 750,000 hogs. Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina put their populations at 100,000 to 750,000, though Hawaii has moved a level down.

The Texas population overall has been "fairly stable" at roughly 3 million since 2011, said Mike Bodenchuk, state director for USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS.

But statewide reduction, let alone eradication, is likely to be a long slog with tools and money available now, he said in a telephone interview.

That means killing a lot of swine, though a widely repeated figure -- that hogs are so prolific that 70% of those in a given area must be killed each year to keep numbers stable -- just isn't right, said Kim Pepin, a research biologist at USDA's National Wildlife Research Center in Fort Collins, Colorado.

To reduce populations, you only need to kill more than are born each year — and growth rates vary in different environments, Pepin said. "If you want to know growth rates, you need to do monitoring," she said.

In Texas, the four-county Upper Red River Watershed Project and other intense efforts paid by the Farm Bill have made a significant dent in target areas, Bodenchuk said. But those cover only 16 of the state's 254 counties.

The bill is paying for 34 eradication projects in limited areas of a dozen states.

In Texas, APHIS is targeting areas with the worst damage, teaching landowners how to continue the work after Farm Bill projects end in 2023, and leaving resources such as loaner traps -- each \$7,000 or more -- to help "while we move the program across the landscape," Bodenchuk said.

"Even using this approach, we won't have the resources to eradicate pigs in Texas in my lifetime," he wrote in an email.

Researchers are still trying to get good numbers for populations and damages. The current estimate of at least \$2.5 billion in annual national damages is up \$1 billion from the 2014 estimate, and the number of pigs is now estimated at 6 million to 9 million rather than 5 million.

But those don't indicate actual increases, said Marlow, the national assistant program manager. "I think we just have a better handle on it," he said.

The agency has been making surveys to improve damage estimates, but they're still limited — such as damage to six top crops in 11 states. And the figures are likely low, leaving out costs such as extra time

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and fuel needed to harvest hog-damaged fields, said Sophie McKee, a research economist at the wildlife research center where Pepin works.

When a small group of farmers and ranchers was asked to consider those costs, their damage estimates nearly tripled, McKee said.

Chapman, the Red River farmer, said such costs can be difficult to assess. For instance, he said, if hogs root on the low side of an irrigated farm "it won't ever drain again."

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Arizona election equipment was certified ahead of midterms

CLAIM: Election equipment in Arizona was not certified by an accredited testing lab before it was used in the midterm election.

THE FACTS: Voting equipment used in the 2022 election in Arizona was certified by the Arizona secretary of state and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, according to spokespeople and documentation from both offices. A video showing a man claiming that the certifications for election equipment in Arizona lapsed prior to the 2018 election has spread widely online in recent days, with many social media users claiming that such equipment was not certified during the 2022 midterm elections. In the video, a man states that Arizona's election machines must be "certified by an accredited test lab" before claiming that the machines' "accreditations had expired at the time of the original accreditation" going back to the 2018 election. A Twitter user who posted the video last week wrote that "the voting machines in Arizona were not certified and thusly the election in turn cannot be legally certified." The tweet with the video was shared over 15,000 times. But the equipment used in the midterm elections was certified, according to officials and publicly available documentation. "All of Arizona's election equipment that is currently in use meets federal and state standards and remains properly certified," Sophia Solis, a spokesperson for the Arizona secretary of state, wrote in an email to the AP. Election equipment used in Arizona must be certified by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and the secretary of state to ensure the equipment meets both federal and state requirements, according to Solis. The certifications don't lapse, though recertification is necessary if significant upgrades or modifications are made to equipment, she wrote. The office maintains a publicly available list of Arizona voting equipment that has previously been certified, as well as a list of hardware used in the 2022 cycle, with the latter showing three companies — Dominion, Election Systems & Software and Unisyn. An Election Assistance Commission web page shows that all Arizona counties use voting systems that have been certified by the commission, and also lists the same three companies. "According to our records, there are three EAC-certified systems in use in Arizona," Karen Meyers, a spokesperson for the commission, wrote in an email to the AP, citing the same systems. Manufacturers of election equipment submit applications for certification to the Election Assistance Commission, said Laura Albert, an industrial engineer who studies voting systems at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Federally accredited labs conduct tests of the equipment as part of the certification process. "There's a lot of checks and there's a lot that election officials do to ensure the integrity of the system," Albert said.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report.

Posts falsely claim Arizona county 'lost' nearly 300K Election Day votes

CLAIM: Arizona's Maricopa County announced that more than 540,000 voters visited voting centers on Election Day. It also announced that only 248,000 Election Day ballots were counted. Therefore, the county "lost" some 292,000 votes.

THE FACTS: This distorts county data. As officials in Arizona's largest county met to certify the canvass of

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the 2022 election on Monday, social media users shared false claims about the county's published Election Day turnout numbers. "IMPOSSIBLE: Maricopa County Lost 291,930 Election Day Votes?" read a headline on a popular conservative website. "BOMBHELL REPORT: Maricopa County announced that on Election Day over 540,000 VOTERS visited one of the 223 vote anywhere centers in the county DESPITE releasing FINAL OFFICIAL RESULTS DATA claiming only 248,070 people voted..." read a tweet shared more than 8,000 times. The posts referenced a document in which the county announced that, "On Election Day, over 540,000 voters visited a site, which is more Election Day voters than all prior General Elections since 2008." The posts also cited a document from Maricopa County reporting its final election results, which showed 248,070 "Election Day" ballots were counted. However, these claims misrepresent the 540,000-voter figure, according to Megan Gilbertson, a spokesperson for the county's elections department. The figure not only includes the 248,000 people who voted in person on Election Day, but also about 290,000 voters who were issued mail-in ballots and returned them in person on Election Day, as well as nearly 3,000 people who cast provisional ballots on Election Day. Together, the 248,000 in-person Election Day votes, the 290,000 early ballot drop-offs, and the 3,000 provisional ballots, accounted for the more than 540,000 people who visited voting centers in the county on Election Day.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

Former Balenciaga stylist not pictured in devil-like outfit

CLAIM: A photo shows Lotta Volkova, the top designer for luxury fashion brand Balenciaga, dressed in a devil-like outfit while holding two red dolls.

THE FACTS: Volkova, a Russian stylist, is not Balenciaga's top designer, nor is she the woman in the photo, her agent confirmed to the AP. After Balenciaga came under fire in recent days for ad campaigns that were criticized for condoning the exploitation of children, social media users began sharing the gory image. "This is the Chief Designer for Balenciaga, Lotta Volkova," one tweet alleged along with the image. "Enough said. They knew exactly what they were doing." It had received more than 19,000 likes and more than 6,000 shares. But Julia Hackel, Volkova's agent, told the AP that the woman in the photo is not Volkova. "We can confirm that Lotta Volkova is not the person pictured in the mentioned image widely circulated on Twitter," she wrote in an email. Volkova is also not a top designer at Balenciaga. She has previously worked with the brand, but as a stylist, according to Hackel, who added that Volkova has not worked with Balenciaga since 2018. A Balenciaga spokesperson further confirmed to the AP that Volkova has not worked with the brand since that year. The original photo was taken by a Getty Images photographer in 2016. A caption for the image states that it shows a model during China Fashion Week in Beijing walking the runway for Sheguang Hu, a Chinese fashion designer — not Balenciaga. Balenciaga is being criticized for two ad campaigns. One, for its 2022 gift shop collection, featured children holding teddy bear-shaped bags dressed in what appeared to be bondage gear. The other, for its 2023 spring collection, included a photo featuring a partially-observed document from *United States v. Williams*, a 2008 Supreme Court ruling that confirmed child pornography is not protected by the First Amendment. Volkova was falsely accused of being involved in the campaigns after social media users shared screenshots of posts from her Instagram account showing imagery with violent and satanic themes. The account is currently set to private. Hackel said that Volkova "in no way participated" in Balenciaga's recent advertising campaigns. "We strongly condemn child abuse; it was never our intent to include it in our narrative," Balenciaga wrote in a statement posted to Instagram in response to the criticism."

— Associated Press writer Melissa Goldin in New York contributed this report.

UK census data on ethnic demographics misrepresented

CLAIM: New figures from the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics shows that three of the country's largest cities, London, Manchester and Birmingham, are now all "minority white."

THE FACTS: The claim excludes several subsets of data for white-identifying groups. The 2021 census data shows that white residents in London and Manchester across all categories still exceed 50% of the population, though Birmingham falls slightly under that. Following the publication on Tuesday of 2021

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census data by the U.K.'s Office for National Statistics, social media users misrepresented information about the demographic data to claim that white-identifying people are now the minority in three of the country's largest cities. Nigel Farage, a British broadcaster and former populist politician, tweeted to his 1.7 million followers that the data showed that "London, Manchester and Birmingham are now all minority white cities." His post received more than 8,000 shares and 18,000 likes and spread across social media platforms. But the claim is inaccurate and excludes several subsets of data. While it is true that Birmingham now has a majority of residents who reported their ethnicity as nonwhite, the data released by ONS does not support this claim for London nor Manchester, where white-identifying residents still exceed 50% of the population. ONS breaks down the ethnic group "white" into five categories, English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British; Irish; Gypsy or Irish traveler; Roma; and other white. Across all of these categories, the data shows that 53.8% of London residents identified as white, 56.8% of Manchester residents identified as white and 48.6% of residents in Birmingham identified as white. Isolating just the category "White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Ireland or British" shows that this group was in the minority in London at 36.8%, Manchester at 48.6% and Birmingham at 42.9%. But using just that subset ignores the multiple other groups who also identified as white. In a statement Wednesday, ONS responded to what it called "misleading statistics" being shared based on the census data. "There have also been misleading statistical claims that the latest census data show that white people are now a minority in London and Manchester," the agency wrote. "This is confusing responses from people who have identified with the 'white British' ethnic group with responses which identify with 'white' ethnic group." Farage did not respond to a request for comment.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in New York contributed this report.

Photo of beer disguised as Pepsi is from Saudi Arabia in 2015, not Qatar

CLAIM: A photo shows beer cans disguised as Pepsi that were smuggled into Qatar for the World Cup.

THE FACTS: The photo is from November 2015, when a smuggler attempted to pass off 48,000 cans of beer as Pepsi at Saudi Arabia's border with the United Arab Emirates. Qatar has strict limits on the purchase and consumption of alcohol. And just days before the World Cup opener, the country suddenly banned the sale of beer at stadiums. Social media users have since been sharing an image of an officer peeling a Pepsi label off a beer can, with false claims that the photo was taken in Qatar. "Interesting: Fans smuggling beer into Qatar#FIFAWorldCup," reads a post on Facebook. But the photo is seven years old, and not from Qatar. A reverse image search revealed that the image was featured in multiple media articles in November 2015 about an attempt to smuggle beer into Saudi Arabia, where alcohol is outlawed. The articles cite Twitter posts from a Saudi customs account that has since been deleted, but the same photo can be found in a news release published online by Saudi Arabia's customs authority. The larger image in the news release shows more clearly that the officer in the photo has a badge saying "Saudi Customs" on their arm. The release states that there was an attempt to smuggle 48,000 cans of beer concealed as Pepsi across the country's border with UAE. At the time, Saudi customs also released a video on social media showing an officer peeling off the Pepsi labels. The tweet has since been deleted, but the video can be seen in news reports. Drinking alcohol is considered haram or forbidden in Islam.

Russia rejects pullout from Ukraine as condition for talks

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia said Friday that Western demands it should pull out completely from Ukraine as part of any future talks to end the war effectively rule out any such negotiations, as Russian strikes continued and a Ukrainian official set his country's battle losses at up to 13,000 troops.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains open to talks but the Western demand that Moscow first withdraws its troops from Ukraine is unacceptable.

Peskov's comments came as Putin spoke on the phone Friday morning with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Scholz's office said he made clear to Putin "that there must be a diplomatic solution as quickly as

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possible, which includes a withdrawal of Russian troops.”

On Thursday, U.S. President Joe Biden also indicated he would be willing to talk with Putin if he demonstrated that he seriously wanted to end the invasion and pull out of Ukraine.

A statement issued by the Kremlin after the phone call with Scholz said Putin again blamed the West for encouraging Ukraine to prolong the war by supplying it with weapons.

Putin also said recent crippling Russian strikes on Ukraine’s infrastructure were “forced and inevitable” after Ukraine allegedly bombed a key bridge to the Crimean peninsula — which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014 — and energy facilities.

Russian forces have been bombarding Ukraine’s critical infrastructure since October, leaving millions without electricity amid cold winter weather. Scholz’s office said that in the phone conversation with Putin he “condemned in particular the Russian air attacks on civilian infrastructure” in Ukraine and said Germany was committed to continuing to help Ukraine defend itself.

Russian forces kept up rocket attacks on infrastructure and airstrikes against Ukrainian troop positions along the contact line, the Ukrainian general staff said Friday, adding that Moscow’s military push has focused on a dozen towns including Bakhmut and Avdiivka — key Russian targets in the embattled east.

A top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, citing military chiefs, said that since Russia invaded on Feb. 24 10,000 to 13,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed in action. It was a rare comment on Ukraine’s military casualties and far below estimates from Western leaders.

“We have official figures from the general staff, we have official figures from the top command, and they amount to between 10,000 and 12,500-13,000 killed,” the adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said late Thursday on Channel 24 TV. He also said civilian casualties were “significant.”

The Ukrainian military has not confirmed such figures and it was a rare instance of a Ukrainian official providing such a count. The last dates back to late August, when the head of the armed forces said nearly 9,000 military personnel had been killed. In June, Podolyak said up to 200 soldiers were dying each day in some of the most intense fighting and bloodshed so far in the war.

On Wednesday, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Union’s executive Commission, said 100,000 Ukrainian troops had been killed, before her office corrected her comments — calling them inaccurate and saying that the figure referred to both dead and injured.

Zelenskyy’s office reported on Friday that at least three civilians were killed and 16 wounded in Ukraine in the past 24 hours. Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the office’s deputy head, said on Telegram that Russian forces had attacked nine southeastern regions with heavy artillery, rockets and aircraft.

Ukrainians have been bracing for freezing winter temperatures as Russia’s campaign has recently hit infrastructure including power plants and electrical transformers, leaving many without heat, water and electricity.

Ukraine has faced a blistering onslaught of Russian artillery fire and drone attacks since early October. The shelling has been especially intense in Kherson since Russian forces withdrew and Ukraine’s army reclaimed the southern city almost three weeks ago.

Kherson’s regional governor said three people were killed and seven injured in shelling on Thursday. Russians hit residential areas of the city, part of which remained without electricity following Russian strikes Thursday.

In the eastern Donetsk region, Ukrainian governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said Russian shelling has intensified significantly. The Russian army is seeking to encircle the key town of Bakhmut by capturing several surrounding villages and cutting off an important road.

Russian strikes targeting towns across the Dnieper river from the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant also were reported. And in northeastern Kharkiv province, officials said Russian shelling injured two women.

In a press briefing in Kyiv on Friday, United Nations-backed human rights investigators called for the creation of a “victim’s registry” that could help people affected by the war to receive help quickly. Pablo de Greiff, a member of the team mandated to look into rights abuses by the Human Rights Council, said

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"victims have needs that require immediate attention."

The pandemic, Karens, crypto craziness: We're over you, 2022

LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The rudeness pandemic, the actual pandemic and all things gray. There's a lot to leave behind when 2022 comes to a close as uncertainty rules around the world.

The health crisis brought on the dawn of slow living, but it crushed many families forced to hustle for their lives. Karens went on the rise. Crypto currencies tanked. Pete Davidson's love thing with Kim Kardashian made headlines.

A list of what we're over as we hope for better times in 2023:

INCIVILITY BE GONE

The pandemic released a tsunami of overwrought Karens and Kens, but heightened incivility has stretched well beyond their raucous ranks.

Researcher Christine Porath restricted herself to rudeness, disrespect or insensitive behavior when she recently wrote about the subject in Harvard Business Review. The professor of management at Georgetown University found incidents of incivility way up, in line with a steady climb stretching back nearly 20 years.

Particularly hammered this year, Porath wrote, were frontline workers in health care, retail, transportation, hospitality and education. All were declared heroes when the pandemic struck. It didn't take long for that to become a beat down.

Noting that incivility can and does escalate to physical aggression and other violence, Axios dubbed it the rudeness pandemic.

Stop it, mean people. We're all stressed out, including you we're quite sure.

CRYPTO CRAZINESS

Will the implosion of FTX, the world's third-largest cryptocurrency exchange, bring on broader chaos in a digital world that millions of people already distrust?

Time will tell as other and otherwise healthy crypto companies face a liquidity crisis. And there's the philanthropic implications of the FTX bankruptcy collapse here in the real world, since founder Sam Bankman-Fried donated millions to numerous causes in "effective altruism" fashion.

The FTX bankruptcy filing followed a bruising of crypto companies throughout 2022, due in part to rising interest rates and the broader market downturn that has many investors rethinking their lust for risk. That includes mom-and-pop investors along for the ride.

While more people than ever before know what cryptocurrencies are, far fewer actually partake. Is it any wonder? Get it together, crypto.

ASMR, PIPE DOWN

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. It began, innocently enough, as brain tingles brought on by whispering, tapping, brushing or scraping. Then, bam, it took off on social media like a really loud rocket on a mission to annoy.

Today, we've got millions of videos filled with people attempting to calm by speaking in low tones, armed with anything they can get their hands on in conjunction with their expensive, ultra-sensitive mics.

Companies are selling beer and chocolate, paint and home goods using ASMR. All the calming — and commerce — is deafening.

GRAY, THE COLOR

Gray walls, gray floors, gray furniture. Is gray passé? Here's hoping.

The color spent much of 2022 as a purportedly neutral "it." The problem was, we were already feeling gray on the inside.

Of course, gray has been around since color itself but it took over as an alternative to beige and Tuscan brown. Gray took a tumble mid-year but one doesn't paint or swap out the couch as quickly as trends fade. We've been stuck with gray, thanks to TV home shows and social media loops.

"What would your reaction be if I told you that color is disappearing from the world? A graph suggesting

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that the color gray has become the dominant shade has been circulating on TikTok, and boy does it have folks in a tizzy," wrote Loney Abrams in Architectural Digest in October.

By that, she explained, the upset folks she mentioned stand firmly behind the notion that a lack of color "spells tragedy."

Abrams, a Brooklyn artist and pop culture curator, speaks of the fixer-uppers of Chip and Joanna Gaines and the Calabasas compound of Kim Kardashian. And she cites Tash Bradley, a trained color psychologist who works for the U.K. wallpaper and paint brand Lick.

Bradley, Abrams wrote, points to the hustle-bustle of pre-pandemic life as one villain leading to The Great Gray Washing. Bradley, the interior design director for Lick, sees no psychological benefits to gray.

Many actual colors are calming. Find one. And speaking of design trends, quit turning around your books, pages out. Read one instead, perhaps a volume on color theory.

PETE DAVIDSON'S LOVE LIFE

Not the King of Staten Island himself, per se. Look deeply into your hearts and decide for yourselves whether to love him or Ye him.

We're talking about the vast quantities of air volume his love life has sucked up on a near-hourly basis, especially in 2022, otherwise known as his Kim Kardashian era (which actually started in late 2021 for the obsessives).

Davidson's love roster has puzzled for years, stretching back to his MTV "Guy Code" days in 2013 while still a teenager, leading to his Carly Aquilino phase.

There were stops along the way with Cazzie David (Larry Davidson's daughter), Ariana Grande, Kate Beckinsale (briefly), Kaia Gerber (even more briefly), and others, including his latest: model Emily Ratajkowski.

The "SNL" alum and self-described — in appearance — "crack baby" is a paparazzi, social media, gossip monger magnet. Rather, his love life is.

As Ratajkowski mouthed recently in a TikTok video to some random audio track while riding in a car: "I would be with multiple men. Also some women as well. Um, everyone's hot but in an interesting way."

So be it. Live your life, Pete. Can the rest of us stop chasing every relationship-confirming kiss?

MOVIE UPCHUCK MADNESS

The film industry, to state the obvious, has produced decades of genre-spanning grossness, much of it significant and legit to show on camera.

However, there's one particular cinematic exclamation point we could do without, or at the very least, with significantly less of: The dispensable spew.

Implied vomiting with an urgent rush to a curb, hand to a mouth or turn of a head would sometimes suffice, thanks. Who spread the word in Hollywood that movie watchers actually desire all the nauseating details. The projectile-ness, the color combinations, the chunks.

Well, in some cases, audiences themselves.

That notable dress shop scene in the 2011 smash hit "Bridesmaids" was a gender test of sorts, according to the Daily Beast. Would audiences accept all the spewing and other grand scatology from women in a wedding-themed movie as they do for the bros of producer Judd Apatow's other comedies?

Apatow and director Paul Feig extensively tested "Bridesmaids" with audiences and they were fine.

Fast forward to 2022's notables. There's the satire "The Triangle of Sadness," which could hardly do without, but there's also "Tár," a far more serious film that wouldn't make the vomit hall of fame with Lydia Tár's one fleeting gush. We ask, what's the point of that? Meaning, the upchuck as aside.

Cate Blanchett's Tár has far bigger problems, so let's rein in all the gratuitous spewing. Make it count, people!

THE ULTRA HUSTLE

Elon Musk put it thusly in an email to his remaining employees:

"Going forward, to build a breakthrough Twitter 2.0 and succeed in an increasingly competitive world, we will need to be extremely hardcore. This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade."

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Musk is Musk, but he illustrates a moment: A need to remain in motion, to work harder, climb higher, sweat longer. With the volatile economy, political chaos, extreme weather and wars, it's no wonder that a blanket of anxiety has kept the ultra hustle alive.

As if all the slow living and work-life balance talk is meaningless, or more to the point, can't exist for many. "We're hustling to make ends meet, 'building our brand,' ensuring our startup doesn't tank, or dreaming about the day our side hustle takes off and we can walk into the office and give everyone the bird," wrote Benjamin Sledge on Medium.

It stands to reason, he said, that "most of us are hustling because we literally have to in order to survive." Bring on a 2023 that allows for all those long walks in the woods we've been hearing so much about.

AP sources: Biden tells Dems he wants SC as 1st primary vote

By ZEKE MILLER, MEG KINNARD and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has declared that Democrats should give up "restrictive" caucuses and prioritize diversity at the start of their presidential primary calendar — dealing a major blow to Iowa's decadeslong status as the state that leads off the process.

In a letter Thursday to the rule-making arm of the Democratic National Committee, Biden did not mention specific states he'd like to see go first. But he has told Democrats he wants South Carolina moved to the first position, according to three people familiar with his recommendation who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

The president's direction came as the DNC rules committee gathered in Washington on Friday to vote on shaking up the presidential primary calendar starting in 2024. Members now expect to approve new rules putting South Carolina first, followed by New Hampshire and Nevada on the same day a week later.

Georgia and Michigan would move into the top five as new early states, and each would hold primaries in subsequent weeks, committee members say. The two battlegrounds were critical to Biden's 2020 victory over then-President Donald Trump, who had won both states in his 2016 White House campaign.

Much of the rest of the country would vote as part of Super Tuesday soon afterward.

Such changes are set to come after years of calls from many top Democrats for the voting calendar to better reflect the party's deeply diverse base than mostly white Iowa, which holds the country's first caucus, and New Hampshire, which holds the first primary. The new calendar would still have to be approved by the full DNC in a vote likely to come early next year, but the DNC will almost certainly heed the rule-making panel's recommendations.

The proposed order of the early states was first reported by The Washington Post.

"For decades, Black voters in particular have been the backbone of the Democratic Party but have been pushed to the back of the early primary process," Biden wrote in a letter on personal stationery that did not carry the White House seal. "We rely on these voters in elections but have not recognized their importance in our nominating calendar. It is time to stop taking these voters for granted, and time to give them a louder and earlier voice in the process."

He said caucuses were "restrictive and anti-worker" because they require voters "to spend significant amounts of time" on one night gathering to choose candidates in person, "disadvantaging hourly workers and anyone who does not have the flexibility to go to a set location at a set time."

The changes could be implemented as soon as 2024 but would be rendered largely meaningless until 2028 if Biden opts to seek a second term. The president has said for months that he intends to run again, and White House aides and Biden allies have begun staffing and structural discussions for his likely 2024 bid while refraining from overt steps while the president weighs a final decision.

Such a shakeup would nonetheless be seismic given that Iowa's caucus has led off the Democratic voting calendar since 1976. Still, it would come two years after a series of technical glitches so marred party results that they prevented The Associated Press from declaring a 2020 Iowa Democratic caucus winner.

Iowa Democratic Party Chair Ross Wilburn said in a statement Thursday night that the state party intended to abide by Iowa law and hold its caucus first.

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"Our state law requires us to hold a caucus before the last Tuesday in February, and before any other contest," Wilburn said. "When we submit our delegate selection plan to the Rules and Bylaws Committee early next year, we will adhere to the State of Iowa's legal requirements, and address compliance with DNC rules in subsequent meetings and hearings."

New Hampshire state law calls for it to hold the first actual primary, and officials there have for months threatened to simply move up their election regardless of what new rules the DNC approves

On the current Democratic calendar, Iowa has been followed by New Hampshire, which has held the nation's first primary since 1920. Nevada and South Carolina have gone next since the 2008 presidential election, when Democrats last did a major primary calendar overhaul.

The Republican National Committee, meanwhile, has already decided to keep Iowa's caucus as the first contest in its 2024 presidential calendar, ensuring that GOP White House hopefuls — which include Trump — will continue campaigning there frequently.

South Carolina holds special relevance to Biden. His victory in the state's first-in-the-South primary in 2020 kickstarted his presidential campaign after poor finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire on his way to winning the Democratic nomination.

Dick Harpootlian, a longtime Biden ally, fundraiser and former South Carolina Democratic Party chair, said Thursday that he and Biden discussed South Carolina's possible advancement the night of Biden's 2020 primary victory there. Harpootlian said he'd impressed upon Biden that the state was a better place than Iowa to hold an even earlier presidential voting contest — to which Harpootlian said Biden was receptive.

"I think he agreed that this was a much more dynamic process," Harpootlian said. "Iowa was just a nightmare."

The DNC rules committee has been discussing reordering the early calendar for months, touching off a fierce battle among many states to go first. In a joint statement Thursday night, Michigan Democratic Party Chair Lavora Barnes and U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell said, "We have always said that any road to the White House goes through the heartland and President Biden understands that."

Several states have previously tried to violate party rules and jump closer to the front, only to be threatened with having their delegates not count.

New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen issued a statement blasting "the White House's short-sighted decision," while fellow New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan said, "I strongly oppose the President's deeply misguided proposal."

"But make no mistake," Hassan said in a statement. "New Hampshire's law is clear and our primary will continue to be first in the nation."

Ukraine bans religious organizations with links to Russia

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine on Friday banned the activities of religious organizations "affiliated with centers of influence" in Russia and said it would examine the links between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox churches.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a decree enacting a National Security and Defense Council decision to impose personal sanctions against representatives of religious organizations associated with Russia, which invaded Ukraine more than nine months ago.

Zelenskyy's decree additionally provided for examining the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, one of two Orthodox bodies in Ukraine following a schism that in 2019 resulted in the establishment of one with independence from the Russian church.

Ukrainian officials suspect the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is promoting pro-Russian views and that some priests may be actively collaborating with Russia. Moscow Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has justified Russia's war in Ukraine as part of a "metaphysical struggle" to prevent a liberal ideological encroachment from the West.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Ukrainian authorities last week of "waging a war on the Russian Orthodox Church." But the Rev. Mykolay Danylevich, who has often served as a spokesperson

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for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, disputed Peskov's characterization, asserting on Telegram that the church was not Russian.

The UOC declared its independence from Moscow in May over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In his nightly video address on Thursday, Zelenskyy said the use of Kyiv's Pechersk Lavra monastery complex — a UNESCO world heritage site revered as the cradle of Orthodox monasticism in the region — would also come under further scrutiny.

Members of the Security Service of Ukraine, the country's National Guard and police searched the monastery last week after a priest spoke favorably about Russia during a service there. The Security Service said its agents searched more than 350 church buildings in all, including at another monastery and in a diocese of the Rivne region, 240 kilometers (150 miles) west of Kyiv.

The security agency, which is known by the Ukrainian acronym SBU, said the searches turned up "pro-Russian literature, which is used during studies in seminaries and parish schools, including for propaganda of the 'Russian world.'" More than 50 people underwent in-depth "counterintelligence interviews, including using a polygraph," as part of the investigation, the agency said.

The investigation of the centuries-old monastic complex in Ukraine's capital and other religious sites underscored Ukrainian authorities' suspicions about some Orthodox Christian clergy they consider as remaining loyal to Russia. The SBU said last week's activities were part of its "systematic work to counter the subversive activities of the Russian special services in Ukraine."

Orthodox Christians are the largest religious population in Ukraine. But they have been fractured along lines that echo political tensions over Ukraine's defense of its independence and its Western orientation amid Russia's continued claim to political and spiritual hegemony in the region — a concept sometimes called the "Russian world." Many Orthodox leaders have spoken fiercely in favor of Ukrainian independence and denounced the Russian invasion, but the recent searches show that authorities suspect places like Pechersk Lavra of being hotbeds of pro-Russian sentiment and activity.

Today in History: December 3, gas disaster in Bhopal

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 3, the 337th day of 2022. There are 28 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 3, 1984, thousands of people died after a cloud of methyl isocyanate gas escaped from a pesticide plant operated by a Union Carbide subsidiary in Bhopal, India.

On this date:

In 1818, Illinois was admitted as the 21st state.

In 1828, Andrew Jackson was elected president of the United States by the Electoral College.

In 1947, the Tennessee Williams play "A Streetcar Named Desire" opened on Broadway.

In 1964, police arrested some 800 students at the University of California at Berkeley, one day after the students stormed the administration building and staged a massive sit-in.

In 1965, the Beatles' sixth studio album, "Rubber Soul," was released in the United Kingdom by Parlophone (it was released in the U.S. by Capitol Records three days later).

In 1967, a surgical team in Cape Town, South Africa, led by Dr. Christiaan Barnard (BAHR'-nard) performed the first human heart transplant on Louis Washkansky, who lived 18 days with the donor organ, which came from Denise Darvall, a 25-year-old bank clerk who had died in a traffic accident.

In 1979, 11 people were killed in a crush of fans at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum, where the British rock group The Who was performing.

In 1991, radicals in Lebanon released American hostage Alann Steen, who'd been held captive nearly five years.

In 1992, the first telephone text message was sent by British engineer Neil Papworth, who transmitted the greeting "Merry Christmas" from his work computer in Newbury, Berkshire, to Vodafone executive

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Richard Jarvis' mobile phone.

In 2015, defense Secretary Ash Carter ordered the armed services to open all military jobs to women, removing the final barriers that had kept women from serving in combat, including the most dangerous and grueling commando posts.

In 2017, the second-largest U.S. drugstore chain, CVS, announced that it was buying Aetna, the third-largest health insurer, in order to push much deeper into customer care.

In 2020, Facebook said it would start removing false claims about COVID-19 vaccines.

Ten years ago: The White House rejected a \$2.2 trillion proposal by House Republicans to avert the "fiscal cliff," a plan that included \$800 billion in higher tax revenue over 10 years but no increase in tax rates for the wealthy. St. James's Palace announced that Britain's Prince William and his wife, Kate, were expecting their first child (Prince George was born the following July).

Five years ago: Former longtime Illinois congressman John Anderson, who ran for president as an independent in 1980, died in Washington at the age of 95.

One year ago: A prosecutor filed involuntary manslaughter charges against the parents of a teen accused of killing four students at a Michigan high school, saying they failed to intervene on the day of the tragedy despite being confronted with a drawing and chilling message — "blood everywhere" — that was found at the boy's desk. President Joe Biden pledged to make it "very, very difficult" for Russia's Vladimir Putin to take military action in Ukraine as U.S. intelligence officials determined that Russian planning was underway for a possible military offensive. A judge in Denver ruled that Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, charged with killing 10 people at a Colorado supermarket earlier in the year was mentally incompetent to stand trial and ordered him to be treated at the state mental hospital to see if he could be made well enough to face prosecution.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Jaye P. Morgan is 91. Actor Nicolas Coster is 89. Rock singer Ozzy Osbourne is 74. Rock singer Mickey Thomas is 73. Country musician Paul Gregg (Restless Heart) is 68. Actor Steven Culp is 67. Actor Daryl Hannah is 62. Actor Julianne Moore is 62. Olympic gold medal figure skater Katarina Witt is 57. Actor Brendan Fraser is 54. Singer Montell Jordan is 54. Actor Royale Watkins is 53. Actor Bruno Campos is 49. Actor Holly Marie Combs is 49. Actor Liza Lapira is 47. Pop-rock singer Daniel Bedingfield is 43. Actor/comedian Tiffany Haddish is 43. Actor Anna Chlumsky (KLUHM'-skee) is 42. Actor Jenna Dewan is 42. Actor Brian Bonsall is 41. Actor Dascha Polanco is 40. Pop/rock singer-songwriter Andy Grammer is 39. Americana musician Michael Calabrese (Lake Street Dive) is 38. Actor Amanda Seyfried is 37. Actor Michael Angarano is 35. Actor Jake T. Austin is 28.